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## Introduction

Compulsory schools in Sweden are governed by the curriculum *Läroplan för grundskolan samt för förskoleklassen och fritidshemmet*, Lgr 11, and the students are graded on the scale A-F from year six through nine. Grading and assessment, in regulation with this grading system, is a complicated process and the equivalence of grades has been questioned. At the same time, assessment and grading has become a central part of the everyday professional lives of teachers in Swedish compulsory schools.

At the time of the implementation of Lgr 11, in 2011, it was promised that this curriculum would be more precise and coherent to help strengthen equivalence. The Swedish government wrote at the time that: "an increase in the precision of goals and demands in the regulatory documents is deemed to increase the equivalence in the assessment of students' knowledge and the degree of goal attainment" (Prop. 2008/09:87). Still, the critics argue that there is a lack of equivalence.

The current grading system has been widely critiqued. One of the main problems with the current system is that students can receive a lower grade in cases where they perform poorly on a minor part of the knowledge requirements, (Björkstén, 2018) due to the fact that: "at the end of year six or nine a student has to (...) have shown that she or he knows everything included in the whole knowledge requirement for for example the grade E to receive said grade. You cannot disregard any part of the knowledge requirements" (Skolverket, 2020). In addition, there are complicated rules applying to the grades B and D. Also, the subjective phrasing of the knowledge requirements leaves them open to interpretation (Björkstén, 2018).

To aid music teachers in these assessment processes there are regulatory documents as well as other additional documents. However, the interpretation of these documents needs to be performed in cooperation with other members of the teaching community to contribute to an increase in grading equivalence. The Swedish Schools Inspectorate states that:

The music teacher is most often alone at the school, while at the same time the subject is rarely discussed in collegial contexts. We see a great need for music teachers to have the opportunity to have discussions with other music teachers to develop their education practise. Questions of assessment should also be discussed between music teachers. (Skolinspektionen, 2011, p. 8)

Evidently, cooperation is essential for developing music teachers' assessment practises.

Apart from insufficient cooperation, one of the most common deficiencies in the work environment for Swedish teachers is an "unhealthy workload" (Arbetsmiljöverket, 2017, p. 4). In light of these arguments the need for research regarding music teachers' assessment and grading practises is manifested.

Researching the *teachers' visions* (Hammerness, 2006), how teachers see their ideal practise, can reveal how teachers see tasks such as assessment and grading and ultimately how they perceive and use regulatory documents. An increase in knowledge about the assessment and grading practises may also contribute to a greater understanding of the needs of support for the development of teachers' abilities to assess and grade.

### Aim

The aim of this research project is to examine the teacher's visions (Hammerness, 2006) of music teachers and music teaching students regarding their professional role as assessor and grader and what efforts are needed to aid professionals with these assignments. In the long run, this project can contribute to strengthening the collective competencies of music teachers in relation to assessment and grading in compulsory education as well as an increase in equivalence.

## Research Questions

- How do Swedish certified music teachers and music teacher students work with assessment and grading in grades six through nine in compulsory schools?
- What are their teachers' visions regarding assessment and grading in music?
- How can they collaborate to join their practises with their teachers' visions?
- How do their responses relate to what is written about assessing and grading in the regulatory documents of music in compulsory school?

## Theoretical Perspectives

### Social Constructionism

The ontological and epistemological basis for this study is social constructionism, which implies that the view of what is, the view of knowledge, and the way in which individuals are perceived is socially constructed. (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000; Johansson, 2005). Johansson (2005) perceives this “perspective to be *anti-essentialistic* and therefore challenges ideas of a true, real ‘reality’” (p. 26). In light of this study the social constructionistic perspective means that all parts of the study will be perceived as constructions stemming from within the social contexts in which they were produced.

### Narrative Theory

Narrative theory deals with peoples' stories and their analyses. Since the 1980s, the interest in narrative theory has grown within the humanities and social science (Johansson, 2005).

In this study, narrative theory will be viewed from the social constructionistic perspective. Johansson (2005) explains that “stories do not express any underlying ‘essence’, their intention and meaning are produced through verbal communication in social interaction, in a specific cultural and historical context. They are social constructions” (p. 26). In this way, narrative theory and social constructionism are connected.

### Teachers' Visions

The concept of teachers' visions (Hammerness, 2006) will be used in this study both as an element within the used theory and as a concept aiding the production of data. The concept is, in short, the ideal view a teacher has of his or her professional identity and work. Hammerness (2006) explains teachers' visions as:

Teachers imagine what they could be doing in the classroom, how they could be interacting with their students, and what they and their students could be achieving. They envision classroom activities, discussions, and projects. They picture the kind of learning environment in which they and their students could work – including the design of the classroom, the type of school, and even the kind of community that would support their dreams. (p. 1)

In this research project, a modified version of the concept of teachers' visions will be used since focus will not be on a teachers' ideal of his or her whole work and professional identity but on visions of assessment and grading.

A focus on teachers' visions can contribute to an explanation as to why some music teachers choose to leave the profession or change their place of work. Hammerness (2006) explains that:

the teachers with strong clear visions who saw a huge gap between what they *wanted* to do and what they *were able* to do in their current context were those who were already thinking about leaving teaching or, at the very least, switching schools. (p. 8)

According to Hammerness (2006) there is, as shown, a possibly problematic result of having a clear vision of one's professional ideal - if the discrepancy between the vision and the actual possibilities is vast it can cause the teacher leaving his or her profession. For current and future students in Swedish compulsory schools it is crucial to both keep educated and certified music

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teachers as well as the fresh intake of music teachers working smoothly. Hence, it is essential to focus on how teachers in schools are affected by their teachers' visions.

## Method

### **Methods of Data Production**

The data production of the study will consist of the conducting and recording of qualitative individual interviews and one focus group interview, the transcribing of these, and the collection and selection of official documents pertaining to music education in compulsory schools in Sweden.

#### ***Individual Qualitative Interviews***

The participants of the study are both music teachers currently working in compulsory schools in Sweden with experience of grading in school years six through nine as well as music teacher students. With the intention of finding interested participants for the study, collegial connections will be used. The participants need to be located within a certain area since the basis of the study is Malmö in the south of Sweden and the interviews will be conducted face to face. Bryman (2018) describes advantages of conducting face to face interviews, for example the interviewer can be made aware of the interviewees' body language. Due to the current pandemic, Covid-19, which has affected most parts of the world in 2020-2021 and the fact that vaccination in Sweden seems to be slower than expected, the interviews will be starting at a somewhat later time than first planned.

Bryman (2018) explains qualitative interviews as being less structured than the quantitative counterpart. He points out that there is a focus on the interviewees' responses and therefore the research questions are more loosely phrased. Moreover, Bryman suggests that qualitative interviews can move in different directions, that there should be an emphasis on rich answers and that it is not uncommon that the same interviewee is revisited multiple times. Apart from what is stated about qualitative interviews above, the reason for using this type of interview in the present study is that the aim demands an explorative method.

#### ***Focus Group interviews***

A focus group (FGI) interview is an interview situation where more participants are included (Bryman, 2018). For the purpose of this study, music teachers will be interviewed individually as well as in a group. The reasons for using FGI:s can, according to Bryman, be to draw attention to what happens in the interplay of the group. The basis for doing both individual interviews as well as an FGI in this study is to see how different standpoints and arguments, which can be uncontested in an individual interview, are contradicted or deepened in the context of a group.

#### ***The Process of Transcribing***

Transcriptions of interviews need to be detailed to fit into the process of qualitative research. Bryman (2018) expresses the need for a comprehensive transcription including the interviewees' accounts as well as the manner in which these accounts have been related. Because of this, the transcriptions need to have a high level of accuracy and detail to be compatible with the aim and theory of the present study.

#### **Documents**

The documents included in the study will all be the type of written material which music teachers need to relate to when assessing and grading students in the subject of music: curricula, the music syllabus in Lgr11, comments to the syllabus, assessment support produced by the National Agency for Education and the publication on general advice on assessing and grading also published by The National Agency for Education. In addition, in interviews the participants might mention other written documents which they find important in their practise in which case these may also be included in the material for the study.

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## **Methods for Analysis**

In the study, narrative method, in combination with systemic functional grammar, SFG, and the concept of intertextuality will constitute the methods for analysis.

### ***Narrative method***

Johansson (2005) states that “the material world has no meaning in itself but is ascribed meaning through language. It is through stories, descriptions and explanations – through language as a social activity – that we create our identities and relations, systems of values and norms, an even our organisations” (p. 18). Because interviews and FGI:s are based on social interaction, either between interviewer and interviewee or between participants in a group, this method is particularly befitting this study.

Also, in regard to the social constructionistic perspective of the study, the data material produced from transcribing the interviewees accounts will be perceived as narratives of a reality constructed by the participants in the study. In addition, what the narratives do, or want to do, with the context or environment will be interesting aspects for analysis.

### ***Systemic Functional Grammar***

Nearly fifty years ago, the first article on functional grammar was written by Michael Halliday (Matthiessen, 2014) and just over two decades later he wrote *Introduction to Functional Grammar*. The purpose of the book was to “describe and explain the meaning-making resources of modern English” (Halliday, 2014, p. 4). Since then, his theories on grammar have been elaborated on by many linguists (Matthiessen, 2014). A connection between narrative theory and method and Halliday’s methods is easily made since “we use language to make sense of our experience, and to carry out interactions with other people” (Halliday, 2014, p. 25).

In a Swedish language context, Holmberg and Karlsson (2019) and Holmberg, Karlsson and Nord (2011) have written about SFG (in Swedish systemisk-funktionell grammatik) resting on the previous work of Halliday. Holmberg, Karlsson and Nord (2011) state that SFG can be used “to find categories (for example *types of processes* and *participants*) that capture how language shapes our view of reality” (p. 7). According to them, SFG shows “how we can analyse specific instances of language through a grammatical analysis set through which we can understand how the specific text is involved in creating its context” (p. 9). This makes SFG, together with a social constructionistic perspective and narrative method, applicable to this study. Social constructionism makes out the theoretical perspective and SFG and narrative method are to be used in data production and analysis; however, all three theories/methods stem from the same ontological standpoint. In this context, SFG can contribute with a method for analysing text at a microlevel.

### ***Intertextuality***

Intertextuality is a concept used within critical discourse analysis to describe how texts build upon each other (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000). The concept of intertextuality will be interesting to aid in examining how, if at all, teachers’ ways of speaking about assessment and grading build on, or is affected by, other texts.<sup>1</sup> This has ties with SFG through what Holmberg and Karlsson (2019) explain are the three different aspects of what language does:

First of all, we seek contact with others and relate to them. Secondly, we describe our experiences of the world around us. And thirdly, we organise the information that we convey so that we, with the help of language, can create connections between pieces of information. (p. 18)

As is seen above this also has points of contact with narrative theory and method.

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<sup>1</sup> The concept of text is used in a wider sense and can imply, talk, writings, and other instances where language is the bearer of knowledge, whether it be spoken or written.

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## Ethical Standpoints

The Swedish Research Council explains that “the project as a whole, the documentation and the report should exhibit clarity, order and structure” (Vetenskapsrådet, 2017, p. 25). The implications for this study will be that, for every step taken within the study, ethical considerations will be made, both with participants in mind as well as the data material and the research itself.

Regarding ethical considerations relating to participants, people who are interested in participating will receive a description of the study before deciding on possibly taking part. After that, those who wish to participate will have to sign a consent form in which they are clearly informed that they can withdraw their consent at any point during the research process without any explanation, and that they will be anonymised. In addition, to further secure ethical aspects being considered, a description of the study has been sent to The Swedish Ethical Review Authority, which has decided that this project does not need to be ethically approved according to their guidelines.

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