Assessment culture matters
Teachers' and students' perceptions of assessment and feedback

Ívar Rafn Jónsson

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of a Ph.D. degree

HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS
MENNTAVÍSINDASVIÐ

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Ívar Rafn Jónsson

Supervisors
Professor Kari Smith
Associate professor Guðrún Geirsdóttir

Doctoral committee
Kari Smith, University of Science and Technology
Guðrún Geirsdóttir, University of Iceland
Ingvar Sigurgeirsson, University of Iceland

Opponents at defense
Mary Hill, University of Auckland
Christopher DeLuca, Queen's University

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A dissertation for a Ph.D. degree in education

Preface

In the following pages, I will explore the topic of assessment, specifically how assessment is used for the purpose of learning and the interplay of cultural context. The thesis consists of three articles and a meta-text.

I began this work in 2015. In the early years, I worked on the project while employed full time, first as an upper-secondary psychology teacher and later as a part-time lecturer at the University of Iceland's School of Education. After receiving a two-year scholarship from the Icelandic University Fund in 2019, I was able to continue the project with the focus and dedication necessary for a doctoral thesis.

Doing a PhD is like undertaking a long journey, but all journeys must have a destination that is valuable and worth the effort. For me, gaining a deeper understanding of how the use of assessment can benefit students has instilled a passion that has helped me keep going in the face of difficult challenges. In the course of the journey, I visited several locations and met people who either walked with me or shared their perspectives to help frame the challenges I was bound to face. Various authors, researchers, and my dialogic companions have generously lent me their voices to help me think, and as a result, my voice speaking to you, the reader, has become multi-voiced. Going on a trip like doctoral studies has allowed me to explore deep valleys, and it has taught me the value of good travel companions. I can state with certainty that I have been exceptionally fortunate with mentors who have reached my hand, especially when I felt lost and unsure of which path to pursue. There have been many successes, owing mostly to the fact that the project has forced me to step outside my comfort zone and take on new challenges, yet in the end, it is me that has been the main challenge. One of the most difficult obstacles has been developing and discovering my own voice, and doctoral studies, in my opinion, are about that—finding your academic voice that marks the unification of the personal and the theoretical.

Abstract

Research indicates that the implementation of Assessment of Learning (AfL) has overemphasized the "letter" of AfL at the expense of the "spirit." There is still limited research about how teachers perceive assessment and feedback in different assessment cultures at the upper-secondary level, particularly in the Icelandic context. The aim of the research is to gain a deeper understanding of how teachers' and students' perception of assessment and feedback is shaped by different assessment cultures. The research was conducted in three upper secondary schools in Iceland. The methodology is based on mixed method design, where quantitative survey data is followed by qualitative focus-group interviews. The dataset consists of a survey administered to teachers and students, as well as six focus groups of teachers and students in corresponding schools. The schools for this study were purposefully chosen based on school policy and experience of implementing AfL. The findings suggest that students' involvement in assessment is limited and teachers' and students' perceptions of assessment diverse. AfL cultural characteristics were dynamic and demonstrated by personal communication, strong teacher-student relationships and culture of dialogue. The findings indicate that the grading/testing assessment culture is more static and characterized by superficial approaches to learning, distrust of student participation, an emphasis on bureaucracy, and power imbalances. Overall, teachers' and students' perceptions of assessment and feedback appear to be influenced by characteristics of the assessment culture. The findings conclude that limited student involvement needs special attention, particularly in relation to emphasis in the national curriculum and to enhance teachers and students assessment literacy.

Abstract in Icelandic

Námsmatsmenning skiptir máli

Upplifun kennara og nemenda af námsmati og endurgjöf

Rannsóknir benda til þess að innleiðing leiðsagnarnáms hafi ekki gengið sem skyldi og er skýringin m.a. sú að áhersla sé lögð á tæknilega útfærslu (e. assessment for learning) á kostnað þeirrar námsmatsmenningar (e. assessment culture) sem til þarf. Hérlendis skortir rannsóknir á námsmati á framhaldsskólastiginu og fáar erlendar rannsóknir hafa verið gerðar á áhrifum námsmatsmenningar á reynslu nemenda og kennara af námsmati. Markmið rannsóknarinnar er að öðlast skilning á því hvernig námsmatsmenning mótar reynslu kennara og nemenda af námsmati. Rannsóknin var unnin með blönduðu rannsóknarsniði (e. mixed method design). Spurningalisti var lagður fyrir nemendur og kennara í þremur íslenskum framhaldsskólum og þeim síðan fylgt eftir með rýnihópaviðtölum. Notað var markvisst úrtak (e. purposive sampling) og voru þátttökuskólar valdir með hliðsjón af námsmatsstefnu og reynslu af innleiðingu á leiðsagnarnámi. Niðurstöður sýna að þátttaka og ábyrgð nemenda á framkvæmd námsmats er takmörkuð. Einkenni lærdómsmiðaðrar námsmatsmenningar, sem er forsenda leiðsagnarnáms, birtist meðal annars í persónulegum og afslöppuðum skólabrag þar sem ríkja jákvæð tengsl á milli kennara og nemenda. Prófa- og einkunnamiðuð námsmatsmenning endurspeglaðist hins vegar í yfirborðslegri nálgun nemenda í námi og neikvæðri afstöðu til þátttöku nemenda í námsmati. Út frá niðurstöðunum og áherslum námskrár á hæfni og lýðræðislega starfshætti, má álykta að huga þurfi mun betur að námsmatsmenningu sem byggir á þátttöku nemenda í námsmati. Niðurstöður sýna jafnframt að leita þarf frekari leiða til að auka hlutdeild og ábyrgð nemenda og þannig stuðla að aukinni námsmatshæfni (e. assessment literacy) kennara og nemenda.

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List of Papers

This dissertation is based upon the following papers, referred to by their Roman numerals

I.   Jónsson, Í. R., Smith, K., & Geirsdóttir, G. (2018). Shared language of feedback and assessment. Perception of teachers and students in three Icelandic secondary schools. *Studies in Educational Evaluation, 56*, 52-58. doi:10.1016/j.stueduc.2017.11.003

II.   Jónsson, Í. R., & Geirsdóttir, G. (2020). "This school really teaches you to talk to your teachers": Students' experience of different assessment cultures in three Icelandic upper secondary schools. *Assessment Matters, 14*, 63-88. doi:10.18296/am.0042

III.   Jónsson, Í. R. (2022). Student involvement in assessment and power relations: Teachers perspective. P*edagogy, Culture & Society* Accepted with revisions.

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1   Introduction

1.1 Background - Motivation

As a teacher, and researcher, I am bound by the paradoxical context of being a part of this study's social and institutional framework. My perspective and pedagogical beliefs influence how I go about my work as a teacher, and it goes without saying that this also influences my approach as a researcher.

Assessment has always been a struggle for me since I began teaching psychology in 2006. As I have a background in psychology, I approached the assessment via the perspective of psychometrics. That is, regarding assessments as an objective and trustworthy appraisal of what students learnt in my classes. However, I soon noticed a disconnect between the outcomes of my "measuring" method and how I perceived my role as a teacher in the classroom. Despite my desire, I refrained from altering my approach. I was hesitant to question the established method of doing things at my school, knowing from my conversations with colleagues that the testing approach was viewed as a quality indicator of my professionalism. The question "how can you measure what students have learned if you don't test them?" was frequently used to respond to ideas and suggestions to innovative assessment methods. "Are you really unconcerned if someone passes your course without deserving it?" Later, in retrospect, I know how important these questions were. Not because they touched my conscience as a professional teacher, but because they reveal two challenging issues when it comes to changing how assessment is practiced. Firstly, how learning is conceptualized and secondly, the strong influence of accountability.

The spark that led to this project can be traced back to when I became a teacher in a school that recently started implementing Assessment for Learning (AfL)[1]. It was meaningful to me and in harmony with my values to use assessment for the benefit of the student and their learning. I was very impressed by the school's policy of focusing on formative feedback instead of grades and students' work over the whole semester rather than final

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[1] The new regulations were less centralized than its predecessor and gave schools more freedom to develop and implement pedagogical and assessment policies.

examinations. Although, I embraced this new context, I encountered a few obstacles. The first one was my limited understanding of AfL. Yet on my second day of work, we (the new teachers) received a short lecture on AfL and the school´s policy on assessment. My first impression was that if I was to master AfL, I would need to learn "the right technique" in order to give students feedback that entailed clear and detailed information about student assignments. Through my observations, I discovered that if I was to use AfL, I would need to focus on finding the correct technique.

I started to put a lot of ambitious work into constructing very detailed and precise criteria which could later be used to justify the grade "behind" the feedback. This was quite complicated because the purpose of giving formative feedback appeared to contradict our obligation to assign grades at the end of the course. When reading students' work and wondering what I should write in the feedback, I found myself conflicted trying to convey two competing, even incompatible voices. One said the feedback had to be codifiable into numbers, while the other wanted dialogue with students to help them learn. I soon discovered that when I complied with the pressure of making the feedback translatable to numbers, my feedback, at most, served summative purposes under the disguise of practicing AfL.

More importantly, students did not seem to read or use the feedback I had spent a long time constructing. Yet, by having the feedback documented, I could rationalize to myself that at least I had done my part of the work. I began to call into question what I had taken for granted and started to reflect together with my colleagues and students on AfL (Jónsson & Jónsson, 2015). These dialogues gave me insight into the breadth and complexity of practicing AfL and subsequently pushed me onward to the journey of this thesis, with the purpose of understanding how teachers' and students' perceptions of assessment is shaped by the culture. To understand the context in which I work, the next section briefly presents the Icelandic context.

1.2 Assessment in Icelandic Context

This section focuses on Icelandic upper-secondary education background, which is followed by a discussion of the Icelandic curriculum and research on assessment in the Icelandic context.

The Icelandic educational system contains preschool (1-6), compulsory (6-16), upper-secondary (16-19) levels. Compulsory school entails both primary and lower-secondary levels and students generally attend the same school at both levels. Iceland's first legislation on children's education was

passed in 1907, stating that all education should be free for children aged 10-14. Before the legislation was introduced, education was mainly homeschooling for privileged boys. In the 18th and 19th centuries, assessment was primarily a replication of Danish procedures (It is important to note that Iceland remained part of Denmark until the mid-19th century). In 1930, with the impact of psychometric testing from the United States, a national testing system began at the national level, implementing national testing at elementary level in 1927 (Jónasson et al., 2021; Proppé, 1983).

The national tests have been a topic of debate, both at a political and school level, especially concerning educational value and purpose. The conflict between Nordal (1927) and Arason (1926) highlight tensions about assessment in Icelandic society at the beginning of the 19th century. Arason was a Columbia University graduate who advocated for adopting standardized tests in Iceland. He defended the tests' efficacy, claiming that "the value of measurement has repeatedly been shown and acknowledged[2]" (Arason, 1926, p. 2). Nordal (1927) was sceptical of the purpose of the tests and stated that "the objective seems to be to make people mechanical ... and that everything should be measured[3]" (p. 57). Nordal took a humanistic position and pointed out "that at the same time, it must be recognized that some things will never be measured, exactly because the laws of measurement do not apply to it ... and this *it* is precisely the most valuable thing in life[4]" (Nordal, 1927, p. 57).

Tensions concerning assessment in Iceland are evident at a political level and, as a result, in policy texts. The tension manifests itself, among other things, as opposing poles, especially in the discourse that appears in different curricula and legislation texts. But even opposing views are expressed in the same policy text. For example, it seems possible to identify two different threads in the latest educational Act from 2008 and the national curriculum from 2011, threads that seem to be in harmony with previous Acts, for example, emphases regarding democracy and student-centered emphases in the 1974 Act. At the same time, one can also see psychometric emphases prevalent in the national curriculum for upper secondary schools from 1999 (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture,

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[2] Translated by author from the original text: Það er orðið margsannað og viðurkennt að það margborgar sig.

[3] Translated by author from the original text: að allt eigi að mæla og ekki verði felldur öruggur dómur um neitt, nema hann sé á tölum reistur. [...] Takmarkið virðist vera að gera mennina vélar eða vélaþjóna

[4] Translated by author from the original text: En um leið verður að gera sér ljóst, að sumt verður aldrei mælt [...] Og þetta sumt er einmitt hið verðmætasta í tilverunni.

1999). It can be argued that the 2011 curriculum is an attempt to advocate democratic values, yet without compromising the requirements for accountability and reliable and objective assessment (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2011). To a certain extent, the 1974 Act (Elementary School Act 1974/63) appeared to be preeminent concerning assessment, where assessment of learning (AoL) and assessment for Learning (AfL) were defined separately. The phrase "leiðsagnarnámsmat" in the Act refers to assessment used for the purpose of facilitating students' learning. Interestingly, the concept "leiðsagnarnámsmat" (e. formative assessment or assessment for learning) appears to have been introduced long before it became widely used in Icelandic context (now either as "leiðsagnarmat" or "leiðsagnarnám"). Furthermore, the concept is clearly defined in the Act as follows:

> Assessment is not limited to the end of study, it is supposed to be integrated as part of education and interwoven into teaching and learning. The main goal of assessment is to motivate and help students in their learning (Elementary School Act 1974/63). [5]

However, Proppé (1983) paints a rather negative picture of an upper-secondary school culture driven by testing and grading in the 1970s and 1980s. Proppé asserts that, "evaluation at all school levels in Iceland seems to be here what has been called "quantitative evaluation" and claims that "any forms of guidance is almost unheard of" (p. 253). Proppé describes teaching as mainly focused on an academic subject and textbook learning. According to Proppé, teaching is concentrated on academic subjects and textbook learning. Additionally, he argues that the common attitude of students is the belief that "that examinations and their results are what the school is all about" (p. 243). Yet, despite his pessimistic outlook, Proppé notes that there are encouraging signs of teachers "at all levels who are trying new procedures, often more personal than is the general practice" (p. 239). However, there appears to have been little change in the following years, given the overall message conveyed in the 1999 national curriculum. The 1999 curriculum defines assessment primarily as summative, and the whole section on assessment is devoted to the administration of tests and grades (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 1999).

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[5] Translated by author from the original text: Námsmat fer ekki eingöngu fram í lok námstímans, heldur er það einn af föstum þáttum skólastarfsins, órjúfanlegt frá námi og kennslu. Megintilgangur námsmats er örvun nemenda og námshjálp.

However, over the last decade, there are some signs of a gradual shift away from traditional practice of focusing predominantly on written examination at the end of the semester. While at the same time, continuous assessment has become more common. Yet, there is some confusion about what "continuous assessment" refers to (Ingvarsdóttir, 2018).[6] Arguably, the confusion reflects the international context, where an increase in continuous assessment is meant to mitigate the negative impact of high-stakes final exams while also reconciling the tension between summative and formative assessment purposes (De Lisle, 2015).

In summary, there appears to be a strong historical legacy of focusing mostly on summative assessment in terms of testing. However, as indicated by the 1974 Act, there is a tendency in Icelandic context toward more student-centered and learning-oriented assessment perspectives.

1.3   The Icelandic National Curriculum and AfL

In comparison to the previous national curriculum from 1999, the 2008 Act and the national curriculum guide from 2011 (Icelandic Parliament, 2008; Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2011) placed a stronger emphasis on defining general education from social and individual needs. The social dimension of education is stressed in the so called fundamental pillars and on an individual level to enhance competence. The six fundamental pillars are supposed to be reflected in all school activities (i.e. literacy, sustainability, health and well-being, democracy and human rights, equality and creativity). The social dimension of the fundamental pillars is reflected at an individual level in the key competencies and in the description of learning outcomes. Key competency is defined as the following:

> Pupils have to *know what they know and what they are capable of, and how best to utilize their knowledge* [emphasis added] and skills to influence their environment and improve it. Therefore, competence is more than knowledge and skills; it also encompasses attitudes and moral strength, feelings and

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[6] One such approach is to assemble students work (assignments, tests and other kind of students work and participation) over the semester and count it as a final grade. Another common practice of continuous assessment is when teachers apply a pre-defined a target grade that students have to reach to skip the final examination.

creative force, social skills and initiative [emphasis added].
(Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2011, p. 23)

As discussed in the preface of the curriculum guide, the role of the fundamental pillars is to strengthen student´s competence as "future ability to be critical, active and competent participants in a society based on equality and democracy" (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2011, p. 5). Interestingly, the curriculum emphasizes what has been label led the "third aim" of assessment, sustainable assessment "that meets the needs of the present and [also] prepares students to meet their own future learning needs" (Boud, 2000, p. 151).

The Act from 2008 and subsequent Curriculum Guide from 2011 is less centralized than its predecessor and provides schools with more authority to develop and implement pedagogical and assessment policies.

Some upper secondary schools have implemented assessment for learning (AfL) policies in their practice. There is, however, a scarcity of research on the success of these projects. This thesis intends to explore the Icelandic context, whereas research from the international context shows a gap between AfL policy and classroom practice (Grob et al., 2019; Hayward, 2015).

1.3.1   Incompatible Messages

It is food for thought that the national curriculum guide from 2011 sends teachers two conflicting messages that could be difficult to integrate into the classroom. On the one hand, teachers are given a message in the constructivist tradition encouraging them to adopt a variety of flexible assessment approaches. On the other hand, they must interpret a message with a psychometric undertone, that is, to apply a quality assessment that is "reliable, impartial, honest, and fair"' and that "all aspects of education are to be evaluated" (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2011, p. 26). Impartial and trustworthy judgments are, in some ways, founded in the positivist tradition of psychological testing (Gipps, 1994). While the curricular emphasis is also that assessment should be holistic and student-centered, where the following is expected to be assessed:

As *many aspects of learning as possible. Therefore, both oral, practical, written and pictorial assignments are to be assessed*, [emphasis added] also short specific exercises and more thorough studies, individual and group work, projects carried

out within a limited timeframe and with unlimited time, and additionally various types of examinations. Portfolios or workbooks, where various tasks and solutions are collected, for example digitally, can be useful to give an overview of the pupils' work and to show their application, *activity, work methods, progress and social skills* [emphasis added]. (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2011, p. 26)

Given the subjective nature of assessment tasks and capacities such as social skills and creative work, it is difficult to see how the above criteria can be assessed in an objective and reliable manner. The concern is that there may be a discrepancy between assessment and the national curriculum guidelines, which raises the question of how teachers might reconcile these opposing viewpoints. Prior research, both in Icelandic context at the elementary level (Þórólfsson et al., 2009), and secondary level (Cross & Frary, 1999) indicates that the consequence of contesting messages can lead to what has been termed the „hodgepodge" of various assessment sources (e.g. attitudes, effort, achievement). Which subsequently leads to an incoherence in grading practices and a gap between curriculum policies and practice (Þórólfsson et al., 2009; Cross & Frary, 1999).

Additionally, schools are to follow governmental regulations to assign final course grades in numbers 1-10, while at the same time, the curriculum gives authority and freedom to "make an effort to form their policy concerning varied assessment and guidance for students" (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2011, p. 60). It could be argued that the regulations can become problematic, as grading could encourage teachers to focus on grades at the cost of using feedback and assessment for learning purposes. Furthermore, teachers are challenged to report summative assessment at the end of each course according to numerical scale demonstrating students competence based on verbally stated learning outcomes, which according to Sadler (1987) are "always to some degree vague or fuzzy" (p. 202).

Studies indicate that teachers have difficulty reconciling trustworthy and evidence-based evaluation regarding student participation in assessment (Forsell et al., 2021). Moreover, according to the national curriculum guidelines', all courses end with a final grade, assumingly creating tension between fair and objective grading and formative purposes (Cheng et al., 2020). Considering the possible social consequences of accountability and external pressure on teachers, one can imagine, having in the strong-hold of accountability to document "many aspects of education as possible,"

that the tendency develops into sustaining a status quo on teacher-centered assessment approaches.

In the end, despite the curriculum's guide (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2011), emphasis for more democratic and student-centered practices, the message concerning assessment is relatively ambiguous, most possibly because the curriculum attempts to balance opposing perspectives.

1.3.2   AfL in the National Curriculum

The underlying message about the assessment strategy to be used is conveyed in broad terms, without specifying what the various assessment methods mentioned here entail in practice, such as "oral or written, including self-evaluation, peer assessment, assessment on a continuous basis and final assessment" (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2011, p. 60). AfL is defined in the curriculum as a practice where students "regularly consider their education with their teachers to attain *their own* [emphasis added] educational goals and decide where to head" (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2011, p. 26). Therefore, objectives are described as student-centered, while, they are also described as imposed, with the teacher having to "*explain to them the objectives of education and how they are progressing* [emphasis added] towards them … Criteria, on which the assessment is based, have to be absolutely clear to pupils" (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2011, p. 26).

It is worth considering that the curriculum indicates the transfer of ownership of learning without elaborating on how this is accomplished. Moreover, a more extensive description of AfL or its implementation in practice is missing. Even though feedback is a critical component of AfL, it is only mentioned once in the curriculum regarding students receiving "an opportunity to utilize their talents and feedback for their work" (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2011, p. 39). For instance, the meaning of feedback is not elaborated further, and it is presumed that providing students with feedback is enough to facilitate learning. This vague definition of AfL is problematic in not having a clear picture of what to expect and observe when practice is implemented (Bennett, 2011; Klenowski, 2009a). One possible consequence of unclear messages in policy texts is a gap between practice and curriculum (Harlen & Hayward, 2010; Hayward, 2015). However, as Clark (2011) points out, a standardized definition of AfL may be unrealistic, as teachers cannot prepare and define a course of action where every context of interaction in the classroom is

unique. Widely varying definitions of AfL have emerged (Assessment Reform Group [ARG], 2002; Bennett, 2011; Black & Wiliam, 1998; Klenowski, 2009a) and a consensus of definition in the literature has been problematic (Bennett, 2011).

1.3.3   Formative Assessment and Assessment for Learning

Formative assessment (FA) and assessment for learning (AfL) are often used interchangeably (Swaffield, 2011; Torrance, 2012). In this thesis, the two concepts are in some cases, used interchangeably, such as when referring to the purpose and function of feedback and assessment. However, it should be highlighted that while FA is used in the thesis' initial article, the decision to use AfL instead of FA was gradual, and driven by a shift in the Icelandic context. The traditional Icelandic term for AfL has been "leiðsagnarmat", which literally translates as "guided-assessment" (a compound of the words "guidance" and "assessment"). However, the term has been criticized in recent years for exaggerating assessment at the expense of learning, and gradually the second compound of the word ("mat," or assessment) has been replaced with nám (learning), which translates into Icelandic as "leiðsagnarnám" (guided learning). According to the Icelandic newspaper and article database (timarit.is), leiðsagnarmat was first used in 1992, while leiðsagnarnám was first used in 2018. It may be argued that the transition in Iceland mirrors criticism of formative assessment for putting too much focus on the letter of AfL at the expense of the spirit of AfL (Bennett, 2011; Cech, 2008; Swaffield, 2011). Furthermore, some scholars have argued that formative assessment and AfL have different meanings (Klenowski, 2009a; Swaffield, 2011), arguing that formative assessment, as defined by Black and Wiliam (1998) and later by the Assessment Reform Group (ARG, 2002), is more teacher-centered than AfL beacuse the teachers' role in gathering and using assessment data formatively to adapt instruction toward students' needs are more profoundly reflected in FA. In contrast, AfL focuses more on learning and the student as an autonomous agent, and Swaffield (2011) points out, "In assessment for learning, pupils exercise agency and autonomy, while in formative assessment they can be passive recipients of teachers' decisions and actions" (p. 443). Swaffield argues that while FA focuses on learning objectives, AfL focuses on learning and the aspirations to learn.

The definition proposed in this thesis is built on the second-generation definition of AfL (Klenowski, 2009a). It considers the context AfL is embedded in, and capitalizes on student´s involvement, the role of dialogue

and student's ownership of learning. Furthermore, AfL is situated in everyday contexts, where collaboration and dialogue with others are a source of learning. In this thesis, AfL is defined as *a part of everyday practice, embedded in a culture that facilitates active participation and dialogue between students, teachers and peers in ways that enhance ongoing learning and guides students to become owners of their own learning*.

The proposed definition has some built-in assumptions, such as situating AfL as a relational part of a complex social context. Implementation of AfL has been characterized by putting the "letter" above the "spirit" of AfL (Birenbaum, 2016; Marshall & Jane Drummond, 2006). Therefore, it is suggested to position AfL in the context of assessment culture and empowerment of the student, which should not be neglected in AfL practice.

1.4   Research on Assessment in Iceland

Although there has been limited research on assessment at the upper secondary level in Iceland, some studies provide indicators about broad pedagogical approaches. A thorough study of 130 lessons in nine schools reveals a predominance of teacher-centered and traditional practices, such as lectures and written assignments, with little student interaction (Sigurgeirsson et al., 2018). The researchers concluded that teaching in Icelandic upper secondary schools seems to be lacking in methods that "require students to make decisions, show independence, participate and show initiative" (Sigurgeirsson et al., 2018, p. 21). One section of the research, Ingvarsdóttir (2018) focused on how student's autonomy was expressed in the actions of teachers and students. Ingvarsdóttir concludes that "teacher-centered instruction remains the most conspicuous teaching method and the student's voice is absent most of the time" (p. 15). Furthermore, one interesting theme in the findings was "test-driven teaching", which Ingvarsdóttir interpreted as a tool for teachers to regulate students' behavior and motivation (Ingvarsdóttir, 2018). Another study focused on the perception of assessment among twelve mathematics teachers at a vocational level (Eiríksdóttir & Jóhannesson, 2016). The findings indicated that teachers' decisions about assessment are primarily based on superficial assumptions, such as controlling student conduct such as, ensuring that students did work independently (e.g. not copying work from other students). Meanwhile, other teachers expressed that decisions in assessment were built on pedagogical ideologies, such as meeting

student´s needs. Teachers regarded the traditional final test as the primary method for summative assessment. The authors noted a transition among some of the teachers, as indicated by decreasing weighting of the final exam. Interestingly, teachers who viewed testing as a controlling instrument appeared to be less receptive to changing their practices in accordance with the curriculum. (Eríksdóttir & Jóhannesson, 2016). According to Ragnarsdóttir and Jónasson (2020), changing assessment and teaching methods is challenging because of resistance from established traditions within disciplines and departments in schools.

In summary, the findings above reveal a disconnect between what is emphasized in the curriculum and what is practiced in the classroom, which is characterized by teacher-oriented approaches.

According to the TALIS survey from 2018 (OECD, 2021), Icelandic teachers seem to have improved in adding feedback with grades. However, they score among the lowest when asked about student involvement in assessment. Furthermore, Icelandic teachers score low when asked whether they give immediate feedback on students work.

Moreover, there is some research on elementary school assessment, for example, in Sigthorsson's (2008) case study on four schools. His findings showed that the assessment culture was mainly grading- and testing oriented, especially as students grew older (13-15-years). Teaching approaches were based mainly on presenting students with factual knowledge in the spirit of the transmission model. Another study by Þórólfsson et al. (2009) reviewed the purpose and policies around assessment in elementary schools in Iceland as described in the curriculum guide. Their findings showed that assessment appeared to be a hodgepodge (Icelandic = samsull), a mix of various assessment tools and methods. Moreover, the study revealed a conflict between policy and the implementation of assessment. Despite good intent and the declared policy of AfL, the authors state a strong tendency for schools to emphasize quantity rather than quality and to use formal grades rather than informal and constructive feedback.

According to a more current comprehensive research at the compulsory level from 2014, assessment methods seem to vary between teachers, and as previously noted by Sigthorsson (2008), more emphasis on traditional exams at older levels. Interestingly, the findings revealed a discrepancy between what teachers said about their practice and what researchers observed in their classrooms. The authors conclude that, despite teachers' aspiration to adopt diverse teaching methods, they choose not to do so.

Possible explanations include a lack of self-belief in necessary skills or knowledge and teachers' articulation of what they feel is desirable rather than actual (Óskarsdóttir et al., 2014; Sigurgeirsson et al., 2014).

However, more recently, there has been a growing interest and appreciation of AfL at the elementary level. As a result, over 20 schools have started to implement AfL in the capital city, Reykjavik. Yet, this project has not been researched. Nevertheless, a report by school administrators' yields a positive experience with the project. Participants mention, for example, how the project has provided teachers with tools (e.g. website with resources, external professional support) for improving teaching practice and positively influencing teacher´s attitudes towards student learning (Sigurgeirsson & Jónsdóttir, 2019).

In summary, the limited research on assessment in Iceland indicates that instruction and assessment practices are largely teacher-centered. Moreover, there is a gap in knowledge regarding assessment at the upper secondary level, which this thesis intends to address.

1.5 Purpose, Aim and Research Questions

Research indicates that the implementation of AfL has overemphasized the "letter" of AfL at the expense of the "spirit" (Hayward, 2015; Marshall & Drummond, 2006; Torrance, 2007) and there is a gap between teachers and student´s perception of assessment and feedback (Carless, 2020; Havnes et al., 2012). Perception of assessment and feedback practices influence how students approach in learning activities (Carless, 2006; Gamlem & Smith, 2013; Struyven et al., 2005). Although teachers report giving students plenty of useful feedback, much of it is not perceived as such, nor is it used by the students, mainly because the students do not understand the feedback (Havnes et al., 2012; Mäkipää & Ouakrim-Soivio, 2020). It is assumed that the influence of AfL on student learning rests on how students perceive the feedback and assessment practices. If they do not perceive it as relevant or helpful in their learning, they are subsequently less likely to use it (Havnes et al., 2012; Van der Kleij & Lipnevich, 2021). In this thesis, I intend to address this by exploring how teachers' and students' perceptions are affected by assessment and feedback practices against the backdrop of different assessment cultures.

In the past, international research focused chiefly on the effectiveness of AfL and feedback to enhance learning. There is substantial and growing literature on teachers' and students' perceptions of assessment and feedback (Havnes et al., 2012; van der Kleij, 2019). Yet, as Dawson et al.

(2019) point out, previous research has mainly focused on students' or teachers' perceptions, while studies including both teachers and students have been lacking. Additionally, the focus has mainly been on one institution. Furthermore, past research has primarily focused on the lower secondary schools (Gamlem & Smith, 2013) and the perception of feedback in higher education institutions (Carless & Boud, 2018; van der Kleij, 2021). At the same time, the upper-secondary level is relatively under-researched (Mäkipää & Hildén, 2021). Overall, there is a need for further research on assessment in the Icelandic context, especially in relation to upper-secondary level schools. An indication from prior research suggests that there is a gap between practice and the policy of the national curriculum guide, and the transmission approach portrays the primary pedagogical approach and a strong tradition for testing and grading oriented assessment culture (Eríksdóttir & Jóhannesson, 2016; Proppé, 1983; Ragnarsdóttir & Jónasson, 2020; Sigurgeirsson et al., 2018).

The aim of the research is to gain deeper understanding of how teachers' and students' perceptions of assessment and feedback is shaped by different assessment cultures. This project adds to the limited research literature about assessment and feedback at upper-secondary level schools in Iceland. Furthermore, it intends to contribute to the limited literature on international level assessment and feedback in diverse assessment cultures at an upper-secondary level. The project aims to contribute by providing new insights into the discussion about assessment for learning and, concurrently, raise more awareness about the value of cultural characteristics that shape the practice of AfL. The research findings are important to teacher education, in-service training within schools, and will provide more knowledge for the discourse on implementing assessment policy. Exploring teachers and students' perceptions in schools with different emphasis and policy in assessment can shed light on factors that either support or inhibit AfL. The overarching research question is: *How are teachers' and students' perceptions of assessment and feedback shaped by different assessment cultures*? To illuminate the overall questions, three sub-questions are asked.

1. How do teachers and students in secondary schools in Iceland perceive feedback? How do different assessment cultures affect students' and teachers' perception of feedback and assessment?
2. How do students in three upper secondary schools in Iceland experience different assessment cultures?
3. How do teachers perceive students' involvement in assessment and feedback?

1.6 Thesis Outline

This thesis is divided into six chapters. Here in the first chapter I have given a brief overview of the context of the project. I reflect upon the Icelandic context, policy papers, research and the curriculum. The thesis's objective and research questions are stated in the final section, followed by presenting the theoretical background and the rationale for the theoretical perspective. The third chapter gives an outline of relevant literature and research, followed by chapter four which describes the methodology, the research paradigm and the structure of the three studies on which this project is based. The fifth chapter includes the findings and synthesis of the three articles. The sixth chapter discusses the synthesis of the findings in relation to relevant research literature and the theoretical perspective. Finally, conclusion and implication are discussed, together with future research and limitation of the research.

2   Theoretical Perspective

The thesis is situated within a sociocultural viewpoint in order to address the research question about the influence of the assessment culture on the perception of assessment. It will be argued that technical conceptualization of AfL, rooted in the transmission paradigm and psychometrics, is at the expense of what AfL was initially about, the student, and how assessment is used to facilitate learning. The issue mandates a theoretical perspective that portrays the "spirit" of AfL. To this end, learning is situated within dynamic relationships embedded in an assessment culture. Situating the thesis within a sociocultural context enables us to view learning, assessment, and dialogue as dynamic and culturally sensitive processes. Finally, against the backdrop of shifting traditional roles in AfL, Freire (1970) and Ellsworth's (1989) perspectives are used to redefine power dynamics in the teacher-student relationship.

2.1   AfL From a Sociocultural Perspective

The transmission paradigm of learning views the learner as a passive recipient of information, which is consistent with positivist epistemology's notion of knowledge as "out there", independent to the observer. By contrast, constructivism views the learner as an active agent engaged in the process of creating new meaning from experience (Bruner, 1996). The sociocultural perspective begins at the border of where the constructivist perspective ends, in virtue of challenging the notion of the learner as a possessor of knowledge and skills with the notion of learning as socially distributed (Bruner, 1996; Wertsch, 1993). In this sense, the concept of learning is rooted in social interaction as a "person-in-the-world," as opposed to the traditional dichotomy of identifying the source of learning in terms of internal versus external elements. The sociocultural approach, on the other hand, "locates learning, not in the head or outside it, but in the relationship between the person and the world, which for human beings is a social person in a social world" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 52; Wenger, 2010, p. 1). Learning, according to Vygotsky (1978), can be viewed from two closely interdependent planes, the intermental (psychological) and intramental (social interaction). From this perspective, the boundary between the environment and the individual mind becomes permeable, whereby interaction functions to "mediate intermental processes are taken

over to form the intramental plane of functioning" (Wertsch, 1998, p. 111). Accordingly, the outlook of learning and assessment, which on the surface appears individualistic, are, according to essentially dialogic as the activity has emerged from participating in "encounters on the instrumental plane" (Wertsch, 1998, p. 110).

The conditions of one's relationships with others determine the possibility of learning through participation in social activities, which in turn influence teachers' and students' perceptions of legitimate authority and their role in the community. As a result, this creates an ongoing conflict within relationships and a transition of roles and responsibilities is assumed as part of learning in a community with others, as Lave and Wenger (1991) point out, learning "implies becoming a full participant, a member, a kind of person" (p. 36). Accordingly, students' involvement in AfL is defined as learning in terms of negotiating a sense of self relative to others by joint action and 'because [as] learning transforms who we are and what we can do, it is an experience of identity. It is not just an accumulation of skills and information, but a process of becoming- a „certain person" (Wenger 1998, p. 215).

Unsettlement of pre-established social roles from a sociocultural perspective is problematized as the evolvement of membership, where practitioners define and redefine responsibility toward a shared understanding of the legitimacy of its members. According to Lave and Wenger (1991), access to the community´s language is "access to practice as a resource for learning" (p. 85). In the case of participating in the assessment-discourse, teachers and more competent others can serve as gatekeepers to learning resources mediated by dialogue, which becomes an essential part of extending further learning opportunities in the community (Rogoff, 1995; Vygotsky, 1978; Willis, 2009).

Learning from a sociocultural perspective is embedded in participation and through interactions with others. As a result, learning is sensitive to the quality of the relationships and shared cultural context (Wertsch, 1993; Willis et al., 2013).

2.2   Assessment - Sociocultural Perspective

One of the challenges with AfL may be traced back to the psychometric and transmission paradigms' overemphasis on "assessment" at the expense of "learning" (James, 2006). Additionally, James (2006) argued that stressing the "spirit" of AfL must be acknowledged in a theoretical framework that is

compatible with the concept of learning as open-ended and creative beyond the scope of objective measurement.

Shepard (2000) points out that historically, the literature did not make a distinction between requirements of standardized testing and classroom assessment, "where it was teachers who held beliefs more consistent with traditional principles of scientific measurement" (p. 5). Accordingly, values inherent in the context of psychological testing were undertaken by the educational realm, who agreed upon the presumption that objective and reliable measures equal quality, with the consequence of narrowing the value of learning into what was measurable (Biesta, 2009). The questionable assumption of viewing quality of assessment in terms of measurement is highlighted by Stiggins (2007), who stated that: "Even the most valid and reliable assessment cannot be regarded as high quality if it causes a student to give up. (...) High-quality assessments encourage further learning; low-quality assessments hinder learning" (p. 7).

Assessment is dynamic and relational, interwoven with pedagogy and relationships in the classroom (Willis et al., 2013). Klenowski (2009b) stresses the role of the student as an active agent, as opposed to being the object of assessment. In other words, assessment is not "something that is being done *to* students [but rather as] something that is being done *with* and *for* the students" (p. 89). The notion of how assessment shapes learning is highlighted in Vygotsky´s notion of mediation of cultural artefacts. Wherein cultural tools shape students thinking and activity "is mediated and that it cannot be separated from the milieu in which it is carried out" (Wertsch, 1993, p. 18). The cultural artifacts can both refer to physical tools, such as written exams, as well as conceptual tools embedded in the language (Vygotsky, 1978).

From the traditional transmission perspective, learning activities can be divided as occasions that can be internalized at one point and retrieved later for assessment. In contrast, time is inherent in learning from a sociocultural standpoint, and hence assessment is part of preceding and subsequent learning activities. Finally, the gap between assessment and previous learning activities is problematic from a sociocultural standpoint, since learning is continuous, and prior activities are integrated in subsequent activities as an extension of prior learning (Rogoff, 1995).

Accordingly, time is inherent in assessment as learning, and therefore assessment as a distinct occasion from past learning falls short in reflecting the learning process (Rogoff, 1995). From this vantage point, assessment is never complete, it implies opportunities of engagement. In comparison,

assessment based on the psychometric paradigm is regarded as complete and static, unrelated to prior learning in terms of time. In dynamic interaction and reflections, the student develops further insight and ownership of learning. From this standpoint, assessment is conceptualized as a part of ongoing interaction, providing insight for further evolvement of students learning (Willis, 2009; Shepard, 2019).

In conclusion, from a sociocultural perspective, assessment should represent "the spirit" of AfL, as dynamic, ongoing, and dialogical, rather than as a tool for measurement.

2.3   Feedback as Dialogue in AfL

Feedback was initially used in engineering and cybernetics to describe reactive processes in closed energy systems, thus regulating a change in mechanical systems. Wiener used the term feedback in cybernetics in 1948 to define the quality of information, whether in living machines, organisms, or society (Wiener, 2019). The engineering model was adopted by Ramaprasad (1983), who defined feedback as *closing the gap* between "the actual level and the reference level of a system parameter which is used to alter the gap in some way" (p. 4). Ramaprasad noted that if "information is not used to close the gap, it is not feedback, rather, „dangling data" (Sadler, 1989, p. 121). Drawing on Ramaprasad´s definition, Sadler (1989) expanded the notion of feedback and argued that to close the gap, both the student and the teacher must hold similar understanding of the goal and the purpose of feedback is to engage one in making one´s own judgement on what constitutes quality.

Scholars have argued that feedback is trapped in a vocabulary of an old theoretical perspective, often termed the transmission model in literature (Carless, 2020). According to the transmission paradigm, feedback equals information being channeled from one place to another, and traditionally it is the teacher who "sends" the feedback and the student "receives" it. The traditional learning model placed knowledge as the "possession" of the teacher, who is situated in the power position handing the knowledge to the student (Freire, 1970). One could argue that the transmission paradigm's longevity stems from its compatibility with traditional, teacher-oriented practices, such as formal traditional written feedback, while often falling short of reflecting the spirit of AfL as defined by the contingency of classroom dialogue (Black & Wiliam, 1998). With this in mind, a comparison of written feedback versus face to face dialogue is helpful to illuminate the suitability of framing AfL in a theoretical framework which situates learning

as contextual and dynamic. Sadler (2010) argues that the problem of traditional written feedback is that it is used to "tell" students what they need to improve. However, in everyday moment to moment interaction of AfL, perception of the immediate context of the dialogue is in the foreground. Conversely, in written feedback, it is presupposed that the intended teacher's meaning is written in a different context than when the student receives it. According to Linell (2009), the salience of the context shapes the dialogue itself and thus provides signals and responses to develop shared understanding. Linell's observations are relevant in relation to the value of moment to moment contingency of the dialogue (Black & Wiliam, 1998), by stressing the dynamism in the making of the learning resources for the immediate context accessible, both to the student and the teacher.

While a variety of definitions of dialogue have been suggested, this thesis will use the definition first suggested by Lodge (2008), who wrote that dialogue "requires participants to be engaged in a dynamic talk that builds on the ideas and *perspectives of all.* It requires *openness* [emphasis added] to differences and to considering alternatives" (p. 7). Lodge´s concept is valuable because it emphasizes the democratic, dynamic, and open characteristics of dialogue. Additionally, democratic dialogue is assumed to be a necessary aspect of AfL as a result of the transition from traditional teacher-student relationships. Moreover, dynamism situates the dialogue within the sociocultural paradigm. Dialogue is not fixed but dynamic and open to constructing new meaning mediated by the social-cultural context Wertsch (1993). The notion of Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development (ZPD) captures clearly the value of dialogue and collaborating with more capable others. Vygotsky assigns the concept of learning with plasticity to go beyond individual current capacity, where potential learning emerges in joint space where the individual internalizes the guidance and perspective of more capable others (Vygotsky, 1978).

Both the teacher and the student are also communicating with the surrounding environment. Dewey (1916) used the term "medium" when referring to "something more than surroundings which encompass an individual" (p. 15). Institutional roles, such as teachers' positions of authority, are a part of the context and influence expectations about relationships and communication. Granted that AfL is practiced via active participation, a tension unfolds between assumed traditional roles in the teacher-student relationship and the notion of teacher and student as collaborators (Crossouard, 2009).

By adopting Freire's (1970) radical perspective, who situates dialogue within a political framework and as an instrument for liberation, where dialogue takes place between equals, and the division between who teaches whom becomes blurry; as Freire maintains, that it is equally the student who teaches as it is the teacher who teaches:

> Through dialogue, the teacher-of-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in their turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow. (Freire, 1970, p. 80)

Freire opposed dialogue and "banking education", whereby in the dialogue, the individuals are viewed as incomplete and through the dynamic of the dialogue, one becomes critical and creative, and "unveil reality". In contrast, banking education suppresses critical awareness creativity, and students are presumed to be complete and disconnected from reality. Although Freire admits the imbalance in terms of teachers positions as experts, he reframes teachers as "owner of knowledge" by positioning the object of study as mediators between teacher and student, "In other words, the object to be known is put on the table between the two subjects of knowing" (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 14). Accordingly, transforming the context into co-learning of the teacher with students levels out the imbalance in power relations. The Freire perspective anticipates that changing power relations is a means toward a more democratic assessment culture. Reflecting and negotiating culturally ingrained preconceptions about assessment and roles, creates a space for re-definition of students and teacher´s responsibilities and roles (Freire, 1974). However, Ellsworth (1989) is critical of Freire's notion of dialogue. Ellsworth argues that Freire simplifies the dynamism by leaving out the complexity of the context of prevailing power-relations the dialogue is embedded in. She points out that the students' empowerment depends on other contexts, such as the teachers' struggle within an oppressive system. To address the complexity of historically and socially constructed roles, Ellsworth (1989) suggests entering the dialogue embedded in relationships of unequal power between individuals "but of building a coalition among the multiple, shifting, intersecting, and sometimes contradictory groups carrying unequal weights of legitimacy within the culture and the

classroom" (p. 317). Ellsworth's notion highlights the importance of taking the dynamic transition in roles relative to external forces and individual mobility roles rooted in cultural and historical context.

2.4 Assessment Culture From a Sociocultural Perspective

Highlighting the external forces at play in shaping interaction, the notion of assessment culture provides a valuable tool for understanding the context of the relationships' complexity and challenges. However, although widely used, a clear definition of what assessment culture refers to is commonly lacking (Allal, 2016). Before conceptualizing assessment culture, it is helpful to undertake its meaning. Here I draw on the work of Haviland et al. (2008) who define culture as "shared and socially transmitted ideas, values, and perceptions, which are used to make sense of experience, and which generate behaviour and are reflected in that behaviour" (p. 26). According to Haviland et al. (2008), culture is dynamic and shared; also, culture shapes and is shaped by participants within the culture. Secondary to culture is the school culture, which Allal (2016) defines as the context of shared values, practices, and assessment tools constructed by participants and can either hinder or improve assessment culture. Moreover, Allal suggests that assessment culture is defined in terms of how beliefs about the goal and relationship of assessment and learning influence teachers' practices and student involvement and how the meaning of tools shapes those practices. Notably, according to Birenbaum (2014), assessment culture refers to a school culture viewed through the lens of assessment. Earlier definitions of assessment culture had a narrower scope and focused on distinguishing between assessment and testing (Birenbaum, 1996; Wolf et al., 1991). As Wolf et al. (1991), who used the term assessment culture, capitalizing that the purpose of assessment cannot be limited to correcting students, rather assessment is "involved with questions of what is of value" (p. 51). Later definitions of assessment culture have focused on identifying contexts within the school culture that support learning and identify the "spirit" of AfL. Drawing on the work of Birenbaum (2014), Allal (2016) and sociocultural theory, assessment culture in this thesis refers to *shared values of practices and tools and the context of power-relations*.

As Lave and Wenger (1991) point out, "it is important to consider how shared cultural systems of meaning and political-economic structuring are interrelated with learning practice in general, and as they help to co-constitute learning in communities of practice" (p. 54). The tools constitute the resources of the community, and students' legitimacy as participants in

using these tools, is shaped by established power relations within the community. As Lave and Wenger (1991) note, "Hegemony over resources for learning and alienation from full participation are inherent in the shaping of the legitimacy and peripherality of participation in its historical realizations" (p. 42). Taken-as-given practices viewed through the lens of assessment culture provide us with the tools needed to question shared ideas and values and identify how assessment culture shapes learning (IEAN, 2021).

Birenbaum (2014) contrasts testing/grading as opposed to assessment culture. Yet, for this thesis, assessment culture is used as an umbrella term for the dimension of testing/grading and AfL culture. Birenbaum et al. (2011) define AfL culture as the context which "nurtures genuine participation of learners in the assessment process" and is characterized by "democratic relations among the partners where decisions are reached by mutual consent, dialogue is maintained, and freedom of choice coupled with responsibility is granted" (p. 6). The values inherent in the psychometric paradigm correspond to individualistic values of testing and grading culture, characterized by a strong emphasis on accountability, student comparison and a rigid belief of testing results as representative of prior learning. Conversely, in an AfL culture, diversity is embraced, and assessment is viewed as complex, needing diverse perspectives and guidance from others. Moreover, testing/grading and AfL cultures are opposed in their rigor and adaptability (Birenbaum, 2014).

In alignment with sociocultural perspective, dynamic interaction and involvement are embedded in AfL culture, wherein unpredictability and greater adaptability to changes in the environment are expected to be part of the learning process. By contrast, grading/testing culture is characterized by top-down relationships and rigidity toward constraints (Birenbaum, 2014). When looking at power relationships from this point of view, the challenge of shifting established positions can either be facilitated or sustained by features of the assessment culture. Identifying the assessment culture is therefore important for understanding how "the spirit" of AfL is implemented and conversely, how practices are affected by the tradition of the psychometrics tradition. Furthermore, understanding the dynamism of AfL embedded in a complex system composed of different layers within the institutions, such as teachers, professional community and leaders (Birenbaum, 2016) and the level of policy and discourse (IEAN, 2021). Dewey´s (1916) words highlight the interrelationship between AfL and the "spirit" of the assessment culture:

It is truly educative in its effect in the degree in which an individual shares or participates in some conjoint activity. By doing his share in the associated activity, the individual appropriates the purpose which actuates it, becomes familiar with its methods and subject matters, acquires needed skill, and is saturated *with its emotional spirit* [emphasis added]. (p. 27)

However, emphasis on instrumental and technical aspect of AfL at the cost of the "spirit" is highlighted in how the assessment part of AfL is emphasized at the cost of learning. The next section will address this by framing AfL from the perspective of the power-dynamic in teacher-student relationships.

2.5   Power Dynamic and AfL

As previously noted, in the last decade, scholars have argued that the problem with AfL is framing communication as a one-directional, that is, feedback from teachers to the student.
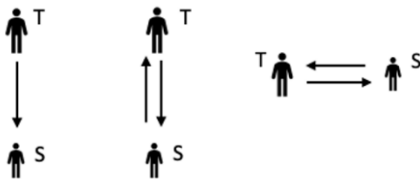
Figure 1 *Weighting out power balance in the communication.*

Picture adopted from Tomasello, M., Kruger, A., & Ratner, H. (1993). Cultural learning. Behavioral and Brain Sciences, 16, 495–552.

As this model suggests (**Figure** 1.), Ellsworth (1989) argues that the narrow framing of dialogue undermines the complexity of unsettling historically and culturally embedded roles in assessment. Ellsworth (1997) concisely summarizes the dialogue's nuances:

Dialogue in teaching is not a neutral vehicle that carries speakers' ideas and understandings back and forth across a free and open space between them. It is a vehicle designed with a particular job in mind, and the rugged terrain between speakers that it traverses make for constantly interrupted and never completed passage. (p. 49)

AfL requires student involvement, and subsequently, both teacher and students have to step out of their traditional roles, relative to the dynamic relations with contextual constraints that affect the dynamic of roles (Crossouard, 2009). As Wenger (2010) notes "there are all sorts of constraints, impositions, and demands on the production of practice – external factors over which participants have little control" (p. 2). Therefore, it is essential to anticipate mobility within the teacher-student relationship. Examples of constraints are: Curricular flexibility, grading policy, demand in the subject area and expertise, institutional traditions, and regulations. As a result, it will be argued that openness plays a role in shifting the dynamic of potential role transitions and will serve as a catalyst for mediating change toward shared responsibility of assessment.

Moreover, it is presumed that the unsettling of traditional roles entails explicitness of authority and acknowledgement of contextual forces within the assessment culture, influence mobility of authority and responsibility within the teacher-student relationship. The possible transition of authority in the teacher-student relationship can be facilitated or constrained by the culture the relationship is embedded in (Davis & Simmt, 2003). Davis and Sumara´s (2006) notion of "enabling constraints" reflects conditions within a system to keep a balance between randomness and coherence, as they "are not imposed rules that one must obey in order to survive, but conditions that one must avoid in order to remain viable" (p. 147). Constraints can be viewed as rigid and unchangeable, or, as in AfL culture, as a chance to address through collective collaboration (Birenbaum, 2014)

2.6 AfL Embedded in Open and Dynamic Assessment Culture

Harlen and James (1997) argue that the process of AfL is always incomplete and should be viewed as an open-ended process. An open approach reflects the mindset characterized in AfL culture and is emulated in the view that the "unexpected should be expected and that flexibility, critical reflective thinking, and responsiveness should be practiced" (Birenbaum, 2014, p. 291).
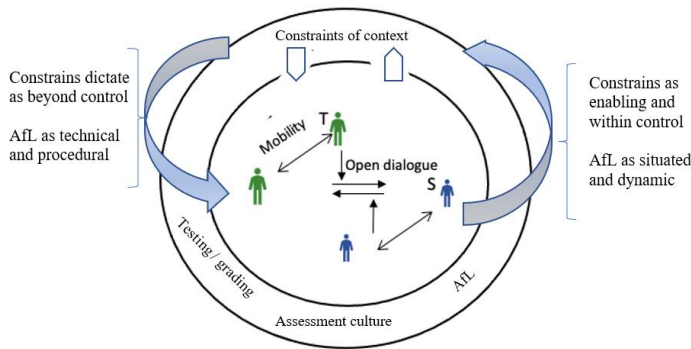
Figure 2 *Open and dynamic communication in alignment with limitations of the context.*

Dynamic relations consider the limitations of the context the relationship is embedded in (**Figure** 2.). As Lave and Wenger (1991) point out, the process of acquiring legitimate participation creates conflict. Wenger (2010) points out that when the newcomer contributes by new experience into the relationship, it needs to be negotiated and subsequently "will embrace this contribution as a new element of competence—or reject it" (p. 2). Allowing students to participate opens the door to new perspectives, which might challenge teachers' authority and, as a result, be "muted" due to power imbalances. As a result, involvement should be understood as dynamic rather than static "where different viewpoints and stakes are at interplay" (Wenger, 2010, p. 116). Openness refers to a shared value of considering tension and conflict as necessary components in allowing students to participate in and take an active role in assessment and feedback. Additionally, openness refers to being approachable for critical reflection on taken-for-granted traditions during role negotiation and assessment processes (Allal, 2016). However, as Willis et al. (2013) point out, it should take into account that the teacher is part of multiple assessment-discourses belonging to different communities with diverse traditions and histories.

Nonetheless, openness is contingent upon how the individual views social constraints that either limit or enable alignment of the personal and socially constructed goal, as Wenger (2010) points out, "Our engagement in practice is rarely effective without some degree of alignment with the context – making sure that activities are coordinated, that laws are followed, or that intentions are communicated" (p. 5). The process is dynamic and contrast with one-way direction of either submitting to external authority, where perspectives are coordinated (Wenger, 2010).

Yet, as Willis et al. (2013) point out, shared understanding is contingent upon the notion of "critically problematize and recontextualize norms of assessment communities" (p. 252).

Open approach toward AfL can be problematic and contradict the notion of AfL as "closing the learning gap" (Ramaprasad, 1983; Black & Wiliam, 2009; Sadler, 1989). The linear conception of AfL as a controlled guidance toward predetermined goals is incompatible with sociocultural notions of learning as being part of becoming a person by participating in activities that are dynamic and unpredictable (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Shepard, 2019; Willis, 2009)

By means of "diminish the distance between what they say and what they do so as not to allow a directivity to turn into authoritarianism or manipulation" (Freire, 1993, p. 116), it is essential to account for explicitness and honesty when considering enabling and constraining factors in the teacher-student relationship, e.g. explicitness of negotiable vs non-negotiable goals, conditioned/limited vs transition in roles. By opening and explicitly voicing the limits of the situation and pre-given assumptions (e.g., insecurity to go against normative practices in the institution; concerns about not meeting the perceived requirements of the curriculum; external requirements of documentation), may not otherwise be shared and recognized as the condition that shapes the flexibility of engaging within a space of "enabling constraints" whereby constraints are problematized as a possible space of learning (Davis & Sumara, 2006). One characteristic of AfL culture is a positive view towards a space of possible change within the limits of the institution that "values diversity and facilitates the crafting of 'enabling constraints'; such an approach, they believe, is likely to lead to exploration of the range of possibilities" (Birenbaum, 2014, p. 291). Openness entails reflexivity to consider the value and implications of shifting established roles and responsibilities. By introducing openness into AfL culture, it is feasible to identify explicitness regarding the dynamic nature of the teacher-student interaction as a mediator of legitimate involvement and collaboration, and thus as a mediator of teacher and student skills as assessment literate, defined by Willis et al. (2013) as:

> Dynamic context-dependent social practice that involves teachers articulating and negotiating classroom and cultural knowledges with one another and with learners, in the initiation, development and practice of assessment to achieve the learning goals of students. (p. 242)

Willis et al. (2013) state that assessment literacy in the sociocultural paradigm, as being a community of teachers and students negating identity and meaning. Willis's definition of assessment literacy aligns with AfL as a relational and context-dependent practice.

This section explores the teacher-student relationship in the foreground of the assessment culture. It is argued that the function of power-relations is contingent on the constraints and that engaging openly in dialogue about the forces which shape decisions and presumption about actions can facilitate the change toward greater equality when collaborating.

Taken together, from a sociocultural perspective, AfL is in the foreground of the assessment culture, whereby the practices are interdependent with the values and assumptions shared by the individuals of the culture. In other words, the assessment culture is inherent in AfL and, correspondingly the values of the culture embedded in decisions and perception of its members. Furthermore, part of the cultural context is the power dynamic embedded in relationships.

3 Literature review

The previous chapter focused on theoretical framework around assessment culture and AfL. This chapter will use relevant literature to contextualize the research question about the influence of assessment culture on teachers' and students' perceptions. The first section of this chapter discusses challenges around the definition of AfL. The subsequent section discusses the prevalent discourse of effectiveness and the impact on AfL. The following sections discuss previous research on teacher and student perceptions of assessment and feedback and how a shared understanding is contingent on student involvement and the assessment culture.

3.1 Problem of Definition and Effectiveness

Distinction between summative versus formative assessment purposes in education originates from Scriven (1967), where summative evaluation is at the end of study program and formative evaluation aimed at program improvement. Later, Bloom (1969), in the context of student learning suggested that the formative purpose of evaluation was to provide feedback as a correction to improve the teaching-learning process.

Currently, and in the last two and a half decades, most definitions of AfL take note of Black and Wiliam landmark article from 1998, *Inside the Black Box* where AfL is defined as:

> All those activities undertaken by teachers, and by their students in assessing themselves, which provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged. Such assessment becomes 'formative assessment' when the evidence is used to adapt the teaching work to meet the needs. (p. 2)

However, Black and Wiliam's (1998) definition was not received without criticism. Perrenoud (1998) questioned Black and Wiliam's claim that "formative evaluation with the application of feedback which will reinforce learning" (p. 85). His point is that how feedback affects learning needs a theoretical backdrop, instead of presuming that the mere presence of feedback with a formative purpose will lead to learning gains. Another

drawback of Black and Wiliam's (1998) definition is that it places a priority on instructional preparation and the use of data to alter or adapt instruction. However, as Cowie and Bell (1999) point out, AfL is interactive and on-going while learning and teaching takes place. Cowie and Bell defined AfL as "the process used by teachers and students to recognize and respond to student learning in order to enhance that learning, during the learning" (p. 101). Later, the Assessment Reform Group (2002) proposed to define AfL as "the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there." However, the ARG (2002) definition has been criticized for narrowing students' learning experiences to the pursuit of predetermined goals, giving rise to an excessive reliance on meeting criteria and receiving teachers' consent (Torrance, 2012). Subsequently, learning objectives are translated into continuous testing practice to accumulate evidence from students' testing scores, "which are intended to be indicators of, or proxies for, learning, become the goals themselves" (Klenowski, 2009a, p.11).

With international recognition following the "Inside the Black Box" article a split arose in the literature over the use of "formative assessment", which was highlighted in an Edweek's heading "Test industry [is] split over "formative assessment" quoting Stiggins proposing to stop using "formative assessment" (Cech, 2008). Stiggins statement reflected the problematic nature of how schools applied formative assessment as benchmark tests used for summative purposes (Bennett, 2011). Kahl's (2005) definition highlights instrumental conceptualization of AfL "*as tool that teachers use to measure* [emphasis added] student grasp of specific topics and skills they are teaching. It's a 'midstream' tool to identify specific student misconceptions" (p. 11).

One aspect of placing AfL as a measurement tool represents the requirement of providing evidence of effectiveness. The most cited findings of promising learning gains of AfL is Black and Wiliam's "Inside the Black Box" from 1998, where findings from meta-analysis of 580 articles from 160 journals over a nine-year period. The review claims that AfL is effective across different educational contexts with effective sized varieties from 0.4 to 0.7.

It could be argued that discourse on effectiveness seemed to pressure stakeholders to focus on issues non-related to AfL as a pedagogical approach to support students learning, which later developed as a barrier to the implementation of AfL (Smith, 2015). Biesta (2009) contends that

seeking effectiveness has an instrumental and technical value, that is, value for a quality process and reliable outcomes that are independent from the value of the outcomes. Smith (2015) points out that accountability measures of school improvements and student learning are interdependent which can result in over-emphasis on documentation and testing, leading to narrowing the curriculum. Smith (2015) argues that the unhealthy bond is rooted in the institutional pressure to document improvement in a way that can be used meaningfully to compare and rank schools and countries into league tables. Furthermore, Black and Wiliam (2005) state that the "final irony" is that it is precisely the demand for accountability, which has produced unprecedented pressure to improve education systems that is likely to be the biggest impediment to achieving that improvement" (p. 260). Given that the "data" (outcomes) are sent back into schools, the burden is on teachers and stakeholders to translate effective AfL use into meaningful and verifiable metrics, facilitating comparison and ranking. Ironically, while AfL was promoted as an effective method of raising standards, it appeared to override the intended moment-to-moment pedagogy inherent in the classroom (Biesta, 2009). The danger is that AfL is understood as a method that codifies evaluative data using sophisticated tools.

Additionally, the effectiveness model appears to strongly resonate with the transmission model, which has been identified as a barrier to developing AfL and feedback toward student agency and responsibility. According to the transmission paradigm, learning equals information being channelled from one place to another. Winstone et al. (2021) argues that the problem with the transmission paradigm is that its description of learning and assessment activities tend to apply vocabulary that implies students' inactivity at the cost of teachers' agency. Implementing AfL from this angle highlights how a technical approach and the use of language situated within the transmission paradigm tend to imply students' inactivity – positioning the student receiver of others doing, whereby the teacher's role is to feed knowledge information into the student.

Black and Wiliam's (2009) model of AfL assumes the active participation of teachers and students to create a shared understanding of AfL and support students to develop into competent learners. Direct teacher-student participation is embedded in sharing learning intentions, activating students as learning resources for one another and activating students as owners of their learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Hattie & Timperley, 2007). However, despite good intention and a vision of shared understanding of what AfL means, the challenge has been to transfer the interactive and

empowering aspect of AfL into practice, creating a gap between the initial aspiration and practice in the classroom. Notably, in the last decades, misalignment between the theory of AfL and practice has been problematic in terms of unsuccessful implementation of AfL (Hayward, 2015). Part of the problem seems to be mediated by cultural traditions and attempts to put the theory and practice of AfL into vessels described in terms of the transmission model of learning (Carless, 2020).

Scholars have challenged a transmission view toward assessment and feedback by raising questions concerning effectiveness (Boud, 2000; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Yorke (2003) raised a question focused on how feedback impacted student learning and whether we should adopt a teacher or student perspective. Yorke´s remark is significant because focusing on teacher's behaviors and intentions do not indicate a students' actual reception and use of feedback. Yorke noted that:

> From an assessor's point of view, formative assessment could, for instance - be taking place when an assessor comment on an assignment, even though the student subsequently merely notes the grade and ignores the comment. From the perspective of student learning, a case can be made that the feedback received is formative if (and only if) it has contributed to learning (p. 484).

Taken together, the issues of effectiveness and definition of AfL emphasize the importance of incorporating AfL into everyday practice rather than confining it to the testing context. Additionally, rather than viewing assessment through the lens of the teacher's perspective and authority, it should be embedded in a context that encourages active involvement of the students, who are both influenced by assessment and responsible for its use.

3.2 Teacher-Student Shared Understanding of Assessment and Feedback

Research provides a somewhat conflicting picture when teachers' and students' answers about assessment and feedback practices are compared. Studies have shown that students generally have a narrow understanding of what assessment entails, mainly as an outcome of receiving grades (Mäkipää & Hildén, 2021; Mäkipää & Ouakrim-Soivio, 2020; Smith et al., 2014). These findings resonate with teachers' complaints about students

only wanting grades instead of constructive feedback (Havnes et al., 2012). Conversely, substantial research shows that students value receiving feedback that helps them take the next step in learning (Brooks et al., 2019; Carless, 2006; Carless & Boud, 2018; Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

Studies in secondary schools have documented a substantial gap in how teachers and students experience the practice of assessment and feedback (Carless, 2006; van der Kleij, 2019). The findings of Havnes et al. (2012) on teachers' and students' perceptions of feedback from six Norwegian lower secondary schools revealed that teachers appeared to overestimate the quality and use of feedback when compared to students. These findings have been documented in later research, such as in van der Kleij (2019) study, which reported that teachers were more favorable toward feedback quality and the use of feedback than students. Research in higher education has shown similar trends (Carless & Boud, 2018; Chalmers et al., 2017).

Gamlem and Smith (2013) noted that students' notion of the usefulness of feedback differs from teachers' reports regarding the time and space given for working on feedback. That is not surprising, considering teachers' reports on their uncertainty regarding the purpose of feedback, for example how it affects students as well as their concerns about student motivation and their competence to act on the feedback (Bailey & Garner, 2010; Havnes et al., 2012). Moreover, Gamlem and Smith (2013) reported that students rarely experienced active verbal dialogue with teachers. That finding is thought-provoking, bearing in mind the importance of active interaction between teacher and student on learning (Ajjawi & Boud, 2018) and the students' appreciation for a dialogue about their learning (Mäkipää & Ouakrim-Soivio, 2020).

Notably, teachers complain that students tend to be reluctant to use the feedback given (Hattie & Clarke, 2019), which, according to Vattøy and Gamlem's (2019) study, may be a result of teachers' paying insufficient attention to students' perspectives during teacher–student interactions. Moreover, studies indicate that teacher-student interactions are monologic, wherein feedback is perceived as authoritative, not transparent or individualized according to the students' needs, and not understood because of academic terminology or jargon (Carlsson Hauff & Nilsson, 2021; Jonsson, 2013), or as Carless (2006) notes that feedback "is generally delivered in academic discourse which students may not have full access to" (p. 221). Overall, these studies highlight the need for understanding the nature of the gap between teachers' and students' perceptions of feedback and assessment. van der Kleij (2019) presents her account of the gap

regarding teachers' and students' disagreement concerning perceived feedback frequency. van der Kleij notes that there either must be a discrepancy between teachers' actual and intended feedback practice, or students are not aware of all the feedback received. Mäkipää and Hildén (2021) conclude that students may not always be aware of teachers' feedback, as it may lack the salience of summative assessment. Brown et al. (2009) study on secondary students demonstrates the prominence of summative assessment in perceived assessment relevance. Their findings indicate that as informal and interactive activities became more prevalent, students perceived them as less relevant to the assessment. Another factor contributing to the gap is teachers' perceptions of external pressure, such as not having enough time to create more feedback and engage students (Forsell et al., 2021; van der Kleij, 2019). These findings align with Eriksson et al. (2018) study, where teachers reported being constrained by choosing between intended practice and managing the diverse needs of students.

Studies have shown that students perceive it as challenging to understand and interpret feedback from the teacher, because of poor handwriting, ambiguous or overly vague and general comments, as well as praising or standardized feedback (Carless, 2006; Engelsen & Smith, 2010). A teachers' inclination to deliver standardized feedback has been linked to an inclination to turn words into numbers in order to justify grades (Price et al., 2010). This is perhaps a striking example of reconciliation of AfL purposes with accountability, where teachers try to avoid perceived conflict with official standards, by what might on the surface be perceived as a part of AfL practice. As Carless (2006) rightly points out, such practice constrains students' opportunity to "access the discourses in which this feedback is embedded" (p. 226). Despite students reporting a willingness to approach teachers for dialogue and further explanation, they generally complain about lack of space for dialogue about the feedback, such as not giving time in class to discuss and work with the feedback (Havnes et al., 2012). One reason may be due to students' presumptions about students' and teachers' roles, assuming that it is the teacher's role to be the feedback provider and to take the initiative to follow feedback up with dialogue, while a student's role is to be the receiver of feedback (Carless, 2006; van der Kleij & Adie, 2020). Moreover, as van der Kleij's (2021) findings indicate, a students' perception is shaped by more than the feedback itself, a student's prior experience with teachers' traditions transfers to other settings of feedback practice. Additionally, as Carless and Boud (2020) point out, even when students identify areas for improvement by taking more

responsibility in the feedback process, they appear hesitant to implement them.

Seemingly, in recent years, questions have been raised about how student agency in the feedback process can be increased (Nicol, 2010) while emphasizing different paradigms, such as, social constructivism and social-cultural perspective (Carless, 2020). Nevertheless, as Winstone et al. (2021a) analysis of the dominant discourse in the literature the last decade (2009-19) shows, the ashes of transmission vocabulary resist leaving the discourse. Their study focused on how "feedback/feed-back" was presented concerning how and what verbs were used regarding teacher/student and actions. Their findings show a general trend toward utilizing feedback consistent with the old paradigm. The authors recommend better clarification of feedback and point out that the word "feedback "does not come in a vacuum, pointing out, that it enters the discourse anchored in historical and institutional contexts (Winstone et al., 2021a). In recent years more scholars have argued for abandoning the transmission model of feedback. Dawson and Henderson (2017) noted that "over the past few decades, thinking about feedback has moved beyond a focus on information transmission and inputs towards a focus on change" (p. 213).

Moreover, the transition has been toward a more dialogical approach, focusing on what the student does and the relational aspect of the feedback context rather than the teacher (Winstone et al., 2021b). However, focus on change cannot be limited to the theoretical discourse. As Earl and Timperley (2014) claim, a teachers' understanding of AfL is often superficial because teachers professional learning is built chiefly on the transmission model, where experts tell teachers about what AfL is in theory, without an opportunity to use and reflect on it in practice.

Overall, studies highlight the gap between teacher and student understanding of assessment and feedback and the need to understand its nature. Here, student involvement is of particular concern, which bears upon teacher-student relations' social and cultural context and their preparedness to participate in the assessment.

3.3   Student Involvement

Boud and Falchikov (2006) argue that the purposes of summative and formative assessment have not adequately met the need to prepare students for long-term learning. They continue to argue that both AfL and summative assessment have put too much focus on students relying on "others opinion" and subsequently students miss vital and sustainable

learning opportunity to develop "broader set of skills that enable them to do this for themselves" (p. 403). Furthermore, researchers have noted that Western consumerism promotes a receptive role for students in assessment (Chilvers et al., 2021), which contributes to teachers' reluctance to include students (Bonner, 2016; Bourke, 2018; Cook-Sather et al., 2014; Jonsson et al., 2015). However, by focusing on student agency, the scene expands from a rather narrow technical lens, looking at how teachers apply summative assessment and one-sided feedback monologue toward dialogue designed to engage teachers and students to negotiate shared understanding (Nicol et al., 2013). The ramification of student involvement rebounds as the focus returns to teachers and how they develop as assessment literate and engage students as active participants in assessment and co-construction of feedback (Crossouard, 2009; Deeley & Bovill, 2015; Engelsen & Smith, 2014; Reynolds & Trehan, 2000).

By focusing on the student, the social elements embedded in responsiveness in the teacher-student relationship moves to the foreground (Smith, 2015; Smith et al., 2016). In Ajjawi et al. (2021) review on open-ended tasks in higher education, students' perceived relationships with teachers as the most dominant factor in determining engagement with feedback. Furthermore, their findings demonstrate that students perceive face to face/one-on-one as an essential aspect in cultivating a relationship with the teacher. Moreover, comparison of different feedback formats (e.g. written, video, audio, computer-generated) indicates that the more feedback acquired personal and dialogic characteristics, the more students' engagement improved (Ajjawi´s et al., 2021).

AfL (and student involvement) grew from the constructivist tradition and the notion of focusing on students learning instead of the teacher´s actions (Carless, 2020). However, the learner-centered approach has been criticized for focusing too much on learning, what Biesta (2009) calls "learnification" and questions whether such narrow conceptualization of education surpasses other important goals that have value in education, such as teacher-student relationships. While Ashwin (2020) argues that focusing on student-centered learning simplifies and undermines the value of teachers' expertise, students' engagement with knowledge, and the institution's role in providing the context of knowledge and can overshadow a teacher´s expertise. According to Ashwin, a project meant to employ students' everyday knowledge and vocabulary rather than relying on teacher expertise resulted in an assignment with an insufficient structure for students to demonstrate their capacity. These arguments remind us of the importance of keeping a healthy balance between the teacher's role and

student learning and the requirement for both the student and teacher to be literate in assessment when actively engaging students as partners in AfL.

Bourke (2018) claims that student involvement, such as self-assessment, bridge the gap between learning and assessment. To put it in simple terms, student involvement functions as a path to pass across assessment toward learning. However, involvement is contingent on whether the assessment culture provides context of trust and flexibility for students to share the responsibility of assessment (Birenbaum, 2014; Deely & Bovill, 2017). As Deeley and Bovill (2017) point out, involving students and moving the intersect of teacher-student responsibility can be perceived by students as risk. To that end, it is important to encourage appreciation of mistakes as an opportunity for learning and dialogue. Deeley and Bovill (2017) findings indicate that trust functioned as an essential mediator of active student involvement, which contributed to a student´s improvement in terms of assessment language and thereupon a student´s assessment literacy. Furthermore, students taking more responsibility and sharing the interest of assessment paved the way for trust. Stiggins (1995) notes that being assessment literate means that teachers are not "intimidated by the sometimes mysterious and always daunting technical world of assessment" (p. 240). The notion of assessment literacy has evolved from being conceived as a technical skill in psychometrics, toward a more holistic view of how teachers negotiated professional aspect of teachers' identities" and assessment knowledge with learning content, pedagogical beliefs, self identity and learning context (Looney et al., 2018). Assessment literate teachers have developed an ability to read into their student´s needs; know how and when to apply assessment tasks and give feedback that takes notes of the context and power-relations (Carless et al., 2011). Feedback literacy, has in recent years not been as prominent in the literature as assessment literacy, however, it has received growing interest. It could be said that assessment and feedback literacy are the two sides of the same coin, hence, using a different emphasis in management of developing a shared understanding of assessment and feedback (Engelsen and Smith, 2014). Feedback literacy has been defined as "the understandings, capacities and dispositions needed to make sense of information and its use to enhance work or learning strategies" (Carless & Boud, 2018, p. 1316) and knowing one´s role in the process (Tai et al., 2021). Thus, a teacher´s feedback to students is contingent upon the student´s literacy to use it and understand its purpose.

In Panadero and Brown's (2017) study, teachers used peer assessment more frequently if their experience and beliefs about peer assessment were positive. Ketonen et al. (2020) argue that peer assessment provides a space of opportunity to develop assessment literacy, which in turn enhances a reliable use and positive experience of peer assessment. Additionally, peer assessment encourages and facilitates self-assessment. According to Li and Grion (2019), students perceived giving feedback to peers as more positive than receiving feedback, particularly when examining others' work, which benefited them in reflecting on their own work. To summarize, the relationship between assessment and feedback literacy and student involvement is complicated and challenging, as student involvement may be inadequate due to a low level of assessment literacy of the students.

In conclusion, to develop assessment skills, both teachers and students need practice. For example, by enabling involvement and negotiation of contrasting views when co-constructing peer feedback for others (Li & Grion, 2019). However, student involvement entails a culture of assessment with opportunity for mistakes and exploration, which requires an atmosphere of trust and flexibility (Birenbaum et al., 2011; Wolf et al., 1991).

3.4   Assessment Culture

In Birenbaum et al. (2011) study on teachers at different school levels, the findings imply that AfL is shaped by elements of the assessment culture, such as teachers' pedagogical beliefs, the ethos in the classroom and engineering of motivation. Moreover, teacher participation in professional learning mediated the quality of the assessment culture. The authors concluded that AfL practices were nested in different levels of assessment cultures, i.e. the classroom, school culture, professional community and the overall culture in the society. Birenbaum's (2016) research focused on schools with contrasting assessment cultures, characterized by a mindset of AfL culture and conversely the mindset of testing culture. Her findings indicated that the mindset of AfL culture was evident in its emphasis on learning, where assessment and dialogue drive learning forward; student´s empowerment through teacher´s feedback; embracement of diversity and collective belief in each student's ability to learn. Testing and grading cultures reflect beliefs such as "it's all about the grade" and "the aim of assessment is accountability". Furthermore, assessment is viewed as an objective measure of learning and power relationships are depicted as top-down, with student involvement undervalued, as well as intolerance for

uncertainty and a mindset that ability is fixed (Birenbaum, 2016; Dweck, 2006).

The most salient aspect of the culture is ingrained in the quality of the teacher-student relationship, where it shapes the climate in the classroom (Prewett et al., 2018), as well as the student´s well-being and influences on student engagement (Roorda et al., 2011). Prewett et al. (2018) findings suggest that students perceive the relationship stronger if their teachers make themselves approachable. In the Duffy and Elwood's (2013) study, students who perceived their teachers as respectful, warm, flexible and humorous were more motivated, and engaged in their learning. Creating and nurturing a strong teacher-student relationship depends, to a degree, on framing a joint space for dialogue (Leach & Crisp, 2016). As in a study by Grainger (2020), students were reluctant to have face-to-face dialogue with their teachers about their feedback, except when the relationship was perceived as strong and trustworthy. Therefore, it is of great significance that the assessment culture supports the teacher-student relationship by encouraging teachers to be proactive in reaching out to students in cultivating the student-teacher dialogue. However, even though teachers engage students in active dialogue and implement specific AfL strategies, this does not necessarily imply an assessment culture characterized by student involvement. For example, Mottier Lopez and Allal (2007) observed that while students in two different classrooms engaged in some AfL activities and teacher-student dialogue, student engagement in assessment varied between the two classes in terms of "microculture." In one class, the assessment was the teachers' responsibility, and in the other, students participated by exchanging opinions about each other's work. Shepard (2000) argues that the assessment practices and teachers' pedagogical beliefs need to correspond to create AfL culture; however, those beliefs can be challenged by the traditional power-relations when students are involved in the assessment. Furthermore, identifying the value and purpose of actively engaging students in assessment is contingent on the assessment culture and level of the assessment competence of teachers and students.

3.5 Student Involvement and Power-Relations

Assessment culture characterized by encapsulating the "spirit" of AfL seems to be characterized by democratic relations and a collective view toward learning, where student engagement is encouraged (Birenbaum, 2016; Marshall & Drummond, 2006). According to Mashall and Drummond's

(2006) findings, teachers who portrayed the "spirit" of AfL appeared to value students autonomy and embrace their contribution. Conversely, minimal student involvement in assessment was anticipated in an assessment culture characterized by top down power-relations (Birenbaum, 2016). Changing the teacher-student traditional roles in assessment insists on teachers' self-awareness as authority figures. The effect of power can be an implicit part of the assessment culture, and as Boud (1995) notes, "We judge too much and too powerfully, not realizing the extent to which students experience our power over them" (p. 43). It could be argued, that the historical tradition of taken-for-granted power relations can be seen as part of the transmission model and the psychometric view is rooted in the epistemology of positivism, grounded on the ontology of seeing the world objectively, being independent of the subjective position of the observer.

It has been warranted that a superficial view toward student involvement, that is, without addressing the underlying and implicit power-relations, can counteract the students' opportunity of being authentically involved. For example, in Reynolds and Trehan (2000) study, the power imbalance in peer-assessment was passed from the teacher-student relationship into in the student-student (peer assessment) relationship. A student´s perception of the authority of assessment is highlighted in Nieminen (2020), where students were granted the authority of summative assessment via self-grading. Nieminen´s (2020) approach posits an interesting lens on student's perception in a context of unsettling traditional roles in summative assessment, by enabling self-assessment to count as a final grade. Generally, self-assessment is only used for formative purposes and it is recommended that it should not count as a final grade (Bourke, 2018). His findings show that the student´s perceived authority was not shared among all students and created uncertainty among some, even among those whose self-grade aligned perfectly with the rubric, they still distrusted their own judgment by believing that external authority (exam, other students or teacher) would grade them differently. In other cases, students took an active part in the "reflective discursive practices", which seemed to promote a critical awareness of responsibility and empowerment. Notably, as in Reynolds and Trehan´s (2000) study, some students in Nieminen's (2020) study perceived that they had adopted the self-governing role to get the self-assessment "right". However, one critical aspect of focusing on students' self-assessment is emphasizing the process itself over the product. Research shows that focusing on self-assessment to "get the right grade" can counteract students' opportunity to develop self-regulation (Panadero et al., 2016; Rust et al., 2003). To manage a change of

established authority in assessment, the responsiveness and trust in the teacher-student relationship can catalyze traditional power relations. Chilvers et al. (2021) actively involved students in course development by establishing a safe environment for negotiation and trusting relationships between teachers and students. The challenge for teachers was to be responsive toward student voices while remaining non-defensive about student suggestions.

Moreover, there seems to be a need to explicitly conceptualize and communicate student involvement as a change in the traditional teacher-student power dynamic, as communication of AfL seems to be mainly a burden for teachers as student agency is minimal. Current literature underpins the need for how AfL is conceptualized in terms of active involvement, where teachers and students are proactive in negotiating practice and develop competence to have shared dialogue. In the end, previous research indicates that teachers and students perceive practices differently. Moreover, reasons for the difference changes whether practice is viewed from the vantage point of students or teachers (Carless, 2006). Granted that context where teachers and students actively engage together, and discuss diverse perspectives could contribute to shared understanding. Nevertheless, the studies presented thus far provide evidence that student involvement in feedback and assessment is commonly lacking. Furthermore, relatively little is known about how various assessment cultures shape perception research at the upper-secondary level due to lack of research. Moreover, previous studies provide limited understanding on how the assessment culture relates to the perceived gap between how teachers and students perceive assessment and feedback. This thesis intends to highlight new understandings of how teachers and student's perception of assessment and feedback is shaped by the assessment culture at upper-secondary level in Icelandic context.

4   Methodology

While the previous chapter focused on putting the research in context of relevant literature, this chapter describes the methodology used to answer the research questions concerning how assessment cultures in three upper-secondary schools shape teachers and students' perceptions of assessment. The first section discusses the research paradigm of pragmatism. The following section discusses mixed methods and research design. Then the data collection and analysis are presented, and finally, there is a reflection on the research ethics.

4.1   Research Paradigm and Mixed Methods

The use of mixed method research is underpinned by the pragmatic assumption that reality is constantly changing and being renegotiated or redescribed (Rorty, 1999). However, one could argue that combining qualitative and quantitative research is problematic from an ontological and epistemological stance, because quantitative and qualitative research is founded on incompatible research paradigms (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017; Crotty, 1998).

Quantitative research is generally located within the epistemology of positivism, grounded in the ontological worldview that there is an external reality "out there" independent to the observer. In contrast, qualitative research is commonly situated within the epistemology of constructivism, based on the worldview that reality is multiple, constructed, and dependent on the observer (Crotty, 1998). Contrary to paradigms that take a position toward the nature of reality, those who advocate pragmatism refuse to debate reality and truth (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019; Rorty, 1989).

Mixed methods have predominantly been situated within the pragmatist paradigm (Creswell & Plano Clarke, 2017). Rorty's (1989) pragmatism draws upon the work of Wiliam James and Dewey, where dualistic descriptions of reality are rejected. Rorty (1989) argues against the dualistic notion of reality where language functions as a conduit to reality. From the perspective of pragmatism, the truth is "what we say about them" (James, 2000, p. 199). Any attempts to discover vocabulary, where our descriptions of the world correspond to reality, should be abandoned as "the world does not speak. Only we do" (Rorty, 1989, p. 6). Rorty based his argument on the

notion that language is a social phenomenon *made* by people and cannot serve as a medium toward the external world. Instead, the vocabulary functions as a tool in adapting to the environment, with new words replacing older ones when they prove more beneficial in coping with the environment.

The pragmatist is not bound to maintain an unbroken chain between words and their ontological and epistemological implications, given that one excludes the other. Rather than addressing the ontological issue of reality, the pragmatist questions whether it serves our purpose to integrate qualitative and quantitative as a tool to interact with the environment and achieve the objective of our inquiries (Rorty, 1999). In terms of mixed methods, the value of accessing shared vocabularies of both quantitative and qualitative benefits in answering questions about the complex social and cultural phenomenon. James (2000) states that ideas "become true just in so far as they help us to get into satisfactory relation with other parts of our experience" (p. 197). In mixed methods, the question of whether it fits between the method and ontology becomes irrelevant, whilst the issue of the relationship between research question and method becomes the central point.

Applying a mixed methods approach in this research is based on the assumption that it will provide a deeper understanding of teacher and student perceptions. In mixed methods, different methods are integrated, where finding one kind of data can illustrate and inform findings from other data collected from different methods (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

This research is thus based on mixed methods, where qualitative and quantitative approaches are combined "for the broad purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration" (Johnson et al., 2007, p. 123).

Mixed research methods have been identified as the third research paradigm. As Johnson et al. (2007) point out, a mixed-method is an "approach to knowledge (theory and practice) that attempts to consider multiple viewpoints, perspectives, positions, and standpoints (always including the standpoints of qualitative and quantitative research)" (p. 113).

By applying a mixed-method research, the weakness of one method is compensated by other approaches. In this project, the quantitative approach provides a general pattern on how students and teachers perceive feedback and assessment in the three schools. Gill et al. (2008) claim that "qualitative methods, such as interviews, are believed to provide a 'deeper' understanding of social phenomena than would be obtained

from purely quantitative methods, such as questionnaires" (p. 291). Morgan (1996) points out that focus groups, plus questionnaires, can be informative, give cues for discussions and provide a deeper understanding of the quantitative data. One problem with the questionnaire is the limited space to reflect on sensitive and controversial issues. Focus groups are seen as a social event where "language is viewed not as a neutral conveyor of information, but as functional and constructive, as a medium which people use to achieve a variety of actions" (Smithson, 2000, p. 105). The data in this research is based on a survey and focus group interviews. The aim of assembling survey data is to provide an overview of assessment and feedback practices and use as input for the interviews. The focus group interviews will contribute to understanding the survey findings and participants' perception of practices.

4.2   Research Design

The research design is composed of two layers. The first is a quantitative survey designed to assess teacher and student perceptions toward feedback and assessment. The second layer is a follow up qualitative study, consisting of six focus groups of teachers and students (3 groups of each). The rationale for mixing two methodologies was to provide a more comprehensive answer to issues about how assessment practices are perceived and shaped in various contexts than either quantitative or qualitative methods separately could. The focus groups aim to explore the findings from the questionnaire and reflect on feedback and assessment.

This research is designed as a two-phase explanatory method, where quantitative survey data, followed by qualitative focus-group interviews with participants of the same sample for a more in-depth understanding (Creswell & Plano Clark , 2017).
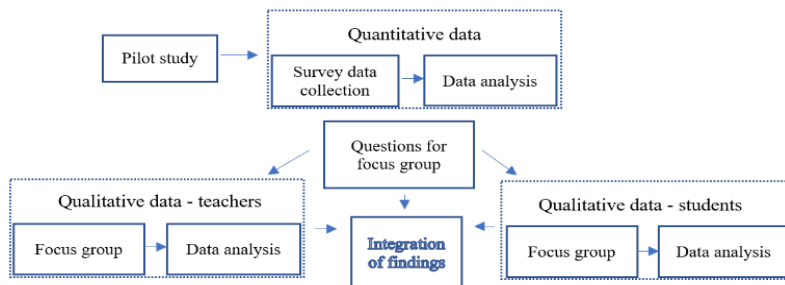

Figure 3 *Research design – two-phase explanatory mixed method*

The qualitative method is given priority because it will elaborate and inform the quantitative findings. The quantitative study's objective was to offer a broad picture of teacher and student perceptions of assessment, and feedback in various contexts. The purpose of the qualitative data provided an opportunity for in-depth understanding of significant findings from the quantitative study. Findings from the quantitative study are used to construct focus group questions. The two stages were integrated by selecting participants from comparable corresponding schools in both phases and designing interview questions using quantitative data from the quantitative study, and at last, by integration of overall research findings.

This dissertation's dataset is a collection of teachers' and students' perceptions in order to illuminate the assessment cultures within the schools.

4.3 The Participating Schools

4.3.1 The Schools

Purposive sampling was used to identify three upper-secondary schools. It is worth noting that the number of schools in Iceland having AfL policy is rather low, limiting the pool of potential participants to a small number. School leaders were contacted by an email, in which I introduced myself, explained the project and inquired about the possibility of participation (Appendix A). Thus, two schools were identified and met the criteria of having a policy and experience of implementing AfL, whilst the third school fell outside the criteria of having experience and declared policy of AfL. In identifying participants for the focus group, an informant with inside knowledge of the school was contacted to recruit candidates for the focus groups (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

It should be noted that, although the two schools are labeled in this thesis as AfL schools, this is based entirely on schools' self-declarations of their assessment policies.

According to the legislation from 2008 and the national curriculum guide (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2011), schools are supposed to publish their own curriculum based on the national curriculum where a school´s policy and vision are detailed. The schools should as well have a "clear procedure policy on assessment and publish it in their school curriculum guide" (p. 60).

Schools 1 and 2 are rather small schools located outside Reykjavík. On the official website of school 1, the pedagogical policy is outlined as follows:

"(school pedagogical policy is) based on task-based learning and assessment is continuous and based on assessment for learning."

For school 2, the corresponding website places emphasis on small assignments and tests, and no final exams. Personal communication is reported to characterize the school culture. Both schools 1 and 2 have been developing AfL practices for several years. The assessment policy of the schools is not explained in any depth on the school website.

The table below, outlines a comparison of the three schools in relaion to assessment practices.

Table 1 *Overview of the three school*

	School 1.	School 2.	School 3.
Policy of assessment	AfL	AfL	No
Policy of pedagogy	Task-based learning	Task-based learning	No
Use of grades	No (except final grades)	Yes	Yes
Use of written feedback	Yes	Yes	Varies with teachers
Final exams	No	No	Yes
Systematic feedback	Mid-term assessment	Every five weeks)	Mid-term assessment

– In school 1 the students only get a final course grade and no grades during the semester, except a midterm grade (on three letter scale A, B and C). Low stake use of testing is to some degree subject-dependent.

-In school 2, students receive regular feedback, both in grades and written feedback. Final grade is calculated from cumulative grade from different assignments over the semester.

–In school 3, continuous assessment is prevalent, however, according to students (and in Iceland in general), a common understanding of continuous assessment is that students can pass the final exam by attaining specific grades over the semester. Additionally, continuous assessment can refer to the summative evaluation of students work over the semester (with or without final exams). However, a common practice of continuous assessment in Iceland is that students can drop the final exam by attaining a particular grade over the semester.

4.4 The Survey

4.4.1 The Pilot Study

As part of validating the questionnaire, the survey was piloted with two groups of students (five and six, respectively), and seven teachers. Participants in the pilot study were identified as a convenient sample on account of being easily accessible by the researcher. Some of the students were younger than 18 years old and needed written consent from legal guardians (See Appendix B). The students and teachers for the pilot study were chosen because they were not included in the survey sample. They did however, have experience of the assessment culture of one of the sample schools. Participants were asked to read the survey and carefully comment on unclear or vague questions. They were asked to give the word "feedback" (endurgjöf) special attention in the context of assessment in Icelandic. Most comments concerned the wording, spelling, and definitions of concepts and questions. Finally, there was some disagreement about how to interpret "feedback" in Icelandic ("endurgjöf"). Most participants chose to refer to feedback as "comment." To avoid confusion, a definition of feedback was included at the beginning of the questionnaire's instructions. The definition applied was, "Feedback is meant to refer to all oral and written information (e.g. comments) given to students about their assignments and tests." Another comment brought up by students concerned finding it odd being asked about grades, granted that they do not receive grades at their school, except for a final grade at the completion of the course.

4.4.2 Survey Sample

Convenience sampling was used in the survey. A convenience sample is non-random and is applied when participants are accessible in terms of time, willingness to participate and location (Palinkas et al., 2015). The sample size (N=200) in School 3 was meant to compensate for the small sample size in Schools 1. (N=181) and 2. (N=40). Students aged 18 years and older were chosen for convenience, as sample selection did not require parental approval.

   A total of 56 teachers and 234 pupils were included in the sample. There were 181 students over the age of 18 in School 1. 105 students answered the questionnaire, representing a response rate of 58%. 17 out of 21 teachers answered the questionnaire, providing an 80 % response rate. There were 40 students above the age of 18 in School 2. Out of these, 27

students responded to the questionnaire, which gives a response rate of 68%. The questionnaire was completed by 11 out of 11 teachers, resulting in a response rate of 100%. In School 3, out of the 200 students, 102 students answered the questionnaire, resulting in a response rate of 51%. Out of 49 teachers, 28 responded to the questionnaire, which gives a response rate of 57%.

4.4.3   Structure, Administration and Analysis of Survey

4.4.3.1   Structure of survey and administration.

The survey consisted of 30 similar questions both for students (Appendix C) and teachers (Appendix D). The questions were largely based on Havnes et al. (2012) questionnaire. In Havnes et al. (2012), the questionnaire was validated by having a survey expert examine it, and then piloted with students and teachers from a school that was not included in their sample. The questionnaire was revised according to comments from the pilot study, and unclear questions were eliminated in response to the feedback. In Havnes et al. (2012), the questions were merged into four variables: quality of feedback, students' use of feedback, peer feedback, and student involvement in assessment practice. In the questionnaire used for the current study, two statements about self-efficacy were added to the students' questionnaire. The shared set of questions (30 questions) for both the teachers and students made it possible to compare their perceptions of how they engaged with the feedback and assessment practices.

The participants were asked to rate their agreement with the statements on a four-point Likert scale. The rationale for using a four point Likert scale was to ensure the comparability of the results with prior studies using the same questionnaire. The advantage of using Likert scales is that they are easy to read, whilst the weakness of such scales is that participants are less likely to reflect extreme dimensions which may lead to central tendency bias (Taherdoost, 2019).

Participants could select one of four options for each statement: (4) Strongly agree (3) agree to some extent, (2) disagree to some extent, and (1) strongly disagree. Additionally, there was an open-ended question at the end of the survey.

Table 2 *Examples of questions and factors.*

Factor	Examples of teacher´s questions:	Examples of student´s questions:
Student involvement	The students set their own learning goals	We, students, take part in setting the learning goals
"	discuss with the student´s different ways they can improve	The teacher encourages us to improve the way we go about to learn in the subject
"	I engage the students in finding out what they want to work on and learn in my subject	The teacher talks with us about what we want to attend to in the subject
Peer assessment	The students give feedback to each other and comment on each other's' work	We, the students, give comments and feedback to each other
"	The students give feedback to each other in groups	We give feedback to each other in groups
Quality of feedback	I tell the students what their strengths are when it comes to ways of learning	The teacher emphasizes what our strengths are in our way of learning
"	I give feedback that is useful for further learning	The feedback that we receive is such that I learn from working on them
"	The students receive feedback in addition to grades	The students receive feedback in addition to grades
Use of feedback	I work through assignments that the students have had in class	The teacher goes through the assignments when we receive it back
"	adjust my teaching when I notice that the students do not understand the subject matter	When there is something of the subject matter we do not understand, we try to get the teacher to explain it in a different way
"	I check out that the students have used the feedback they have received on tests and assignments	It is not useful to spend time working on feedback on tests and assignments

The administration time of the survey was selected in consultation with school administrators and a contact person who assisted in identifying the optimum time in the school timetable regarding overall school attendance, and minimizing possible conflict with other school activities and arrangements. The survey was administered during class time, and teachers could respond at their own time.

4.4.3.2   Data analysis of survey

SPSS was used for analyzing data from the survey. Principal component analysis (PCA) is suitable when condensing a set of variables into a few dimensions and to simplify comparison between groups of questions. PCA was used to compare how questions were loaded together and subsequently compared in terms of content, and loading to the factors in the Havnes et al. (2012) research.

The output of the analysis provided an overview of how individual questions loaded on each factor. When compared to the original questionnaire from Havnes et al. (2012), most items loaded identically to the four components. Some items needed to be deleted because of cross-loadings on more than one factor or too low loadings.

A T-test was employed to determine group differences. When comparing two groups, as in this study, the T-test is preferable to ANOVA. Cronbach's alpha was used to determine the factor's stability.

Table 3 *Summary of factor analysis and reliability coefficient.*

Factor	E. g. Question items	Cronbach's alfa coefficients for students	Cronbach's alfa coefficients for teachers
Student involvement	Students are setting their own learning goals, clear expectancies from teachers, discussions of improving learning, discussing criteria.	,61	,54
Quality of feedback	Feedback about strengths and weakness, grade versus purely formative feedback, feedback about how to improve learning, usefulness of feedback.	,68	,58
Peer-assessment	Students, give comments and feedback to each other, give feedback to each other in groups	,79	,91
Self-efficacy	Students sense of belief in having good grades, students believe in own capability to learn.	,87	X No questions on self-efficacy for teachers
Student use of feedback	Working on feedback on assignments in class, following up students' use of feedback, using feedback to adjust teaching,	,79	,82

Cronbach alpha was comparable to Havnes et al. (2012) in terms of students' use of feedback and peer assessment, but was lower in terms of student involvement and feedback quality.

4.5   Focus Groups

4.5.1   Participants

Six focus groups from the three schools were conducted (two at each school) to reflect the perceptions of student and teacher feedback and assessment practices. The number of participants in the groups was between seven and nine. A contact person from each school recruited

students and teachers for his or her school. The criteria for the participants were as follows: an equal mix of gender, age, the experience of teaching (for teachers)/studying (students), and diversity with regards to academic subjects. The focus groups had 7–9 students (N=25), with 11 males and 14 females. The teacher's focus group were 7-8 members (N=22), with 6 males and 16 females.

4.5.2 Structure of the Focus Group Interviews

The focus groups lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and were semi-structured. The focus groups began with an introduction and explanation of the focus group's goal. Participants were asked to consent to voice recordings and were informed that all discussion transcripts would be erased after data analysis. The focus group discussions were framed around student involvement, feedback and culture (see table below).

To gain a deeper understanding of quantitative findings, the teacher' focus group meetings featured a graphic representation of findings in relation to their school. The graphs illustrated the diversity in students' and teachers' perceptions (Appendix E). The second graph, although used in the discussions, provided data not included in the current research. In two of the schools, I served as a group moderator. A project supervisor engaged as a moderator in the school where I worked. Finally, the moderator explained the chart throughout the presentation and then led the conversation with questions (see interview questions below and Appendix F and G).

Table 4 *Focus of discussions and questions*

Discussion points	Example of questions
Student focus groups	
Feedback	What is quality feedback?
	What is the purpose, in your opinion, of assessment and feedback?
	How and what kinds of feedback do you get for tests and assignments?
	What do you do with the feedback?
Student involvement	Do students generally take part in the assessment process about how their work is assessed?
	Do you discuss the assessment and feedback with your teachers?
	Are teachers generally accessible for discussions about assessment and feedback?
	How would you describe teacher-student dialogue in this school?
Culture	Describe how you generally perceive feedback in this school.
	Can you give an example of what is different and what is alike regarding how teachers use feedback and assessment?
	Describe differences and similarities between subjects.
	Do teachers try out new methods in assessment?
Teacher focus groups	
Findings from quantitative survey	What comes to your mind when you look at the findings?
Feedback	What is the purpose, in your opinion, of assessment and feedback?
	How and what kinds of feedback do you use in your practice? How do you use grades?
Student involvement	Do students generally take part in the assessment process of how and on what their work is assessed? Is student involvement in assessment important? How do you perceive student use of feedback? How do they use the feedback? Is it easy for students to affect how assessment is planned and executed?
	Do you discuss assessment and feedback with your students? Describe these discussions.
	How would you describe teacher-student dialogue in this school?
Culture challenges	Does your description portray your school? Is your description generally like this here? How would you describe the obstacles in your practice?

4.5.3   Analysis of Focus Group Interviews

Reflexive thematic analysis (TA/RTA) was used to analyze the interview transcripts. Braun and Clarke (2006) define TA as a "method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (p. 6). According to Braun and Clarke, TA is suitable for different kinds of research questions, such as asking about experiences and perceptions. Braun and Clarke (2006) emphasize that themes do not emerge from the data; instead, they are actively constructed in researcher engagement with the dataset. Using TA offers theoretical flexibility for the researcher to use different theoretical lenses to construct and understand the data in engagement with relevant literature (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Despite TA being "theoretical free", the researcher's reflexivity becomes critical as the subjectivity and interaction of the researcher with the data emerges as the main research tool (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The process of reflexivity gives the researcher the flexibility to adjust the analysis accordingly, where the researcher goes back and forward between each stage of analysis and engages with theory and literature concurrently with analysis.

TA is distinct from other data-driven approaches, such as analysis underpinned by grounded theory, where analysis is entirely inductive. In TA, there is a flexibility to use both inductive and deductive approaches, which take the form of semantic coding (descriptive), and latent coding (analytical/interpretive). Furthermore, reflexivity in thematic analysis is distinct from the "coding-reliability" method, which assumes that inter-reliability or consensus among analysts indicates what is "real" in the dataset. In TA, coding is organic and evolves throughout the coding process (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Braun, et al., 2019)

Transcripts were read and re-read at the initial stage of analysis and the focus was on becoming familiar with the dataset and taking notes connected to the research question. Yet, as Smithson (2000) points out, data "should be read as one of a multiplicity of possible analyses" (p. 115). Reflexivity at the stage of familiarization can entail asking questions about one´s own assumptions, points that are interesting and issues that need further reflection. For example, a note was written for each data item (see example below).

Table 5 *Example of quote and note from the stage of familiarization*.

Quote	Example of note
T3: These are all kinds of assignments, such as essays, video projects, posters and everything possible that cannot be measured quantitatively (objectively). But one always use a particular scale, even though the scale is subjective but it also depends on the competence level of the whole classroom	An interesting point here concerning the „subjective grading rule ". This teacher asserts that all kinds of assignments cannot be quantified – why does he make this assumption?

In the following stage, codes were constructed, in which each segment of the transcript was given equal weight, and text fragments were identified with names indicating their meaning, and related codes were collated into categories used to develop possible themes.

Parallel to coding, patterns between possible themes started to develop. Codes, such as "teachers fulfilling individual requirements," "flexibility," "accessibility," and "connection with teachers," were constructed and clustered into a group that encapsulated the codes' shared meaning and possible theme. Examples of semantic codes that captured explicit or surface meanings associated with the category "meaning of grading": "grades mean you compare" and "grade to pass," along with codes that reflected latent interpretations associated with text segments, such as "top-down relations" and "growth mindset" (Birenbaum, 2014; Dweck, 2006). The latent codes were constructed mainly by using Birenbaum's (2014) conceptualization of assessment culture in the analysis of student transcriptions. Then, to compare schools, each coding group was analyzed separately. At the stage of theme construction, and to explore the difference concerning assessment culture, similarities and differences across the three interviews (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002).

Table 6 *Examples of codes from students and teachers focus groups.*

Categories	Quotes	Codes
Example from teachers focus group		
Students understanding of assessment	R: When you think about assessment … what comes to mind?	Code: Assessment means grading
	S3: Grades … such as when teachers give us numbers for assignments … also peer assessment	Code: Assessment as continuous
	S2: I think of continuous assessment	
	S5: We don´t take final exams … just many smaller tests	
Example from teachers focus group		
Arbitrary involvement	T5: At the end of the semester, they have forgotten it and say that they did not have anything to say about it.	Code: Students lack awareness of involvement in assessment
	T4: Whatever it is … at least do we experience that they are being involved in decision making	Code: Students involvement reflects teacher´s perception

The initial coding in the teacher's dataset was more inclusive and at a semantic level. At this stage, examples of codes included were "external obstacles," which reflected teachers' descriptions of barriers to using AfL, such as concerns about the requirement to have a syllabus prepared prior to the start of the course, as well as the requirement to provide written feedback to parents, and the difficulty of using an individual approach in large classes.

In later analysis, coding became more selective and latent. "Trust creates an environment conducive to discourse" was an example of latent coding that captured teachers' descriptions of occasions in which trusting relationships facilitated dialogue. "Our students claim that everyone is equal and everyone has a voice here (at this school)." The quote "it's as if you're starting on a journey together (face-to-face interview) ... you get to know them better, and it creates trust." Next, the code was collated with

other codes with a similar meaning under the code-group "symmetrical-relations." Another latent code was "conditioned choice," which captured teachers' accounts of instances in which students were allowed to choose from predetermined (by the teacher) options at the beginning of the semester. Another code with a similar meaning was "teacher position creates an imbalance in power" was used to capture teachers' account of themselves in terms of power ("naturally (as teacher) you are power-position") and how their words derived different value and meaning owing to their power position. These codes were later clustered together under the category "vertical/asymmetrical power-relations. At the stage of theme construction, the groups "symmetrical – power relations" and "vertical/asymmetrical power relations" constructed the theme power-relations.

At the stage of refinement of possible themes, schematic outlines of candidate themes were constructed to gain a sense of what themes needed to be combined or abounded.
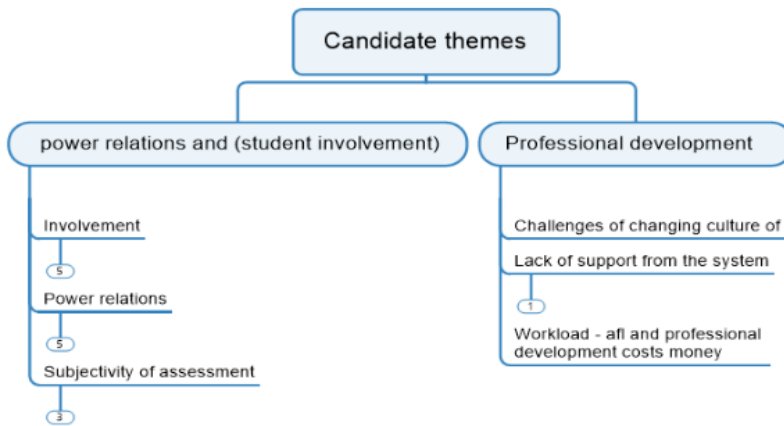

Figure 4 *Initial stage of theme development*

Some of the themes overlapped, while others were too "thin" (e.g. professional support) to be considered as a theme (Figure 4. Above). Other themes, such as power relations and student involvement, were too diverse to be identified as a single coherent theme (see Figure 4.)
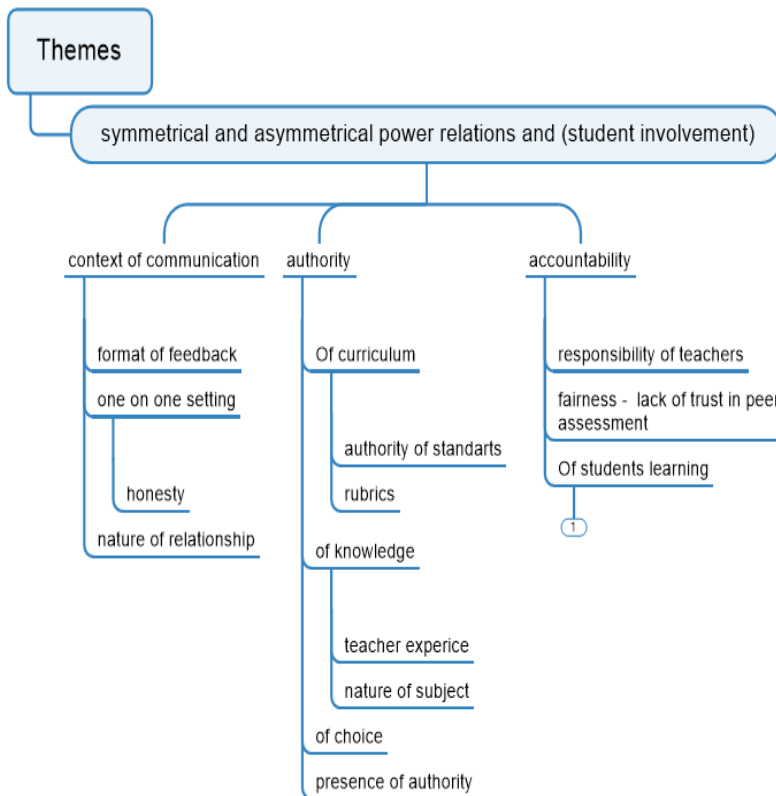
Figure 5 *Candidate themes at later stage of theme refinement*

At this stage, codes and code-groups were revisited and some themes such as "accountability" emerged under another theme (authority of grades) and "professional support"; some codes were discarded and others constructed under the theme "context of communication".

In the last stage of theme construction, two "central organizing concepts" were generated from the teacher data (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Authority and context were used to construct a narration about teachers' perceptions of how various social and cultural components, such as assessment tools (e.g., grades, written text), influenced the teachers' perceptions of student involvement in assessment. One sub-theme related to words and their shaping of how teachers spoke of their practice, especially "feedback" relative to the power balance between teacher and students (Winstone et al., 2021a). In the analysis, the words feedback, self-assessment and peer-assessment were used as search words in the transcripts and analyzed according to how verbs were used to describe teacher/student agency in relation to feedback practice.

4.6 Credibility of Analysis and Data Collection

As an insider researcher in one of the schools, there are several challenges, such as maintaining an impartial point of view. Unlike the traditional research approach, in which the researcher is situated outside the research subject, an insider researcher has knowledge of and social connection to the institution (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). One disadvantage of insider research is the duality of roles, which can create tension between institutional loyalty and demands for the researcher's role as a researcher, such as desiring positive change within the institution while writing papers that could be construed as negative for the institution. A person who is an insider should try to be aware of their own position and bias in order to avoid possible ethical problems (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009).

It is critical for the researcher to be self-reflective with regard to the subject. My experiences as a teacher, parent, and student have shaped my perspective on assessment, as well as my theoretical and methodological perspective as a reserarcher. As Smith (2006) notes, these aspects can influence the types of questions asked and left out, as well as the manner in which results are conveyed. A reflective log was kept during the research process. In my diary, I wrote down my reflections during the project as well as my project. My diary entries contain conversations with colleagues, supervisors, and other authors (reading), as well as my thoughts on the research. These entries were an important part of positioning and repositioning me in relation to the research, theoretical paradigm, and last but not least, assessment. While the diary helped me to be reflexive during the research process, it is also a testament to my position towards the research subject. Constant reflection during the research process has therefore been an important factor in being open to the conclusions I draw and the assumptions I make, especially because of my relationship to the field as a researcher at the school where I taught. The following entries provide insight into how I used the diary during the research process.

Entry 1: In relation to positioning myself

One point of contention in the assessment dispute has been whether to use summative or formative assessment. On the one hand, some may argue that summative assessment is required for accountability and reliability. Some scholars, on the other hand, argue that formative assessment is superior for learning, while others argue that balance is essential when employing these two approaches to assessment. In my opinion, the most important issue to ask is what the purpose of assessment is, rather than polarizing summative and formative assessment as two incompatible approaches/polarized and even incompetable viewpoints on how assessment should be conducted. When it comes to assessment, most of us will readily agree that it is an important element of learning. However, this agreement frequently comes to an end when it comes to accountability. While some believe that employing formative assessment does not undermine accountability, others believe that it does. (RD, 19.3.17)

Entry example 2: reflection on dominant discourse.

Dominant discourse in connection with exams and traditions. But what rhetoric is / is this referring to? It can be very difficult to spot a discourse that has become so intertwined with culture that we are compelled to use the same terms and words to describe it. It is a very interesting analogy that Moses and Nanna (2007) use when they compare culture to a fabric sewed from social material tests. "Testing has become part of the very social fabric that comprises our current cultural blanket" (RD, 23.3.20)

Entry example 3: Reflection on the quality of using survey to frame teachers' and students' perceptions

Having in mind the idiosyncratic social background of the student, not to mention the meaning of peer-culture, the teacher's awareness (or lack of it) of the student's background comes into question, is prominent, and comes to mind. Wertsch claims that the tendency to isolate phenomena is evident in social science, and that "any tendency to focus exclusively on the action, the person(s), or the mediational means in isolation is misleading" The approach of using a questionnaire as a tool for framing diversities of teachers' and students' perceptions of what goes on in the classroom should be taken with caution, given the possibility of diversive interpretations. As Bruner reminds us, Once one takes the view that a culture itself comprises an ambiguous text that is constantly in need of interpretation by those who participate in it, then the constitutive role of language in creating social reality becomes a topic of practical concern. (RD, 01.02.17)

4.7 Ethical Issues

All school leaders and participants approved the study. A contact person was sent an e-mail and asked if they would agree to participate in the study (Appendix A).

Participants in the survey and focus groups were informed that their names would not be used in the transcription process and all data would be permanently deleted. No official approval was needed, as research data did not include any vulnerable or traceable personal information (Act on Data Protection and the Processing of Personal Data, 2018). The participants were 18 years of age or older, which eliminated the need for consent from a parent or guardian. Every student participated voluntarily. However, some students in the pilot study were younger than 18 years of age and therefore written consent from legal guardians was needed. The letter informed the purpose, timing and a short description of the study (Appendix B).

The questionnaire's introduction provided information about the purpose of the research and, candidate contact information (phone number and e-mail, and the mentor's name). The introduction stated that participants were neither obligated to answer an individual question or the questionnaire altogether and that individual answers were not anonymous and non-traceable. Furthermore, it stated that all data would be handled as confidential and deleted after data processing. Finally, it informed participants that the research purpose was not to evaluate individual teacher´s practices or courses (Appendix C and D).

Required information was provided to the University of Iceland about details of the research and a description of how researcher guarantee that processing of personal data is in accordance with article GDPR act 90/2018 (Lög um persónuvernd og meðferð persónuupplýsinga) with EU regulation 2016/679. (Appendix H)

In the analysis of the quantitative and qualitative analysis, three other other researchers were involved in various aspects of the data. In the interview setting at the school where I taught, another researcher administered the focus group discussion and one of the school administrator collected the survey.

5 Findings

5.1 Main Findings

The aim of the thesis was to explore teacher and student perceptions of assessment and feedback in three Icelandic upper-secondary schools. The overarching research question is: *How are teachers' and students' perceptions of assessment and feedback shaped by different assessment cultures?* The sub-questions illuminate the overarching research question. This chapter first provides an overview of the findings of the three studies, followed by a synthesis of the three sub-questions presented in the three articles.

Table 7 *Overview of research questions and main findings in the three articles*

Research question(s)	Main findings
Study 1. How do teachers and students in three secondary schools in Iceland perceive feedback? How do different assessment cultures affect students' and teachers' perception of feedback and assessment?	- Substantial gap in how teachers and students perceive practice of feedback and assessment. - Compared to students, teachers seem to overestimate the quality of the feedback, use of feedback and student involvement. - Teachers and students disagree about perceived student involvement across the three schools. - More agreement between teachers and students in schools with AfL policy. - Stronger indication of AfL culture in schools with policy and experience of AfL. - General agreement between teachers across all schools.
Study 2. How do students in three upper secondary schools in Iceland experience different assessment cultures?	- Two of the schools reflect elements of the AfL culture, such as flexibility, responding to students need, emphasis on dialogue and trusting atmosphere. - Students believe that tests encourage superficial learning. - Assessment culture in two of the schools reflected

grading culture, whereas one school reflected "mixed" assessment culture in one school.

- Grades and testing mediated perception of the teacher-student relationship, the value of learning and students' well-being.

- Students receiving feedback with grades (school 2.) mediated student´s value of formative feedback.

- Feedback with grades and students' availability for dialogue could complement the negative effect of low grades.

Study 3. How do teachers perceive students' involvement in assessment and feedback?	- Students' resistance toward involvement in assessment is described in terms of unsettling established roles and students lack awareness about teachers intend. - Descriptions of feedback practice conveys the teacher's agency and inactive role of students as receivers of feedback. - Students' involvement without clear and explicit negotiation can backfire and induce discontent and insecurity. - Students are perceived to lack assessment vocabulary and awareness about assessment practices. -Context of communication and relationship shaped teachers' perception of student´s responsiveness toward teacher feedback. - Grading mediated perception toward peer and self-assessment. - Difference in settings in teacher-student dialogue mediated perception of power-dynamic. - Teachers experience tension in identity in relation to using assessment for learning or instrumental purposes.

5.2   Summary of Findings

5.2.1   Article I: Shared language of feedback and assessment. Perception of teachers and students in three Icelandic secondary schools.

The goal of the research was to explore variability in teacher and student perceptions of feedback, with the primary focus on exploring how teachers and students perceive assessment in the Icelandic context. The main research question was: How do teachers and students in secondary schools in Iceland perceive feedback? The second question was: How do different assessment cultures affect student and teacher perceptions of feedback and assessment?

Teachers and students answered questions entailing shared statements framed around engagement in feedback and assessment. The questions clustered around four dimensions: Student involvement, use of feedback, quality of feedback and peer assessment. The results aligned with previous findings (Havnes et al., 2012). Compared to students, teachers seemed to overestimate the quality of the feedback, students' use of feedback and student involvement. Yet, there was no statistical difference between teachers and students with respect to peer assessment. The gap between teachers and students is smaller in schools with AfL policy, and formative feedback is reported to be more frequent. More agreement between teachers and students in schools 1 and 2 more reports of formative practices, indicates stronger AfL culture. Interestingly, there was no difference between teachers' reports across all three schools. Taken together, the findings indicate that teachers and students perceive feedback differently in various learning contexts. The differences between teachers and students appear to be affected, at least in part, by diverse assessment cultures and approaches to feedback and assessment.

5.2.2   Article II: "This school really teaches you to talk to your teachers": Students' experience of different assessment cultures in three Icelandic upper secondary schools.

The aim of the second article was to explore students' experiences of assessment practices in schools with overt AfL policies and a school with no AfL policy. The research question was: How do students in three upper secondary schools in Iceland experience different assessment cultures? The research question focused on assessment and feedback practices from the student´s perspectives in three focus groups from each of the three schools.

In the focus groups, participant discussions focused on feedback practices, student involvement, and school characteristics. The analysis focused on similarities and differences between schools with the conceptual lens of different assessment cultures (Birenbaum, 2014).

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), revealed two major themes: Teacher-student relationship and grades and feedback. The findings indicate that students' perceptions of the teacher-student relationship influence how they report the quality of the dialogue and the student´s engagement in assessment and feedback practices. Overall, students value positive teacher–student relationships, flexibility and active dialogue with teachers. Students in schools 1 and 2reported some of the characteristics of AfL culture, such as ongoing dialogue, flexibility toward individual needs, open and approachable teachers for dialogue, opportunity to learn from mistakes, and feeling empowered by teacher feedback. Characteristics of grading/testing culture were described in school 3 in terms of "it´s all about the grade" and "passing the test" with minimal effort.

Furthermore, teacher-student relations in school 3 were described as top-down and to some extent contingent on the student´s willingness to conform to receive a high grade. Exams were generally perceived as having low value in relation to learning, although the value of testing, seemed to some extent subject-dependent. One school was identified as having a "mixed" assessment culture. Hence, a blend of AfL cultural characteristics as well as a grading oriented mindset of seeing grades having an "exchange value", whilst feedback was perceived as secondary to grades, as a means toward receiving high grade and neutralizing negative affect of low grade.

5.2.3   Article III: Student involvement in assessment and power relations: Teachers perspective.

The goal was to explore teachers' views on assessment and feedback, emphasizing student involvement. The research question was: How do teachers perceive the student´s involvement in assessment and feedback? To answer the question, focus groups of teachers from the three schools were assembled. The quantitative findings revealed a perceived gap between teachers and students across all three schools, independent of policy. Therefore, the focus of analysis was on teachers' perception of student involvement. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), was used to analyze the interview transcripts. Findings revealed two main themes: Authority and context of communication. Teachers described authority in knowledge and expertise to contribute to the student´s lack of involvement

and shared understanding of assessment, where teachers possess a more comprehensive assessment vocabulary to articulate various assessment practices. Students' resistance towards participation in assessment and feedback activities was attributed to students' lack of awareness and vocabulary to identify occasions of involvement and students complaining about taking the teacher´s role and responsibility. Descriptions of feedback practice conveyed a strong sense of teachers' agency and students as inactive receivers of feedback, conversely practices of involvement characterized by students' agency.

In some cases, involvement without clear and explicit negotiation seemed to contribute to teachers' reports of students' discontent and insecurity. The authority of grading was emphasized by teachers' lack of trust in peer- and self-assessment, where grading was viewed as unjust and skewed toward external approval. Rigidity of criteria, as an objective measure of grade was presented as non-negotiable. The context of communication and the quality of teacher-student relationships influenced students' responsiveness to teacher feedback. The teacher's identity as a facilitator of dialogue was perceived to be in conflict with the requirement for documentation. One-on-one sessions were regarded as a two-edged sword; on the one hand, they encouraged honest students' self-assessment and contributed to stronger teacher-student relationships. On the other hand, they were perceived as a threat to students. Overall, the findings shed light on diversity in how teachers and students perceive engagement in assessment and feedback activities. Moreover, developing relationships of trust are critical in creating a space for dialogue and student involvement.

5.3 Synthesis of Findings

The overarching research question is: *How are teachers' and students' perceptions of assessment and feedback shaped by different assessment cultures?* The synthesis of the findings of the three sub-studies show that three dimensions of the assessment culture shape teachers' and students' perceptions of assessment and feedback; 1) culture of communication and involvement, 2) assessment tools, and 3) the dynamism in the assessment culture.

5.3.1 Culture of Communication and Involvement

The general trend in the findings is that active communication and quality of teacher-student relationships are perceived to support student learning.

Findings from the quantitative survey show a smaller gap between teachers and students in the AfL schools and greater use of formative feedback is higher in the AfL schools. The students' interview findings support this, and students in AfL schools report dialogue between teachers and students as part of the learning process. Moreover, students perceive a sense of empowerment through engagement in teacher-student dialogue and where they can have a voice about their learning. Findings from both teachers and students interview data underpin how the quality of teacher-student relationship shapes students' responses toward teacher feedback, whereas relations characterized by equality makes both teachers and students more accessible in dialogue.

Moreover, there are indications that teachers' perceived pressure to comply with bureaucratic requirements constrained them from building their identity as facilitators of learning through informal teacher-student dialogue. Results from both student and teacher interview data show that the perception of inequality in the teacher-student relationship pushes students away from participating in assessment and feedback activities. In a similar vein, practices emphasizing grading and testing seem to resonate more with less dialogue and perceived distance in the teacher-student relationship.

The findings from the survey show that there is a gap between teachers and students concerning student involvement across all three schools. Moreover, students rated student involvement and peer assessment lowest (except peer assessment in school 1.). Low student involvement is consistent with teachers' interview data, indicating a lack of trust toward student competence to participate in such activities and students tend to conform mediated by a culture of grading.

5.3.2   Assessment Tools

One common thread across both sets of interview data reveals an instrumental view toward assessment tools, such as using peer assessment for grading, written feedback, tests for memorization of facts, and discourse on feedback reflecting students' passivity.

Another thread in the findings indicated a more complex and situated view of assessment tools, such as framing one-on-one teacher-student dialogue as a way to build the trust necessary for efficient use of assessment tools (e.g., self-assessment); and viewing assessment tools as relational, such as teachers framing one-on-one teacher-student dialogue as a way to build the trust necessary for efficient use of assessment tools

(e.g., self-assessment). In conclusion, the difference between an instrumental and a situational/complex approach appeared to impact how students approached and perceived learning. Additionally, the quantitative study suggests that teachers and students agree to a greater extent than in the non-AfL school on the use of feedback for formative purposes. Arguably, formative use of tools enables teachers and students to join in a dialogue and create a shared understanding.

5.3.3 Static and Dynamic Assessment Cultures

The findings imply that diverse assessment cultures shape how assessment tools, relationship quality, and power relationships shape communication.

Testing and grading reflect static cultures wherein assessment activities, such as testing, grading, and receiving feedback, are viewed as distinct from learning. Students' description of summative tests as parrot learning and participation in decisions regarding optional work later in the semester and not at the start of the course are examples. While assessment activities in complex and dynamic cultures are interwoven into a culture of continuous dialogue, relationships, and change in power dynamism. An example of this is students' discussions in one of the AfL schools about how learning in that particular school requires active engagement in dialogue with the teachers. Another aspect of dynamism is tension toward change toward AfL culture, where one group of actors within the culture is unwilling to agree on the payoff of exchanging the value of grading for the value inherent in learning as well as giving up the value of receiving documented feedback for the value of participating in dialogue. The tension in one of the AfL schools was related to teachers' complaints about having to grade every assignment and students' rejection of non-graded assignments, arguing that such work was pointless.

Involving students in decision-making early in the semester demonstrates a static conception of student involvement in which planned engagement in decision-making is decontextualized from any experience necessary to make an informed decision. Finally, according to quantitative and qualitative data, students appear to be more sensitive to cultural variety than teachers, despite the fact that the survey found no difference between teachers across schools.

5.3.4 Synthesis Summary

The findings show that there is a gap between how teachers and students perceive feedback and assessment. The gap seems to be related to the

school´s policy and experience with AfL, reflected in the school culture. Furthermore, the findings suggest that focus on dialogue, the teacher´s flexibility toward the students and positive teacher-student relationships contributed to shared understanding of assessment and feedback. Divergence in perception is related to the culture, recognizable in the nature of communication, power dynamics and approach toward assessment tools.

6 Discussion

This chapter discusses the key findings of the thesis, based on the results from the exploration of the three sub-questions of the thesis. The first section focuses on reviewing the research questions and findings in relation to the literature. The following sections discuss three different aspects based on the findings how assessment and feedback shape teachers and students' perception.

The purpose of this project is to gain a deeper understanding of how teachers' and students' perception of assessment and feedback is shaped by different assessment cultures. This research adds to the meager research literature about assessment and feedback at the upper-secondary level in Iceland. Moreover, this research intends to contribute to the limited literature at an international level at how teachers' and students' perceptions of assessment are shaped by diverse assessment cultures at upper-secondary levels. The project aims to contribute with new insights into the discussion about assessment for learning and, concurrently, raise more awareness about the value of cultural characteristics that affect the implementation of AfL. The overarching research question and sub-questions are as follows: *How are teachers' and students' perceptions of assessment and feedback shaped by different assessment cultures?*

1. How do teachers and students in secondary schools in Iceland perceive feedback? How do different assessment cultures affect students' and teachers' perception of feedback and assessment?

2. How do students in three upper secondary schools in Iceland experience different assessment cultures?

3. How do teachers perceive students' involvement in assessment and feedback?

6.1 The Overall Findings

Teachers' and students' perceptions of feedback are consistent with past research indicating a gap between teachers' and students' perceptions of feedback (Havnes et al., 2012; Mäkipää & Ouakrim-Soivio, 2020; Van Der Kleij & Adie, 2020; van der Kleij, 2019). Additionally, the results suggest that students' and teachers' perceptions are shaped by contextual aspects of

the culture and diversity in assessment and feedback practices (Birenbaum, 2014; Sandvik, 2019; van der Kleij & Adie, 2020; van der Kleij, 2019). Furthermore, as previous studies have documented, atmosphere of trust, honesty and positive teacher-student relationship is perceived to engage students in learning activities (Claessens et al., 2017; Cornelius-White, 2007; Cowie, 2005; Duffy & Elwood, 2013; Dunworth & Sanchez, 2016; Gamlem & Smith, 2013; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Roorda et al., 2011). Given that grading appears to divert attention away from the information contained in feedback (Butler, 1988), it is reasonable to assume that grading practices reflect a greater degree of disagreement between teachers and students in school 2, which emphasizes grading and formative feedback, compared to school 1, that does not use grading with feedback. That was however not the case.

According to the findings, as in previous research, the participants' perception of external constraints and challenges is shaped by established assessment culture. In this study, traditions of grading and documentation were perceived by teachers as counteractive toward changing practice toward AfL (Birenbaum, 2016; Birenbaum et al., 2011; Butler, 1988; Shepard, 2019). Additionally, as previous studies have documented (Bonner, 2016; Bourke, 2018; Jonsson et al., 2015), teachers seem reluctant to share the responsibility of assessment with students and find student involvement challenging. Additionally, the results reveal that involving students is challenging, particularly when it comes to changing pre-established views about the teacher-student dynamic and culturally embedded views on learning anchored in the transmission paradigm (Carless, 2006; Crossouard, 2009; Taylor & Robinson, 2009).

The findings from this study add new knowledge of how teachers and students perceive feedback and assessment relative to the assessment culture in which the practice is embedded. Previous research has either focused on the experience of teachers and students of practice (Havnes et al., 2012; van der Kleij, 2019) or perception of different assessment cultures (Birenbaum, 2016). Furthermore, these findings shed light on the perceived gap between teachers and students by stressing how the assessment culture contributes to diversity in the experience of practice. Various aspects of the different cultures are discussed below. The following sections will address three characteristics influencing assessment culture and how teachers and students perceive assessment practices: Culture of communication and involvement; assessment tools and cultural dynamism.

6.2 Culture of Communication and Involvement

The findings suggest that different assessment cultures shape teacher-student communication. Thus, teacher-student level of agreement may be influenced by the assessment culture in which the practice is embedded and communicated. Moreover, the gap between teachers and students might reveal that some aspects of the communication and practice need further attention. Despite positive evidence from AfL schools, the findings indicate that some aspects of the communication lane are missing, such as the student´s participation in feedback and assessment. Provided that students are more likely to engage in learning when a culture of dialogue and teacher-student relationships are strong (Ajjawi et al., 2021; Duffy & Elwood, 2013; Looney et al., 2018), it raises the question about why dialogue and strong relationships between teachers and students in the AfL schools do not translate into student involvement. Presumably, the reason seems rooted in historical traditions in Iceland (Proppé, 1983) indicating classroom activities are driven mainly by the teacher (Sigurgeirsson et al., 2018).

The findings from the teacher's study suggest that part of the gap is related to the influence of how external constraints are perceived in the assessment culture. The findings suggest that the teachers have to negotiate between pedagogical conviction and constraints such as documentation. In similar vein, previous research shows that when teachers experience a discrepancy between intended practice and what is actualized in the classroom, they attribute external factors, workload, bureaucracy, institutional regulations, the requirement of testing and grading (Lee et al., 2016; Lee, 2008; van der Kleij, 2019). From a sociocultural perspective, external constraints limit the teacher´s opportunity to engage and develop their identity in alignment with AfL, whereas teachers perceive tension between becoming a "full participant, a member, a kind of person" in the AfL community (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 36). As a result, the influence of constraints experienced by teachers, shape interaction with students, and, students' identities as learners. While teachers complain about external constraints such as workload, research indicates that students are given limited opportunities to engage and take greater responsibility in the assessment and feedback process (Havnes et al., 2012; Jonsson et al., 2015; van Der Kleij & Adie, 2020). In other words, the findings suggest that sharing responsibility with students and collectively addressing constraints, such as the teacher´s workload and student disengagement, appears problematic. There is a culturally

embedded assumption about the teacher's role as the authority figure, in terms of being the expert and the provider of assessment and feedback (Carless, 2006; van Der Kleij & Adie, 2020).

Van der Kleij (2019) offers a possible explanation for the disparity between teachers' actual and intended feedback practices suggesting it may stem from students lack of awareness of the feedback they receive. The current findings could shed light on van der Kleij´s (2019) point, that is, one strand of findings, indicated that teachers perceived students lacking the vocabulary necessary to communicate and differentiate assessment and feedback practices. This is noteworthy, given the teacher tendency to keep assessment knowledge tacit, prohibiting students from gaining access to possible learning tools (Sadler, 1989). Furthermore, as documented elsewhere, teachers in this research complain that students do not necessarily read or use the feedback they receive (Carless, 2006; Havnes, et al., 2012). Yet, the findings also indicate that teachers would better use their time and students would benefit more from informal dialogue rather than written feedback.

Taken together, the gap indicates that awareness of the importance of student involvement is missing and needs to be addressed. The extent to which different assessment cultures shape the gap has not been reported elsewhere. The survey findings indicate a general gap when the focus is on the combined results from the three schools. However, when the schools are compared, the only significant commonality between the three schools concerns student involvement. The school characterized by a testing/grading culture amounts to the reported discrepancy of other facets of the gap, most notably in relation to interaction between teachers and students. Prior research has highlighted the role of trust and flexibility in the teacher-student relationship in cultivating interactions in which teachers acknowledge and appreciate students' perspectives (thoughts and feelings) (Gamlem & Smith, 2013; Vattøy & Gamlem, 2020). It can thus be assumed that the assessment culture in AfL schools, where there is a shared value of flexibility and established trust, shapes teacher-student interactions toward a culture where student perspectives are valued and hence contributes to a shared understanding of feedback practice.

Overall, the findings point at an assessment culture with weak teacher and student shared ownership and decision-making around assessment and feedback. Carless and Boud (2020) conclude that although students are aware that feedback can improve their learning, they tend to underrate the value of taking responsibility in carrying out necessary actions. In contrast,

teachers point at constraints which focus on students (e.g. students lacking vocabulary and awareness of practice; students don´t read/use feedback) and teacher´s workload. The solution for both teachers and students' problems could be collaboration and sharing responsibility with students on. Yet, moving students into the teacher´s territory, a culture of trust and shared values about collaboration need to be developed, where taking more responsibility and sharing the interest of assessment can pave the way for trust and vocabulary of assessment (Deeley & Bovill, 2017). As in this study, the two of the AfL schools have cultural characteristics to foster such collaboration.

6.3   Assessment Tools

This section explores how tools influence teachers' and students' perceptions toward assessment and feedback. It is assumed that "assessment tools" correspond to physical and language tools which mediate perception of practice (Vygotsky, 1978). An essential part of AfL is engaging students in assessment and feedback by using peer and self-assessment and subsequently providing students access to the language of assessment and feedback (Black & Wiliam, 2009). Here, the role of the teacher is important as a gatekeeper for students to enter a joint zone with more competent others, where their current understanding is drawn toward the teacher´s understanding in order to develop a shared understanding of assessment and feedback (Vygotsky, 1978). Nonetheless, the discourse takes place within an assessment culture in which prior experience and expected power relationships can either facilitate or restrict perceived trust (Deeley and Bovill, 2017). The findings imply that when a teacher crosses the border as an authority figure, they can build trust and opportunities for dialogue. For instance, both teachers and students mentioned how informal settings encouraged students to approach teachers for dialogue. The teacher´s authority mediating perceptions of feedback was exemplified in the findings in teacher description of blending teacher feedback anonymously among feedback from student peers. The findings suggest the value of peer feedback is given more weight and teacher feedback seems to have less authority to divert the student´s attention away from the peer feedback. However, Sadler (1989) expressed concern about the teacher´s tacit knowledge not being communicated in the teacher-student dialogue. Yet, the overall findings suggest an underexploited opportunity for teachers to articulate their assessment knowledge with students during a teacher-student discussion, thereby pinning the student´s identity in the assessment discourse (Willis et

al., 2013). The findings indicate that despite the strong teacher-student dialogue in AfL schools, the subject matter of what is discussed appears to be limited in terms of critically reflecting on and sharing responsibility in assessment and feedback.

These findings suggest that students lack access to the teacher´s professional language, which can impede the student´s progress as a legitimate part of the community (Stiggins, 2002). Yet, learning is facilitated by enabling students to access the conceptual tools as "sources for understanding through growing involvement" (Stiggins, 2002, p. 37), and so achieving legitimacy requires getting access to the conceptual tools used by more competent others. However, the transition process from students as newcomers in the language game of assessment is conditioned on to what degree the community values students as legitimate participants. Subsequently, the nature of power-relations can facilitate or hinder the process of student access toward the community resources (Contu & Willmott, 2003). The findings imply that greater sharing of responsibility would need teacher and student identities to be re-negotiated. However, there are positive signs that the established quality of the teacher-student relationship in the two AfL schools, can pave the way for students access to the resources embedded in the assessment discourse (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Willis, 2009). According to Derrick et al. (2008), research on how different learning cultures influence teachers' approach to AfL indicates that the teacher-student relationship and ongoing dialogue are viewed as the foundation of the learning culture. They state that the observed learning culture had in common was "a premium is put on good personal relationships between teacher and student (…) and on continual dialogue between learners and a teacher who is seen more as an expert friend and helper rather than a figure of authority" (p. 179). The challenge for the AfL schools is to use preexisting culture embedded within the schools to involve the students, through self-assessment and peer feedback. That, however, involves a change in teachers' beliefs towards assessment. Prior research (Smith et al., 2014), indicates that although teachers' preconception of assessment is relatively stable, it is possible to challenge their mindset with a clear, structured professional development opportunities in which teachers collaborate to re-evaluate their stance toward assessment and position themselves toward theories of learning (Hill & Eyers, 2016). Additionally, the arrangement should take into account and be consistent with teachers' professional and social context. As previously stated, the findings from this research indicate that a pre-established culture of trust and good teacher-student relationships may work as a catalyst for teachers

to stretch their comfort zones when putting what they have learned into practice. Additionally, the importance of teacher-student relationships, trust, and continual dialogue should be expressly recognized as a catapult for possible development of putting AfL into reality.

These findings and others (Birenbaum, 2016; Duffy & Elwood, 2013; Engelsen & Smith, 2010; Torrance, 2012) indicate a tendency to conform in a testing/grading culture and that the quality of communication and relationships is influenced by how students perceive themselves in terms of academic accomplishment. In this study, students in the schools with a testing/grading culture believed that their grades influenced whether teachers were responsive and engaging in dialogue with them. Conversely, students in the AfL schools perceived the teacher relationship built around equality and trust.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that in the minds of both teachers and students, grading traditions could counteract the culture of AfL. Although previous research indicates that students can be biased when assessing their peers (Dochy et al., 1999), the students' level of honest peer feedback depends on whether a culture of trust has been established. Whether feedback and criticism of others are recognized as constructive can raise the students' expectations for their peers' work and, as a result, provide more honest and critical assessment (Carlsson & Nilsson, 2021). From Freire´s (1970) perspective, the student tendency to use peer grading to conform is due to student dilemmas over choosing between being rejected because of honest assessment or conforming their beliefs toward peers' expectations. According to the findings, compliance is mediated by fear of being rejected by the teacher, due to a low grade or granting others a low grade. As the findings suggest, students with lower grades in one of the schools, are reluctant to approach teachers and risk providing honest grades. Furthermore, as according Deeley and Bovill (2017), research students are less willing to take risks or explore new terrain if they fear it will affect their grade. This is particularly prominent when it comes to taking on more responsibility in assessment and feedback activities. Also, as previous research in Iceland has shown, there is a tendency to conform which sustains top-down power balance assessments providing the teacher with perceived authority over students (Eiríksdóttir & Jóhannesson, 2016; Ingvarsdóttir, 2018). The danger is that in the end, conformity is maintained through top-down power relations and further reliance on grading and testing.

The issue with peer assessment is related to the common understanding that it is predominantly graded summative assessment. To reduce the high stakes of grades, peer assessment would need to be reconceptualized primarily as the provision of formative peer feedback (or peer review). Additionally, it is important to bring into the discussion the value of using peer feedback for students to gain insight into their own learning; the value of reducing the negative effects of teacher feedback because of an imbalance in power (Carless & Boud; Vickerman, 2009); and the payoff for teachers to diminish their workload (Jonsson et al., 2015). Furthermore, when implementing peer feedback, it is important to take into account how possible problems with peer feedback can be counteracted, such as through anonymity, moderation by teachers, modeling, training, and the use of groups in peer review of peers' work and co-construction of feedback (Vickerman, 2009; Carless & Boud, 2018).

One of the problems with the limited use of peer assessment in the AfL schools is that students have few opportunities to develop as feedback literates. While students' ability to use peer feedback appears to imply that they are already feedback literate, research indicates that practising peer feedback helps students develop into feedback literate (Ketonen et al., 2020). When students receive feedback from peers, it allows them to evaluate the quality of the feedback rather than passively accepting the teacher's feedback uncritically. As Tai et al. (2021) point out, pushing students to judge the quality of feedback from peers requires understanding how messy peer assessment is. They also point out that power relations affect how and whether students are willing to be critical of others' work. In order to create shared values for students to take an active part in evaluating the feedback and work of others, Tai et al. (2021) suggest an openness toward how and why the social context and power relations can act as constraints. Therefore, developing shared awareness about the effects of assessment tools, practice, and power relations is a prerequisite for teachers and students to negotiate and adapt to the constraints.

Furthermore, when implementing AfL, teachers commonly complain about greater workload, which is important to capitalize, because in the end it could disengage further development of AfL (Jonsson et al., 2015). Teachers' perception of being constrained by workload, may be elucidated by looking at the conceptual differences between the FA and AfL (Jonsson et al., 2015; Swaffield, 2011). According to Black and Wiliam (2009), instruction in FA is adapted according to assessment evidence "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" (p. 9). These decisions can span the space between classes or even longer, for example when teachers respond with written feedback to students' work after task has been completed. In contrast, as Swaffield (2011) points out, AfL deals with the "here and now of learning" (p. 441). Concerns about extra workload of documentation in AfL, based on Swaffield (2011) argument about the difference between FA and AfL, may reflect misconception and confusion about AfL and FA.

Moreover, lack of student involvement contradicts with the democratic emphasis in the national curriculum guide, where it states that "active democracy can only flourish if simultaneously every form of equality between individuals and groups in society is supported" (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2011, p. 15). To advocate for autonomy and responsibility, it is vital to establish context and a shared understanding of what it means for students and teachers to step outside their comfort zone and take risks in unfamiliar territory, such as greater responsibility in assessment (Deeley & Bovill, 2017).

The findings indicate that how feedback is communicated, primarily written versus verbal dialogue, shapes how it is perceived. A traditional written form of feedback has been criticized for being monologic, where the student is "told" what needs improvement and is rooted in the transmission view on learning (Sadler, 2010; Carless, 2020). Conversely, there is a positive indication in the findings that face-to-face dialogue and easy access to teachers contribute to a perception of "personal school" characterizing the assessment culture in the two AfL schools. Nevertheless, despite the perceived value of verbal dialogue, teachers experience pressure from students and parents to use the written form for documentation. From a situational perspective, the salience of the immediate context is placed in the background of the message itself. While in written feedback, it is presumed that the meaning of written feedback can be delivered to students, whilst it is created in another setting and time than the moment of receiving the message, or as Wertsch (1993) notes, the intended meaning is decontextualized at both end of the communication. Conversely, the informal context of verbal feedback, the importance of contextual features of the situation shape the activity itself and subsequently create the platform for shared understanding, as in the moment, questions and further explanations can be immediately addressed. Moreover, the salience of the context is accessible in face-to-face communication (Linell, 2009), such as bodily signs, physical space and psychological states are accessible and shape how the communication is perceived. The findings suggest that context influences teacher-student

power relationships and that teacher authority can be increased or decreased by recontextualizing communication, such as by regulating the teacher's physical presence in the room; his or her presence in feedback (e.g., through the use of anonymous feedback); and by providing opportunities for face-to-face feedback as a continuum of written feedback and finally, by presenting self-assessment as a two-way conversation between teacher and student.

According to the findings, conceptual tools such as "feedback" mostly portray top-down relations, in which teacher agency and student passivity is capitalized. Teachers' descriptions of feedback practice mostly consisted of descriptions of teachers' activities, such as 'to give feedback,' 'write comments,' and 'tell the student.' However, student agency, on the other hand, was more evident in the teacher's descriptions of innovative teaching methods and activities such as peer and self assessment. It could be concluded that language in relation to descriptions of feedback appears to be in accordance with the testing/grading assessment culture, characterized by top-down relations. One implication of these findings is that the terminology used in AfL may go unchallenged. Provided that conceptual tool shapes practice, there may be a need to reframe how assessment and feedback practice is described, both at the level of practice and research. According to Winstone et al. (2021a), literature papers on feedback are still written using vocabulary located within the transmission paradigm. Furthermore, when teachers are asked about the meaning of feedback, they generally refer to something that the teacher does, such as to give constructive criticism; give comments; show students right/wrong answer; answer students question and tell when the student is on right track (Hattie & Clarke, 2019).

It is noteworthy how one of the schools held grades back toward the end of the course and thereby reconciled the strong tradition of grading in an Icelandic context and national curricular requirement with formative use of feedback. The findings imply that students have been encultured by the notion of not needing a grade to improve and articulate that compared to formative feedback, grading does not provide them with valuable information needed in the process of the next step in learning and learning from previous mistakes. It could be argued that teachers and students have cultivated shared value and joint interest of holding grades back and focusing instead on feedback and dialogue. These findings conclude that certain assessment culture elements must be present to withhold grades and use only formative feedback. Here, dialogue and students' accessibility to the teacher appear to be the essential component because, through the

dialogue, students appear to be able to trust the teachers to explain the feedback and provide further clarifications. The results reveal that one disadvantage of grading is that it appears to encourage students to use feedback as a means of achieving superficial goals, such as passing an exam or earning a high mark. Additionally, the findings underscore the value of the overall assessment culture when grades are used, as students perceive feedback with a low grade and when teachers make themselves available for dialogue countereffect the negative effect of grading on the student's well-being (Chilvers et al., 2021; Ketonen et al., 2020; Li & Grion, 2019; Panadero & Brown, 2017).

6.4   Static and Dynamic Assessment Cultures

One challenge of advancing the discussion in terms of assessment cultures is to resist the temptation of simplification, that is, to position two cultures in oppositional dichotomy. As a result of the dichotomy, both terms become restricted and devolve into shallow debates regarding assessment cultures characterized by "either/or" arguments. The discussion will focus on assessment culture on the continuum of dynamic and static which shapes teacher and student perceptions.

The findings highlight the complexities of assessment culture, as multiple cultures can coexist within a single institution. For instance, in school 2, which has explicit AfL policies and several AfL cultural characteristics, the findings indicate that the grading culture within the student community resists changing the perceived value of grading, despite pressure from the teacher community. Furthermore, based on the findings of the teachers' study, individuals and groups of teachers are attempting to develop an AfL culture inside a school culture that is mostly test/grade-oriented. This is consistent with prior observations that different cultures and groups can coexist and be in tension within a given culture (IEAN, 2021; Mottier Lopez & Allal, 2007). Moreover, the assessment culture in schools is difficult to view without the surrounding cultures and the overall culture in society. In Iceland, as is the case in many other western countries, where the value of individualism and competition are highly regarded, encouraging testing/grading culture and thus conflict with some of the values inherent in AfL culture. For example, in Iceland, the media provides current news headlines about students scoring highest at their school at the end of the semester. Additionally, few students in each school (at the end of elementary and upper secondary) who earn the top grade in each subject receive various awards.

Teachers report students lacking awareness about different assessment activities, and students report on a grading culture, which aligns with earlier findings indicating that students have a narrow understanding of assessment (Brown et al., 2009; Smith et al., 2014). The findings from the student interviews indicated that assessment was mainly discussed in terms of grading and testing, whereas the student´s view toward assessment and feedback in the AfL schools was more identified with being contextualized and embedded in relationships. An example from the findings was a student's perception that developing a strong relationship with the teacher was an integral aspect of learning and that actively engaging in discourse with the teacher legitimized the student as a learner. Therefore, innovations in assessment practice must not just reflect a change of tools, but also a transformation of the assessment culture the tools are embedded in.

One possible explanation for the difference between cultures is that psychometric approaches may be insensitive to instruction, while AfL is more instructional sensitive, characterized by "fine-grained information that both teachers and students need to keep learning moving forward, minute-by-minute, day-by-day" (Heritage, 2014, p. 347). Pedagogy and assessment are continuous and intertwined in AfL, and it could be argued that in terms of instructional sensitivity, the contingency of informal dialogue account for greater agreement in the two AfL schools. For instance, in Brown et al. (2009) study, informal practices were perceived as unrelated to assessment, whereas students identified assessment more with traditional practices, such as testing. Therefore, comparing teachers' and students' perceptions may reveal students not differentiating between informal and fine-grained practices, where distinctness between instruction, dialogue, feedback and assessment becomes blurry (Brown, et al., 2009). The findings of this research complement the findings of Brown et al. (2009), indicating that the backdrop of grading and testing culture, such as in school 3, draws students' attention away from the importance of moment-to-moment activities away from the more fine-grained element of the assessment culture which facilitates learning.

Findings by Brown et al. (2009) imply that students valued time spent in informal and everyday practice as an essential component of assessment and learning. From a sociocultural point of view, the difference in instructional sensitivity is underpinned by the notion of learning as dynamic and interconnected or, conversely, static events (Rogoff, 1995). From the transmission perspective, learning and assessment activities are detached, such that they can be internalized and retrieved later. From a

social-cultural standpoint, the distinction between assessment and learning becomes blurry, as learning is a continuous extension of prior occasions of learning and assessment. An example of the significance of continuity between occasions of learning activities is where teachers allow students to participate in decision making in relation to the syllabus at the start of the semester. However, the occasion of participating in the decision-making process is separate in time from the activity the decision corresponds to. From a sociocultural standpoint, choosing was disconnected from the activity, and thus involvement in decision-making at the beginning of the semester became meaningless in terms of learning. Furthermore, the influence of testing/grading culture was underlined in students' perceptions of tests as memorization (parrot learning) rather as true learning. Another example of how testing/grading culture shaped students' perceptions were stories about "doing enough" to pass the course with a minimal grade, which was also evident in the context of continuous assessment, where some students found it difficult to maintain motivation if they had already achieved their target grade because the motivation from the final exam was missing. The findings suggest that in an assessment culture that recognizes grades as having exchange value, substituting grades with other assessment tools (e.g. standards/feedback) can be complex and can result in previous culture fostering the "new" assessment tools, especially if the cultural traditions of surface learning had previously been dominant (Birenbaum, 2014; Hume & Coll, 2009; Torrance, 2012). Thereby, changing the tools without addressing the assessment culture, could translate into using the new tools with the old mindset.

One can argue that teachers holding authority in assessment communicates the teachers' identity within a complex cultural framework. Teachers must reconcile their assessment ideas with their identity relative to school policy, discipline, institutional traditions, curriculum requirements, and the role of the student in assessment (Willis et al., 2013).

Assessment, in its original Latin form, refers to the Latin verb assidere, which means' to sit beside, 'implying that assessment is part of AfL as a process in which the teacher sits with his students in order to understand how they learn and what steps to take in order for the student to gradually become an autonomous learner (Marshall & Drummond, 2016; Swaffield, 2011). As scholars have noted, this requires the teacher to develop a different perspective on practice (Crossouard, 2009) and to view students as equals who learn side-by-side with the teacher (Crossouard, 2009). Conversely, as Swaffield (2011) points out, assessment from a psychometric perspective is incompatible with AfL. For instance, teachers' comments on

the use of grades in peer assessment exemplified the psychometric conception of assessment. However, the students' perspectives on peer assessment were shaped through the lens of their prior experiences as well as their identity as students and teachers. As Marshall and Drummond (2006) point out, a shift in the teacher's mindset is required. Teachers' descriptions of changes as a result of implementation and assistance to teachers in the Black et al. (2003) study shed insight on this, as one instructor who had discovered that AfL was indeed "a way of thinking, almost a philosophy" (p. 80). The phrases underline the limited value of instructors' practice alone; the transformation must occur in the teacher's personality and how he views his function as a teacher, as well as the student's responsibility for his or her own learning. Some teachers in the study described how specific paths they took in teaching shaped how they viewed their role as facilitators, such as teachers who conducted self-assessment interviews and subsequently influenced their view of the student. Moreover, teachers who wanted to use oral feedback instead of written feedback felt pressured to make contrasting decisions about practice and about how they wanted to be seen as a teacher.

The findings capture some aspects of the complicated curricular background, which is reflected in the national curriculum guide's contesting messages regarding the request of using a student-centered approach while at the same time being impartial in assessing as many aspects of learning as possible (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2011). It could be argued that the contradictory message from the national curriculum are manifested in these findings in three ways: first, through the reported grading culture in one of the AfL schools, second, through the use of continuous assessment in school 3, and third, through teachers' conflicted identities regarding the use of feedback for documenting vs learning purposes. Furthermore, the national curriculum's ambiguous definition of AfL and unclear message about the purpose of assessment make it difficult to align the curriculum with teaching and assessment (Bennett, 2011). It may be argued that in the two schools with characteristics of AfL culture, there is a greater alignment with the national curricular emphasis especially concerning adapting instruction to a student´s individual needs and a greater variety of assessment and feedback approaches.

7 Conclusions and Implications

This section will conclude the research by summarizing key findings in relation to thesis aims and research questions, as well as their value and contribution. Finally, it will discuss limitations and suggestions for future research.

The thesis aims were to explore and gain a deeper understanding of how teachers' and students' perception assessment and feedback is shaped by different assessment cultures. Based on findings from the survey and focus group interviews, teachers and students' perception of assessment and feedback is shaped by characteristic of the assessment culture, such as the quality of teacher-student relationships, use of assessment tools, context and nature of communication as well as power-relations. Overall, the findings show that although perception of assessment and feedback varies across schools and between teachers and students, the general trend is that student participation is limited in all schools. The findings of this research complement those of earlier studies in an Icelandic context in upper-secondary schools, indicating pedagogical responsibility is mainly placed on the teachers (Ingvarsdóttir, 2018; Sigurgeirsson et al., 2018). The main implication of the findings is to actively engage students taking responsibility for learning in the assessment and feedback process.

7.1 Implications

The findings raise questions about the student´s role and responsibilities in assessment, and consequently, how current practices meet the national curricular requirement of supporting students' competence in becoming independent learners. It is suggested that, to develop students as competent learners, it is important to recognize and encourage student involvement in decision-making processes, which ultimately students are responsible for carrying out. The findings imply that being receptive and approachable for dialogue is significant for building trust in the teacher-student relationships. Furthermore, a culture of dialogue, trust, and a sense of equality contribute to viewing dialogue with teachers as part of learning. Based on these findings, there is an unexploited opportunity for teachers and students to collaborate and co-share the responsibility to support students to develop competent and autonomous as lifelong learners (Boud,

2005). Furthermore, two schools have already developed a trust and flexibility assessment culture, indicating that such an endeavor can thrive (Deeley & Bovill, 2017). It is suggested that professional support might be of benefit by being situated within community resources, using the backbone of accumulated learning and experience within the schools. Yet, student participation must not become mechanical. Therefore, it is important to approach student involvement from the students' perspective and their initiatives to avoid participation becoming a method of complying with the teacher.

These findings have significant implications for understanding how grading influences students' well-being and shapes teachers' decisions about practices that support student learning, such as self and peer assessment. Moreover, the findings imply that the value of formative feedback is emulated in neutralizing the negative effect of low grades in a grading culture.

As portrayed in these findings, the role of continuous assessment is still somewhat vague. These findings indicate that the typical arrangement of continuous assessment is that students can skip the final exam if they reach a definite target grade for cumulative work over the semester. Although some students perceive such an arrangement as motivating, it can encourage viewing grades as having an exchange value for learning activities. However, it raises further questions, such as whether such arrangement indicates an attempt to adapt assessment toward students need or a reflection of teachers striving to resolve the tension between summative and formative assessment purposes. There seem to be conflicting messages in the national curriculum guide, rooted on one hand in the psychometric tradition, while on the other hand, situated in the constructivist tradition. Thus, teachers are encouraged to employ various and flexible methods for assessing as many aspects of education as possible, including students' social skills and creative work. For example, it may seem that on the surface, the increasing use of continuous assessment in Icelandic upper secondary schools reflects an attempt to align practice and requirements of the national curriculum by dividing summative assessment into smaller units throughout the semester. Drawing on earlier experience in the Icelandic context (Þórólfsson et al., 2009), lack of a clear assessment policy within the national curriculum guide could lead to a hodgepodge of assessment methods and potentially create incoherence between how individual teachers and institutions approach them grading.

Moreover, considering the range of applications and vague definitions of continuous assessment, it may require open and critical discussions among stakeholders, particularly about the alignment of curriculum and practice and the purpose and benefit of such an arrangement for student learning.

It is important to understand if, and to what extent the schools with a declared AfL policy , have actually implemented it in practice. The answer to this question is significant because it can shed light on what schools must do to bridge the gap between policy and practice. However, it is important to emphasize that this research did not observe classroom activity and hence relies on what teachers and students say about the practice. As a result, it is hard to claim whether or not AfL was practised in these schools. The definition of AfL is based on Klenowsky's definition (2009a), which states that "assessment for Learning is part of everyday practice by students, teachers and peers that seeks, reflects upon and responds to information from dialogue, demonstration and observation in ways that enhance ongoing learning" (p. 2). Klenowsky (2009a) elaborates further on what the definition entails:

'Part of everyday practice': In the AfL schools, especially in school 1, seems to be to some extent informal and part of the daily communication between teachers and students, characterized by interactive communication where no formal final examinations are used. Assessment is largely based on students' work with assignments. However, feedback practice is mainly the teachers responsibility in terms of providing written comment and marks (as in school 2) on assignments. In conclusion, the infomal nature of using oral feedback and students' description of cultivating a dialogue as being part of learning indicate that AfL is practiced to some extent. Conversely, emphasis on written feedback suggests that the spirit of AfL is lacking.

'By students, teachers, and peers': Students are listed first, because, as Klenowsky (2009a) argues, AfL should be student-centered, not teacher-led. According to Klenowsky (2009a), the main goal of AfL should be to convey AfL's methods (asking questions, giving feedback, and explaining learning objectives) to the students, so that they ultimately take responsibility for the assessment and feedback activities. The findings suggest that in this aspect, AfL is underdeveloped. For example, data from interviews and the survey indicate that student participation is limited in working with learning objectives and the use of peer assessment and peer feedback is also limited.

'Seeks, reflects upon and responds to': One of the AfL schools seems to use interviews where students and teachers discuss students' learning together. However, the interviews are not something that distinguish the AfL schools from the schools that do not have a stated policy. Also here, some teachers in the focus group have started to use student interviews as a tool to help teachers and students gain better insight into their studies. Students in the AfL schools, especially as stated in student interviews from school 1, seem to appreciate receiving regular feedback on their projects. It looks like the AfL schools' focus on using regular assignments tasks as evidence of learning helps them meet their goal of being able to look back and respond to students' work on a regular basis.

'Information from dialogue, demonstration, and observation in ways that enhance ongoing learning': It is common practice to allow students to submit assignments orally and furthermore use of self-assessment in interview setting. As Klenowski (2009) points out, AfL is characterized by using information from both planned and unplanned activities, while assessment in the participating schools was mainly based on pre-planned tasks. Additionally, while students receive feedback on their tasks, it is unclear whether the feedback is always formative or a confirmation of completed assignments, which, based on the interview data, appears to be part of the general feedback practice. However, a positive sign from one of the AfL schools where students have the opportunity to re-deliver assignments after working with the feedback, is a positive indication of formative use of feedback.

To conclude, AfL schools only partially follow the stated policy of adopting AfL. However, they do not sufficiently delegate responsibility for applying assessment for learning purposes, so students can guide themselves and one another toward becoming independent learners. Given the difference between the FA and the AFL, it may be worthwhile to examine whether school practice is more aligned with FA, which, according to Swaffield (2011), places a greater emphasis on the teacher's responsibility and workload.

The findings indicate that further progress in the schools would benefit from emphasizing developing teachers and student´s assessment and feedback literacy by professional support within the schools and active collaboration between schools. Based on this conclusion, it is suggested that when implementing AfL, stakeholders should focus on how to integrate pre-established resources within schools to support teachers and students to share the responsibility of feedback and assessment in developing a

culture of learning in a risk-free context (Birenbaum, 2016; Zhou et al., 2021). To emphasize the importance of student involvement is to frame involvement as a bridge between assessment literacy, and student learning (Panadero et al., 2016). Furthermore, student involvement can be presented as an opportunity for the teacher to re-learn what they already know about assessment — by engaging in the assessment activity in dialogue with the student to negotiate alternative points of view (Shor & Freire, 1987).

The findings indicate that the conceptualization of peer assessment and feedback favors the "letter" of AfL over the "spirit." The language used in connection with peer assessment could be changed to peer feedback or peer dialogue to emphasize that the purpose of peer assessment is not for students to assign grades to one another, but to deepen their understanding of their own learning and develop the ability to identify the quality of work (Sadler, 2010). In general, teachers' descriptions of feedback imply that they are in the active role of sending and providing feedback to the passive student. Instead of peer assessment, it is encouraged to use dialogue or feedback dialogue (in Icelandic, "samtal" or "samtalsendurgjöf") to stress student agency, and also emphasise that AfL is not based on a one-dimensional flow of information, but on mutual understanding of people engaging in communication.

The findings imply that schools have built significant knowledge resources within their corresponding communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). However, it is important to highlight, that the acquired knowledge within communities is contextual and should be shared through the assessment lens situated within the schools. For example, sharing the perceived external constraints in one context can be addressed as enabling constraints when shared with other schools addressing joined challenges, albeit using different measures. An example from the findings indicates that despite joined constraints by the national curricular requirement of the final grade, one of the schools has addressed it by cultivating shared values of formative feedback and dialogue, whereby grades are held back until at the end of the course.

When implementing a policy of AfL, it can be beneficial to discuss and situate changes in practices with established assessment culture(s) within the schools. Teachers can be affected by various contexts and must negotiate conflicting aspects of the assessment culture, such as the subject, the curriculum, and the institution in which they teach (IEAN, 2021). Prior research has shown that implementing new practices is more difficult if

new policies contrast with older policies and prior assessment culture within the local community (Cowie et al., 2009; Thrupp & Easter, 2013). The 2008 Act and subsequent national curriculum guide contrast with the emphasis of previous policy as shown in the 1999 curriculum. Therefore, supporting the school in implementing curricular change must be enacted within the context of schools, aiming to understand the current fitness of the community with anticipated change in practice. Implementing change in the Icelandic context, the cultural traditions within teacher´s subjects have to be considered.

Moreover, school leaders seem to be focused on changing traditional and culturally embedded assessment and teaching methods, yet admittingly have limited authority when changes overlap the teacher´s authority within the field of the subject they teach. As shown in Ragnarsdóttir & Jónasson (2020) study, those school administrators who managed to integrate the value of change (institutional values) and the subject field of teachers were more confident in achieving positive change within their institution. A big part of a teacher´s identity is how they relate to their subject. In Icelandic upper-secondary schools, the influence of subject field is considerable, keeping in mind that education of teachers of academic subjects is chiefly subject-based. Positive change in practice is more likely if teachers have enough time, autonomy and flexibility within the community to explore innovative practices where the risk of failure is anticipated and used in the process as a part of collective reflection (Black, 2015). Moreover, as Engelsen and Smith (2014) point out, to create a culture of AfL, at different levels within the institution, the school leaders, teachers and students must aim to develop a shared understanding of assessment and feedback. Nonetheless, in order to develop shared understanding, the voices of those most affected by assessment should be taken into account (Duffy & Elwood, 2013). As Duffy and Elwood (2013) state, "By authorizing the student voice in this area, policymakers and qualifications developers must be prepared to share authority about examination and assessment matters with students and to rethink who is authoritative about these aspects of educational life" (p. 109).

Involving students in assessment decisions at classroom and policy levels could enable further improvement in the Icelandic educational context. Provided that the stakeholder´s goal is to create alignment between the national curriculum policy and practice, the gap between what is perceived as ideal and actual practice must be addressed. Therefore, the value of learning about perceived views and experiences at the level of students cannot be overstated.

Providing space for collaboration between stakeholders could be a moderator in addressing coherence between teaching, assessment and the

national curriculum, thereby demystifying the complex nature of integrating different aspects of culture, practice and policy texts. Yet, it could be a challenge in a culture where the teachers' jobs in Iceland at the upper secondary level are often solitary pursuits. The teacher, is a member of several communities, some of which have strong traditions, such as those within the subject community, which may conflict with the school's or national curriculum's policy (Ragnarsdóttir & Jónasson, 2020). Additionally, the results reveal the challenge of opening up toward student involvement, especially if external constraints are perceived counteractive, such as when the case of sharing responsibility and culture of collaboration is limited (Birenbaum, 2016). Given that both teachers and students negotiate and agree upon sharing responsibility for assessment and feedback, perceived constraints related with teacher workload and student disengagement may be alleviated.

7.2 Contribution

The aim of the research is to gain a deeper understanding of how different assessment cultures shape teachers' and students' perceptions of assessment and feedback. This project is the first comprehensive research of assessment and feedback in Iceland at the upper-secondary level. Compared to previous studies on teacher and student perception, this research focuses on assessment cultures and student involvement. On an international level, prior studies on assessment cultures have focused on lower levels in education (Birenbaum, 2016) or medical education (Watling, 2016). However, this research adds to limited literature at the international level on diversity in assessment cultures at the upper-secondary level. Using the lens of assessment culture to explore how both those who implement practice and receive it in the classroom provides a tool to view aspects within the schools needed to develop AfL culture where student learning is the focal point of practice (Birenbaum, 2016). These findings offer resources for focusing on which area can be addressed to bridge the gap between policy and practice – In this regard, by underpinning both weak and strong characteristics of the assessment culture. At last, the thesis provides a new theoretical model in chapter 2 to add the understanding of the dynamism of student involvement and how the notion of openness can contribute to developing the culture of AfL teachers and students sharing the value of collaborating and sharing the responsibility of assessment. Furthermore, the theoretical model provides a critical lens on student involvement by suggesting to openly discuss taken-for-granted traditions about roles and decisions about assessment.

7.3 Limitation and Future Research

The generalizability of these results is subject to certain limitations. For instance, the cases were limited to three schools in Iceland, using purposeful sampling, and therefore findings should be interpreted with caution. One of the project's strengths is the mixed study approach, by using findings from the survey as an input for the discussions in the teachers' focus groups. This could, however, also be interpreted as a weakness, as the input shaped the discussions and the findings. Another limitation of the project might be the hybrid position of the researcher, specifically because of my participation in implementing AfL in one of the schools. However, it can also be considered a strength related to contextual insight and experience. Self reporting is criticized in the literature as a methodological limitation, such as a self-desirability bias (Rosenman et al., 2011). However, capturing perceptions through self-reporting was considered the most appropriate approach due to its convenience as a use and its ability to collect a great quantity of data in a short period of time. A recommended continuation of this project is to focus on the interactions in the classroom, by using more context-sensitive methodology, e.g. an ethnographical approach could provide deeper understanding of interactivity within the classroom. Further research should be undertaken to explore how subjects' traditions influence the assessment culture, especially in relation to the enactment of assessment policy (Ragnarsdóttir & Jónasson, 2020). Furthermore, the research does not include students younger than 18, which could have influenced the findings. However, there has been a gap in the research literature about older students still in secondary education, and this project has contributed new information on the older learners.

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Appendix. Letter for recruiting schools

Sæl(l) X

Ég heiti Ívar Rafn Jónsson og vildi athuga hvort þið í X hefðuð áhuga á að taka þátt í rannsókn sem tengist námsmati. Ég er á fyrsta ári í doktorsnámi við Menntavísindasviði og er að skoða námsmat. Fyrsti hluti rannsóknarinnar snýr að því hvernig kennarar annars vegar (og skólastjórar) og nemendur upplifa námsmat og þá sérstaklega endurgjöf (e. Feedback) í námi.

Spurningalistinn er ætlaður nemendum sem eru eldri en 18 ára og öllum kennurum innan bóknámssviðs. Hvernig ég myndi framkvæma fyrirlögnina þyrfti að vera í góðu samstarfi við ykkur. Það gæti nefnilega komið í ykkar hlut (stjórnenda) að vera bandamenn mínir í praktískum málum varðandi framkvæmdina.

Það er ekki enn komin tími á hvenær ég safna gögnum (tek viðtöl) en núna vil ég athuga hvaða skólar eru tilbúnir til þátttöku. Í augnablikinu er nóg að vita hvort þér þyki þetta spennandi og seinna myndi ég væntanlega kynna þetta í skólanum þínum til að athuga hvaða kennarar væru til í þátttöku.

Í rýnihópnum fara fram umræður um námsmat og endurgjöf (e. feedback).Rannsóknin beinist einkum að upplifun kennara og nemenda í bóknámi, þ.e. íslensku, raungreinum, stærðfræði, erlendum tungumálum og félagsvísindum. Í upphafi fundarins verður stutt kynning á niðurstöðum úr könnun um námsmat og endurgjöf (könnun frá vorinu 2016). Í kjölfarið verða umræður um niðurstöður og ýmsar vangaveltur tengdar námsmati og endurgjöf. Varðandi val á kennurum er mikilvægt að kennarahópurinn á fundinum gefi ágætis þverskurðsmynd af kennurum í skólanum ykkar. Þess vegna væri æskilegast ef hópurinn væri samsettur af kennurum sem hafa mismikla kennslureynslu, eru af báðum kynjum og á ólíkum aldri.
Ég þyrfti um það bil 8 - 10 kennara af bóknámssviði og fundurinn ætti ekki að taka lengri tíma en eina og hálfa klukkustund.

kær kveðja,
Ívar Rafn Jónsson
Doktorsnemi við Menntavísindasvið

Appendix – Letter for parents

Til foreldra og/eða forráðamanna.

Hér með óska ég eftir því að fá samþykki foreldra/forráðamanna fyrir því að börn þeirra taki þátt í þróun spurningalista *(pilot-study)* sem notaður verður til að kanna námsmat í framhaldsskólum á Íslandi.

Með þessu leyfi fá nemendur að taka þátt í að prófa og móta spurningalista sem er verið að þróa og verður seinna hluti af doktorsrannsókn sem ég vinn að á Menntavísindasvið við Háskóla Íslands. Leiðbeinendur með rannsókninni eru Kari Smith prófessor við háskólann í Bergen og gestaprófessor við Menntavísindasvið ásamt Guðrúnu Geirsdóttur dósent við Menntavísindasvið.

Í verkefninu svaranemendur rúmlega 30 spurningum sem tengjast námsmati og í kjölfarið taka þeir þátt í umræðum með mér um hvað megi færa til betri vegar í könnuninni. Þetta er mikilvægur liður í að gera spurningalistann sem bestan. það tekur nemendur um 45 mínútur að svara spurningalistanum og taka þátt í umræðum. Hluti af tíma í sálfræði verður nýttur í þetta verkefni.Ég geri ráð fyrir að leggja spurningalistann fyrir í vikunni 15. – 19. febrúar.

Ég mun taka upp umræðurnar til að geta metið og ígrundað helstu niðurstöður umræðurnar með leiðbeinendum mínum en þeim verður svo eytt að verkefni loknu.

Ekki verður unnið með svör nemenda í rannsókninni sjálfri.

Ég gef _____ leyfi til að taka þátt í könnun á spurningalista.

_____
Foreldri / forráðamaður

Ef einhverjar spurningar vakna eða þú hefur einhverjar athugasemdir er þér velkomið að hafa samband við mig.

Með von um um góða þátttöku og samstarf
Kveðja,
Ívar Rafn Jónsson irj11@hi.is / ivar@fmos.is
Eða í síma 691 9670

Appendix. Questionnaire for teachers

HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

Kynning

Ágæti framhaldsskólakennari.

Hér með er óskað eftir því að þú takir þátt í könnun á námsmati í skólastarfi. Könnunin er hluti af doktorsrannsókn sem ég er að vinna að við Menntavísindasvið Háskóla Íslands. Leiðbeinendur með rannsókninni eru Kari Smith prófessor við háskólann í Bergen og gestaprófessor við Menntavísindasvið og Guðrún Geirsdóttir dósent við Menntavísindasvið.

Markmiðið rannsóknar er að afla upplýsinga um reynslu kennara og nemenda á námsmati í framhaldsskóla. Einnig að kanna námsmatshefðir ólíkra námssviða. Í þessari rannsókn er ekki verið að kanna fyrirkomulag námsmats hjá einstaka kennurum eða áföngum.

Þér er ekki skylt að svara einstökum spurningum eða spurningalistanum í heild. Könnunin er nafnlaus og ekki verður hægt að rekja svörin til þín. Farið er með öll svör sem trúnaðarmál og öllum gögnum verður eytt að lokinni úrvinnslu. Í könnuninni er að finna fullyrðingar þar sem þú ert beðinn um að merkja við þann möguleika sem best fellur að þinni reynslu þína af námsmati í þeim áfanga sem á við. Ég hvet þig til að svara spurningalistanum eftir bestu getu og sem allra fyrst þannig að úrvinnsla geti hafist og niðurstöður nýtist við frekari þróun námsmats í námi og kennslu. Það ætti ekki að taka meira en 10 – 15 mínútur að svara könnuninni.

Athugið að lesa spurningalistann á báðum megin á blaðsíðunum.

Ef einhverjar spurningar vakna eða þú hefur einhverjar athugasemdir er þér velkomið að hafa samband við mig.

Með von um góða þátttöku og samstarf

Kveðja,

Ívar Rafn Jónsson irj11@hi.is

HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

Spurningalisti

Nú ertu beðin(n) um að meta hversu sammála eða ósammála þú ert fullyrðingum um tiltekna grein

sem þú kennir og velur að meta með hliðsjón af eftirfarandi spurningum.

Merktu við þá grein sem þú kennir og ætlar að meta. Merktu aðeins við eina grein.

☐ **Erlend tungumál** (Enska, spænska eða danska)	☐ **Félags- og hugvísindi** *(Félagsfræði, sálfræði, sagnfræði eða heimspeki)*	☐ **Raungreinar** Líffræði, náttúrufræði, jarðfræði, eðlisfræði eða efnafræði	☐ **Íslenska**	☐ **Stærðfræði**

Það er mikilvægt að þú hafir sömu greinina í huga þegar þú svarar öllum spurningunum.

Í textanum er spurt um endurgjöf. Með endurgjöf er átt við allar munnlegar og skriflegar upplýsingar

(t.d. umsagnir) sem nemendur fá um verkefni og próf .

Passaðu að lesa fullyrðingarnar vel og vandlega.

Hversu sammála eða ósammála ertu eftirfarandi fullyrðingum? Merktu við það atriði sem best á við

hverju sinni.

1 **Nemendur taka þátt í að setja sér sín eigin námsmarkmið**

- ☐ Mjög sammála
- ☐ Frekar sammála
- ☐ Frekar ósammála
- ☐ Mjög ósammála

2 **Ég gef nemendum endurgjöf sem hjálpar þeim áfram í náminu?**

- ☐ Mjög sammála
- ☐ Frekar sammála
- ☐ Frekar ósammála
- ☐ Mjög ósammála

HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

3   **Ég gef stutta endurgjöf fyrir verkefni og próf nemenda**

- ☐ Mjög sammála
- ☐ Frekar sammála
- ☐ Frekar ósammála
- ☐ Mjög ósammála

4   **Nemendur fá umsagnir fyrir verkefni og próf**

- ☐ Mjög sammála
- ☐ Frekar sammála
- ☐ Frekar ósammála
- ☐ Mjög ósammála

5   **Mér finnst eins og nemendur hafi meiri áhuga á einkunninni en endurgjöfinni**

- ☐ Mjög sammála
- ☐ Frekar sammála
- ☐ Frekar ósammála
- ☐ Mjög ósammála

6   **Nemendur vita vel hvaða væntingar ég geri til þeirra í náminu?**

- ☐ Mjög sammála
- ☐ Frekar sammála
- ☐ Frekar ósammála
- ☐ Mjög ósammála

7   **Ég nota tíma í kennslustundum til að fara með nemendum yfir verkefni og próf sem þeir hafa skilað**

- ☐ Mjög sammála
- ☐ Frekar sammála
- ☐ Frekar ósammála
- ☐ Mjög ósammála

8   **Nemendur geta skoðað verkefni sem aðrir nemendur hafa skilað (t.d. verkefnalausn frá öðrum)**

- ☐ Mjög sammála
- ☐ Frekar sammála
- ☐ Frekar ósammála
- ☐ Mjög ósammála

HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

9   **Ég læt nemendur mína sjálfa vinna með og leiðrétta verkefni og próf**

☐   Mjög sammála
☐   Frekar sammála
☐   Frekar ósammála
☐   Mjög ósammála

10   **Ég ræði við nemendur um leiðir sem þeir geta farið til að bæta sig í náminu**

☐   Mjög sammála
☐   Frekar sammála
☐   Frekar ósammála
☐   Mjög ósammála

11   **Þegar ég sé að nemendur skilja ekki efnið, breyti ég kennslu minni í samræmi við það**

☐   Mjög sammála
☐   Frekar sammála
☐   Frekar ósammála
☐   Mjög ósammála

12   **Ég geng úr skugga um að nemendur skilji hvað þeir þurfa gera til að ná betri árangri í náminu**

☐   Mjög sammála
☐   Frekar sammála
☐   Frekar ósammála
☐   Mjög ósammála

13   **Ég bendi nemendum á hvaða styrkleikum þeir búa yfir og hvernig þeir geta nýtt þá í náminu**

☐   Mjög sammála
☐   Frekar sammála
☐   Frekar ósammála
☐   Mjög ósammála

HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

14   Einkunnagjöf mín byggir aðeins á verkefnum og prófum

☐   Mjög sammála
☐   Frekar sammála
☐   Frekar ósammála
☐   Mjög ósammála

15   Ég sé til þess að hver og einn nemandi vinni áfram með þá endurgjöf sem hann fær (t.d. fyrir verkefni eða próf)

☐   Mjög sammála
☐   Frekar sammála
☐   Frekar ósammála
☐   Mjög ósammála

16   Ég kanna hjá nemendum hvernig þeim gengur við að vinna verkefnin sín

☐   Mjög sammála
☐   Frekar sammála
☐   Frekar ósammála
☐   Mjög ósammála

17   Ég tek tillit til óska nemenda um hvernig þeir vilja nálgast námið í áfanganum

☐   Mjög sammála
☐   Frekar sammála
☐   Frekar ósammála
☐   Mjög ósammála

18   Ég geri nemendum grein fyrir hverjar þeirra veiku hliðar eru í náminu

☐   Mjög sammála
☐   Frekar sammála
☐   Frekar ósammála
☐   Mjög ósammála

19   Ég skipulegg kennsluna mína þannig að nemendur vinna saman í hópum við að leiðrétta og vinna áfram með verkefnin sín

☐   Mjög sammála
☐   Frekar sammála
☐   Frekar ósammála
☐   Mjög ósammála

HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

20   Ég athuga hvort nemendur hafi nýtt sér þá endurgjöf sem ég hef gefið fyrir próf eða verkefni

- ☐ Mjög sammála
- ☐ Frekar sammála
- ☐ Frekar ósammála
- ☐ Mjög ósammála

21   Ég gef nemendum tíma til að vinna með endurgjöfina áður en þeir fá lokamat eða einkunn fyrir verkefni eða próf

- ☐ Mjög sammála
- ☐ Frekar sammála
- ☐ Frekar ósammála
- ☐ Mjög ósammála

22   Nemendur fá endurgjöf frá samnemendum sínum (jafningjamat)

- ☐ Mjög sammála
- ☐ Frekar sammála
- ☐ Frekar ósammála
- ☐ Mjög ósammála

23   Í hópavinnu gefa nemendur hver öðrum endurgjöf

- ☐ Mjög sammála
- ☐ Frekar sammála
- ☐ Frekar ósammála
- ☐ Mjög ósammála

24   Ég lít á námsmat sem leið til að kortleggja skilning nemenda og nota þá kortlagningu til að skipuleggja kennsluna

- ☐ Mjög sammála
- ☐ Frekar sammála
- ☐ Frekar ósammála
- ☐ Mjög ósammála

HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

25 **Miðannarmat án einkunna gefur vel til kynna hvernig nemendur standa sig í greininni**

- ☐ Mjög sammála
- ☐ Frekar sammála
- ☐ Frekar ósammála
- ☐ Mjög ósammála

26 **Tilgangur miðannarmats er að upplýsa nemendur um hvernig þeir geti bætt sig í náminu**

- ☐ Mjög sammála
- ☐ Frekar sammála
- ☐ Frekar ósammála
- ☐ Mjög ósammála

27 **Ég gef nemendum endurgjöf um verkefni og próf sem sýnir hvernig þeim hefur tekist til**

- ☐ Mjög sammála
- ☐ Frekar sammála
- ☐ Frekar ósammála
- ☐ Mjög ósammála

28 **Ég ræði við nemendur um námsmatsviðmið (þ.e. hvað og hvernig verður metið) áður en þeir vinna verkefni eða þreyta próf**

- ☐ Mjög sammála
- ☐ Frekar sammála
- ☐ Frekar ósammála
- ☐ Mjög ósammála

29 **Endurgjöf mín gefur skýrt til kynna til hvers er ætlast af nemendum**

- ☐ Mjög sammála
- ☐ Frekar sammála
- ☐ Frekar ósammála
- ☐ Mjög ósammála

30 **Ég gef nemendum skýr skilaboð um hvað þeir þurfa gera til að bæta sig í náminu**

- ☐ Mjög sammála
- ☐ Frekar sammála
- ☐ Frekar ósammála

☐ Mjög ósammála

31 Miðannarmat í formi einkunna gefur vel til kynna hvernig nemendur standa sig í greininni

☐ Mjög sammála
☐ Frekar sammála
☐ Frekar ósammál
☐ Mjög ósammála

32. **Ef þú vilt bæta einhverju við getur þú skrifað það hér að neðan**

_____

_____

_____

_____

Questionnaire for students

HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

Kynning

Ágæti framhaldsskólanemandi

Hér með er óskað eftir því að þú takir þátt í könnun á námsmati í skólastarfi. Könnunin er hluti af doktorsrannsókn sem ég er að vinna að við Menntavísindasvið Háskóla Íslands. Leiðbeinendur með rannsókninni eru Kari Smith prófessor við háskólann í Bergen og gestaprófessor við Menntavísindasvið og Guðrún Geirsdóttir dósent við Menntavísindasvið.

Markmiðið er að afla upplýsinga um reynslu kennara og nemenda á námsmati í framhaldsskóla. Einnig að kanna námsmatshefðir ólíkra námssviða. Í þessari könnun er ekki verið að kanna fyrirkomulag námsmats hjá einstaka kennurum eða áföngum.

Þér er ekki skylt að svara einstökum spurningum eða spurningalistanum í heild en rannsóknarinnar vegna er mikilvægt að fá svör við sem flestum liðum spurningalistans. Könnunin er nafnlaus og ekki verður hægt að rekja svörin til þín. Farið er með öll svör sem trúnaðarmál og öllum gögnum verður eytt að lokinni úrvinnslu.

Í könnuninni er að finna fullyrðingar þar sem þú ert beðinn um að merkja við þann möguleika sem best fellur að þinni reynslu þína af námsmati í þeim áfanga sem á við. Ég hvet þig til að svara spurningalistanum eftir bestu getu og sem allra fyrst þannig að úrvinnsla geti hafist og niðurstöður nýtist við frekari þróun námsmats í námi og kennslu. Það ætti ekki að taka meira en 10 – 15 mínútur að svara könnuninni.

Athugið að lesa spurningalistann á báðum megin á blaðsíðunum.

Ef einhverjar spurningar vakna eða þú hefur einhverjar athugasemdir er þér velkomið að hafa samband við mig.

Með von um góða þátttöku og samstarf

Kveðja,

Ívar Rafn Jónsson irj11@hi.is

S. 691 9670

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Leiðbeiningar og dæmi

Dæmi:

Í þessu dæmi velur nemandi *eina grein* í erlendum tungumálum, félags- og hugvísindi og raungreinum.

Erlend tungumál:	Félags- og hugvísindi:	Raungreinar:
☐ Enska	☐ Félagsfræði	☐ Líffræði
☐ Spænska	☐ Sálfræði	☐ Náttúrufræði
☐ Danska	☐ Sagnfræði	☐ Jarðfræði
	☐ Heimspeki	☐ Eðlisfræði
		☐ Efnafræði

Hann á að meta fullyrðinguna: *Eina sem við fáum fyrir próf og verkefni er einkunn.*

Hann metur fullyrðinguna út frá því hversu hann er sammála eða ósammála með því að merkja við í kassana hér að neðan til hægri.

	Mjög sammála	Frekar sammála	Frekar ósammála	Mjög ósammála
Íslenska	☐$_1$	☐$_2$	☐$_3$	☐$_4$
Stærðfræði	☐$_1$	☐$_2$	☐$_3$	☐$_4$
Erlend tungumál	☐$_1$	☐$_2$	☐$_3$	☐$_4$
Félags- og hugvísindi	☐$_1$	☐$_2$	☐$_3$	☐$_4$
Raungreinar	☐$_1$	☐$_2$	☐$_3$	☐$_4$

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Leiðbeiningar

Í þessari könnun ert þú beðin(n) um að horfa til baka og rifja upp <u>námsmatið í þessum skóla út frá fimm námsgreinum.</u>

Þú þarft að hafa í huga íslensku og stærðfræði og síðan velja eina grein úr hverjum þessara þriggja dálka.

(athugaðu að þú metur einungis áfanga sem þú hefur reynslu af í þeim skóla sem þú stundar nám í núna. Þú þarft ekki að meta áfanga innan sviðs ef þú hefur ekki enn setið áfanga innan sviðsins):

Merktu við þá grein í eftirfarandi greinaflokkum sem þú ætlar að meta þegar þú svarar spurningalistanum:

Erlend tungumál:	Félags- og hugvísindi:	Raungreinar:
☐ Enska	☐ Félagsfræði	☐ Líffræði
☐ Spænska	☐ Sálfræði	☐ Náttúrufræði
☐ Danska	☐ Sagnfræði	☐ Jarðfræði
	☐ Heimspeki	☐ Eðlisfræði
		☐ Efnafræði

Síðan metur þú hversu sammála eða ósammála þú ert fullyrðingunum um íslensku, stærðfræði og þær greinar sem þú merktir við hér að ofan.

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Spurningalisti:

Passaðu að <u>lesa fullyrðingarnar vel og vandlega</u> og merkja í þann reit sem þér finnst eiga best við.

Í textanum er spurt um *endurgjöf*.

Með endurgjöf er átt við allar munnlegar og skriflegar upplýsingar sem nemendur fá um verkefni og próf.

Vinsamlegast svaraðu eftirfarandi:

Skóli:
Braut:
Fæðingarár:
Námstími við þennan skóla: ☐ Skemur en 1 ár   ☐ 1 til 2 ár   ☐ 2 til 3 ár   ☐ Lengur en 3 ár
Kyn: ( ) KK   ( ) KVK

Hversu sammála eða ósammála ertu eftirfarandi fullyrðingum:

1.   Við nemendur tökum þátt í að ákveða hvað við ætlum að læra

	Mjög sammála	Frekar sammála	Frekar ósammála	Mjög ósammála
Íslenska	☐$_1$	☐$_2$	☐$_3$	☐$_4$
Stærðfræði	☐$_1$	☐$_2$	☐$_3$	☐$_4$
Erlend tungumál	☐$_1$	☐$_2$	☐$_3$	☐$_4$
Félags- og hugvísindi	☐$_1$	☐$_2$	☐$_3$	☐$_4$
Raungreinar	☐$_1$	☐$_2$	☐$_3$	☐$_4$

2.   Endurgjöfin sem ég fæ er þannig að ég læri af því að vinna með hana

	Mjög sammála	Frekar sammála	Frekar ósammála	Mjög ósammála
Íslenska	☐$_1$	☐$_2$	☐$_3$	☐$_4$
Stærðfræði	☐$_1$	☐$_2$	☐$_3$	☐$_4$
Erlend tungumál	☐$_1$	☐$_2$	☐$_3$	☐$_4$
Félags- og hugvísindi	☐$_1$	☐$_2$	☐$_3$	☐$_4$
Raungreinar	☐$_1$	☐$_2$	☐$_3$	☐$_4$

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3. Við fáum endurgjöf um hversu vel við stöndum okkur á verkefnum og prófum

	Mjög sammála	Frekar sammála	Frekar ósammála	Mjög ósammála
Íslenska	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Stærðfræði	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Erlend tungumál	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Félags- og hugvísindi	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Raungreinar	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$

4. Eina sem við fáum fyrir próf og verkefni er einkunn

	Mjög sammála	Frekar sammála	Frekar ósammála	Mjög ósammála
Íslenska	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Stærðfræði	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Erlend tungumál	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Félags- og hugvísindi	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Raungreinar	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$

5. Ég hef bara áhuga á að vita um einkunnina fyrir verkefni eða próf og hef ekki mikinn áhuga á endurgjöfinni (t.d. umsögn)

	Mjög sammála	Frekar sammála	Frekar ósammála	Mjög ósammála
Íslenska	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Stærðfræði	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Erlend tungumál	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Félags- og hugvísindi	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Raungreinar	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$

6. Við vitum til hvers kennarinn ætlast af okkur í námi

	Mjög sammála	Frekar sammála	Frekar ósammála	Mjög ósammála
Íslenska	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Stærðfræði	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Erlend tungumál	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Félags- og hugvísindi	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Raungreinar	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$

7. Kennarinn fer með okkur yfir verkefni og próf eftir að hann hefur skilað þeim til baka

	Mjög sammála	Frekar sammála	Frekar ósammála	Mjög ósammála
Íslenska	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Stærðfræði	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Erlend tungumál	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Félags- og hugvísindi	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Raungreinar	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$

8. Við höfum tækifæri til að skoða verkefni frá öðrum nemendum

	Mjög sammála	Frekar sammála	Frekar ósammála	Mjög ósammála
Íslenska	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Stærðfræði	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Erlend tungumál	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Félags- og hugvísindi	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Raungreinar	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$

9. Kennarinn lætur okkur sjálf leiðrétta verkefni og próf sem við vinnum með

	Mjög sammála	Frekar sammála	Frekar ósammála	Mjög ósammála
Íslenska	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Stærðfræði	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Erlend tungumál	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Félags- og hugvísindi	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Raungreinar	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$

10. Kennarinn ræðir við okkur um hvernig við getum bætt okkur í greininni

	Mjög sammála	Frekar sammála	Frekar ósammála	Mjög ósammála
Íslenska	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Stærðfræði	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Erlend tungumál	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Félags- og hugvísindi	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Raungreinar	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$

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11. Ef eitthvað er óljóst eða við skiljum ekki reynir kennarann að útskýra það á annan hátt

	Mjög sammála	Frekar sammála	Frekar ósammála	Mjög ósammála
Íslenska...	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4
Stærðfræði...	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4
Erlend tungumál....................................	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4
Félags- og hugvísindi	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4
Raungreinar..	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4

12. Ég veit hvað ég þarf að vinna með svo mér gangi betur í náminu

	Mjög sammála	Frekar sammála	Frekar ósammála	Mjög ósammála
Íslenska...	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4
Stærðfræði...	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4
Erlend tungumál....................................	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4
Félags- og hugvísindi	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4
Raungreinar..	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4

13. Kennarinn leggur áherslu á styrkleika okkar í námi

	Mjög sammála	Frekar sammála	Frekar ósammála	Mjög ósammála
Íslenska...	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4
Stærðfræði...	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4
Erlend tungumál....................................	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4
Félags- og hugvísindi	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4
Raungreinar..	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4

14. Námsmatið byggir aðeins á verkefnavinnu og prófum

	Mjög sammála	Frekar sammála	Frekar ósammála	Mjög ósammála
Íslenska...	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4
Stærðfræði...	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4
Erlend tungumál....................................	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4
Félags- og hugvísindi	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4
Raungreinar..	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4

15. Hver og einn nemandi fær tækifæri til að nýta hluta kennslustundar í að vinna með þá endurgjöf (t.d. fyrir verkefni eða próf) sem hann fær frá kennaranum

	Mjög sammála	Frekar sammála	Frekar ósammála	Mjög ósammála
Íslenska	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Stærðfræði	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Erlend tungumál	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Félags- og hugvísindi	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Raungreinar	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$

16. Kennarinn spyr okkur hvernig okkur gengur á meðan við vinnum verkefnin

	Mjög sammála	Frekar sammála	Frekar ósammála	Mjög ósammála
Íslenska	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Stærðfræði	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Erlend tungumál	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Félags- og hugvísindi	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Raungreinar	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$

17. Kennarinn ræðir við okkur hvað við viljum læra um í áfanganum

	Mjög sammála	Frekar sammála	Frekar ósammála	Mjög ósammála
Íslenska	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Stærðfræði	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Erlend tungumál	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Félags- og hugvísindi	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Raungreinar	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$

18. Kennarinn útskýrir fyrir okkur hverjir eru okkar veikleikar í náminu

	Mjög sammála	Frekar sammála	Frekar ósammála	Mjög ósammála
Íslenska	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Stærðfræði	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Erlend tungumál	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Félags- og hugvísindi	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Raungreinar	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$

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19. Við fáum tíma til að vinna í hópum með endurgjöf frá kennara

	Mjög sammála	Frekar sammála	Frekar ósammála	Mjög ósammála
Íslenska	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Stærðfræði	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Erlend tungumál	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Félags- og hugvísindi	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Raungreinar	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$

20. Það er gagnlegt að nota tímann til að vinna með endurgjöf fyrir verkefni og próf

	Mjög sammála	Frekar sammála	Frekar ósammála	Mjög ósammála
Íslenska	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Stærðfræði	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Erlend tungumál	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Félags- og hugvísindi	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Raungreinar	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$

21. Áður en við fáum einkunn fyrir próf eða verkefni verðum við fyrst að vinna með það sem stendur í umsögninni eða athugasemdunum sem við fáum til baka

	Mjög sammála	Frekar sammála	Frekar ósammála	Mjög ósammála
Íslenska	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Stærðfræði	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Erlend tungumál	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Félags- og hugvísindi	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Raungreinar	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$

22. Í hópavinnu gefum við hvert öðru í hópnum endurgjöf (jafningjamat)

	Mjög sammála	Frekar sammála	Frekar ósammála	Mjög ósammála
Íslenska	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Stærðfræði	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Erlend tungumál	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Félags- og hugvísindi	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Raungreinar	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$

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23. Sem hópur gefum við stundum öðrum hópum endurgjöf fyrir verkefni (jafningjamat milli hópa)

	Mjög sammála	Frekar sammála	Frekar ósammála	Mjög ósammála
Íslenska	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Stærðfræði	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Erlend tungumál	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Félags- og hugvísindi	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Raungreinar	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$

24. Kennarinn fer yfir það í tíma sem við áttum erfitt með að leysa eða skilja í verkefni eða prófi

	Mjög sammála	Frekar sammála	Frekar ósammála	Mjög ósammála
Íslenska	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Stærðfræði	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Erlend tungumál	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Félags- og hugvísindi	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Raungreinar	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$

25. Miðannarmat er til að athuga hvernig við stöndum í greininni

	Mjög sammála	Frekar sammála	Frekar ósammála	Mjög ósammála
Íslenska	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Stærðfræði	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Erlend tungumál	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Félags- og hugvísindi	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Raungreinar	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$

26. Miðannarmatið gefur litlar leiðbeiningar um hvernig eigi að bæta sig í náminu

	Mjög sammála	Frekar sammála	Frekar ósammála	Mjög ósammála
Íslenska	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Stærðfræði	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Erlend tungumál	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Félags- og hugvísindi	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Raungreinar	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$

HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

27. Endurgjöfin sem við fáum á prófum og verkefnum segir til um hversu vel okkur hefur
gengið

	Mjög sammála	Frekar sammála	Frekar ósammála	Mjög ósammála
Íslenska	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Stærðfræði	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Erlend tungumál	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Félags- og hugvísindi	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Raungreinar	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$

28. Áður en við byrjum á verkefni eða tökum próf ræðir kennarinn um hvað við þurfum að
gera til að ná góðum árangri

	Mjög sammála	Frekar sammála	Frekar ósammála	Mjög ósammála
Íslenska	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Stærðfræði	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Erlend tungumál	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Félags- og hugvísindi	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Raungreinar	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$

29. Endurgjöfin fyrir próf og verkefni sýnir vel til hvers er ætlast til af mér

	Mjög sammála	Frekar sammála	Frekar ósammála	Mjög ósammála
Íslenska	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Stærðfræði	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Erlend tungumál	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Félags- og hugvísindi	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Raungreinar	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$

30. Við fáum skýra endurgjöf sem segir hvernig við getum bætt okkur í náminu

	Mjög sammála	Frekar sammála	Frekar ósammála	Mjög ósammála
Íslenska	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Stærðfræði	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Erlend tungumál	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Félags- og hugvísindi	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Raungreinar	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$

HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

31. Ég veit að ég get náð góðum einkunnum ef ég ætla mér það

	Mjög sammála	Frekar sammála	Frekar ósammála	Mjög ósammála
Íslenska	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Stærðfræði	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Erlend tungumál	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Félags- og hugvísindi	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Raungreinar	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$

32. Ég hef fulla trú á að ég geti lært það sem ég vil læra

	Mjög sammála	Frekar sammála	Frekar ósammála	Mjög ósammála
Íslenska	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Stærðfræði	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Erlend tungumál	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Félags- og hugvísindi	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Raungreinar	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$

33. Ég hef mikinn áhuga á eftirfarandi greinum:

	Mjög sammála	Frekar sammála	Frekar ósammála	Mjög ósammála
Íslenska	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Stærðfræði	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Erlend tungumál	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Félags- og hugvísindi	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$
Raungreinar	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$

Ef þú vilt bæta einhverju við getur þú skrifað það hér að neðan

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Graphic view of comparison between teachers and students in corresponding school

Skóli X
Samanburður á mati kennara og nemenda

Samanburður á mati kennara og nemenda í skólum m/stefnu og án stefnu um leiðsagnarnám
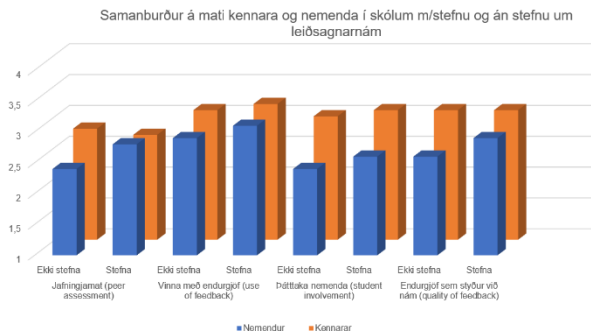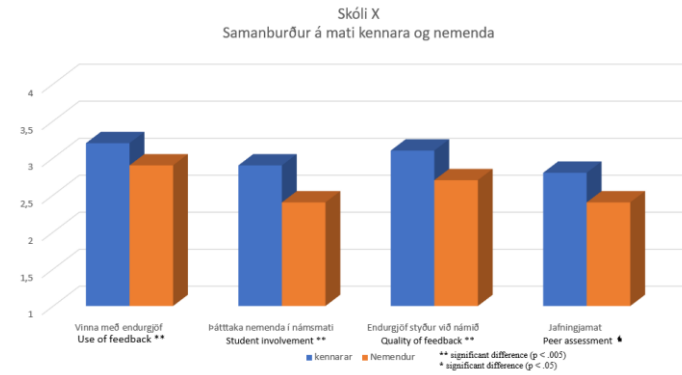
Focus group questions - teachers

Questions for teacher focus groups

1. Slides – ask participants to describe their perception. What comes to your mind when you look at the findings?
   a. If they have not mentioned the gap between teachers' and students' answers and the consensus in how teachers reply (independent of school culture)
      i. What I found most interesting was how different teachers and teachers seem to answer, why is that?
2. *The feedback! What is quality feedback?*
   a. What is the purpose, in your opinion, of assessment and feedback?
   b. How and what kinds of feedback do you use in your practice? How do you use grades? Ask for an example.
   c. What comes to your mind when you give feedback? What is important (when giving feedback)?
      i. When do students get feedback (timing)?
   d. How do teaching and assessment interrelate? Has the assessment an impact on teaching? Does the assessment affect how you go about your teaching?
   e. Do you experience a difference between subjects in assessment? How? Describe.

3. Students' involvement
   a. Do students generally take part in the assessment process of how and on what their work is assessed? (An example of involvement is creating rubrics and learning goals.) Can you give me an example of student involvement? Why/why not?
   b. Is student involvement in assessment important? Why and how?
   c. How do you perceive student use of feedback?
      i. How do they use the feedback? Can you give an example?
      ii. Do students generally use the feedback? Why do some students use the feedback and others not?
   d. Is it easy for students to have an effect on how assessment is planned and executed?
      1. Do you discuss assessment and feedback with your students? Describe these discussions.
      2. How would you describe teacher-student dialogue in this school? Can you say anything general about this dialogue, or is it dependent on individual teacher or subject?
      3. Do you use self and peer assessment? How? Can you give examples?

4. Culture and challenges
   a. Does your description portray your school? Is your description generally like this here?
   b. Challenges: How would you describe the obstacles in your practice? What is difficult?
   c. Do you get help from the school administration? Do you get professional assistance with assessment? Describe.

Focus group questions - students

Questions for student focus group

1. The feedback! What is quality feedback?
   a. What is the purpose, in your opinion, of assessment and feedback?
   b. How and what kinds of feedback do you get for tests and assignments? Ask for examples. Do you often receive feedback? When (and when not)?
   c. What do you do with the feedback? (Do you work with it in class? Ask for examples.) What comes to your mind when you give feedback? What is important (when giving feedback)?
      i. When do students get feedback (timing)?
   d. Describe feedback that helps you in your learning.
   e. How do teaching and assessment interrelate? Has the assessment an impact on teaching? Does the assessment affect how you go about your learning?
   f. Do you get feedback on your weak and strong sides as learners? Describe.
   g. Do you experience a difference in assessment between subjects? How? Describe.

2. Students' involvement
   a. Do students generally take part in the assessment process about how and on what their work is assessed? (An example of involvement is creating rubrics and learning goals.) Can you give me an example of student involvement? Why/why not?
   b. Do you discuss the assessment and feedback with your teachers? Are teachers generally accessible for discussions about assessment and feedback? Describe.
   c. How would you describe teacher-student dialogue in this school? Can you say anything general about this dialogue, or is it dependent on individual teacher or subject?
   d. Do you use self and peer assessment? How? Can you give example?

3. Culture
   a. Describe how you generally perceive feedback in this school.
   b. Can you give an example about what is different and what is alike with respect to how teachers use feedback and assessment?
   c. Describe differences and similarities between subjects.
   d. Do teachers try out new methods in assessment? How? Can you give an example?

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Required information about processing of personal data is in accordance with article GDPR act 90/2018

School of Education Registration form for doctoral research projects 2021

ⵜ Every researcher must guarantee that processing* of personal data is in accordance with article 6 of the GDPR regulation no. 2016/679 in order to be legitimate.

The GDPR act 90/2018 (Lög um persónuvernd og meðferð persónuupplýsinga) with EU regulation 2016/679 in Icelandic can be found on this page: https://www.althingi.is/lagas/nuna/2018090.html and the EU regulation 2016/679 in other languages here: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2016/679/oj .

ⵜ Before data processing begins the purpose must be decided, listed and described fully on which article of the GDPR legislation (90/2018) the lawfulness of the processing is based.

*Processing, applies to all data handling, from collection, structuring, storing and more, until all personal information has been removed from the data.
- -
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-> Tungumál formsins (Íslenska/enska) ákvarðast af hvernig þú hefur stillt tungumál vafra þíns.
Hægt er að velja á milli íslensku og ensku hér efst til hægri á þessum rauða fleti.
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The language can be switched between English and Icelandic at the top right corner of this red square.

The form is linked to your university e-mail address and therefore no need to register your name.

Articles in the Ph.D. Thesis

Article 1

Shared language of feedback and assessment. Perception of teachers and students in three Icelandic secondary schools

Ívar Rafn Jónsson[a,*], Kari Smith[b], Guðrún Geirsdóttir[c]

[a] School of Education, University of Iceland, Iceland
[b] Department of Teacher Education, Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), Norway
[c] Faculty of Teacher Education, School of Education, University of Iceland, Iceland

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

This study addresses the issue of variability of perception of teachers and students regarding feedback; with the primary focus being the exploration of how teachers and students perceive assessment in the Icelandic context. According to prior research feedback is not necessarily received by the student in the same manner as intended by the teacher. A survey was administered to teachers and students from three schools with differing emphases on assessment policy. This study supports previous studies (Havnes et al., 2012), which have reported a substantial gap in how teachers and students experience the manner in which feedback and assessment are practiced. Findings revealed that the stronger the culture around formative assessment, the stronger the dialogue between teachers and students. Some implications are drawn from these findings.

1. Introduction

Carefully selected and precise feedback is one of the most influential factors in students' learning processes (Black & Wiliam, 2009; Hattie & Timperley,2007). Feedback is defined by Hattie and Timperley (2007) as "information provided by an agent regarding aspects of one's performance or understanding that reduces the discrepancy between what is understood and what is aimed to be understood" (p. 86). In this paper, feedback refers both to the information about students' work and their engagement with the feedback information. It is at the centre of formative assessment, mainly located in the dialogue between students and teachers, which Engelsen and Smith call "… the learning dialogue" (2010, p. 416). Sadler (2010) emphasizes the use of feedback as an essential element in enhancing further learning. Yet, for students to consider feedback useful and act on it, it has to be understood and accepted. Despite the importance of how feedback is perceived, relatively little research on the manner in which teachers and student perceive feedback has been carried out (Carvalho, Santos, Conboy, & Martins, 2014; Gamlem & Smith, 2013; Havnes, Smith, Dysthe, & Ludvigsen, 2012; Jonsson, 2013; Rakoczy, Harks, Klieme, Blum, & Hochweber, 2013).

In the past, research has mostly focused on how to give effective feedback in order to enhance learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Hattie, 2012). Giving feedback implies that there is a receiver who perceives and decides whether to act on the feedback.

Despite substantial research on how to give feedback, there is still a limited understanding of how feedback relates to learning (Shute, 2008). Wiliam (2013) notes how the literature on feedback has prioritized studying the giving of feedback rather than the receiving of feedback. He claims:

> The question "What kind of feedback is best?" is meaningless, because while a particular kind of feedback might make one student work harder, it might cause another student to give up. There can be no simple recipe for effective feedback; there is just no substitute for the teacher knowing their students (p. 18).

Wiliams' claim is relevant in the context of this research because it underpins the importance of taking students' and teachers' perspectives into consideration. Whereas researchers have different opinions of how feedback works, the importance of feedback perception cannot be ignored (Rakoczy et al., 2013; Strijbos, Narciss, & Dünnebier, 2010; Yorke, 2003).

The theoretical framework is based on a social constructive paradigm on how learners construct their understanding in relation to others. That is to say, students are not seen as passive receivers of knowledge. Instead, they are active in making sense of the world by constructing the meaning of it (Bruner, 1996), and that meaning is constructed in dialogues with others (Bakhtin, 1986). Feedback plays an essential role in knowledge construction through proficient guidance by peers or adults and as an internal process which is part of a

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metacognitive mode of learning (Butler & Winne, 1995; Vygotsky, 1978). Student involvement in the feedback and assessment process is important so they are not seen only as passive recipients of the work of others (Boud & Falchikov, 2006). Black and Wiliam (2009) claim that feedback is one of the key elements in the instructional process, and some researchers go as far as to say that feedback and learning are inseparable (Orsmond, Merry, & Reiling, 2010, p. 24). For feedback to be effective, Hattie and Timperley (2007) argue that the conceptual framework of feedback consists of three main questions, for students to consider:

– Where am I going? (feed up),
– Where am I? (feed back),
– What am I doing next? (feed forward).

These questions can be embedded as feedback on four different levels: task level, process level, self-regulation level, and the self. Feedback can be effective when used at the first three levels, and less effective when directed at the self (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Feedback on tasks can be about direction and corrections, while feedback on processing is related to the course of action taken to complete, or work on, a task. When students self-regulate, they seek feedback from various sources such as books, teachers, peers etc. All three feedback processes are intended to bridge the gap between students' actual knowledge level and the reference level of understanding (Butler & Winne, 1995; Hattie & Timperley,2007).

Black and Wiliam (1998) state that instruction can change at critical points which they term "moments of contingency". In other words, the teacher responds to the student in relation to how she/he understands and interprets what the student is thinking beyond mere utterance. Smith, Gamlem, Sandal, and Engelsen (2016) use the term 'responsive pedagogy' for the dialogue taking place between the student and the teacher about goals, competence in achieving those goals, and strategies for getting there. The teacher responds to the student's own assessment and tailors the feedback accordingly. This is based on Harlem and James' (1997) definition of formative assessment, where they emphasize that teachers should know students' current level of understanding as well as possess skills to pinpoint the next steps for further learning. This is important when it comes to giving feedback. For example, when a student's interpretation is flawed, the teacher can use the student's misunderstanding to empower further learning (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Hermeneutic listening describes a collaborative learning process where the teacher synchronizes his thinking with the students' current understanding, or as Freire (1970) puts it:

> Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teaches. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow (p. 26).

Dialogue is the core of feedback practice, and the interaction between teacher and student creates a new space which links the separate worlds of the teacher and the student (Smith, 2015). The space between teachers and students will ultimately come down to teachers sharing vocabulary of assessment with students. Sadler (2013) addressed this by claiming that: "Students need a vocabulary for expressing and communicating both what they find and how they judge, at the least for that part of their evaluative knowledge they can express in words" (p. 59). It is not enough for teachers to assume that the students inherit assessment vocabulary without "appropriate evaluative experience" and discussions about what quality looks like.

This would imply that assessment information feeds into the planning of future learning as well as the planning of future teaching. Therefore, it is of great significance that the culture around formative assessment reflects active student involvement in the feedback process

and a mutual dialogue between student and teacher. To create such a culture, the assessment practices and teachers' pedagogical beliefs need to be in correspondence (Shepard, 2000).

However, research shows that feedback is not necessarily received by the student in the same manner as intended by the teacher (Gamlem & Smith, 2013; Havnes et al., 2012; Perrenoud, 1998). As Hattie (2012) points out, teachers give a lot of feedback, but much of it is not received by the students. Subsequently, there is an indication of disparity in how teachers and students perceive feedback (Gamlem & Smith, 2013; Havnes et al., 2012). For instance, teachers seem to embellish the quality and the usefulness of feedback when compared to students' experience of it (Havnes et al., 2012). Gamlem and Smith (2013) noted that students' notion of feedback usefulness differs from teachers' reports regarding the time and space given for working on feedback. That is not so surprising, in light of teachers' reports on their uncertainty regarding purpose of feedback, for example how it affects students as well as their concerns about student motivation and their competence to act on the feedback (Bailey & Garner, 2010; Havnes et al., 2012). Moreover, Gamlem and Smith (2013) reported that students rarely experienced active verbal dialogue with teachers. That finding is food for thought, bearing in mind the importance of active interaction between teacher and student on learning (Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, & Wiliam, 2004; Hattie & Timperley, 2007) and the students' appreciation for a dialogue about their learning (Havnes et al., 2012). Research points out that students often lack understanding of teachers' feedback and that teachers have a tendency to provide standardized feedback (to avoid perceived conflict with official standards) in the form of general phrases like "good work"/"excellent" (Engelsen & Smith, 2010). This practice is, according to Perrenoud (1998), like throwing a bottle out to sea and never being sure if the message will one day find a receiver. What the teacher intended when he gave feedback is not necessarily received in the same manner by the student. Indeed, the student can accept, modify or reject the feedback (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

Mutual understanding of feedback is necessary for it to have the desired effect on learning. If a student and teacher have a different understanding of feedback in the assessment process, it will probably not enhance student learning. On the contrary, it could create a misunderstanding which confuses the learner. Hayward draws attention to the perplexing challenge in putting formative assessment into practice. Research indicates that teachers lack skills and the necessary support to encompass the many aspects of implementing a culture of formative assessment, where learning is the focal point (Clark, 2011; Hayward, 2015; Shepard, 2000).

Students' and teachers' perception of feedback and assessment in upper-secondary schools in Iceland is an under-researched area and in light of the discussion above, it is important that primary stakeholders in education (students, teachers, principals and other supervisors) develop a shared language of assessment.

1.1. The aim of the study

The aim of this study is to address the issue of variability of perception of teachers and students regarding feedback, with the primary focus being the exploration of how teachers and students perceive assessment in the Icelandic context. Feedback as part of formative assessment in different learning contexts is of particular interest. In this study context refers to schools with diverse practices of formative assessment. Understanding how teachers and students experience feedback will give insight into the dialogue that takes place in the classroom.

Research questions:

– How do teachers and students in secondary schools in Iceland perceive feedback practices?
– How do different assessment cultures affect students' and teachers'

perception of feedback and assessment?

1.2. Context

Rowntree claims: "if we wish to discover the truth about an educational system, we must first look to its assessment procedures" (Rowntree, 1987, p. 1). Since the implementation of a new National Curriculum in 2015, Icelandic schools have been challenged by requirements to evaluate the skills and competences of students rather than their subject-based knowledge. The Curriculum Guide based on the Upper Secondary School Act, General Section ((Ministry of Education, 2008/2012Ministry of Education, 2008/2012) states:

> Emphasis should be on formative assessment where pupils regularly consider their education with their teachers in order to attain their own educational goals and decide where to head. Criteria, on which the assessment is based, have to be absolutely clear to pupils (p. 26).

and later:

> An effort should be made to make students active and independent in their studies and capable of acquiring knowledge autonomously. Learning and teaching methods are to give all students an opportunity to utilise their talents and get feedback for their work (p. 39).

A few formative assessment development projects have been implemented in Iceland, however there is a lack of research on the success of these projects. Still, we have a positive indication from research in one particular school in Iceland about the use of formative assessment and no-use of final exams (Jóhannesson & Bjarnadóttir, 2015).

Three Icelandic upper secondary schools participated in this study, and they were selected based on the criteria presented below. All three schools are located just outside the capital city. School One and Two are rather small and School Three is considered big in the Icelandic context. We define a small school as one with fewer than 400 students and a big school as having a population of between 800 and 1200 students.[1]

In a report from the website of the schools One and Two, it is claimed that there are no final exams and that assessment consists of small assignments and tests. Both Schools One and Two have been developing formative assessment practices for several years and claim and report that their work is based on Black and Wiliams article from 1998.

School Three is a big school, which has not declared a policy of formative assessment on their official webpage. Although, it is important to note that in School Three, a small group of teachers have recently started a group that meets regularly to learn about the practice of formative assessment.

2. Sample, data collection, analysis

Quantitative data were collected from the three upper-secondary schools presented above. The requirements the schools had to meet for this study were:

1 Declaration and policy of formative assessment
2 Experienced in implementing the policy into their school culture

or

1 No declaration of formative assessment as a special assessment policy
2 No experience of formal practice of formative assessment

The two rather small schools that met requirements one and two and are defined in this paper as Schools with FA (formative assessment)

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[1] The exact number of students is not presented.

policy. The third school, which satisfied the third and fourth requirement, is defined as a School without FA policy. It is important to note that other factors than those mentioned above were not taken into consideration in this research. In the current article, we refer to Schools One and Two as *Schools with FA policy* and School Three as *School without FA policy*.

A contact person was chosen for each school. When using purposive sampling, it is important to know the qualifications of the informant (Tongco, 2007). The contact person had tenable insight into the school environment and the resources to assist with sampling and the administration of the questionnaire. The first author of this paper was also a teacher in one of the schools (School One). In the other two schools, the contact persons were the assistant schoolmaster (School Two) and the module manager (School Three). Participants were teachers and students, 18 years old and above. The questionnaire was handed to the students by teachers during class time. We did not control the administration of the questionnaire. However, the response rate that is presented is calculated from the total number of students involved.

In Schools One and Two, all teachers and students in academic subject were included in the sample. By using only a selected sample in School Three we managed to countervail the limited sample-size in Schools One and Two. The reason why students 18 years old and above were selected was for convenience purposes as the selection of sample did not require parental consent.

2.1. Sample and response rate

The total sample consisted of 56 teachers and 234 students (111 girls and 115 boys; 8 students did not answer the question about gender). In School One there were 181 students over 18 years old. Out of these, 105 students responded to the questionnaire, which gives a response rate of 58%. 17 out of 21 teachers responded to the questionnaire, which is a response rate of 80%. In School Two there were 40 students over 18 years old. Out of these, 27 students responded to the questionnaire which gives response rate of 68%. 11 out of 11 teachers responded to the questionnaire, which is a response rate of 100%. In School Three 200 students over 18 years old were purposefully selected. Out of that, 102 students responded to the questionnaire, which gives response rate of 51%.

2.2. The pilot study

The survey questions are framed around how feedback is perceived by teachers and students.

The survey was translated and developed from the work of Havnes et al. (2012). To validate the questionnaire in the Icelandic context, it was pre-tested and piloted with two groups of students (one with five and the other with six members), six teachers and one expert (an assistant university instructor specialising in methodology and former secondary-school teacher). The students and teachers in the pilot study did not participate in the survey. However, they had prior experience with assessment culture at one of the schools in the sample. The teachers and the expert in methodology were given a copy of the questionnaire and were requested to read it thoroughly and to comment if anything was unclear or vague. They were also asked to pay particular attention to the word feedback ("endurgjöf") in relation to assessment discourse in the Icelandic context. Most of the teachers' comments were about wording, spelling, and definitions of concepts and meaning of questions. There was a notable unclarity, both among teachers and students, about the Icelandic version of the concept "feedback". It was interesting to note teachers' and students' preference for using the term "comment" when referring to feedback. Subsequently, it was decided to include a definition of feedback in the instruction of the questionnaire. The definition applied was: "Feedback refers to oral and written information (e.g. comments) given to students about their assignments and tests." Also, some of the students found it odd that they were asked

Table 1
Summary of main findings.

	Teachers/students diversities Independent of FA policy *T-test Teachers and Students replies*	School diversities With FA policy vs. without FA policy *T-test Students replies.*	School diversities With FA policy vs. without FA policy *T-test Teachers replies.*
Student involvement	There was a difference between teachers' and students' replies. Student involvement in assessment is rated higher by teachers than students.	Students in schools with FA policy rate student involvement in assessment higher than students in school without FA polic	Teachers in schools with FA policy rate students' involvement higher, but difference is *not significant*.
	Significant difference	*Significant difference*	
Use of feedback	Teachers rate the usefulness of feedback higher than students.	Students in schools with FA policy rate use of feedback higher than students in school without FA policy.	Teachers in schools with FA policy rate use of feedback higher than teachers in schools without FA policy. But the difference is *not significant*.
	Significant difference	*Significant difference*	
Quality of feedback	Teachers rate the quality of feedback higher than students.	Students in schools with FA policy rate quality of feedback higher than students in school with no FA policy	*No significant difference* between teachers in schools with and without FA policy.
	Significant difference	*Significant difference*	
Peer assessment	*No significant differences* between teachers and students replies.	Students in schools with FA policy rate use of peer assessment higher than students in school with no FA policy.	*Not a significant difference*
		Significant difference	
Self-efficacy	X	Students in schools with FA policy rated self-efficacy higher than students in school with no FA policy.	X

X – Teachers did not reply to questions about self-efficacy.

about grades, noting that they do not get grades for tests and assignments, except a final grade when they finish the course. This was especially the case in the schools which had developed a formative assessment culture.

2.3. The frame of the questionnaire

The survey consisted of 30 shared statements both for students and teachers. In Havnes et al. (2012) the statements were condensed into four variables: *quality of feedback*, *students' use of feedback*, *peer feedback* and *student involvement* in assessment practice. Two statements about self-efficacy were added to the students' questionnaire. The shared set of statements (30 questions) for both the teachers and students made it possible to compare their perception of how they engaged with feedback and assessment practices.

The participants were asked to consider whether they agreed with the statements or not. For each statement, the participants could select one of four options: (4) strongly agree, (3) agree to some extent, (2) mostly disagree and (1) strongly disagree.

There was also an open-ended question at the end of the survey.

Students were requested to answer the survey for five main academic programs, or fields of study: Icelandic, mathematics, science, foreign language and social science-humanities (it is, however, important to note that in this particular paper, program diversity is not of particular concern). Programs such as science, foreign language and social science-humanities included three to five possible secondary subjects of study. To get a clear picture of how students assess different programs, they were asked to have one subject in mind when evaluating each of the three programs. Students could select, for example, psychology or sociology as social science-humanities and Danish or Spanish as foreign language; but if students did not have any experience with the programs in their school, they did not have to answer. Teachers were requested to assess one subject in which they had teaching experience. The questionnaire was administered to the students during their class-time, and given to teachers to answer in their own time.

2.4. Data analysis

The data were collected from the three schools and processed with SPSS. Factor analysis was applied to reveal which questions condensed

and framed dimensions of how students and teachers engage with feedback.

As in Havnes et al. (2012) the questions are condensed to four dimensions structured around teachers' and students' engagement with assessment and feedback, plus one dimension regarding self-efficacy. To measure the internal consistency of the factors, alpha coefficient was calculated. (1) *Student involvement* (e.g. students setting their own learning goals, clear expectancies from teachers, discussions on improving learning and on criteria.). Cronbach's alpha coefficients were 0.54 for teachers and 0.61 for students. (2) *Students' use of feedback* (e.g. working with feedback on assignments in class, following up students' use of feedback, using feedback to adjust teaching). Cronbach's alpha coefficients were 0.82 for teachers and 0.79 for students. (3) *Quality of feedback* (e.g. feedback about strengths and weaknesses, grades versus purely formative feedback, feedback about how to improve learning, usefulness of feedback). Cronbach's alpha coefficients were 0.58 for teachers and 0.68 for students. (4) *Peer-assessment* (e.g. students give comments and feedback to each other individually and/or in groups). Cronbach's alpha coefficients were 0.91 for teachers and 0.79 for students. (5) *Self-efficacy* (e.g. student belief in having good grades, student belief in own capacity to learn). Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.87 for student (there were no questions about self-efficacy for teachers).

3. Findings

In this section we will present the findings from the survey on how teachers and students responded. We will examine diversities between schools and look into other findings.

3.1. Main findings

In this section we present the main findings from the survey. The emergent picture from the data is a general discrepancy in how teachers and student perceive student involvement in assessment, quality of feedback and students' use of feedback (Table 1). Teachers seem to overestimate how much students are involved in the feedback dialogue and the assessment process, and they rate the quality of the feedback and the students' use of feedback more highly than students. For peer assessment, teachers and students agree on the moderate use of feedback by peers. There is no observable difference in teachers' responses

Table 2
Summary of results—differences between teachers' and students' responses.

Factors	Groups	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean
Student involvement[***]	Students	234	2,5	0,49	0,03
	Teachers	56	3	0,46	0,06
Use of feedback[*]	Students	233	3	0,38	0,03
	Teachers	55	3,2	0,42	0,06
Quality of feedback[**]	Students	234	2,7	0,38	0,03
	Teachers	56	3	0,45	0,05
Peer assessment Ns	Students	232	2,5	0,83	0,06
	Teachers	56	2,5	1,03	0,14

Ns Not significant (p > 0.05).
  *** Significant difference (p < 0.001).
  ** Significant difference (p < 0.005).
  * Significant difference (p < 0.05).

Table 3
Findings – diversities. FA policy vs without FA policy. Students replies.

Factors	Groups	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean
Students involvement[***]	FA policy	132	2,6	0,49	0,03
	No FA policy	102	2,4	0,48	0,06
Use of feedback[***]	FA policy	131	3,1	0,39	0,02
	No FA policy	102	2,9	0,33	0,03
Quality of feedback[***]	FA policy	132	2,9	0,43	0,03
	No FA policy	102	2,6	0,39	0,05
Peer assessment[***]	FA policy	130	2,8	0,95	0,06
	No FA policy	98	2,4	0,85	0,14
Self-efficacy[**]	FA policy	131	3,8	0,45	0,03
	No FA policy	100	3,5	0,61	0,05

Ns = Not significant (p > 0.05).
  *** Significance level (p < 0.001).
  ** Significance level (p < 0.005).

in schools with FA policy and without FA policy. A rather strong formative assessment culture is predominant, according to teachers across all schools, as illustrated by the fact that almost all teachers, independent of school, report giving purely formative feedback.

Analysis of students' answers confirmed a substantial part of earlier findings (Havnes et al., 2012). Most of the students experience feedback as being useful for further learning and as providing information on what is expected of them. That said, it is also important to note that some students did not agree that the feedback they received was useful.

3.2. Teachers/students diversities independent of school policy

Teachers rate students' involvement significantly higher than students do (see Table 2). Teachers' and students' disagreement about how they perceive discussion regarding learning is prominent. When examining how teachers discuss ways to improve students' work, all teachers, except one, agree or strongly agree to the statement, compared to 70% of students. The majority of teachers reply that they discuss with students what to address in the subject compared to only 38% of students.

Quality of feedback is rated significantly higher by teachers than by students (see Table 2). For instance, a substantial number of teachers and students disagree on whether teachers emphasize students' strengths and weaknesses when it comes to ways of learning. For example, 33% of students agree that teachers explain to them what their weak spots in learning are, compared to 66% of teachers who say they do inform their students.

Use of feedback is perceived more highly by teachers than students. The difference is small, but significant (see Table 2). Overall, it can be said that a substantial percentage of teachers and students agree on the use of feedback. However, there is a tendency for students and teachers to disagree more at both end of the scale (strongly disagree or strongly agree). On the one hand, 60% of teachers strongly agree that they ask students about their work while they are working on assignments, while only 28% of students strongly agree. But on the other hand, the difference is not as striking when agree and strongly agree are added up, (90% of teachers agree versus 80% of students).

3.3. School diversities

As reported by students, the formative assessment culture is stronger in schools with FA policy than in the school without FA policy (see Table 3). Most of the students in schools with FA policy report receiving purely formative feedback or feedback complemented by grades. The majority of students in the school without FA policy reply that they get a grade and no feedback. Half of the students in FA schools declare that they are supplied with time to work on feedback before a grade is given, compared to only one third of the students in the school without FA policy. With this in mind, it is relevant to mention that

students in one of the schools with FA policy (School One) do not get grades for assignments and tests. How students in this particular school understand questions about grades in a context without grades, is somewhat difficult to interpret.

Self-efficacy is rated highly by most of the students in all the three schools, though students in FA schools rate their self-efficacy more highly than students in schools without FA policy.

3.4. Students and teachers diversities – separate analysis for the three schools

When schools are analysed independently the reported gap between teachers and students changes with regards to the individual school (see Table 4).

The gap between teachers' and students' answers is considerably smaller in one of the schools with FA policy (School Two). That particular school stands out in terms of reporting a general agreement between teachers and students about the use of feedback and quality of feedback, although not students' involvement. In fact, teachers and students seem to disagree about student involvement across all schools. For instance, 38% of students agree that teacher discusses the assessment criteria with the students before the tests and assignments, while 92% of teachers agree (this is when agree to some degree and strongly agree are added up). Furthermore, only 10% of students strongly agree with the statement the teacher talks with us about what we want to attend to in the subject, while 36% of teachers strongly agree.

When the schools are compared, we find that as the size of the school gets smaller, the disagreement between teachers' and students' perception lowers. The size of the schools could have an impact on the findings on how students and teachers perceive feedback and assessment practices. It×s worth noticing that the standard deviation value for peer assessment is higher for teachers which indicates a greater variability in how teachers respond to questions around peer assessment. Interpretation of this difference should, however, be taken with caution, having in mind the small sample of teachers compared to the larger number of students.

4. Discussion

In this section we make an effort to shed some light on the findings from prior research. Possible implications are examined for the implementation of formative assessment practices in upper secondary schools in Iceland.

From the findings, it may be argued that students seem to be more influenced by the discourse around assessment compared to the teachers. It could be argued that culture around formative assessment opens space for possible renegotiation of assessment. The stronger the FA culture, the stronger the dialogue between teachers and students. Students become more knowledgeable about assessment for learning.

Table 4
Teachers and students diversities in all three schools.

Factors	Groups	School One Mean (N/Std)	School Two Mean (N/Std)	School Three Mean (N/Std)
Use of feedback	Students	**3,1** (104/0,51)	**3,1** (27/0,42)	**2,9** (102/0,37)
	Teachers	**3,3** (16/0,58)	**3,2** (11/0,60)	**3,2** (28/0,39)**
Student involvement	Students	**2,7** (105/0,59)	**2,5** (27/0,51)	**2,4** (102/0,58)*
	Teachers	**3,2** (17/0,53)***	**2,9** (11/0,54)*	**2,9** (28/0,50)**
Quality of feedback	Students	**3,0** (105/0,48)	**2,9** (27/0,38)	**2,7** (102/0,52)
	Teachers	**3,3** (17/0,47)*	**2,8** (11/0,40)	**3,1** (28/0,38)**
Peer assessment	Students	**3,1** (104/0,72)	**2,0** (27/1,02)	**2,4** (101/0,82)
	Teachers	**3,2**(17/1,01)	**1,9** (11/1,04)	**2,8** (28/1,00) *

*** Significance level (p < 0.001).

** Significance level (p < 0.005).

* Significance level (p < 0.05).

The data can lead to the conclusion that the differences between schools are partly dependent on the development of formative assessment culture in the schools and, more importantly, what is practiced in the classroom setting.

These findings, support previous studies (Gamlem & Smith, 2013; Havnes et al., 2012) which document a substantial gap in how teachers and students experience how feedback and assessment are practiced. This gap seems to be related, at least to some degree (bearing in mind the multiple factors that affect learning) by school diversities and whether a formative assessment policy is reported and more importantly, practiced in the classroom settings. Teachers and students in schools with FA policy seem to possess more of a shared language of feedback. It is of special concern that the gap between teachers' and students' perceptions is widest when looking at student involvement. This divergence creates a challenge for teachers in actively engaging students in the regulation of own learning (setting their own goals, working with assessment criteria, etc.) and the feedback process (Boud & Falchikov, 2006; Hattie & Timperley,2007).

According to Hattie and Timperley (2007) there are three questions for students (and teachers') to consider? Where am I going? (feed up), Where am I? (feed back), What am I doing next? (feed forward). Having in mind the reported gap between teachers' and students' responses, emphasizes the importance of teachers' giving students opportunity to answer these questions. However, students may lack training and competence in responding to do so. In order for the students to be able to use the feedback, this study suggests that they have to believe in their own competence as well as trusting their teacher (Sadler, 2013; Wiliam, 2013). Sadler (2013, p. 62) reminds us about the importance of teachers sharing assessment vocabulary with students, as he claims that: "Students need a vocabulary for expressing and communicating both what they find and how they judge, at the least for that part of their evaluative knowledge they can express in words." It is not enough for teachers to assume that the students inhere assessment vocabulary without "appropriate evaluative experience." For students to develop a vocabulary of assessment, teachers need to make students more involved in the assessment and feedback process. That is food for thought, having in mind that in this study, the reported gap is biggest concerning student involvement in assessment.

The parallels revealed in teachers' perception of feedback and assessment across all the three schools is thought-provoking. It appears that context across learning in different schools influences students' perception more than teachers. Prior research shows that an active dialogue between students and teachers has a positive effect on learning and is appreciated by students (Black et al., 2004; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Havnes et al., 2012). Additionally, an active dialogue exploiting the 'moments of contingency' around learning is a critical component of formative assessment (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Engelsen & Smith,2010). The schools with FA policy report more agreement between teachers' and students' perception, which indicates that the dialogue around

learning is more active within those schools.

Our findings suggest that teachers' and students' perceptions on how feedback is practiced in the classroom differ. Furthermore, students' perception is affected by diversity in the assessment culture. Nonetheless, it is important to take into consideration that the scope of this research does not include many of the important aspects which can influence how teachers and students perceive feedback practice. This includes factors such as teachers' beliefs about student learning, the nature of subject related practices and the characteristic of the dialogue between students and teachers (Havnes et al., 2012). That said, in the development of culture of formative assessment our study supports Shepard's (2000) claim that "new ideas about the role of assessment are likely to be at odds with prevailing beliefs, teachers will need assistance to reflect on their own beliefs as well as those of students." (p. 11)

4.1. Conclusions and implications

The aim of this study was exploration of how teachers and students perceive assessment in three upper-secondary schools in Iceland and to address the lack of Icelandic research in the field. Feedback as part of the different assessment culture was of particular interest. Therefore, schools with different emphasis on assessment policy were purposefully chosen for this study.

The main findings point at diversities in perception between teachers and students of feedback in different learning context. The diversities manifested between teachers and students seem to be at least partly affected by how the schools engaged with feedback and assessment.

One of the questions that arise from these findings has to do with how the size of schools could have an impact on the findings. Despite research indicating that the relationship between school size and assessment is somewhat controversial (Duncan & Noonan, 2007), the current data give an indication that size of the schools influences the perception of teachers and students. That is to say, the size of the schools is in accordance with how much teachers and students agree on feedback practices. The smaller the school, the smaller the gap is between how teachers and students reply regarding feedback practicesIt could be worthwhile for future research to look further into this finding. Is it possible that there is something special about how teachers and students engage in discussion around feedback and assessment in the smallest school in the sample and could it possibly relate to the size of the school? School size could raise a challenge for teachers and other stakeholders in bigger schools of how to implement formative assessment with quality results.

Our research suggests that policymakers should encourage the implementation of formative assessment. That said, it is also vital that teachers get the support they need to carry out the project in the long run (Hayward, 2015). Hayward's large-scale evaluation is a critical reminder of how these kinds of projects can develop in long term.

Hayward found in her study how complicated it is to put these kind of projects into practice. Moreover, scholars have focused on the importance of emphasising developing teachers' skills in implementing a culture of formative assessment (Clark, 2011; Shepard, 2000; Wiliam, 2007/2008; Wiliam, 2007).

The implication for Icelandic schools is to give attention to the importance of developing a shared language of feedback. We therefore hope that this study can contribute to the discussion about formative assessment and concurrently raise more awareness about the value of an active dialogue around feedback and assessment. We recommend using the study as a platform for discussion in teacher education, in-service training, within schools, and not least, in the discourse of implementing assessment policy.

The current study has shed light on the perceived feedback and assessment practice in three upper secondary Icelandic schools and is the first study of its kind in Iceland. It is, however, important to have in mind that these results are preliminary due to constraints involved in the research method applied. In addition, our sample is rather small, which limits the generalizability of the findings. To analyse more deeply the nature of dialogue around feedback and assessment, a more comprehensive approach is needed (Onwuegbuzie, Johnson, & Collins, 2009). A further study based on interviews with teachers and students could shed some light on what strategies are used by teachers for implementing feedback for further learning, and more importantly how students perceive this endeavour. However, our findings provide a baseline for further discussion and research about feedback and assessment in Iceland and elsewhere.

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Article 2

"This school really teaches you to talk to your teachers": Students' experience of different assessment cultures in three Icelandic upper secondary schools

Ívar Rafn Jónsson and Guðrún Geirsdóttir

Abstract

Assuming that the quality of assessment for learning (AfL) is, to some extent, bound by the context of the assessment culture it thrives in, it becomes important to understand students' experiences of the cultural characteristics that are regarded as valuable for their learning. The purpose of this study is to explore and compare students' experiences of assessment practices in schools with an overt policy of AfL implementation with those of students in schools with no AfL policy. Focus group interviews with students were conducted in three Icelandic upper secondary schools. The findings show that students value positive teacher–student relationships and active dialogue with teachers. Moreover, a "mixed" assessment culture could be seen in one school, where a culture of grading is prevalent in conjunction with a learning-oriented assessment culture. We propose that stakeholders of upper secondary schools discuss openly and review critically the interplay of assessment tools such as grades and formative feedback. In light of these findings, it is important that the prevailing practice of assessment guides students to internalise the mindset that is embedded in AfL.

Introduction

The study focuses on students' experiences of assessment for learning (AfL) within three upper secondary schools in Iceland, two of which have declared AfL policies. AfL is defined here as "part of everyday practice by students, teachers, and peers that reflects upon and responds to information from dialogue, demonstration, and observation in ways that enhance ongoing learning" (Third International Conference on Assessment for Learning, 2009). This definition has some built-in assumptions, such as informal peer–peer/teacher–student relationships and dialogue, that cannot be presumed or neglected in AfL practice.

Researchers are increasingly paying attention to students' experiences of different assessment cultures and how they conjoin with the implementation of AfL (Birenbaum, 2016; Birenbaum et al., 2011; Sandvik, 2019). International findings focusing on the implementation of AfL indicate that too much attention has been given to the technical aspects of assessment which misses the true spirit of AfL (Birenbaum, 2016; Hayward, 2015). Some schools that have implemented AfL seem to overemphasise the instrumental role of assessment (i.e., where it is used only as a tool for meeting quality criteria or preparing students for tests (Torrance, 2007)). Yet, the term *assessment culture* is commonly used without a clear definition (Allal, 2016). Allal argues that assessment culture refers to the shared institutional meaning that guides teachers' and students' beliefs about the purpose of assessment and how assessment is to be practised. Others point to the importance of institutional culture in supporting or hindering assessment practices (Fuller & Skidmore, 2014). Moreover, Shepard (2000) highlights that we need to look at the cultural and social aspects of assessment in order to understand how we can change our cultural practices. Research on the part played by AfL in institutional contexts is still in its early stages, especially with regard to upper secondary schools.

Context

In Iceland, the Upper Secondary Education Act[1] (2008) and the subsequent curriculum guide (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012) encourage educational institutions to aim for skills and competences over subject knowledge. To attain that goal, the curriculum guide (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012) states that "assessment is to be formative, that is, guidance for the students on how they most successfully can handle their future education" (p. 60). Additionally, the curriculum guide is less centralised than its predecessor, giving schools more freedom to develop and implement their own pedagogical and assessment policies. Accordingly, it encourages schools to "make an effort to form their policy concerning varied assessment and guidance for students" (p. 60). This was therefore the first time that the curriculum guide explicitly emphasised AfL as a policy for secondary schools in Iceland. Despite the encouragement to practise AfL, the curriculum guide provides limited guidance on its implementation.

Since the 2008 Act, some secondary schools in Iceland have established a formal policy on AfL and gained substantial experience with its implementation, while other schools have not adopted such policies. However, information about the issue is limited. We know that some schools have implemented the AfL policy, but if we want to truly understand the extent to which the spirit of AfL has been successfully implemented we need to hear from the recipients of the practice; that is, the students (Hayward, 2013).

The aim of this study is to explore students' experiences of assessment practices in schools with overt AfL policies and a school with no AfL policy.

Assessment culture focused on learning versus testing or grading

Birenbaum (2014) is one of the few scholars who has conceptualised different types of assessment cultures. She has further identified features of AfL cultures where the focus is on ongoing learning dialogue. In this article, dialogue is defined as an informal conversation in which student and teacher can gather assessment information, and students have a voice in influencing their learning (Gamlem & Vattøy, 2019; Ruiz-Primo, 2011). Birenbaum has identified a number of features of a specific learning-based culture. In such a culture, assessment drives learning. The assessment involves dialogue (interaction) with the learner which seeks to empower the learner, and is characterised by diversity, belief in an I/we can do it attitude, modesty, freedom of choice, and flexibility.

AfL culture is characterised by a democratic and trusting environment where diversity and mistakes are embraced. These features to some extent rest on the quality of the peer–peer and teacher–student relationship, particularly in cases where the teacher attempts to empower the learner. Namely, active dialogue, trust, flexibility, and democratic relations presume that the teacher–student relationship is framed in a way that appropriately mediates these aspects of learning-oriented assessment culture.

In contrast to AfL, testing- or grading-oriented culture is characterised by the following: strong emphasis on accountability; an attitude toward assessments where one size fits all; the assessor knows best; lack of belief in students' involvement in the assessment process; lack of belief in underachieving students; test/assessment as the accurate quantification;

competitive atmosphere; top-down relations; and a lack of consideration for students' needs (Birenbaum, 2016). Birenbaum's (2014) model of learning-oriented vs grading/testing cultures corresponds to Dweck's (2006) idea of the opposition between a learner's growth mindset and a fixed mindset. Students with a growth mindset approach challenges and mistakes as an opportunity for learning and believe in their own ability to grow. Conversely, students with a fixed mindset believe that one's ability cannot be changed. They are more likely to blame others for mistakes, seek external reward, and avoid challenging tasks (Dweck, 2006). As noted above, successful assessment is, to some extent, mediated by the quality of the teacher–student relationship. We define the teacher–student relationship from the students' perspective as the perceived meaning students make of teacher–student interactions in day-to-day settings (Claessens et al., 2017).

In a high-stakes testing culture, grades have an important social influence on students' perception of how high grades relate to future success, such as school and job opportunities (Löfgren et al., 2019). Grades may be seen as a type of extrinsic reward that diminishes students' intrinsic motivation to learn for the sake of learning. Yet, students' grade improvement is perceived by many teachers as an indication of their progress in learning (Yates & Johnston, 2017). Previous studies have reported that grades can have a negative influence on students' wellbeing, self-confidence, motivation, stress levels, and their view of themselves as learners. Grades may, therefore, lower students' motivation to engage in learning (Butler, 1988; Carless, 2006; Cowie, 2005; Ferguson, 2011). In Ryan and Henderson's (2017) study, students who received lower grades than expected showed negative emotional responses, such as shame, sadness, and anger.

The culture of testing pushes students to focus more on grades than on their learning. Löfgren et al. (2019) warn educators and policy makers about the danger that testing culture poses for students' enjoyment of learning. As Gipps (1999) points out, our perception of assessment activities as a technical phenomenon needs to be abandoned for a more all-encompassing approach. Assessment should be a collaborative endeavour that is integrated into the relationship between participants, such as the teacher–student relationship. To enable the student to participate in the relationship, teachers need to be both approachable and open to the process of forming a relationship with students. Ryan and Deci's (2000) self-determination theory claims

that our need to relate to others is a basic human need and a necessary condition for students to develop as autonomous learners.

Several studies indicate that students view the teacher–student dialogue as motivating. It provides opportunities for questions and clarifying misunderstandings. Students often report that they find dialogue to be a more honest form of communication than other kinds of feedback (e.g., written feedback). Students are often dissatisfied with feedback because of its lack of dialogue and active reflection (Bowen et al., 2017). Dialogue, in contrast, allows them to feel involved in the feedback process (Ali et al., 2017; Gamlem & Smith, 2013; Hill & Edwards, 2019; Nicol, 2010). Orsini et al. (2018) showed that supportive teachers had a more positive effect on student learning than the feedback they received. By defining feedback in a vacuum, these authors claim it is distanced from the impact of supportive teacher–student relationships, and as such becomes meaningless.

We argue that teacher–student relationships serve as the backdrop for many of the positive features of AfL. Studies have shown that positive teacher–student relationships are essential to students' engagement and motivation (Claessens et al., 2017; Quin, 2016). Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2004) have pointed out that, if assessment is intended to promote learning, students must be motivated and given the opportunity to engage with feedback measures. Previous studies on assessment cultures have not explicitly addressed how students perceive teacher–student relationships in terms of different assessment practices (i.e., grading versus non-grading). Additionally, current literature on upper secondary schools has not paid enough attention to how the use of grades as feedback is perceived by students. Lastly, research on assessment in Icelandic upper secondary schools is limited. Hence, the research question of the current article is: How do students in three upper secondary schools in Iceland experience different assessment cultures?

The study

Iceland is a small country with almost 40 secondary schools. The Upper Secondary Education Act (2008) grants secondary schools considerable autonomy concerning assessment practices. However, upon graduation, schools are obligated to award grades.

Assessment in students' diploma includes a final whole number from 1 to 10 or in a system that can be clearly connected to it. This is necessary to facilitate evaluation when a student is transferring from one school to another. Generally, 5 is the minimum grade in order to complete a course unit. (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012, p. 61)

Participants

This study is limited to the area around Reykjavík, the capital city, where the first author has worked as a teacher. Based on his inside knowledge and on a previous study (Jónsson et al., 2018), the first author purposefully selected three schools for this study, all of which had different assessment practices, especially in relation to the use of grades and tests. Two schools that had AfL policies and one without were selected. Table 1 gives a comparison of the three schools in relation to assessment practices.

Table 1 Overview of the three schools

	School I	School II	School III
AfL policy	Yes	Yes	No
Use of grades	No	Yes	Yes
Use of written feedback	Yes	Yes	Varies by teacher
Final exams	No	No	Yes

In School I, the students only get a final course grade but no grades during the semester except a mid-term grade (on a three-letter scale—A, B, C). Final grades are calculated from the students' work over the semester. In School II, students receive grades and written feedback. Additionally, students routinely receive standardised feedback in the form of short sentences indicating where they stand in their course work. In School III, so-called continuous assessment is prevalent. Continuous assessment refers to frequent summative evaluation of student work over the semester with or without final exams. However, a common practice of continuous assessment in Iceland is that students can drop the final exam by attaining a certain grade over the semester.

Method

Three focus groups, one from each of the three schools, were asked to reflect on assessment practices in their respective schools. Use of focus groups has the advantage of creating diverse discussions, where different perspectives and experiences of assessment can be collected and compared (Nyumba et al., 2018). A contact person was chosen for each school. When using purposive sampling, it is important to know the qualifications of the informant (Tongco, 2007). In all cases, the contact person had tenable insight into the school environment and assisted with the sampling of the student groups. Our contact persons were school administrators and experienced teachers at the schools. The contact person recruited students. The criteria were as follows: an equal mix of gender, age, years of studying, and diversity with regard to academic subjects and success. The number of students in the groups was from seven to nine, including in total 11 males and 14 females. Students' age range was between 18 and 23 years old.

Focus group administration

The focus group discussions were semi-structured, lasting between 60 and 90 minutes. The discussion started with an introduction and information about the purpose of the focus group. Participants were asked to consent to voice recording and assured that transcripts of the discussion would be deleted after the data analysis had been conducted.

Analysis

The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. The first author read and analysed the data, while the analysis was validated and confirmed by the second author. In the first reading, the focus was on becoming familiar with the dataset as well as taking notes in connection with the research question. In the second reading, the main discussion points were summarised according to the interview questionnaire (see Appendix A). In the third phase, the focus was on summarising (vertical analysis) similarities and differences (horizontal or comparative analysis) across the three interviews (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002). In the fourth phase, the dataset was analysed using content analysis to identify possible themes. Interviews were coded by using the Dedoose software that identifies themes based on recurrent

activities, opinions, words, and concepts. Codes were categorised according to the research question and themes. Theme development entailed combining Birenbaum's (2014, 2016) conceptual framework with the emerging theme analysis of the data (Tuckett, 2005).

Ethical issues

All school leaders and participants approved of the study (interviews). The participants were 18 or older, which eliminated the need for consent from a parent or guardian. Every student participated voluntarily. Participants were informed that their names would not be used in the transcription process and all data would be permanently deleted. No official approval was needed, as research data did not include any vulnerable or traceable personal information (Act on Data Protection and the Processing of Personal Data, 2018).

Findings

The findings fall under two main themes. The themes are teacher–student relationships and dialogue in conjunction with grades and tests. First, we present a table with the main points of each theme in accordance with students' experiences of assessment practices in the schools. Secondly, each theme is described through excerpts from the data that demonstrate the point of discussion in each of the schools. Although the findings are divided into two themes, they are clearly intertwined with Birenbaum's (2014, 2016) conceptual framework around assessment culture.

Teacher–student relationships and dialogue

School I

In School I, communication with teachers is seen as an integrated part of learning. Both external structures (the timetable) and teacher approachability supported the students' pursuit to build interaction with their teachers. Students mentioned special task hours and face-to-face interviews as opportunities to engage in a dialogue with their teachers. Teachers were described as being readily approachable. "You have access to the teachers in many different ways," one student said.

Table 2 Main points relating to the themes in each school

	School I	School II	School III
Teacher–student relationship and dialogue	Active communication between teachers and students is perceived as a unique school characteristic and integral part of learning.	Communication between teachers and students described as informal and personal.	Students express a need for more dialogue with teachers.
	Teachers described as approachable for discussion about assessment and feedback.	Teachers are viewed as flexible, considerate, and knowledgeable about their students.	Mixed student view of whether teachers try to relate to students.
	Students appreciate ongoing face-to-face meetings to discuss assessment and feedback.	Students appreciated being able to discuss their learning and personal issues openly with teachers.	Students express need for increased teacher consideration.
	Feedback viewed as an opportunity to promote learning.	Strong preference for the ongoing feedback arrangement that entails regular feedback over the semester.	Difference of opinion on whether students or teachers should show initiative in communicating about assessment.
		Students feel that they have a voice about instruction and assessment.	Students feel that grades have influenced their relationships with their teachers.

Students described their relationships with teachers as positive, democratic, and equal, which influenced their view of the feedback and the teaching practices:

> It's the thing with the feedback, you know, the teachers do not behave like they have higher status. Everyone is equal.

Some of the students displayed beliefs reflecting a growth mindset and described how their final grades had improved since starting in School I. They felt that diversity was desirable, in which different approaches to learning were encouraged. One student said:

> I just do much better here than in the [previous school], like in math. There was just one way to learn there, but since I have been here, I have had great success in math.

Further explaining the reason for success, the student expressed that the assessment via communication with the teachers and the positive feedback gave rise to a sense of empowerment:

> You know, the communication and feedback play a big part … Then you get it [feedback] and you just … 'Great!, [you] can work on this, but everything else is ok' and then your self-confidence goes up.

Overall, students in School I claimed it was the feedback system that made "this school so unique" and "personal". Students' description of teacher–student interaction reflected the idea that learning is all about dialogue (interaction). That is, students were encouraged and required to engage in one-on-one discussions with teachers about their learning:

> This school really teaches you to use the opportunity to talk to your teachers. Some students don't fancy it because it pulls you out of your comfort zone ... but then you just have to go and talk [to them] ... Then there are these weeks of cairn interviews or task hours or something where you can talk to the teacher in private.

School II

When describing the characteristics of School II, the students mentioned close teacher–student relationships and the teachers' flexibility and willingness to adapt instruction to the students' needs as positive features of the school. Additionally, the students expressed contentment with how the feedback was organised, where a platform for face-to-face meetings with their supervising teacher was offered after each round of feedback (referred to as cairn interviews). Students were given opportunities to express their views about the feedback and other issues that influenced their learning. Students found such discussions straightforward:

> Yes, I approach him [the teacher] and tell him straight out … and just say this was like this and I think this is unfair.

Teacher–student relationships were described as personal. Student learning, personal issues, and students' opinions were openly discussed in a non-threatening context:

> You are not afraid to approach the teacher after class and have a talk with him about the assignments or something. Maybe it's more difficult in bigger schools. Mainly because it becomes more formal and the teacher sees himself as superior.

Teachers were described as being generally approachable in and between classes and, in line with democratic relations and student empowerment, the teachers encouraged an atmosphere in which everyone was seen as an equal. Students appreciated not being anonymous, "as in some schools" where one participant said he had been "just some ID number".

Altogether, students described teachers as being open for dialogue concerning personal matters and learning. Furthermore, students framed teacher relationships around equality and felt like they were given a voice in their own learning.

School III

In School III, teacher–student relationships were described in more authoritative terms. Some students brought up the lack of personal connection between teachers and students. However, there were some teachers who were described as putting serious effort into making connections with the students. The students all agreed that personal connections between student and teachers are important:

> Like John [the teacher], who asks questions like: 'Where are you from?' 'Where do your parents live and what kind of work do they do?' Just asks some questions about you, so he can have a dialogue with you about your personal story.

Top-down relations and a lack of consideration for students' needs were noted by students, who described teachers as having "tunnel vision"; that is, the teachers could only see the world from their own perspective. Others described a feeling of not being seen as a unique individual and instead "just as some student" who is taking "this and that course". Students brought this up when they felt that the teachers were only focused on their classes while not taking into consideration student responsibilities in other courses and outside of school.

In relation to student involvement, teachers were generally seen as in control of learning activities. However, students also mentioned teachers who were enthusiastic about student voices concerning the curriculum and their participation in class discussions: "You know, there are always a few teachers who pass some control over to students."

Interestingly, grading came up when students were asked about what would change if they had more dialogue and connection with teachers. Some

students seemed to hold a fixed mindset and mentioned that "if they could receive higher grades" they would be able to please the teachers and "relate" more to them.

Students disagreed on whether it was the responsibility of the teacher or the student to take the initiative for dialogue. One student claimed that it was important for teachers to pay attention to students who receive low grades, and commented that:

> If a student received a 5 [the teachers] do not try to help him … not like 'Hey Lydia, can I help you with this?' Personally, that would change something [for me] to get help, instead of trying on your own to learn something you already have difficulties with.[2]

Yet, the discussion indicated that different experiences of teacher approachability were somewhat related to whether or not students showed initiative in approaching teachers:

> If you receive a low grade, wouldn't you just go after class and talk to the teacher and say 'I don't understand why I got this low grade' … then the teacher would help you?

The same student added that she seldom received low grades and described teachers as generally approachable for discussing ways to get higher grades:

> If I get 8, … I ask what was missing here?

The findings show that there is a difference in communication between the teacher and students with high or low grades. Higher achieving students approached the teachers when they felt they needed an explanation, whereas students with lower grades were more reluctant to do so.

To sum up, students complained about teachers possessing a negative view toward under-achieving students. However, they appreciated being able to engage in a dialogue with teachers, and appreciated that teachers adapted teaching practices to student needs. The discussions indicate that students felt that the teachers in School III were, in most cases, reluctant to approach students. Student grades contributed to whether students approached teachers for interaction and feedback.

Grades and tests

Table 3 Main points relating to the themes in each school

Grades and feedback	School I	School II	School III
	Assessment mainly based on students' assignments and occasional tests. No final exams.	School described with phrases such as "a lot of assignments" and "no final exams".	Generally positive views about continuous assessment where students with minimum grades skip high-stakes final exams.
	Students appreciate feedback over grades (no grades are assigned).	Formative feedback secondary to grades.	Students argue that high-stakes tests only reflect students' memorisation.
	Discontent over short feedback (e.g., "good job").	Grades have exchange value for students' work.	Students argue against using grades as main feedback.
	Formative feedback perceived as more motivating and informative than grades.	Grades important for students' self-confidence and wellbeing.	Grades perceived as a threat to self-image and push students to compare themselves with peers.
	Learning from mistakes and working with weaknesses perceived to be an important part of learning.	Assignments and feedback viewed as preparation for tests.	Having a minimum grade to pass is perceived as driving students to put less effort into learning.
		Different views on the value of tests.	Students claim that receiving formative feedback without a grade would be more learning oriented.
		Argument for using tests in science and math.	

School I

Discussions about grades and tests in School I were coloured by the fact that students only receive compulsory grades at the end of the semester and during mid-term assessments. Despite a generally positive view on feedback practices, students felt that receiving short comments, such as "well done" or "done/not done" was "a little bit like just receiving a grade".

The students stated that grades, compared to other kinds of feedback, were not informative, especially with respect to motivation. Receiving feedback

that they could work with was experienced as meaningful and reflected the belief that assessment empowers the learner and motivates students to keep going:

> It's just more fun to get some pep. [The teachers] are pepping you up by writing 'keep up the good work' you see … instead of just receiving a 7. The feedback is important.

Students' views on receiving feedback were related to the process of being allowed to learn from mistakes and improving their learning based on those mistakes. Some students expressed a positive view on having an opportunity to re-submit assignments. The absence of grades and the ability to use mistakes as a platform for improvement seemed to strengthen students' beliefs in their own ability. One student compared this type of feedback with receiving a grade when working on essays:

> You know mistakes … for example, instead of receiving a grade for the essay, we submit it in parts and get feedback for every submission. You can always improve later when you do an essay. You have it all in your mind.

In some courses, students were asked for self-assessment (i.e., to guess the grade and subsequently discuss it with the teacher):

> You know, in John's class, we guessed twice by trying to calculate the final grade and we were almost always right.

Students stressed the importance of receiving feedback about how they could improve their weaknesses. One student noted that:

> You are not just being told about your weakness, but also how you can improve them.

Further discussion on this topic revealed that students saw feedback on their weaknesses as an aid in developing their skills in receiving constructive criticism, as well as exercising critical faculties and speaking openly of others' work through peer assessment. In accordance with the mindset that it is all about learning, feedback on how to improve (feed-forward) was mentioned as an important aspect of learning. One student commented that students are "often helped to find out how you can improve". The discussion revealed that students differentiated between corrective feedback, such as "fix this, you can do it", and feedback that entailed information on how to

improve their work. In the latter case, "the teacher points out possible solutions [and says] 'You can do this to improve'." A student used an example from a math teacher who pointed out that:

> 'There are many ways to think about math' and then the teacher opens up other pathways to think.

In general, students in School I showed a strong preference for learning-oriented use of formative feedback.

School II

In School II, students' views on the importance of feedback and grades illuminate the assessment culture and how grades affect their wellbeing and self-confidence. Students appreciated receiving grades with feedback. Feedback helped students to prepare for tests, to pass the course, to rework assignments, and to counteract the possible impact of receiving a low grade. Thus, combining written feedback with grades strengthens the belief that assessment empowers the learner. "It keeps you motivated, and you don't hit rock bottom."

The exchange value of grades seemed to play a part in regulating students' motivation to work on assignments and reflected the perception that assessment is all about making the grade. The discussion revealed a strong dislike for working on non-graded assignments. Assignments that were not graded "do not matter" or are "not as important", bringing to light the exchange value aspect of a grade for given work:

> When the teacher doesn't bother to give you a grade for something, you don't bother to learn for the teacher.

Students agreed that grades are important because they affect their wellbeing and "give you self-confidence". However, receiving a low grade had the opposite effect on students' self-confidence: "It lowers your self-confidence, then you start thinking … maybe I can't do it." Additionally, high grades motivated them to learn: "You show more interest if you are performing well." The students shared their views on the validity of tests. One stated that:

> You take a test and you only have to remember. It doesn't matter if you really know the subject. It's like parroting.

Another added that tests do not show anything "about competence". Students' attitudes varied regarding different subjects. Tests were described as useful in subjects like science and math that deal with "hard facts": "Like in math … I learn so much from taking tests." Conversely, in subjects such as social sciences, essays were preferred as an assessment method.

Altogether, receiving grades seemed to outweigh the learning-oriented purpose of formative feedback as well as influencing students' wellbeing. Students' work seemed widely understood as having an exchange value for grades.

School III

The students in School III perceived grades to be a threat to their self-image, since grades encouraged students to compare themselves with their peers. Interestingly, this was not noted in School II. The grade comparison was particularly true when teachers presented the test results (mean, lowest, and highest test score) to the whole class, thereby creating a competitive atmosphere:

> There is one teacher who always writes the lowest and highest grades on the whiteboard plus the average grade. All the students see the highest and lowest grades and I think this creates tension and stress among the students. Everybody is just 'Oh, someone just received a 2 on this test!'

They agreed that this arrangement made students self-conscious and, in some cases, "shameful". Conversely, receiving high grades did not come without complications. Some mentioned that being told they were so good (receiving a high grade) made them insecure and conscious about themselves. Negative comparisons were especially salient in relation to low, and more unexpectedly, to high grades:

> It's sad to know that your friend received a 10 while you only got a 4 […] It's just sad to be the one who flopped, and your friend is super intelligent.

When students were asked about the purpose of grades, some reasoned that different grades reflected students' preparedness for tests. The most significant cause of dissatisfaction with receiving grades was that they did not know what they did wrong or how they could improve the situation:

> It only says how much you prepared for the test, how well you know the subject, but it doesn't tell you what you did not know.

Several students believed that assessment is all about making the grade. They argued that it was desirable to obtain a minimum grade, enough to pass the course, as a higher grade only meant more work. As one student commented, "everything above a 4.5 [minimum grade to pass] is working overtime".

However, when asked about receiving written feedback instead of a grade, students saw that it would be more suitable because it would not allow them to compare themselves with others, and instead would allow them focus on how to improve. Having a minimum grade just to pass was perceived as driving students to put less effort into learning. In contrast, some pointed out that receiving formative feedback without a grade would tell them more about their learning.

Most of the students showed a preference for continuous assessment. Some argued that this arrangement pushed them harder to receive higher grades by virtue of skipping the final exams. In some courses, the arrangement was solely based on work over the semester. In these courses, the motivation tended to drop down. One student pointed out that students become lazier in class "if there are no final exams ... you just have to show up".

Despite the widespread use of continuous assessment, students admitted that teachers rarely used information from student work to adapt their instruction to their needs. Corresponding to the view that one size fits all, the prevailing instructional practice mainly consisted of covering the material, which was not revisited until preparations for the final exam began:

> Well, we review it before the final exam. Something you learned in January at the beginning of the year and you will never use again except for maybe one and a half questions in the final exam … I would rather like to learn well than learn too little too fast.

One student explained that either you try to do the assignments well over the semester or you leave your effort for the final exam:

> Some students who don't do so well over the semester might think to themselves: 'Oh it does not matter … I'll just take the final exam.'

When asked about why students liked skipping the final exam, some of them explained that there was so much at stake, such as the stress of covering all the material and possibly not being "up for it on the day of the test".

Feedback practice seemed to depend more on individual teachers than on the subjects taught. As one student said: "I do get feedback from one teacher. Aside from that, there is no guidance."

Students generally agreed that using tests was not an effective way to learn. When asked about what they learned from tests, one student replied that the tests tested "not what you learn, only what you remember". Some of the students used the term *parroting* when discussing final exams. In discussing tests as an assessment tool, it is important to have in mind that some students perceived tests as useful in some cases, especially when referring to subjects and personal preferences. In this context, they mentioned subjects like math and physics.

To sum up, discussions about grades and tests seem to reflect a fixed mindset and were generally perceived as threatening to the students' self-image and only suitable for memorisation. A rather dominant and positive view of continuous assessment was related to motivation for a higher grade and the ability to skip the final exam.

Discussion

As the findings show, students describe different underlying cultural dimensions of assessment in the three schools, manifested in how they interact with their surroundings—mostly with their teachers. Supporting the findings of previous studies, students in all three schools found it important to engage in positive relationships (Cornelius-White, 2007; Roorda et al., 2011) and active dialogue (Black & Wiliam, 2018; Havnes et al., 2012) with their teachers. In accordance with Birenbaum's (2016) framework of assessment culture, students in Schools I and II appreciated elements of the AfL culture, such as ongoing dialogue, flexibility, having a voice about their learning, learning from mistakes, and perceiving themselves as empowered by teacher feedback. Conversely, most students in School III described characteristics of grading culture, such as passing the test with minimal effort and the prevalence of a competitive atmosphere (Birenbaum, 2016). Additionally, students avoided high-stakes tests and argued that they have low value in relation to learning. Despite the AfL policy in School II, students appeared to hold a fixed mindset toward grades. The negative effect grading has on students' affection was reduced by complementing grades

with written feedback and situations in which teachers made themselves available for dialogue.

Our findings demonstrate that learning-oriented assessment cultures have developed differently in the two schools with AfL policies. There are signs of what we term a *mixed assessment culture* in School II, where there is a prevalent grading culture in conjunction with characteristics of AfL. Students in School II partly characterised feedback as a means to receive higher grades and effort was perceived as having an exchange value for grades. In School I, students appreciated receiving feedback and it was considered valuable in and of itself. This is consistent with Shepard's (2019) argument and Butler's (1988) prior research showing that, from a motivational viewpoint, grading serves as an external reward and may shift students' attention from learning.

Interestingly, in School III the general opinion of the students in the group was that grading affects how students see who is responsible for initiating teacher–student dialogue, thus influencing the teacher–student communication. We know from previous research that there is a difference in the amount and quality of communication between strong teachers and weaker students. In a study by Engelsen and Smith (2010), teachers paid more attention and gave more feedback to stronger students than to weaker students. Our findings are, to a certain extent, aligned to Birenbaum's (2016) study, which suggests that students in schools with a rich testing/grading culture reported conflicting feelings, to the extent they felt distanced from the teachers but were at the same time willing to conform to the testing culture in order to receive higher grades. The question then becomes whether it is the teacher's responsibility to approach students or the student's responsibility to approach teachers. In our findings from School III, students with lower grades claimed that it is the teacher's responsibility to take the initiative. Conversely, students from the same school with high grades argue that the student is responsible for taking the initiative to talk with the teacher.

Students with low grades may not take the initiative because they fear looking bad in front of their teachers (Ryan & Weinstein, 2009). They may also harbour anger toward the teacher (Ryan & Henderson, 2017) or a lack of motivation for further engagement (Butler, 1988). Being mindful of the teacher's responsibility to help students learn, it is hard to overlook the

teacher's role in taking the initiative and approaching students who do not perform according to standards.

Conclusion and implications

This article explores how students in three upper secondary schools in Iceland experience assessment cultures, with a focus on AfL. Not surprisingly, students in the school with no AfL policy (School III) were under the influence of grade- and testing-oriented culture. Our findings, however, indicate that different assessment cultures can be found within schools with explicit AfL policies. Despite the fact that the students in our sample from the AfL schools underlined the importance of feedback, they do so for different reasons. While students in School I seek feedback for learning-oriented goals, students in School II display attitudes that involve a fixed mindset and seek feedback for more grade-oriented purposes (Dweck, 2006). Students in all schools appreciate positive relationships and active dialogue with their teachers. However, using grades as the primary source of feedback negatively affects learning-oriented practices (Hattie and Timperley, 2007).

The importance of dialogue and positive student–teacher relationships can serve as a backdrop for further development of a culture that supports AfL practices.

To develop a learning-oriented mindset, Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2004) emphasise that assessment should be a positive experience with less focus on situations that threaten the student's ego, such as feedback on fixed attributes (such as intelligence), and performance goals (passing the test). Teachers and students should use mistakes as a learning opportunity and put less focus on grades (Dweck, 2006). Furthermore, if schools are to implement an AfL policy, it is important to introduce AfL step by step, emphasising teacher collaboration and open discussion about the purposes and practices of AfL (Birenbaum, 2016; Wiliam, 2007/2008). Moreover, the assumption that "one size fits all" should be avoided and each school should be approached on its own terms (Birenbaum, 2016). Echoing Shepard's (2005) argument, we propose that, in order to facilitate learning-oriented assessment cultures, teachers and other stakeholders need to emphasise learning as a shared endeavour that has value in and of itself, rather than insisting on grades as the only way to measure education. In the Icelandic context, this could be

problematic since entrance to universities is conditional on students' grades from upper secondary school. As Shepard (2019) points out, this requirement can be addressed by other means than grades, such as using examples of students' work to demonstrate progress or by using ongoing formative feedback while withholding grades (Butler, 1988). Parkin et al. (2012) argue that giving students the opportunity to work with feedback before receiving grades can counteract the negative effect of grades. Keeping in mind the negative emotional effects of low grades, we propose that teachers engage in supportive and empathetic discussions with students about the feedback with the aim of developing a trusting environment (Carless, 2006; Ryan & Henderson, 2017).

Students in School III expressed positive opinions about continuous assessment, mainly because it gave them the opportunity to avoid high-stakes final exams. Given the divertive and vague definition of continuous assessment in upper secondary schools in Iceland, we propose that stakeholders of education openly discuss the nature of such practices, especially in relation to their purpose and value for student learning.

It may be argued that for learning-oriented assessment to thrive, teachers must be aware of the purpose of assessment, the effect of assessment tools (e.g., grades) applied in practice, and the importance of democratic relations between teachers and students.

Limitations and future research

One of the main limitations of this study is the first author's hybrid position as teacher and researcher. The second author is, however, solely focused on research. The hybrid position of the first author poses a potential problem due to his participation in implementing AfL in one of the schools where he was teaching. However, the insider position of the first author contributed to a rich understanding of the data, despite some difficulties in distancing himself from the data. To avoid participants who were in the school where the first author taught, the second author moderated the focus group in that school. Another limitation is the small sample size, which does not lend itself readily to generalisations. Furthermore, as our study reflects largely how students perceive their interactions with their teachers, it might miss other important elements of assessment culture. A larger number of

participants, which would also include teachers' perspectives, would be an interesting avenue for further research. Notwithstanding the limitations, this work offers valuable insights into students' perceptions of different assessment cultures.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. Icelandic Parliament (2008). Upper Secondary Education Act No. 92/2008. Reykjavík: Althingi. Retrieved from https://www.government.is/media/menntamalaraduneyti-media/media/law-and-regulations/Upper-Secondary-Education-Act-No.-92-2008.pdf
2. The grading system in Iceland follows the scale 1–10.

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The authors

Ívar Rafn Jónsson is a Ph D candidate in the Faculty of Education at the University of Iceland. His research focuses on teachers' and students' perceptions of formative assessment and feedback.

Email: ivarrafn@hi.is

Guðrún Geirsdóttir is an associate professor in the Faculty of Education and Pedagogy and the director for the Centre of Teaching and Learning at the University of Iceland. Her research is grounded in the context of higher education practices and SoTl research. Her research focus is on higher education pedagogy and includes curriculum thinking, assessment and teaching practices in higher education and university role in democracy. https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8687-1637

Email: gudgeirs@hi.is

Article 3

Student involvement in assessment and power relations: Teachers perspective

Ívar Rafn Jónsson

Abstract

Student involvement in assessment is considered essential to assessment for learning (AfL), mainly for developing a shared understanding of what it means to be a competent learner. However, translating AfL into practice has been difficult, one reason being teachers' reluctance to co-share assessment with students. Thus, this paper explores secondary teachers' perceptions of student involvement in assessment and feedback in three secondary schools from the angle of power relations and highlights the conflicting positions and challenges of inviting students in the decision-making and negotiations on assessment. The data set was purposefully collected from three focus groups of teachers from three upper secondary schools in Iceland. The findings indicate that power relations influence teachers' perception of student involvement. Power relations are mediated by teachers' positions and their knowledge, language, and space. Moreover, the findings show that developing relationships of trust is critical in creating a space for dialogue and student involvement.

Introduction

Student involvement is one of the fingerprints of assessment for learning (AfL) in practice, given that students are granted space to develop a shared understanding of assessment and what it means to be a competent learner. Notably, involving students underpins three of the five characteristics in Black and Wiliam's (2009) theory of AfL. These are sharing learning intentions, activating students as learning resources for one another, and activating students as owners of their learning. Moreover, Black and Wiliam (2009) state that if "students are active as owners of their learning, this will require them to have some idea about what they are trying to achieve" (p. 25). Some go as far as to say, that student involvement, such as self-assessment, blurs the boundary between learning and assessment (Bourke, 2018). Framing self-assessment to pass across borders of assessment and learning seems to be, at least to some degree, related to assessment literacy. Willis (2013) views self-assessment as a "dynamic context-dependent social practice that involves teachers articulating and negotiating classroom and cultural knowledges with one another and with learners, in the initiation, development and practice of assessment to achieve the learning goals of students" (p. 242).

Panadero et al. (2016) observed that co-construction of rubrics positively affects students' assessment literacy, with the language of learning outcomes becoming more accessible for students. Accordingly, Deeley and Bovill (2017) noted that students become more oriented towards learning when students' literacy is improved. Therefore, we could say that students' ownership in assessment anticipates a co-ownership and a shared understanding of assessment. Notably, having students as partners (SaP) has shown promising results in terms of student–teacher co-ownership, although mostly in higher education. For example, teachers who have managed to renegotiate their authority in traditional teacher–student relationships tend to note greater student autonomy, motivation, and engagement (Deeley & Bovill, 2017; Marshall & Drummond, 2006; Merce-Mapstone et al., 2017). However, one should be mindful of the context of SaP studies, as most of them focus on non-graded courses that are located outside the curriculum and not necessarily determined for the long term. Moreover, in the Merce-Mapstone et al. (2017) review, only 6 % of SaP studies showed negative results, indicating a skew towards positive reports on student involvement. Indeed, research indicates that teachers have an opposing and conflicting view towards assessment, especially student involvement, which Bonner (2016) describes as a "story of conflict and tension" (p. 21). Resistance towards student involvement aligns with the

failure to put AfL into practice for the long term (Deneen et al., 2019; Hayward, 2015).

Overall, research does not seem to draw a promising picture of the attempts to implement Afl. A large-scale study in Scotland showed that despite initial enthusiasm, the implementation of AfL failed to leave a long-term impact (Hayward, 2015). These findings and other studies (Deneen et al., 2019) indicate insufficient professional teacher training and support for teachers' competence for managing influences, such as external accountability demands of summative assessment, which is incompatible with the spirit of AfL. Often, Afl seems to be used rather superficially, in a way that Earl and Timperley (2014) describe as the 'letter' of AfL, meaning that emphasis is on "techniques rather than the spirit, based on [a] deep understanding of the principles underlying the practice" (p. 325). An example of this is using assessment criteria to quantify learning, a procedure that encourages compliance to criteria rather than focus on learning and nurturing open-ended dialogue and students' autonomy (Ferm Almqvist et al., 2016; Torrance, 2007).

One strand of research has focused on the lack of student involvement as a conceptual problem of feedback. As Winstone et al.'s (2021) analysis shows, the literature indicates a general trend towards situating feedback within transmission vocabulary and subsequently creating tension with the dialogical nature of AfL. Another strand of literature addresses the absence of student involvement as an issue of disruption of the traditional teacher–student power relations. The teachers are "custodians" of the institutions' norms and traditions (Reynolds & Trehan, 2000). Accordingly, the challenge for practitioners is to keep the traditional assessment arrangement at a distance and transform teacher responsibility from a 'curriculum-carrier' stance towards a co-sharing-and-partnership stance with students (Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017). Crossouard (2009) problematised student involvement in AfL as tension in teachers' hybrid role embedded in teacher–student power relations.

On the one hand, the teacher judges students' work (asymmetrical relations) and, on the other hand, shares their practice with students' (symmetrical relations). Crossouard (2009) highlighted that student involvement means a shift in how teachers' and students' roles are renegotiated. However, according to Reynolds and Trehan (2000), involving students without transparent negotiation of roles can lead to students experiencing less control than in conventional settings, arguing that it can "provide the illusion of equality but, for the most part, an essentially

hierarchical relationship remains intact" (p. 275). Furthermore, if mistrust between students emerges through participating in peer assessment, the role of surveillance is handed to students as self-police (Reynolds & Trehan, 2000). In Focault's (1977) terms, the surveillance is handed to students as self-police. As Bruner (1990) noted, our vision of our situation may be blurred by the social forces that are "already in place, already there deeply entrenched in the culture and language" (p. 11). Furthermore, following Freire's (1974) perspective, if we wish to transform power relations in assessment, we have to face the reality of the situation authentically. Additionally, student involvement is located in the space of power relations mediated by the cultural and historical settings (Freire, 1974). Then, student involvement refers to authentically negotiating a co-ownership of assessment where all involved have equal opportunity to have a voice about assessment and feedback practices (Deeley & Bovill, 2015). Formulating student involvement in this way is important, as AfL practices can unsettle teachers' and students' preconceptions of roles in the traditional assessment settlement, which are deeply rooted in cultural and historical contexts (Crossouard, 2009).

Context of Curriculum

Perhaps the most prominent manifestation of students participating in the Icelandic Curriculum Guide for Upper Secondary Schools (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012) relates statements about the general purpose of education, which is "to encourage the overall development of pupils and their active participation in [a] democratic society" (p. 7). However, what participation in a democratic society means exactly for practice is imprecise and open to interpretation. Two of the six pillars stipulate that democratic practices and equality should be "evident in all educational activities" (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, p. 15). Moreover, to demonstrate democracy and equality in practice, teachers are encouraged to apply "unconventional teaching methods and unusual approach to school activities" (p. 15). In any event, the message in the national curriculum guide seems to send a clear message about student involvement in AfL: "Emphasis should be on formative assessment where pupils regularly consider their education with their teachers in order to attain their own educational goals and decide where to head" (p. 26).

Student involvement is mainly mentioned regarding students participating in self-evaluation and working towards their own goals. The teacher's role is to consider and decide with students how to attain their

goals, who should "regularly consider their education with their teachers to attain their own educational goals and choose where to head" (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, p. 26). Interestingly, the discourse on assessment in the curriculum appears to send teachers two conflicting messages that could be difficult to integrate. Teachers are encouraged to use various and flexible assessment methods:

The methods of assessment have to be varied and in accordance with the emphases of educational work and apply to as many aspects of learning as possible. Therefore both oral, practical, written and pictorial assignments are to be assessed. Portfolios or workbooks, where various tasks and solutions are collected, for example digitally, can be useful to give an overview of the pupils' work and to show their application, activity, work methods, progress and social skills.

Thus, the curriculum indicates that assessment approaches (e.g., portfolio) should be approached in the background of theoretical paradigms such as constructivism and social-cultural approaches. Yet, as stated, all assessments should "be reliable, impartial, honest and fair" and that "all aspects of education are to be evaluated' (p. 26). The problem here is that teachers are being caught between contrasting and probably incompatible trends in education. Impartial and reliable assessments are rooted in the positivist tradition of psychological testing (Gipps, 1994), the same native soil as the transmission model of learning. Accordingly, the object of study is reduced into quantifiable units by applying 'the right' instrument. The literature comprehensively documents how the positivist mindset has drifted into AfL projects because of the focus on applying the 'right' tools to reduce learning into quantifiable units, such as overreliance on testing and assessment criteria (Torrance, 2007)

Aim of the Study

That said, if we are interested in translating student involvement from theory into practice, we need to consider student involvement from teachers' perspectives. This paper draws on a small-scale study of three groups of secondary-level teachers in Iceland. While there is substantial literature about student involvement in AfL in higher literature (see, e.g., Carless, 2020; Bourke, 2018; Nieminen, 2020) and lower secondary level (Gamlem, 2015; Havnes et al., 2012), less attention has been paid to how teachers' perceive student involvement at the upper-secondary level, especially in the Icelandic context.

This study thus explores teachers' views on the matter of assessment, Afl in particular, and their perception of students' involvement in assessment and feedback at the upper-secondary level. The research question is 'How do teachers perceive students' involvement in assessment and feedback?'

Method

Participants

This study is limited to the area in and around Reykjavík, Iceland's capital city, where the author has worked as a teacher. Based on his inside knowledge and a previous study (Jónsson et al., 2018), three schools with different assessment practices were purposefully selected for this study. Two schools with AfL policies and one without were selected. The criteria for selection were built on the assumption that two of the schools had mixed experiences with AfL. Three focus groups, one from each of the three schools, were asked to reflect on assessment practices in their respective schools. Focus groups facilitate diverse discussions, from which different perspectives and experiences of assessment can be collected and compared (Nyumba et al., 2018). The criteria for participation were as follows: an equal mix of gender, age, years of teaching, and diversity concerning academic subjects. The number of teachers in the groups varied from six to nine.

Focus Group Administration

The three focus group sessions included a graphic view of findings from a survey (Jónsson et al., 2018) conducted in the three schools. The survey was adapted from Havnes et al. (2012), with questions on how teachers and students perceive student involvement in assessment and feedback practices. The graphs displayed a general trend towards limited student involvement and reported teacher's overestimation of student involvement compared to students' reports. Mapstone et al. (2017) stated that neglecting the negative outcomes of student involvement may preclude necessary learning gains from unsuccessful approaches. This study addresses this issue by using reported survey findings in teachers' affiliated schools.

Analysis

First, the purpose was to get familiar with the data. Gaining insight included reading and re-reading the whole data set, writing down points of interest, possible codes and asking questions. In the coding process, data items with similar meanings were grouped and named as per the research question. As the coding proceeded, the research question began to take a different shape. Accordingly, the codes were refined by merging or splitting some and eliminating others (Braun & Clarke, 2006). With more engagement with the dataset and focus on latent and semantic meaning, patterns of meaning started to develop. Besides the participants' statements, the researcher focused on implicit assumptions that frame the semantic level of the data. The possible themes were drafted with interconnected codes and constructed according to the research question and the theoretical lens of social-cultural and critical pedagogy (Braun & Clarke, 2021). As the themes were revised and evaluated for coherence, the preliminary drafts of the findings were developed.

Ethical Issues

All school leaders and teachers approved of the study (interviews). The teachers were informed about the anonymous use of their data and that all data would be permanently deleted after transcription. No official approval was needed, as research data did not include any vulnerable or traceable personal information (Act on Data Protection and the Processing of Personal Data, 2018).

Findings

This section discusses the findings of the focus groups. The themes revolve around how the balance of power influences teachers' perception of students' involvement in assessment. These power relations are expressed as two major themes: the context of communication and authority.

Authority

Authority of Knowledge

One strand in the discussions focused on why teachers and students perceived assessment practices and student involvement differently. A reason for not involving students was found in teachers' authority in terms of assessment knowledge. The following quote clearly exemplifies this:

> When we (the teachers) define assessment in one course, we are talking about an assessment that comprehensively evaluates all assignments, including self and peer assessment; whereas students' impression of assessment comes mainly from the syllabus and the course description from the ministry. (T4: SII)

Discussions also revealed students resisted participating in dialogue about assessment: "Although we often try to discuss peer assessment with students ... they just shy away" (T2: SIII). Moreover, some teachers argued students lacked the vocabulary and awareness about the kind of practice they were involved in, such as not being able to differentiate between practices they were being invited to participate in: One explained, "They are not aware of it as a peer assessment or other kinds of formative assessments" (T2:SIII), and another added, "They don't experience it as peer assessment, even though we define it as a peer assessment" (T1: SIII). Teachers' superiority in terms of experience and students' lack of experience was said to contribute to the lack of shared understanding. Discussions also revealed how student involvement could be equated with giving students arbitrary freedom of choice: "Although we believe that students have been given the freedom to choose, for example, whether to take a test or do an assignment ... they may not necessarily experience it that way". (T6: SII)

Reportedly, at the beginning of the semester, students are often invited to choose between different formats of submission for an assignment (e.g., presentation vs. essay). However, students' inexperience, especially at the

beginning of the course, prevented their involvement: One commented, "Students who are invited to choose in the beginning, may not, later in the course, experience it as a freedom to choose ... you don't know what you are choosing until you have some experience of it" (T1: SII), while another stated,

I always ask them in the beginning ... one time we discussed how we should assess students' work in class … later, they were unhappy and claimed that they had not been involved in decisions about the assessment of students' classroom work. (T6: SII)

Teachers discussed students' resistance to participate because students viewed assessment as a teachers' job. Interestingly, this was especially the case when teachers attempted to break down the expectations of the teacher–student working relationship, such as inviting students to respond to written feedback and co-construction of course assessment. One teacher noted as follows:

> In one of my courses, they composed the instructions for the assignments and the assessment ... they could, for example, decide what the peer assessment counted, etc. ... however, they just seemed to be uncomfortable with this arrangement ... in a way, they just freaked out ... 'you just do it' ... I think students are just not into this. (T1: S1)

The above discussion demonstrates how perceived student involvement in assessment is related to different power positions of teachers and students by virtue of their knowledge and experience. Furthermore, these discussions show how students' involvement without clear and explicit negotiation can backfire and induce discontent and insecurity.

Authority of Presence

Authority was described in teachers' reports in terms of how students perceived teachers' authority via presence in text and space. Interestingly, teachers pointed out how peer assessment could be arranged to mask teachers' presence. In such cases, teachers hid their feedback among peer feedback so that students would not know which came from their peers and which from the teacher. By coating teachers' presence with peer feedback, all feedback was perceived equally important, and subsequently, students received diverse perspectives on their learning. Anonymous teacher feedback was said to change the teacher–student power relations, as all points of view in peer feedback would receive the same significance

and prevent students from using only the teacher's feedback. "Feedback from peers often reflects what I would have said, and they appreciate it more if received from their peers rather than the teacher (...) who is in the judge's seat" (T1:SI).

Additionally, giving students space to use and discuss anonymous feedback from peers would produce a change in the power dynamic between the teacher and students. Furthermore, as one teacher commented, giving students space and privacy was perceived as necessary: "It's important to give them privacy so that they don't feel like someone is watching over their shoulder ... it's only natural to be shy of who they are assessing sits beside them" (T4: SIII).

One teacher described a situation, if he withdrew himself out of the classroom to create space for students to exchange opinions:

> I tend to remove myself from the situation ... then they are more likely to discuss their assignments ... because then I don't have judicial power ... they hesitate ... if I tell them something is not correct ... in contrast, when I leave them on an equal plane, they debate and ask questions like 'why did you do it that way', etc. about their solutions and even argue. (T3:SI)

Taken together, the above discussions suggest that students feel and respond to teachers' presence, physically as well as in written text. To mitigate the teacher's presence as an authoritarian figure, teachers combined their feedback with that of students. However, written peer and anonymous feedback only partially balanced asymmetrical power relations and influenced how students perceive teachers and students' feedback.

Authority of Language

When describing feedback practice, teachers' statements conveyed strong teacher's agency, where the active role is mediated by words and phrases that signal the actions of the teacher, such as the teachers '*give* feedback/comments', '*deliver* feedback', '*mark* following the rubric', '*write* comments', '*tell* the student', and '*check* assignments'. Examples of this sort of language can be found in the following excerpts: "Then the student *receives* a grade, then *I review* and *tell* what needs improvement" (T5: S2). "We are *assisting* and constantly *giving* feedback" (T6:S1). "Sometimes *I mark* in a rubric and *write* down sentences such as 'you did not follow

instructions' or 'this part was missing in the assignment" (T2: S2). "...praise for what is well done..." (T5:S1).

Conversely, students' agency was described in more inactive terms such as '*receiving* feedback' and '*get* feedback'. In some cases, students' actions reflected more active roles, such as *looking*, *using* and *reading*. Interestingly, these were often notable in discussions related to teachers' descriptions of problems using written feedback (e.g. 'Many students don't look and read the feedback.' [T3:S1]).

One teacher, in an attempt to involve students, allowed them to construct comments for responding to teachers' feedback. In the following example, the role of the student is to *think*, *tell* and *read*: "This worked because they read the feedback I had written, because they had to read it and tell me about what they thought about the feedback" (T2: S1). Moreover, in cases where students participated in self-assessment, students' actions were described in terms that conveyed activeness: "It was brilliant to meet them one-on-one, and they support their self-assessment with arguments" (T4: S1).

Taken together, language situated within the transmission view characterised teachers' descriptions of feedback practice. Simultaneously, students' agency was highlighted in teachers' attempts to engage students as authors of their feedback and assessment.

Authority of Grades

Focus group discussions about peer assessment conveyed a strong lack of trust towards graded peer- and self-assessment: "If the self-assessment is graded and counted in the evaluation, they would just grade themselves with a nine in everything ... but if it is just for themselves, they are much more honest" (T4: SII). In graded peer assessment, teachers argued that students' popularity and friendship, rather than fairness, influenced peer grading: "Maggy, because she is popular, received all the high grades, despite poor assignments" (T1: SIII).

Additionally, peer grading was related to accountability for peers, where students are inclined to protect others from receiving a low grade, especially when using peer assessment for summative purposes: "In discussions with my students ... they told me that they would honestly not give their fellow peers a low grade, knowing that it counted" (T3: SII). Regarding the objectivity and negotiability of assessment criteria, some teachers felt using criteria in assessment ensured objectivity and fairness of

grading, notably with peer assessment, and was more likely to reveal "the right grade" (T4:S3). Moreover, in some cases, assessment criteria were seen as non-negotiable, as a metaphor used by one teacher underlines: "the assessment criteria ... just come from heaven" (T5:S2). Some remarks also revealed the complexities of changing the once established culture of using summative assessment and grades: "It may still be the case in how students think ... of course, they think it strategically. For example, they say that if some assignment I want them to work on isn't graded ... they don't bother doing it".

Context of Communication

Context of the Written Text

The context of communication affects how teachers perceive power relations in teacher–student interactions. The formality and nature of the teacher–student relationship influence how students respond to teacher feedback; students are often afraid to face teachers, and when they experience difficulties understanding written feedback, they avoid it. This is especially the case when language use is a part of the hierarchy. Interestingly, teachers reported that the meaning students ascribed to feedback depended, to some extent, on the nature of the teacher–student relationship. For example, teachers discussed the difficulty of "carefully choosing the right words" (T1: SI), and as underlined in the following comment, that "they would have been shocked if these words came from me" (T3: SI). One teacher recalled how once when she had provided complimentary written feedback to a student, it left the student scared and confused because she had misinterpreted a particular word: "She thought this was some terrible word and didn't dare to show her parents" (T5: SI). This example was also used to emphasise the advantage of verbal communication over written feedback: "I could have just spoken to her", and the misunderstanding would have been avoided. However, we see varying degrees of symmetry in teacher–student relationships reported concerning written feedback, such as framing the communication as a bidirectional conversation. One teacher described using individualised feedback, by making them more personal: "…you get the sense that you are talking with the person … the student ... you see his face in front of you and speak with him and provide feedback" (T5: SII).

Another thread in the discussions concerned the imbalance between time spent in writing feedback and lack of students' engagement with the feedback: One noted, "I have probably spent over fourteen hours in writing

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feedback for one assignment, and that was probably four times more time than my students spent in working on the assignment" (T6: S1), and another teacher added, "which they will probably not read" (T1:S1). An interesting point that came up was how teachers framed their pedagogical approach when communicating with learners, such as believing written feedback was relevant in distance learning and verbal dialogue more suitable with how they perceived their practice – as 'apprenticeship', as one teacher noted:

> I think the emphasis on written feedback belongs more to distance learning … here, they are with us … more like apprenticeship … they do not spend time listening to lectures … its task-based … we are at the same time instructing and giving them feedback in the classroom. (T4:S1)

Moreover, the teacher–student responsibility of learning was discussed in terms of the teacher's identity as an instructor, pointing out that it is the student who is responsible for seeking assistance as is highlighted in the following comment:

> They don't constantly need the teacher to say 'this was great' … I feel like we have described ourselves as instructors or as trainers. As a trainer, I can't always be on the field with them; I don't have a position on the field … but I can cheer and support them from the sidelines. As a foreign language teacher, I sometimes tell my students that they don't want to have me over their shoulder nagging them about how to speak correctly during their vacation. (T6: S1)

The discussions about the teacher's identity as an instructor exposed a tension between giving informal and 'constant feedback … a dialogue … which creates a stronger teacher–student relationship' (T4:S1) and experiencing pressure to provide written feedback for documentation. As one teacher said, documented feedback was mainly for parents and the system:

> It is just about bureaucracy … for parents … something I have to deliver … then the parents can see it in the system … however, you can just write in the system – 'oral feedback', and if something is not clear … you just contact the teacher. (T3: S1)

However, an advantage of documented feedback over oral feedback was related to teachers being able to rationalise graded work: "at the end of the semester ... if a student approaches me and asks why he got four for this assignment ... I may not recall [the reason]".

Altogether, the context of written feedback somewhat seems to reflect asymmetrical teacher–student power relations and contribute to teachers' tensions over choosing between documentation and verbal feedback. The informality versus formality of the context seem to be related to whether teachers described the context involving students as threatening or non-threatening. Teachers reported symmetrical teacher–student relations in communication, such as face-to-face interview settings, produced a more informal and relaxed atmosphere, open dialogue, and honest self-evaluation. Conversely, asymmetrical student–teacher relationships meant more formality, which could mediate student's avoidance and affective reactions.

Context of Self-Assessment in a One-On-One Setting

One-on-one student interviews seemed to be a common practice among several teachers. Students were described as being honest in self-assessments in a one-on-one context, where self-assessment is empowered with dialogue: "It was brilliant to ask them to meet me and defend the self-assessment and allow them to change it after the discussion" (T3: S1). Another teacher reported using interviews as an opportunity for students to describe and reflect on themselves as learners: "When I have finished the midterm assessment, I ask them to tell me three words that describe themselves as learners and then we build our discussion on that" (T5: SIII).

Self-assessment was sometimes used as an aid to facilitate the teacher–student relationship and reach out and get to know students (especially the more passive/shyer ones) better. Moreover, students' self-assessments, particularly those non-graded and followed with dialogue, were often described as 'honest': "In self-assessment, they are more honest and consistent ... compared to being more competitive in peer assessment" (T5: SII). Teachers also discussed how one-on-one dialogue allowed them to address unrealistic self-assessments: "You can see in the dialogue if there is any self-deception … if they are not realistic in their assessment" (T2:S1). One teacher highlighted that sitting down with the students gave them the impression that the teacher cared: "There is more dialogue, and in a way, the kids feel that you have their interest at heart ... because you sit beside them and talk to them individually" (T7: SIII). They compared this dialogue

to a journey: "… it's like I am on a journey with my students … you get to know them, and therefore, trust starts to develop; it just works" (T7: SIII).

Another thread in the discussion related to teachers' concerns about students' anxiety and their fear of being alone with the teacher: "Students are alone with the teacher ... and unable to register what is said ... because of fear" (T4:SI). Another teacher pointed out that this was particularly the case "in the first interview ... they sometimes act like I am about to attack them" (T2: SIII). Finally, gender was mentioned as a threatening factor in the context of a one-on-one interview setting:

> You are not going to take the student down, you are giving praise, saying how great this was ... however ... there are just two of us, and I have had few occasions with male students who felt bad when seeing me closing the door … I started to wonder how you think about how you sit, how and where you position yourself in the room ... and know what you are doing and the possible consequences. (T2: S1)

Taken together, meeting students one on one was mostly described as an opportunity for teachers and students to discuss self-assessment and strengthen the teacher–student relationship. However, one-on-one settings were also reported as a threatening context for students, where the teacher's power was highlighted in being alone in a closed space with students.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of how teachers' perceive of students' involvement in assessment and feedback at the upper-secondary level. Overall, the findings shed light on how teachers perceive students' participation in assessment and feedback activities. Furthermore, cultivating trusting relationships is important in creating a space for dialogue and student involvement. The findings suggest that symmetrical teacher–student relationships open up a space for trust (Carless, 2009) and dialogue (Smith, 2015) and are a possible gateway for student involvement (Winstone et al., 2021). Moreover, symmetrical relations appear to nurture a balance between the perceived authority of assessment and the creation of a space for teachers and students to understand each other (Crossouard , 2009).

In this study, teachers spoke about feedback practice, primarily written feedback, as a one-directional activity, which reflects their implicit conceptualisation of feedback as the teacher's responsibility. This is no surprise; first, other studies show that teachers define feedback as something that the teacher *does*, such as *giving feedback and telling* a student when they are on the right track (Hattie & Clarke, 2019; Winstone et al., 2021).

Reynolds and Trehan (2000) observed that despite the teacher's intention of mutual assessments, students were confused about their expectations, as the transformation of roles and power was not explicitly negotiated. Thus, Reynolds and Trehan concluded that students in such an arrangement "have even less control than in more traditional methods" (p. 71). Reynolds and Trehan's findings align with teachers' reports of students being discontent and confused with arbitrary participation when students did not possess the necessary experience and knowledge to make informed judgments. Moreover, they illustrate the importance of teachers' possession of honest negotiation to "diminish the distance between what they say and what they do so as not to allow a directivity to turn into authoritarianism or manipulation" (Freire, 1993, p. 116). Assumably, asymmetrical teacher–student power relations are highlighted for their lack of reflexivity in the negotiation process, which aggravated students' perception of lacking authority and equal opportunities to contribute.

Sadler (2010) argued that if students are supposed to create a shared understanding of assessment, they must have direct assessment experience and be active participants in the dialogue about assessment practices. Until students use and have adopted the discourse of assessment (as agents),

they will shy away from the discourse, as it poses 'quotation marks' over the teacher's authority over assessment (Dysthe et al., 2006), which can also be the case with teachers, placing criteria and curriculum beyond teachers' authority. Conversely, teachers' blending of anonymous feedback with other peer feedback seemed to put the authoritative voice of the teacher in the background, change the context and sway the dialogue towards symmetrical communication. Moving teachers' presence to the background resonated with Freire (1995), who claimed that "educators should never allow their active and curious presence [to] transform the learners' presence into a shadow of the educator's presence" (p. 379).

As per Freire (1970), oppression is rooted in the oppressed as much as the oppressor. He spoke of the dilemma of the oppressed over choosing between freedom or rejection by fellow citizens, that is, the twin fears of not conforming and of being rejected by peers. Thus, using grades in peer assessment can contribute to students' dilemma over choosing between authenticity and consequent rejection by peers or conformity to their beliefs and peers' expectations.

Consistent with the literature (Tillema, 2014), the teachers' discussions reflected grading mediated negative views towards peer assessment, which they described as unfair and biased towards seeking external approval. However, student's expertise can be valuable in peer assessment. Peer feedback is often perceived as more accessible than teachers' feedback and peer feedback, providing diverse perspectives, especially for sensitive students (Nicol, 2013). Honest self- and peer assessments contribute to a trusting atmosphere (Harris & Brown, 2013) and allow students and teachers to enter a safe space of assessment activities. If students fear losing face when participating in assessments, they can fear making mistakes and, consequently, get fewer learning opportunities. For example, Noonan and Duncan (2005) found teachers feared involving students because of their fear of receiving critical feedback, which emphasises the importance of teachers' openness towards changing and reflecting on their beliefs about student involvement and assessment (Black et al., 2003).

Interestingly, one-on-one interactions with teachers were perceived as a double-edged sword, depending on how individual teachers perceived their role when communicating face to face with students. Contrasting reports of the one-on-one context reveal the complexity of social situations and the importance of teacher–student relationships (Winstone et al., 2021).

From the teachers' perspective, balancing asymmetry and symmetry in relationships appears to be embedded in the contextualisation of

communication. As Smith (2015) noted, the student is both in dialogue with other members of the culture and "in dialogue with the context" (p. 741). Differences in the arrangement of communication settings reflect the dynamics of teacher–student power relations. Teacher–student power relations are reported to be transformed by contexts such as text, physical space, one-on-one settings and arrangements of peer- and self-assessment. According to Ellsworth (1997), it is impossible to address "students with a "neutral" attitude or tone of voice" (p. 47), as is highlighted in the teacher's description of power evoked in teacher–student communication, particularly in the contexts of written and verbal communication. That being said, teachers' positive view of verbal feedback has been observed in studies showing a general positive towards verbal feedback. In Agcricola et al. (2020) study, verbal feedback was perceived superior to written feedback in terms of usefulness, quality and timing. The advantages of verbal feedback seem to compensate for the possible drawbacks of written feedback, such as misunderstandings and lack of interactivity (Chong, 2017; Ferguson, 2011), and more importantly, verbal feedback meets students' need for dialogue (Smith, 2015). Teachers' reports on the advantage of using informal in-class feedback align with studies that demonstrate that involvement encourages students to take more responsibility and subsequently diminishes teachers' workload (Harris & Brown, 2013).

Moreover, teachers reported on students' affective responses towards the perceived authority, evoked by teachers' phrasing. The words chosen for written feedback (another communication), especially if perceived as academic jargon or alien to the learner's vocabulary, reminds us of the importance of taking a perspective, understanding how those words are addressed and, above all, how communication is conceptualised. Thus, while the form of communication (e.g., written vs oral feedback) seems to contribute towards symmetrical power relations, the framing of communication, such as conceptualising written feedback as *a talk between persons* can weigh up against the power imbalance.

Conclusion and Implications

Teachers in this study reported tension towards student involvement, especially concerning the communication and negotiation of the teacher's authority. Developing trust was key in diminishing asymmetry in teacher–student power relations and creating a space for dialogue and the negotiation of assessment practices. Moreover, this study supports other findings (Chilvers et al., 2021; Harris & Brown, 2013) that show how student involvement is structured, especially concerning power relations; such

negotiations of roles highly influence the success of the collaboration. Moreover, teachers ascribe students' non-involvement to students shying away from the assessment discourse. Teachers' perception of students' resistance to participation appears to emulate the diverse contexts of asymmetrical teacher–student power relations as it plays in the context of communication and authority. The current study's findings echo the classroom settings' complexities and diversity and highlight the implicit power balance that influences teachers' perception of students' involvement in assessment.

The findings provide insight into what challenges need to be addressed. The first challenge is teachers' and students' asymmetrical roles in assessment, keeping in mind the historical discourse of assessment that has shaped teachers' and students' roles. The second is the disruption of the established power relations (Nieminen, 2020) and renegotiation of what it means to participate (Winstone et al., 2021). Lastly, a critical re-examination of the use of concept feedback will seemingly encourage practices in the spirit of the transmission perspective and consequently increase teachers' responsibility on the cost of students' agency, towards a more dialogical and open approach, focusing more on the student and the context than the teacher (Nicol, 2010). Against this background, scholars should convey a coherent message to bridge the gap between theory and practice, that is, communicate a theoretical paradigm that sustains the complexities and challenges of inviting students to negotiate assessment practices.

While developing the AfL, negotiation of assessment and feedback procedures need to be embedded in building a shared understanding of AfL practices. However, we should be mindful of the unpredictability of negotiation, where different perspectives can unsettle ends-focused expectations, teachers' presumptions about teachers' and students' roles and pre-established assessment culture (Serrano et al., 2017). Disruption of conventional power relations underscores the importance of approaching student involvement with openness and viewing it as a learning opportunity instead of a threat to teachers' and institutional authority. When students and teachers participate in assessment negotiation, they need to justify their choices and be open for critical reflection on their own beliefs and practice, with the reflection aimed towards a shared understanding of assessment purposes and changes in roles and responsibilities, instead of surface and procedural knowledge (Crossouard, 2009; Torrance, 2007). Therefore, we should reframe student involvement as a bridge between assessment literacy and students' learning. (Panadero et al., 2016). Student involvement can be framed as an opportunity for the teacher to re-learn what they already know about assessment – by seeing the assessment activity together in dialogue with the student (Freire & Macado, 1995).

As Robinson and Trehan (2000) highlighted, stakeholders must pay attention to the institutional context if the practice changes. Power relations are embedded in relationships, traditions and presumptions about the 'assessment game', which influences the extent to which authority can be relinquished to students. We should be mindful about not advocating arbitrary involvement of students, only to play a part in the game of politically correct language of student empowerment (Dispenza, 1996). Not addressing underlying power relations when students are involved in assessment decisions may prohibit students' sense of responsibility and self-confidence. Reconstructing teacher–student roles demands "people to reflect on themselves, their responsibilities, and their role in the new cultural climate' (Freire, 1974, p. 13).

However, if we acknowledge the need for an authentic approach towards student involvement, questions arise about what implications teachers' authenticity has when co-sharing assessment with students:

- To what extent are students to be involved when the external context is taken into consideration (e.g., curricular flexibility [Serrano et al., 2017]; grading policy [Jónsson & Geirsdóttir, 2020]; demand in the subject area and expertise [Ashwin, 2020])?

- To what degree is the teacher ready to negotiate and show vulnerability in a critical discussion with students about their practice?

- Is the teacher ready to openly reflect on teacher–student power relations with students?

It might be argued that authentic dialogue between teachers and students helps teachers to reflect on their practice and subsequently demystify student involvement. Moreover, honest spaces for negotiating require both teachers and students to lay down arguments and subsequently support students in their assessment literacy development.

One of the main limitations of this study is the first author's hybrid position as teacher and researcher. However, the insider position of the first author contributed to a rich understanding of the data. Moreover, this study is limited to teachers' reports, rather than classroom observations of teacher–student communication. Another limitation is the small sample size. Future studies should take a broader approach and focus on teacher–student classroom interactions.

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