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Forms of Formative Assessment on Writing: Students’ Perceptions
Former av Formativ Bedömning på Skrivande: Elevuppfattningar

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Abstract

Formative assessment is an integral part of teaching, not only as a tool for monitoring student-development, but also as basis for potential adjustments of pedagogical strategies. Therefore, this research paper examines how upper secondary students perceive, and report acting on different forms of formative assessment on writing in the subject of English 6. It also highlights what teachers perceive as key strategies in formative assessment, and how they report applying these strategies for improving students writing when teaching English 6. How teachers report clarifying, sharing, and explaining learning goals and criteria for success to their English 6 students is also discussed. The study was carried out by using mixed methods research and included a student questionnaire, a student focus group interview, and individual teacher interviews. Our results show important similarities and crucial differences in how students and teachers perceive different forms of formative assessment on writing, as well as how they perceive the learning goals and criteria for success in the subject of English 6. Moreover, our study identifies the need for further research on the perceptions of formative assessment on writing from a student viewpoint. In addition, we present ideas on how teachers could work with different forms of formative assessment to better meet the students’ needs.

**Keywords:** Formative assessment, formative assessment on writing, key strategies for formative assessment, constructive alignment, learning goals, criteria for success, English 6.
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1. Introduction

Formative assessment is an integral part of teaching, not only as a tool for monitoring student development, but also as basis for potential adjustments of lesson planning and pedagogical strategies. Consequently, by collecting information about the students’ knowledge, teachers can change their planning and teaching accordingly to better meet the students’ needs (Skolverket 2019). Hirsh & Lindberg (2017) conclude that research on formative assessment in a Swedish context is scant and diverse (p.74). Hence, the collected research within the field, especially in a Swedish context, cannot be considered sufficiently valid from a scientific perspective. Furthermore, they also suggest that descriptions of methodology and validity are often lacking and/or unclear in many existing studies. Most importantly, they recommend that research should “aim at in-depth understanding of the work with formative assessment that is going on in Swedish classrooms, even such research that takes the students' perspective” (our translation, p.78). Therefore, our research study aims to address the recommendations above: our focus is to investigate formative assessment on writing, to make our methodology replicable, and also to highlight the student perspective.

Apart from the collected data, our research is also supported by theoretical background gathered from some of the most prominent professionals within their respective fields. Arguably, constructive alignment is the framing concept of our study, where most components in the school system are covered, from the starting point of defining learning outcomes to finally arriving at a grade. Biggs (2011, para.1) points out the importance of alignment between learning outcomes, teaching methods and assessment tasks, and he also underlines the teacher’s role in creating an environment that aids students in their development towards reaching the learning outcomes.

Regarding formative assessment in general, the works of Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam are of particular importance for this study. This is both a strength and a weakness. The strength is apparent when going through previous research, where almost all studies on formative assessment in some way refer or relate to Black and Wiliam. Hirsh & Lindberg (2017) found that in almost all of the 340 articles they studied for their background material, Black and Wiliam were mentioned. Additionally, the teacher interviewees in our research were all familiar with Wiliams’ research in particular and were therefore able to relate to the established key
strategies on formative assessment. The potential weakness of Black and Wiliam being referred to as dominant authorities within the field of formative assessment is that their theories could constrain some other potentially challenging ideas and developments of the concept.

Feedback and formative assessment are often used interchangeably, and they are undoubtedly connected to a great extent. For example, Hattie (2009) explains feedback as “a consequence of performance” (p.174). Given that feedback is often mentioned in our discussion-section, by both students and teachers, feedback on writing is defined in the background section along with examples from a systematic research overview on “feedback on writing” from Skolforskningsinstitutet (2018).

We are also detailed in our methods section to avoid vagueness, which has been a problem in previous research within the field. Most importantly, we wanted our research to be replicable to the greatest extent as possible without risking the integrity of our sources. Therefore, we decided on a mixed method research approach (questionnaire and interviews) to increase the generalisability of the findings. For example, by starting off with a broad questionnaire, we were able to adjust and sharpen our questions for the focus-group interview. This approach is suggested by Dörnyei (2003), who argues that collecting data from a questionnaire before doing an interview can support the reasoning and improve the validity of the results of the study (p.15).

Our study is focused on formative assessment on writing in English 6 in a Swedish upper secondary school. The results and discussion highlight the student perspective, but we also present teacher views on key aspects on formative assessment to illuminate this particular context. 57 students and three teachers participated in this study.

1.1 Aim and research questions

Given the central position that formative assessment holds in school, more research within the field is needed. Our study focuses on the students’ perspective by letting the students comment on how they perceive the usefulness of different forms of formative assessment on their writing. Additionally, our aim is to identify which key strategies in formative assessment some English 6 teachers perceive as the most effective for “providing feedback that moves learning forward” in the context of written production.
Our research questions are:

1. How do some upper secondary students perceive and report acting on different forms of formative assessment they encounter regarding written production in English 6?

2. What do some upper secondary teachers perceive as key strategies in formative assessment for improving students’ writing, and how do they report applying these strategies when teaching English 6?

3. How do some upper secondary teachers report clarifying, sharing, and explaining learning goals and criteria for success to their English 6 students?
2. Background

In this section, we define and explain key terms central to our research. We also present the concepts that underpin our study and discuss significant contributions in the field of formative assessment. Finally, we highlight an international systematic overview on feedback on writing.

2.1 Constructive Alignment

Constructive alignment is a principle that includes most components in the teaching system. Biggs (2011) states that the key is “that all components – the curriculum and its intended outcomes, the teaching methods used, the assessment tasks – are aligned to each other” (para.1). Consequently, to successfully implement this principle, teachers need to create learning environments that support students to reach the desired learning outcomes. Constructive alignment has two aspects to consider: the constructive and the alignment. The constructive aspect revolves around the idea that students construct meaning through relevant learning activities (Biggs, 2011, para.4). Notably, the meaning constructed by students is not about teachers transmitting material for their students to memorize, but rather how they approach the study material and construct their own meaning from the content. In other words, teaching should simply act as a catalyst for learning (Biggs, 2011, para.5). The alignment aspect refers to the everyday work for teachers when creating relevant learning activities, considering teaching methods, and utilizing assessments that should align with learning goals and intended outcomes (Biggs, 2011, para.5). By connecting these aspects successfully in constructive alignment, Biggs (2011) argues that “the learner is in a sense trapped, and finds it difficult to escape without learning what he or she intended to learn” (para.7). Furthermore, Biggs (2011) points out four major steps to consider in constructive alignment:

1. Defining the intended learning outcomes.
2. Choosing teaching/learning activities likely to lead to the intended learning outcomes.
3. Assessing students’ actual outcomes to see how well they match what was intended.
4. Arriving at a final grade. (Biggs, 2011, para.12)

The starting point for teaching is that teachers should have knowledge about, and a clear idea of what they want students to learn. This is described in the steering documents and should therefore frame the construction of learning activities and assessments with the means to aid students in achieving their learning goals (Skolverket, 2019). Regarding curriculum objectives,
Biggs (2011) also stresses “that we need to make clear what level of understanding we want from our students, in what topics, and what performances of understanding would give us this knowledge” (para.13). Additionally, he points out the importance of incorporating verbs, both high level (e.g. reflect and hypothesise) and low level (e.g. describe and identify) that reflect different levels of understanding. Preferably, these verbs should be presented in learning outcomes, teaching activities and in the assessment tasks (Biggs, 2011). This stance is also supported by Wiliam (2011), who on one hand finds merit in student friendly language, but on the other hand also underlines that certain phrases are characteristic for specific disciplines/subjects and are therefore important to help students come to terms with the fact that “official” language is part of the process (Wiliam, 2011, p.65).

2.2 Formative Assessment

Formative assessment is a broad concept, and research therefore provides with a variety of definitions. Cowie and Bell (1999) define formative assessment 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. 32). This definition implies that formative assessment is a process that requires active participation from both students and teachers. This standpoint is also stressed in other definitions and expressed as when “assessment is carried out during the instructional process” (Shepard et al., 2005, p. 275). Wiliam (2011) points out the significance of formative assessment, or assessment as a whole, because it is impossible for teachers to predict what students will learn just by designing a, hopefully, suitable material (Wiliam, 2011, p.46). Although formative assessment is not explicitly mentioned, or defined, in the curriculum for the Swedish school system, there are passages in the document which indirectly point out that it should be an integral part of the learning environment. The syllabus for upper secondary school, Lgy11, clearly states that the teacher should “continuously give the students information on successes and development needs in their studies” (our translation, Skolverket, 2011, p.10). Furthermore, under the rubric “learning goals” in the same document, the syllabus also expresses that students should “take responsibility for their learning and study results, and be able to assess their study results and need for development in relation to the requirements of the education” (Skolverket, 2011, p.13). Hence, the documents clearly indicate that both teachers and learners should be active participants in the learning/teaching process. This shared responsibility is also notable, and a core part, when working with formative assessment. Wiliam
(2011) points out five key strategies for formative assessment, where all points are connected to the research questions in our study, but mainly those in bold text:

1. **Clarifying, sharing, and understanding learning intentions and criteria for success.**
2. Engineering effective classroom discussions, activities, and learning tasks that elicit evidence of learning.
3. **Providing feedback that moves learning forward.**
4. Activating learners as instructional resources for one another.
5. Activating learners as the owners of their own learning.

The first point seems obvious at a glance since learners should know where they are heading to reach learning goals and fulfill knowledge requirements. Still, sharing learning intentions and goals with students was not regarded as important until about twenty years ago (Wiliam, 2011). However, Wiliam (2011) also points out that sometimes the sharing of learning intentions become too extensive and formulaic. He gives the example of a too zealous lesson in which learning intentions are clearly stated at the start of the lesson. Undoubtedly, it is important for students to know where they are heading, but how that is communicated to learners in a particular context is always up to the teachers’ professional judgement (p.69). All key strategies for formative assessment are equally important, but the starting point of clarifying learning intentions is the foundation for a fruitful interaction, where both students and teachers can adapt to changes during the teaching/learning-process. Next step is to establish where the students are in their learning process, and, by doing that, teachers can consequently provide relevant feedback to the learners on their work. From there, it is easier to identify progress, or needs for student development in relation to learning intentions and knowledge requirements.

### 2.3 Feedback

Feedback is often used both in practice and as terminology in conjunction with formative assessment. Black & William (2018) point out that when it comes to assessing formatively, feedback has a given and central role in the process. Researchers, teachers and students frequently use the term feedback in studies as well as in their everyday interactions in school. As with other broad concepts, it is hard to find a definition that covers all aspects of the term. Nevertheless, Hattie (2009) attempts to summarize feedback as “information provided by an agent (e.g. teacher, peer, book, parent, or one’s experience) about aspects of one’s performance or understanding” (p.174). Further, Hattie (2009) states that “feedback is a consequence of
“performance” and that the agent highlighting this “consequence” could vary from, for example, a parent who provides encouragement, or a teacher who provides corrective information to their student (p.174). Therefore, in a school context, feedback can be described as information delivered with the purpose of moving the student forward.

Skolforskningsinstitutet (2018) in an international systematic research overview on feedback on writing addresses overarching, generalized findings that can serve as either guidance for in-service teachers, or as a starting point for further research within the field. One major finding on “timing of feedback” was that students were more likely to benefit from the feedback whilst they were still in the writing process, as opposed to when they were given the feedback afterwards (p.11). However, the same studies also showed that writing assignments had to be challenging enough to have a positive impact on students’ writing development. On easier assignments, students could find feedback irritating when they felt they could manage the assignment themselves (p.11). Regarding “what feedback should highlight in order to support students’ writing development”, two conclusions were drawn. Firstly, versatile feedback is crucial in comments and suggestions. Hence, effective feedback should address both deep-level features (e.g. purpose and disposition) and surface-level features (e.g. grammar, spelling and punctuation). The risk of focusing feedback on surface-level features only to minimize errors in a text is that students could be hesitant in trying to use more advanced alternatives in both content and language (p.11). Secondly, for feedback to be effective, it has to comply in content with the learning intention at hand. Many studies in the research overview show that teachers sometimes fall into leaving feedback routinely rather than being specific in their feedback, connecting it clearly to the stated learning intentions. For example, an assignment that is supposed to teach students a particular genre of writing should focus on just that. If the teacher instead focuses feedback on spelling errors, the feedback could be perceived by students as confusing (p.11). Additional important aspects that are crucial for enabling effective feedback were identified in the research: teacher-student dialogue is central to enable constructive feedback, teacher responsiveness (some students need more clarification), inspiration is important but needs to be balanced with learning goals, and teacher feedback can be personal if it still focuses on the learning goals (p.12).
3. Methodology

When deciding on what research methodology a study should consist of, it is crucial to look at the aim of the research and assure that the questions can be answered. In our study, we considered it of benefit to gather data from various sources. For the quantitative part of our research, we decided to conduct a questionnaire. Since our research questions also focus on teachers and students’ views on and perceptions of formative assessment, we decided to use interviewing as another method in order to get more detailed answers. Thus, our research consists of mixed methods.

3.1 Mixed Methods Research

Mixed methods research makes it possible to view a subject from different perspectives. Thus, with the combination of questionnaires (quantitative) and interviews (qualitative) in our research study, we acquire a broader and deeper understanding of the subject. Moreover, mixed methods also allow researchers to investigate whether the findings from the different methods support each other.

Dörnyei (2007) gives a clear and comprehensive explanation of mixed method research, in which he covers both quantitative and qualitative research. He also highlights the issue of ethics within research, and how to conduct research with human subjects taking into consideration various protection and confidentiality issues (these are also consistent with the guidelines for research provided by Vetenskapsrådet). We followed his suggestions by informing all the participants of their rights before, during and after conducting the interviews. Furthermore, as suggested by Creswell (2014), we also followed the mixed methods approach when starting off with a broad questionnaire to obtain generalizable results, and then put focus on the second phase where we did in-depth interviews to collect rich data to contextualise the quantitative questionnaire (p.48). By adapting this approach, we can compare and correlate the results from the different data sets to strengthen the validity and generalizability of our findings. This is also suggested by Dörnyei (2003), who argues that a questionnaire can be used as the first method of data collecting, before doing an interview in order to support the reasoning and provide validity to the results of the study (p.15).
3.2 Participants

There were 57 participating students of English 6 in our study (57 answered the questionnaire, 4 participated in the focus group interview) and three English 6 teachers. All participants work at or attend the same school in Sweden. Regarding the use of gender pronouns connected to the teacher interviews, we use she throughout the text for the sake of consistency and anonymity. The students participating in the focus group interview will be addressed as student 1 (S1), student 2 (S2), student 3 (S3), and student 4 (S4). The same principle applies to the teachers, who will be addressed as follows: teacher 1 (T1), teacher 2 (T2), and teacher 3 (T3). We were recommended by the participating teachers to write the questionnaire in Swedish and also carry out the interviews in Swedish to make sure both the students and the teachers are relaxed and comfortable during the data collection. Therefore, we have subsequently translated all student and teacher quotes throughout the text. Both student and teacher participation were voluntary, and all the participants have been given aliases with no connection to their identities (see also 3.5 below).

3.3 Questionnaires

Questionnaires are often handed out to a larger group of people when collecting answers on their views concerning a specific topic. We used the questionnaire as a basis to further develop questions in the interviews conducted with students in the focus group. Gillham (2000) lists a number of advantages when using a questionnaire, such as efficiency (in terms of researcher time) and researcher effort. Also, by using a questionnaire, researchers can collect a large amount of information in a relatively short time. However, similar to other methods, there are also disadvantages. Some disadvantages for the researcher(s) can be that it is impossible to double check the answers for mistakes, as well as the issue that participants sometimes give untruthful answers or provide answers they feel are “right” rather than what they actually feel or believe (Dörnyei, 2003, p.12). Furthermore, questionnaires do not always focus on answering the “why” behind answers and can therefore be ruled as one-dimensional. Thus, questionnaires could be used as the first step of collecting data when doing research but should be followed up by interviews to strengthen the validity and reliability of the results (p.15). In our study, all 57 participating upper secondary students answered our questionnaire.
The questionnaire contains both open and close questions to cover both qualitative and quantitative aspects of our study. Our question design was constructed after we finalized the phrasing of the research questions to make the questionnaire and research questions as harmonized as possible (see Appendix 8.1).

### 3.4 Interviews

As argued by Kvale (2007), interviewing is key to determining people's honest opinions (p.1). Furthermore, as suggested by Dörnyei (2007, p.136), the interview guides we have created are semi-structured and have open-ended questions (see Appendix 8.2 and 8.3). Our research consists of a focus group interview with four upper secondary students of English 6, and individual, in-depth interviews with three upper secondary teachers of English 6. The interviews with the teachers took place at the school they are working on, in a conference room and a staff room respectively. As for the students in the focus group interview, the interviews were held in their classroom with only the participants and us present. To make the students in our focus group more comfortable, we went through the guidelines from Vetenskapsrådet (2002) and assured them that no one will access the interviews in their entirety apart from us. Also, the students were completely anonymous and did not have to state their names on record.

Regarding the interview structure, interviews can be divided into three categories: structured interviews, unstructured interviews and semi-structured interviews; however, our study consists of interviews that are semi-structured with open-ended questions. Semi-structured interviews are structured and there are guidelines to follow, yet there is also flexibility. Dörnyei (2007) defines it as follows: “...the format is open-ended and the interviewee is encouraged to elaborate on the issues raised in an exploratory manner. In other words, the interviewer provides guidance and direction (hence the structured part in the name) but is also keen to follow up on interesting developments and to let the interviewee elaborate on certain issues (hence the semi part)” (p.136).

Moreover, as with other research methods, interviewing as a method can be both advantageous and ineffective. Kvale (2007) claims that since an interview is very much conversation-like, people tend to be more relaxed, and therefore, more open (p.1). However, Bryman (2004) argues that there are disadvantages as well, with the risk of the participants rather expressing themselves and giving answers depending on what they believe the researcher wants to hear. Furthermore, conducting interviews is also highly time consuming, mostly for the researcher(s)
but also for the participant(s). However, due to the flexibility of interview-form, researchers have the possibility to ask clarifying questions straight away and therefore do not have to worry about not collecting the relevant data for their study (Dörnyei, 2007, p.40).

3.5 Research ethics

In our study, we have followed the GDPR (The General Data Protection Regulation) guidelines for how to collect and store data when conducting a research study (Datainspektionen, 2019), as well as the four principles for research ethics provided by Vetenskapsrådet (2002). They are as follows:

1) The obligation to inform the participants with all necessary information surrounding the study, such as their involvement, their right to anonymity, and their right to resign from the study at any point (Vetenskapsrådet, p.7). To make sure that we followed the principle correctly we informed the participants of their rights when meeting them for interviewing. Also, the same information was stated explicitly on the consent forms signed by all the participants taking part in interviews.

2) This principle relates to the matter of consent. All participants have to give consent and sign a form; however, for students under the age of 15 the consent from a legal guardian is needed (p.9). Since all of the students participating in this study are over the age of 15, they were able to decide on their involvement themselves: thus, legal guardians do not take any part in the decision making or signing of consent forms.

3) The third principle involves anonymity and its importance. The identity of the participants, and in this case also the school, was completely anonymized (Vetenskapsrådet, p.12). To follow this principle, we gave all the teachers and students aliases with no connection to their identities.

4) Lastly, the fourth principle concerns the data collection. The data collected will not be used in any other study without the consent of the participants and will have been be destroyed upon finalizing the study (p.14).
4. Results

The findings in our research are presented in three different sections. The order is as follows: 1) *Formative assessment on writing*, 2) *Student perceptions and actions following different forms of formative assessment*, and 3) *Student and teacher perceptions on instructions, learning intentions, knowledge requirements and success criteria*. We combine the data from different data sets to illuminate these three themes.

4.1 Formative assessment on writing

In this section we present the findings connected to questions 1, 3 and 4 from the questionnaire (see Appendix 8.1). We have also added relevant comments that were made during the focus group interview with students, along with the teachers’ perspective and quotes from their interviews.

4.1.1 Student perspective

![Figure 1: How the teachers are commenting](image)

As visible in Figure 1, most students report varying experiences on *how* they receive feedback. 36% answered that their teacher writes comments throughout the text, and 31% answered that their teacher provides them with comments and a grade. 18% stated that their teacher gives them comments at the end of the text, whilst 15% stated “other” than the options above. Some of the students who ticked “Other” offered further comments. One student added to the “other”
option by stating: “We receive grades and oral comments in the form of discussion of the text with teachers”. Other students mentioned that they "usually get comments continuously through the text, then a summary of the comments at the end and then finally a grade", and that the type of comment "depends on what text it is".

In the focus group interview, we asked students to elaborate and comment on the question with more in-depth examples. They clarified by stating that even though teacher feedback differs depending on the text type, it is usually structured in the same way. S1 clarified: “There is usually both comments throughout the text and a summary at the end, that is something that is always consistent. However, sometimes we have to wait before receiving the grade, sometimes we get it straight away, and sometimes we don’t get graded. It depends on whether it is an argumentative essay or a poem, for example” The other three students agreed with S1’s statement.

To summarize the findings related to question 1 in the questionnaire, the results show that students receive varied feedback. This can be seen by looking at the spread of student answers under Figure 1. In the focus group interview, students agreed on the issue and further stated that feedback can sometimes differ, depending on the different text types.

![Figure 2, When teachers are commenting](image)

Figure 2 shows that a great percentage of students share similar opinions on question 3 in the questionnaire, regarding where the received feedback can be found. 38% of students stated that the comments are found in connection to what the teachers want them to pay attention to, while
37% answered that there are both general and localizable comments with a clear division. However, 14% claim that the comments are more general, and not in connection to what the teachers want them to pay attention to, while 11% chose “other”; for example, one student added: “Not always clear, i.e. requires verbal explanation for understanding”. Additional comments under “other” read “Comments are on specific errors that I should pay attention to, but also general comments, or repeated errors”, and “Usually smaller comments in the text that are bound together at the end with a larger comment. No specifics”.

To summarize the findings from question 3 in the questionnaire, students’ perceptions did not differ a lot. The vast majority agree on where the feedback is located and claim that it is found in proximity to what the teachers want them to pay attention to. However, 14% report that the comments are not in connection to what the teacher wants them to pay attention to, making the feedback hard to use to develop their writing.

Figure 3 demonstrates that 24% of students mostly receive comments on grammar, spelling, word choice and punctuation, while 21% receive comments on structure and disposition. 19% receive comments on sentence structure, while 15% ticked the option for getting comments on the text as a whole. 12% get comments on how the text is adapted to purpose and recipient, and 9% chose “other”. The percentages show that teacher feedback is versatile and does not only focus on surface-level features.
In the questionnaire under “other”, student comments varied; for example, some of the students offered the following comments: “We often get detailed comments and many aspects are addressed”, but also “[feedback] usually varies, but I would say that grammar is most consistent”. However, we also received comments about feedback on high-level concerns of writing: “mostly about how the text should be adapted to purpose and recipient”, and “mainly I get feedback on the text as a whole with structure and purpose in focus. Smaller grammar and spelling errors usually do not affect the grade”.

To summarize the findings from question 4 in the questionnaire, students report often receiving comments on grammar, spelling, word choice and punctuation. However, students’ perceptions vary, and the results displayed in Figures 1-3 demonstrate an almost equal division between the different types of feedback. However, even though there is a slight reported predominance for surface-level features, the results could also reflect that students may perceive such features as easier to grasp compared with more in-depth structural errors.

4.1.2 Teacher Perspective

When conducting the teacher interviews, we asked questions linked to the student questionnaire (see Appendix 8.1). However, teachers did not answer a questionnaire, but instead they answered questions based on our teacher interview guide (see Appendix 8.3). Due to semi-structured interview form and open-ended questions, the teachers added comments without focusing only on or directly answering the questions.

When asked about their perceptions on how, where and what they give feedback on, T1 stated “Both throughout the text as well as a small summary at the end. I write my comments like questions, I want the students to read my comments as if we are having a dialogue”, and then further stated that, “I comment on what I see the student is struggling with of course, however, if I see a development from a previously written text to the one I’m currently giving feedback on, I always make sure to mention that (orally) to the student as well.”

Moreover, T2 on the same topic offered that “Most of the time I try to be detailed and point out specific errors, both in-text and in a summary I write at the end, so I usually give both general and localizable comments, but not all the time on every text”. T2 gave an example and explained “Sometimes I ask my students to pick two focus areas they would like me to pay
extra attention to in their texts, for example grammatical issues such as subject-verb agreement, etc.”. Similar to both T1 and T2, T3 stated “My comments are mostly throughout the text and about the text as a whole, however, if I see specific errors, I address that too, of course. And mostly it is grammatical issues”.

In summary, the teachers’ answers on how they give feedback, where feedback can be found, and on what the feedback is mostly about, clearly show that all three teachers use similar strategies for giving feedback. The teachers usually write comments throughout the text and provide both general and localizable comments. Also, they all state that they address specific errors if they see a student is struggling with a particular linguistic feature. T1 also provides oral feedback when commenting on the development between students’ previous writing compared to the text at hand, while T2 sometimes focuses extra on two specific areas aside from the overall comments. By comparing the teacher answers with the student answers, it is clear that they agree on questions concerning how they receive feedback and on what they receive feedback, even though the students wish for the teachers to be even more explicit when giving feedback. However, there is a difference between teacher and student answers on where feedback can be found, since 14% of students claim they are not always able to locate the feedback in connection to where the teachers want them to direct their attention. This discrepancy and the students’ wish for more explicit feedback may be elevated by developing common metalanguage for feedback on writing.

4.2 Student perceptions and actions following different forms of formative assessment

In this section we present the findings connected to questions 2, 5, 6 and 7 from the questionnaire (see Appendix 8.1). We have also added relevant comments that were made during the focus group interview. The teacher perspective is left out in this section since all questions were directed at the students. Instead, teacher comments that are relevant for this section are discussed in section 5.
Question 2 examined how students perceived criticism and praise on their writing. 44% of the students stated that they thought there was a good balance between criticism and praise and that they tried to take in both. A lower percentage, 29%, answered that they appreciated that the teacher provided both criticism and praise, but that they mostly acted on the criticism. This could be compared to 6% who also appreciated the feedback, but instead reported that they mostly focused on the praise. The numbers above show that 79% of the students do appreciate criticism and praise on their writing, but that they focus on different aspects of the feedback. 4% of the students stated that there is no balance between praise and criticism and that they found comments difficult (to take in). 16% ticked the box “other”; some of these students also added extra comments in the questionnaire: “Sometimes I think that too much energy is added to the criticism and they do not mention very much what we have done right”, ”Criticism often gives concrete improvement opportunities, and praise gives encouragement and to some extent confirmation; the combination and the balance between them is important”, and ”Both are important, but praise is important to increase self-confidence”.

To summarize the answers to question 2 in the questionnaire, a vast majority, 79%, appreciated criticism and praise on their writing. However, more students were focused on criticism (29%) compared to praise (6%). Only 4% did not perceive a good balance between praise and criticism, and they also found teacher comments difficult to understand. 16% ticked the box “other” and provided extra comments. One student felt that the feedback was not balanced,
while the other comments mostly pointed out the importance of having a balance between praise and criticism.

Question 5 in the questionnaire shows what students do with the feedback they receive on their writing. Unfortunately, response rate for this question was low: 36 out of 57 did not answer. Below are quotes from answers representing the three modi operandi that were most prevalent among the students: to save and use the feedback in future assignments, to save the feedback but never use it, to read the feedback to possibly use in the future without saving it. The question read “Describe as clearly as possible what you do with feedback you receive on your writing. Are you reading the comments or just looking at the grade? Do you read the comments more than once? Do you forget them after reading, or do you save them somewhere to be able to look at them again for the next written task?” (see Appendix 8.1). Here are some of the typical student answers:

"I save all my comments and texts. Before a test such as the national test, I look at my texts again to see what went wrong last time”. (save and use)
"I save all my comments and texts but tend not to look through it, either when I get them or before the next task”. (save and not use)
"I read the comments carefully but then I save neither the texts nor the comments”. (read, but not save)

Despite the low response rate, these results demonstrate an even distribution between the three groups of students regarding what they do with their feedback. Some students saved all comments and texts and used them for improving on future assignments, some students saved all feedback and comments but tended to never make use of them, and, finally, some students read comments and feedback carefully but did not save the material for future assignments.
Figure 5 illustrates that 42% of students perceive teacher feedback as advice on what they can improve in their writing as whole, 38% perceive it as an aid for developing their writing and achieving higher grades. 9% choose “other”, 6% claim that they do not put too much focus on the feedback they receive and that the grade is more important than the feedback, 5% state they perceive teacher feedback as (negative) criticism.

In the questionnaire under “other”, a student clarified “If I get a good grade then I tend to focus less on the comments, but in cases with worse grades, I always read the comments”. When asking the students in the focus group interview to develop, they shared somewhat similar views and offered some more detail. S1 claimed “For example, let’s say I get a low grade, then I read the comments to try and figure out what was missing so that I can improve my writing till next time, but if it’s a B and I’m satisfied with that grade, I might not even look at the comments because they’re not important enough for me, the importance here is that I got a high grade”. While S2 expressed an opposite view: “I disagree, I always look at the feedback no matter the grade. If I did good, I want to know specifically what was good and remember it till next time, and if I didn’t receive a high grade, I read the comments and make sure not to make the same mistakes next time. Either way, the comments are always helpful and useful”.

Question 7 (see Appendix 8.1) in the questionnaire focused on what students think will help them to improve their writing the most. The students were given alternatives to consider: handwritten comments from the teacher, digital comments from the teacher, oral feedback, peer response, general commentary on the whole text, comments on more specific issues, comments
on the text structure, comments on grammar and spelling, or other. Response rate was rather low on this question as well: 21 out of 57 students answered the question. The answers showed an even distribution of the different alternatives except from “oral feedback” which stood out. 12 out of 21 answers mentioned oral feedback in a positive manner; for example,

“Handwritten comments combined with oral feedback because it makes it clearer”.
“I think that both oral feedback and written comments help, the oral clarifies the written”.
“I feel that oral feedback affects me better than, for example, written feedback”.
“Oral feedback, it remains longer”.

Despite the low response rate on question 7, a clear pattern emerged regarding what feedback the students believed would have positive impact on their writing. Oral feedback was frequently mentioned in the questionnaire in a positive manner while the other suggested alternatives were distributed more evenly and were less frequent. This may be connected to the fact that in face-to-face interactions, students and teachers may negotiate the feedback in a clearer way. In turn, this may point to a certain lack of shared metalanguage for feedback on writing. If students and teachers share the feedback metalanguage, the teachers’ written and oral feedback should be equally accessible to students.

4.3 Perceptions on instructions, learning intentions, knowledge requirements and success criteria

This section is connected to our third research question (How do some upper secondary teachers report clarifying, sharing, and explaining learning goals and criteria for success to their English 6 students?). However, since our study is focusing on the student perspective, this section initially presents relevant student answers from the questionnaire completed with thoughts from the students in the focus group. Notably, questions 8, 9 and 10 in the questionnaire were the only questions that did not offer the opportunity to add comments (“other”). This is balanced by including more data from the student focus interviews instead. The teacher perspective, with interview quotes, is presented at the end of this section.
4.3.1 Student perspective

Figure 6 shows that a clear majority of the students, 68%, feel confident about how to achieve the knowledge requirements in English 6 regarding written production. However, when the students in the focus group were asked to elaborate further on this question, they started in unison that they did not feel confident about the knowledge requirements. It was also clear that the focus group tightly connected the knowledge requirements with the grade criteria. For example, S1 illustrated this by saying: “You know that you are supposed to write in proper English, but not more than that. Maybe it is ignorance, because I have always reasoned that a B is good enough, I don’t care about the A then. Therefore, I have never checked the criteria or rubric afterwards.” This statement was obviously very subjective and tied to the student’s own goals and reflections, but S4 offered a similar explanation on a more general level: “I think that if you are not doing so well, you will focus on the grade criteria more. In that case, I think, you would try to find out what is required to reach the higher grades”. All students in the focus group found the above explanation reasonable and they also agreed that the difficulty of understanding knowledge requirements, in general, is not subject specific. To emphasize this, S2 remarked “I agree on that the knowledge requirements are unclear, but that goes for all subjects not only English”.

In summary, the questionnaire data showed that a clear majority (68%) felt confident about how to achieve the knowledge requirements regarding written production in English 6. However, in the small focus group (4 students) all agreed that generally knowledge requirements in
themselves are often unclear across subjects. The students seemed also to strongly connect knowledge requirements to grading criteria. The students’ answers suggest again important shared metalanguage is in feedback situations and in giving assignment instructions.

![Figure 7, Receive instructions on how to reach knowledge requirements](image)

Figure 7 displays data on whether the students usually receive instructions explaining what is required to reach knowledge requirements for a specific writing assignment. A majority, 61%, answered positively, but many students (39%) answered negatively which was also reinforced by the students in the focus group. The students agreed on that they receive instructions, but that the language that is often used to express the knowledge requirements can be a problem.

![Figure 8, Clear instructions](image)
Regarding how clear instructions on knowledge requirements are to students, 17% stated that they were not clear. On the other hand, 83% perceived instructions as quite or very clear. In the focus group, the students presented examples of what they thought was unclear.

For example, S1 stated “I think that the knowledge requirements are unclear. The language is too formal, you get confused”. S3 partially agreed and suggested improvements that teachers in general should consider: “They (the teachers) should present the knowledge requirements and show examples and assess based on that. Also, what is ‘utförligt och nyanserat’? I think our teacher is good, we get clear instructions. They tell us to read instructions, plan, and think about the receiver (target audience). And we are also provided with examples on how to write the text”. When S3 pointed out the adjectives “utförligt och nyanserat” as problematic, the other students agreed and argued that it is impossible to know exactly what those adjectives mean if no text examples are selected and presented by the teacher beforehand.

In summary, a clear majority of the students found instructions to be quite/very clear to help them understand knowledge requirements. However, the focus group pointed out that certain language use, directly from Skolverket’s knowledge requirements, can hinder understanding of instructions and requirements. They also suggested that text examples should be used more often to illustrate the assignment objectives and the different grading criteria. We also concluded from the interview that teacher instructions were clear in general, but that the difficulty for the students was to connect the more concrete language in the instructions to the often more abstract language of the knowledge requirements.

4.3.2 Teacher perspective

The teachers in our study did not answer questions directly linked to the students’ questionnaire. Instead, during our interviews with the teachers they had the opportunity to speak freely and express their thoughts on how they introduce and clarify learning intentions and grading criteria to students.

T1 touched upon working with instructions in relation to Skolverket’s knowledge requirements: “I want my instructions to be permeated by the knowledge requirements. The students have access to the formal documents, of course, but the knowledge requirements should be visible in my instructions. I also work with modules where the oral and the written parts support each
other.” T1 also commented on clarification of learning intentions to the students: “I also try to start each week by connecting what we have done and where we are going, and why.”

On this topic, regarding frequency and timing of sharing the intentions and criteria with the students, T2 linked to changes in the teacher education: “I think that teacher students now are more focused on connecting every lesson to the learning goals. Of course, I am also presenting learning goals and knowledge requirements to my students, but not on a lesson to lesson basis.” T3 also reasoned in this direction, but pointed out that how she shared learning intentions and assessment criteria had changed due to student reactions to the official documents: “If I look back a few years, I often copied the original documents from Skolverket and handed them out to the students. But I soon realized that almost all students just threw them away. So now, I go through the knowledge requirements on the whiteboard and explain the requirements directly, and I also point out that the National Test is not everything. I try to repeat this when we summarize the fall semester: think about this…etc”.

When we discussed this topic with the teachers, it was apparent that they all had strategies for how and when to share learning intentions and assessment criteria with the students. Two of the teachers pointed out that practices change over the years. One of the teachers perceived a paradigm shift regarding how frequent teachers share this information with their students and suggested that new teacher students are more focused on clarifying leaning intentions and assessment criteria on a lesson-to-lesson basis. Lastly, all three teachers reported using conscious strategies when trying to bridge the gap between official documents and their own instructions.
5. Discussion

In this section, we discuss the findings from the results to provide answers to our research questions. The discussion is underpinned by previous research and statements from Skolverket.

5.1 Research question 1

*How do some upper secondary students perceive, and report acting on, different forms of formative assessment they encounter regarding written production in English 6?*

From the results, we can determine that the vast majority of students perceive formative assessment on writing to be of great value, and the majority also claim that there is a good balance between criticism and praise even though some students are more prone to take in criticism whilst others focus more on the received praise. Zumbrunn et al (2016) conducted a study where they asked 600 students, ranging from middle-school to upper-secondary school, to what extent they appreciated feedback, their confidence as writers and their independence as a writer. The results showed that students with high confidence and independence were also those who appreciated feedback the most, while students with low confidence and independence did not appreciate feedback to the same extent. Moreover, it was argued that teachers should think more about not only what kind of feedback they provide to students, but also how their feedback can be perceived by the students (p.35). Student answers in our questionnaire illustrated and reinforced that the perception of praise and criticism in feedback is indeed highly individual, and it is clear that student perception and reactions differ widely (see figure 4).

Also, we found during our focus group interview with students, that even though all students shared similar beliefs with regards to criticism and praise, there was a difference in how they perceived the feedback. The students’ opinions differed depending on whether or not they perceived themselves as being strong or weak students of English, and depending on the grade they currently had in English. It was clear, however, that the majority of students seemed to be satisfied with what their teachers were giving them feedback on and claimed that there was a good balance. Dweck (2015) describes how too much praise can harm student motivation, and that too much praise tends to make students overly confident. Consequently, there should always be a balance between positive feedback and constructive feedback. In the specific school where the interviewed teachers work at, and the interviewed students attend, we can therefore
conclude that the balance in the feedback seem to correlate well to what is suggested in previous studies.

Many students wished for their teachers to be more clear when giving both criticism and praise. In the focus group interview, when asked to elaborate, all students claimed that they did not entirely understand what they did well and what they needed to develop, because the “why” was often missing. The exact same issue is discussed in a study by Kronholm-Cederberg (2009), in where students from a different school context also claimed that they do not always understand what their teachers mean, with a student stating that “I learn nothing if I just get to know that an area is underdeveloped and poorly written, but I DO NOT get to know WHY, or suggestions on WHAT I can do to make it better” (p.230). Students in our focus group interview claimed that the teachers often seem to take for granted that they should understand the feedback they are receiving, when often they do not understand it. Interestingly, several students further argued that their teachers often ask them to be more clear, while they perceive the teachers not being clear themselves. In a research series conducted by Ellis (1994), the same issue is investigated and the findings there also point to similar results (p.641). 20 percent of students claimed that they did not understand the feedback they were receiving from teachers and that it was not clear, suggesting that the opinions from students in our study are not unique. In that research, the opinions of the teachers were not discussed. However, in our study, all teachers seemed to believe that they are clear when providing feedback, suggesting that students and teachers do not agree on the specific topic. Perhaps, more preparatory and regular work in class on developing common metalanguage for writing may alleviate these issues.

Additionally, it was strongly pointed out by students that they wish for their teachers to combine their written feedback with oral feedback to make it even clearer, and the majority of students (12 out of 21 answers we received) argued that oral feedback is what helps them improve their writing the most (see comments under figure 5). Previous studies seem to be in line with what these students are asking for and underline the positive effect of oral feedback when commenting on written production. Murtagh (2014) discusses the connection between oral comments and written feedback. The author also compares written feedback to the oral feedback and shows that written feedback tends to be more focused on linguistic errors rather than focused on other developing aspects as well, whereas oral feedback gives the teachers the opportunity to exemplify and clarify their comments to students. The importance of dialogue between teacher and student is highly stressed. Also, oral feedback seems to work in several
other ways than only to clarify the written comments and make them understandable for the students. By having a dialogue, teachers can also provide students with suggested models on “how to”. Thus, teachers and students have the possibility to exchange ideas on how to develop the text even further, and at the same time help the students to become better writers. Hence, oral feedback makes it easier to let students know how to develop their writing on several aspects than solely commenting on linguistic ones. In the study (2014), a student stated the following: “When the teacher explains and gives you models it’s very valuable. Gives you “WOW” ideas, telling you this is what you are heading for… (p.529)”. Therefore, taken from the answers given to us by students and results from previous studies, the conclusion can be drawn that oral feedback is of huge importance for students writing development, most importantly, when touching upon several aspects of writing and not only linguistic ones.

However, despite its obvious advantages, oral, face-to-face feedback is often even more time consuming than written feedback. There may be a need of a compromise between the wishes of the students and the teachers’ workload that is afforded by the latest technological developments. Nowadays, there are many apps and programmes supporting oral and video feedback. Such mode of feedback can be less time consuming and easier to administer.

Additionally, previous studies also show that oral feedback is a significant part of feedback. Vygotsky (1986) claims that oral feedback given by the teacher is one of the most important aspects of student development, and that the relationship between teacher and student plays an important role. Also, he claims that the learning occurs between individuals and contextualized social environment, in which spoken language plays a central role. Obviously, we can determine that oral feedback seems to be of great importance for both students in our study, and for students in previous studies, which suggests that it is crucial for student development. However, as Linnarud (2002:2) states, the aspect of time should not be forgotten. Due to teachers sometimes stressful schedules and duties, there is not always time for one-to-one interaction with each student after each assignment. Thus, the high quality feedback the students are asking for is often very limited. This is also pointed out to be problematic by all three teachers in our study. As mentioned before, both students in our study as well as students from other studies claim that oral feedback is something they regard as very beneficial and highly effective. Therefore, we suggest that teachers work on finding an effective form of feedback that allows them to provide students with the feedback students feel is most beneficial, without having to spend extra time on it. For example, oral feedback can be given in form of audio or
video feedback with the help of the nowadays numerous digital tools. By providing the students with in-text comments and audio/video comments at the same time, teachers save time while students receive both comments and oral feedback. Also, teachers can explain in detail and clarify their written comments, which is something the students in our study explicitly asked for. Such feedback is less transient than oral face-to-face feedback, in that students can re-listen or re-watch it and do not need only to rely on their memory of the interaction. While working on this study, we ourselves have received audio feedback from our supervisor, and we feel it has clarified the in-text comments we received. In addition, research shows that students generally are positive to this mode of feedback (Anson, 2017).

A possible drawback of optional oral feedback is that not every student takes the opportunity when it arises. For example, T3 reported offering all of her students to meet in class an hour before school starts once a week, where they can ask questions about feedback they have received on previous texts. However, she noticed that it is always the same two or three students who show up and want to discuss the feedback, and they are the stronger students of English. Now, it is interesting that even though T3 does offer the students in our study exactly what they claim they want and need, they do not take the opportunity when given to them. Similar to T3, T2 claim that her students know that they are always welcome to see her after class if they have any questions or want to discuss the feedback. Yet, the students almost never take this chance, except for, once again, the stronger students. Further research on why only the stronger students take the opportunities given to them, while the vast majority of students in our study claim to want oral feedback more, is thus needed. However, Najeeb (2013) underlines three principles connected to learner autonomy in language learning which need to be in place and which can clarify such lack of student motivation: teacher’s must 1) “engag[e] learners to share responsibility for the learning process”, 2) “help[.] learners to think critically when they plan, monitor and evaluate their learning”, and 3) “us[e] the target language as the principal medium of language learning” (p.1239). In our study, it is highly possible that the students simply do not understand the importance of their own engagement in their learning process and therefore put too much responsibility on the teachers. Therefore, this indicates that the teachers should put extra emphasis on communicating the importance of student motivation and self-awareness to the students.

Furthermore, a majority of students in our study claim that they tend to focus more on the grades then on the comments they receive as formative assessment, which is also highlighted by one
teacher as highly problematic. Thus, T1 uses a strategy in order for the students to take in the feedback. First, T1 gives feedback in form of written comments (and sometimes a very brief oral comment) and then, after approximately a week, gives the grade. This strategy is used to make students less grade focused and hopefully more feedback focused. However, we noticed a clear pattern when collecting the data on how students act upon receiving feedback, and three groups of answers emerged: 1) Save and use, 2) Save and not use, and 3) Read, but not use. It was also clear during the focus group interview that the stronger students of English often are the ones who save and read the teacher feedback before writing future assignments. This can be connected to what T2 and T3 point out, that it is the stronger students who ask questions, discuss, and save their feedback, whilst weaker students are not as actively engaged in their own development. One way to make this strategy even more efficient is to ask students for revisions or a revision plan based on the feedback received before grading their written production. Further research is needed in order to pinpoint why the stronger and the weaker students do not utilise the opportunities equally. Therefore, we suggest further research with focus on learner autonomy, student motivation and self-awareness.

To conclude, a majority of students appreciate and value formative feedback on written production. Students also seem to be satisfied with the division between praise and criticism, as teachers seem to provide both parts according to what is suggested in previous studies. However, students want the teachers to be clearer when giving feedback, and strongly wish for oral feedback on written texts to occur more often in order to discuss and clarify, which they claim is key in order to understand what teachers mean. Working on the shared metalanguage could be part of the solution to this issue. Lastly, we suggest that further research on student perceptions and acting upon receiving feedback is needed, most importantly on the issue concerning stronger and weaker students, with the hope to find a solution on how teachers can engage weaker students to an equally broad extent as stronger students, as well as how to increase student motivation and self-awareness.

5.2 Research question 2

What do some upper secondary teachers perceive as key strategies in formative assessment for improving students’ writing, and how do they report applying these strategies when teaching English 6?
Our second research question was discussed during the teacher interviews. All teachers reported that they applied key strategies on formative assessment in their daily work, but it was also obvious that they implemented them differently with regard to both details and frequency. These differences in details and frequency are perfectly logical since the teachers in our study teach different groups of students, which means different learning. These different contexts are apparent when considering the three key processes in teaching: finding out where learners are in their learning, finding out where they are going, and finding out how to get there (Wiliam, 2011). Thus, there is no magic formula that is applicable in all contexts, and therefore teachers have to make situational and contextual decisions on when and how often they apply the key strategies of formative assessment. This conclusion was confirmed by all our teacher interviewees. All teacher interviewees stated that they tried to give varied feedback on student texts which included specific comments throughout the text as well as a summary at the end. Furthermore, they all pointed out the importance of establishing a dialogue with the students in order to facilitate for writing development. This is in line with Alston & Brown (2015) who concluded from their research the importance of broad and varied feedback. Additionally, they also found that students developed their writing more if they were given challenging assignments in conjunction with ongoing feedback during the writing process. Our teacher interviewees all mentioned peer reviewing as a formative strategy when working with writing as a process. T1 and T2 had slightly different experiences from peer reviewing. T1 stated that it was sometimes difficult to work with peer reviewing because the efficiency of peer review depended heavily on the students’ maturity. Furthermore, students sometimes did not trust the peers’ judgments on texts. T2, on the other hand, worked more often with this strategy and perceived that the students mostly appreciated this method. Interestingly, all teachers agreed that peer reviewing was very time efficient: it was time saving when working with process writing. By using the students as resources, the teachers then had more time for dialogue, and they also mentioned that the submitted papers in general were of higher quality when using peer reviewing. Studies from both Igland (2008) and Alston & Brown (2015) support that feedback during the writing process is a success factor and despite some students fear of not getting enough high quality feedback from peers, we concluded from our interviews that the teachers really tried to work with this strategy albeit with different experiences and outcomes. Lundström and Baker (2009) conducted a study where they measured L2 writer’s improvement when being either givers or receivers of feedback. Their results suggested that students who were taught to give peer feedback improve in their own writing abilities more than students taught to use peer feedback. One reason for this may be that students become better at self-
evaluation when reviewing other students’ texts as this makes them more critically aware when revising their own writing. Those skills may not be developed when students are only taught to interpret feedback given from others, peers or teachers (Lundstrom and Baker, 2009). Therefore, it is important to give the students the right tools to develop their writing through peer-review activities. Thus, lessons on both how to give quality feedback and how to work with received feedback are crucial to make students see the benefits of peer reviewing from both sides, both as a reviewer and a reviewee. In addition, this may be a good way to work on the common understanding and use of the metalanguage. Consequently, we believe that a lot more could be done in terms of collegial learning and sharing to develop peer reviewing further as a working method for both teachers and students.

To summarize the teachers’ views on key strategies on formative assessment, they all have similar thoughts on how to best apply these strategies in order to develop the students’ writing. They all report writing specific comments throughout the texts and providing both general and localizable comments. Additionally, they all stated the importance of having a working dialogue with the students. On peer reviewing, they all agreed on the potential of using this method, although they had experienced different outcomes. Furthermore, there seems to be no collegial discussion on this topic at the school. All interviewees also mentioned the importance of sharing and clarifying learning goals as a key part of formative assessment which is discussed next (see 5.3).

5.3 Research question 3

How do some upper secondary teachers report clarifying, sharing, and explaining learning goals and criteria for success to their English 6 students?

Our results show that most teachers and students agree on the importance of having clear learning intentions, knowledge requirements and criteria for success. We had the participating teachers explain to us how, and when, they shared learning intentions, knowledge requirements and grading criteria with the students, but we also asked the students through our questionnaire and focus group interview how they perceived learning intentions, knowledge requirements and grading criteria. We found that, in general, learning intentions, knowledge requirements and grading criteria were consistently shared with the students, although in different ways and with different timing. The strategy of sharing learning intentions in the classroom is a rather new phenomenon (Wiliam, 2011), which was also commented on by T2: “I think that teacher
students nowadays are more focused on connecting every lesson to the learning goals. I am also presenting learning goals and knowledge requirements to my students, but not on a lesson to lesson basis.” T2 had a slightly different approach where she consistently repeated and shared, learning intentions and learning goals on a weekly basis. T3 acknowledged that her strategy has changed over the years, and she now plans more time for the explanations to students.

The different approaches above are not to be judged as right or wrong. According to Wiliam (2011), there are no simple rules when it comes to how and when to share learning intentions, knowledge requirements and grading criteria with the students. Instead, he points out that it is up to the individual teacher’s professional judgment regarding the best way to communicate intentions and criteria to the students in each particular context (p.69). It should be pointed out that the three teachers in our research are all very experienced. All three teachers have at least 20 years of experience as in-service teachers, and all of them have worked on different levels and in more than one school. Additionally, in the documents on formative assessment, there are no specific guidelines for teachers on how and when to clarify learning intentions or success criteria to students, instead the core message reads: “Students need to understand the purpose of the teaching and the goals need to be clear and relevant to the teaching situation” (Skolverket, 2019). From our interviews and questionnaire, we can conclude that teachers do share and clarify learning intentions and success criteria with their students, albeit in different ways. On the same topic, but with the student perspective in mind, some of our questions were rather geared towards how students understand this sharing and clarifying of learning intentions and success criteria.

When asked “Do you feel confident about what is required to achieve the knowledge requirements in English 6 regarding written production?”, a majority of students answered affirmatively. However, when students motivated their answers in the focus group a contradictory pattern emerged. The focus group started in unison by answering that they did not feel confident about the knowledge requirements and seemed to confuse the knowledge requirements with the grading criteria. The interviewed students expressed somewhat negative sentiments to the formulations of knowledge requirements and instructions for specific written assignments.
Undoubtedly, much of the language in steering documents, curricula and rubrics is often very formal, or “official”. Degree of formality came up many times during the focus group interview, and the teachers also recognized this and described different approaches in order to address language formality in instructions and steering documents. One of the teachers said that they both pointed out the official documents to the students as well as re-wrote them in a more student-friendly language: “The students have access to the formal documents, of course, but the knowledge requirements should be visible in my instructions”. Wiliam (2011) finds merit in such approach, but he also underlines that students should come to terms with official language since it is part of the process: official language is often discipline defining (p.65). During the interview, the students often pointed out the importance of being provided with examples in order to understand knowledge requirements and “quality”. More effort can therefore be devoted to the development of a shared disciplinary metalanguage, a bank of concrete examples, and a common understanding of knowledge requirements and the grading criteria/rubric.

This practical technique is also highlighted by Wiliam (2011) who argues that showing examples of other students’ work helps them to understand learning intentions and success criteria (p.65). By doing this, students can identify strengths and weaknesses in the provided examples and also easier “de-code” official language in steering documents and rubrics. The students were also asked a question where they could grade to what extent instructions were clear to them in order to understand knowledge requirements (not clear, fairly clear and very clear). Notably, the posed question does not consider the difference between knowledge requirements in general or for a specific assignment, and therefore the answers could only be analyzed in light of how students perceive instructions in general. 65% of the students stated that they found the instructions to be quite clear, whilst 18% answered that instructions were very clear. 17% stated that instructions were not clear. Analyzed positively, one could argue that 83% found instructions to be clear to some degree. On the other hand, 17% of the students did not find the instructions to be clear and for future research it would be valuable to interview students in this category further, and divide general and specific instructions, in order to find reasons and possible solutions for enabling an even more positive result in this area. Lastly, we also believe that metalanguage must be more purposely shared (and taught/learned) between staff and students to further clarify learning intentions and to facilitate students’ understanding of language learning resources as well as teacher feedback.
6. Conclusion

Our research focused on how students perceive and act upon different forms of formative assessment. Additionally, we examined how teachers share and explain learning intentions and criteria for success to their students. Knowing that research within this area is much needed, we tried to make our methods as valid and replicable as possible. Hence, our hope is that research in this area can be expanded and given more resources moving forward. By embedding the student perspective and letting the students’ voices be heard in conjunction with our research questions, we believe that this research study brought new insights and data to a research area that is in dire need of focused material in both quantity and quality. A few main conclusions can be drawn from our study. Previous research shows the importance of feedback variation, and our results show that both students and teachers perceived that they were both given, and handing out, varied feedback respectively. However, regarding feedback clarity there seemed to be a slight discrepancy in perception between students and teachers. Another clear finding was that students highly appreciate oral feedback in conjunction to written comments, and that they want more formative assessment in oral form. The teacher interviewees all had different strategies to accommodate this wish, but they also mentioned how time consuming this activity is, which was their reason for oral feedback being quite scarce during a school term. However, the teachers also added that they always have their door open for students who wants additional feedback, but they also noted that it was only, in general, the stronger students who asked for additional guidance. This gap in ambition and motivation between stronger and weaker students is something that needs to be addressed and researched in order to enable the full potential of effective formative assessment. Regarding how teachers share learning intentions and criteria for success to their students, we found different approaches through our interviews. The difference between the teachers in this area had less to do with content but instead they had different strategies on timing and frequency as to when, and in what context, learning intentions were presented. Instead, the major find in this area was how students, in many cases, have trouble understanding meta language (or formal, official language in school documents). Many students expressed that they wanted more examples that visualized, or explained, the meaning behind the used metalanguage. All teachers stated that they tried to clarify the formal language in learning intentions, but given the data we collected in this study more has to be done in this area. Interestingly, some students pointed out that problems with understanding formal school language was not specific for English, but rather a general problem concerning all subjects.
After having interviewed the highly experienced and engaged teachers along with their English 6 students, we found that many aspects of formative assessment are working fine, but, as always, there is some room for improvement. We posed some suggestions for improvement in the discussion section, but as a general stance, we firmly believe that it takes more of collegial sharing and planning, as well as setting clear structures on metalanguage training within schools in order to facilitate effective formative assessment that reaches every student in an understandable way. As for time and resource constraints regarding oral feedback, we believe that digital tools will, and must, play a forefront part in modern classrooms moving forward.

6.1 Limitations

In spite of several significant findings, there are some limitations to our research study that should be addressed. Firstly, our study is limited in scope, and the number of participants thus may have affected the generalizability of our findings outside the given school context. However, even though the conclusions in this study are based on 57 student questionnaires, student focus group interviews with four students, and three teacher interviews, the data still offers insights on how students perceive formative assessment, how they report acting upon receiving formative assessment and how teachers describe their practice in the given school context.

6.2 Further research

To follow up on the results in this study, we would like to suggest several action research projects to develop a school-wide strategy for dealing with writing and feedback on writing. These projects stem from our discussion of the findings and encompass sharing metalanguage for writing; developing peer review as part of the writing process; providing feedback in audio and video form, using different digital tools; integrating revision into the writing process; and increasing learner autonomy, motivation and self-awareness.
7. References


8. Appendices

8.1 Questionnaire

Hej,
Om du har några frågor kan du nå oss på; rebeka.rafael@gmail.com eller marcus.oredsson@skola.malmo.se

En definition av formativ bedömning: "Formativ bedömning är den kontinuerliga bedömningsprocess där elever får en förståelse för vad som ska läras och olika kvaliteter i lärandet och där läraren genom sin bedömning anpassar (formerar, därav begreppet) undervisningen så att den bättre möter elevernas omedelbara inlärmingsbehov" (Black & Wiliam, 1998).

Med andra ord handlar formativ bedömning, eller lärarens respons/kommentarer, om att bedöma för att underlätta och utveckla elevers lärande (och underlätta för lärare att planera aktiviteter och uppgifter som för elever närmare lärandemålen). Därför kan man säga att formativ bedömning är bedömning för lärande till skillnad från summativ bedömning (betyg) som oftast mäter elevens kunskapsnivå vid ett specifikt tillfälle.
1. Kryssa i det alternativ som bäst stämmer överens (flera val är möjliga).
När jag har skrivit en text kommenterar läraren genom att...

☐ Skriva kommentarer genom hela texten.
☐ Skriva kommentarer i slutet av texten.
☐ Ge mig ett betyg med kommentarer (A, B, C, osv.)
☐ Annat:
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

2. Kryssa i det alternativ som bäst stämmer överens (flera val är möjliga).
Uppskattar du att läraren ger både beröm och kritik på ditt skrivande?

☐ Ja, men jag tar mest till mig av kritiken.
☐ Ja, men jag tar mest till mig berömmet.
☐ Ja, där finns oftast en bra balans mellan beröm och kritik och jag försöker ta till mig av båda.
☐ Nej, för jag tar mest till mig av kritiken.
☐ Nej, för jag tar mest till mig av berömmet.
☐ Nej, där finns oftast inte en bra balans mellan beröm och kritik och jag har svårt för att ta till mig kommentarerna jag får.

Annan/tillägg:
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
3. Kryssa i det alternativ som bäst stämmer överens (flera val är möjliga).
När läraren kommenterar på mitt skrivande…

☐ Är kommentarerna oftast lokalisera in texten (dvs, kommentaren står i direkt anslutning till det läraren vill uppmärksamma mig på).
☐ Är kommentarerna oftast mer generella och inte skrivna i direkt anslutning till det läraren vill uppmärksamma mig på.
☐ Finns oftast både generella och lokalisera in kommentarer, men med tydlig uppdelning.
☐ Annat/tillägg:

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

4. Kryssa i det alternativ som bäst stämmer överens (flera val är möjliga).
Lärarens kommentarer på mina texter handlar oftast om:

☐ Grammatik, stavning, ordval och kommatering (punkt, komma, kolon, etc).
☐ Meningsbyggnad.
☐ Hur texten är anpassad efter syfte och mottagare/publik.
☐ Texten som helhet.
☐ Textens struktur och disposition (till exempel, om idéer/argument är begripliga och lätt att följa för läsaren).
☐ Annat/tillägg:

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

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☐ Lägger inte stor vikt vid det, betyget är viktigare.
☐ Uppfattar det som negativ kritik.
☐ Uppfattar det som tips och råd på vad jag kan förbättra i mitt skrivande överlag.
☐ Uppfattar det som hjälp för att utveckla mitt skrivande och nå ett högre betyg.
☐ Annat/tillägg:

7. Vad tycker du hjälper dig mest för att förbättra ditt skrivande? Till exempel, handskrivna kommentarer från läraren, kommentarer från
läraren digitalt, muntlig återkoppling, kamratrespons, generella kommentarer om hela texten, kommentarer om mer specifika problem, kommentarer på textens struktur, kommentarer om grammatik och stavning, eller annat. Motivera varför.

__________________________________________________________

Kryssa för det alternativ som bäst stämmer överens.

8. Känner du dig säker på vad som krävs för att uppnå kunskapskraven i Engelska 6 gällande skriftlig produktion (A,C,E)?
☐ Ja  ☐ Nej

9. Inför olika skrivuppgifter, får du då oftast instruktioner från läraren om vad som krävs för att nå kunskapskraven?
☐ Ja  ☐ Nej

10. När/om du får instruktioner, hur tydligt är det för dig vad du ska göra för att nå kunskapskraven?
☐ Inte tydligt  ☐ Ganska tydligt  ☐ Mycket tydligt

Tack igen för din medverkan!
8.2 Interview guide, student focus group

1. Hur uppfattar du det när du enbart får kommentarer och inte ett betyg i anslutning till en text? (Anknytning till fråga 1 i enkäten)

2. Hur kan beröm och kritik se ut i din text? Finns det bra och dålig beröm, kontra bra och dålig kritik? Ge exempel. (Anknytning till fråga 2 i enkäten)

3. Vilken del av kommentarerna är svårast att agera på/ta åt sig av/förändra? Ge exempel. (Anknytning till fråga 4 i enkäten)

   • Grammatik, stavning, ordval och kommatering (punkt, komma, kolon, etc).
   • Meningsbyggnad.
   • Hur texten är anpassad efter syfte och mottagare/publik.
   • Texten som helhet.
   • Textens struktur och disposition (till exempel, om idéer/argument är begripliga och lätt att följa för läsaren).

4. Hur värderar du återkopplingen/kommentarerna du får på ditt skrivande?
   Är det beroende av vilken typ av skrivuppgift det handlar om? Varför?
   (Anknytning till fråga 6 i enkäten)


8.3 Interview guide, teachers

Bakgrund
- Berätta om din utbildning.
- Berätta om din lärar erfarenhet.

Bedömning
- Hur arbetar du med formativ bedömning gällande elevers skriftliga produktion?
- Vilka nyckelstrategier använder du i formativ bedömning?
Exempel på strategier:

1. Klargöra lärandemål och bedömningskriterier.
2. Konstruera aktiviteter och uppgifter som utvecklar och visar elevers lärande.
3. Ge återkoppling som för lärandet framåt.
4. Använda eleverna själv som läranderesurs för varandra.
5. Aktivera eleverna som ägare av sitt eget arbete. Arbeta med metakognition.

- Hur anpassar du din bedömning till elevernas behov?
- Hur vet du att eleverna förstår din formativa bedömning och kan använda den för att utveckla sitt skrivande?

Lärarrollen
- Ni arbetar med kollegialt lärande. Till vilken utsträckning handlar era diskussioner om formativ bedömning?
- Vad innebär formativ bedömning för ditt arbete som engelsklärare? (Till exempel: tidsåtgång, planering, uppföljning)