Examensarbete
10 poäng

*Interpretation and Grading in the Current Grading System*

*Tolkning och betygssättning i det nuvarande betygssystemet*

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Lärarexamen 180 respektive 200 poäng
Moderna språk med inriktning mot undervisning och lärande i engelska.
Höstterminen 2006

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Abstract
This dissertation deals with the goal- and criterion-referenced grading system in use in Swedish schools today. We have chosen to investigate how teachers perceive the current grading system and what challenges they are faced with when grading in the English subject. The interest for this topic was deepened during our final in-school-practices after which we discussed the issue with each other and came to the conclusion that the grading system would be useful to delve into in order to feel more secure when leaving the teacher training college. The current grading system is debated in schools on a daily basis since it is a tool for teachers to work with.

Although the teachers give the impression of still having difficulties with the current grading system, the results show that the majority of the interviewees have grasped the system. It rather seems as if the difficulty is how to interpret different policy documents due to the fact that the goals and the criteria are of a general nature at times. A general opinion among most of the teachers is that they do not have difficulties with the grading itself in the current grading system. But they do, however, request further grading steps in order to be better able to explain where the students are on the grading scale. Moreover, we concluded that the teachers believe the system to benefit the students as well as themselves. Also, that it is necessary to continuously have discussions concerning the current grading system so as to better understand what it entails.

Keywords: the current grading system, policy documents, goals and criteria, grading, teachers’ perceptions.
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1 Introduction
Our experiences during most of our in-school-practices have been that there are still, after its launch in 1994, uncertainties among teachers concerning the current grading system and concerning the grading itself. What these uncertainties consist of, however, is something we have not yet been able to grasp. Is it that teachers still have difficulties with thinking according to the old relative grading system? Is it that it is difficult for teachers to understand the curriculum for the compulsory school system, i.e. the Lpo94, the national syllabus and the national grading criteria, and if so, why? Can it be that they still feel that they have very little knowledge about the “new” grading system, or have they just not been able to grasp the ideas behind it? Do teachers feel insecure when grading students in the English subject, and if so, what creates this insecurity? In “Betygsättandets etik” from Skolverket’s Att bedöma eller döma. Tio artiklar om bedömning och betygsättning, Roger Fjellström argues that:

   It is however often unclear how the criteria are supposed to be interpreted and implemented in the evaluation of the students’ achievements which then naturally reinforce the problems of assessment. The curriculum for the compulsory school system i.e. the Lpo94 has no longer the ambition to regulate in detail. The authorities’ purpose with the curriculum is to give a more distinct formulation at a local level. It is in other words a sketch which requires interpretation and supplementation in order to become applicable in practice. (2002, p 78. Our translation)

The uncertainties mentioned above do create a few worries. In the near future we are going to be the ones grading students in the English subject, and given that the implementation of the current grading system seems fairly complex and is an important part of a teacher’s job, it is certainly imperative to have adequate information about it. Therefore we feel that we would like to enhance our knowledge about the current grading system as well as about the grading itself in the English subject.

After having read articles about the current grading system, we are interested in how it is perceived by English teachers, as well as what challenges they are faced with when grading. On the teachers’ part it is important to understand the grading system in order to be fair and correct when grading, and for students it is important to understand it in order to know what is being expected of them. The focus of this dissertation will be on the teachers’ points of view rather than the students’, since we feel that that could be a dissertation on its own.

We have often had discussions about the challenges which schools and teachers are faced with when it comes to interpreting the curriculum for the compulsory school
system, i.e. the Lpo94, the national syllabus and the national grading criteria. From our point of view it looks as if many of these policy documents are constructed in a very vague manner, giving the impression that it is difficult for schools and teachers at a local level to interpret them in a consistent way. Skolverket’s “Handlingsplan för en rättssäker och likvärdig betygssättning” states that: “Among many teachers there is a lack of knowledge about syllabi and grading criteria which leads to great inconsistency when grading” (2004, p 1. Our translation).

We believe and hope that by looking at how teachers perceive the current grading system, we and other teachers will gain a better understanding of how to interpret the different policy documents which the current grading system consists of. In addition, we also hope that our investigations will lead to a better understanding of how to deal with the challenges teachers are faced with when grading in the English subject.

2 Purpose
Our aim is to explore teachers’ perceptions of the current grading system as well as to investigate the challenges and difficulties concerning grading in the English subject. Our hypothesis is that teachers feel insecure about the current grading system.

We believe that by enhancing our knowledge about the current grading system as well as understanding some of the challenges and difficulties that can be encountered when grading, we will be better able to find new ways of dealing with the obstacles we may face when grading.

2.1 Question
- How do teachers perceive the current grading system, and what challenges do teachers experience when grading?

3 Method
In order to get a broader picture of how the grading system works, not only in theory but in practice, we conducted interviews with teachers to see how they experience the current grading system. We considered conducting surveys in order to get answers from a greater number of teachers in a shorter period of time. However, that would have meant that we would have been unable to ask further questions and the data would have been completely reliant upon whether the respondents had understood the questions as
they were intended. A reason for conducting interviews was that we felt the chosen subject would be better served by using a qualitative rather than a quantitative approach. We have had a lot of use of Hatch’s book Doing Qualitative Research in Education Settings (2002) and decided after reading it to conduct formal interviews rather than informal ones.

A semi-structured interview approach was appropriate since we wanted to keep a certain amount of control, while at the same time remain open to new types of questions which might crop up during the interviews. If we had restricted ourselves to a closed set of questions we would not have had the opportunity of getting spontaneous reactions from the interviewees (Johansson & Svedner 2004, pp 24).

The people interviewed are kept anonymous since there is no reason for having their names in the dissertation. Also, we wanted them to be able to speak freely and not to feel pressured into talking about their opinions on sensitive subjects, for example, about their school’s view of the grading system (Aspelin, 2006-10-25, lecture notes). We have replaced their names with the following codes:

School X
T1 – 11 years of teaching experience in secondary school
T2 – 25 years of teaching experience in secondary school
T3 – 20 years of teaching experience in secondary school

School Y
T4 – 21 years of teaching experience in secondary school
T5 – 9.5 years of teaching experience in secondary school (T5 has previously worked in an independent adult education college)
T6 – is currently teaching at secondary school (and has previously worked one term in primary school)

As seen in the presentation above, the interviewees include three teachers with approximately twenty years of experience, and who accordingly have experience of the previous relative grading system. Furthermore, we have interviewed two teachers with approximately ten years of experience in secondary school, as well as one teacher who has only recently received certification. There were doubts whether or not to include T6 as one of our interviewees given that she has only been working for a short while and has no experience of grading. However, we decided to add her to the list since we thought her views on the system were just as valid as those of the other teachers. Of course we had to adapt some of the questions so as to be relevant for her.
The six interviews were conducted at the two schools in question, apart from one interview which took place in the person’s home. One could have seen this as a problem but we felt that this made the conversation more relaxed even though it might have been preferable with a neutral place for the interview.

A tape-recorder was used in all of the interviews, as it was important to be able to go back and listen to them again, rather than having to rely solely on our notes. We informed the interviewees that we were going to record them, and they were all very understanding (Johansson & Svedner 2004, p 26).

3.1 Selection
When selecting people to interview we chose to ask teachers from schools we have a connection with already: in this case, one of our partner schools as well as a school where we know some of the teachers. The first is a school with levels F-9 situated in a small town in the east of Skåne with approximately 700 students; the second is situated in a town in the heart of Småland and is a school consisting of levels six to nine, with approximately 330 students. At the time of this study the schools had only female English teachers on staff and therefore we were not able to get any responses from male English teachers.

We chose to keep our subject of investigation as open as possible so as to be able to apply the information in our minor subjects as well. We are going to be teachers in two subjects, and investigating something which would be of no use in our second subject felt wrong.

4 Previous research
An introduction to the previous research concerning this area is needed so as to understand that there are similar studies around which have aided us in our work. Bengt Selghed has been studying assessment and grading since the beginning of the 1990s and did a study of the current grading system which resulted in his dissertation _Annu icke godkänt. Lärarens sätt att erfara betygssystemet och dess tillämpningar i yrkesutövningen_ (2004). This lead him to also write the book _Betygen i skolan – kunskapssyn, bedömningspraxis och lärarpraxis_ (2006). These two books have been of great use since he has investigated the current grading system thoroughly.
Skolverket’s Grundskola för bildning – Kommentarer till läroplan, kursplaner och betygsriter have been useful since we in a short period of time have had to delve into the policy documents. This book introduced us to many of the terms concerning the current grading system and explained them in a good way. In order to be able to find recommended translations for the terminology in the policy documents we used the Department of Education’s Svensk-engelsk ordbok för utbildnings- och forskningsområdet which provided us with translations from Swedish into English.

5 Background
Even though the current grading system has been in use for almost twelve years and is no longer strictly speaking new, we feel that in order to get a more thorough view of the grading system as it is today, it is necessary to review the old relative grading system before introducing the current grading system.

5.1 The relative grading system
The relative grading system was introduced in 1962 and a grading scale of one to five was used. Teachers were supposed to hand out grades according to a bell curve where a comparison was made between all of the students in the country studying the same course (SOU 1992:86, p 20). A problem occurred when some teachers used the percentage for the whole country when setting the grades for his/her class, which entailed, for example, that the teacher calculated that seven percent of the students in a given class were able to get a grade five and thirty eight percent were able to get a grade three. The system was considered unfair and not based on the knowledge the student had managed to acquire, but rather on how one individual's degree of knowledge related to another individual’s (http://www.skolverket.se/sb/d/208/a/6338, 2006-11-09).

The relative grading system was designed to serve as a measuring tool which was completely objective; that is, a teacher was not to take motivation and suitability for higher studies into consideration when grading the students (1992:86, p 21). It is also important to mention that those in favour of the relative grading system found it useful to have a system where a comparison of the whole country could be achieved. This was something the majority in favour of the relative grading system was adamant about – the ability to compare students and measure their acquired knowledge objectively would make the system better (1992:86, p 22).
The idea of changing the grading system from the relative to a more goal- and criterion-referenced system was considered in the late 1960s and discussed for some time. One of the disadvantages of the relative grading system was that the central steering did not let teachers decide on their teaching. However, it was stated in the policy documents that the goals should not have any bearing on the different subjects’ content, but rather serve as a starting point for the setting of grades (Egidius 1994, p 43).

Throughout the 70s and 80s the grading system was discussed at all levels within the government. A number of studies and investigations were produced and presented. In the beginning of the change in the grading system there were also numerous debates concerning whether or not to have grades at all. However, in 1994 the new system was launched, and it entailed not just a change of grades but a change in the way of looking at knowledge.

5.2 The current grading system
An important element in the current grading system is the notion of “management by objectives”,¹ which leads to a more indirect management of schools today than in the days of the relative system. The national curriculum and syllabi are no longer intended to function as documents with a fixed set of rules on, for example, how to teach and what to teach. Because of the system being goal- and criterion-referenced, today’s policy documents require an existing set of established practices and teachers who continuously discuss this independently of the policy documents. That is to say, teachers are to use their professional experience as a foundation for interpreting these documents. It is these discussions and interpretations which create the content and form within the schools and enable them to reach their target achievement. In practice this means that teachers who interpret the policy documents need to take into account what is required of schools in order to see to it that all students develop in many different areas. They also need to make sure that schools create an environment where students want to learn regardless of whether they are interested or not (Skolverket 2003, p 17). This also means that schools need to develop more concrete syllabi and grading criteria at local levels in order to concretise what schools and students should aim for and what goals the schools want the students to attain.

¹ ”Målstyrning” The English translation is from the Department of Education’s Svensk-engelsk ordbok för utbildnings- och forskningsområdet 2003-12-10
During the 1990s the government decentralised the management of schools and opened up for a so-called “participatory management by objectives”\(^2\) at local levels. This entailed that the national curriculum, syllabi and grading criteria were not to give clear and precise advice and rules on how schools are supposed to reach certain goals. This is why schools today have to create their own goals and criteria in order to make the local syllabi and grading criteria more concrete. These local syllabi should clarify “the national goals to aim for” as well as “the national goals to attain” and make it easier for teachers, students and parents to understand what particular goals the students will need to have attained by the time they finish ninth grade. The idea is that each school should be able to make their own choices on what means and materials to use in order to get the students to reach the goals. However, regardless of how these goals are attained, the end result should still conform to the nationally agreed upon “goals to attain” after the ninth year of compulsory school. These national goals are supposed to maintain a level of conformity between the different schools within the country. Thus, it is not important how students achieve a certain goal, but rather the fact that they are able to reach them, i.e. students no longer have the obligation to attend classes in order to acquire the knowledge needed to achieve the goals. If students can show that they have acquired sufficient knowledge, even if it has been acquired outside of the school, it should be looked upon as adequate for reaching “the goals to attain”.

“Participatory management by objectives” is also intended to allow the students to become involved in decisions concerning their own education. The current grading system is supposed to be more open to the involvement of students and their parents, thereby making it possible for them to take part in the educational system. The current grading system with its “participatory management by objectives” also relies on continuous discussions between school managements, teachers, students and their parents about the grading system in order to implement the ideas of it. Inger Carlgren argues in her article “Det nya betygssystemets tankefigurer och tänkbara användningar” that the current grading system is a so-called “socio-technical system”, which means that

It is in the interaction with the new tools which the new systems occur. The new grading system is constituted by the use of it. It is therefore important to have discussions concerning the current grading system, what kind of system this system is, and perhaps above all, what you can accomplish with it. (Skolverket (1-172) 2002, p 17. Our translation)

\(^2\) “deltagande målstyrning” “Since a more adequate translation could not be found this translation is made by the authors of this dissertation.
Carlgren also argues that when a reform of a grading system is conducted, it is not only its construction that needs to change, but also its function. A grading system is built into social systems and networks, which implies that in connection to these social systems and networks there are certain ways of thinking concerning grades, knowledge, people, etc. Every grading system includes conceptions and ideas about what should be assessed and graded; therefore, with the transformation of a grading system, one also needs to change the way one thinks about what knowledge is and how it can best be acquired (2002, p 15).

In the 1970s there was a change in the way knowledge was perceived. The dominant epistemological view, which before had been based on a quantitative and reproductive outlook, was now replaced by a qualitative way of looking at knowledge (Selghed 2006, p 21). This new established principal was later discussed by different authorities over the course of the following years until it was adopted in the curriculum for the compulsory school system, i.e. the Lpo94, and entered into effect in 1994. In the current grading system schools have the responsibility of developing a more in-depth knowledge by letting students reinterpret and re-structure their knowledge. It is stated in the Lpo94 that:

Knowledge is a complex concept which can be expressed in a variety of forms – as facts, understanding, skills and accumulated experience – all of which presuppose and interact with each other. The work of the school must therefore focus on providing scope for the expression of these different forms of knowledge as well as creating a learning process where they balance and interact with each other to form a meaningful whole for the individual pupil. (1998, p 6)

Today knowledge is seen as a process which is individual and in which students, rather than mechanically registering information, are supposed to continually relate their knowledge to the surrounding world (Selghed 2006, p 22). Even if the current grading system focuses on the learning process as something that is individual, it also entails a socio-cultural viewpoint implying that this individual process is developed in relation to other people. Roger Säljö claims that: “[…] knowledge is something which does not only exist within individuals – but on the contrary, between people. Knowledge is developed and mastered through interaction between people who try to coordinate their perspectives and to handle different situations together” (1992, p 22. Our translation).

In the current grading system, interpreting and structuring one’s knowledge is considered more important than remembering specific facts. The students’ ability to analyse what they have learned and how they have learned it are key factors. This new
epistemological view has also led to an even greater demand on teachers and schools to interpret what knowledge really is on the one hand; and what knowledge to teach on the other. There has also been a change in the approach of the different policy documents when it comes to the importance of students acquiring knowledge about fundamental values. There is therefore a greater obligation on schools to enlighten and educate students about ethics, respect, democratic values, etc. It is stated in the Lpo94 about fundamental values that:

Democracy forms the basis of the national school system. The Education Act (1985: 1100) stipulates that all school activity should be carried out in accordance with fundamental democratic values and that each and everyone working in the school should encourage respect for the intrinsic value of each person as well as for the environment we all share (Chapter I, §2). The school has the important task of imparting, instilling and forming in pupils those fundamental values on which our society is based. The inviolability of human life, individual freedom and integrity, the equal value of all people, equality between women and men and solidarity with the weak and vulnerable are all values that the school should represent and impart. In accordance with the ethics borne by Christian tradition and Western humanism, this is achieved by fostering in the individual a sense of justice, generosity of spirit, tolerance and responsibility. Education in the school shall be non-denominational. The task of the school is to encourage all pupils to discover their own uniqueness as individuals and thereby actively participate in social life by giving of their best in responsible freedom. (1998, p 3)

It continues with a paragraph concerning understanding and compassion for others which states that:

The school should promote an understanding for others and the ability to empathise. Activities should be characterised by care of the individual’s well-being and development. No-one should be subjective to discrimination at school based on gender, ethnic belonging, religion or other belief, sexual orientation or disability, or subjected to other degrading treatment. Tendencies toward harassment or other degrading treatment should be actively combated. Xenophobia and intolerance must be met with knowledge, open discussion and active measures. The internationalisation of Swedish society and increasing cross-border mobility place great demands on people’s ability to live together and appreciate the values that are to be found in cultural diversity. Awareness of one’s own cultural origins and sharing a common cultural heritage provides a secure identity which it is important to develop, together with the ability to empathise with the values and conditions of others. The school is a social and cultural meeting place with both the opportunity and the responsibility to foster this ability among all who work there. (1998, pp 3)

All of the fundamental values listed above are to be taught within the different subjects in schools on top of the knowledge which students are expected to attain in a certain subject. This is something which permeates the entire essence of the Swedish school system.

The current grading system is, compared to the old relative system, seen as a better way of providing information concerning the students' development of knowledge and profile of knowledge. Teachers are no longer supposed to rank students on a scale
depending upon test results and the percentage needed to attain a certain grade. Grades are also no longer to be seen as something on a scale, but rather as having a basis in qualitative differences. The idea is that the students' knowledge in relation to specific criteria is based upon national goals and criteria which are supposed to serve as the foundation for a certain grade. These goals and criteria are included in the national syllabi which have been created on the basis of the Education Act, the Compulsory School Ordinance and the curriculum for the compulsory school system, i.e. the Lpo94. All of these policy documents, including the national syllabi, constitute an entirety, i.e. the current grading system, and ought to be read together (Skolverket 2003, p 14). However, as mentioned earlier, when talking about “the national goals to aim for” and “the national goals to attain”, schools and teachers need to create local syllabi as well as local grading criteria. This is necessary in order to make them more concrete and tangible so that teachers, students and parents can better understand what is expected of the students.

When looking at how the construction of the grading levels and their criteria are intended to function, we find a system with the levels IG, G, VG and MVG, where the grades of G, VG and MVG are constructed upon one another. That is to say the VG-grade entails more than a G since it meets all of the criteria of the G-grade as well as fulfilling further grading criteria. The same logic applies to the MVG-grade. When creating the local grading criteria the schools and the teachers are aided by the national VG- and MVG criteria. There are no grading criteria in the national syllabi for the G-grade. However, “the national goals to attain” are intended to indicate what knowledge the students should have acquired before having finished the ninth grade; i.e. “the national goals to attain” in the national syllabi state what proficiency levels the students should have reached as a minimum. It is, however, up to each school to formulate their own local grading criteria to indicate what is needed in order to pass a course (http://www.skolverket.se/sb/d/208/a/6338 2006-11-09).

6 Result and Analysis
When presenting the result of the interviews with the teachers we are not going to add any of our own opinions since the results describe the teachers’ way of perceiving the current grading system and the grading itself. However, we are aware of the fact that interpretations of collected data never can be fully objective in the sense that
interpretations always to some extent contain an individual’s way of looking at a phenomenon. As it is stated in Hatch’s *Doing Qualitative Research in Education Settings*: “Interpretation situates the researcher as an active player in the research process” (2002, p 180). We therefore believe that since the researcher is an active player he/she can never be completely neutral when interpreting data.

### 6.1 The information given about the current grading system

The interviewed teachers, with the exception of T6 who has recently graduated from teacher training college, generally felt that they had received very little or no information about the current grading system at the time of its launch in 1994. T2 remembered that parts of the in-service training at the time had dealt with information about the system, but she and her colleagues felt they had wanted more. They all remembered that there were a lot of discussions concerning the system in the schools and that these discussions were initiated and encouraged by the school managements, but that the teachers felt they had no real support from higher authorities when it came to understanding the new way of thinking. Some felt that they were supposed to understand the system at once without really getting enough time and material to grasp this immense change of systems. As T1 put it: “I was pretty much expected to know it” (Our translation).

T2 felt it was imperative that the teachers should have received adequate information about the new system and its main ideas. She said that better information from the school management would have been a very helpful aid in understanding a whole new way of looking at grading in the English subject as well as in being better able to introduce this new system to the students. However, some of the teachers said that the school management was new to this grading system as well, and for that reason it should have been the responsibility of Skolverket to provide schools with clearer information about the new grading system and about creating local work plans and local grading criteria. As T3 said: “The new grading system was just as new to the school management as it was for us; they did not know anything either” (Our translation). The general feeling among the interviewed teachers was that they all felt lost and uneasy about the new grading system when it was first introduced.

Since T6 has not been working as a teacher for more than one and a half term, we decided to ask her whether or not she had received information in her education. The answer was that she felt the information had been absent apart from it being touched
upon briefly in different courses. She wished that courses specifically dealing with the current grading system had been offered in her education so she could feel more secure when grading for the first time.

6.1.1 Analysis
The new epistemological approach in the “new” grading system completely changed the way that knowledge had been perceived. Selghed argues that it was an immense change of schools’ ideology and corresponding changes of the same size within other public institutions were hard to find (Selghed 2006, p 18). One might wonder if this immense epistemological change contributed to teachers having difficulties with understanding what was now being expected of them. It was a complete change from one system to another, not merely in terms of how knowledge was viewed, but also in terms of how the policy documents were to be handled.

The results confirm that there was a lack of information about the “new” grading system at the time of its launch. All of a sudden the teachers were supposed to understand something new and it seems as if they were not prepared for the change. The teachers wanted to get more information than what was given. Also, they wanted to have better support from higher authorities. The teachers felt that Skolverket should have been responsible for giving clearer and better information to the schools. Selghed’s study *Betygen i skolan – kunskapssyn, bedömningspraxis och lärarpraxis* confirms the fact that there was a lack of information at the launch of the system and he states that there was a “lack of time for the assignment, poor knowledge concerning the intentions with the grading system as well as a lack of legible guidelines for the implementation” (2006, p 38).

Furthermore, the results show that the teacher who recently finished her teacher training college had not had any courses specifically dealing with the current grading system. This lack of knowledge has made her very insecure when now having to grade for the first time. Skolverket’s “Handlingsplan för en rättssäker och likvärdig betygssättning” states that: “It is important that those who are in charge of grading being executed in a similar way have adequate knowledge about it. Skolverket therefore requires that assessment and grading is dealt with within the teacher training college” (2004, p 1. Our translation).
6.2 The teachers’ understanding of the current grading system

T2 and T3 said they did not have any difficulties understanding the new grading system since they had been working with goal-related criteria even in the relative grading system. T5 had no difficulties understanding the new system either since she had had the advantage of being a teacher in an independent adult education college where a similar system had been in place for many years. T2 said: “It was not hard to understand the new grading system per se, but we received too little information” (Our translation). Furthermore, T1, who was a new teacher in 1994, did not have any difficulties with adapting to the new goal- and criterion-referenced system.

T1 and T5 perceived that some of their colleagues were having a hard time understanding the new system. These colleagues continued thinking according to the relative system, and when grading merely adapted the old system to conform to the requirements of the new one; for example, the grades two, three and the weak fours in the old system were considered to be the same as the new system’s G. T1 and T5 both felt that they had grasped the new system, and therefore found it difficult to discuss grading in the English subject with the teachers who they thought had not understood the new way of thinking. This was confirmed in the interview with T4 who explained that during the first eight years after the launch of the new system in 1994 she continued to grade and think in terms of the old relative system. She also admits that she still thinks according to the Lgr80. “I am still thinking according to the Lgr80 and unfortunately I have not read any other curriculum since then” (Our translation).

T6 has never worked according to the relative system, but was a student in secondary and upper secondary school when the old relative grading system was in use. She said that she does not find it difficult to understand the ideas behind the goal- and criterion-referenced system, yet feels that she has not been able to discuss the current grading system enough in order to feel confident about the system.

Still today, the teachers interviewed feel that they do not find it difficult to grasp the ideas of the goal- and criterion-referenced grading system, but that it is difficult to know how to interpret certain parts of the national syllabus, especially since the national goals and the national grading criteria are described in a very general manner.

6.2.1 Analysis

The lack of information does not seem to have affected the teachers understanding of the grading system. The results show that some of the teachers made no distinction
between the two systems since they claimed to have been working goal-relatedly even in the old relative grading system. One of the teachers did, however, have difficulties with adapting to the new grading system and continued to grade and think in terms of the old relative system. Selghed describes this as “looking at the current grading system through the previous one”; and continues by saying that “[t]he new grading system is not discerned, but rather looked upon as a revised edition of the previous one” (2006, p 121. Our translation).

Today, the difficulty is that there still exist insecurities about how to interpret the national goals and the national grading criteria since they are very general. Selghed argues: “The experience is that it is difficult to interpret the formulations because of them being quite open. The space for interpretation is considered to be large making it difficult to use the goals and criteria. They give very little or no guidance” (2004, p 152. Our translation).

6.3 The national syllabus in relation to the local work plan
The interviewed teachers, again with the exception of T6, felt they received very little or no help when they were given the task of producing their schools’ local work plans. T1, T2 and T3 said that all English teachers sat down together and discussed from their own experiences how they wanted to structure the work plan. After that they compared their ideas to the policy documents and looked in Skolverket’s so called Tulpbanboken3 for guidance. T4 and T5 also said they had used their own experiences and had studied the policy documents.

When asked about whether they had experienced any difficulties when interpreting “the national goals to aim for”, all teachers concluded that they had been written in a very general manner and this made interpretation hard. However, T5 said: “It makes it possible for you to put a lot of your own ideas into them” (Our translation). Another teacher saw the general goals as troubling, whereas a third one regarded them as something which allowed her much greater freedom than before. T5 said that the fact that “the goals to aim for” are formulated in a general way allows her to “use them to her advantage” (Our translation), i.e. giving her the ability to assume more control over her own teaching situation.

3 This book is revoked today but you can find the same information in Skolverket’s newer publication Allmänna råd och kommentarer. Likvärdig bedömning och betygsättning.
When questioning the interviewees about what they believe the purpose of the local work plan is, and how it differs from the national syllabus, they all responded that since the latter is very general in its descriptions the purpose of the local work plans are to make the goals more concrete. That is, making them easier to grasp for the students. In addition, they noted that the local work plan makes it easier for the teachers to work more uniformly, hence that the teachers know that all English teachers at their school are working according to the school’s work plan. It is a tool for assuring uniformity of the way in which the students are educated in the English subject in that specific school.

6.3.1 Analysis
One of the important elements in the current grading system is participatory management by objectives. It increases individual teachers’ ability to make decisions concerning their own working environment, and the benefit is that decision making is more effective if the decisions are made closer to the people being affected by them (2004, p 12).

The result shows that the teachers had difficulties with interpreting the “the goals to aim for” in the national syllabus since they were very general. It seems as if the vagueness of the goals created a feeling of not really knowing what do with them. Due to the lack of information, the teachers had to rely on their own experiences to a great extent when creating the local work plan.

The results also show that even though most of the teachers think that the goals are vague they can also see the benefits of them since they are able to decide more freely on what and how to teach than they were in the previous system. Also, the teachers find the local work plan as a way of concretising the national syllabus for the students and as a way of adapting it into something which the school can present as a manual on how to work with the specific subject.

When looking at the work plans from both school X and school Y one can clearly see that they differ both in the way they are constructed as well as in content. School X does not work with a specific textbook. Thus, it is up to the individual teacher to choose what materials they prefer working with from the existing ones in the school, or if they want to work freely of teaching materials. School Y on the other hand uses a specific textbook which is used by all English teachers in the school.

The work plan formulated by school X is written in a general way and is open to using different materials. The work plan is divided into four parts called “listening”,

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“speaking”, “reading” and “writing”. In these different parts the teachers have agreed on specific values which the students should aim for in the different courses. They do not have “goals to aim for” specifically for grade eight or nine since the work plan states in the beginning that the knowledge widens and deepens as students age and mature. When it comes to “listening” they have formulated the goals to aim for as follows:

- the student should be able to listen in a concentrated way to teachers and fellow classmates, to recorded material with and without the support of written text
- the student should be able to understand the context in films without subtitles (Our translation)

As seen in the example of what the work plan from school X consists of, when it comes to the “listening” part, “the goals to aim for” are still written in a general way but at the same time they concretise and summarise “the national goals to aim for”. The section containing “listening”, “speaking”, “reading” and “writing” is followed by a part which describes what different grammatical aspects to focus on in the different grades.

School Y has a completely different approach in their work plan since they have specific teaching material which is used by all the English teachers working at the school. The work plan is constructed so as to follow the textbook. For example in year eight the students are to work with words and expressions which have to do with tourism, discoveries, mountain climbing, adventures, Christmas celebrations in Great Britain and Australia, flights, argumentation, theatre, city and country, the Tower and the Wild West etc. The work plan continues in the same way for grade nine.

The fact that the local work plans differ is something which the teachers do not have problems with. They rather see it as something beneficial for them and the students since it enables the teachers to choose their teaching material and adapt it to the local work plans. The problem is not the issue of working according to the work plans but rather how to concretise and formulate the criteria within the work plan since the national syllabus is difficult to interpret.

6.4 The national grading criteria in relation to the local grading criteria
The teachers who had the task of creating the local grading criteria at the launch of the current grading system said that it was quite difficult since there were no stated national grading criteria for the G-grade, nor were there any for the MVG-grade. “We received the VG-criteria but had to create the G- and MVG-criteria ourselves. Each school had to
create their own grading criteria… well, no comments!” (Our translation), said T2. When asked how they created the G-grade T1 said that the teachers of English at her school worked together in order to decide the criteria for G. The teachers had used their own experiences so as to create the criteria. After some time they realised, however, that their stated minimum level of knowledge was a bit too high and that they had to revise their criteria given that Skolverket had lower criteria for G in the national test in English. T2 and T3 both relied on common sense as well as on their own experiences as teachers when working with creating the G-grade and they claimed that there was not much else to do since there was no clear directive about how to create the grading criteria.

T4 used her own experiences when being a part of the process of creating the criteria for a G. T5 said that since she had not been part of the process she could not really answer this question. However, later on she said that she remembers having discussions about the G-grade with the other teachers in the beginning of her employment, a couple of years after the new grading system had been launched, and that they had discussed what the G-grade was to entail. She described it with a metaphor: “If you were to be dropped from a helicopter in the middle of London and you are able to get food and get yourself back to Sweden again, then you deserve a G” (Our translation). She and the rest of her colleagues are according to her, in agreement that this is a minimum level of knowledge and that it is an important level of knowledge when considering the criteria for the G-grade. T6, who has not been part of the process of creating criteria for the G-grade, feels that she is not able to say anything concerning this question.

The interviewees were also asked if they thought the local grading criteria clarified the national criteria and most of the teachers stated that their schools’ own grading criteria do have that function. However, T5 feels that the local criteria are just as general as the national ones and that the purpose of that is “to not have to fail students and also that it gives us the freedom to freely interpret the criteria to the students’ advantages” (Our translation). On the other hand, all of teachers are of the opinion that the national grading criteria need to be clarified in order to make it easier for the students to understand them. As the national grading criteria are constructed today, they are too general and need to be more concrete so as to be more comprehensible to the students. It is important that the students are able to understand what is expected of them in order to reach certain grades.
Almost all of the teachers stated that they miss more precise criteria from Skolverket for “the goals to attain”. The teachers feel that it is difficult to know how to interpret them in a “good” way so as to keep a fairly similar level as the rest of the country. They believe that it is possible to have more precise “goals to attain” while at the same time keeping the open criteria for “the goals to aim for” so that different schools still will be able to decide on how they want to go about reaching “the goals to attain”, i.e. they still want to be able to choose their own way of working in order to get the students to reach “the goals to attain”.

The teachers were all in agreement about the fact that the current grading system makes grading within different schools unfair since they have to formulate their own local goals and grading criteria based upon the national ones. “It easily becomes unfair between different schools since our school puts focus on certain factors while another school focuses on something else and so on” (Our translation), said T2. The teachers stressed that there ought to be some guidance or control in order to ensure some fairness of grading within the different schools around the country. T2 mentioned that there had been discussions concerning this unfairness in the local newspaper recently in which the grading system had been examined. The conclusion of this journalistic investigation showed that the grading criteria had varied substantially between the different schools in the area which meant that some schools were less restrictive with handing out for example MVG than other schools. T4 said that in the municipality in which her school is situated they have drawn guidelines on a municipal level in order to get fairer grades between the two secondary schools.

6.4.1 Analysis
Creating the local grading criteria put a lot of pressure on the teachers and it was a difficult task to make them more concrete compared to the national grading criteria. There were no real guidelines as to how to create the local grading criteria and the teachers at both schools had to rely on their own experiences in order to create them. The only help they had were the national syllabus for the English subject and the Lpo94. The most difficult part of creating local grading criteria was to produce criteria for the G-grade. Only one of the teachers mentioned having specifically thought of “the goals to attain” as a base for creating their local grading criteria for a G. As stated in Skolverket’s Grundskola för bildning the intention of “the goals to attain” is to show the minimum level of knowledge which the students should have reached in order to
receive a G (2003, p 15). Furthermore, it looks as if Skolverket’s criteria for a G on the national test in English to some extent set the standard for a G in the local grading criteria. Selghed states that “the national tests seem to ‘cover’ the knowledge which the student should have attained during compulsory school” (2004, p 141. Our translation).

Selghed also argues that “[t]he compulsory school in Sweden is regulated through the national curriculum and syllabi along with their grading criteria. In Sweden it is the teacher who assesses and grades the student on the basis of national goals and criteria which have been concretised at local levels” (2004, p 81. Our translation). The results in our study show that the teachers believe that the local grading criteria clarify and make the goals and grading criteria in the national syllabus more concrete. However, the teachers want more precise criteria from Skolverket for “the goals to attain” than exist today. Also, they want to have better help with what the students need to achieve as to keep a fairly similar level of knowledge among the students as the rest of the country. In Grundskola för bildning it is stated that “[t]he professional interpretation basis is one of the conditions of equality, in order for schools to realise the goals even though they work in different ways and with different contents” (2003, p 19. Our translation). As it is today teachers have a lot of pressure on them to achieve this similar level of knowledge among students and it seems as if they are without adequate guidelines. Selghed argues that:

> My reflection concerning the support which the teacher may lean on appears to be very vague, if a fair and equal grading is to take place. Only for the final goals in secondary school – in the spring term of year nine – do teachers have national goals to attain and national grading criteria […] as concrete support when grading along with the results of the national tests. (2004, p 78. Our translation)

A fear could be that this might lead to schools loosing their participatory management by objectives. However, one of the teachers said:

> Perhaps they should have controlled this more from higher levels with more precise things of what should be attained. Then the means to get there is something else; how we choose our ways to get the students to achieve the knowledge which we want them to achieve should be optional. (Our translation)

When looking at the local grading criteria at the two schools one can see that they differ from each other. At school X the grading criteria for the English subject appear to be fairly similar to the national ones and they do not distinguish what level of knowledge should be attained in year eight and year nine, i.e. their grading criteria are
the same for both age levels. At school Y the grading criteria seem to be a bit more specific and they have grading criteria specifically for year eight and year nine also.

The national grading criteria for the VG-grade state:

- the student profits from, concludes and comments on the content in clear spoken language from different language areas
- the student uses strategies such as reformulations and explanations to bridge language difficulties
- the student speaks clearly and coherently as well as adapts his/her language to different situations
- the student reads, profits from and comments on easily read texts, both fiction and fact
- the student writes varied and with coherence and is able to communicate in writing when exchanging information and having social contacts, asks and answers questions and adapts his/her language to different recipients (Our translation)

The local grading criteria for the VG-grade at school X state:

- the student should understand fairly advanced English
- the student should be able to speak and express his/her own opinions and actively participate in conversations on a fairly adequate level of English
- the student should be able to read, understand and comment on somewhat more advanced texts such as fiction and fact
- the student should be able to express himself/herself relatively correctly, varied and coherently
- the student should have knowledge about different societies and cultural traditions within English speaking countries
- the student should be creative, be able to work independently as well as in groups. The student should be able to reflect and draw conclusions about his/her own learning process (Our translation)

The local grading criteria for the VG-grade at school Y state:

- the student should clearly understand British and American speech
- the student should participate actively in discussions and conversations within general areas/subjects
- the student should be able to orally present something which she or he has heard, seen, read or experienced
- the student should have adequate pronunciation and acceptable intonation
- the student should understand fiction and be able to search for facts within texts
- the student should in a free and easy way, and with the use of the grammar which so far has been looked at, with a higher demand of correctness be able to formulate himself/herself in writing
- the student should be able to use dictionaries
- the student should have adequate knowledge about different societies, cultural traditions and ways of living (Our translation)

These local grading criteria for the VG-grade at the two schools show how interpretations of the national grading criteria can be different between schools. As a result one might draw the conclusion that these interpretations may differ even further
between each teacher. The various interpretations also affirm the teachers’ perception of schools having difficulties with being similar in their way of interpreting “the national goals to attain” in order for them to have fairly similar local grading criteria.

6.5 Grading in the English subject
The results show that most of the teachers felt that they had no difficulties adapting the way of grading accordingly to the current grading system. One of the teachers said, however, that she had had difficulties adjusting to the idea of setting grades according to the goal- and criterion referenced system. She admitted that she still sometimes thinks of twos, threes and weak fours as being equal to a G.

Of course I can still think in this way sometimes that VG…well… it’s the old fours. But in the beginning you definitely thought like that. Then you adapted […] the good twos and threes and the bad fours, into a G. At that time you were absolutely into the old system but for the most part, nowadays, I’m not. (Our translation)

According to the teachers it is far better grading in the current grading system than in the old relative system. T2 and T5 said that it is now easier to show the students at what level they are. T5 said it is fairer for the students since it shows the level of knowledge which they have attained rather than how they measure-up in relation to other students. She said that “the old grading system did not give any information about what specific knowledge a student had acquired” (Our translation). T3 and T4 stated that although it is better grading in this system than in the previous one they feel that there is a heavier workload attached to grading in a goal- and criterion-referenced system since it entails more administrative work, as, for example, having to make action plans when giving students an IG. Furthermore, T2, T3 and T4 said that the current grading system in itself puts a lot of pressure on the teachers to give students a G. T3 feels that this system forces the teachers to pass the students who in truth are not able to achieve “the goals to attain” at almost any cost. T3 also said that the current goal- and criterion-referenced grading system entails that students, parents and others are able to question the teachers’ decisions of a certain grade for better or worse. As she put it: “Nowadays I have to justify what I do in a completely different way as opposed to before, since parents and students, as well as others, are better able to overlook a teacher’s work (Our translation). The teachers have to be able to orally, but also if necessary in writing, justify why the students have not been able to achieve “the goals to attain”.

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T1, T3, T5 and T6 said that they give their students a copy of the grading criteria at the beginning of term in order for the students to become aware of what is expected of them. Almost all teachers stated that they presented the grading criteria in connection with new assignments or projects so as to inform the students in what area they are to be graded. T1, T2 as well as T3 said that going through the grading criteria with the students forces them to think about the purpose of the assignments which they think is good not only for the students but for themselves as well. T1 also explained that she has the grading criteria posted in her classroom but said that they are not the first thing the students should see in the classroom when entering. She feels that she does not want their only focus to be on the grades when it comes to learning. T6 said that going through the grading criteria with the students can have a negative effect since it sometimes makes them feel stressed and worried about being able to achieve the stated goals. She said: “You notice the stress among some of the students, especially know when they are in grade eight and they are about to be graded for the first time” (Our translation). T4 is the only one who does not present the grading criteria or talk to the students about them. However, she wishes that she did since she believes it could benefit the students.

When asking the interviewees about whether or not attendance, tardiness and disruptive behaviour are aspects taken into consideration when grading their students they all said that tardiness and disruptive behaviour is not something they think of when setting the grades. However, attendance is taken into consideration when and if the students are not able to show their level of knowledge. T4 said that the students have to achieve certain goals in the English subject and if they do not attend classes they might not be able to reach these goals. One of the teachers stated that a lack of attendance reflects the students’ ambition and interest. T5 stated that attendance is important when it comes to the students’ ability to show what level of knowledge they have achieved. She as well as T1, T2 and T4 said that it is the students’ level of knowledge which is important and not how they acquire that knowledge. They may get their knowledge outside of the school and still achieve a level of English which corresponds to a certain grade. T4 said that “it does not really matter where the students acquire their knowledge as long as they are able to reach the stated goals” (Our translation). T3 believes that attendance, tardiness and disruption “automatically regulate themselves since those who do not attend will not perform well” (Our translation). The same thing was stated in the interviews with T1, T2 and T6.
Most of the teachers also stressed the fact that they feel that the IG-grade in this system is unfair since getting an IG in a core subject in the ninth grade has a great impact on the student’s chances of getting into a programme in upper-secondary school, and that it therefore sifts out students much more than the previous grading system did. This could have consequences for the student’s future. In the previous system getting a one or a two meant that the students were still able to move on with their studies whereas nowadays an IG might put their studies on hold. As T4 said: “The system is harder on students who work hard but are not able to reach the goals” (Our translation).

Furthermore, T1, T2, T3, T4, and T6 feel that there are too few grading steps in the current grading system and this is something they would like to change. According to these teachers the G-grade is problematic in the sense that it includes the students who have barely reached the goals of a G as well as the students who have reached even further goals within the G-grade but have not yet fully reached the goals for a VG. T1, T2, T3 and T4 said that the students themselves ask for additional grading steps within the existing grades and that the students prefer getting, for example, pluses and minuses attached to their grades in order to get more information about where, for example, on a G-scale they are. However T5 said she is indecisive about the matter of attaching pluses and minuses after a grade.

All the teachers said that the national test functions as support for them when setting grades since the test shows the degree of knowledge which is acquired for the different grades on a national level. The teachers also explained that they use the national test when they feel unsure about what grade they should give students who are on the borderline between two grades. The outcome of the test might be helpful when deciding which way to go with a grade. They all stressed the fact that they use the national test as one test among others, i.e. it does not absolutely determine a student’s grade.

In addition the teachers stated that they use tests, quizzes on homework, oral assignments, listening exercises, written work as well as different projects among other things as methods when assessing and grading the students. According to almost all the teachers the communicative aspect is more important now than it was in the previous grading system and has become a large part of assessment. T3 stated that in order to be able to receive a higher grade it is imperative for the students to be orally active during the lessons. The interviewees were also asked about what criteria they use when putting together a test or an assignment. T6 stated that she checks the grading criteria so as to be on the right track when creating an assignment. T1 has her own criteria in her head and
believes she knows what is needed. T5 explained that she uses the tests which come with the textbook and said that that material ought to follow the necessary criteria. When she puts together tests on her own she said that she follows the grading criteria unconsciously. T2, T3 and T4 stated that they do not work with the grading criteria when putting together assignments or tests but rather look at getting speaking, writing, listening and reading into them.

6.5.1 Analysis
Grading is a large part of a teachers’ job. It is therefore expected of them to be professional and to have adequate knowledge about the current grading system. This includes knowing how to interpret the different policy documents which the current grading system consists of.

The results of the interviews show that most of the teachers do not have any difficulties with grading according to the current grading system. One of the teachers does, however, still experience difficulties and adapts, to some extent, the relative grading scale into the current grading scale. The phenomenon of adapting the grading steps from one system to another also occurred among teachers in Selghed’s study (2004, p 133).

Furthermore, the current grading system is seen as more beneficial for the students than the old relative grading system. It is easier to show the students what level they are at and discuss in advance how the required goals and criteria are to be achieved. However, the current grading system entails a heavier workload for the teachers due to an increasing amount of administrative work, such as action plans and documentation of the students’ progress. In the Lpo94 it is stated that the teacher should:

[O]n the basis of the requirements stipulated in the syllabi comprehensively assess each pupil’s learning, and report this orally and in writing to the pupil and the home as well as inform the head teacher, taking as the starting point the wishes of the parents, keep the pupils and the home continuously informed about progress in school, what is needed for development (1998, p 17)

Also, the teachers feel pressured to give students Gs even though they may not have reached “the goals to attain”. Selghed argues: “Teachers sometimes feel an unspoken, but unpleasant, demand from the municipal politicians, that all students should at least attain the G-grade” (2004, p 172. Our translation).

Moreover, the teachers believe the system to be unfair regarding the IG-grade. It sifts out students more than what a one or a two did in the old relative system, since an
IG is equivalent to not receiving a grade at all. According to Selghed’s research, teachers are of the opinion that “a grade is missing for those who have not yet reached the goals to attain for the G-grade. [---] They suggest introducing the grading step, almost passed” (2004, pp 130. Our translation).

Most of the teachers like the idea of presenting the local grading criteria to the students. It helps them and the students to lay out a set of concrete goals to be accomplished during term, as well as to show what is expected of the students. The results also show that going through the criteria can lead to an overemphasis on grading as the most important part of the students’ learning process, which in turn can cause increased stress among the students. Selghed’s study shows:

At the beginning of term teachers present and discuss the stated goals and criteria in the English subject with the students. [---] Goals and criteria are sometimes worded into concrete intermediate goals and specific subject criteria, which have direct connections to the current teaching content” (2004, p 143. Our translation).

The teachers try not to include attendance, tardiness and disruptive behaviour when grading the students. A general opinion among the teachers is that poor attendance is not an issue if the students can show that they have reached an adequate level of knowledge in English. Attendance does, however, have an effect on some of the teachers’ way of perceiving the students, as poor attendance is equated with lack of ambition and interest. Selghed argues that teachers believe that students’ ambition and effort are important aspects when grading (2004, p 83). At one of the schools in our study they have included ambition and commitment as part of their local grading criteria. However, the Lpo94 states that it is only the students’ knowledge which is to be assessed and graded.

Grades express the extent to which the individual pupil has attained the goals stated in the syllabus for each respective subject or subject unit. Assistance in awarding grades is provided by means of specific criteria based on the goals in the syllabi for different subjects. (1998, p 16)

[W]hen awarding grades make use of all available information on the pupil’s knowledge in relation to the requirements of the syllabus and make a comprehensive assessment of the knowledge acquired. (1998, p 17)

There are no criteria in the national syllabus which state that ambition and commitment are to be taken into consideration when grading. In the Lpo94 there are many guidelines concerning what schools and teachers are supposed to aim for when educating the students. These include fundamental values, students’ responsibilities and influence etc.
These guidelines and goals are to be included in schools’ everyday work, but when it comes to assessing and grading it is only the students’ knowledge which should be taken into account. Some of the interviewed teachers do, however, state that it does not matter how the students acquire their knowledge of English, as long as they can demonstrate that they have achieved the adequate level of knowledge in order for them to reach “the goals to attain.

There is also a desire among most of the teachers to have more grading steps than exist in the current grading system. According to the teachers even the students seem to feel that additional grading steps are necessary, since it is important for them to know where they are on the grading scale. Most of the teachers are using additional grading steps, for example G- and G+, in order to better clarify the students’ level of achievement when explaining the student’s grades to them. The G-grade seems to be especially difficult for the teachers to justify without the aid of additional grades. The G-grade includes the students who have barely reached the goals for a G as well as the students who are on the borderline of reaching a VG. The teachers would not use these additional grading steps on any other occasion, but it seems necessary for them in order to know where on the grading scale their students are. However, in Skolverket’s national test in the English subject pluses and minuses are a part of the grading scale. Selghed argues that: “Several of the statements give the impression that they would be able to manage grading the students’ knowledge and skills in a more nuanced scale, and they also state that they would like to have a grading scale with further steps”(2004, p 129. Our translation). All teachers in our study use the national test as support when grading. The results help them when they feel unsure about students’ grades. The national test is only used as one test among others and does not determine students’ final grades.

The national tests are supposed to be look at as a guideline when assessing if the students have reached the stated goals.[-] A national test can […] not be seen as an examination or on its own constitute any form of eligibility. (http://www.skolverket.se/sb/d/298 Our translation)

The communicative aspect is more important now than in the previous grading system and has become a large part of assessment. Among other things, the teachers use tests, quizzes on homework, oral assignments, listening exercises, written work, and projects to assess and grade the students. Also, most of the teachers use the different criteria when creating assignments or tests for example. The Lpo94 states that “[t]he
school should promote the harmonious development of pupils. This is to be achieved by means of a varied and balanced combination of content and working methods. (1998, pp 6)

7 Conclusion
Our hypothesis was that teachers today still feel insecure about the current grading system even though almost twelve years have gone by since it went into effect. When talking to the teachers about the system in general they give the impression of still being insecure about the current grading system and that they do not trust their own knowledge about it. The lack of information at the time of the launch still seems to cause irritation among them. Nevertheless, after further discussions with the teachers one realises that most of them actually do understand the current grading system. It is rather the general nature of the goals and criteria within the national syllabus and the Lpo94 that create difficulties for the teachers.

One of the opinions among the teachers is that they need more precise criteria for “the goals to attain” so as to be able to keep a fairly similar level of knowledge between their students and the rest of the country. This is something the teachers see as a large problem within the system. The two schools’ local work plans and local grading criteria illustrate how interpretations of the national goals and criteria may differ between schools. However, even if they desire more precise criteria for “the goals to attain” they find it beneficial to have quite open “goals to aim for” since it gives them the freedom of choice regarding how and what to teach the students. Since the current grading system is a system which measures the students’ knowledge it is important that this measuring device functions similarly between the schools within the country. How you reach the knowledge does not really matter as long as it is achieved.

Furthermore, one of the challenges when grading appears to be the vagueness of “the goals to attain”. A further challenge is that the current grading system demands more of the teachers, in the sense that it creates a heavier workload when having to, for example, document the students learning process. Another challenge is that teachers feel pressured to pass all students even though they do not reach the adequate level of knowledge for a G. The biggest challenge, however, is the grading steps, i.e. the teachers feel that there are too few grading steps by which they can better explain where the students are on the grading scale. The G-grade especially creates a lot of difficulties
since it includes students who barely reach a G as well as students who almost reach a VG. As support the teachers use the national test when grading since it represents a level of knowledge in the English subject which all students in the country should have achieved in order to reach “the goals to attain”. The test is, however, only used as a guideline when grading and does not determine students’ grades.

Finally, one can draw the conclusion that discussions about the current grading system among teachers, school managements, higher levels of authorities as well as among students and teachers at the teacher training college are imperative and necessary so as to continue the process understanding the system better. But it is also important to see what needs to be improved in the future. The current grading system with its participatory management by objectives requires these continuous discussions; without them there would be no grading system. It also requires, first and foremost, the teachers’ involvement and their professional experiences in order to function. It is not a system with an absolute set of rules but rather a system which is constantly under interpretation and it is therefore important that today’s teachers feel that they have adequate knowledge about the grading system so as to feel secure in their role as professional teachers.

7.1 Proposals
This dissertation has dealt with looking at the grading system from the teachers’ point of view. An interesting aspect which has not been the investigated here is the students’ views on the grading system. What is it like to be graded in the current grading system and what advantages and disadvantages are there? The teachers in this dissertation have brought up the issue of fairness. What are the students’ thoughts concerning this? “According to some statements students do not see the grades as fair when comparing themselves to their friends who have received the same grade” (Selghed 2004, p 129. Our translation).

Looking at the current grading system from the point of view of the students would be interesting in order to understand how they perceive the current grading system.

7.2 Final words
We, the writers of this dissertation, have discussed the current grading system at times throughout our education, and have always felt that it has been difficult to go through as well as understand the different policy documents which the current grading system
consists of. The process of going through documents and work plans have been an ordeal, but very useful for the future. The current grading system is not the ideal system but after having conducted the interviews with the teachers we have come to realise that the system is beneficial in the way that it seems to be a natural way of working. There are, however, disadvantages with the current grading system which have been pointed out in this study and which we hope will be dealt with at some point.

It is our duty to grasp the system in use so as to be able to teach and grade our future students in a correct way. Because we have chosen to investigate the current grading system we now feel more secure with it. We are happy to have chosen this topic as we think that it has been beneficial for our future practice as English teachers.
References


Electronic references


Utbildningsdepartementet *Svensk-engelsk ordbok för utbildnings- och forskningsområdet 2003-12-10*. Länkadress: http://utbildning.regeringen.se


http://www.skolverket.se/sb/d/208/a/6338 (2006-11-09)

http://www.skolverket.se/sb/d/298 (2006-12-12)

**Other resources**

Local work plans and local grading criteria from the two schools in study
Appendix

Intervjufrågor:

Allmänt

1) Fick ni någon information om det nya systemet innan det sjösattes? I så fall vilken?

2) Upplever du att du fortfarande tänker i det gamla betygssystemets banor?

3) Vad är det svåraste med att förstå det nya betygssystemet?

4) Fördelar / Nackdelar?

5) Deltagande målstyrning – vad innebär det för dig i ditt arbete?

6) Hur har du uppfattat kunskapssynen i det nuvarande betygssystemet?

Nationella / Lokala kursplaner - Betygskriterier

7) Upplever du att det föreligger några svårigheter i att tolka de nationella kursplanerna?

8) Vad anser du är syftet bakom de lokala kursplanerna och hur tycker du de skiljer sig från de nationella?

9) Hur har ni utarbetat den lokala kursplanen?

10) Hur har ni arbetat fram kriterier för G?

11) Anser du att er lokala arbetsplan och era lokala betygskriterier förtydligar de nationella?

12) Hur uppfattar du innebörden av mål att sträva mot samt mål att uppnå?

13) Går du igenom betygskriterierna med eleverna?

14) Vad väger du in betyget?

15) Vilka metoder använder du för att få hjälp i din betygssättning?

16) Vilka kriterier överväger/följer du när du utformar dina prov/uppgifter?
17) Hur är det att betygssätta eleverna nu gentemot förut (med det relativa systemet)?

18) Hur använder du dig av de nationella proven när det gäller betygssättning?

19) Anpassar du ditt läromaterial efter det nationella provet – det vill säga övningar som förbereder eleverna inför provet?