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Potentials and Problem Areas in Assessment in Visual Arts Education in Sweden

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The focus of the study is teaching, and assessment in visual arts in Swedish compulsory school analysed and discussed in relation to the national evaluations (NU-92, NU-03, NÄU-13), assessment research and research in the subject field. The article aims at highlighting and problematising assessment and grading in visual arts education in relation to teachers' assessment practices. The study is based on group discussions and seven interviews with visual arts teachers on assessment practice carried out in connection with the production of two National Assessment Guides in visual arts, and supplementary films on assessment on behalf of The Swedish National Agency for Education (Sw. Skolverket) in 2012 and 2014. The result of the study indicates an ambivalence among the visual arts teachers concerning assessment. The author points at problem areas affecting teaching, assessment and grading in visual arts education. However, the author also points out potential strengths concerning assessment in the subject field and presents arguments for the significance of the subject visual arts for school and general assessment research.

Keywords: assessment, collegial co-operation, compulsory school, formative assessment, visual arts education.

1. Introduction

In the Swedish school system, pupils are graded from school year six up to the last year of upper secondary school. The criteria or requirements (Sw. *kunskapskrav*) that the grading is based on aims at assessing how the pupils measure up to abilities according to the syllabuses in the *Curriculum for the compulsory school, preschool class and school-age educare*, Lgr11 (Skolverket, 2011; Skolverket, 2019). The aim of the assessment is to identify skills, provide feedback for learning, make visible aspects

of practical knowledge, evaluate the learning processes, and grade knowledge according to The Swedish National Agency for Education (Sw. *Skolverket*, 2011 p. 7).

This article highlights and problematizes teaching, assessment and grading in the school subject visual arts (Sw. *Bild*). The article discusses assessment for learning in relation to visual arts and problematizes research on assessment related to the Swedish national evaluations, completed in 1992, 2003 and 2013, and prevalent conditions for assessment and collegial co-operation between visual arts teachers in the subject field.

1.1 Assessment research: International and Nordic perspectives

An international OECD research study about teacher professionalization in Europe shows that school education has not undergone any radical changes during the last 100 years. Attempts to change the system often result in traditional formations of the school levels and educational models (Alexandersson, 2011-05-10). Internationally, there has been an expansion of research on assessment since the mid-1980s. In education, instrumental knowledge mediation, promoted by behaviourist views, has been replaced by constructivist and social-constructivist theories that promote socio-cultural perspectives emphasizing situated learning, social learning strategies, meta-reflection and higher-order learning, or 'learning to learn' (Gardner, 1993 p. 20–24; Gipps, 1994; Korp, 2011 p. 11, 16-18; Rauste-von Wright et al., 2003 p. 132–133, 178-188; Resnick, 1987). This paradigm shift is also visible in assessment research since the assessment practice in education is still dominated by behaviouristic and developmental psychological influences, according to Mitchell, Morton and Hornby (2010), with an emphasis on assessment of individual performance.

The interest in research on assessment has grown continuously since 2000, according to Forsberg and Lindberg (2010). They place assessment research into a Nordic and international context and refer to several handbooks in their survey on Swedish research on assessment (2010 p. 61). The researchers identify eight categories in a survey of object studies about assessment in Sweden: 1) teacher's didactic assessment practice; 2) pupil achievement and school performance; 3) school management and teacher's work; 4) transitions between different types of schools; 5) organisation of the school, teaching and pupils; 6) assessment as a phenomenon; 7) pupil's experiences and

perceptions of assessment; and 8) the quality of assessment tools (2010 p. 76). Their survey shows similarities in the focus of studies in the Nordic countries (2010 p. 79). The classroom teaching in the Swedish school, where being in front of a whole class is most common even today, leads to traditional forms of assessment, turn-taking, initiating, feedback and evaluation (Lundgren 1972; Gustafsson 1977 in Forsberg & Lindberg, 2010).¹ Bamford (2006) notes from her international survey that “over-reliance on outcomes-based assessment” and “restrictive assessment structures tend to limit the extent and quality of art-rich education” (2006 p. 92, 94). Selander (2017) states that the rigid measurement-oriented assessment practice in school does not count in the meaning-making aspects of learning *per se*, but is more a tool for control and aiming to legitimise the school as an institution (2007 p. 31).

An increased emphasis on evaluation leads to a focus on school results and grading. Therefore, it is a challenge for the school system to welcome more collective systems of learning and assessment (Biggs & Tang, 2007). Use of digital media in school call for the use of several different communicative strategies and relations that encompasses participation (Märner & Örtengren, 2013). New teaching practices brings on new assessment practices, like the use of rubrics and digitization:

The shifts in the approach to knowledge and learning and changes to the school's activities and use of new technologies such as ICT are emerging new assessment practices with new objectives alongside the traditional assessment forms (cf. Roos 2005). In addition to controlling feedback is also emphasized and feed-forward for promoting learning (Sadler 1998, Wiggins 1998). A relatively common sight in schools nowadays is various forms of assessment rubrics (Lindberg 2009). (Forsberg & Lindberg, 2010 p. 26) [author's translation]

Assessment practice has come to focus more on the learning process with learning outcomes integrated into the teaching process (Korp, 2011 p. 114-115). The ability to reflect on learning and create meaningfulness in learning, including social and dialogic aspects, is linked to qualitative and process-oriented assessment methods. Biggs and Tang (2011) have contributed with research on

¹ Assessment in the form of an oral assessment practice as control of knowledge, historically originating in ‘house questionings’ about knowledge of the Catechism statutory from 1600th century, was transferred to the school field through the start of Swedish elementary school in 1842 (Forsberg & Lindberg, 2010 p. 22-23).

motivation, portfolio assessment and constructive alignment in this field. In line with this, Lindström (1999) discusses the importance of what Ziehe (1998) calls evaluation-free zones, providing space and time for pupils to act without assessment as part of the school activities.

1.2 Formative assessment

Hattie and Gan (2011 p. 252) describe the transformation of assessment practice from different epistemological positions linked to a more general change in views on knowledge formation that has shifted from a more instructive and external to a more dialogical and internal position, where formative assessment plays an integral part in developing motivation and self-awareness in learning. Thus, formative assessment has become more recognized in assessment research (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Hattie & Timperley, 2007). The purpose of assessment is to promote learning. Therefore, Black and Wiliam (1998) emphasise the importance of feedback and self-assessment, which they believe benefit the pupil's knowledge development by mapping and visualizing the current position in the learning process to guide to a specific goal. Here, the teacher's role is to contribute to the pupil's awareness of how goals are to be achieved and which paths exist to attain them (Black & Wiliam, 1998, 2012). Hattie and Gan (2011) note the following aspects of improving learning through giving feedback. Feedback is powerful when it:

- makes the learning goals transparent to the learner,
- calibrates the learning task just above the level where the learning is currently functioning,
- the learning environment is open to errors and disconfirmation,
- peer feedback provides a platform for engaging pupils in interactive and elaborative feedback discourse as well as taking ownership of their learning,
- the teachers' attention is on errors in their own instruction so that modifications can be made to improve teaching and learning (Hattie & Gan, 2011 p. 250).

Hirsh and Lindberg (2015) have written a survey on formative assessment research where they claim that the in-depth knowledge required to educate students in assessment in teacher education is lacking and studies in the professional use of formative assessment concerning learning processes. They also claim that “lack of collegial learning among teachers and school leaders many

times mean that pseudo-formative practices develop, where the understanding of formative assessment tends to be instrumental and linked to a more ritual work with a general methodology” (2015 p. 4) [author’s translation].

1.3 Visual arts education, assessment and the other school subjects

Understanding of assessment is traditionally framed by the belief that knowledge development progresses from basic skills to more advanced, that teachers are able to evaluate and assess this progress, with focus on testing and assessment of individual performance, technical skills, and products (i.e., summative results and grades) rather than the process of acquiring knowledge. Lindström (1999) state that the product is often considered more important than the learning process. According to him, the compulsory school have not developed sufficient knowledge of process-oriented work or knowledge forms that have to do with a recognition of assessing tacit knowledge or reflection of content (1999 p. 102). In the Swedish school system, the Swedish language, English and Mathematics are considered core subjects. In contrast, the aesthetic subjects have lesser teaching hours and are considered practice-based subjects with a more pragmatic orientation. National tests in the core subjects in grades 3, 6 and 9 aim at providing a basis for the analysis of national standards to make the assessment equivalent independent of context, since grading is complex in itself in any subject, according to Wikström (2006). Grading also varies between teachers and is due to a significant variation of criteria in the different school subjects (Wikström, 2006). Marner and Örtégren (2003) and Åsén (2006) claim that national school measuring of pupils’ school performance emphasises the core subjects, while other subjects become secondary. In a research review on assessment focusing on visual arts, Haanstra and Schönau (2007) point at the lack of studies in assessment in visual arts, and highlight the problem of assessment in the subject field related to assessment in other school subjects. They believe that the result or product in visual arts is only a small part of what is assessed. Murphy and Espeland (2007) note that arts education assessment requirements are often not explicit or standardised. Hence, teachers in aesthetic subjects tend to develop their own criteria with reference to common practice, one of several problematic issues concerning assessment practice in visual arts education.

1.4 The national evaluations and assessment research in visual arts

Örtegren (2017) stresses the lack of national studies in visual arts didactics even though Swedish research in the subject field has increased in recent years. For instance, Stam (2016) describes a collaborative project between the school subject visual arts and Swedish language. The result shows how visual arts are marginalised in the general school context due to the verbal and text-based domination in school, despite the teachers' ambition to find cooperative forms on teaching and learning on equal terms. The latest national evaluation in visual arts shows that the minor position of the subject increases in relation to other school subjects in the later years of compulsory school and parents who perceive visual arts as a less important school subject (NÄU-13 p. 36).

Individual performance dominates education in visual arts. The results from several national evaluations have emphasised individual image-production, focus on technical and chirographic skills, lack of use of image analysis and teacher-domination (NU-92; NU-03; NÄU-13). What is common, both for teachers and pupils, is the perception of visual arts as a subject that emphasizes product-focus, object-oriented solutions and results (Marner & Örtegren, 2013). Atkinson (2006, 2016) adds to this view from an Anglo-Saxon perspective, that a modernist conception of art is prevalent, where the subject content reproduces an art view with a focus on individual results and personal expression supported by learning in traditional artistic methods and technical skills. This view can also be derived from an even older conception of art linked to the medieval artist as master, the use of art portfolios and the master and student-relation (Skolverket, 2012a).²

According to Åsén (1998), Swedish visual arts education has exhibited more innovative forms of assessment than other school subjects. Lindström, Ulriksson and Elsner (1998) developed criteria for assessing the work process and the product, making visible the complexity of the learning process in visual arts, and used assessment based on portfolios in an innovative way. Their study shows that the learning process can be made visible through in-depth working methods where

² “As far as the assessment of knowledge about and in visual arts is concerned, there is a long tradition, from Leon Alberti whose painting school 1436 broke with the obsession with today's knowledge and skills in the subject. In the early days, copying masters was preferred over other methods to acquire knowledge of images and art, but the size of the copy and the choice of methods and materials varied. In environments where the artist was in focus, rather than the craft and traditional methods of formulating and solving problems, the portfolio was used to assess the knowledge of images and in art” (Author's translation, Skolverket, 2012a p. 17-18).

tasks are supplemented with, for example, picture talks (Lindström et al., 1998; Lindström, 1999, 2006, 2008a, b; 2011). Teaching aims to support the learner's progression within the subject so that the pupil can move from solving simple tasks to more complicated problems, and go from being a novice to expert. In this process, co-assessment gives the pupil a basis for comparing his or her performance at different stages of the work process from a progression perspective (Lindström, 1999; Skolverket, 2012a).

1.5 A framework: The production of National Assessment Guides in visual arts

Two National Assessment Guides in visual arts were developed with a progression perspective for school years 7 through 9 in 2012 (Skolverket, 2012a, b, c) and 4 through 6 in 2014 (Skolverket, 2014a, b) by visual arts teacher educators – of whom the author was one – at the University of Gothenburg.³ Two supplementary films, focusing on the significance of collegial conversations on assessment in visual arts, were produced to complement the Assessment Guides. The reason for these guides' production was that the national summative assessment in Sweden uses a renewed grading system, based on the curriculum presented in 2011 to evaluate school outcomes.⁴ The Assessment Guides, consisting of a research survey in visual arts, rubrics and films on collegial discussions based on the directives for the renewed grading system, were produced to aid visual arts teachers in formative assessment and grading. The Assessment Guides depict teaching situations and provide concrete examples of assessment from classroom situations.

Marner and Örtengren (2015) have written a research survey over visual arts and Swedish research on subject didactics. In this survey, they describe and comment on the content of the Assessment Guides in visual arts as follows:

As a follow-up to the syllabus and the curriculum Lgr11 (The National Agency for Education 2011a) and the commentary material in visual arts (2011b), an assessment guide has been developed in visual arts (Skolverket 2012). In the assessment guides for subjects such as Bild

³ The visual arts teacher educators Author and Lindgren produced the material in 2012, and Johansson Bäcklund (earlier Wu), Author and Valenta produced the material in 2014.

⁴ The syllabus and grading system that was new in 2011, is mainly referred as the renewed in this article, since the study was conducted and the empirical material was collected during the following years of the renewal, between 2011-2015. This syllabus and grading system is still prevalent in compulsory school in Sweden.

[visual arts] (and other so-called practical-aesthetic subjects such as sloyd [crafts, author's notification] and music) both filmed elements and texts is presented. Characteristic of the work coordinated by the University of Gothenburg /.../, is that the text material is related to specific assessment practice and the underlying didactic principles.

The first part covers a discussion about and a concrete example of possible rubrics to cover the knowledge requirements for parts and whole. Areas identified are the product, process and communication (p. 3). To clarify the connection between long-term goals, central content and knowledge requirements, circle rubrics are developed where these [areas, author's notification] are related to each other. They are then put in a linear rubric (p. 10), but teachers are encouraged to see the students' performance based on a "spider rubric" so that the development from simple to well-developed levels in different areas is presented. Several examples of work areas, pupil documentation and teacher assessment are given, and the need for reflection on completed tasks is emphasized, where tools such as student blogs are highlighted.

The second part of the assessment guides gives theoretical perspectives on the subject content and emphasizes discussions about the motivation for the subject. The concept of visual literacy /.../, as well as certain concepts of creative activity introduced in Sweden via Lars Lindström, is used to demonstrate the width and complexity of the subject. In conclusion, the content and relationships between summative, formative and portfolio assessment are reflected upon (Marner & Örtergren, 2015 p. 64) [author's translation].

The assessment material highlights the use of product and process criteria, inspired by the assessment scheme developed by the researchers behind the national evaluation made in 2003 in the subject visual arts (NU-03; Lindström et al., 1998). The assessment material aims to find tools for assessing the work process and the non-verbal dimensions of knowledge (Carlgrén in SOU1992:94), not solely the final product. This was also the aim of the production of the films on collegial discussions. Another consideration in the production was to find ways for teachers to work with equivalence in the assessment. Equivalence of assessment, since there is a lack of collegial interaction and teachers tend to develop their own assessment criteria, was the condition the Assessment Guides and films aimed at affecting. In the national evaluation made in 2013, the

new curriculum and criteria are considered by visual arts teachers to have improved the possibilities for equal assessment. It is pointed out by teachers with many years of teaching experience, that the interpretation of the knowledge requirements must be adapted to a reasonable level if some pupils should have the opportunity to reach the highest grade (NÄU-13 p. 132). Since the national evaluation shows that only a few pupils achieve the highest grade in visual arts, such adaptation is probably due to the assessment criteria' complexity. Still, the national evaluation states that not much progress is shown in the assessment procedure of visual arts teachers despite the new Assessment Guides, and points to the need for in-service training in assessment and grading (NÄU-13 p. 39; Marner & Örtengren, 2015).

The presentation of the background to the production of the films on collegial conversations and the Assessment Guides shapes a framework for the following presentation of the aim, method and research material of the study.

2. Aim of the study

This study aims to explicate and discuss teaching, assessment, and grading in the school subject visual arts, specifically in relation to teachers' assessment practice in a Swedish school context. The study further aims to contribute to an understanding of teaching and assessment on a more general level by discussing process-based learning and formative assessment to create participative strategies for learning in visual arts, both for pupils and teachers.

3. Method: Specification of research material and research ethics

The research material of the study was gathered during the production of two films on collegial conversations in connection with the production of two Assessment Guides in visual arts for school years 4-6 and 7-9. These were produced for the web on behalf of the Swedish National Agency of Education. The films are supplementary material to the Assessment Guides, all of which was published on the agency's website in 2012 and 2014 (Skolverket, 2012a, b, c; 2014a, b). The research material is based on the collaboration with two groups of visual arts teachers participating in the production. The background material that shaped the understanding of the research material in the study consisted of collected material for the production of the Assessment Guides: notes

from the transcription of filmed teaching sessions with the teachers, visual and written planning and assessment materials made by the teachers, and photographs and notes from collegial discussions with the teachers. The results are discussed in relation to a Swedish research context in assessment in visual arts, the Swedish national evaluations, and Nordic and international research on assessment in school, shedding light on assessment and grading in Swedish compulsory school.

The teachers' assessment practice, highlighted through interviews and two roundtables, includes thoughts from their collegiality and co-assessment discussions. The research material consists of excerpts from 1) group discussions with visual arts teachers at two roundtables, one for school years 7-9 (2011-09-10), another for school years 4-6 (2013-11-13), and 2) of material from earlier unpublished semi-structured interviews with seven visual arts teachers. Excerpts from the interviews are presented in the form of quotations from transcriptions from the interviews with Teacher 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7, and are translated by the author from Swedish to English. The interview material was collected at sessions between 2011-2015, with teachers 1-4 working in school years 7-9 (2015-11-14 and 2013-06-14), and teachers 4-7 working in school years 4-6 (2013-05-21, 2013-06-14, 2013-11-06 and 2013-11-17).

Since the research material was gathered in connection with the production of the Assessment Guides and film material, it can be considered problematic how to separate the material from the interviews and the group discussions from the material produced for the Swedish National Agency of Education. Therefore, the agency was informed that research material was collected from the group discussions and interviews. According to the Research Ethics Committee (Sw. *Vetenskapsrådet*, 2011), research ethics, is to be followed in producing the material. The agency is informed about the writing of articles based on the gathered material and has given consent. The participating teachers who worked in different rural, suburban and urban parts of Sweden, are anonymized but have given consent to use the material.

3.1 Methodological stance

The study represents a qualitative method, but can also be described as an ethnographic study since the research material was gathered in both structured and unstructured ways (Gobo, 2008) and consists of mainly written notes and audiovisual material. The combination of different methods, as observations, interviews and audio-visual recordings, are usual in research in visual studies and visual didactic studies (Björck, 2014). In analysing audio-visual material, “visual and digital media are part of the ways we constitute ethnographic knowledge” (Pink, 2013 p. 1). An unstructured way of collecting (visual) information in research can, according to Fors and Bäckström (2015), generate other kinds of information and meaning-making by possibilities to create free personal reflections and unexpected interpretations. In this way, the ethnographic character gives freedom of analysis and interpretation of the material. The ethnographic nature of the primary material of the study – the semi-structured interviews and group discussions with the visual arts teachers – is due to complex processes (Johansson, 2009), where many different aspects have contributed to the reflection on and the analysis of the material.

4. Presentation of results and analysis

The research material from the group discussions and interviews concerning the conditions for assessment in visual arts education is categorized, summed-up and commented by the author. The categorization is further analysed, mirrored through, and integrated into an on-going discussion that, in its turn, is related to the author’s understanding of earlier research and assessment research in visual arts. In reading the notes from the group discussions in the roundtables, the interview material and the analysis of the transcripts, the teachers have recurrently commented on several areas. The author found these areas to describe the conditions for visual arts education affecting teacher’s assessment practice. The analysis of the research material led to seven areas categorized as follows:

1. Conditions for visual arts education
2. Differences in conceptions of visual arts education
3. Parent’s views and equivalence

4. Collegiality and the assessment practice of teachers
5. Formative assessment and peer assessment
6. Use of analogue and digital media
7. Non-verbal aspects of visual arts education

The presentation of the categories encompasses thematized discussions by the author in relation to a) the syllabus for visual arts in the curriculum Lgr11 (Skolverket, 2011, 2019) results from the national evaluations in visual arts (NU-92; NU-03; NÄU-13), c) research about school and assessment, and d) the Assessment Guides in visual arts. The analysis of the categories and the discussion leads to presenting identified problem areas and arguments for the potential of visual arts and assessment of significance for assessment research.

Of course, the material could have been categorized in other ways than the chosen one, have points of contact on many levels, and is therefore partially interwoven. Due to the gathered research material and the thematized discussion, the result of the categorisation is presented below under the heading PART I *Conditions for assessment in visual arts education*. The result of the analysis of the categories is presented, discussed and summed up under the heading PART II *Presentation of results – problem areas and potential strengths of visual arts education*, and then further discussed under the heading *Discussion of results*. The presentation of the results and the discussion finally leads to final reflections of the author, presented under the heading *Concluding comment*.

5. PART I Conditions for assessment in visual arts education

5.1 Conditions for visual arts education

Today, there are approximately 2500 visual arts teacher whole-time positions in compulsory school in Sweden (Skolverket, 2019). According to the national evaluation, visual arts teachers typically have extensive classes and encounter a median of around 300 pupils in a week (NU-03 p. 62; NÄU-13 p. 30). This kind of teaching environment risk creating high rates in staff turnover. Teacher 1 (2015-11-14) comments and confirms the conditions for teaching and assessment:

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If you had had the conditions, when it comes to time compared to colleagues, absolutely, then it [the aims of the subject in the curriculum, author's notification] can be fulfilled. Then visual arts becomes a very rewarding subject in every way, but as it looks now, I think that it fails on the equal distribution of resources.

The recently published national evaluation (NÄU-13) has not shown any notable changes in the conditions for teaching and assessment for visual arts teachers:

The subject is taught mostly in whole class, groups are large in 9th grade, and pupils have teachers that face many pupils per academic year. In grade 6 the subject is often not "its own subject". Pupils in visual arts are taught mainly by female teachers. The teachers in 9th grade consider to mostly have appropriate premises (for the educational work), but not in grade 6 where pupils are often taught in regular classrooms. /.../ Teachers do not share the principals' perception of their strong commitment to the aesthetic subjects. The vast majority of pupils have visual arts teachers who think it is fun to teach the subject, but most pupils also have teachers who feel that they have a high workload (NÄU-13, p. 7) [author's translation].

Visual arts classes have fewer hours than many other subjects, which gives less time to fulfil the curriculum's learning goals and leads to stress concerning assessment practice. In the national evaluation made in 2013, the teachers consider that the lessons are too few in relation to the course syllabus's objectives as the most crucial obstacle to the teaching's implementation (NÄU-13 p. 135). Teacher 4 (2013-06-14) expresses the many demands that are making the work complicated:

In addition to the visual arts teacher assignment, I work with what we call special support and a group of pupils in year 7 who have support programs where it is written that they are allowed to work individually or in a small group. For several years, the pupils with special needs have been integrated into the teaching. I have had to be very driven to get that work done, and the work is not yet really supplemented with staff from special needs, which creates some friction.

Teacher 5 (2013-05-21) speaks of meeting the 6th-graders once a week and how she creates a line of content between the lessons. She explains that she lets the pupils:

...document their projects over the year and try to find time to comment on the work in each lesson. When the project is over, the pupils then have a whole series of pictures and commentaries, and the process becomes visible.

She uses special occasions when they look at the process together and where the pupils discuss between themselves about how they have succeeded with their tasks.

5.1.1 Comment

In this category, the teaching conditions are problematic due to large groups, few hours teaching the subject, and many tasks and demands. Still, the potential is to have didactic freedom to set the learning situation and use dialogic methods with the pupils. Thus, the visual arts teachers seem to or are obliged to find didactic solutions to deal with the circumstances.

5.2 Differences in conceptions of visual arts education

Visual arts as a school subject has undergone significant changes historically and in the scientific legitimization of the field. In Sweden, at least three traditions – technical, expressive, and communicative – have dominated the field over the last hundred years: orientations towards realistic depiction, technical, chirographic drawing, and visual communication (Sw. *bildspråk*, Nordström, 2004; 2014) have replaced each other historically. Åsén (2006) describe these traditions as a change of focus from children's drawing, through free creation to visual communication, a focus inspired by language semiotics (2006 p. 107). All these perspectives still affect the conception of the subject. Åsén points out that the beginning of visual arts as free creation and drawing as relaxation, created in the 1950s and 1960s, can be seen as a significant factor to the marginalization of visual arts as a school subject today.

The current situation is characterised by a pictorial and educational turn, emphasising visual arts education as part of the research field visual culture studies (Lindgren, 2008; Lindström, 2011). Teacher 1 (2015-11-14) comments on how she thinks about how cross-fertilisation between different disciplines and traditions is needed, as well as new ideas and interpretations of the subject:

I think that the practical-aesthetic teacher group at the school, that you might break it up and could see, for example, visual arts as one of the language subjects ... There are many ways to go there. We are today locked-in by lack of time but also lack of will and lack of new thinking. I think that, in organizational terms, one could open up to another type of approach to different subjects.

The results in the national evaluations of school practice in compulsory school in 1992 (NU-92) and 2003 (NU-03; Marner, Örtégren & Segerholm, 2005) showed that assessing visual arts is perceived as problematic because the gradings often are not entirely consistent with the goals for learning. One reason for this is likely the different views or conceptions of the subject content among teachers. These differences depend on the priorities and trends of the time and place due to varying views on the subject field that exist simultaneously in different schools and classrooms (Skolverket, 2012a). Teacher 2 (2015-11-14) comments the different conceptions of the subject in the syllabus as a combination of older content and new ideas:

I think there may be a difference in that the new syllabus in visual arts is, after all, a continuation of previous changes. It is a little bit on the same track that one should work more with image analysis, think more in process and not so much on, not just on finished products. After all, it is a continuation that is confirmed [of earlier conceptions, author's notification]. This development, so to speak, that has been earlier in the subject, is actually confirmed by the new curriculum.

5.2.1 Comment

The national evaluations show differences in interpretations of the content of the subject among visual arts teachers around the country, an incongruity that may, for instance, be the result of different generational and geographical contexts as well as differences in educational backgrounds. These frames of reference affect how teachers interpret the curriculum and theories and epistemologies differently, as commented by Teacher 2. In this category, the interviews show that the visual arts teachers are conscious of the earlier conceptions of the subject and that they see this as problematic, hindering renewal. They look upon the new syllabus as a potential pointing at vital parts in the subject field, like image analysis and process-based work methods.

The teachers also see cross-border practices as a potential through collaboration with other school subjects but do not think they get the right circumstances for collegial work.

5.3 Parent's views and equivalence

The national evaluations (NU-03; NÄU-13) shows that pupils perceive visual arts as rewarding and fun, but this perception decreases in the higher years in compulsory school. Pupils believe that their parents do not consider the aesthetic subjects as essential skills for future professional life. This is noted in the national evaluation (NÄU-13):

Many of the pupils have teachers who are hesitant about if the school where they work has an equal standpoint of the different school subjects. Most pupils have teachers that consider that the subject may have a high status by the pupils' view, but not by the parents (NÄU-13, p. 7) [author's translation].

Teacher 3 (2015-11-14) describes how she thinks the renewed curriculum Lgr11 (Skolverket, 2011) can affect the mindset of parents about the subject, and what obstacles a visual arts teacher can meet in the form of resistance to, and different interpretations of, the subject from both pupils and parents:

I know that there is a huge resistance from pupils and pupils' parents when I want them to reflect on their artwork, writing texts, such as sending in or writing their own work. They do not see that visual arts is a theoretical subject, which I think it is. /.../ I think the new syllabus will make it clear to pupils what it is we believe and what we want with visual arts education.

The national evaluation shows that the parents' education level also co-varies with the pupils' grades in visual arts. Pupils with parents with post-secondary education tend to get higher grades than pupils with parents with lower education (NÄU-13 p. 135).

Teacher 1 (2015-11-14) comments the renewed syllabus and what it signals about visual arts:

It's [the syllabus, author's notification] more stripped down, it is made clear there that visual arts is a communicative topic, that is about images as a language, and not as a craft item only ... image formation is not an end in itself but a tool in a communicative process. It is clearer than it was previously. It also opens up the subject as a topic that goes well together with other school subjects that it has not traditionally been associated with, so I think this is positive...

The differences in the understanding and valuation of the subject content also impair the assessment practice. There is a lot of pressure on the pupils and the teachers to perform and get the grading right based on the syllabus's criteria. There is also documentation on the pressure from parents on teachers concerning grading (SVT Nyheter, 2015-06-04). The clarification of the criteria used is, therefore of great importance in the communication of assessment. Teacher 1 (2015-11-14) describes how she works to clarify the policy documents and assessment criteria for the pupils, and with consideration of the parents:

I feel it is important that pupils understand that we, the teachers are obliged to look at [in the assessment, author's notification] and that the pupils understand that this is not about the teacher's own taste. And to do so, I show them the policy documents. And to the extent that they need help in understanding them [the policy documents, author's notification], I think it is the teacher's task to decompose the goals and formulate them in such a way that pupils, teachers and parents understand them.

The national guidelines require assessment practice to be adapted to different school contexts across the country to guarantee equivalency, but there are problems in ensuring equivalence of assessment. There are also problems in ensuring equivalence because of varying school practices.

5.3.1 Comment

In this category, the teachers describe problems in reaching through to the parents with the significance of the subject and assessment based on the learning goals. At the same time, they recognise the potential of the renewed syllabus to clarify the character of visual arts and formulate

more precise assessment criteria in the teaching. The teachers also express that they are responsible for communicating the subject content, the assessment criteria, and the subject's significance to pupils and parents. In this way, they see themselves responsible for creating equivalent prerequisites for the pupils through their communication in the teaching, finding collaboration with other teachers, and making them see the potential of visual arts in relation to their teaching in other school subjects.

As the curriculum is a directive, it also is open to interpretation. However, this flexibility means that the teaching can address different knowledge requirements in various assessment and evaluation situations. One of the challenges in today's school practice is thus, of course, that curricula and syllabi represent an ideological level of the educational context that often differs from the school practice. This also points to a need for collegial discussions about assessment and how assessment should be carried out to assess equivalently.

5.4 Collegiality and the assessment practice of teachers

Research shows that teachers' conceptions of assessment criteria follow older models, and lead them to produce and use their own assessment criteria (Borg, 2016; Wikström, 2006), sometimes despite assessment directives and grading models. Researchers in the field of assessment points at a discursive shift, from a content-focused orientation of the previous curriculum to a more performance-oriented approach, leaving teachers to make their own interpretations of what and how to assess (Borg, 2016; Wikström, 2006). There is a risk that assessment is based on the pupils' personal qualities (Grettve, Israelsson & Jönsson, 2014; Lundahl, 2011). Teachers in aesthetic and practice-based subjects assess unique qualities more often than other categories of teachers do, according to Klapp (2016), even though several national evaluations in the aesthetic subjects show that the teachers experience the new assessment criteria to be more transparent and reasonable (NÄU-13). Teacher 4 (2013-06-14) comments the clarification in the latest national directives in the syllabus and the difficulties in bringing in the new directives into their work.

We have a new curriculum, and it takes time to shift focus, the old idea is that it is a craft subject. Now it is written more clearly that it [the subject visual arts, author's notification] is a communication subject.

Teacher 4 comments the need for professional language as a factor to communicate a non-traditional approach of the teacher as one that solely keeps order:

It is very much a matter of the teacher acquiring an open and positive, professional language and an attitude in relation to expectations. In this way, you can shift focus from education and "keeping order" to what you really want to do [as a teacher author's notification], and formulate this yourself.

In the roundtable with teachers teaching in years 4-6 (2013-11-13), they discuss professional language, but also the need for assessment-free zones:

An important part for the teacher is to be able to distinguish when assessments should be made and when space is needed for experimentation and training - and to be able to communicate this to the pupils. The training [teacher training, author's notification] in being able to formulate yourself provides support and strength in their own assessment work. One of the teachers says that sometimes she uses the first lessons to just practice a technique or material where she tells the pupils that what we do now I will not assess.

Co-assessment between subjects can lead to an understanding of the school's governing documents' interpretation and application and improved assessment practice (Jönsson & Thornberg, 2014). Teacher 4 (2013-06-14) comments co-operation with other teachers:

In year 7, we collaborate across all subjects, between boundaries to and fro. We make a lot of joint assessments, integrate topics and work with the computer and social media to the extent possible with the equipment we have. We film and video shoot, use dramatization and presentations, link pictures and text and work with websites. I am not the one to push it, but we work together. You can probably say that the teacher in the Swedish language has an extra drive in this.

In the roundtable (2013-11-13) preceding the production of the film material supplementing the Assessment Guide for school years 4-6, the teachers speak about collegial assessment:

Different frameworks in work create various opportunities for assessment. To assess the pupil's knowledge, it can be a great support to exchange thoughts and ideas with other colleagues, either in the same subject or with colleagues who teach other subjects. Teachers can also co-operate through integration between subject fields. A dialogue between colleagues around the example of a finished product can be a complement to the teacher's own assessment and grading.

Grettve, Israelsson and Jönsson (2014) point out that many teachers have not received any in-service education at all in assessment and grading. This is a fact that may jeopardize the directives on equivalence in grading, which was confirmed in the national evaluation (NÄU-13). A survey made by The Swedish School Inspectorate (Sw. *Skolinspektionen*, 2018) has found that teachers seldom take part in in-service training concerning assessment and grading and that knowledge on the subject varies between different teachers depending on when they have completed their education and graduated. This risk was leading to jeopardizing equivalence in assessment due to differing conceptions and context-related circumstances.

5.4.1 Comment

The teachers witness that the work with assessment is complicated and needs planning to be made properly. They express positive feelings concerning the renewed syllabus's formulations, perceiving them as clarifying and giving visual arts a stronger position as a subject. They also talk about the need for professional language as part of a non-traditional teaching approach as crucial in communication with pupils. They comment assessment, and the need to understand when to use assessment, and when not to, and in this way, giving the pupils assessment-free zones (Lindström, 1999; Ziche, 1998).

Researchers point out an increased need for in-service training and claim that teachers seldom have the opportunity to participate. This calls for collegiate conversations to share experiences and learn from each other and prevent teachers producing and using their own assessment criteria. The teachers in the study testify that this kind of collegiate co-operation and co-assessment exists as a

potential. Still, the individual-oriented school context, as well as the division in subject fields, complicates collaboration.

5.5 Formative assessment and peer assessment

Criteria-based models have dominated the assessment in schools and the whole educational process, including how the daily work in classrooms is conducted, which affects the knowledge formation and choices of learning subjects, tasks, work methods, tests, etc. This emphasis on results means that assessment (especially summative assessment) steers how education is conducted. Assessment can be described as a two-headed model with “psychometric and test measurement in one end and interpretative constructivist models for assessment in the other”, as Forsberg and Lindberg state, and point out that that formative assessment is inherently a part of the learning process (2010, p. 45). Hirsh and Lindberg (2015) claim that more classroom studies are needed that examine formative assessment, feedback and learning, especially there is a lack of studies about pupils’ perspectives (2015, p. 73).

Formative assessment is considered to positively affect the learning process, while too much focus on summative assessment is supposed to hinder the learning process (Harlen & Deakin, 2002; Leahy & Wiliam, 2009). In line with this, Teacher 1 (2015-11-14) expresses her view on the need for dialogue, peer response and more involvement in, and awareness of, matters of content in the subject among the pupils:

There should be a change in how pupils view their work, not necessarily to make the artwork prettier and nicer, but for change and a reflection, and that the pupil develops an ability to talk about their work and discuss with others. Perhaps working with peer response, so I think...

Teacher 4 (2013-06-14) comments on how she fits in formative assessment with the other aspects of the teaching:

I work as much as I can with long sessions of 100 minutes. In this way, I can fit in reflection, planning, instruction of tasks, formative assessment, and the actual artwork in every lesson. Sometimes this does not fit in the schedule, and then I have to adjust.

Teacher 7 (2013-11-17) describes the work with film and digital media and peer assessment:

The pupils built an urban environment of paper, cardboard and recycling materials containing a traffic environment. They then had to work on a short film with a clear message, a story with both a sender and the receiver, with a clear beginning and a clear ending. They planned the film work themselves in the form of film sequences and edited the film on a computer. When the work was done, the pupils and I had picture talks based on the films, and they were allowed to give [verbal, author's notification] assessments to each other. They were supposed to critique and suggest improvements to each other, and tell them what they thought worked in the films [the pupils had made, author's notification] and what knowledge requirements they felt their classmates had succeeded with. In this work, the pupils used a type of assessment rubric to draw out the learning goals in the task in relation to the knowledge requirements.

Teacher 6 (2013-11-06) explains how she works with formative assessment and peer participation in the assessment as a way to gain an understanding of the subject content:

When the work is done [with the given task, author's notification], I gather the pupils and let them work with self- and peer assessment of their production. I want them to work together to understand the grounds for the assessment better. This, to better understand what the subject visual arts is about and that it concerns more than what traditionally is conceived as "drawing a nice picture". They are supposed to assess their work to train self-evaluation. The pupils are to grade themselves in relation to the criteria E, C or A, but start this by discussing if they have succeeded in one or the other direction related to the criteria and the grading scale.

When giving feedback, the timing, type of feedback, and the dialogue with the pupil are essential. Teacher 4 (2013-06-14) describes how she clarifies the teaching tasks to the pupils related to the three areas in subject content in the syllabus for visual arts (image production, technical skills, image analysis, Lgr11, Skolverket, 2011 p. 26-33). She also implicitly relates the criteria to Lindström et al.'s research (1998) on assessing the product and the process:

To know to what extent you reach the knowledge requirements, the teacher will look at the quality within [the task, author's comment]: 1) How you work and develop during the image process, 2) How your product actually looks when it is finished, and 3) Your ability to describe, compare and interpret images.

The feedback can be found confusing or incomprehensible to the pupil if the feedback is not adjusted to the pupil's personal situation, motivation and learning strategies, and "make it transparent to the learner" (Hattie & Gan, 2011 p. 249-250). This calls for teachers to work in more transparent ways, inviting the pupils into the learning process and a need for peer assessment to focus on their learning. Teacher 3 (2015-11-14) elaborates the difficulty of formative assessment and the need for the communication of the assessment to be consistent towards the pupils:

I think that the teacher must be very consistent when working with assessment based on the process because what I present in the task, I have to assess all the way based on it [the process, author's notification]. Therefore, it must run a line of progression from the time I present the task to the execution of the final [summative, author's notification] assessment. I put a lot of weight in the documentation of the process. /.../ I cannot first present a task and say that the process is important and then emphasise how to use materials and techniques. The entire task needs to be designed so that it is possible [for the pupil, author's notification] to report their process. All the time I give feedback, both in the classroom situation and on the blog, and the feedback must also always be consistent and focus on the process, absolutely, and then the assessment [grading, author's notification] must go in line with it too.

According to Korp (2011), rubrics can help assess and show how goals are achieved, starting from the task up to the grading. Documentation through rubrics, or by blogs as mentioned by Teacher 3 above, can support the assessment through systemising the continuing observation. Rubrics can also lead to instrumental learning (Hirsh & Lindberg, 2015, p. 37). Therefore, assessment can either enhance or oppose best practice for learning and requires a teacher to balance their learning strategies. This response emphasises the importance of the role of the teacher in education.

5.5.1 Comment

Formative assessment is used by the teachers and seems to be considered a tool for creating pupils' participation and understanding the subject content and assessment criteria and how and why to use them. The excerpt of Teacher 3 above shows sensitivity to creating cohesion between the different phases in the assessment process and the relation between the teacher and pupils. Formative assessment is thus perceived as a potential by the teachers, although it requires more transparency. They seem to find ways to connect the formative and summative parts of the assessment process.

The assessment documentation gives teachers and pupils opportunities to complement assessment through dialogic models favouring formative assessment and favouring peer participation. The need for continual documentation, rubrics, blogs and so forth, can also lead to instrumental learning and “enslave” the teacher if the pupils are many, and there is a lack of time.

5.6 Use of analogue and digital media

In visual arts education, the evolution of assessment practice has changed from drawing tests to electronic portfolios (Kárpáti & Gaul, 2013). New methods for documenting and assessing aesthetic subjects are needed because one-sided assessment systems cannot capture the teaching and the assessment of creative learning activities associated with visual arts (Haanstra & Schönau, 2007). Teacher 3 (2015-11-14) describe why she chose to use digital media in the form of blogs to make the learning process evident to the pupils, seeing the blogs as a tool for participation in the assessment process:

Well, I have chosen to work with a blog in year 9 and done so that each pupil has started their own picture blog that is only used for the artwork. They can have private blogs alongside. All the class blogs are linked to a mother blog, where I post information every week. I might post feedback, or sometimes I post images to illustrate a little task and so on. Why I chose to work with a blog started with, really, that I thought I had too little time with them [the pupils,

author's notification]. They come in here in full class one hour a week, and I cannot give feedback to each pupil as I would like, but with the blog, I can subsequently go in and give feedback to each pupil and comment on their text and pictures, how they have described their work and what pictures they have chosen to post. /.../ Here, it [the blog, author's notification] will dock the whole process where the pupil always chooses what they want to show, what they want to publish on the blog and how to describe it. It means that you have to continually think about what you work with, how to describe it. Then it becomes visible since they [the pupils, author's notification] can go into each other's blogs and be inspired and comment on each other. Yes, the process becomes very visible with the blog; both the pupil and I can go back in time and see what they did three weeks ago. /.../ It is also exciting to see how sketches develop, you start with a sketch, and then you build on it and do something, then the whole process is documented in photos so that it becomes very clear.

The possibilities to use digital media depend on the schools' material resources, which affects the equality of education in visual arts between schools. The national evaluation (NÄU-13) comments the deficit of proper digital equipment in schools, but also the knowledge of the use of digital media among the visual arts teachers:

The equipment is insufficient, in particular the digital equipment, according to the teachers in both grade 6 and in year 9 /.../ The teachers believe that the need for training is great in the digital areas and the assessment and grading of the subject (NÄU-13, p. 7) [author's translation].

There is also a lack of teacher's competencies to use digital media, both technically and didactically (NÄU-13 p. 7). The documentation practice takes a lot of time and energy, being more and more digitalised and requiring ICT skills (Hirsh & Lindberg, 2015). The national evaluations in 1992, 2003 and 2013 show that many teachers still stress about handicrafts and analogical techniques, although digital media is predominant in contemporary society (NU-92; NU-03; NÄU-13). This is often not compatible with the pupils' knowledge in digital media, and Teacher 4 (2013-06-14) gives testimony of the pupils being creative and innovative in the use of digital media:

Pupils sometimes surprise with completely new ways of working with a technology or a subject, making the work as a visual arts teacher so exciting! It is then important to be a resource [for the pupils, author's comment].

Teacher 3 (2015-11-14) comments both the difficulties with interpreting the assessment criteria and the potentials in using digital media in assessment:

As far as the assessment is concerned, I think the new grading scales and the criteria formulations are very arbitrary. The difference between "relatively complex" and "complex" [formulations in the assessment criteria in the curriculum to discern between different grades, author's notification] relationships, in reality, with heterogeneous classes and in short time, open for free interpretations in my opinion. Of course, this makes it even more difficult to explain the difference between different grades for the pupils. Again, I would like to highlight the blog as a constructive tool for assessment, as it allows getting together with the pupil, and have a dialogue in the progression of knowledge levels.

5.6.1 Comment

The teachers confirm the need for finding new ways to assess visual arts due to the digitization of the subject in the interviews. The teachers see the pupils' digital competence as a potential in renewing the teaching and the need for themselves to improve their own media literacy and technical competencies through in-service training. Further, in the national evaluation (NÄU-13), the teachers may lack appropriate digital equipment. The use of digital media is described by them as a potential and help to communicate the tasks to the pupils in formative and summative assessment of the pupils' production and performance.

The national evaluations show that pupils increasingly use digital media in their spare time (NÄU-13 p. 8). According to the teachers, process-based learning and the use of process criteria, the pupils' participation in assessment, and documentation tools can help understand the content and flow of knowledge formation in visual arts.

5.7 Non-verbal aspects of visual arts education

The concept of tacit, or hidden, knowledge (Polanyi, 1966) is often used in practice-based learning and professional development research to describe practical skills acquisition. The tacit dimension of visual arts and the relation to spoken and written language is a challenge in assessing the subject area. When assessing visual arts, words cannot capture all aspects of the pupil's artwork but are often needed to complement the artwork in educational situations. Haanstra and Schönau (2007) state that a dilemma with visual arts is the verbal formulation of non-verbal skills and competencies (2007 p. 338) since the subject knowledge is based on analogue and digital production visual images and visual communication.

To highlight the learning that is non-verbal, as well as practical and aesthetic dimensions of learning, the researchers Lindström, Ulriksson and Elsner (1998) created criteria to assess the entire visual artwork process, in a national project in the form of a study about portfolio assessment of pupil's creativity in assessment (Lindström, 2006 p. 54; Lindström et al., 1998). They presented process-based criteria that complement the more traditional assessment of only assessing the product. Their study shows that it is possible to make visible, the non-linguistic or hidden knowledge, thus facilitating the creation of assessment methods (Lindström, 1999 p. 107).

Still, the tacit dimension of the subject area can be one reason that visual arts teachers neglect theoretical aspects and avoid defining the subject area and its validity in a subject-specific or comprehensive learning manner (Skolverket, 2012a). Lindström et al. (1998) mean that the non-verbal context leaves the field to be defined by others without knowledge of the subject area, a situation that risks resulting in superficial and conventional opinions about the subject. This makes the definition of visual arts even more complicated since visual arts education can be described as in-between art and pedagogics, which also constitutes a striking duality to consider in the formation of the knowledge field (Lindström, 2008b). Some of the teachers in the group discussions in the roundtable with teachers teaching in school years 7-9 preceding the production of the film material supplementing the Assessment Guides (2011-09-10), saw the non-formulated aspects of image-making as a free zone (Lindström, 1999; Ziehe, 1998) of possibilities of expression. Others in this

group of teachers believed that the subject content, or image production, cannot be understood and analyzed without the spoken and written formulation and dialogue.

Teacher 5 (2013-05-21; Skolverket, 2014b) gives an example of her work when she has conversations about text and images on sports with the pupils. The starting point for one task was to train image analysis and text reading by reading about sports. Soon the pupils started talking about cheating and doping. The teacher wondered how they got into this because it was nothing about doping in the text. They went through the pages, the chapter headings and sub-headings, but there were no words for doping. Soon they realised – when they looked more carefully – that although texts about doping were not included, there were signs of doping in a different way that was directly visible in the images through what is called indexical signs (Eriksson & Göthlund, 2012). Through image analysis and picture talks, the pupils understood the impact of underlying visual codes and could discuss them. Teacher 5 (2013-05-21) claims:

A non-formulated dimension in itself constitutes potential for pupils to express themselves in other ways. Being able to express oneself with non-linguistic expression, besides writing and speaking, is an equally important part of visual arts as in other school subjects.

This is especially highlighted by Teacher 5 since school is dominated by a written context (Marner, 2005). This teacher claims that enforcing non-verbal expression gives new possibilities to the pupils who have difficulties expressing themselves in writing by using other tools for expression. Teacher 5 (2013-05-21) speaks about her teaching, also as a tool to create equivalence in learning (connecting to the category of *Parents' views and equivalence*) and summarises:

This is important, particularly for certain groups of children in the earlier years, who often can express themselves better in speech than in writing. It can also apply to pupils with dyslexia, pupils with Swedish as a second language or newly arrived pupils who cannot speak Swedish. Therefore, it is important to work in different ways in the classroom to create equality; asking questions in different ways, working in different configurations to create more opportunities for pupils to speak, dare to say something, and express their opinion and learning from each other.

In this way, she also connects the understanding of non-verbal communicative skills as an aspect of equivalence, since pupils have different capacities.

5.7.1 Comment

Ambivalence comes forth in the study, due to differing opinions among the teachers on the importance of the subject's non-verbal dimensions and language formulations. The teachers' views about the non-verbal dimensions of visual arts are disparate since some of them work using the non-verbal in the teaching as a resource to create, for instance, equivalence or as a way to analyse underlying messages. Others express ambivalence in perceiving the non-verbal communication to have potential since the school context is mainly text-oriented, and legitimizes formulated, written, theoretical and language-dominated learning in contrast to practice-based, embodied and non-formulated learning. The opinions were polarized concerning this matter, and confirm that the non-verbal aspect of visual arts education is a problematic area, affecting the legitimacy of the subject.

6. PART II Presentation of results: Problem areas and potential strengths of visual arts education

Based on the material from the interviews and group discussions with visual arts teachers thematised above, in the seven categories, the hindrances for visual arts are identified by pointing out problematic areas and showing potential strengths. From the categorization, two themes are outlined: 1) *problem areas* that indicate the need for change and development work, and 2) *potential strengths* in visual arts education and research in the subject field with significance for assessment research and school practice.

6.1 Problem areas of visual arts

6.1.1 Conditions for and conception of visual arts education among teachers and parents

In the study, the teaching conditions are proven to continue being problematic. Teacher 1 points at the lonely conditions for teaching in visual arts. Teacher 5 tells how she had developed didactic

tools to cope with the large classes and the lack of time in teaching since a visual arts teacher often is a lone actor meeting hundreds of pupils a week in large classes (NU-92; NU-03; NÄU-13).

The conditions described in the study are signalling a position as a lesser important subject in school for visual arts, as earlier described by Marner and Örtégren (2003) and Åsén (2006). Collaboration with other school subjects is needed to be enforced to understand visual arts as a school subject in relation to other subjects to prevent this marginalization.

The visual arts teachers are conscious of differing interpretations of the subject content, triggered by earlier conceptions of visual arts, and they see this as problematic, hindering renewal. In-service training on assessment is insufficient, and there is a need for taking measurements to problematize the differences in conceptions of visual arts teachers. De-professionalization of subject knowledge through introvert action or locking out new ideas marginalizes the subject and the work of visual arts teachers (Marner, 2008).

The teachers describe problems in getting through to the parents. The societal view on the subject affects how visual arts is perceived, which affects the pupils' opinions of the subject and the assessment, as notified in the national evaluations and by Teacher 3. Their notifications point at a need for collegial discussions about assessment and how assessment should be carried out to make it more equivalent with other subjects. Assessment has socio-political importance as it affects how young people view themselves and their possibilities for education and future careers (Forsberg & Lindberg, 2010).

6.1.2 Collegiality and the assessment practice of teachers, formative assessment and peer assessment

The visual arts teachers in this study state that assessment is complicated and needs planning and efforts. Dialogues between teachers can be of value, as they provide ways to exchange their thoughts and ideas about teaching and assessment with each other. In this way, they empower their professional practice and reduce the dominance of individual work in school (Mitchell et al., 2010). In the teachers' assessment practice collegial collaboration, conversations and co-

assessment are needed to exchange knowledge, create professionalism, and reflect on their assessment practice to counteract pseudo-formative practices (Hirsh & Lindberg, 2015) as well as use of one-sided, individual-oriented methods in teaching (NÄU-13).

According to Biggs and Tang (2007), collegial discussions and collaboration on assessment contribute to reflections on the teacher's teaching practice and collective learning processes. Teacher collaboration, strategic assessment and evaluation help improve quality in teaching, according to Bamford (2009). This is notified by Teacher 1, who calls for change and collaboration to enhance qualitative procedures in teaching, also between different subjects. Teachers can cooperate by using co-assessment if they have integrated teaching processes between different subjects; of course, this approach needs to be done without losing focus of the criteria for knowledge requirements in their specific subject fields (Stam, 2016).

Teacher 1 problematizes the tradition of individual production and product-focus in visual arts and calls for more reflection to highlight the subject content and image analysis to stimulate the communication between pupils. In the national evaluations in visual arts, collaborative work and image analysis are emphasised. This is done due to earlier findings that describe a dominance of individual performance and chirographic practice in visual arts in schools (Mitchell et al., 2010; NU-92; NU-03; NÄU-13).

An essential part of the formative assessment is the teacher's communication of what and how to assess the pupils. The teacher needs to be clear about the different phases of the assessment process to promote pupils' knowledge formation. How the teacher explains the assessment criteria will affect the pupils' perception and performance of their skills and capabilities, as described by Teacher 3. The teachers repeatedly point at using different ways of peer assessment, and at the need of assessment-free zones for the pupils to experiment, try out new strategies, and fail without the pressure of continuously being assessed in the teaching. Through a reflected assessment practice, the teacher's awareness of his or her role in the mediation of the formative assessment process is clarified. This, leading to an understanding of how explaining and interpreting the assessment criteria affects pupils' perception, implementation and application of the criteria in relation to their tasks (Black & Wiliam 1998, 2012; Hattie & Gan, 2011). Process-based learning

and use of process criteria help pupils understand the assessment in relation to the content if they participate in the process, as described by Teacher 3.

Differences in learning conditions and conceptions of the subject content among teachers risk inequality in teaching and assessment. To create equality in assessing abilities in visual arts, teachers can engage in collegial dialogues with each other and colleagues from other subjects and work with peer participation. This is also what research identifies as missing (Hirsh & Lindberg, 2015). Teacher 5 highlights pupils' differences, especially the learning situation of pupils with special needs, as an aspect of teaching and assessing. The teacher needs to consider different ways of communicating knowledge and skills.

6.1.3 Use of analogue and digital media and non-verbal aspects of visual arts education

New methods for documenting and assessing aesthetic subjects are needed to give alternatives to one-sided assessment systems and to grasp creative and process-based learning activities in visual arts (Haanstra & Schönau, 2007). Digitization and collaborative teaching strategies is a way to create more participation and communication (Marner & Örtégren, 2013). The visual arts teachers are aware of a need for themselves to improve their own media literacy and technical competencies, which indicates the need for in-service training and points at a lack of appropriate digital equipment, as shown in the national evaluation (NÄU-13). Documentation and rubrics have the potential to support systematic assessment and elucidate observation and visibility of the knowledge expansion and process (Korp, 2011). In this work, pupils can use process logs or rubrics in relation to specified tasks or parts of the teacher's educational plan, as presented by Teacher 3. The methods can also be time-consuming and need a participative, educational context to be relevant and useful. More research on teaching practice of collaborative and participative strategies is required, both between teachers and between teachers and pupils, and appropriate and informed use of documentation of rubrics, process logs and so forth in formative assessment in visual arts (Forsberg & Lindberg, 2010).

In visual arts, non-verbal communication and visual knowledge are often shown in other ways than verbally. This is vital in the assessment in visual arts since one-sided assessment systems have difficulties in capturing the manifold layers in creative learning (Haanstra & Schönau, 2007). The

non-verbal aspect of visual arts education is a problematic area affecting the legitimacy of the subject since the school context is mainly text-oriented (Marner, 2005), and legitimizes formulated, written, theoretical and language-dominated learning in contrast to practice-based, embodied and non-formulated learning. Instead of solely focusing on the product, assessing the knowledge process requires another kind of tools for documentation and analysis to create in-deep reflection and make visible non-verbal aspects of knowledge (Lindström et al., 1998). Participation for pupils in the assessment process is needed to increase understanding of the assessment criteria and the subject content to create equal learning possibilities and consider differences in learning conditions and dimensions, as the visual arts' non-verbal character. The visual arts teachers in the study are aware of the need to professionalise their language to formulate the subject content and talk about the significance of the subject to other teachers and parents.

6.2 Potential strengths in visual arts

6.2.1 Conditions for and conception of visual arts education among teachers and parents

The visual arts teachers in the study give witness about the potential to have didactic freedom in their teaching and see cross-border practices between subjects as a potential to collaboration in creating a common frame of reference about the knowledge requirements in the curriculum. They see the criteria in the renewed syllabus in 2011 to have the potential to clarify the character of visual arts and to formulate more precise assessment criteria in the teaching. However, they also point to the problems with interpreting the criteria. They also see themselves as responsible for making other teachers aware of the potential of visual arts in relation to their teaching in other school subjects.

Assessment research in visual arts, due to Lindström et al.'s presentation of product- and process-criteria (1998), in many ways, has potential to contribute to assessment practice and assessment research in visual arts, but also in general for other subject areas. This, since they support teacher's assessment based on both media-specific (material-based) and media-neutral (thought- and idea-based) perspectives (Marner & Örtégren, 2003; Lindström, 1999, 2006, 2011; Åsén, 1998). Visual knowledge is not limited to visual arts education but can be identified in several school subjects and have a multidisciplinary role. The study's result acknowledges process-based strategies for

learning in visual arts teaching practice and assessment research in the subject field, adding to giving visual arts education status in itself as a subject and in relation to other school subjects.

6.2.2 Collegiality and the assessment practice of teachers, formative assessment and peer assessment

Like Teacher 1 and 3, the visual arts teachers express positive feelings concerning the formulations in the renewed syllabus in 2011, perceiving them as clarifying and giving visual arts a stronger position as a subject. They hope for the more precise criteria to lead to a more shared and collective view on assessing and interpreting the criteria between visual arts teachers. Although they see collegiate conversations and co-assessment to share experiences and potential, they also describe this as complicated and problematic. For instance, Teacher 4 gives evidence of situations where the conditions are working against her despite her efforts, opposing the hopes and expectations.

Formative assessment is used by the teachers and seems to be considered a potential for creating participation for pupils and developing an understanding of the subject content. Formative and process-based assessment, for example, through the use of documentation practice with rubrics or process logs, can support pupil's in-depth reflection on their learning in the long term. The documentation gives opportunities for teacher and pupils to complement assessment through dialogic models. Inviting the pupils to participate in their learning process and formative assessment improves motivation and self-reflection (Korp, 2011; Hattie & Gan, 2011). Documentation through rubrics, or by blogs as mentioned by Teacher 3 above, can support the assessment through systemizing the continuing observation but is a demanding work method that requests communication between teachers and pupils.

6.2.3 Use of analogue and digital media and non-verbal aspects of visual arts education

Acceptance and inclusion of the use of assessment tools in visual arts, like digital media and so forth, offer tools for more relational and communicative teaching practice and a more varied and collaborative teaching situation and offers tools for enhancing visual knowledge in an increasingly visual and digitized society. The pupils' digital competencies are seen by Teacher 4 as a potential

in renewing the teaching practice. Teachers' digital competencies help to communicate the tasks, and formative and summative assessment to their pupils, according to Teacher 3.

There seems to be a need for acknowledging the subject and significance of visual knowledge as part of a larger educational context. Visual arts contributes the knowledge specifically of visual arts and generic competencies (Wagner & Schönau, 2016) that contribute to the pupils' overall learning and development, not only to easily measurable outcomes. Cross-fertilization between different disciplines and traditions is needed according to Teacher 1, 3 and 7, and puts the significance of visual arts education into a widened visual context in society. Visual arts education is about developing skills to interpret the contents of images, understand the social power of visual communication, and discuss imagery purposes.

Assessment in visual arts is complicated due to the subject's non-verbal character. Assessment practice and research in assessment in visual arts offer alternative ways of learning possibilities in the education of pupils and assessing learning processes compared to other school subjects. The non-verbal dimensions of knowledge can be made visible and assessed through assessing process and the product (Lindström et al., 1998). Recognition of non-verbal dimensions of knowledge in the school puts the light on pupils having different capacities. It thus contributes to a more complex perspective on learning and in this way to more equal possibilities through a widened definition of knowledge, as highlighted by Teacher 5. Still, the relation between non-verbal and verbal communication seems to split opinions. There is a notable ambivalence in the relation between formulated and non-formulated dimensions of visual arts between the teachers. Some of them are practicing non-formulated aspects consciously to analyse underlying messages in their work, while others seem not to notice this potential.

7. Discussion of results

Although only including seven visual arts teachers, the result of the study confirms the focus on measurement-oriented assessment practice in visual arts education in compulsory school (Selander, 2017). The teachers give testimony of assessment criteria steering a lot of their teaching with few opportunities to create free zones (Lindström, 1999; Ziehe, 1998) for the pupils, but are at the

same time aware of the value of implementing spaces of non-assessment in their teaching. The study shows that for the teachers partaking in this study, the pupils' meaning-making is significant and they also seem to find creative ways to encompass the artistic aspects of visual arts education, in contrast to Bamford's findings of assessment defying "art-rich education" (2006). Murphy and Espeland's (2007) claim that assessment requirements being dependent on the teacher's working circumstances is confirmed in this study. The renewed syllabus and assessment criteria from 2011 seem to be present in the teachers' reflections concerning their assessment practice, and they are well aware of the older conceptions of the subject leading into traditional thinking and instrumental teaching.

Formative assessment, self-assessment, and peer assessment (Black & Wiliam, 1998) are used in the teachers' teaching and feedback, and they use different communicative strategies to create participation for the pupils (Marner & Örtengren, 2013). This, for instance, through picture talks and use of image analysis, which the national evaluations have found to be lacking (NÄU-13). There is still an emphasis on assessing individual performance in a traditionally teacher-led school context (Mitchell et al., 2010). Still, the teachers are aware of and struggle with coming around the old conceptions, trying to take in more participative learning and assessment (Biggs & Tang, 2007). In the study, there is evidence of the visual arts teachers using many of the feedback aspects pointed out by Hattie and Gan (2011 p. 250). For instance, making the learning goals transparent to the pupils, calibrating the learning task to the pupils' understanding, and engaging them in interactive feedback through peer assessment and use of digital platforms. Thus, the teachers work with different methods aiming at reaching the pupils, using digital media and blogs, rubrics and peer assessment in finding ways to make the pupils take part and understand the assessment criteria and in visualizing their position in the learning and assessment process (Black & Wiliam, 1998). This, in opposition to Lindström (1999), who gave testimony of visual arts teaching being dominantly product-oriented, but where his research contributed to emphasising the process-oriented parts of the assessment. According to this study's results, his research seems to have influenced the teachers to focus more on the process. This points at Korp's (2011) assumption that today's assessment practice focuses more on process-based learning, integrating learning outcomes into the teaching. This seems to fit in with the teaching and assessment practice by the

visual arts teachers in this study, where a reflection on the learning process is created through social and dialogic aspects.

The teachers in the study try to find ways to work with and assess the non-verbal dimensions (Carlgren, SOU1992:94) of visual arts in using image analysis (Lindström et al., 1998; Lindström, 2011). The teachers are aware of the collegial potential of visual arts in relation to teaching in other school subjects, and place a demand on themselves to reach out to their colleagues. The collaboration with other subjects is often due to creating co-operation on a personal level, and complex school situations seem to hinder a more developed collaboration. The teachers' reflections also witness that visual arts seem to have a marginalised position in relation to other school subjects that the national evaluation describes (NÄU-13; Marnér & Örtégren, 2015). An assumption can be made that expectations from society and parents influence pupils' perception of visual arts as a lesser critical subject. The interviews with the visual arts teachers in this study show a consciousness of the difficulties and problematic areas in the subject field that align with the results in the national evaluations. The teachers tackle these difficulties and challenges in different ways. Still, there is also consensus on what needs to be done and changed in the subject and professional practice conditions.

8. Concluding comments

A concluding reflection is that formative assessment and pupil participation are still a challenge in visual arts education because of a school system that favours individual learning, creating hindrances to collective learning and assessment systems. Collegial conversations, collaboration and co-assessment could reduce the risk of individual-orientation and teacher assessment to solely be based on their subject conceptions, leading to a more equivalent, professional and quality-assured assessment practice in relation to the national goals. In this way, the pseudo-formative practices that can arise could be counteracted. This, in turn, leads to challenges for teacher education to highlight these aspects early in education. The result of the study presents several necessary conditions for teaching and assessment in visual arts, identified problem areas, and arguments for acknowledgement of the potentials of visual arts education in school. Through highlighting collegial co-operation between teachers as part of creating a reflected practice, and the

relevance of formative assessment in creating participation for pupils, the author emphasises process-based learning to be significant for visual arts education, for research on assessment in visual arts and development of assessment in general.

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