

Chapter 9

Assessing Children in the Nordic Countries: Framing, Diversity and Matters of Inclusion and Exclusion in a School for All

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9.1 Introduction

The general background of this chapter is an interest in how schools deal with diversity between children when organising teaching and learning practices with a specific focus on *the role of assessments in these processes*. A comprehensive school of the kind the Nordic countries offer implies that the variation in the population, with respect to social background, health, age, interests, educational ambitions and many other factors, will be visible in most classrooms. The explicit political ambition of having ‘a School for All’ signals an expectation that it is possible to organise teaching and learning in the classroom in manners that make it possible for all students to profit from the activities.

In this chapter we will especially discuss different ways of using assessment and framing assessment practices in lower secondary education in Nordic countries with a focus on formal assessment tools such as standardised test and examinations. The discussion will include theoretical perspectives and different conceptualisations of a School for All. Assessments are being used for many different purposes of which selection, certification, control, competition, supporting learning, etc., can be mentioned (Broadfoot 2007; Harlen 2006). In addition, assessments play a key role in processes of differentiation and in the implementation of one School for All. The different forms of assessments being used in lower secondary education reflect a wide-scaled variation ranging from experts assessing pupil’s abilities in formal and standardised ways to teachers’ assessments of pupils’ academic progress and skills

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using different kinds of mandatory test and assessments, and to assessments of a more informal character, including presentations, portfolio, and self-assessments, course assignments, standardised testing, etc., just to mention but a few. Whether the question concerns the more formal differentiation of pupils to be selected and placed into different educational tracks or the more informal differentiation in social communities and groups according to status and roles – such as in the school class, family and other similar communities – assessment will play a role by being a part of these processes. In a School for All, it is important to explore and highlight such processes. Our research is a contribution to this field of knowledge.

The formal framing of assessment in Nordic countries reflects a wide variation, ranging from a rather low degree of public regulations seen in Iceland to strong regulation including the use of national standardised testing in combination with one or two more types of assessments in Denmark and Norway. In between is an area characterised by some regulations according to the use of national standardised testing as it is seen in Sweden and Finland (European Commission 2009). As different ways of framing assessment practices can be expected to influence processes of inclusion and exclusion of children at school, we will consider possible consequences of these according to a School for All. The different role and purpose of formative and summative assessment practices, given by the focus on respectively the process and the product (outcome) of pupil activities at school, can be considered to play a key role in such processes. As a consequence of their different focus, they will play different roles in social differentiation and in processes of inclusion and exclusion of pupils at school. Thus, the formal framing of approaches to assessment and the way they are integrated in teaching and learning practices in school must be considered to be of relevance in a School for All.

The discussion will have its starting point in an analysis of the use of assessments in comprehensive school in Nordic countries, as we will also include different kinds of documentary and empirical studies in the argumentation. We will focus on which kinds of assessments are being used and for which purposes and also the role of assessments in the perspective of society and in differentiation between pupils. More contemporary trends reflecting neoliberal education policy will be discussed, specifically the use of standardised testing. At a theoretical level inclusive pedagogical practice has been emphasised in Nordic schools. Discourse has reflected an interest in promoting more inclusive pedagogical practices and in segregating fewer pupils to special needs education (E.g. Meijer et al. 2003). At the same time, more standardised ways of assessing have gained currency both worldwide and in the school systems of some of the Nordic countries. This will be discussed further below. However, we will start with a brief discussion of such tendencies from a historical perspective.

9.2 Inclusive School and the Concept of a School for All

The emergence of lower secondary educational systems throughout the world was initiated by the formation of modern society in which formal education of all citizens became a necessity and turned into a key question. The complexity of

modern society has made it necessary to improve and expand lower secondary education according to its duration, content and demands, as to what should be learned at school, who was expected to attend school and for how long. At the same time the democratic state from time to time has considered the question of how to realise ideas of democracy in educational system. The history of such developments reflects different understandings of the concept of a School for All.

During the early 1700 religious education, the so-called popular teaching organised by the churches became mandatory for everyone for religious purposes (Mediås 2004). Such tendencies were seen in all of the Nordic countries. Already at this period of time, assessment and strategies for differentiation were seen as called for. For example, children's ability of reading was assessed, and the children were divided into three different groups depending on their ability to read and understand Christian texts in Sweden (Warne 1929, pp. 33–34). Furthermore, in 1738, Salvius, an editor of a Swedish economics journal, debated the motives of rationally sorting out the 'quick-witted' individuals (in Swedish: 'kvickare ämnena') (Salvius 1738) for enrolment (Warne 1929, p. 128). This was seen as a more profitable strategy than enrolling all children. Thus, the idea of differentiating pupils within educational practices seems to have been an option discussed from the very beginning of mass education.

Later on, lower secondary educational systems evolved, characterised by different kinds of schools and teaching in, for instance, urban and rural areas (Mediås 2004). Despite such variation, school system was meant to realise the idea of establishing a mandatory school and giving as many children as possible the opportunity to attend. During 1900, more homogenous school systems emerged throughout Nordic countries, implementing lower secondary education as an opportunity but also an obligation for all children. However, not everyone did fit into the school in the expected manner. Schools and classes were organised for children who were disabled in different ways, who needed special needs education or who of other reasons did not fit into the ordinary school system. For example, children classified as 'poor' or 'unintelligent' were marginalised by being offered a very short period of schooling – in Sweden called minimal course. However, since the term 'poor' could be assigned to most of the pupils attending compulsory school during these early periods, the result was a situation in which most pupils went to school for a short time only (Nordström 1968). Special classes or schools for children assessed to be in need for special education could be integrated in the ordinary school system or have a more separate position. For instance, such education was in Denmark organised in 'auxiliary classes' (in Danish, 'hjelpeklasse') often integrated in school system and by schools for special needs education called 'Værneskolen' (Skov-Jørgensen 2005).

From such short descriptions it is clear that it is easy to point to very different possible conceptualisations of a School for All. Do we mean ONE School for All or do we mean one School for All? (see also Hjørne and Säljö 2008 for a deeper analysis). As pupils have different needs depending on their background and different resources, teaching and learning strategies need to reflect diversity. However, this is practised in different forms: by keeping an (in principle) undivided school but offering different kinds of teaching or classes within the same school context (special

need classes, talent classes, etc.), by separating pupils into different tracks within compulsory educational system, by offering an extra year at school, by keeping children regardless of their abilities in the same class and offering individualised teaching to match their needs, etc.

Being aware of conceptual understandings of a School for All is central when discussing assessment related to this idea; it might raise questions as for what purpose assessments are used, with which effects and consequences.

In Nordic countries comprehensive school was formally established during 1800 and early 1900, with intentions and initiatives of providing same schooling for all pupils at the primary school level. But providing formal frames for such educational intentions did not mean that pupils had equal opportunities in the school system. The concept of a School for All included much more than this. As pointed out by several sociologists, such as by Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990), school did not at all realise the idea of equal chances for all. On the contrary, the school strongly tended to reproduce social structures and social classes. Social background, gender and other social categories were early seen to play a significant role in the differentiation in school.

In 1945, the idea and intention of a School for All was explicitly framed in UNESCO's constitutional act, where the signing countries claimed their belief in 'full and equal opportunities for education for all' (UNESCO 1945). This was later followed by the UNESCO Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (1994) and the Dakar Framework aiming on 'education for all 2015', also dealing with this question. With the Salamanca World Conference on Special Needs Education 1994, inclusive education was addressed and intentions to realise this were formulated. Questions of adapting teaching to fit pupil's needs, individual resources and improvement were brought into focus and thus conceptualised the School for All in a way reaching beyond the formal framing and discussing the demands of inclusive practice.

Researchers, engaged in questions of inclusive education, have formulated key points on such practice. One such researcher, Mel Ainscow (2005), who has done significant research in this area, points to the question of learning to deal with differences at school as central:

Inclusion has to be seen as a never-ending search to find better ways of responding to diversity. It is about learning how to live with difference and learning how to learn from difference. In this way differences come to be seen more positively as stimuli for fostering learning, amongst children and adults. (Ainscow 2005, p. 118)

Furthermore he states that such practice 'involves a particular emphasis on those groups of learners who may be at risk of marginalization, exclusion or underachievement'. Inclusive thus is about 'the presence, participation and achievement of all students' and is 'concerned with the identification and removal of barriers' (Ainscow 2005, p. 118).

Assessments play an important role in how schools are dealing with such diversity. Bernstein (1997) points to strong or weak framing of pedagogies reflecting different ways of understanding knowledge (see also Chap. 2 by Blossing and

Söderström, this volume). The stronger the academic content is framed and defined, the less room there will be for 'alternative' knowledge and thus for diversity. Assessments would assess and reward only the canonic and accepted academic knowledge and not be able to catch competencies reaching beyond this. Thus, inclusion and exclusion of pupils at school is mediated by assessments, bringing pupils who do not present the kind of knowledge considered as the 'right' and 'accepted' into processes of exclusion (Bernstein 1997). Thus, the assessments of the strongly framed pedagogy do not seem to meet the demands of an inclusive practice as described above.

9.3 Assessments for Different Purposes and with Different Techniques

As described assessment is and has always been used in educational settings for many different purposes. In a historical perspective, all of such purposes can be identified in the way assessment in compulsory school has been practised and has been framed by legislation. *Formal assessment tools of different design* have been used by society to point out differences among pupils and have played an important role in school systems to emphasise transitions, in keeping such transitions and realising them. As such practices have been defined and designed by those who have had the access and power to do this, they have at the same time reflected certain ways of thinking of society, knowledge, role of educations, etc. In such processes assessments have played a very important role in the reproduction of structures of power and classes of society (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990).

For example, in the beginning of the twentieth century, a new institutional strategy was developed for handling diversity in many parts of the world. The strategy now relied on 'objective' and 'scientific' instruments when dealing with issues of differentiation and segregation. At the same time, the testing of intellectual capacities of children and their maturity was introduced. The testing movement was grounded in medical and psychological accounts of school readiness and school problems. This strategy also represented a more standardised and scientific approach to diagnosis. For example, when moving a pupil to a remedial class, the decision had to be preceded by a comprehensive testing of the child by a medical expert. Ability testing eventually became the accepted tool for evaluating pupils' capacities to manage school (Mercer 1973; Sundqvist 1994).

Assessments and how to assess pupils' ability have changed over time, but at the same time it has more or less remained the same at important points. For instance, assessment by the use of standardised questions and scoring is well known, as mentioned, in accordance to rote learning and religious education several hundred years back, and has lately gained wide currency in several Nordic countries. More project-based ways of assessing in lower secondary education were introduced in the last decades of 1900 and have been mandatory in some countries, for instance, in Denmark and for some years in Norway too (Andreasen and Rasmussen 2011).

A common distinction is between assessment for summative and formative purposes. With a reference to their typical purpose and use, formative assessment is often referred to as assessment *for* learning and summative assessment as assessment *of* learning (Harlen 2006; Lundahl 2011). Both purposes can to some extent be identified in any kind of assessment. Formative assessment is supposed to point forward and support pupils' learning processes, while summative assessment is meant to state a level at a specific time, often by the end of a course. Due to such differences in purposes and use, these two kinds of assessment have a different character. The aim of summative assessment is summing up and thus often use standardised and comparable ways in the communication of results (marks, scores, fail-pass, etc.). Formative assessments are not meant to point to differences to select between pupils. Instead they should supply teachers with information needed to support pupil improvement. Thus, formative approaches to assessment seem to relate more to the idea of a School for All than the summative approaches.

In the inclusive school formative purposes of assessments can be considered as essential (Harlen 2006). Such use will support teacher's possibilities and intentions of giving pupils the necessary support to improve. Assessments for summative purposes and with summative character might on the contrary affect processes of inclusion in negative ways and can thus in general not be considered as supportive for implementation of the idea of a School for All. To further discuss these questions according to comprehensive school in the Nordic countries, we will give a brief summary over the framing of assessment in these countries.

9.4 Assessment in Comprehensive School in the Nordic Countries: Short General Descriptions

The general structure of comprehensive school in Nordic countries does not show significant variation between the five countries. The duration of compulsory education is approximately 9–10 years, children starting school at age 6 or 7 and moving automatically to next grade in all countries, except in Finland (European Commission 2011). The general syllabus is also comparable, reflecting some variation across countries. But turning to the question of assessment and how such practice is framed by legislation, important differences appear. It includes an extensive variation between the countries when it comes both to the kinds of assessments demanded and to their frequency and use (European Commission 2009). It can be considered what the consequences might be from such differences according to the School for All. We will start by taking a closer look at the specific assessment practice as framed by legislations in the five Nordic countries.

Iceland introduced standardised assessments in 1977 (Shiel et al. 2010), but these differ apart from other Nordic countries by the absence of explicitly strong framing of assessment in compulsory school. Neither pedagogical assessments as practised by teachers nor their use is standardised (European Commission 2009). Recently trends promoting self-evaluation in pupil assessments have dominated.

Thus the standardised assessment can be said to work as a tool for teachers to consider how to use and integrate more formative assessment in their teaching and pedagogical practice (European Commission 2009, p. 20). On the other hand, results from standardised testing are used in external evaluations, and local authorities have access to results from their own area. This fact works as a contradiction of conclusions going in direction of weak framing of assessment in Icelandic comprehensive school. It is well known that the effect of external purposes or consequences of assessment is considerable and must be expected to have profound pedagogical effects.

Using Bernstein's terminology assessment in Sweden and Finland can be considered as somewhat stronger framed than in Iceland, but weaker than it is the case in Denmark and Norway.

In *Finland*, teachers should give feedback on pupil progress by the end of each school year using a report which should include different kinds of documentation. Since 1999 legislation has demanded teachers to promote pupil self-assessment (European Commission 2009; Ministry of Education Finland 2009). From grades 1 to 7, the feedback could be given either verbally, using grades or in a combination. Assessments in the last school years should include grades (European Commission 2010). National standardised external testing was introduced in 1998 and is monitored approximately two times during compulsory School for All pupils. Test results are being used both internally and externally, and especially their external use must be expected to have a profound impact on pedagogical practice.

Sweden was the first Nordic country to implement the use of standardised testing in comprehensive school. This was done in the 1930s (see Chap. 2 by Blossing and Söderström, this volume). From 1994 the test became strongly related to syllabus and to a marking system (Nordenbo et al. 2009, p. 22). It is intended to have formative uses in grades 3 and 5 and summative use in grade 9 by the end of compulsory school. As a supplement to the national test, the test system provides teachers with several other kinds of pedagogical test and material for diagnostic purposes (Nordenbo et al. 2009, p. 23). The system thus reflects considerable contradictions, on one hand pointing to weak framing of assessments and little use of it in comprehensive school and on the other hand encouraging an extensive use and also to some extent using testing for external purposes. To this should be added that there is a formal demand of the use of a so-called individual 'lesson plan' (in Sweden an IUP, individual development plan) in which also test results play a role (Danish Ministry of Education 2010, p. 6). All such factors point to a strong framing. Swedish legislation concerning aims and use of pupil assessment during compulsory school reflects a focus on reducing the negative effects of assessments according to its role, for instance, in processes of exclusion of pupils.

Denmark and Norway share some trends when it comes to assessment in comprehensive school and the implementation and use of standardised testing.

Norway is characterised by the mandatory use of diagnostic test (grade 2, in Norwegian and mathematics), national testing according to syllabus (grades 5 and 8) and a final examination by the end of compulsory school in grade 10. Thus, Norway seems to represent the most extensive use of assessments among the Nordic countries. On the other hand, Norwegian legislation also has a demand on continuous

evaluation, reflecting the summative use of assessments, and assessments are not being used for external purposes. These characteristics are of importance according to the possible effects of assessment and point towards a less strong framing than, for example, in Sweden.

Denmark was the last Nordic country to make a full implementation of national standardised testing in comprehensive school in year 2010. But compared to the other Nordic countries, the way this kind of assessment is used in Denmark has an intensive character with test being monitored several times through compulsory school in different subjects (Nordenbo et al. 2009). The test is designed to match the goals of the national syllabus, and there is a demand of using test results in a mandatory lesson plan. Add to this there is a final exam in several subjects by the end of compulsory school. Test results are not made public, but the grades from the final examination are published at school level. Neither test results nor results from the final examination are of any external use. However, since the local county has access to the results from both kinds of assessments and since schools are obliged to make a quality report to be published at the homepage of the school, results might be considered to have some external use.

As those short descriptions show, assessment practice is at some points framed in similar ways in the Nordic countries but differs at other points in important ways. Before discussing the impact and role of the different ways of framing assessment described above, according to processes of in- and exclusion in school, we will give some examples from our own research on the processes and practices by which this happens and which would also illustrate how possible effects of assessments manifest itself in the practices it is a part of.

9.5 Assessments and Its Role in Different Practices and Discourses

The processes of inclusion and exclusion of school are strongly related to the creation of identities, positions and roles in the school class (Hjørne and Säljö 2012). These positions, identities and roles can be understood as social constructs (Hacking 1999). They are based on identification of differences, thus referring to processes of seeing – or considering – something as different from something else. As a central idea of assessment is to point to differences, they might play an important role in such social processes. They might become a part of the formation of social structures, of defining positions and identities in the community of the school class (Andreassen 2008). Their role in such processes will depend on factors such as the character and design of the assessment, how it is reported, how it is used, discourses related to it, etc. (Broadfoot 2007).

It has been discussed how learning disabilities in accordance to such perspectives can be considered as social constructs, as a ‘cultural preoccupation and production’ (e.g. McDermott et al. 2006). Theorists such as McDermott are pointing to the importance of seeing social categorisations as depending on and integrated in social processes. Extensive research has been made by Mehan and colleagues (1986) on the

process of assessing and sorting pupils into categories such as ‘normal’, ‘special’ or ‘educationally handicapped’ in an American context. They found, for instance, that the social language of the school psychologist has a strong position when discussing pupils’ problems in a decision meeting at school. In these psychological categorising practices, the problems of the child ‘are treated as if they are his private and personal possession’ (Mehan et al. 1986, p. 154). This also shows that there is a strong tendency in school to explain children’s difficulties in terms of individual disorders. As a consequence, the problems become located ‘[b]eneath the skin and between the ears’ (Mehan 1993, p. 241) of the child.

Thus, these characteristics contribute to the understanding of the child and also to the construction of the role or identity added to the pupil in the social community of the school class (McDermott et al. 2006).

As mentioned above, assessments will play an important role in such a process and in the implementation of different understandings of the School for All depending on its design, purpose and use. We will give some examples of this from our own research. The examples will give some insight into these processes. They will also illustrate how assessments strongly affect conversations about pupils’ skills and development in different contexts, for example, in conversations between teachers and different kinds of experts, between the teacher and pupil and in pupils’ own dialogues.

The first example shows how *summative assessments as the national tests are referred to* in experts’ negotiations of pupil problems and welfare in the Pupil Health Team (PHT). The team is an institutional arena which can be seen as a community of practice, i.e., as a group of people ‘who share a concern, a set of problems’ and ‘who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis’ (Wenger et al. 2002, p. 4). The discourse of this community reflects the ideologies and preferences of the institution as interpreted locally at a specific level in the social structure. When discussing a particular problem, the members make visible their assumptions and priorities, and they have to respond to issues, *make an assessment* and come up with solutions.

The second example shows how summative assessments are having attempted formative use according to the ‘lesson plan’. Finally, the third example shows how products of tests and assessments (scores and marks) are understood with a reference to different categorisations and hierarchical positions in the social communities among the pupils.

We are fully aware that the practices according to the use of assessments will depend on factors in the national contexts even if situations like these might have similarities across countries. It is beyond the aim of this chapter to go into deeper discussions of that; the examples are meant only for illustrating the processes.

9.5.1 Assessments in the Pupil Health Team

During a meeting in a Swedish pupil health team, experts (educational psychologist (EP), school nurse (SN), principal (PR), special needs teacher (ST), assistant principal (AP)) meet, define and *assess* pupils who are considered to have difficulties in

reaching the goals in school (Hjørne and Säljö 2004; Utbildningsdepartementet 2000). During the meeting the experts are expected to come up with different perspectives on the problems. However, certain ways of selecting what is in focus and the order in which it will be presented frame the discussions (Bernstein 1996). Assessments and results *from different tests, as, for example, the national tests*, seem to play an important role in such negotiations as illustrated below.

Excerpt 1, David, 11 years old

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- | | | |
|----|-----|---|
| 1 | ST | yes he refused he..he didn't want to receive help he absolutely did not want to be in the classroom, he wanted to be like the others but he <u>is</u> not a grade five, he's a weak grade four if I look at what I've [done ^a]- |
| 2 | PR: | [is he] like this both in or is it all over or is it specifically in maths |
| 3 | ST: | he isn't really mature and he doesn't understand (short pause) instructions either when he reads or when he hears, he he is not that mature, actually |
| 4 | EP: | but he is in grade five now, you said (?) |
| 5 | ST: | yes |
| 6 | EP: | and read or [write]- |
| 7 | AP: | [and we]are really [convinced] |
| 8 | EP: | [or simple] |
| 9 | AP: | to speak frankly, we are rather convinced that he won't pass the- |
| 10 | ST: | no |
| 11 | AP: | national tests |
-

^a[] means overlapping speech

In this case, there is a strong framing, to use Bernstein's (1996) terminology, of the boy as having learning difficulties and being a boy in need of special support. David is assessed as being 'a weak grade four' (1) already in the initial presentation. The arguments selected to support this assessment are that the boy is found to be not 'really mature' and 'doesn't understand instructions' (4). Furthermore, he is assessed as not being able to pass the national tests (10, 12). Implicitly, this means that he is assessed as being in need of special support, and in this particular case, this also implies that he probably will need an extra year in school. The labelling of the boy could analytically be seen as a function of the framing (Bernstein 1996).

In the next excerpt, the educational psychologist is supposed to report on an intelligence test concerning Maria, 16 years old. In this case, the girl and her described problems are framed as being a matter of lack of intelligence.

Excerpt 2, Maria, 16 years old

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- | | | |
|---|-----|---|
| 1 | EP: | well, I don't really remember but it was in principal almost as low as last time, extremely low, a disaster, although it is something about her that makes me uncertain |
| 2 | ST: | mm |
| 3 | EP: | I told you that afterwards too |
| 4 | ST: | mm |
| 5 | EP: | it is not only that simple |
| 6 | ST: | no |
| 7 | EP: | it is not only unintelligence |
-

(continued)

(continued)

-
- 8 ST: no
- 9 EP: and then you become more uncertain
- 10 ST: mm
- 11 EP: I think
- 12 ST: I think that's pretty much how it is, we'll see
- 13 EP: you cannot only look at the numbers, but it will be difficult for her in the upper secondary school in regular, in a regular program
- 14 ST: yes, I am sitting with her national test and it is not that simple, you don't know where, it is very hard to assess cause you don't know really
what you're assessing cause after all some things runs very well but then something is wrong
- 15 EP: no
- 16 ST: it is very difficult to decide, like what is it?
- 17 EP: don't get it together
-

The psychologist reports that the intelligence test was extremely low, 'a disaster' (1). Still, he is unsure whether the girl is unintelligent since 'it is something about her that makes me uncertain' (1), he adds. The special needs teacher supports the psychologist by saying 'I think that's pretty much how it is' (12). During the meeting they continue to further elaborate on how difficult it is to make the assessment, and they do not contribute with something essential that makes it more clear or widens the understanding of the problem. 'It is very difficult to decide, like what is it?' (16), the special needs teacher confirms. In spite of a rather long conversation concerning Maria, it is difficult to assess her capacity and whether she would benefit from regular schooling. As a result, she was later on placed in a segregated programme, in Sweden called an individual programme, for pupils who do not finish the school with complete grades. The strong framing of the problems at hand makes the educational psychologist in control of the situation, and further discussions concerning how to change the teaching or what the girl actually manages are left out (Bernstein 1996).

9.5.2 Assessments in Teachers and Pupils' Dialogue About the Lesson Plan

In Denmark and Sweden, teachers are required by law to make lesson plans (in Sweden called an individual development plan). In Denmark this lesson plan should give 'information about results from continuous evaluation in all subjects' (Ministry of Children and Education 2009). In Sweden there are similar directions concerning an individual study plan for each child. The intention is described as to strengthen 'the base for the planning and preparation of teaching', 'continuous evaluation' and 'the cooperation between school and home' (Ministry of Children and Education 2009). Based on the lesson plan, teachers conduct mandatory dialogues with pupils and their parents. *Results from assessments of different design, both summative and formative, are used for this purpose*, but the standardised national test plays a key

role in the content of the lesson plans and thus also in these dialogues. Results from the Danish national test are reported in ways making it possible for teachers to refer directly to results using phrases such as ‘average’, ‘above average’ and ‘below average’ (Ministry of Children and Education 2010). Observations from such dialogues between a teacher and a pupil about the lesson plan show how this might frame some of the dialogues (Andreasen 2011). In the conversation, the pupil’s reading skills are described like this:

As the teacher points to the scheme in which there are marks in three categories “Above average, “average” and “below average”, she explain to him [the pupil], that he actually has done well in the reading test, pretty well in fact, and that the marks show his position compared to the average of the whole country. (observation. Andreasen 2011, p. 309)

The reference to the results from the national test and some of the questions to which he gave a wrong answer appear in the dialogue that follows. However, the test report does in fact point to different kinds of mistakes to make it possible to understand and explain the reason for wrong answers; it still leaves questions open where he should make more effort in order to improve. The test situation might even let the pupil have the wrong impression that it is all a matter of being fast to get high scores. Observations done in the test situation show this might give rise to problems of being stressed and nervous, especially for children with reading problems (Andreasen 2011, p. 310ff).

9.5.3 Assessments in Pupils’ Communication About Roles and Identities

When pupils describe the types of assessment, they refer to different categories and hierarchical positions in their social communities, and such interpretations will highly influence their constructions of identities, their understandings of themselves and their potentials and general opportunities in school and in life. *Especially assessments of a summative design will play a role in such processes.* For instance, this becomes clear when pupils in level 9 in Danish compulsory school are interviewed about marks (Andreasen 2008). Pupil descriptions clearly illustrate how different social categories are constructed with a reference to understandings of assessments and their results (Andreasen 2006, 2008, p. 114).

A description from a Danish girl interviewed about marks shows how she considers marks to play a role in how teachers see her as a person. Getting low marks she thinks indicates that she is less skilled and would make teachers attach her to a low position in hierarchy:

[...] to many teachers, you would like to be skilled, not being one of those of who they think, well she can’t anything, but it is compared to many people, you would not like to be the one who is the lowest. (Alberte)

Pupils’ categorisations as it manifests itself in their communication will play a role in how they perceive themselves. For instance, a girl, Josefine, describes how

marks indicate pupils' academic potentials, and 'if someone are exclusively getting the highest marks, you would think like, oh, he is a genius' (Josefine). Such categorisations also influence pupils' considerations on their future related to positions in society. Another girl, Alberte, says about the pupils in her class, considered to be lazy, that he or she would be seen as someone who 'will not get high marks and who will not make it'.

The social relations between the pupils and the social structures between them are in fact very sensitive to such tangible marking of differences produced by summative assessments. Getting high marks will not necessarily lead to a high social position in the group, but might even lead to a marginalised position, depending on the culture of the specific group. Expressions like 'nerd' and the like are commonly used in the descriptions of the social position of pupils getting high marks in school. Although the expression for some might have a positive sense, it usually indicates someone being excluded from or being in a sort of marginalised position in the community of the school class. As one of the boys (Chris) describes, bullying might start from this:

[...] you see that all of the time, those who are nerds and those who are being bullied, often it begins if they get high marks. (Chris)

The use of standardised ways of assessing early in school will make such processes start at earlier stages. These excerpts from interviews with pupils in level 6 in Danish compulsory school illustrate this.¹ Several of these describe that they are in fact very sensitive to felt expectations from people in their social surrounding concerning their test results, whether these expectations are real or not. A boy tells:

I was afraid that I would not make it and then you become a little stressed. And when your father is going to see it, and if you did not do well, he will not be so happy about that. [...] Most of all I am afraid to do badly. (John)

The assessment as a factor playing a role in social relationships and communities is described by this girl:

You would like to do well. If your friends results are in the top [...] it is not funny to be the lower, you would like to do well. (Helen)

9.6 Assessment in Nordic Countries: Comparative Considerations

Tendencies in design and use of assessments in schools in Nordic countries show an increase in the use of summative designs, such as standardised tests. Although these tests in some of the countries are mostly for formative purposes, the real effect of such designs on assessment has to be considered. *The empirical examples show*

¹ Interviews are made as a part of a postdoc research project financed by Danish research Council, focusing on assessments' practice in Danish compulsory school (2009–2013).

clearly the role of such assessment design in processes of inclusion and exclusion of children in school. They also show by which practices it influences these processes as, for instance, in pupil's dialogues or in dialogues between teachers and different experts. Furthermore, standardised ways of testing tend to realise the idea of ONE School for All which the pupils have to conform to, rather than one School for All where teachers adapt their pedagogy to include all pupils. This has consequences for the political goal of offering an equal and democratic education that includes everyone. In addition, research shows that they might influence the way pupils understand themselves, their classmates and school in general in ways that can be considered as a possible threat to the comprehensive school, the School for All. The empirical examples show assessments tend to frame interactions, dialogues and judgements on matters playing a role in processes of inclusion and exclusion of pupils in the school context. This is particularly the case for assessments of a summative character. These interactions will have an impact on both pupils' approaches to school activities and on their self-perception. Furthermore, this will also have consequences in a wider perspective according to pupils' lives and positions in society after leaving school.

If syllabus is strongly linked to standardised assessment, as it is the case in, for instance, Sweden and Denmark, this would have a negative impact on diversity, on the room left for alternative knowledge and alternative ways of presenting knowledge. Consequently this can be considered as a threat to inclusion.

As mentioned above assessments used for formative purposes are an important element in the inclusive school. Only Norway is explicitly demanding such use of assessment and continuous evaluation, but both Finnish and Swedish legislations reflect similar intentions. Formative uses of assessments takes that information given by the test can be used to show how and by which means pupils can improve. Thus summative assessments are usually not suited to give the necessary information to be used for formative purposes, unless their design integrates such intentions. To support formative purposes, teachers are often offered material to interpret results from summative tests to make it possible to give instructions pointing forward in pupils' developments. But formative use of assessments means that it has to be designed to supply the teacher with such information enabling teacher to point to specific initiatives and activities. This is crucial for the extent to which teachers find they can use tests and assessments and to which extent they are inclined to make any use of the results at all (Nordenbo et al. 2009, p. 61). From this can be concluded that the impact of assessments of a summative character being used for external purposes can be significant on teaching and learning, but such characteristics might on the other hand lead to that teachers do not find the results relevant or useful for formative purposes, to support learning (Nordenbo et al. 2009, p. 63). For instance, in the Danish national test, problems concerning this question can be identified (Andreasen 2011).

The feeling of influence and ownership has an impact on how relevant and useful teachers find assessments (Nordenbo et al. 2009, p. 62). National standardised testing with some external purposes is implemented in all of the Nordic countries. Teachers have no influence on these tests and thus a poor feeling of

ownership. If such design and framing of assessments will make teachers find them useful is questionable. Thus, such testing might not have a positive impact on nor contribute positively to pupil's profit of activities at school or inclusion in general. It clearly points to differences between pupils and makes a hierarchical approach to their performances possible for everybody involved, teachers, classmates, parents, etc. In this way, assessments might play a role in processes of exclusion having an effect on the social structures of the school class and in the shaping of self-conceptions and identities of pupils.

In such perspectives the framing of assessment practice reflects serious contradictions in several of the countries. Especially the intended positive influence from more formative approaches to assessments has bad conditions when standardised national testing is used at the same time and especially if it has external purposes, as is the case in several countries. This contradiction or field of tension is reflected in all of the countries. Although the external purposes might not be related to formal consequences for schools or teachers, the effect of such purposes can be very strong and can be expected to overrule so to say more formative approaches.

9.7 Concluding Remarks

Realising the idea of one School for All is calling for considerations on how to handle diversity between pupils in schools – the diversity that will always be present in relation to their social backgrounds, experiences, etc. Processes of inclusion and exclusion of children in school are strongly related to this and are affected by the way differences and diversity are handled and met in classrooms, by teaching strategies and in different pedagogical practices. As illustrated by our empirical examples, *institutional categories will play an important role in such processes as mediated by assessments and the practices they are a part of. Such role depends on the specific design and use of assessments. Especially assessments of a summative design might influence such processes in unintended ways.* By pointing to differences and children's shortcomings in relation to certain kinds of knowledge and academic skills, they can be used to compare children and to indicate who should be included in school and who should not. This can be in a physical sense, by selecting pupils for special needs education or more figuratively by adding different statuses to pupils at school. For instance, the pupils with a low status can be exposed to being ignored or simply treated as less accepted member of the social community of the school class. Often such processes can be identified when children lose interest in school activities as a consequence of feeling unable to meet demands in the 'right' ways to feel included and accepted. Possible key points in such considerations could focus on questions to which extent diversity is considered a resource and not a problem, how it affects pupils' access to participate in activities to make learning possible (include or exclude pupils) and to which extent differences are being used to point to possible activities to support learning (Ainscow 2005; Harlen 2006).

On this background, contemporary trends in neoliberal education policy as reflected, for example, in the extended use of assessments and especially in the use of summative assessments have to be problematised and considered a threat to the School for All. Assessments are based on ideas of pointing to what can be considered as the expected and accepted knowledge of school and ways of communicating it. Thus, the children whose experiences, knowledge and skills do not fit into these ideas are at risk of being placed in marginalised positions in school. This practice reflects a conceptualisation of the School for All, in which pupils do not have equal statuses or rights. As for children with special educational needs, the effects of the stronger framing of assessment that were introduced in some Nordic countries recently could be discussed. Such design, structure and way of using assessment might make teachers focus even more on minimising diversity, seeing it as a potential problem and teaching pupils in ways to make sure that they are able to deliver the expected knowledge in the accepted way. Thus, pupils who do not have the social background that provides them with such knowledge are in risk of being categorised in marginal positions by the system, both in the school in general and in other social communities to which the pupil belong, such as school class and family. Moreover, this will have considerable consequences for children's future career in school and in life.

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