WRITING EDUCATION AND ASSESSMENT IN NORWAY:

TOWARDS SHARED UNDERSTANDING, SHARED LANGUAGE

AND SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

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Abstract

This article reports on a study of writing and assessment in upper primary school, focusing on how teachers develop assessment competence through professional discussions in interdisciplinary groups. The empirical data consist of dialogues between teachers assessing and giving feedback on students' texts from different subjects. To support their evaluations, the teachers used and referred to a defined construct of writing and norms for expected writing proficiency. The analyses reveal a complex picture of the teachers' use of the assessment resources and their processes of appropriating a broader understanding of writing, including acquiring an extended meta-language. Three thematic categories are crystallised: an *instrumental approach* and a flexible and *functional approach*, appearing as two ideal typical points on a continuum, linked together by an overarching category labelled *learning in progress*. The article argues for an analytical reading as a basis for formative assessment in general writing education, and points to the need for knowledge on writing, text and linguistics – traditionally seen as domains for L1 teachers. The findings are discussed in light of the L1 teachers' responsibility for both the specific subject discourses of literacy and Bildung, and for providing students with general knowledge on language and text to support their overall writing competence. Critical implications of this double responsibility for the L1 subject are presented and reflected upon.

Keywords: writing education, assessment, collegial discussions, meta-language, Wheel of Writing, L1 double literacy responsibilities

1.   INTRODUCTION

Assessment plays an important part in all writing education. Students receive feedback from their teachers – in one way or another – to improve their writing competencies. The feedback, however, may vary as to type and quality, often indicating a narrow understanding among teachers of the complexity of both writing and assessment (cf. Montgomery & Baker, 2007; Smidt, 2010; Ferris, 2014). Bearing in mind the key role writing proficiency plays as a tool for communication, learning and reflection, and the documented close relation between assessment and development of competence (Hattie & Timperley, 2007), this field is in need of closer investigation. This article examines formative assessment in upper primary writing education (involving pupils aged 8–13), focusing on the role teachers play and how they can develop their competence on reading texts as a basis for providing constructive feedback to their students.

The presented study is part of a larger intervention study on writing and assessment in different subjects, the so-called NORM project (see Solheim & Matre, 2014 and chapter 2 in this article).[1] An important hypothesis in this project is that assessment anchored in a functional understanding of writing and specific norms for expected writing proficiency may be an important impetus for developing students' writing competence across subjects, as well as teachers' assessment competence. To succeed in this, teachers need to acquire a well-founded and shared understanding of writing, text and assessment. This article aims to provide insight into the teachers' practices and knowledge development while discussing and assessing students' texts from different subjects in collaborating groups, supported by a defined writing construct and derived assessment resources including explicit standards. We will examine teachers' ability to deal with the complexity of writing in student texts, and we will focus on the role of references to the construct and the teachers' use of the norms for expectations in assessment processes.

Focusing on writing across subjects also opens for a discussion of the mother-tongue subject's role in writing education. In Norway, since the 2006 curriculum reform, writing as a key competence across the subjects has been more in focus than writing within the mother-tongue subject. However, the L1 subject is responsible both for providing the students with general literacy skills, which may form a basis for writing in all subjects, and for developing specific disciplinary literacy and Bildung. This double responsibility will be discussed in light of findings from the study of teachers' assessment work. Our research may thus contribute to a discus-

sion of assessment based on quality standards and the need to anchor teachers' assessment in the literacy field.

We approach our study by first presenting a theoretically grounded argument for writing assessment as an integrated part of writing education before looking at the position of writing and assessment in Norwegian compulsory school, anchored in earlier research, educational policies and governance documents. This point of departure is followed by a presentation of the theoretical framework for the study, together with a description of the empirical data, consisting of teachers' assessment discussions in interdisciplinary groups and suggested formative feedback to students' texts. This data material has been analysed through a close reading of the dialogues and the text responses, where the presented theory is used as support in search of possible patterns and strategies used by the teachers. The findings from these analyses will be compared with results from a pilot study with similar data. Furthermore, we will discuss the tension between writing as a key competence and L1 writing, as it is related to the teachers' roles and competencies on the one hand, and the L1 writing culture versus writing as a tool for learning across subject discourses on the other hand. The discussion will conclude with reflections on what implications this extended responsibility for writing might have on the L1 subject. This is also seen against a background of educational politics tending to strengthen the aspect of skills at the expense of broader literate experiences.

1.1 Writing assessment as writing education

To assess in a qualified way it is necessary to know the phenomenon being assessed, how it is constituted and what competence it is reasonable to expect at different levels. Writing is a complex activity involving a wide range of cognitive and social aspects related to language, content and communicative intent. A writing process requires simultaneous control over all these aspects. Consequently, writing development is also multidimensional and highly individual, and it is difficult to describe development processes in general as linear or sequential (Evensen, 2006; Parr, 2011). In a society of great linguistic diversity and continuously changing textual cultures, teachers need nuanced perspectives on linguistic as well as cultural aspects of writing to support these processes. According to Vygotsky (1978), we could say that an important premise for good writing education is to identify where the students are in their individual writing development so the teacher can work with them in their zones of proximal development and help them to progress. This is a complex field for teachers to move into as it requires a nuanced understanding of writing and knowledge of the writing proficiency that can be reasonably expected at different levels.

The assessment of writing has traditionally been based on general holistic impressions, often with a rather unclear understanding of what to expect. Several researchers underline the value of teachers being explicit and focused in their assessment if they are to succeed in helping their students to improve their writing

competence (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Huot, 2002; Myhill, Jones & Watson, 2012; Parr & Timperley, 2010; Sadler, 1989). However, the multidimensional nature of students' texts makes it difficult to define and describe relevant and accurate criteria. Qualitative judgments and interpretations from the teacher are always needed – for example to appraise subjective aspects such as creativity and originality. Thus, professional assessment practices require qualitative interpretations as well as ratings based on more or less fixed criteria, and the teachers need to have the knowledge and confidence to make their own evaluations and break with defined criteria if necessary (Sadler, 1985, 1989; Wyatt-Smith & Klenowski, 2013).

In a discussion of what kind of competencies teachers need to support their students' writing education, Phelps (2000) points out the need for a pedagogical hermeneutics. An important part of the L1 teacher's expertise is the ability to *read* students' texts in an analytical way, and to understand their attempts at making meaning (Phelps, 2000; Igland, 2013). This constitutes a relevant basis for formative feedback to the writer in question. Huot (2002, p. 111) discusses what it means to "read like a teacher" and refers to a continuum from a traditional "fault-finding summative evaluation" to a dynamic and hermeneutical practice including pedagogical and dialogical perspectives. Reading like a teacher demands both extensive subject knowledge and compound competencies in language, text and writing. Relevant concepts and meta-language are prerequisites not only for communication but also for *seeing* what the students do and do not master, and what they are trying to do (Matre & Solheim, 2014; Myhill, Jones & Watson, 2013). In Shulman's terms (1987), we can talk about pedagogical content knowledge, enabling the teachers to use and integrate knowledge on subjects and on language and text in their teaching of writing. Training the students to receive feedback is also an important part of this competence.

When Hattie (2012, p. 25) talks about *expert teachers*, he points out that one of the prominent attributes of expertise is a deeper understanding of the subject, seeing both the surface and the underlying aspects in an integrated way. For the expert *writing teachers*, this implies a flexible use of knowledge relating to language, writing and text qualities. These literacy competencies support the subject content knowledge and have to be adapted to the students' performances in terms of integrated assessment and instruction. With this in mind, we argue that explicit formative feedback has to be an integrated part of writing education to promote learning for the student. One way to achieve this is through formative assessment and feedback designed to "close the gap" (Sadler, 1989) between current and desired competence. Hattie and Timperley's feedback model (2007) provides information on the goals the student should aim for ("feed-up"), gives "feed-back" on how the student is making progress towards the goals and finally, "feeds forward" to help the student progress. These principles form a key perspective on assessment for this study, but the analyses primarily focus on the work *behind* the formative feedback, namely the teachers' analytical reading of students' texts and their use of knowledge from the literacy area to see, interpret and articulate the stu-

dents' writing competencies. Thus, core knowledge from the L1 subject represents a necessary basis for this work.

1.2 Writing education and writing assessment in Norway

In recent decades several larger research projects on writing education have been conducted in Norway (e.g. Berge, 1996; Berge, Evensen, Hertzberg & Vagle, 2005; Smidt, 2010). Two major issues in this research are particularly relevant for this article, namely writing as a key competence across subjects on the one hand and writing assessment with focus on the need for a shared understanding of writing on the other.

The QAL project (*Quality Assurance of Learning Outcome in Written Norwegian*) (Berge, Evensen, Hertzberg & Vagle, 2005) studied writing tasks, students' texts and teachers' assessments from the final L1 examination in lower secondary school over a three-year period (1998–2001). The study documents a rather narrow writing competence among L1 students at the end of compulsory schooling. This may be illustrated through the students' choices of tasks and genres, as we may expect that students in an exam situation will choose a text type they presume they can master. Two of three students chose to write narrative texts while less than a third chose to write non-fiction texts, and among these, personal genres, such as letters and personal essays, dominated. Even though narratives and personal genres represent important parts of the L1 writing culture, the subject was criticised for having too narrow a focus in writing education, and for not qualifying the students to write a broad range of texts through expository and persuasive writing.

In 2006, the Knowledge Promotion reform was introduced in Norway. With writing, reading and oral skills as key competencies, this curriculum is often referred to as a literacy reform (Berge, 2005). The research project SKRIV (*Writing as a basic skill and challenge*, 2006–2010) (cf. Smidt, 2010; Smidt, Solheim & Aasen, 2011) studied writing across the curriculum at different school levels, following up and discussing the role of writing in the curriculum. When it comes to L1 writing, the project supports the QAL findings on narratives as a dominant part of a rather narrow writing culture. The project group found that L1 teachers had the main role in writing education and saw the need for broader perspectives on writing as well as more cooperation between teachers from L1 and other subjects. Another finding from the SKRIV project was that the students seldom wrote for particular readers, neither in L1 nor in other subjects. Major parts of the writing were fragmented texts, answers to questions and other types of texts that had little relevance outside the particular school situation. The teachers' feedback was often general and seldom related to the purpose of the text. An important conclusion from the SKRIV project was that the teachers had a rather narrow understanding of writing, and that writing education did not address functional aspects sufficiently – e.g. how to reach desired purposes through writing different types of texts for different audiences.

When it comes to writing assessment, a full scale national writing test conducted in 2005 also provides relevant background for the present study. Students' writing proficiency across the curriculum was tested, and comprehensive guidelines and assessment resources were developed to support the teachers' assessments of the students' texts. All this assistance notwithstanding, the results showed major differences between teachers assessing the same texts – indeed, to such an extent that the tests were considered invalid (Thygesen et al., 2007). These findings revealed the need for a shared understanding of writing as a basis for joint interpretation and valid assessment of students' texts. Studies of assessment from the above-mentioned QAL study and an earlier study of L1 assessment (Berge, 1996) also found these needs. This became a point of departure for the NORM project.

The research findings presented above point to some key challenges within writing education and writing assessment in Norway that can be summarised as a limited repertoire of genres and text types in use, a lack of focus on functional aspects of writing and a lack of shared understanding of writing and what to expect of students' writing proficiency at different levels. These findings – and challenges – point to the fact that students and teachers are not used to working with a diversity of texts, and they do not have a shared understanding of what kind of writing competencies are needed for different purposes. There are thus grounds to claim that the writing education does not prepare the students to participate in different text cultures the way the curriculum prescribes. Unclear roles and responsibilities between different subject teachers in writing education also underline the need for a more elaborated and shared understanding of writing among Norwegian teachers, as a basis for teaching and learning. These assumptions are supported by studies showing that writing as a key competence has not been sufficiently implemented in Norwegian compulsory school (Møller, Ottesen & Hertzberg, 2010).

In 2013, the Knowledge Promotion curriculum was revised to sharpen the focus on literacy and basic skills. A framework document was developed to serve as a point of reference for developing the skills within each subject over different levels (NDET, 2012). Teachers in all subjects are here assigned the responsibility for educating their students in writing within their subject discourses, which requires considerable literacy qualifications. According to the curriculum, the L1 teachers are delegated an extended responsibility, helping the students "to develop their ability to plan, design and elaborate increasingly more complex texts that are adapted to different purposes and audiences" (NDET, 2013). Together with a continuously growing subject area, this represents an expansion of the traditional Norwegian L1 subject, as well as the L1 teacher's role. It also implies an expansion of subject teachers' roles within literacy areas that traditionally has been the domain of L1 teachers, for example grammar and text linguistics.

In this article we will shed light on these challenges by examining how a sample of teachers from different subjects develops assessment competence through collaborative assessment of students' texts, supported by the writing construct and norms for expectations, taken from the NORM project. What do the teachers focus

on? How do they use the norms and the defined writing construct? Since we understand assessment competence as both the analytical reading of the text and the use of this reading as a basis for formative feedback to the students, we will also include perspectives on the teachers' formulation and communication of feedback.

2.   THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

The theoretical basis for this study is presented in *the Wheel of Writing*, a writing construct anchored in perspectives on writing as both a culturally construed and an individually intentional phenomenon. The model (see figure in appendix A) provides a picture of writing in a literate society and represents a functional approach, focusing on *writing acts* and *purposes of writing* (Evensen, 2010; Berge, Evensen & Thygesen, forthcoming). When acting through writing, the utterance has to be mediated through language and other semiotic resources, oriented towards a possible reader and the actual purpose. The writing construct operates with six acts of writing – to *interact*, to *reflect*, to *describe*, to *explore*, to *imagine* and to *convince* – related to different purposes in a dynamic construct. A common writing act in school is, for example, to describe a phenomenon with the purpose of organising knowledge about the topic. In every act of writing, semiotic mediation resources, such as for example modalities and structural features, have to be chosen according to the purpose of the text, the intended reader and the context. Thus, social semiotic perspectives are also integrated in the model.

Following the aims of the NORM project, a set of norms for what it is reasonable to expect from students' writing after years 4 and 7 was developed in close cooperation with teachers: Researchers listened to and analysed teachers' collaborative assessments, interviewed teachers about their practices and arranged for groups of teachers to meet and discuss their judgments on text qualities. The motivation behind this approach was to come as close as possible to teachers' experience-based and often tacit knowledge about children's writing. Suggested norms were organised and reformulated by the researchers, tested and then discussed and refined in cooperation with the teachers. This cyclical process resulted in a set of norms for children's expected writing proficiency, which was used together with the construct as a basis for teaching and learning in the NORM project's intervention.

The norms are sorted into seven textual dimensions: *communication, content, text structure, language usage, orthography and grammar, punctuation* and – finally – *use of the written medium*. These dimensions help the teachers to see and assess different levels and different qualities of students' texts, and the norms formulated under each of them also provide a relevant meta-language (see excerpt in appendix B). The expectations are explicit, but still not formulated in a very detailed and prescriptive way. Thus they may open for teachers to call on additional and more specified criteria when needed. This may lead to a flexible use of the norms for expected proficiency, lending authority to the teacher and his acquired

competence in writing and assessing texts (cf. Sadler, 1985; Wyatt-Smith & Klenowski, 2013).

The set of norms for expected writing proficiency, the assessment dimensions and the writing construct used by the teachers in this study constitute validating reference points for the teachers' assessment. Within each of the dimensions, students' texts are scored on a five-grade scale. The teachers' analytical reading of the texts may then be expressed in summative profiles of the students' performances. These profiles, leaning both on research-based criteria and teachers' professional judgment, give the teachers a broad basis for deciding on and communicating formative feedback to the students, adapted to individual development and goals (cf. Hattie and Timperley, 2007). With this in mind, a summative assessment may be used formatively to answer Hattie and Timperley's question about how the student is doing. It may also serve as a basis for formative feedback and instructions on where to go next. This is supported by Wiliam (2013) who points out that the term "formative" does not refer to the assessment in itself, but to "the function that the evidence generated by the assessment actually serves" (p. 15).

Several researchers emphasise how collegial discussions offer dialogic spaces for negotiating interpretations of students' texts, questioning understanding and sharing knowledge (Colombini & McBride, 2012; Evensen, 2012; Jølle, 2014; Parr, 2011; Sadler, 2009). Wenger's theory on "communities of practice" (1998), focuses on mutual commitment, joint enterprises and shared vocabulary. This offers a useful approach to describe and understand the participating teachers' collaborative work on assessment.

2.1 Data material and analytical approach

This study draws on data from the NORM project where teachers participated in an intervention designed as a competence development program to implement knowledge about the writing construct and the norms for expectations. The project teachers were involving their students in a wide range of text writing within different subjects, using different acts of writing for different purposes in accordance with the writing construct (see Solheim & Matre, 2014). All the way through the development program the teachers were given extensive training in assessing and giving feedback on students' drafts and simultaneously expanding their knowledge and their register of meta-language related to different aspects of writing. To use Hattie's words (2012), an overarching aim of the training was to move the teachers from being "experienced teachers" to becoming "expert teachers" in writing (p. 25).

The assessment data reported on in this article was collected in the middle of the two-year intervention period of the NORM project, in a seminar where all the teachers from one of totally four geographical regions in the project met to discuss and assess unknown texts. The seminar was a part of the Norm project's intervention program and data collection. The teachers worked in groups of 3–4, formed so

as to represent the same year levels but different schools. Each group did joint readings and assessed a set of five texts. Our data consists of audio recorded *assessment dialogues* from five groups, selected according to the criterion that all group members had participated the intervention program from the outset.

The data material also includes the teachers' discussions on how to transform knowledge from analytical reading and summative assessment of texts to tentative formative feedback. A premise in formative feedback is that teachers should consider the individual student's abilities and development. Since the student writers' identities were unknown to the groups, the assessment data are supplemented with information from interviews where project teachers present and reflect on experiences from formative assessment in their own classes (see Figure 1 below).

In the analysis we lean on sociocultural perspectives on learning, using a dialogical approach to understand the interaction taking place in the teachers' conversations. Through careful listening and reading of transcripts, the data were analysed inductively and sorted into thematic categories. Important elements in this analytical process were the teachers' construct references, their use of the norms for expected writing proficiency and metalinguistic concepts from the literacy area. The study may also be said to have abductive elements by seeking support in hermeneutical analyses and findings from previous research, preparing the ground for further studies.

It is necessary to underline that most of the teachers in this study were general teachers whose education included courses in mother tongue education of different length, in addition to studies of varying other subjects. Our data do not make it possible to specify the individual teachers' subject expertises. The discussion on L1 teachers' role in writing education (see chapter 4) is therefore based on observational data from the main project, other studies and Norwegian education policy documents.

The study reported on here was preceded by a pilot study (Matre et al., 2011) where teachers also assessed students' texts in collegial discussions, but without having participated in any specific education in writing and assessment and without support in any explicit criteria. Findings from this study will be presented initially in part 3 below – as a backdrop to the main analyses and the discussion.

	Data	Function
The Norm project	*Interviews* with project teachers about their feedback practice Observations from the competence development program of the intervention	Supplementing analyses, shedding light on the findings, providing perspectives to the discussion
The pre- sent study	*Collegial discussions* from 5 groups of teachers assessing 5 texts using resources from the NORM project's intervention, including discussions on formative feedback	Basis for the primary analyses in the article
The pilot study	Findings and examples from assessment discussions (before intervention project)	Backdrop for the discussion

Figure 1: Overview of the data material of the present study.

3.   ANALYSES AND RESULTS

3.1 The pilot study – a backdrop

Findings from the Norm projects' pilot study (Matre et al., 2011) showed that the teachers often had a holistic approach to the students' written texts, focusing on general impressions, earlier experiences or subjective aspects, rather than explicit criteria. The pilot study also points to different cultures of writing and assessment in L1 versus other subjects. While L1 teachers most often focussed on spelling, grammar and other formal aspects in their assessment, teachers from other subjects, such as social and natural science, first and foremost paid attention to facts and subject content and not necessarily to the written presentation.

In spite of the L1 teachers' focus on linguistic surface elements in the students' texts, analyses of the assessment dialogues revealed a very limited use of linguistic terminology. When referring to cohesion, the teachers used expressions like "lack of connection", "natural transitions" and "sudden transitions" and concepts like "flow" and "red thread". And when talking about sentences, they very seldom sought support in syntactical terminology. They mostly limited themselves to describing the students' sentences as "bad", "good", "long", "short" or "incomplete". These examples illustrate how the teachers' use of colloquial language made it difficult for them to describe the students' writing competencies; they did not come close enough to the texts (see also Matre & Solheim, 2014). Considering the teach-

ers' analytical reading of students' texts as a basis for formative assessment (cf. the introduction), having precise concepts is a prerequisite both for seeing the qualities of the text and for expressing and passing on formative feedback to the students.

3.2 The assessment dialogues – teachers' joint reading, analysis and assessment of students' texts

By listening to and analysing the project teachers' assessment dialogues from the seminar presented in chapter 2.1, a rather complex picture of the teachers' approaches is revealed. Still, we can clearly identify two ideal typical points in a continuum when it comes to the teachers' use of the assessment resources: A rather *instrumental* and ritualised use of the norms for expected writing proficiency on the one hand, where the norms function more or less as "check lists", against a more *flexible* and functional understanding on the other hand, where the teachers assess different features in texts related to contexts, acts of writing and the project of the individual writer. None of the teacher groups used just one or the other of these ways of assessing, and between the two extremes we see clear signs that the teachers' discussions and collaborative work are bringing them into a learning process that deals with internalising a more complex understanding of writing – and thus a more independent use of the assessment resources. We refer to this continuum as a third category labelled *learning in progress*. In the following, we will report from our analyses through the three presented categories.[2]

3.2.1   The instrumental approach

The instrumental use of the assessment resources is characterised by teachers relying on the norms as very strict guidelines. They go through the student text and check item by item in reference to the norm document: "Do we find this in the text?" They do not reflect upon the functions that the different phenomena may have. "Yes, he has extended noun phrases," one teacher states and immediately moves on to the next step in the analysis. This kind of procedural approach often occurs when the teachers are talking about coding competencies (orthography and punctuation[3]), which they often do, as in this utterance: "Does the writer master commas, exclamation marks and parentheses?" Such an approach to the assessment of students' texts often leads to teachers looking for what is missing without asking about what is relevant. One of the teachers expresses this point of view by uttering that "it's easier to see what is bad than what is good. That's logical, because then there's something that's missing".

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[2] *Parts of the analyses have been presented earlier in a Norwegian context (Matre & Solheim, 2014).*

[3] *The assessment dimension* use of the written medium *may also be considered as part of the coding competence.*

When it comes to the more complex functional competencies (including the assessment dimensions communication, content, text structure and language usage), the teachers are fumbling more often. Many utterances show how teachers tend to focus on the content level ahead of how the text communicates and how the topics are structured and presented. When assessing a persuasive text, for example, some of the teachers discuss whether certain content elements should have been omitted or included. But they do not comment on how the student manages to realise his arguments linguistically or how he builds his argumentation.

A great number of utterances within this instrumental approach display how the teachers have difficulties giving precise and text-specific assessment of the composition of texts, both on the micro and macro levels. They may, for example, talk about "lack of structure" without pointing to the text. The norms emphasise cohesion in and between sentences, but we find many examples where the teachers do not manage to take advantage of the resources in this area. Some of them mention cohesion markers listed as examples in the norm document and check whether they are used in the texts, but they rarely bring in other cohesion markers or discuss how suitable the usage is. Others state that they do not know what "cohesion" markers mean. Many of the dialogue sequences thus give the impression that the teachers – also L1 teachers – lack knowledge in this area, which makes them very dependent on the resources they were given as support.

Several of the norms for expectations under the assessment domain *language usage* deal with the syntactic level, for example the point concerning varying the beginning of sentences. The assessing teachers often claim that the texts have or do not have much variation. But common for most of these utterances is that they refer to the word level and not to the functional level, as this dialogue excerpt illustrates:

A:	He has a varied start to his sentences because when one is going to describe things, then it's very easy to just use 'and then', 'and then', 'and then'. He doesn't do that.
B:	He has 'when', 'I', 'so', 'then'.
A:	But his sentences aren't especially good. They aren't …
C:	No.

The teachers appreciate that the student does not start all his sentences in the same way. However, they do not see that he also has managed to create syntactic variation by using different constituents in the fundamental position, nor do they appear to see what effect such topicalization might have. Other times the teachers accentuate relevant syntactic phenomena in the students' texts but without labelling them precisely: "many cumbersome sentences", "it's kind of an oral style", "this is a little simple, in a way", "very much is lacking" – or "not especially good", as in the excerpt above. Here we recognise the colloquial language from the pilot study (cf. chapter 3.1 above).

The norms for expectations, especially under the domains *text structure* and *language usage*, contain some specific terminology from grammar and text linguistics. If the teachers have not acquired an understanding of these text domains and the accompanying terminology, it is surely difficult for them to *see* the particular features in the texts and assess their effect. This obviously stimulates a mechanical use of the norms – with little use of independent considerations.

The characteristics described here – focusing on the linguistic superficial features and on coding competencies – are similar to what we saw in the pilot project. The teachers are commenting on the linguistic surface and on local details without asking what function they have in the text. Furthermore, the assessment is often connected to the word and content levels.

3.2.2   The flexible and functional approach

This category on the other end of the continuum is characterised by more thorough discussions among the teachers, often provoked by questions and objections. The assessors go more deeply into several aspects of the texts, and they display a more complex view of writing, including multimodal resources. This functional and flexible approach also implies that the teachers see the norms for expectations in the light of the overarching understanding of writing (cf. the Wheel of Writing). This means that the norms cannot be used as a universal check-list, rather the assessors have to judge what may be appropriate use of language and other semiotic resources to realise a given act of writing or a given purpose. The following discussion about use of the written medium in a descriptive text from the natural science subject, written for a younger audience, may illustrate this.

A: Very good! Very good! Just the fact that she has included these illustrations elevates the text. But could she have included the illustrations throughout the text?

B: Sure, but that could have easily appeared to be a bit messy. She has concentrated her illustrations here.

A: But is it necessary? Is it necessary to illustrate what an axe looks like? Don't the kids know what a bucket looks like? It is decorative, though.

B: But I'm thinking that for those who are not good readers, it strengthens this recipe to see…

A: When I read a recipe, I would rather have these illustrations along the way.

C: If it is done like here, we know that the weaker pupils will focus on the drawing.

The teachers here discuss the degree to which the illustrations contribute relevant information suitable for satisfying the needs of the potential readers, and conclude that consideration for the weak readers is the decisive factor. In this way they are

relating to all the three dimensions in the Wheel of Writing – act of writing, purpose and recipient, and semiotic mediation.

In discussions reflecting a flexible use of the writing resources we also see that the teachers show a greater understanding of the micro level in the texts. They identify and refer to a broader range of cohesion markers than those mentioned in the norms. They also refer to syntactic concepts that are not explicitly mentioned, e.g. "subordinate sentences", "conjunctions" and "infinitive markers". This shows how they disengage themselves from the examples in the resources and act more autonomously according to broader linguistic knowledge.

Within this category we also find several discussions about coding competencies. An important difference from the use related to the instrumental approach – and also to the pilot study – is that the teachers do not only look for what is missing but also for what the students actually master. For example, a weak text written by a year-four student is commented on as follows: "Yes, there are many mistakes here, but do you see that he writes 'læring' with /æ/ and 'lov' with /o/? He's on his way to orthographical writing". We also find similar comments on other aspects of the texts, signalling that the teachers read and assess in a more analytical and professionally grounded way, and that they know more than what is written in the resources. They have developed a more profound understanding of text and writing.

3.2.3   Learning in progress

What distinguishes the two extreme categories presented above is how the norms for expectations are anchored in the teachers' knowledge about language and text. While assessment utterances within the first category show how teachers check off what elements the texts contain without further reflection on function, the second category shows how linguistic concepts and textual phenomena are related to broader textual and communicative contexts and to more independent judgments. We interpret this variation as a result of the teachers being in a collaborative process of learning, where they try out different interpretations of the texts and different uses of the norms. From a developmental perspective, this is an interesting approach.

One aim of the NORM project's interventions was that the teachers should learn to use the norms for expectations in a flexible and functional way. In this learning trajectory it is reasonable to assume that they have to go through a phase where the resources are used more mechanically. Therefore a large part of the assessment utterances are somewhere in between instrumental and flexible application – on a continuum where learning is in progress.

In the dialogue excerpt below we see how an assessment group moves from an instrumental to a functional understanding. They are about to assess the point in the norms that says that the student is supposed to be able to use full narrative, interrogative and imperative sentences:

A: He doesn't ask about anything. Nor does he request anything either.

B: But is it a natural thing to have included?

A: Yes, some questions might have been included as this is an exploratory text.

B: But instead of questions, he writes "I believe", "I think perhaps" and "may be". He *asserts* nothing.

C: Because it's an exploratory text, he doesn't assert anything, but it's rather "believe" and "may be", he also writes "because".

Teacher A states to begin with that the student does not use the type of sentences mentioned in the norms, something that could be understood as a shortcoming. But the objection from teacher B initiates further reflection. The utterance is anchored in the concern for the task and the exploratory act of writing, and that stimulates the assessors to discuss the fact that linguistically speaking, the intended exploration may actually be promoted. This discussion, which in reality deals with the relation between the act of writing and semiotic mediation, leads the teachers to see the quality in the student's text. They also agree that the formulations that have been mentioned strengthen the exploratory nature of the text.

Another example of discussions which force the assessors to delve under the linguistic surface deals with a year-four student who argues against a command from the principal. This text does not have an explicitly marked introduction and conclusion, as the norms suggest. According to an instrumental approach this could have undermined the general impression, but this group discovers together how these parts are implicit in the text:

A: She really gets straight to the point here: "When you said no phone or computer, then I was irritated". That's really an introduction.

B: Yes, that *is* an introduction, it is.

C: It states what this text is going to be about.

B: Yes, and that now the arguments will be stated.

C: Because …

B: [quotes from the text] Because I use my computer … Because you cannot decide …

A: But there is no *final conclusion.*

C: No, not really.

B: *Yes*, there is in a way one: [quotes] But yippy, you said nothing about TV.

By anchoring the discussion in the text the teachers see what the student actually masters. We interpret the examples presented above as indicators of teachers being on their way to a more nuanced reading of students' texts and a broader understanding of linguistic aspects of written mediation, as well as writing as a functional means for communication.

3.2.4   Summing up

Comparing the results from this study of assessment dialogues with findings from similar dialogues in the pilot study, we find differences that clearly indicate that the teachers in the main project are on the whole analysing and assessing texts in a more competent way. All the teachers manage to pinpoint and label different aspects of the texts, and they have – to varying degrees – acquired a more extensive meta-language. Some teachers also discuss the actual use of the texts in social and cultural contexts, indicating a functional understanding of writing.

More precisely, most of the teachers seem to be confident when it comes to coding competencies. Several of the teachers do not limit themselves to finding shortcomings, they also point to things that the students have mastered and interpret that as ongoing learning. While the teachers are fumbling to some degree when it comes to functional competencies such as text structure or communication, it is still interesting to see that all the teachers enter into discussions that indicate they are on their way to a deeper understanding of these aspects. However, it is worth noting that the assessment dimension *content* is only discussed by the teachers to a limited extent.

An overall impression from the assessment dialogues is that the norms for expectations seem to have given the teachers a better foundation for assessing students' texts by seeing and expressing qualities and distinguishing between them. This represents a first important step in using assessment in a learning context. The next step, combining descriptions of the texts with an evaluation of linguistic functions, is clearly more challenging and demands deeper insight into writing, linguistics and subject-related aspects.

3.3   From analytical reading to formative feedback

Even if teachers manage to see nuanced qualities and shortcomings in the students' texts it is difficult to transform this knowledge into appropriate formative feedback that can be helpful for the students' further progress. Formulating formative feedback involves making a range of choices. The teachers have to consider the norms for expectations and their summative analysis of the text, and they also have to consider relevant aims and purposes for the specific writing prompt, assumptions about the individual student's strengths and weaknesses, his learning history, motivation and interests, combined with notions about further progress in writing. This is a complex and demanding task. In the following we will present and discuss some of the teachers' formative choices, including what to give feedback on and why and how to communicate the feedback.

It is interesting to see that most of the teachers, independently of whether they leaned more towards an instrumental or flexible approach to the assessment, ended up letting orthography, punctuation and other surface features (coding competencies) play the main part in their responses. Even where the teachers had rich

discussions about the function of the students' choices of linguistic and semiotic resources and their relevance connected to the specific writing acts, they often seemed to lose sight of their textual analyses when they reached the discussion on response. One example is from a group where the teachers entered into an interesting discussion about whether the content in an L1 text should be understood as "irrelevant" or "creative", anchoring their diverging points of views well in the text. This part of their analysis was, however, not touched upon in their final discussion of possible feedback, where they ended up by dealing with concrete deficits in the text. "Giving feedback on orthography is so concrete. It is something the student will be able to learn," one of them says, and the rest of the group agrees. Such dealing with surface structures seems to represent a safe arena for the teachers and a domain in which most of them have good competence (cf. the pilot study). Another reason for the teachers' focus on coding competencies may be that a lack of knowledge and meta-language on such assessment dimensions as communication, text structure and language usage make it difficult to give concrete feedback. Many of the teachers are also short of experience from working systematically with these dimensions. This may be an important explanation why the teachers, with support in the assessment resources, are making relatively nuanced readings of texts, while this to a limited degree is reflected in their suggested formative feedback.

Most of the teachers' discussions on feedback are rather short. Still there are examples of teachers who engage deeper in qualified discussions on which feedback to give. This type of reasoning is illustrated in a dialogue on an exploring text about life in the Stone Age. The teachers finish their summative assessment by stating that this is a text that shows mastering above what is reasonable to expect on all assessment domains. "But the student is still going to have feedback," one of them concludes. They then start to discuss who the student is and what he needs: "How can we best help him to improve? Is there anything special that stands out? Should we concentrate on one specific assessment domain?" They go through different dimensions and eliminate orthography and punctuation, as they do not want to make formal details a main point. Language usage, however, is an area where they see potential for improvement. They comment that the writer manages to communicate that this is an exploratory text, but they underline that he could have used a broader linguistic repertoire to signal that. They conclude by giving him feedback on his choice of words (vocabulary) and formulate their response as follows: "Could you use other words than 'maybe' and 'I think' and still show that you are writing to explore?" They also come up with concrete suggestions on content, for example expanding key paragraphs. These examples illustrate that the feedback is well founded in the text and in the writing construct. The teachers actively *use* their readings of the texts, consider different aspects from the discussion and reflect upon what response may help the students' progress.

How to formulate the feedback to the students is thematised by the teachers in several of the discussions. In one dialogue a teacher states: "We have to be so con-

crete that the students are able to go into the texts and do something with them." This credo results in specific feedback pointing to clearly defined areas for improvement. In another dialogue one of the teachers questions a suggestion for feedback formulated as a directive ("Remove item 2 or move it to the start or end"). He proposes that they could perhaps formulate this as a question instead and thus give the student a chance to evaluate the feedback and decide himself how to revise the text. This teacher is obviously heading for a more dialogic response, inspiring the student to reflect upon his own writing and make his own choices. His colleagues, however, disagree, underpinning their point of view by defining their feedback as advice well-anchored in their summative reading. This dialogue shows teachers who are in a process of learning, trying to find their way within a complex field where practice and negotiation represent a path to improved competence.

Explicit and nuanced formulation of feedback requires a well-developed metalanguage. Still, much of the teachers' proposed feedback contains general and imprecise expressions, like the one reporting to a student that his text has many "clumsy sentences". It is not easy for a young writer to make use of this kind of feedback. The same applies to wording like "You need to work with your sentences" and "Write shorter sentences". Expanding their professional vocabulary on language and text is obviously an area of potential development for the teachers – and an important part of teachers' literacy development and assessment competence.

Having decided what feedback to give and how to formulate it, there is still an important step left, and that is to communicate the feedback information to the writer in a way that stimulates reflection – and revision. Teachers from one school report that they have been training the students explicitly on how to interpret the teacher's comments, how to evaluate them and make their own decisions on whether to agree or disagree with the teacher's input. This feedback is closely related to the norms for expectations, but the written response may often be rather general and overarching (examples: "Show more clearly who you are addressing". "Your text is well organised, but can you manage to turn the final points around a bit?"). This kind of feedback is followed up by an oral conversation with the individual student. The written response thus functions as a stepping stone to the expanding and instantiating one-to-one-dialogues with the students. In such dialogues unclear messages may be clarified, disagreement solved and misunderstandings eliminated (Hyland, 1998).

The analyses and experiences presented above indicate that it is demanding for the teachers to make good transitions from summative text analyses to relevant formative feedback that the students are able to make use of in their revisions. A general lack of textual knowledge combined with the failure to see the connection between different text constituents and their functions are probably two important reasons why the teachers often end up commenting on superficial features in their feedback. This undermines both their assessment work and their writing education.

However, the analyses indicate that the teachers – and the students – are on the right path. In the interviews, project teachers say: "We're now able to see the texts from several angles." And: "We're able to point to things in the texts that the students are good at. It has thus become easier to supervise the students". Still, a critical point seems to be whether the teachers manage to scaffold and inspire the students to make use of the feedback and make their own evaluations of the teachers' comments and manage to use them to improve their texts. The analyses of preparing, formulating and using formative feedback point to the value of *text conversations* as key elements in writing education – both conversations between the teachers and between teachers and students. In this kind of meta-conversation on writing and literacy, L1 teachers should have a key role.

4. DISCUSSION

Anchored in the findings from the empirical analyses we will discuss and reflect on the teachers' development of assessment competence based on the writing construct and explicit expectations of writing proficiency. Bearing in mind the experiences from interviews with the teachers, we will discuss the NORM project's assessment resources as a basis for developing a shared understanding of writing and assessment in the borderland between L1 writing and writing as a key competence across subjects. The L1 subject's double responsibility in writing education will also be discussed together with implications for the position of the subject in Norwegian schools, problematizing the challenge of balancing between Bildung and serving an all-round writing education purpose.

4.1 Teachers' competence and teachers' dialogues

The teachers in the study represent different school subjects, and the assessed texts belong to different subject discourses. The analyses draw a comprehensive picture of how the teachers make use of the writing construct, the assessment dimensions and the norms for expected writing proficiency they have been acquainted with in the NORM project's interventions. Even though the teachers use the assessment resources in different ways and to different degrees, we identify far more nuanced assessments of texts, defining the pilot project (cf. part 3.1) as the point of departure.

The interventions first and foremost seem to help the teachers to become aware of the complexity of writing and the different purposes that written texts can have. Two of the teachers comment on this: "With the Wheel of Writing we get a far wider range for what we are writing" and "We are now more aware of how the pupils can use their writing in different situations." These functional perspectives are also transferred to the students, and another teacher reports on such frequently asked questions from the class as "why are we writing this text, and who is going to read it?" Simultaneously, the textual and linguistic dimensions of the con-

struct help the teachers to come closer to the students' texts. This is documented through gradually more sophisticated readings of the texts, where both coding and functional competencies are included. Several teachers express that it is useful to be "forced" to see and assess different aspects of the texts using the assessment resources. "We can't overlook relevant dimensions anymore," they say, with reference to the former assessment practice focusing on general and superficial features. This differs from the pilot study (Matre et al., 2011; Matre & Solheim, 2014), where the teachers to a large degree leaned on overall impressions.

A problem from the pilot study that also appears in the assessment dialogues, however, is the teachers' lack of meta-linguistic and textual knowledge. Several concepts used in the construct and the norms for expectations were unfamiliar to the teachers – even though most of them may be considered to be quite basic. Bearing in mind the findings from the pilot study, we can argue that many teachers have too little knowledge within this field. In an assessment situation, one consequence may be that the teachers reduce the complexity of writing by mainly giving feedback on concrete and superficial aspects or general impressions. This may also be one of the main reasons why it seems to be so demanding for most of the teachers to transform their analytical readings of texts into well-functioning feedback to the students.

Through involvement in the project's interventions and through discussing texts and assessment with colleagues, the teachers gradually expanded their professional vocabulary, as illustrated in the assessment dialogues showing learning in progress and a more flexible understanding of the construct. The intervention's focus on functional aspects of writing seemed to help the teachers to see the need for a meta-language to put their extended understanding of writing into words – for example by asking questions as "How does the student use language to satisfy the desired purpose?" Thus, teachers developed what Myhill et al. (2013) call grammatical content knowledge, and gradually applied it pedagogically through feedback and writing instruction. A flexible understanding and use of the assessment resources, as described in the analyses, implies a deeper understanding of the linguistic and textual domains they are derived from. It may, at the same time, open for considering qualitative evaluations, contextual knowledge and pedagogical aspects.

The writing construct, the assessment dimensions and the norms for expectations are tools mediating the teachers' assessment, and the dialogues reveal that these resources help the teachers to see their students' work in a more nuanced way. Parr (2011) underlines that such scaffolding resources have to be internalised in the teachers' practice as part of their repertoires. By actively using them and putting them into play, the teachers may gain greater confidence in their judgments.

> The understanding of a construct is refined through experience and processes like moderation where collegial discussion is involved. The shared meaning that develops among those interpreting the evidence of writing behaviour and performance (both

> process and product) within a context is, arguably, also negotiated using tools such as scoring rubrics, exemplars and progressions (Parr, 2011, p. 33).

In line with our findings, Parr emphasises that the construct and assessment resources have to be a flexible support for the teachers' interpretations, adjusted and refined through collaborative use (See also Parr & Timperley, 2010). Thus, the assessment resources become rooted in teachers' experiences (cf. Sadler, 1985).

The analyses in this study all deal with text conversations in some way and point to the value of talking and discussing together to enhance knowledge and acquire better understanding of texts and writing education. The assessment dialogues show how the teachers continuously negotiated meaning and made their collective judgments of the students' texts by referring to the norms for expectations and the writing construct. Sometimes they had to go through extensive discussions to decide the quality of a student's performance. The dialogues involved different aspects of the texts, and the teachers were alternately challenged to ask, to disagree and to argue for their perspectives. The text conversations thus helped the teachers to expand their knowledge and their repertoire of meta-language on writing. Simultaneously, they were collectively training their eyes to see the texts. One of the project teachers reflecting on his experiences from the NORM project says: "We see different things in the texts. It's nice to have someone to disagree with, someone to fill in your thoughts". This teacher points to important aspects of professional discussions, namely that of disagreeing and complementing. It is well documented that objections in dialogues often lead to exploring sequences, and complementing each other's utterances is also an efficient dialogue strategy when developing a topic (Mercer, 2000; Matre 2000, 2007). Colombini & McBride (2012) underline the importance of accepting, and even cultivating, dynamic discussions, with both disputes and consensus, to develop assessment competence.

With their mutual commitment, shared repertoire of resources and joint enterprise, the teachers at the intervention schools represent communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). According to Wenger, "meaning arises out of a process of negotiation that combines both participation and reification" (p. 165) in such practices. This is exactly what our teachers are doing when they are participating in discussions and applying their shared resources onto specific texts. Communities like this, that are dealing with current practices, referring to concrete resources and continuously refining them, represent stimulating environments for professional learning and advancement. They also seem to represent a stimulating environment for developing shared understanding of writing and assessment as a basis for joint interpretation.

Despite the presence of some challenges, our analyses show that after having participated in the NORM project's intervention and having worked with integrating the writing construct and explicit expectations in their local learning ecologies, the project teachers are able to enter into discussions indicating that they are on their way to a deeper understanding of students' writing competencies. Thus, they are about to open an important arena for learning – both for themselves and their

students. But, as Jølle (2014) has documented, it takes time for new assessment practices to be established.

4.2 Literacy in L1 and across the curriculum – a shared responsibility

In the curriculum description of the Norwegian L1 subject, perspectives on text are a fundamental element that is connected to overarching perspectives on *Bildung*: "Through active use of the Norwegian language when working with their own texts and in the encounter with the texts of others, children and young people are introduced to culture and social life" (NDET, 2013). The subject is presented as an arena where the students are supposed to find their own voices, express themselves and receive response, and where they also are equipped with the necessary background for participation in working life and a democratic society. The subject description also underlines the linguistic, textual and cultural diversity that constitutes a broad and constantly changing basis for the subject. The general goals are comprehensive, including both practical skills and Bildung perspectives. Moreover, the L1 subject is delegated a specific responsibility concerning oral skills, reading and writing – so-called basic skills[4] that should be prominent in all subjects.

The increased focus on reading and writing as key competencies has led to an expansion of the L1 subject and increased the responsibilities of the L1 teacher. Simultaneously, international and national tests have strengthened the focus on assessment, and individual achievements and rankings have become key factors in setting education policy and consequently have an impact the school's working day. Reading and writing tests affect the L1 subject. Critical questions have been raised as to whether measuring reading and writing may be moving the focus away from classical aspects and Bildung perspectives of the subject (Krogh, 2012; Applebee & Langer, 2013; Smidt, 2014). Our study, and its focus on writing and assessment across subjects, places itself in the middle of this discussion and sheds light on the question of how to balance between different demands within the L1 subject. The role of writing as a key competence represents a major challenge in this context. As one of our teachers put it: "We like to think that we all have the same responsibility, but the fact is that writing primarily is anchored in L1. We are aiming, however, to distribute this a bit more". An example from one of the intervention schools also illustrates this tension: The students were asked to write a description of how to calculate the circumference of a geometric figure. The question then arose among the teachers as to whether this writing should be done in L1 or in mathematics.

These examples, combined with other utterances from the project teachers, indicate that the division of responsibility concerning writing education between the subject teachers and the L1 teachers is unclear. There is, however, shared agree-

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[4] *The concept 'basic skills' used in the Norwegian curriculum may refer to both technical skills and key competencies for learning.*

ment between literacy researchers and the governing documents that the content subject teachers should have the responsibility for addressing their specific discourses of writing, the texts and the terminology belonging to their subject. This is motivated by the fact that the subject teacher is the one who knows the discourse of writing within his or her subject best (Smidt, 2011, p. 8). But, this is not well understood among teachers, and it is a challenge that takes time to rectify (cf. Hertzberg, 2010).

In practice the main responsibility for students' writing education is thus placed on the mother-tongue subject. This comes in addition to the fact that the L1 writing discourse is understood as less distinct than other subject discourses. A writing task from our project, "Write about a topic that interests you", may highlight this. The assignment is given within the mother-tongue subject and communicates that the writing itself is the most essential element, while the content is subordinate. This is a feature often observed in the mother-tongue education in our project schools, where the students seldom are asked to write about such specific L1 topics as literature or language. It is also interesting to note that about half of the writing prompts are categorised by the teachers as interdisciplinary, often as a joint project between L1 and other subjects, giving room for working with writing across the curriculum (cf. Dagsland, in progress; Otnes, 2015. These tendencies may point to a risk of reducing L1 writing to primarily dealing with formal and textual features, assisting writing in other subjects (cf. Krogh 2012). This practice represents a threat to the subject's distinctive character and to the Bildung components connected to the subjects' text culture, aimed at addressing a broad variety of texts and genres. Focusing on aesthetic dimensions and cultural values and introducing the students to thinking that may be of importance for their personal development are also important perspectives of Bildung – and of the L1 subject (cf. Aase, 2005; Rogne, 2008).

To sum up, the curriculum states that the mother-tongue education must undertake to develop the whole person and educate the student in a broad sense, at the same time as it also has a responsibility for providing tools and skills to make writing a key competence in all subjects. To obtain a clear picture of what to work with and what to aim for in the L1 subject the L1 teacher needs to deal with extensive knowledge on language, literacy and writing.

In Norwegian primary school, however, this double responsibility presents the L1 teacher with a special challenge. The reason is that until 2010, Norwegian teacher education for primary school certified teachers for all subjects. Thus, most teachers in both lower and upper primary school teach the mother-tongue subject along with other subjects. They do not necessarily have an identity as L1 teachers, and they do not hold degrees in language or literature like most L1 teachers in secondary school. This implies that they will have a relatively low amount of knowledge on such topics as grammar and text linguistics, and in many cases the teachers' competence in the literacy area depends on personal interest and experiences. This fact represents a serious impediment when it comes to implementing

writing as a key competence across subjects. Our empirical study provides many examples that point out this problem, especially concerning knowledge on grammar and text structure. The teachers' lack of knowledge also represents a serious challenge to implementing the NORM project's approach to writing and assessment, where we aim to lead teachers into a hermeneutic reading of students' texts, focusing on different textual and linguistic levels – as a basis for formative assessment. The writing construct, the assessment dimensions and the norms for expected writing proficiency all presuppose a nuanced understanding of literacy and rely on a substantial understanding of key L1 topics and terms.

What kind of solution can be found to this challenge? Our analyses show that the writing construct and the assessment resources implemented through the NORM project's intervention program may represent good support for professional development within writing for both L1 teachers and teachers in other subjects. The construct displays the complexity of the phenomenon and opens for using writing as an integrated activity, anchored in different situational and cultural contexts. The focus on diverse purposes and writing acts also opens for a broad range of writing and thus makes it is possible to meet needs both when planning for L1 writing with Bildung aims and for more practically oriented writing. Our data show that the students in the NORM project are exposed to a more varied text repertoire and write within a broader use of text types – contrary to the narrow repertoire that QAL, SKRIV and other research projects have reported (see chapter 1.2). The teachers have also acquired a more extensive meta-language to use in their discussions on texts and writing, and in their feedback to the students. The L1 teachers' competence has also been increased through the intervention program, both when it comes to different subject discourses and their text types and to more explicit knowledge on linguistic aspects. As one principal states when asked what the NORM project has meant to her school: "The most important profit is that we have acquired *a language* we can use to talk about writing."

A prerequisite for making use of this approach is that the teachers acquire necessary education and training to continuously refine their knowledge and develop flexible use of the resources. Wyatt-Smith & Klenowski (2013) refer to this as a cyclical process, constantly reflecting on the use and the appraisal of relevant criteria (p. 37). Our study indicates that a key to success is the use of collegial discussions where teachers meet to talk about and evaluate students' texts in interdisciplinary groups, actively using and referring to the construct and the norms for expectations. Such communities represent good arenas for developing mutual knowledge on writing, especially when the teachers enter into negotiations. The importance of including contexts and disciplinary ways of knowing in these discussions has been underlined by several researchers (Langer, 1997; Applebee & Langer, 2013; Flyum & Hertzberg, 2011).

Nonetheless, there might be disadvantages to working in this way. It is important to be aware that the resources, and especially the norms for writing proficiency, are always subjected to interpretation. Explicit expectations might be mis-

understood as absolutes, and the norms will then end up as check-lists, as shown in the instrumental approach in the analyses above. Such a routinized use of the norms does not imply independent thinking and reflection on part of the teachers and does not help them to refine and expand their knowledge. Sadler (1985) argues that it is not always possible to define distinct criteria into existence. They may overlap each other, they may not be co-extensive with the universe of human experience or they may represent abstract mental constructs which are difficult to grasp through strict logic. Thus judgment cannot be understood as a technical operation alone, based on rigid application of pre-specified criteria. Room must always be left for the competent teacher's qualitative judgements.

A related challenge is illustrated by experiences from our study revealing that the teachers, leaning on the norms for expectations, in many situations do not emphasize the subject content in their reading of the students' texts. One reason for this is probably that the criteria under the content domain are less specific than those describing more linguistically oriented domains, due to the difficulty of being specific about content in general guidelines. This means that ways of knowing in the different subjects have to be taken into account by the teachers through specific criteria adjusted to the given task and context (cf. Applebee & Langer, 2013). Again, this exemplifies the need of the knowledgeable and independent teacher.

To improve writing education in school, our discussion points to the importance of building shared competence on writing and assessment among teachers across subjects through collaborative work. Teachers' hermeneutical reading of students' texts, anchored in a shared understanding of what to expect, may form a good basis for formative assessment as an integrated part of the writing education. L1 teachers should be particularly well prepared for this kind of reading and assessment and may thus be very important contributors in the process leading towards the promotion of joint competence in the teaching staff. We argue that this way of working has potential for developing a more distributed responsibility for the students' writing education, between subject teachers and across discourses, and for building mutual competence and autonomous and confident teachers.

5.   CONCLUSIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

Our study states that teachers need knowledge about and a meta-language on different aspects of writing, text and language, as well as close acquaintance with the different subject discourses to appraise the students' texts and support their writing education. Using Hattie's words (2012), we need expert teachers who can help the students to present and reflect on their subject knowledge through writing. Even though the Norwegian curriculum calls for this, not every teacher can be an expert in the field of writing. Thus, the L1 teacher, with his literacy expertise, has to play a key role in the writing education.

An important aim in the NORM project is to develop a shared understanding of writing and a shared language in this field among teachers across disciplines. Find-

ings from our study show that such professional development may take place within learning communities where participants from different subjects, included L1 teachers, can discuss texts and assessment and enhance their different understandings. Collegial interdisciplinary discussions – in this case on implementing a writing construct that includes functional and textual aspects of assessment – seem to offer both challenges and fruitful meetings between the literacy area and different subject areas. Our analyses of the teachers' use of the construct and norms for expected writing proficiency reveal how they develop from using the resources in an instrumental way, assessing feature by feature, towards a more flexible and functional use, making the teachers able to interface their assessment with disciplinary aspects, pedagogical considerations and contextual knowledge.

In the analysed assessment dialogues the main focus is on the processes behind the formative assessment, which should be considered an important part of the teachers' work (Bennett, 2011). Our findings point to the need for confident teachers who have the necessary knowledge on writing and who manage to use it in a flexible way – as subject teachers as well as writing teachers. Interdisciplinary assessment discussions seem to be a prospering approach to enhance the teachers' competence in writing. However, at the same time our study indicates that there is a way to go, and that the double responsibility put on the L1 subject is a necessity.

These experiences put pressure on the Norwegian L1 subject as it has to balance between its Bildung mission and the demand to convey overall writing competencies – along with reading and oral skills. However, as we see it, the subject's focus on literacy invites integration with the Bildung perspectives. Our project is anchored in a belief that writing contributes to Bildung, through empowering the writer's thinking and his ability to make meaning. In this way writing has the potential to educate the students to become independent and reflective people. In addition, writing gives access to participation and contribution in a democratic society. The writing construct which forms the basis for our study asks for writing on a broad register, including reflective, exploratory and imaginative writing – and it invites to functional writing in meaningful contexts.

The approach to writing education and assessment presented in this study opens for new possibilities, but also represents challenges. The teachers appreciate how the assessment resources help them to distinguish between and elucidate different textual aspects, as this enables them to see the complexity of writing and thus gives a broader basis for formative assessment. In the longer run, however, this may also make it possible to test and quantify partial competencies at the expense of the complex whole. There is thus a risk that the norms for expectations could be used for measuring and comparing students' writing achievements ahead of supporting their further learning. We see this as a serious threat that could reduce the importance of writing as a meaning-making tool. In Norway, a new type of writing test has recently been launched, with the main aim of supporting teachers' assessment and students' learning through preparing the ground for formative assessment. The test resources are based on the same writing construct as the NORM

project and assessment criteria similar to the ones presented in this article. Combined with good education and training, this might serve as a useful tool for teachers to enhance students' further learning. Still, it is necessary to be aware of more general challenges related to the use of assessment systems of different types. In their discussion on experiences gained from using the Common Core Standards in the USA, Applebee & Langer (2013) point out that "new assessments, even more than the standards themselves, are likely to have profound effect on curriculum and instruction in each of the subject areas" (p. 179).

What happens in school is always closely connected to political processes. In Norway, a commission (the Ludvigsen commission) has been appointed by the Ministry of Education with the mandate of "evaluating the subjects in the compulsory school against the need for competence in future society and working life". A preliminary report from their ongoing work gives clear signals of a tendency to strengthen the aspect of skills at the expense of broader cultural and literate experiences (NOU, 2014:7). A utilitarian perspective may thus be said to be present in the report (cf. Krogh, 2012). We find this concerning, given the view of a broad approach to literacy as a path to Bildung and democratic citizenship. This points to the need for a persistent discussion among teachers, teacher educators and policy makers on significant values in the L1 subject.

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APPENDIX A: THE WHEEL OF WRITING
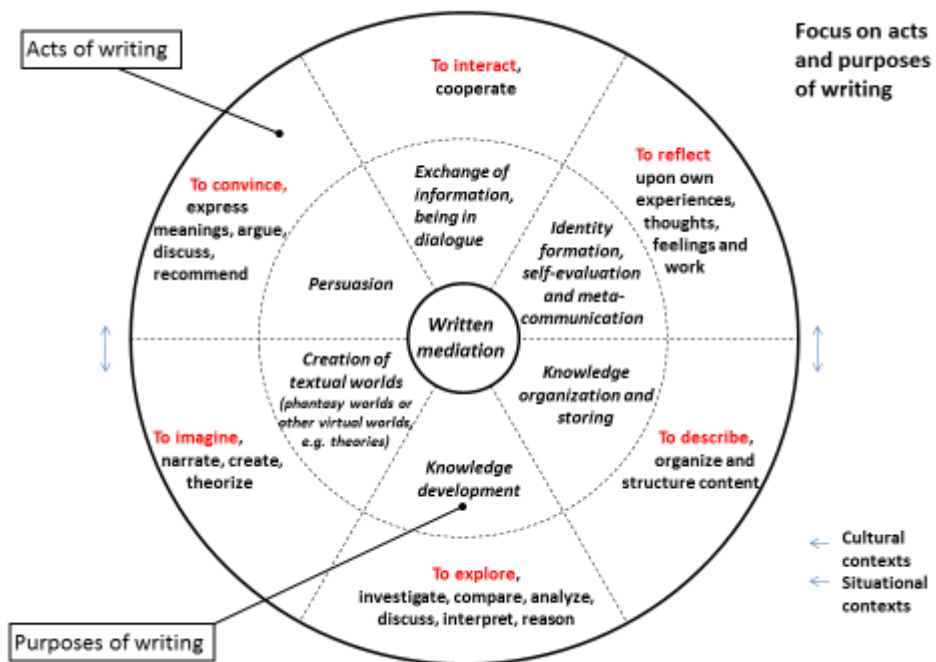
The Wheel of writing – focusing on acts and purposes of writing
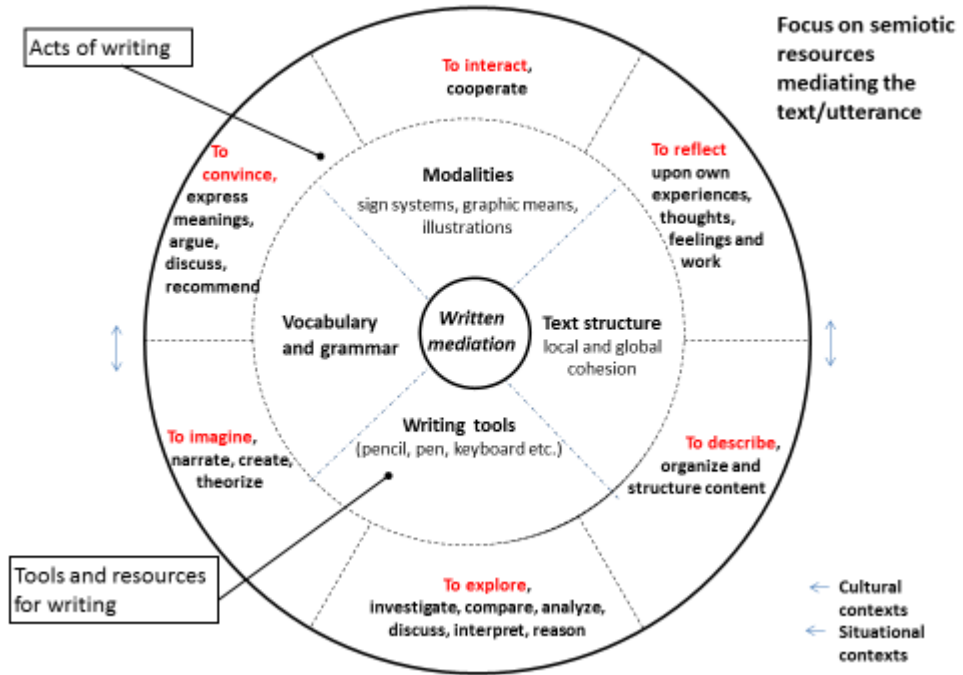
The Wheel of writing – focusing on semiotic resources mediating the text/utterance

APPENDIX B: EXCERPT FROM THE NORMS FOR EXPECTED WRITING PROFICIENCY

Assessment dimension 3: Structuring of the text

(Within this dimension, the overall composition of the text and the coherence between the individual parts and within each part of the text are to be assessed.)

After four years of schooling, the writer should …
- master some relevant principles of composition
- compose the text by using introduction, main body and ending
- make use of paragraphs after introduction and before ending
- create topical cohesion within the various parts of the text
- express text-cohesion through the use of connectives (*or, but/however, because* etc.)

After seven years of schooling, the writer should …
- master various ways of structuring the text
- structure the text in a purposeful way
- master use of paragraphs as an organising principle
- express text-cohesion through the use of a variety of connectives

Assessment dimension 4: Language usage

(Within this dimension, the choice of words, the syntax and style are to be assessed)

After four years of schooling, the writer should …
- make use of narrative sentences, interrogative- and imperative sentences
- use elaborated nominal-phrases
- demonstrate some variation at the beginning of sentences
- make use of a relevant and varied written vocabulary and concepts from school-subjects
- include some idiomatic expressions
- use 'direct' and 'indirect speech' as a means

After seven years of schooling, the writer should …
- build complex and varied sentences of appropriate length
- use a relevant, varied and precise written vocabulary, including professional concepts
- use a relevant verbal style
- use various idiomatic expressions