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English

Understanding the Knowledge Requirements for English 6  
Four Teachers' Interpretations of the Terms "Relatively Varied" and "Well-  
grounded and Balanced" in Students' Written Production

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# Abstract

This paper presents a qualitative study with semi-structured interviews investigating 1) How teachers in the course English 6 interpret the terms “relatively varied” and “well-grounded and balanced”, and how their interpretations differed, 2) How do the teachers interpret the terms in relations to the National Agency for Education’s commentary material?, and 3) What kind of resources do the teachers use to understand those terms? The reason for conducting this research is to gain a greater understanding of how teachers in the course English 6 in upper secondary school interpret the terms in the requirements. The terms in our requirements leave a lot of room for interpretations, and I want to find out how teachers with experiences of teaching interpret the terms in order to better understand how they can be interpreted.

My finding revealed that three out of four of the interviewed teachers did not mention the terms in their description of them, they brought in other aspects from the requirements, and did not address neither of the terms clearly. This applied to all the teachers, except for T4. The teacher that did address the terms was the only one who read the National Agency’s commentary material, therefore T4’s interpretations of the term aligned closest to the description in the commentary material.

From the answers the teachers provided me with, they seemed to interpret the requirements in their own way and this is a validity and reliability issue when assessing the students’ texts. The teachers answers are also discussed from a norm-referenced perspective.

**Keywords:** English as a second language (ESL), "Teachers perception" AND assessment, L2 AND assessment

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## 1. Introduction

Many teachers feel grading is the most difficult part of their work because they have to measure the students' knowledge, and sum up their achievements in accordance with the steering documents (Kenneth Nordgren & Christina Odenstad, 2017 p. 9). The Swedish school system is based on confidence in the teacher's objectivity and competence in grading. However, teachers are people with their own experiences and values and these can of course affect the objectivity in their assessment and grading. It is the student's achievements that the teacher should grade according to the Swedish National Agency for Education's instructions and guidelines, but studies have shown that other factors can affect the teachers' assessment. According to Jenny Bonnevier, Eric Borgström & Daroon Yassin Falk (2017), the curriculum from 1994 was influenced by criterion-referenced assessment with general goals. Our latest curriculum from 2011 is also a form of criterion-referenced assessment, but it introduce standards rather than general goals. The issue that standard-referenced (criterion-referenced) assessment have, means the terms in the requirements leave a lot of room for interpretation. As a consequence, teachers tend to interpret the standards in their own way. According to Bonnevier et, al (2017) this is problematic and an equivalence issue. Therefore, I have chosen to look at a small group of teachers and investigate how they interpret two terms from the knowledge requirements for English 6, in the context of assessing students' written productions. To begin with, I chose to investigate the term "relativt varierat" 'relatively varied'<sup>1</sup> because not only can the adjective "varied" be interpreted differently that is variation in terms of what, and what is a minimum level for something to be described as varied, but also that a description of degree is added with "relatively". How should this degree then be understood. If we look at the description for the level A instead, we find the term "välgrundat och nyanserat" 'well-grounded and balanced'<sup>2</sup> in the context of assessing reception – that is understanding shown through production and it is the students' understanding that should be "well-grounded and balanced", which means that students should be able to express their understanding of a subject in their writing as well (Skolverket, 2011). The National Agency of Education's commentary material for the English subject does describe the term, and I will use their explanations of the terms as a kind of measuring rod of the standards, and compare their descriptions to the teachers interpretations. Hopefully, my study can contribute to a

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<sup>1</sup> From now on I will use the English translation of the term in my text

<sup>2</sup> From now on I will use the English translation of the term in my text

greater insight in how teachers interpret the terms, and make the them somehow clarified for me and other teachers.

### 1.1 Research questions

The purpose of this study is to gain greater understanding and insight about how teachers in the course English 6 interpret the terms “relatively varied” and “well-grounded and balanced” in the context of assessing students’ written production (Skolverket 2011), and if the teachers understanding of the terms aligns with the description in the National Agency of Education’s commentary material for the English subject. Based on the purpose the following questions will be answered:

1. How do teachers of English 6 interpret the terms “relatively varied” and “well-grounded and balanced” when assessing students’ written production, and how do the teachers’ interpretations differ?
2. How do the teachers interpret the terms in relations to the National Agency for Education’s commentary material?
3. What kind of resources do the teachers use to understand those terms?

## 2. Background

In this section, I will present the theoretical background relevant for my study, both in an international and a Swedish context. I begin with a broad description of the current research done in assessment theory and slowly narrow it down to a Swedish context where the terms “relatively varied” and “well-grounded and balanced” are discussed.

### 2.1 Assessment Theory

According to the Cambridge dictionary, the term assessment is defined as “the act of judging or deciding the amount, value, quality, or importance of something”. However, the concept of what assessment is in an educational context, and especially what the term grading means differs internationally and over time. Christian Lundahl, Magnus Hultén and Sverre Tveit (2016), describe in their publication ”Betygssystem i internationell belysning” ‘grading system in international light’<sup>3</sup>, that the term grade have different connotations in different countries. Therefore, an entirely objective understanding of grades and assessment from an international perspective is not possible to produce (p. 2). The previous research that Lundahl

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<sup>3</sup> My translation

et al. mentions are comparisons in students' grading internationally between countries. There are no studies that indicated that one grading system is better than the other. Instead, the research in the field focuses on similarities and difference between countries. Lundahl et al. argues that with more international comparisons between countries' grading systems, we learn what might or might not work in our own country, and it will open up possibilities for innovation in grading (p. 3). Over the past years, the research literature have been characterized by four dominant principles for assessment. The four principles are; Individual related assessment, norm-related assessment, goal-related assessment and standard-related assessment (p. 7). Individual-related assessment is the process of giving feedback to students, where teachers have to understand the students' abilities and conditions, and adapt the assessment criterion after students' status. Norm-related assessment, on the other hand, means assessment is often constructed with a large group, such as all students in a country, as the group which the norm is based on. As the foundation of a grading system, its starting point is the statistical principle of normal distribution and "grading on a curve" rather than creating specific sets of norms for specific student groups. It is an intuitive way to measure level, by comparing students' abilities with perceptions of a "normal" level among a general population. In this way, we can create norms based on what we can expect from students in a specific age (p. 8). In contrast to norm-related have goal-related assessment, which indicates that assessment relates to specific goals in the curriculum. The Swedish curriculum from 1994 is goal-oriented with general aims. The latest curriculum, on the other hand, does introduce standards rather than aims and criteria, therefore it leans towards the fourth form of assessment which is standard-related assessment. This is a form of goal-related assessment, and criterion-referenced is often used to cover both. What is specific for standard-related assessment is that it relates to descriptions in different competence levels. For example, the Swedish grading scale has the level F to A, and assessment is related to the descriptions in the grading scale (in the knowledge requirements) (Skolverket, 2011). A general issue with the standard related assessment is that their use of value expressions and more abstract formulations make them difficult to interpret, and it is hard to make the standards specific enough without becoming too detailed and specific (p. 8). Because they are formulated at more general and abstract levels, they do leave room for a variety of interpretations. For this reason I have chosen to look at a small group of teachers and not only investigate how they interpret two terms from the knowledge requirements for English 6, but also use the commentary material's explanation as a kind of measuring rod.

As Lundahl et. al, (2016) mention, validity and reliability are two central terms in research about assessment (p. 8-9). These terms indicate that all forms of grading need to be perceived as both fair and equitable. For example, validity is mainly about if teachers' assess what should be assessed as defined by the standards (in the knowledge requirements). For instance, the knowledge requirements states teachers should assess "relatively varied" in students' written productions, the teachers should then tell the students to be varied in their writing, so that the students are given the opportunities to be "relatively varied". In addition, validity has to do with how securely one teacher can give a grade, and has to do with how secure they are at what they measure. (p. 9). In Skolverket's supportive material "Kunskapsbedömning i skolan - praxis, begrepp, problem och möjligheter" 'Knowledge assessment in the school - practice, concepts, problems and opportunities from 2011, they define validity as when teachers' assess abilities based on what the knowledge requirements says, and does not include other factors in their assessment such as: behaviour, personal qualities and other abilities that are not mentioned in the knowledge requirements. Assessment should be based on the standards in the knowledge requirements, only then can the assessment be relevant and valid (p. 27-28). For this essay, it is essential to investigate validity in the teachers' interpretations of the terms "relatively varied" and "well-grounded and balanced", and investigate if the teachers' interpretations aligns with what is written in the standards (in the knowledge requirements) and in the agency of education's commentary document about the English subject.

As Skolverket's supportive material (2011a) mentions, an assessment has reliability if it leads to the same grading regardless of who assesses, or when and where the assessment take place (p. 34). In Lundahl et. al, (2016) they explain that one threat on reliability is when different assessors make different interpretations of the students' results (p. 9). Maximal reliability is more or less impossible to reach because assessment always involves an interpretation, and interpretations are subjective (Skolverket, 2011a, p. 34). The lack of concurrence between two assessors can depend on different factors such as: different competence, experience, view on knowledge, and different interpretations of the knowledge requirements. In this essay, I will not investigate whether teachers' grade the same student-text in similar ways. However, if the teachers have different ideas and understanding of the terms in a long term it could be a reliability issue, in that sense my study does raise questions about reliability as well. However, the conclusion drawn about teachers' validity and reliability applies to the teachers in my study, and the results cannot be used to support a more general claim.

Another publication that discusses validity and reliability in assessment is “Generalizability Theory as Evidence of Concerns About Fairness in Large-Scale ESL Writing” Assessments” (2011) an article written by Jinyan Huang. This study examines validity and reliability in teachers’ assessment of students’ writing in two provinces in Canada, during a timeline of three years. Huang (2011) discusses similarities and differences between two programs, one with ESL (English as second language) students and the other with native-English speaking students. The results in these two provinces showed there were systematic differences in assessment, where there were lower reliability in the assessment of ESL students (p. 439). These differences raised some questions about fairness in the assessment of ESL students’ skills. Why there were lower reliability in ESL students’ tests was because assessors with different teaching experiences gave different scores to the same piece of ESL text (p. 424). The testing programmes, with both ESL students and native-English speaking students, were both based on norm-referenced assessment (p. 426). Huang mentions that in norm-referenced assessment, each student’s result on the test was interpreted in relation to the score of all other students’ who took the test (p. 427). He mentioned that future research could include norm-referenced as well as criterion-referenced assessment, and compare the effects of both, so that we can get a holistic understanding of assessment. He also suggests that future research could examine the impact of other factors, as not only ESL students or native-English students. Other factors as, activities, gender, special needs, writing materials etc (p. 439). In my essay I will only investigate teachers with ESL- students, the only difference between the teachers are that one is in vocational programme and the others are in university preparatory. Another difference is that I am interested in the teachers and their understanding of specific terms from the knowledge requirements from standard (criterion)-related assessment, then it would be useful to raise the possibility of reliability issues from a standard-related perspective.

Because I am interested in understanding how teachers’ interpret the terms “relatively varied” and “well-grounded and balanced” from the knowledge requirements from the course English 6, research that explores the curriculum in the Swedish assessment system are essential for my study. Even if the research does not discuss the subject of English specifically or exclusively, it is essential to review research done in assessment theory in a Swedish context as well. In Larissa Mickwitz licentiate thesis ”Rätt betyg för vem? Betygssättning som institutionaliserad praktik” Right grade for whom? Assessment as an institutionalized practice from 2011, she problematize the relationship between formal regulation, such as the knowledge requirements



for upper-secondary school, and the daily practice of teachers' grading as expressed in interviews. She investigated the curriculum from 1994 (which was goal-related, and is a form of criterion-referenced assessment). The teachers in this study tell us about their experiences when grading in the Swedish subject. Mickwitz (2011) explains that the teachers believe there is a gap between the ideal, what is written in the school policy document as the knowledge requirements for the Swedish syllabus, and the practice. One problem they mention is that they want to give the students the "correct grade", but that students and parents demand higher grades, and this problem sometimes hinders the teachers from giving the "right grade" (p. 103). Mickwitz (2011) mentions how teachers' grading based on what the criterion in the knowledge requirements says is "the right grade" (p. 104). However, the teachers in the study argue they want a more "fair grading" instead, where the "fair grading" considers the students as recipients and is linked to the student's knowledge, but takes into account other contextual factors. For example, when the teachers use the aspect of their professionalism that derives from teacher experience as examples of "fair grading" (p. 103). This is as an example of how the "fair grading" is not the same as the "correct grading", but that the "fair grading" is not necessarily an equivalent grade (p. 104). In this essay, I am looking at one small aspect of how teachers negotiate their practice in relation to the "ideal" of the curriculum and policy documents, and if the teachers' understanding of the terms differ in relation to the description in agency of education's commentary document.

Another study that is useful for my essay is Helena Korp's thesis "Lika chanser i gymnasiet? En studie om betyg, nationella prov och social reproduktion" 'Same opportunities in upper-secondary school? A study about grade, national tests, and social reproduction from 2006. She describes how grading of the national tests in Sweden differs between vocational programs and university preparatory programmes. The teachers in the practical programmes tend to focus on form and production so that their students pass a grade, while students in the university preparatory programme are taught to develop their analytical ability and theoretical knowledge. Korp (2006) discusses this as a problem because the students are measured by the same criterion in the national test (p. 25). Both Mickwitz (2011) and Korp (2006) study how the old curriculum from 1994, which was goal (criterion) referenced affected teachers' grading. Even if they look at the 1994 curriculum, the basic principles of criterion-referenced assessment is the same as the standard-related assessment, and thus many of the problems Mickwitz (2011) and Korp (2006) have identified that teachers struggle with are likely to be relevant also for the teachers I am investigating. Korp's observations about differences in

grading of national test depending on the program can be an interesting point of comparison for my discussion of the teachers' interpretation of the knowledge requirements since they teach in both vocational and preparatory programs.

## 2.2 Grades – Their Function in Sweden

This information serves to give an insight of the functions of grading, and which aspect of grading I am focusing on in my study. In Alli Klapp's article "Betyg – deras funktioner och vad de mäter" 'Grades – Their functions and what they measure (2017), she argues that the grading system in the Swedish school has three functions; to make a selection, to convey information and to motivate students to perform in school. To make a selection means that the grades are used as a selection tool for the next level of education. When the students apply for universities, they are ranked according to the merit values they receive from upper-secondary school. The second function of grading is to convey summary information about what the students have done poorly and what they can improve. The third and final function that Klapp describe is that the grading system motivates students to perform in school, as it functions as a method for reward and punishment. In other words, grades encourage students' learning in form of a competition with themselves and other students, and when the students' receive information about their peers' performance they will be motivated to perform better (p. 2) In this essay, the focus will be on the second function of the grading system, as Klapp discuss is a tool to provide the students with summary information about their achievements in school. Therefore, I am interested in how the teachers understanding of the term could potentially affect their ability to communicate these to their students.

An article that discusses how grades functions as a tool to convey information about the students' performances is Ilona Rinne's article "Betygsättning – en mångdimensionell aktivitet i lärares yrkesutövning" 'Grading - a multidimensional activity in teachers' professional practice from 2018. She explains that the grading-system is built on assumptions that teachers can make rational decisions and fair evaluations' of students' knowledge. Therefore, it is essential that the teachers' assessment is fair and equal, and in accordance with the steering documents (p. 2). In addition to this, Rinne (2018) argues that teachers have to explain to the students on what grounds they base their assessments, but also what the terms in the knowledge requirements mean. Teachers need to simplify and clarify the terms to the students in a way that becomes understandable. According to the education act, students have

rights to know on what terms they have been giving a grade: ”Den som har beslutat betyget ska på begäran upplysa eleven och elevens vårdnadshavare om skälen för det” ‘Anyone who has decided a grade shall upon request from the students and their caregivers give their reasons for it’ (SFS, 2010:800, 3 kap., 17 §). This means that teachers should explain the reasons for the grade, and the criteria the students achieves. Rinne (2018) argues that teachers should have transparency in their assessment, so that the assessment material is available for both students and parents. These arguments that Rinne (2018) explains about how grades functions as information are connected to how easily interpret, and clear the knowledge requirements are. It would be essential to investigate if that is the case for my investigated teachers as well. Another point taken is that teachers has to explain on what grounds the students have been giving a grade, and the criterion they accomplish. If the teachers in my study does not understand the criterion (the two terms I am investigating) it will be problematic because their students have the right to know why and how they received a grade.

## 2.3 Syllabus for English 6

The outline of the syllabus for the course English 6 is first a description of the core content that includes three separate headings: content of communication, reception, and production & interaction, and each section describes what the teaching in the course should cover. Then we have the knowledge requirements, the part I am investigating, and the terms that describes what the students should learn for each grade. The knowledge requirements have defined requirement for three levels, E, C and A, and in between steps for the level D and B. These in between steps (level D and A) does not include terms on their own. For example, for the grade D the knowledge requirements for E and predominantly for C are fulfilled, and for the description for an B is the same were C and predominant parts for A are fulfilled (Skolverket, 2011).

In the knowledge requirements for the grade E, the term “relatively varied” is mentioned. I believe this term is the most difficult to understand because not only can the adjective “varied” be interpret differently, but also that a description of degree is added with “relatively”. Then what is the minimum level for something to be done in a “relatively” way. In the knowledge requirements for the grade E, the term “relatively varied” is used to describe that the students’ written and oral productions should be “relatively varied”. The requirements states: “Eleven formulera sig relativt varierat, tydligt och relativt strukturerat. Eleven kan

även formulera sig med flyt och viss anpassning till syfte, mottagare och situation” ’Students can express themselves in a way that is relatively varied, clear and relatively structured. Students can also express themselves with fluency and some adaptation to purpose, recipient and situation’<sup>4</sup> (p. 8). The terms “clear” and “structured” are also mentioned for this level. However, “clear” and “structured” are two other aspects and “relatively varied” is another, and does not mean that the students should do all of these things in a varied way. Even if the requirements for this level does not explicitly mention grammar and spelling, the term “clear” is mentioned and can be related to aspects such as spelling and grammar. The core content does not either mention grammar and spelling explicitly however grammar and spelling are important for things such as clarity, style, variation etc. That is correctness in grammar and spelling are not aims in themselves, but prerequisites for the communicative qualities that are assessed. In this essay I have limited the term to teachers’ interpretations of students’ written production, even if the requirements are described for both oral and written productions.

The same requirements are repeated at each level but with added demands or increased degrees of difficulty. For example, in the requirements for the grade C the adjective “varied” is explicitly mentioned without the term “relatively”. In this level there are increasing demands of what the students should do. For instance, the term is used in this sentence (in the requirements for C) “Eleven formulera sig varierat, tydligt och strukturerat. Eleven kan även formulera sig med flyt och viss anpassning till syfte, mottagare och situation” ’Students can express themselves in a way that is varied, clear and structured. Students can also express themselves with fluency and some adaptation to purpose, recipient and situation” (Skolverket, 2011).

Even though the term “well-grounded and balanced” is not written in the context of assessing writing and speech, I still believe it is interesting to investigate how teachers’ interpret the term in students’ writing. The term is really in the context of assessing reception – that is understanding shown through production and it is the students’ understanding that should be “well-grounded and balanced”. This of course means that the students have to be able to express this understanding in writing and speech as well. In the requirements for A the term is used in this sentence: “Eleven visar sin förståelse genom att välgrundat och nyanserat

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<sup>4</sup> All translations of quotations from the national curriculum are mine.

redogöra för, diskutera, kommentera och dra slutsatser om innehåll och detaljer samt genom att med gott resultat agera utifrån budskap och instruktioner i innehållet” “Show their understanding by in a well-grounded and balanced way giving an account of, discussing, commenting and drawing conclusions on content and details, and with good results act on the basis of the message” (p. 10). There is a progression from the grade E to A, and for this level the students need to show an in-depth understanding of a subject, discuss it in detail, and draw conclusions. This means that the students should not only describe a subject, but to analyse the content. Underlying these criteria are understandings about what can be expected (what is an average performance from students in this certain course). Even though we have the terms written in the syllabus where we only see rather abstract formulations, I believe they are difficult to understand on their own and they leave a lot of room for interpretation.

One article that problematize the steering documents from a norm-referenced perspective is Bonnevier et, al. (2017) article “Normers roll i ett mål- och kriterierelaterat bedömningssystem” ‘The role of norms in a goal- and criterion related assessment system about the concept of norms when grading students’ in all situations. They find it problematic that the steering and policy documents don’t consider the role of norms and their functions when teachers assess students’ text (p. 23). The criterion-related assessment is difficult to interpret word by word, without considering what can be expected from students in different ages. Teachers are influenced by norms because they have to consider what can be expected of a particular age group, only then can they determine the relevance of the criterion (p. 25). In their article, they discuss terms from the knowledge requirements for secondary school which are similar to the ones’ I am analysing which is “relatively varied”. The terms they mention are “relatively varied, clear and coherent” (p. 26). Their conclusions are that teachers should consider the student group (which were students in secondary school year 9) when interpreting the criterion, only then can the terms be understood. Bonnevier et, al. (2017) argues that if the knowledge requirements are teachers only resource, and teachers’ interpret the terms only in relation to their own students, this will become an equivalence issue (p. 26). Their argument about criterion-related assessment is norm-dependent does not mean it is up to the individual teacher to define the knowledge requirements. The meaning of the knowledge requirements needs to be anchored in common standards. They suggest that teachers need to work together, and create similar frame of references and understandings of the criterion in the knowledge requirements, both locally and nationally. From a perspective of equivalence in grading, it is necessary to broaden the interpretation, so that the normative ideas in the

criterion-related assessment becomes valid, and accessible for all teachers (p. 42). I believe that a norm-referenced discussion is necessary when it comes to assessment because the terms such as “relatively” but also what “varied” is require an idea of what is a typical or “normal” performance of a particular age-group or educational level. Therefore, I want to find out what the teachers in my study discuss are “normal” performances when students are “relatively varied” and “well-grounded and balanced” in their writing, but also how the teachers come to their understandings.

## 2.4 National Agency for Education’s Commentary Document

Teachers can turn to Skolverket whenever they need help and guidance, especially when they have questions regarding the terms in the requirements and when they need assistance in their assessment. These documents give examples on how the terms can be interpreted. For example, the commentary material to the English subject syllabus, gives explanations of the terms “relatively varied” and “well-grounded and balanced”.

In the National Agency for Education’s commentary material for the English subject the term “varied” is described as the breadth of the language, the students’ vocabulary, expressions and linguistic structure, and their ability to use these in their writing and speaking. The purpose with variation in language is that the students can adapt their language to genres and different situations, without the language becoming monotonous (p. 9). However, the term “relatively varied” on the other hand, is described as, the students use their limited repertoire of words and write in different sentence structures. For example, they know how to express the same things in different ways. For students to acquire the grade E, they have to formulate themselves in varied ways, so that the language within the written text becomes more dynamic (p. 9).

The commentary material describes that the students’ understanding should be “well-grounded and balanced” including improvements which makes them more effectful (Skolverket, 2011). In the description of the term “well-grounded and balanced” they (the commentary material) have divided the term where they first describe “well-grounded”. It is described as having “en djupare, fylldigare förståelse” ’a deeper, fuller understanding” (p. 8). Here it is interesting to understand how students’ demonstrate these understandings, but also if teachers use these words when describing the terms. If we look at the term “balanced”

instead, its described as: “Elevens redogörelse, diskussion och kommentarer innehåller olika aspekter, perspektiv eller avvägningar” ‘the student's account, discussion and comments contain different aspects, perspectives or considerations’ (p. 8). In my essay, it is interesting to find out if teachers’ interpretations are similar to the description in the agency of education’s commentary documents, if it is the case, they interpret them I accordance with the commentary material.

### 3. Material and Method

To examine how teachers interpret the terms “relatively varied” and “well-grounded and balanced,” I’ve conducted semi-structured interviews. The aim of the semi-structured interviews was to gain an in-depth understanding of how teachers interpret the two terms I am focusing on. As Zoltan Dörnyei (2007) explains, the semi-structured interview uses an interview guide with pre-prepared guiding questions, where the questions provide the interviewee with guidance and direction, but where there is also room to follow up interesting answers (with follow-up question), where the interviewee can elaborate on particular points (p. 136). In line with what for instance Alan Bryman (2011) suggests, I have divided the interview guide into different themes with questions related to those themes. By doing this, I was able to categorized the answers directly, and it had the added advantage of making the structure of the interview clear to the interviewee (p. 429).

There were three interview themes that we discussed. Firstly, the teachers were asked background questions regarding their experiences in teaching. Secondly, the teachers discussed their interpretations of the value words “relatively varied” and “well-grounded and balanced”. For this part of the interview, all the teachers were asked to bring with them student-texts which they believed had accomplished the criterion “relatively varied” and one text which had accomplished the criterion “well-grounded and balaced”. Finally, we discussed their procedure and material they used in order to understand the two terms (see Appendix 2). Before the interviews began, I first piloted the initial questions with the help of a student at Örebro University. This person were not involved in the actual study, nor are the answers presented. This pilot interview helped me to refine my questions so that the questions would not be too specific. (Bryman, 2011, p. 420).

### 3.1 Participants

For this study, I've interviewed four teachers from different upper-secondary schools in Örebro. I contacted all the teachers via mail where I presented myself and the purpose of my study (See research letter, Appendix A). Because I did not want to limit my investigation to one upper-secondary school, I purposely chose teachers from 3 different schools to get diversity in their answers.

The interviews were all around 50 minutes to 1 hour long, and were all recorded with an audio recorder. Recording the interviews allowed me to reanalyse them afterwards, but also helped me to participate in the interviews by asking follow-up questions which made the conversation as natural as possible (David Nunan, 1992). Before the interviews begun I handed out consent form (see Appendix B) which promised anonymity, with no personal details being presented, and information about the possibility to withdraw their consent whenever they wanted. Therefore, I am not going to present any personal data as gender and age, which might expose who they are. Since, they are promised anonymity, they are referred to as T1, T2, T3 and T4, and I use the plural pronoun "they and their" instead of the singular pronoun when I refer to the teachers in the text.

**Table 1**

*Teacher Participant Demographics*

Teacher	L1	Teaching Years
T1	Swedish	16
T2	Swedish	2
T3	Swedish	9
T4	Swedish	19

Although, all the participants were able to speak English, the interviews were conducted in Swedish which was the first language (L1) of all teachers. I've decided to interview them in Swedish because it is more comfortable for the teachers to speak freely in Swedish, and because I am analysing their interpretation I wanted the teachers to express themselves as well as possible and reflect on their interpretations in their first language. Before the interview begun, all the teachers received information about the interview being in Swedish and then transcribed and translated to English. However, I've only transcribed material that is useful for my analysis. As Svend Brinkmann (2013) mentions, the transcription of the interviews are



in itself a form of interpretation. Since I am both translating and transcribing the material, I will try to stay as close as possible to the original in my translation, and do my best to prevent loss and misinterpretations. What is important keep in mind is this study will not attempt to provide the readers with correct interpretations of the terms, instead I will use the commentary material's explanations as a kind of measuring rod and standard, and compare the teachers' interpretations with each other. I am also examining how the teachers handle and think about this fact.

### 3.2 Analysis method

For my analysis of the interview material I have drawn on the tradition of phenomenography, since this approach entails a focus on differing understandings of a concept or term. This approach, then, allows me to highlight the different ways in which the teachers understand the two terms investigated, instead of looking for a complete definition of the term or "correct" interpretation. In Jan Larsson and Inger Holmstrom (2006) article, they describe phenomenography as, different ways of understanding a phenomenon, where the different ways of understanding a phenomenon have both "what" and "how" aspects, The what aspects, tells us about what the person is focusing on, where the how aspect tells us how their meaning is created (p. 56).

## 4. Results

In this section, I will present the results by comparing similarities and differences in the teachers' answers. First, I will present background information about the teachers' experiences of teaching. This is to give the readers some insight on whom the teachers are. Secondly, a section where I will present the teachers' interpretations of the term "relatively varied", where I compare the teachers' answers with each other and to the explanations in the commentary material. Thirdly, I will present the teachers' interpretations of the term "well-grounded and balanced", and finally, a section where I present the teachers' resources and materials in order to understand the terms.

### 4.1 Background: Teachers' Experience of Teaching

At the beginning of each interview, the teachers were asked to describe what they believe are the most important parts of teaching. All the teachers' argued that the relationship with the students are the most significant part of teaching, however, the teachers' answers still differed because they discussed different kinds of relationship with the students. T1 states: "The most important part of being a teacher is to give students confidence, and make them believe in

themselves, and make them believe that they all have a future”. The teacher discusses the importance of motivating the students to learn, and strengthen their confidence because “when they [the students] believe in themselves, they will give the English subject a chance, a chance to work with it”. T1 explains there are 9 students in the course English 6 and they are all from vocational programs.

Likewise, T2 expresses similar thoughts as T1 when asked about the most significant part of teaching, however T2 also added the importance of “bonding with the students” and how it is “even more important than just teaching grammatical rules”. When asked to elaborate, T2 explained “because I want to feel that I somehow change the students’ lives, motivate them, and give them confidence to learn”. Both T1 and T2 mention the importance of motivating the students, and they discuss how there is a relation between motivation and learning. Even though both teachers (T1 and T2) discuss the importance of having a good relationship with the students, their teaching years differs. T2 have been teaching for 2 years (see table 1) and explained how they still are learning something new about themselves and their students during each teaching occasion. T1, on the other hand, have been teaching for 16 years and points out an interesting opinion about their experiences of teaching; “At first, I wanted to be a teacher because of the English subject and now I am a teacher because of the students, without them I would have quit a long time ago”. T2 explains how the interest for the English subject is still there, but the relationship with the students is even more important.

When asked about their opinion on what is the most important part with teaching, T3 stated a rather different answer than having a good relationship with the students. Even though T3 argues that a good relationship with the students is essential when teaching, T3 believes the most important part of teaching is “to develop the students’ knowledge in the subject”. T3 argues that teaching the English subject is as relevant as bonding with the students, and they explained that bonding could entail “setting standards, guiding the students in to right directions, or that sometimes it is just about being a listener”. Both T2 and T3 are teachers at university preparatory programs with 30 to 32 students in each class. These relatively large classes, as T2 and T3 names them, makes it difficult to help every student as much as they would like to.

Similar to T2 and T3, T4 also teaches at preparatory programs with 35 students in the course English 6. When asked the same question, T4 presents a rather interesting train of thought

about themselves, in contrast to the other interviewees, T4 thinks it is important that “ I learn something new as well as the students [...] I wouldn’t chose a scenario where only the students learn, I want to learn as well”. T4 did not explain the reasons behind this argument, instead T4 stated “I like to communicate a lot, especially with the students’, [...] through communication I learn a lot about the students and their lives”. This could be a reason why the teacher also wants to learn something new during each lesson, to develop a relationship with the student and through dialogues with them learn something new about them. This teacher has the longest experience of teaching of all the investigated teachers, therefore it is a rather interesting comment from T4 because none of the other teachers mentions their own will to learn.

Although, the teachers gives rather interesting answers regarding their teaching experiences, this will not answer my research question. However, what my findings regarding their teaching experiences indicates is that these teachers have different opinions regarding the importance of teaching, some have more similar answers than other. These insights will help the readers get a deeper understanding of whom the investigated teachers are, and what they value when teaching from the answers they provided me.

#### 4.2 Teachers’ Interpretations of “Relatively Varied” for the Grade E

The interviews with the teachers revealed there were a number of similarities and differences in their interpretation of the term “relatively varied”. To begin with, all the teachers’ agreed that when they assess a student text, they have to look at the text as a whole and not parts. This is because the whole text needs to be understandable in order for it be assessed as “relatively varied”. T1 said to do something “relatively varied” the students should have “simple sentences, and simple structure”. T1 describes simple structure as follows:

Many of your sentences begins with subject-verb and object order, a similar sentence structure, and there’s not much variation in their (students) structure. [...] There is no fluency, it’s like they have been translating something from their own language directly to English, and it doesn’t feel natural and so English. [...] Then in addition, I have to understand what they are writing, I have to somehow understand the content.

As stated above, T1 argues that the structure of the text is not so varied, and the language is sometimes monotonous, however, the content in the text needs to be clear so that T1 understands what the students are trying to say. This statement indicates that the teacher interpret “relatively varied” as not very varied, and with that they mean a similar sentence structure. T1 also discusses that the content in the text needs to be clear. This finding

regarding “clarity” and “content” are not aspects that are connected to “relatively varied”, these are part of the term “clear” which is part of the same requirements for this level (Skolverket, 2011).

When asked how they interpret the term “relatively varied” when assessing students’ written text, T2 gives a rather interesting response: “The students need to be relatively fluent, relatively coherent, they don’t have to have correct sentence structure, [...] the most important is that they can express themselves in text”. Both T1 and T2 discuss the importance of structure and that they have to understand what the students are writing. However, while T1 discusses “relatively varied” as “not much variation in their structure”, T2 still believes that variation, fluency and coherency is necessary but not in students’ written productions for the grade E. These are some interesting findings regarding T2’s interpretation of the term because this teacher too brings in other aspects, that is does not address “relatively” but rather starts talking about other things than variation. Furthermore, these aspects that T1 and T2 mentions are part of the same requirement, included in terms such as “fluency”, “clarity” and “structure” but are not part of the term “relatively varied” (Skolverket, 2011)

In T2’s interpretation of the term “relatively varied” they consider “grammatical errors as less important than the content”. T2 does comment on the grammatical errors in the texts as for example: “wrong verb ending, singular/plural form and word choice and etc.” but that these errors does not affect the grading. On the other hand, what does affect the grading is the students’ analytical skills. T2 argues about the importance of analysis, and how the students’ needs to be “varied” in their content. This finding regarding T2’s interpretation of “variation” does not align with the commentary documents description of the term. In the commentary documents the term “variation” is described as the students can “express the same things in different ways, [...] to prevent the language becoming monotonous” and does not describe variation in terms of content and analysis (p. 9).

In contrast to T2, T3 consider grammar as equally important as the content when interpreting “relatively varied”. T3 begins with separating the value word, where they first describe the term “relatively”,: “... it means that the text can have some grammatical errors, some faults, but it is still done relatively. [...] if there are a lot of grammatical errors then it is not clear, and not even relatively clear, then it is unclear and an F”. In T3 explanation of their understanding of term “relatively” they seem to shift focus to describing the adjective “clear”,

and they seem to substitute “varied” with other terms instead. T3 also believes grammar play a role in their interpretation of the term “relatively”, in contrast to T1 and T2 who don’t consider grammatical correctness as a part of their interpretation of the value word. When asked to develop, T3 said: “I interpret it as students having a clear structure in their writing. For example, they have an introduction, then a lot of text where they examine the cause, and then a conclusion”. This quote indicates that T3 believes structure should be clear for a text to be varied, and again this teacher substitutes varied for something else. Both T2 and T3 consider structure in their interpretation of the term. However, the difference in their answers are that T2 has a “lower bar” for what an acceptable structure is, but neither of them talk about the term “varied” itself. In the commentary material, variation in terms of structure is only mentioned in the assessment of individual texts at the sentence and paragraph level. The global structure of the text as a whole is not talked about in terms of “variation” but rather in terms of “structure”. “Clarity”, on the other hand, is more connected to grammar, style and word choice and not in terms of “variation” (commentary material, p. 9).

T4’s answers do not align with the other teachers’ answers. T4 reasons that students can be varied in their word choice as they “use linking words, synonyms or search for word in a thesaurus” in this way they are varied in their words. One other way to be varied is syntactically, where T4 refers to the grammatical arrangement of words in a sentence. For example, T4 suggests that the appearance of the sentences are also relevant when students do something “relatively varied” where they should not only use, as T4 said “subject, predicate and object sentences” but both “subordinate and dependent clauses because otherwise the sentences will be monotonous”. T4 give an example of a student, who tried to be varied in their text, but ended up sounding monotonous. According to T4, this student began three sentences with “the same heavy subject, and then wrote two other heavy subjects, and repeated these in their sentences”. T4 describes the text as “robotic, and sounded not so natural”. In conclusion, T4 mentions that it the teachers’ task to teach the students about variation in texts, especially syntactical appearances and design of sentences, so the students becomes aware of how one sentence with the same meaning can be written in several ways. This teachers’ answers regarding the interpretation of the term “relatively varied” aligns more with what is written in the commentary documents than the other teachers.

My findings reveals that T4 has a clearer idea on how they interpret the term “relatively varied” than T1, T2 and T3. Whereas, for example, the other teachers talk about other aspects

than variation. T4 provides us with clear examples of how students should be varied in their sentences. For instance, T4 gives suggestions about how the students can be varied in their structure. They imply "... the paragraphs should not be too long or too short, and they should not be similar to one and other, [...] the paragraphs should be adapted to the situation". The teacher does give clear example of variation, but does not give clear answers regarding the term "relatively" which is the term that distinguish the E and the C level.

#### 4.3 Teachers' Interpretations of "Well-Grounded and Balanced" for the Grade A

Before the interviews with the teachers, I asked them to bring with them two student texts, one which they believe exemplifies "relatively varied" and a E level, and one that is done in a "well-grounded and balanced" way which is from a different requirements and for A level. However, all the teachers only brought with an example of a student text which were "well-grounded and balanced", none of them brought with them another for an E. Therefore, the teachers provided me with more clear examples of student responses which they believed aligned with the term "well-grounded and balanced". Why the teachers only brought with them one text for the level A was not mentioned. One other thing I observed were that all the teachers example texts were book reviews.

Before the teachers showed examples from their student text, they gave a brief summary of their interpretation of the value word. For example, T1 divided the terms and described them separately, they interpret them as: "... they [students] show an understanding of the terms we worked with, in this way they can be well-grounded. [...] as for balanced, they bring in other perspectives, they demonstrate an understanding of the subject when they discuss it from other perspectives". Even if the term consist of two separate adjectives that are connected by an "and" the teacher still divided the term, and explained "well-grounded" as the students use the terms in their writing, and show an understanding of the terms they discussed during class. Whereas "balanced" has to do with perspectives, and if the students discuss a subject from more than one perspective they demonstrate an understanding of the subject. When asked to elaborate, they said a subject could be "different genres, politics, global warming and etc. [...] all subject can be discussed from more than one perspective".

When asked to give examples from the student text which they believes were "well-grounded and balanced", T1 provide the example were the student had presented a dystopia. The teacher gave an example of what the student had written: "It is an unsafe environment which

gives me a negative view on the society, in other words a dystopia” this is a way to be “well-grounded” commented T1. The teacher also commented on the fact that it is difficult to point at one place in the text and say if it is “well-grounded and balanced”, they have to view the text as a whole. On the other hand, some part of the student text can be “balanced”. For example, this student had included their own opinion about the characters’ relationship in the book. The student had written “I liked the relationships between, Tris and Tobias, for me it feels like their love is unbreakable, no matter how hard the disaster hit them, It only makes them stronger. That’s something I admire”. T1 explained that this student had included themselves, and reflected upon the love between the main characters in the book, in this way the student demonstrate a greater understanding of the book, and was “balanced” in their arguments.

Even though, T1 gives examples of how they interpret the value word, they mention how sometimes it is “a feeling” that determines if a text is “well-grounded and balanced”. When you see the text for the first time, T1 described, “you get a feeling if the text is good”. This is a feeling that T1 could not describe. What T2 mentions is that their feeling is correct, even after they read the whole text. T2 expresses similar thoughts regarding how, in the end, there is a feeling that determines if the text is “well-grounded and balanced” and an A, and not a B. In the knowledge requirements for the grade B, it states that “the knowledge requirements for C and predominantly for A are fulfilled” ‘att kunskapskraven för C och till övervägande del för A är uppfyllda (Skolverket, 2011). This segment from the knowledge requirements implicated that the students can be “well-grounded” or “balanced” for a B as well, therefore, it is interesting that T2, at the end relies on their feeling when they give an A instead of a B. Because I am only looking at a part of the requirement, the text is most likely assessed based on other parts of the requirement as well, but it is interesting that the teacher consider the term whenever they feel something is too abstract.

Although, T2 relies on their feeling they admits it is difficult to interpret “well-grounded and balanced” when assessing students’ text right away. Instead they have to compare students’ text with each other, only then can the teacher determine what the term signify. This was clarified when T2 said:

It is really difficult to see when something is done in a “well-grounded & balanced” way because you don’t see it right away. It is only when you compare the text to other students’ text, only then can you understand if it’s higher quality. [...] then you can define if it is well-grounded or if it’s balanced.

This reason implies that T2 adjust their assessment and their interpretation of the terms after their students' abilities. They compares the students' responses, to create an understanding of their pupils' knowledge, only then can they interpret the term. In Bonnevier et, al. (2017) they mention that it is understandable that teacher use this strategy (interpret the terms in relation to their students) to deal with the task of interpreting the requirements, but this strategy leads to problem with equivalence in grading. They mention that the solution is to make it possible for teachers to form larger communities of interpretation and assessment to allow them calibrate their norms and understanding of the terms.

T2, gives a rather different answer than T1 when asked how they interpret the term "well-grounded". They mentioned "confidence in using the language" where the teacher described it as "to do something in a secure, confident way, they have to believe in what they have written. [...] it has also to do with grammar, they can't have many grammatical errors". This is an interesting comment because the commentary documents for the English syllabus also mentions "confidence in using the language" (språklig säkerhet). They describe it as a part of "the versatile communicative ability" 'den allsidiga kommunikativa förmågan and does not use it to describe "well-grounded" (p. 2). In the description of the term it says, "the students does to the possible extent, master the form of language, i.e. vocabulary, phraseology, pronunciation, prosody, spelling and grammar. With knowledge of the different forms of language, the students can develop their ability to express themselves and communicate in more advanced contexts" (p.2). T2, on the other hand, seemed to interpret "confidence in using the language" as grammar, but also as students' confidence. When asked to develop, T2 said that one example is when the students play with the language for example, "they use linking words, or experiment with commas"

There is agreement between T1 and T2 because both teachers believe a discussion of more than one perspective is a part of being "balanced". T2 gave an example of a student text, where the student had brought in other perspectives, as class differences and technological aspects. For example, T2 said that the student explained how the lower class people were treated badly, and that the students gave clear examples why they believed so. The student also used subordinating conjunction as, "although, and because" when describing an event, which the teacher believed "strengthen their arguments". Linking words are another example that the teacher mentioned as "a good tool" to use in their text. For example, linking words as "first of all, however and as in conclusion". These linguistic/grammatical features T2 brings



up are related to other parts of the knowledge requirements and are not used in the description of “well-grounded and balanced”. However, T1 and T2’s answers regarding “balanced” aligns with what the commentary documents says about this term. In the commentary documents they divided the term “well-grounded and balanced” in their description and explain the term “balanced” as the students’ “comments include different aspects, perspectives or considerations” ‘kommentarer innehåller olika aspekter, perspektiv eller avvägningar (p. 8).

T3 consider analysis as a part of their interpretation of the term “well-grounded”, and believes that the students should built their arguments in a logical way, which is different from what T2 mentioned. For example, T3 discuss how “topic sentences and thesis statements” are example on structures that are “well-grounded”. In the commentary documents the term “well-grounded” is not described as structure, neither do the knowledge requirements use it in that way. The term is described as demonstrating a deeper understanding of a subject, which can be expressed in writing as well (p. 8). For balanced, on the other hand, T3 describes it as the content, where the students should argue and have a discussion of more than one perspective.

When asked to give examples from the student text they brought with them, T3 said:

The author had an understanding of the genre, which is gothic, [...] he defines the term and bring attention to details in the book, which are significant for gothic. [...] another good example is when the author tells the readers what he is going to write about. For example, he writes in the introduction ‘I’m going to present, this, this and this’ where the language, at the same time, is good.

Here the teacher discuss the importance of including relevant information and show understanding for something to be considered “well-grounded”. Then they move on to say that the students appeared confident in what he wrote, and was in-charge of the text which the teacher considered as “well-grounded”. T3 explained what they meant with “good” language. They meant that the student had a formal language, which T3 said was suitable for this type of assignment.

Another point mentioned by T3, in contrast to the other teachers’ answers is that you should never interfere feelings when assessing students’ text. T3 argues that as teachers they should not rely on their feelings when they are unsure of their grading, they should assess the students on objective grounds because the students have the rights to know on what grounds they have been assessed on, and the criterion they achieved. However, the teacher does

confirm that sometimes it is difficult to assess a text, and it can be difficult to point out which parts of the text are “well-grounded and balanced”. What T3 does mention is that your interpretations of the value words does develop with experience, where the longer experience of teaching you have, the more clear will the terms be. T1, on the other hand, who has the second longest experience of teaching did not mention this. They said that the terms are difficult to interpret, and said that the terms in knowledge requirement are still relatively new to them.

T4 does not divide the term “well-grounded and balanced” as the other teachers did, they interpret the term as a whole. T4 mentions perspectives as a part of their interpretation of the term, and give an example of their interpretations of the term. This was clarified when T4 stated:

If you want to aim high you need to show analytical abilities, To show that you can analyse, which means that you can reflect, it means that you can reflect on something and look at it from different perspectives. [...] The difference between a reflection and an analysis are your concluding arguments. [...] if you look at something from different perspectives you are doing it in a “well-grounded and balanced” way.

This quote indicates that T4 believes both reflection and analysis can be “well-grounded and balanced”, but what is required for T4 is different perspectives. This is similar to what the other teachers said regarding perspectives, however, the other teachers does discuss the two adjectives separately where they interpret “balanced” as perspectives and “well-grounded” different. They do not define the term “well-grounded and balanced” as one term, as T4 does. Furthermore, T4 showed an example of a text where the student had discussed war from two perspective, from the book and the real world:

This showed how normal people can be exploited during war. The soldiers oppressed them because they were armed and because the people trusted them. To begin with. They were, after all, the defenders of the country. In reality, anybody could be a soldier and nothing would stop them from deserting the army ravaging the nearby towns. The men were often killed while the women were raped; the children were sometimes shown mercy. This is the theme that really caught my eye and I think it is important to consider when talking about war.

T4 explained that the student describe the theme of the book, which was war, and had a philosophical reflection about the outcome of war, where he/she draws parallel from the book and the real world. T4 mentioned that this student demonstrated an understanding of the subject, and was therefore done in both a “well-grounded and balanced” way. In conclusion, all the teachers have mentioned perspectives as a part of their interpretation of the term

“balanced”. This is also in line with the commentary material as they mentions ‘perspectives’ as a part of “balanced”. However, balanced seems to be more easily interpreted with large extent of agreement, but well-grounded appears to invite more diverse interpretations.

#### 4.4 Teachers’ Resources and Material

T1 explained that they presents the grading criterion for an E at the beginning of each term, but that they also make their own criterion for an F as well. T1 argues that their students need to know the difference between an F and an E, and so does the teacher. They need to know that F is still a grading, and is as important to discuss as any other grades. The teacher explain that their procedure to understand the terms is to make a criterion for F as well because they distinguish the terms for E and F. T1 mentions they primarily teaches vocational programs and that “some students, in the class, can’t even speak Swedish”, but that these students are willing to learn and are motivated. The teacher explained that these students’ English skills are sometimes limited and sometimes not enough for E, and that is why the requirements for E and F needs to be clarified. T2, on the other hand, turns to their colleagues whenever they need help to understand the terms “relatively varied” and “well-grounded and balanced”. They described how the other teachers in their school will help the them directly, and sometime the teachers understand a text differently, but that their interpretations does not differ that much.

When asked about their procedure and materials used to understand the terms, T3 and T4 gave rather different answers. For example, T3 turn to their colleagues for help if they need help with their grading and terms. The English teachers in T3 school, twice a year, exchange examination papers and assess each other’s classes. T3 points out that its helpful, both for them and their colleagues because they bring in another perspective in their assessment. In general T3 believes there’s a consensus when it comes to assessment in their school, therefore their grading and especially the understanding of the value words does not differ that much. In contrast to the other teachers, T4 is the only one who turns to the commentary material for assistance in their interpretation. Because the English teachers at their school does not collaborate, in a way that T4 wishes, they have to turn to Skolverket, it’s their only resource whenever they need assistance. T4 argues that teachers need to discuss these terms together because they have to create common grounds when assessing, which T4 believes will lead to equal assessment.

## 5. Discussion & Conclusion

In this section, I am going to summarize my findings by answering my research questions, and connect my findings to the previous research discussed in my discussion section.

### 5.1 Relatively Varied

To summarize, my findings revealed that T1, T2 and T3 seems to be ignoring or missing the term variation in most their answers. The teachers bring in other aspects, and do not really address “relatively” nor “variation”. The teachers substitute the term “variation” and discusses “structure”, “clarity” and “content” as a part of their interpretation of the term instead, and they mention that the content of the text should be varied. These aspects are parts of the knowledge requirements, but not parts of the term “relatively varied”. As mentioned earlier, in the commentary document, variation is described as the structure in the sentence and paragraph level. The global structure of the text as a whole is not discusses in terms of “variation” but rather in terms of “structure” and “clarity”. However, I do not assess the teachers competence as assessors based on one interview, the teachers might actually understand some of the aspects of the terms but did not put this in words during our interview. My results are based on the answers the teachers provided me from one interview, and I don’t present a holistic view of their understanding.

A difference between T1 and the other teachers are that T1 did have “lower bars” in their interpretation of the term “relatively varied”. T1 did not consider analysis as an significant part of their interpretation of the value word, whereas the other teachers did. This difference could depend on the fact that T1 only teaches at vocational programmes and the other teachers are at university preparatory programmes, and as T1 said some students in their class have difficulties to learn. This finding corresponds with Korp’s (2011) remark about teachers in vocational programmes does not focus on analytical abilities as much teachers in university preparatory programmes do. However, as Korp (2011) mentions this is problematic because the students are measured from the same criterion. In Huang (2011) publication he mentioned that the demand levels differs in ESL students’ and native English speaking students’ writing. This conclusion can be drawn for my essay as well, were the teacher at vocational programmes had “lower bars” in their interpretation of the term.

As I mentioned before, T4 is the only one who does present a clear view of what variations entails, and describe that the students can be varied in sentences and paragraph levels. Therefore T4's interpretation of the terms aligns with what the commentary documents describe. Why T4 is the only one who discuss variation, and why their understanding aligns with the commentary material is because T4 is the only teacher who read the commentary material for English 6. On the other hand, T4 is not clear in their description of "relatively" which is in fact the term that distinguish E and C level. As Klapp (2017) mentions the second function of grade is a tool to convey information about the students' performances. Because all the teachers, except T4, seemed to have difficulties in describing what "varied" is, this could be problematic because they have to convey information about the students performances in relation to the description in the knowledge requirements. If the teachers do not communicate a clear idea of what varied is, it could be difficult to explain the terms to their students. As the education act states, "Den som har beslutat betyget ska på begäran upplysa eleven och elevens vårdnadshavare om skälen för det" 'Anyone who has decided a grade shall upon request from the students and their caregivers give their reasons for it' (SFS, 2010:800, 3 kap., 17 §). This means that the students' have rights to know on what base they have received a grade, and the requirements they accomplish, and that the term "relatively varied" or any other terms should be clearly communicated to the students.

One problem with the teachers (except T4) interpretation of the term "relatively varied" is that there could be validity issues in their assessment. The teachers clearly bring up aspects that are mentioned in the knowledge requirements, but my results revealed three of the teachers do not look at the aspect of variation as expressed in vocabulary and sentence structure. Thus, they do not assess all aspects that should be assessed. As Lundahl et, al (2016) mentions assessment should be based on the standards in the knowledge requirements, only then can the assessment be relevant and valid (p. 27-28). The teachers in this study do not assess all that should be assessed based on what is written in the requirements for the level E. The knowledge requirements says teachers should assess "variation" and the teachers begins to discuss other requirements as "clarity" and "structure" instead. The teachers do not communicate the same thing when describing the term "variation" or even the term "relatively varied", this is a validity issue because they have to assess in accordance with the requirements. In a long run, it could be a issue of reliability in grading as well. In Lundahl et. al, (2016) they explain that one threat on reliability is when different assessors make different

interpretations of the students' results (p. 9). Even if I did not investigate whether the teachers assess the same text similar, I believe from the teachers interpretations of the term they would not assess the same text in similar way, In the long run, it may be an issue of equivalence.

I believe Bonnevier et, al (2017) are right in their arguments about criterion-related assessment is norm-dependent. From the answers the teachers provided me they seem to interpret the requirements based on their individual set of norms, and this is as Bonnevier et, al (2017) mentions an issue. They mention that is not up to the individual teacher to define the knowledge requirements themselves. From a perspective of equivalence in grading this is an issue. They conclude that it is necessary to broaden the communities in which these norms and understanding of the terms are calibrated, so that the normative ideas underlying the criterion-related assessment becomes valid, and accessible for all teachers (p. 42).. As Bonnevier et, al. (2017) mentions for there to be equivalence in assessment the understanding of the standards should be anchored in communities and in national instruments (such as commentary materials and national tests) to calibrate the interpretation and presuppose an understanding of the role of norms even in criterion-referenced assessment.

### 5.1 Well-Grounded and Balanced

My findings revealed that the teachers (T2 and T3), even in their interpretation of the term “well-grounded” seemed to discuss other aspects as linguistic and grammatical features, which are aspects of the requirements for the level E, and not used to describe the term “well-grounded and balanced”. Because this term is from the reception part of the requirements, it is about the students' understanding of a subject that should be “well-grounded and balanced”, and does not include aspects such as structure or linguistic features in a text. However, as I mentioned earlier, the students can demonstrate an understanding of a subject in their writing as well. T1 and T4 are the only two who discusses the students' understanding when interpreting the term. Furthermore, my findings revealed that the teachers (T1,T2 and T3) divided the term and said “balanced” was particularly about perspectives, where the students should bring in more than on perspective in their discussion. However T4, on the other hand, did not divide the term, instead they interpret the whole term as the students' content should include analysis and discussion of perspectives. The teachers' interpretations of the term “balanced” aligns with the commentary documents explanations because they also divide the

term and explain “balanced” as students discuss and comments subjects from different perspectives. (p. 8)

Despite the fact that all the teachers only brought with them examples of student text, which they believed were “well-grounded and balanced”. The examples and explanations of the term was not as clearly described as their interpretation of the term “relatively varied”. For example, T1 and T2 reasoned how a “feeling” determine if the text is done in a “well-grounded” way. They discussed how it is sometimes difficult to explain why a text is higher quality, therefore they have to rely on their “feeling”. Because the grades functions as a tool to convey information about the students’ performances Rinne (2018) explains that the grading-system is built on assumptions that the teachers can make rational decisions and fair evaluations of the students’ knowledge (p. 2). Rinne’s discusses that teachers should be transparency in their assessment, so that the material is available for both the students and the parents. When the teachers cannot explain why a text is high quality, and rely on their feeling instead it is problematic. T3 seemed to agree that teachers should not rely on their feelings when they are unsure of their interpretation and grading, they should assess the students on objective grounds. On the other hand, T3 mentioned that the interpretations of the term does develop with experience, where the longer experience of teaching you have, the more clear will the terms be. This argument aligns with what Mickwitz (2011) mentions about when the teachers uses the aspect of their professionalism that derives from teacher experience. They have a clearer understanding of the requirements because they have been working with them for a longer period (p. 103).

## 5.2 Material and Procedure

Just as Mickwitz (2011) argued about how there are gap between the ideal, what is written in the school policy document (as the knowledge requirements), and teachers’ practice, this result corresponds with my findings as well. In my essay, I have been looking at a small aspect of how teachers’ negotiate their practice in relation to the “ideal” of the curriculum (which are terms from the requirements from different levels). My findings revealed that the teachers’ interpretations in some aspects differenced rather significant and in other aspects they did not differ that much from what the commentary documents said about the terms. However, T4’s interpretations aligned closest with the commentary documents and the syllabus for English 6. This is because T4 is the only one who turn to the agency of

education's commentary material whenever they need guidance and help in their understanding of the terms.

T2 and T3 collaborates with other teachers in their school, whenever they need help and guidance with the requirements. Because T2 and T3 does collaborate with other teachers in their school, they say that their interpretations of the terms does not differ that much. The collaborated understanding of the terms does give positive effect on equivalence when grading. In Bonnevier et, al. (2017) they suggest that teacher should work together, and create similar frame of references and understanding of the criterion, both locally and nationally. T1, on the other hand, does not collaborate with other teachers' in their school. They mentioned how they try to distinguish the requirements for E and F whenever they find the terms difficult to understand. From my results, hopefully readers can take with them that they can turn to the commentary material whenever they need help with their interpretations. As we have seen, the teachers that did not read the documents seemed to have interpret the terms differently, and had difficulties in interpret the terms. Even if norm-referenced assessment is necessary in teachers assessment practices, they have the commentary documents to turn if they need an understanding of the terms. However, as it seems from the answers the teachers provided me, the criterion-referenced assessment is difficult to interpret without considering norms.

### 5.3 Future Research

Due to my limited investigation, it would be interesting to read a study that examines the two terms but on a larger scale, with more than 4 teachers. It would also be of interest for future research to look at assessment practices in relation to the terms I have investigated, and compare how teachers actually assess these terms based on the questions about validity and reliability. It would also be of interest for future practice to see studies set to explore Bonnevier et, al (2017) ideas about how norm-referenced assessment is necessary in teachers grading practice. Just because my findings showed that norm-referenced assessment is necessary doesn't mean another study would come to the same conclusions. Furthermore, it would be of interest to investigate how students understand the terms, and if they find the terms difficult to understand. In this way, we can broaden the perspective on teachers' and students' interpretations of the terms.



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## Appendix A – Research Letter

Hej!

Mitt namn är Yagana Nadjafi och jag studerar till ämneslärare i ämnena engelska och samhällskunskap och är just nu inne på 8e terminen. Jag skriver snart min första självständiga uppsats i ämnet engelska och metoden för min undersökning är en fallstudie där jag intervjuar lärare som är verksamma i kursen engelska 6. Ämnet för självständiga arbetet är hur lärare i verksamheten tolkar två av värdeorden i kunskapskraven, värdeorden ”relativt varierat” och ”välgrundat och nyanserat” när de rättar elevers skriftliga texter.

Jag undrar om det möjligtvis finns en lärare i er skola, som undervisar i kursen engelska 6 och som vill/kan ställa upp på en kort intervju? Kortfattat kommer intervjun beröra frågor om kunskapskraven för betygen E och A och det är framförallt lärarens tolkningar av värdeorden som är centrala. Om ni har frågor kring intervjun besvarar jag självklart dessa och ni kommer få tydligare instruktioner kring utformningen av intervjuerna när det börjar närma sig.

I dagens lärarutbildning, enligt mina erfarenheter, får vi inga tydliga riktlinjer kring hur värdeorden i kunskapskraven bör tolkas och förstås. Framförallt är det svårt att förstå hur ett elevarbete som är ”relativt varierat” ser ut i praktiken. Därför vill jag i min uppsats bidra med en konkret bild av hur dessa värdeord kan tolkas, framförallt av olika lärare som är verksamma i hela Örebro kommun. Det hade varit väldigt hjälpsamt om ni vill ställa upp på en intervju, det hade bidragit till ytterligare ett perspektiv på undersökningen.

Vänliga hälsningar,

Yagana Nadjafi

An English translation follows

Hi!

My name is Yagana Nadjafi and I am studying to become an English and social science teacher in upper-secondary school, and I am right now in the eight term in my education. I am soon going to write my first project essay in the English subject and the method for my essay is a field study where I interview four teachers in the course English 6. The subject for my essay is how teachers in the course interpret two terms from the requirements, the terms “relatively varied” and “well-grounded and balanced” when they assess students’ written production.

I wonder if there are any teachers in your school, teaching in the course English 6, who wants/can do a short interview with me? In short, the interview will address questions about the knowledge requirements for the grade E and A, and the teachers interpretations of the terms that will only be central. If you have any further questions regarding the questions or the interview I will of course answer these, and you will get clearer instructions about the interview when their getting close. In our teacher education, according to my experience, we do not get any clear guidelines on how the terms in the requirements should be interpret and understood. Therefore, in my essay, I want to contribute with a clear example on how these terms can be interpret, by teachers in Örebro. It would be very helpful for my study if I can interview one English teacher at your school, it would contribute with another perspective in the essay.

Best regards,

Yagana Nadjafi

## Appendix B – Consent Form

Yagana Nadjafi

[Yagananadjafi@gmail.com](mailto:Yagananadjafi@gmail.com)

Written, informed consent to participation in the interview study;  
Teachers' interpretations of the value words "relatively varied" and "well-founded & nuanced" when  
assessing students' written productions.

I have been informed about the purpose of the study, about how my answers are collected, processed and used in the study. I have also been informed that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I withdraw my consent at any time without negative penalties. The information and answers during the interview will only be used for the purpose of the study, personal information will not be used or presented. The information you give will be saved and unauthorized people will not read it. The information you give will only be read by the interviewer and their supervisor.

### **Withdraw your consent**

You can withdraw your consent at any time, and you do this by mail.

### **Consent to participate in an interview**

- ☐ Yes, I want to participate in an interview
- ☐ Yes, I have been informed about the purpose with the study

By signing, I confirm that I have read information about the purpose of the study and understand how my answers will be treated.

*Date:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Signature:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Clarification of Signature:* \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C – Interview Guide

### Enskilda intervjuer med lärare verksamma i kursen engelska 6.

#### Introduktion

Projektet presenteras för läraren och jag förklarar syftet med intervjun, läraren har tidigare blivit informerat om studiens syfte genom kommunikation via mail. Intervjun utgår från tre teman med övergripande frågor och följdfrågor som medföljer för att få en tydligare förståelse av lärarens tolkningar och svar. I den med tematiseringen av intervjufrågorna är att få en struktur på de olika lärarsvaren som jag senare ska kategorisera.

#### Tema 1: Bakgrundsfrågor – Allmänt om erfarenheter i verksamheten.

- Har du behörighet att undervisa i kursen engelska 6? När tog du lärarexamen?
- Hur länge har du arbetat som engelsklärare på den här skolan?
- Vad är det mest intressanta med läraryrket? – följdfrågor ställs
- Vad värderar du som viktigast i läraryrket? – följdfrågor ställs

#### Tema 2: Tolkningar av värdeorden relativt varierat och välgrundat & nyanserat.

- Arbetar du mest med formativ eller summativ bedömning?
- Hur ger du feedback till eleverna?
- Hur tolkar du värdeordet relativt varierat som är ett kriterium som elever ska uppnå för betyget E när du rättar deras skriftliga prov?
- Hur tolkar du värdeordet välgrundat & nyanserat, som är ett kriterium för betyget A när du rättar elevers skriftliga prov?
- Vilket av dessa värdeorden tycker du är svårast att tolka? Och varför?
- Har du några exempel på elevsvar som är välgrundade & nyanserade?
- Har du några exempel på elevsvar som är relativt varierade?

#### Tema 3: Material och tillvägagångssätt.

- På vilket sätt förklarar du betygskriterierna för eleverna?
- Utgår du från skolverkets kommentarmaterial när du bedömer proven?
- Har du någon specifik strategi du utgår från för att förstå dessa värdeord?
- Hur är ditt tillvägagångssätt när du bedömer elevers skriftliga prov?
- Diskuterar du dessa värdeorden med dina kollegor? Arbetar ni utifrån ett kollegialt samarbete? Om ja → på vilket sätt? Om nej → är det något du saknar?
- Samarbetar du med andra engelsklärare i skolan?
- Hur har det pedagogiska arbetssättet förändrats under dina år som lärare?

#### Avslutande frågor.

- Finns det något du vill tillägga innan vi avslutar intervjun?

*Intervjuerna genomförs på svenska men jag kommer/har transkriberat intervjuerna till engelska. Jag tror att en intervju på svenska, vilket är lärarnas första eller andra språk kommer ge mer autentiska svar, lärarna kan uttrycka sig på ett mer effektivt sätt och är även ett bekvämlighetsfaktor.*