Assessment of knowledge and abilities when working in groups - an intervention study in everyday classroom practice

When group work is used as classroom practice in Swedish compulsory schools teachers are expected to assess each student’s level of abilities in relation to knowledge requirements in the National Curriculum 2011. Numerous times an assessment of individual knowledge and competence should be done in situations when learning is developed in interaction with other students in a social context, for instance a group task. The request for individual assessment of students’ knowledge and abilities in addition to the demand of teaching collaboration abilities through group work seems to be a challenge for teachers.

The comprehensive knowledge interest in this project is to study assessment of knowledge and abilities when working in groups, but also if it is possible to train teachers’ ability to assess by use of education. Previous research shows that assessment in connection with group work is a neglected research area. Hence, this project elucidates an urgent and basic problem in the everyday classroom practice. The project is funded by the Swedish Research Council and runs through 2013-2017.

The purpose of this presentation is to address the project and present some preliminary results.

The study has an experimental longitudinal design and includes three experimental groups, comprising both teachers and students (age 11-16) in two different subjects, mathematics and social studies. The groups are randomly assigned to two different interventions or to a control group. Data are collected before, during and after the
intervention, by means of questionnaires, observations (video) and interviews. The analysis is both quantitative and qualitative.

One important aspect of this study, which we want to emphasise, is that researchers and teachers are working together on the project and that a collaborative interdependence between both parties is a prerequisite for a successful study.

Preliminary results elucidate some of the teachers’ problems concerning assessment in group work as well as some pedagogical implications. For both group work and assessment to function optimally it seems to be of vital importance that teachers have the necessary competence to construct clearly structured tasks, select abilities that are possible to assess but also have knowledge about how to assess these abilities during the group work.

In other words, this presentation summarises and elucidates an urgent and basic problem in the pedagogical practice that may generate knowledge of importance for teachers’ professional practice and further development.