

**What do schoolchildren think of grades in  
school? The views and values regarding grades  
of students in year six.**

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The purpose of this study is to give an insight into how school children in year six, in Sweden, value and view grades. In Sweden, currently there are many debates on whether schools should have grading systems and if so, in which school year they should be introduced. In the present study seven children (3 boys and 4 girls), attending year six, were divided into two focus groups; that were simultaneously conducted. In the focus groups, the children discussed their views, values and their experiences in regard to grades. The results discerned from the two focus groups were that the seven participating school children felt that there was value and merit in receiving grades because they gained a better understanding of their own academic performance based on the grades they received. Additionally, however, the children acknowledged that they also do experience negative emotional effects from receiving grades, such as stress and the de-evaluation of their capabilities in comparison to their schoolmates. Nevertheless, the participating children perceived that grades were necessary and believed that the grading system should begin to be enforced in either year four, or year five, for the most optimal effect.

Key words: children's perspective, children's voices, grades, school children, social pressure

## Preface

I would like to begin by thanking my absolutely fantastic supervisor, Bengt Sandin, for his continuous encouragement and insightful suggestions.

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## Introduction

In Sweden, currently, there are many debates on whether schools should have grading systems. The main debate concerns the age/school year school children should start receiving grades in school. Current research and debates on this subject, concerning the age of when schoolchildren should begin receiving grades in, has largely been centered on the perspectives and opinions of politicians' and researchers; however, the children's views regarding the grades are starting to become more and more taken in to concern (Boberg, & Wennergren, 2010, May 4; Spross, 2010, June 3; Orstadius, 2012, September 17; Sundberg, et al, 2013, February 18; Hallberg, & Gyllenhammar, 2014, March 24; Askergren, 2014, September 9; Pihl, 2014, March 26).

In 2010, there were debates in Sweden regarding, whether or not grades should be re-introduced for students in year 6, when the students are 12 years old (Boberg, & Wennergren, 2010, May 4; Spross, 2010, June 3). Those who were in favor of grades, argued that it was beneficial for the students, and their parents, to know where they stood academically and if they need to increase their efforts in school or not. Conversely the argument of those who opposed the re-introduction of grades, mainly focused on the well-being of the students and the stress and feelings of inadequacy suffered by students as a result of the grading system. Later in 2010, the government passed the decision to re-introduce the grading system. Despite this, the debate still continues on whether, or not, the grading system is really beneficial and helpful for the students (Orstadius, 2012, September 17; Sundberg, et al, 2013, February 18; Hallberg, & Gyllenhammar, 2014, March 24; Askergren, 2014, September 9; Pihl, 2014, March 26). In 2014, the government proposed the introduction of the grading system for students in year 3 (when the children are nine years old) or year 4 (when the children are ten years old) instead of year 6 (Bilkenroth, 2013, October 17). In that regard, in early 2015, the government decided to re-introduce grades in some schools, for students in year 4, on a trial bases; the trial period will start in 2017 and end in 2020 (Lagerlöf, 2015, February 11).

### *Prior research and theoretical perspective*

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the public's interest in children and their welfare became much greater in Sweden, and legislators made schooling compulsory for children (LeVine & New, 2008, p. 11; Sandin, 1988, p. 358). LeVine and New (2008, p. 4) note that when children are approximately five to seven years old a cognitive shift enables them to start taking responsibilities such as attending school. Modern societies, such as Sweden, highly values individual achievements (Eriksen, 2010, p. 143) which is conveyed in the arguments by Boberg and Wennergren (2010, May 4) and Spross (2010, June 3) who debate that giving the students the responsibility of receiving grades at a young age make it possible for them to take control of their studies which will lead them to becoming better students. However, it seems that receiving grades at a younger age has the most positive effect on girls' and their school achievements (Spross, 2010, June 3).

The grading system is used in schools for a number of reasons. The main reasons for using the grading system in school are, to be able to assess the level of knowledge a student possesses, to motivate the students to study, to gain information, such as statistics on how well a school is doing in terms of level of education, and to be used as an instrument of selection in further studies or future work (Skolverket, 2014, September 10; Widén, 2010, p. 21). When assessing what grade a student will receive, teachers follow the requirements set by the Swedish National Agency for Education's subject knowledge standards. These requirements describe how the student's knowledge will be assessed and how they should be valued (Skolverket, 2014, October 2). In order to define the subject knowledge requirements, the Swedish National Agency for Education created a curriculum model for the teachers to follow (Korp, 2011, p. 31). Although the Swedish National Agency for Education states that the grade assessment is to be equal (Skolverket, 2015a, December 1), the teachers might face difficulties in assessing the grades of students equally because the curriculum model is at times, somewhat, abstract which can make it difficult for the teachers to follow them equally nationwide (Korp, 2011, p.

31). To further help the teachers in the assessment of grades the Swedish National Agency for Education have ‘National Exams’ (Nationella Prov) that all students take in school year three, six and nine. The teachers can use the results of these exams as support when assessing the grades for the students (Skolverket, 2014, October 2). As another means of support for the teachers when assessing the grades for a student the Swedish National Agency for Education have made booklets called ‘commenter material’ (kommentarmaterial) which have guidelines for the teachers to understand how they should assess the student knowledge (Carlsson & Olsson, 2014, p. 3). A consequence of assessing the information student’s gain and the instrument for selection for further studies as the reason for using a grading system in school (Widén, 2010, p. 21), is that from year 2010, the interest in the Swedish education system appear to be more focused on maximizing the results and efficiency of the education. However, this focus reduces the functions to support the teachers in teaching, making it more difficult for the teachers to assess the students equally (Korp, 2011, p. 34).

Furthermore, the Swedish National Agency for Education states that teachers should give students clear and concrete information regarding grades in order for them to understand the basics of how their knowledge is being assessed and what they will need to do to improve their results in school (Carlsson & Olsson, 2014, p.3).

In the above mentioned debates, both sides in the question, of re-introducing the grading system in year 6, spoke of what they perceived would be in the best interest of the children, although they had opposing arguments. However, no one in those debates have actually asked the children of what they think is in their best interest (Boberg, & Wennergren, 2010, May 4; Spross, 2010, June 3; Orstadius, 2012, September 17; Sundberg, et al, 2013, February 18; Hallberg, & Gyllenhammar, 2014, March 24; Askergrén, 2014, September 9; Pihl, 2014, March 26). In other words, when debating if children should receive grades or not in school, the children are perceived to not have agency. When children have agency it means that they are

capable of doing things in the world. These things could be physical, emotional, cognitive or other (Oswell, 2013, p. 42). According to Giddens (1984, p. 14, mentioned in Oswell, 2013, p. 46) agency is fundamentally a question of power. If a child has the power to make an affect, then that child has agency. Children with agency are categorized as a minority group within the social order in relation to their sub-ordinate position in regard to adults (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998, mentioned in James, 2009, p.43). The receiving of grades affects the children directly and the children are also affecting the grades they will receive by their level of knowledge. Therefore, it could be valuable to have an insight into how children perceive receiving grades in school. To be able to get a better understanding of children and their perceptions, researchers need to “get into their world” (Prout, 2000, p. 2. mentioned in Oswell, 2013, p. 41). According to the Article 12 in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989, p. 5) children have the right to voice their opinions:

“When adults are making decisions that affect children, children have the right to say what they think should happen and have their opinions taken into account”  
(UNCRC, 1989, p. 5)

### *Aims*

The background to this study is the widely debated question of if children should receive grades in school and in which year they should start receiving the grades. Although these questions are strongly affecting schoolchildren they are not asked what they think in regard to the question. Therefore, I am interested in what the schoolchildren think and feel about grades in school. The aim of this study is to find out how schoolchildren view grades and what value they perceive grades to have.

The research questions of the study are:

- How do children value grades?
  - What aspects do they perceive as problematic?
  - What aspects do they appreciate?
  - Is there a difference between the children's views depending on the grading context?
    - First time
    - Pressure from parents, peers, themselves, future importance.
- Do the children portray the same views of grades that are expressed in the public debate? Are there aspects of the children's perspective on grades that one cannot identify in the public debate?

## Method

### *Choice of methods*

The method chosen in this study for collecting data is focus groups. The reason for this method was to get to know the schoolchildren's personal views of grades by getting an insight into what the schoolchildren feel and think about the grades and the receiving of grades without the interference of adult's opinions (Silverman, 2011, p. 460). During the focus groups an audio recording device was used to make it possible for the researcher to transcribe the data afterwards. Another reason to using the audio recorder device, was so the researcher could remain focused on the discussions without needing to take notes.

The method chosen in this study for analyzing the collected data is thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a flexible method of analysis and is very functional when analyzing data collected from focus groups (Howitt & Cramer, 2011, p. 329).

### *Setting*

The focus groups were conducted at a public school in Sweden. The school have classes from year Förskola (pre-school) to year 6. The focus groups were held in private group room at the school during school hours.

### *Participants*

Seven schoolchildren in year six participated in the focus groups. In the first focus group two boys and one girl participated. In the second focus group one boy and three girls participated. The participants have received grades one time prior to this study, at the end of the first semester in year six. They will receive grades for a second time at the end of the current semester which will be their final grades from primary school.

*External Omission.* In total 37 school-children were asked to participate in the study. Of these 37 school-children 30 did not want to participate and/or their parents did not want them to participate.

### *Instruments*

Information concerning the study and the focus groups were given to the schoolchildren and their parents in the form of a document. The last page of the document, the form of informed consent, was returned to the researcher with their signatures. See appendices I and II for more information.

A template consisting seven questions was used in the focus groups and was designed to discern information concerning the schoolchildren's views of grades and what value they perceive grades to have. The questions in the questionnaire were formed based on information gathered from the political discussions, and with the purpose of attempting to help the

participating school children to voice their views and experiences regarding grades. See appendix III and appendix IV for more information.

The focus groups were audio recorded using a Zoom Corporation Handy Recorder, model H4.

### *Procedure*

The researcher contacted the principal of the school where the focus groups were conducted to inform about the study and to ask for permission to have the focus group at that school. After the principal approved the study, the researcher contacted two teachers at the school that taught year six to inform them about the study and ask for permission to have focus groups with their students. After receiving that permission, the researcher visited the two year six classes, to inform them about the study and to hand out a document with information to be given to the parents. The last page of the document, consisted of a consent form for the parents and students to sign as a form for informed consent (see Appendices I and II). The week after the first visit the researcher came back to the school to collect the signed documents of informed consent from the parents and the students, after which the two focus groups sessions were conducted.

### *Design of study*

For the present study two focus groups were held. The students were divided between the two focus groups based on which class they attended in the attempt to make it a more welcoming and relaxed environment for the students in the focus groups. The focus groups were held in a group room at the school, where the participating students attended, and were held on the same day.

*First focus group.* In the first focus group three students participated, two boys and one girl. When they entered the group room the researcher welcomed the students and thanked them

for taking the time to participate in the study. The researcher gave them a brief overview of the information that had been given the previous week and informed them, one more time, of their right of withdrawal. They were also informed about their anonymity and reconfirmed their participation in the focus group. The researcher then informed them of the audio recording device and showed them how it worked. Before starting the focus group, the researcher asked the students if they had any questions about the study. After answering the questions, the focus group started. The researcher had a template with seven questions (see Appendix III and Appendix IV) that were asked during the focus group. Sometimes, the students discussed other points of grades that were not in the questions and when that happened the researcher asked follow up questions about them.

When one or more of the students did not contribute to a question the researcher asked that student or those students if they had anything to add, so everyone would have the chance to contribute something to the questions. If they said no the researcher did not press for an answer. When the researcher had asked the seven questions the students were asked if they had anything more they would like to add to the subject. Nine minutes of discussions, from the first focus group was recorded. At the end of the first focus group, the researcher debriefed the students and asked them what they thought of the focus group and asked them if they had any questions about it. Then the researcher thanked them once more for their participation and the students left the group room.

*Second focus group.* In the second focus group four students participated, one boy and three girls. The second focus group was conducted in the same way as the first focus group. Thirty-one minutes of discussions, from the second focus group, was recorded.

### *Thematic analysis*

Thematic analysis was used, for the reason that it is a flexible method of analysis and is very functional when analyzing data collected from focus groups (Howitt & Cramer, 2011, p. 329). The first step of analyzing the collected data was to get familiarized with the data by transcribing the conversations from the focus groups (Howitt & Cramer, 2011, p. 335-336). When doing the transcription of the data, the researcher chose to only transcribe the words that was said during the focus groups instead of using a detailed method. The reason for this, is that for the purpose of this study, the researcher would not have the use for the additional information that a detailed method would give and therefore it was not necessary to use it in this analysis (Howitt & Cramer, 2011, p. 336). The second step of the analysis was the initial coding generation. This means that, the researcher generated themes by suggesting coding for aspects that appeared to be important in the transcribed conversations. At this step the main intention was not to form broader themes, it was rather a first step to work up to forming broader themes (Howitt & Cramer, 2011, p. 335, 337-338). The generated codes in this step were notes and summaries in the transcribed text; in total, the researcher generated 18 codes. The third step was to search for themes using the initial coding (Howitt & Cramer, 2011, p. 339). The researcher used the codes from the previous step to create themes by writing down the different codes on small pieces of paper and moving them around on a table to test which ones would fit together in themes. Then the researcher sort those codes in to the new themes. In total the researcher formed eight themes in this step. When doing this, it is important that the themes are closely related to the original data (Howitt & Cramer, 2011, p. 340). Therefore, the researcher then reviewed the themes that the researcher had formed. After reviewing the formed themes, the researcher modified three of the themes. After the review the researcher had a total of five themes. The fifth step the researcher did was theme definition and labelling which means that

the researcher defined the themes and the sub-themes so that they were clearly labelled explaining what they include (Howitt & Cramer, 2011, p. 340-341).

### *Ethical considerations*

*Informed consent.* When doing field work and representing children in research, there are several ethical considerations to consider. In the article “Negotiating informed consent with children in school-based research: A critical review”, Gallagher, Haywood, Jones, Manon and Milne (2010, p. 473) explain that before conducting research, the researcher should have been given informed consent by the participants. In the present study informed consent was given in the form of a signed document by the participating student and a parent of the student (see Appendices I and II). Gallagher, et al continue with explaining that when researching children, they should be given particular consideration (Gallagher, et al., 2010, p. 473; Farrell, 2005, p. 4). To be given informed consent from children, can be difficult in the sense that it can be debated if it is possible for a child to give a fully informed consent. To be given an informed consent by the participant is a way to inform the researcher that the participant understands what the research is and what their part in the study is. That the participant knows that they have the right to say ‘yes’ or ‘no’ regarding their participation in the study, that the participant is aware of their right of withdrawal at any time and that the researcher makes all the participants’ comments and behavior confidential to ensure anonymity (Gallagher, et al., 2010, p. 474; Farrell, 2005, p. 28; Silverman, 2011, p. 226,230). To ensure anonymity, the researcher in the present study, has changed the names of the participants in the two focus groups and the names that are mentioned in the focus groups by the participating children. Gallagher, et al. (2010, p. 475) and Farrell (2005, p. 4) discuss the issue of who can and are able to give fully informed consent and those who are not. They question if children have the ability to fully understand the extent of the research and their participation in the research. Researchers often

regard children as being capable of understanding that and be able to give their fully informed consent (Gallagher, et al., 2010, p.475; Farrell, 2005, p.4). However, et al. (2010, p. 476) points out that the deeming of a child to be capable of making the decision of giving informed consent might make them feel obliged to participate and, furthermore, say yes because they feel obliged to please the researcher because of his or her role of authority (Gallagher, et al., 2010, p. 474; Farrell, 2005, p. 170). With this in mind, the researcher in the present study explained to the participants three times that it is voluntary to participate. When the participants were seated in the group room before the start of the focus group, the researcher asked every participant if they wanted to participate and told them, again, that it was okay if they did not want to participate.

*Children's voices.* According to Spyrou (2011, p. 152) and Warming (2011, p. 51) children's voices are constrained and shaped by factors such as adults' assumptions about children, the language the adults are using when talking to the children, or the misinterpretation of the children's language when answering questions, and in which context the children are being researched in. In the present study, the researcher, in an attempt, to make sure the children's views were not misinterpreted, gave the children a summary of what they had said to verify that their comments were not misunderstood. Spyrou (2011, p. 156) stresses the importance for a researcher to build rapport – a relationship built on trust – with the child/children participating in the research. By building a rapport more 'layers' of information can be found in the words and actions of the child. However, Spyrou mentions that building rapport is a time consuming matter and can therefore be difficult to achieve (2011, p. 156). In the present study, the time constraint did not allow the researcher to build rapport with the participants before the focus groups started.

## Analysis

The formation of the five themes that will be discussed below were partly derived from the politicians' debates on the effect grades have on school children and the debates on whether grades in school are beneficial to school children, and partly derived from the discussions conducted in the present study's focus groups with the seven participant children from year six.

### *Children's experiences of grades*

In this section, the children's experiences of receiving grades are introduced. The participating children in the present study discussed how they experienced the time before and after they received grades for the first time, and how they feel, now, before receiving grades for a second time.

*Before receiving the grades for the first time.* In the present study, the children that participated in the two focus groups were asked what their thoughts on grades were; before they received them for the first time, to gain an understanding of their experiences of receiving grades. Additionally, this also helped provide the study with data to compare the experiences of the children before and after they received grades for the first time. When they were asked this question, all children expressed feelings of nervousness at various levels. Maria in the second focus group said that:

“And I felt like, what if they [the grades] goes up to year seven, how will they [the teachers] think of our grades? And how will they talk in school, classes, what the grades were? And what happens if I got bad [grades]. Like, I really did not like to receive grades, now it feels a little easier, but I was terrified of receiving grades.”

The children in both focus groups discussed different factors that resulted in their nervousness before receiving the grades, and one of these factors was stories they had heard from others regarding grades. Elisabeth said that:

“I thought that it would be very easy to fail. Because they [others] had said that it is difficult to get an A [highest available grade], and such. I thought that we would not pass or get a F [grade for ‘not passed’], or something.”

The stories, Elisabeth and Lars had heard, about grades appear to have been their main cause for their nervousness because that was the only factor they talked about. Another factor, for nervousness, that was discussed in the second focus group was the parents’ reactions to the grades. For example, Anna said that:

“But it was troublesome to see them [the grades], and my parents, if my parents would, that was sort of what I was most afraid of, that my parent would be disappointed with me if I got a few F’s, or so. So it was mostly that, or, that they were disappointed with me.”

Anders, in the first focus group, told the others that he only experienced low levels of nervousness before receiving the grades. Even though he had been a little bit nervous he said that he did “not care so much”. Erik, in the second focus group, had at first agreed with the others saying that he experienced nervousness before receiving the grades for the first time, however, later in the discussion, he said that he did not experience any nervousness on the day he received his grades. These results are similar to the results Balkam, Nellessen and Ronney’s (2013, pp. 39-40) received in their study; where they researched the possibility of reducing test anxiety levels for school children in elementary and middle school. They found that girls experienced higher levels of insecurity and worry than boys did as result of an assessment in school (Balkam, Nellessen and Ronney’s, 2013, pp. 39-40). However, could this perceived difference between girls’ and boys’ results in experienced levels of anxiety depend on

semantics? Perhaps boys use another language when they are talking about their levels of anxiety than girls do and are therefore perceived by others to have lower levels of anxiety, when perhaps, that is not the case. This could be an interesting topic to study further in future research.

*After receiving the grades for the first time.* To be able to do a comparison of how the children had experienced receiving the grades before and after, the next question the children in the focus groups were asked was what their experience was after receiving the grades for the first time. In the two focus groups there were varying responses to this question. Overall, most children in the focus groups said that they felt relieved after receiving the grades for the first time. Margareta had trouble expressing what she had experienced and therefore there is no data for this questions from her. Their feelings of relief appeared to be connected with what grades they received. For example, Anders, in the first focus group, said that:

“Nice to not receive a F.”

Maria, in the second focus group, said that:

“It is difficult, it’s troublesome. Because if you receive, if you receive very badly, if you, like, receive three, four F’s you feel, then you don’t want to show your parents, but then they will find out in another way and that feels troublesome. But if you received good, a little better grades because then you’ll be happy. But it was a little of how you, I thought it was troublesome, I didn’t like the day you could bring them home, I didn’t like it.”

Elisabeth, in the first focus group, said that:

“But when you’ve receive your grades, I think it’s always nice to receive the high grades, well not so very high, but like passing grades, that’s enough.”

Elisabeth added another reason, as well, for why she felt relieved after receiving the grades:

“It felt sort of a little relieving, because when you finally had received them, it’s not so much more you can do.”

It appears that for Elisabeth, when she was no longer able to affect her grades, the worry of them reduced. Lars and Anders from the first focus group said that receiving the grades had not been as difficult as they had heard that it would be. Anders said that it had been “very easy” and Lars said that:

“Like, I was a little nervous before, in the beginning. But now, once you had received them for the first time, I thought that it was just overrated.”

Maria, from the second focus group, however, said that she had been affected negatively from the grades she received:

“My parents want me to work on my homework, but I have been feeling so, I have been feeling psychologically ill over that my teachers have said that I’m not up on that level, that I need to get better in, like, everything.”

From the discussions, it appears that the grade Maria received in her English class was lower than she had expected which has led to her struggling with this subject and, in her words, “been feeling psychologically ill”. These results are similar to Berenson, Ramnarayanan and Oppenheim’s (2015, p. 78) results in their study researching the disconnection between grade expectation and the received grade. They found that when a students receive a grade that is lower than the grade they expected to receive, they can start to decrease the perceived value of that course as well as start to blame the quality of instruction to be the reason for the received grade, which could start a cycle of dislike for that particular subject.

*Before receiving the grades for the second time.* For the possibility of a comparison between the feelings before receiving the grades for the first time and before receiving the grades for a second time the children were asked of how they feel about receiving the grades for a second time. When the children in the two focus groups were asked this question most children appeared to be quite relaxed when thinking of the second time they will receive their grades. Anders from the first focus used only two words to simply express what he thought of

receiving grades a second time: “Eh, good.” Lars from the first focus group, elaborated his answer further saying that:

“Yes, it is nice to know where you are at [what grades you have from before],  
tease my brother when I get home, in case I have better.”

Elisabeth, from the first focus group, answered the question by saying that:

“It is nice. But it was that at first too, if this would have been the first time we received grades, I would probably have been a little bit on edge, or however I should explain it.”

This indicates that, because Elisabeth has received grades before, she is not as nervous about receiving grades for a second time. Anna, from the second focus group said that:

“I think it feels easy, easier now that we know how they [the teachers] think like.”

Anna then added to that, saying:

“I feel relatively calm about receiving grades again, now that we, like, have, now we know how it works.”

Maria, from the second focus group, on the other hand, said that:

“Like, it was a difficult period, especially if you received, when you got a bad grade. Then it was difficult to try to start thinking ‘no, it was only a year’s, like semester grade’, but now, like, it. It is a little more important and then you think about it all the time, what grades you got last time.”

Contradictory to the other students, to Maria, receiving the grades one time appear to not have calmed her down. Rather, receiving grades for a second time appeared to make her more nervous than she was before receiving grades for the first time.

### *Grades effect on time spent on schoolwork*

The reason to why the children in the two focus groups were asked if they thought that receiving grades have effected how much time they spend on schoolwork, both in school and at home, was to see if the children, themselves, have been able to notice a change after receiving grades, or if they perceived that their time spent on schoolwork had been un-effected by receiving grades. The answers to this questions varied a lot amongst the participating children. Anders from the first focus group, answered a simple “no” to this question. Anders was the only child in the focus groups who had not noticed a change in time spent on schoolwork after receiving grades. Maria, Anna and Margareta, from the second focus group, answered, all at the same time: “Yes”. Erik, from the second focus group, answered with saying “A little, kind of”. Elisabeth from the first focus group, had observed a general change in the classroom:

“It has been noticed, at least I have noticed that they [classmates that just managed to receive a passing grade] might be thinking a little more, maybe takes home, or like, taken a book home that you read.”

This change in behavior had been noticed by Lars, from the first focus group, as well. After Elisabeth had said this, Lars added that:

“Yes, one has thought about this a little as well.”

Later in the focus group discussion, Margareta in the second focus group, elaborated on her previous answer, saying:

“Like, the subject I had a little poorer grade in, I feel like I work more with it. So I, like, do the homework, I spend longer time on it than I did before.”

Maria, from the second focus group, had, as well, noticed a change in her time spent on schoolwork. However, Maria had noticed a change that was opposite from what Margareta had explained. Maria’s answer to the question was:

“Easy, that I have had very difficult because, since my grade in, since my grade in English, I have not been able to concentrate on the English, I have not been able to do it. Because when I got something like that. Yes, I got a poor grade in English, and since then, I don’t have any energy, I have not had the energy to sit down with my homework. Because I have always felt, however much homework I do, I will fail in that anyway, yes I have always fe [she stopped in the middle of the word], I have always had that [social] pressure.”

Maria then added that:

“Like, this, it doesn’t matter if I have put down time on [the homework], like, every day, I would never have risen [managed to get a higher grade], and then I feel like I can just as well not care about it.”

The next part of what Maria said shows how the change in behavior is opposite from the change that Margareta had noticed:

“I think it has only changed in the small grades, or, the poorer grades. but in the higher ones I have maybe, I would have wanted to work more with them [the classes] that I got a better grade in. Because then I would have wanted to learn more, maybe gotten a higher grade. But those, those grades I got a little less in, those I felt like I don’t have the energy for anymore. I cannot anyway, so, why would I work with, like, if you get a higher grade, then I think you become happier, if you get a little lower grades it might, like, be more difficult to catch up.”

In other words, Margareta appear to have become motivated to spend more time on schoolwork in the subjects that she had done poorer in than others, while Maria had had the opposite reaction, she had become more motivated to work with the subjects

she had done better in and had experienced a feeling of hopelessness in the subjects she had done poorer in. Balkam, Nellessen and Ronney (2013, p. 40) in their study found that when coping with stress and anxiety, girls would prepare more for an assessment than boys would. The results from the present study could be interpreted in the same way because there seem to be a trend with the girls worrying more and preparing more in order to receive higher grades the second time. In the present study, however, there is not enough data to be able to support this conclusion.

### *Communication and support*

During the second focus group, a discussion formed about the communications the participating children perceived they had with their teachers and their perceived support.

*The semantics of teachers' information.* The semantics of teachers' information refers to how the children in the focus groups interpret what the teachers meaning in what they say when they discuss grades. Åkerman (2011, p. 6) discusses that it is not only the speaker who determines the meaning of the words, but the listener also interprets the meaning of the words as well. The meaning the listeners put into them might differ from the meaning that the speaker had intended them to have. This is more likely, when the words that the speaker used are vague, and therefore can be interpreted more widely. The importance of what words the teachers used when talking about grades is something the children in the present study reflected on. Maria in the second focus group reflected on this by saying:

“And then I think it is difficult with teachers, because some teachers can say one grade this sem, last semester, and then you receive a completely different grade this [semester], and, so, if I lower my grade, how will you feel like then? It's much that they are saying, I don't want to lower your grade, but if they want that isn't it better that they are saying, 'you are at this grade and if

you don't, if you lower in it you will receive a lower grade, if you become better in this you will raise your grade'. They, they don't say, what you need, what you don't need to think about."

Maria developed on this saying that:

"Like, I think it is very difficult when they are saying like this, 'you can receive an A, but you will receive a B, you might receive it next semester'. It is difficult, like, if you lower it, if you receive a B again, then you don't know, have I done something or have I raised it, and so then it gets difficult. It would be better if they, 'look at this, you have received a B. But if you work a little harder, then you might receive a little, might come closer to an A, but it is not certain'. But they see, like, that you can raise yourself to an A-level or a B-level, but it is not certain, then you get a little, like, stressed."

Maria did not only give examples of what she did not like with the words the teachers used when discussing grades, she also gave an example of what words, and how the teachers should have phrased it, when they are talking about grades. Anna adds to this saying that:

"They [the teachers] treats us like small [children], it's like this, 'yes it is okay, and it is like this', like if you would start crying if you received a C instead of an A, and you are like, 'it is okay'.

When Anna said this in the discussion group, Maria agreed to this by saying: "like, we are not babies". Maria then continued saying:

"And then they stretch it out, like, 'and yes it has been a little like this and a little like that', like, and you are just like, 'can't you just say the grade and what I need to practice on?'"

In these discussions the children clearly put an emphasis on the importance of how a teacher phrases their sentences when they are discussion grades.

*Communication between teacher and student.* Another thing the children in the two focus groups discussed was the communication they had with the teachers, when they were alone with the teacher to discuss the grades they had received. When the children in the second group were discussing that, they expressed that they felt less nervous about receiving grades a second time because they now had a better idea of what the teachers expected of them (see above), Anna said that:

“But I don’t think we got so, it might have been because our class got new teachers, and so, but I don’t think we got so informed about what we needed to practice on. These meetings with the teachers, like, they gave nothing. We don’t know what we need to practice on. We don’t know how to become better.”

When the children in the second focus group were discussing this, the researcher asked them if they felt that they have had the opportunity to talk with the teacher about the grades after they received them. To this question, both Maria and Anna answered: “No”, at the same. Maria then elaborated on this saying:

“Like Anna said, they [the teachers] don’t really explain what you need to get better at. It is very difficult to do something, you are to accomplish something you can’t, because you don’t know what you are supposed to do, to, like, perform better.”

One of the teachers that had given the grades to the children in the second focus group, had left the school, and therefore the children were not able to discuss the grades with her. When the children were discussing this situation, Anna said:

“She gave us our grades and we couldn’t talk to her, we can’t, we, don’t know what I need to practice on to get a better grade, or so. We can only talk amongst ourselves now, how we have experienced it, and such. But we have no clue about those biology-, geography-, history-, religion-, and Swedish-classes, how to raise us to a better level. We don’t even know what she thought when she set those grades.”

To this, Erik added that: “Only in art-class”. Following this statement Maria and Anna agreed.

Anna further developed what they meant with the difference in the art-class by saying:

“Like, in art-class, it probably was like, then you know, like, when you have written it out on a paper, and showed us what it was that was, if we had one of those tests, if we only we wrote, she went through it so thoroughly, and if we came late to the class, if we maybe did that one class, she said that. I went through the grade she gave me and I wanted to go through them right. She doesn’t, like, go through them in three minutes and then you have to, like, leave, like, she said it like, ‘this and this is what you need to get better in and this you have already reached this level, so that you don’t need to practice on much’. It was like, it was much nicer to sit with her than what it was with our other teachers.”

Anna puts an emphasis on how important it is to her that she can have an open and concrete discussion about her grades with her teachers about her grades.

*Support.* In the second focus group, when participating children had been asked of their time spent on schoolwork had changed after receiving grades for the first time (see above), they started discussion that help from other classmates help them when they are struggling with a subject. Maria said that:

“It is probably much that it was the homework in English, I know that my friends like Anna, Karin. Anna is very good at English so she usually helps me and, help me in Swedish with, like, correcting [my answers], and it’s very nice to have someone who doesn’t, like, say, ‘you, oh no, you cannot write like this’. Like, Anna say, like, ‘I will help you and correct some’. And then she sits down with me and correct it, and then I get to learn what I do wrong. While some teachers, like maybe, ‘you need to do this by yourself’. But if I correct it by myself, like, I wrote it, how easy is it for me then? It is probably much that you need the energy and the fire, if you have received a bad grade, and help from the teachers, especially. It is much the teachers and parents and friends. I have gotten a lot of help from Anna, Karin and Eva, like I have gotten help from them, but maybe not as much from my teachers.”

Anna added to this saying:

Because it is mostly our classmates that help each other, we are the only ones that, because we don’t receive, like, well, we don’t receive help from teachers, but we have supported each other as a class and help out, helped each other. You know which subject some are good at which they, then you go to them and asks, and asks via, like, social media and such, so you will receive some help regarding the grades.”

It appears that Maria and Anna depend a lot on the help and support they received from their friends and classmates when it came to schoolwork, but wished they received more help from their teachers, as well. Hoferichter, Raufelder and Eid (2014, p. 744) in their study, discuss how a good and strong relationship with classmates, where they learn together, leads to lower levels of text anxiety before an assignment. Furthermore, Conner, Miles and Pope (2014, p. 36) had

similar findings, they found that students that received less support from their classmates suffered significantly more of psychological and physical health effects, than students who did.

### *Social pressure and anxiety*

During the second focus group, a discussion started regarding social pressure and how they, in general, experienced receiving grades, in that regard. The participating children in the focus group experienced social pressure at various intensities and for various reasons. Erik, for example, said that: “I don’t feel any [social] pressure at all”. Margareta said that: “I can feel pressure from my parents”. Anna agreed with Margareta, saying:

“Me too, I can also feel pressured by my parents, that they want me to have a higher grade than what I’m actually receiving. Because it’s mostly my parents, the teachers aren’t so.”

Later Anna develops on her statement saying that the even though she is now experiencing social pressure from her parents she feels such as she is able to cope well with it:

“And think, that’s in year six, so they, I think it is about then you can sort of handle the pressure, somewhat, from the parents.”

Maria, on the other hand, appear to experience the pressure somewhat more negatively, saying:

“You had too much, how do you say it, weight on your shoulders.”

By way of using the words “too much”, Maria indicates that she experiences the social pressure to be more than she feels capable of coping with. This is similar results to the findings of Galloway and Conner’s (2015, p. 110-111) study researching student’s perspectives on the culture in a high performance high-school. Their results were that, the students associated the increased emphasis on high grades and academic achievement with experiences of stress, fatigue, and overload. Moreover, stress can be related to school children’s perceptions of their

performance and overall satisfaction in school (Feld & Shusterman, 2015, p. 40). Furthermore, according to Arslan (2015, p. 187) pressure from worrying about grades can lead to children having problem with social emotional learning, such as developing their skills, attitudes and values (Arslan, 2015, p. 184).

Stress is a cognitive and physical condition that is characterized by a person showing strain and resistance to external stimuli in, what is generally called, alarm situations (Eskicumah, Arslan & Demirtaş, 2015, p. 241). Stress can be caused by many different things, which can be referred to as a stressor. A stressor can be acute – only last for a short time, or it can be chronic – they last for an extended period of time (Nolen-Hoeksama, Fredrickson, Loftus & Wagenaar, 2009, p. 504). The worry and social pressure of grades that the students experience can be a chronic stressor because they can, as seen above, have negative experiences because of grades over a longer period of time. If a person is experiencing a chronic stressor of which the person is not able to cope with, it can lead to feelings of apathy and helplessness (as seen above) (Nolen-Hoeksama, et al., 2009, p. 512). The most common response to stressors, however, is feelings of anxiety (Nolen-Hoeksama, et al., 2009, p. 508).

To take a closer look on how the children in the present study experienced social pressure, we will take a closer look at the pressure from classmates, from parents and from one self.

*Pressure from peers.* Interestingly, even though friends and classmates can have a supporting effect on the children (as seen above), classmates can also be a source of a stressor because they might try to motivate the child to do well in school (Hoferichter, et al., 2014, p. 745). When discussing this in the focus groups, Anna, from the second focus group, said that:

“That is what is difficult in this class. Some want to talk about their grades, because we received them in here. Then it was some that right away said if they got a good grade, and then if I got this, let’s say that I received a F in one subject and then, other say that ‘I got an A in this, or a B’, then I felt down,

and then when you get home, then, then you might not be so content [with your grades].”

Anna later in the discussion added, that:

“And it’s the same, like, when we had gone to our, this class, ehm, this small group room to talk [about grades], then we got, then it was a bomb of what grade you received [from curious classmates], and it would have been embarrassing if I had, like, said that I received this grade.”

Anna appears to be ashamed of her grade and did not want to share it with her classmates because she had perceived that they had received higher grades than her. If the children believe that they are divergent from the norm, negative attitudes of one self, such as feelings of shame, can be experienced by them (Angelöw & Jonsson, 2000, p. 155; Lindberg, 2007, p. 198).

*Pressure from parents.* In the second focus group the participating children discussed a lot about the perceived social pressure from their parents. Maria talked about how she did not want to show her parents her grades if they were bad (see above). Later in the discussion she added to that, saying:

“If they were too bad, I mean if I will receive too much reprimanding, or like, that they say ‘you are supposed to be on this level’, it’s difficult.

Maria continues talking about her parents’ expectations on her grades saying:

“Yes, it gets a little like, ‘oh God, how could you receive a C in this? I got a B, you have gotten this from me, you are very good at mathematics, but then how couldn’t you come up to this level?’ Like, it gets so difficult. And then you feel such a [social] pressure you have to have as good of a grade as your parents had, but, like, that doesn’t work.”

During this discussion Anna reflected that the pressure from her parents might vary depending on the grades she receives:

“Like, if you have a good grade, then they might not be so hard on you, but if you have a little poorer grade they might just become harder and harder on you, that is what’s difficult.”

The parents’ expectations of Maria appear to be something worrisome for her and she seem to have difficulties in coping with that social pressure. According to Anna, the social pressure from her parents seem to be dependent on what grades she receives. These results are similar to the discussion of Eskicumah et al. (2015, p. 241), that the expectations from family member, such as parents, are perceived as social pressure by the child. This is, because the child has to work on the schoolwork under this perceived social pressure, which creates emotional stress.

*Pressure from one self.* In the present study, pressure from oneself was mentioned less than pressure from others, by the children. However, when Maria was discussing the perceived social pressure from her parents, she reflected that she might put more pressure on herself than her parents do:

“I think it is, my parents don’t pressure me so much, but there are, like, a few subjects that I feel that I pressure myself. But then I know that some parents think that if you are home and doing your homework as well, and then you are doing very good, and then you come to school and you, like, fail a test.”

It appears that Maria puts that pressure on herself, because she wants to live up to what her parents thought of her when she was doing so well on her homework.

*Anxiety about current grades future meaning.* In the present study, anxiety how the children’s grades would be perceived when they attended year seven at a new school, was another factor for added pressure and anxiety. Maria had earlier in the discussion mentioned

her concerns about her grades coming with her to year seven (see above), and then she elaborated on that, saying:

“The only thing I am nervous to, they will carry over with these both [the grades from two occasions] to, like, year seven, and then it is like, the teachers will, if you received a F in something, that the [teacher] will take it like, help more, or like, help you, but, like that they talk about what grades you have received. But maybe that is just, like, between teacher to teacher.”

In reply to this, Anna said:

“Or that the teachers in year seven misjudge you, like ‘if this student has a F in English, and then maybe she isn’t so good, then, then it doesn’t matter if we help her’, like, it might be like that.”

It appears that Maria and Anna, in regard to their worries about bringing their grades with them to year seven, was mostly grounded in fears of teachers having a prejudice against them, based on their grades, before they have had a chance to show the teachers what they are capable of accomplishing.

### *Children’s thoughts regarding grades*

This section introduces the children’s views of grades that were found in the two focus groups from the present study.

*Grades in schools.* In the present study, when the participating children in the two focus groups were asked if they think we should have, or not have, grades in school, all seven participants answered “yes”. Maria, from the second focus group, added quickly: “Grades have to exist”. The children were then asked to elaborate on why they thought there should be grades in school. Elisabeth, from the first focus group elaborated her answer by saying:

“It is much easier to know why you are at this [level], passed you are, or whatever you are, that it is all okay. Because otherwise it was if you had passed or not.”

Anders agreed with Elisabeth, saying: “You know how good you are”. In the second focus group, Maria answered that:

“Like, I think it can be good to have grades to find out where you are at, like, what level and, but it might have been so good in our class, like, school, but like, yes, to have found out what we need to improve.”

Anna added to this, that:

“Grades are goof if you want to know where you are at because assessment reports give nothing [no information].”

Lars, in the first focus group gave another reason to why there should be grades:

“Otherwise you can’t compete against someone else”.

It appears that to him it is the competition and how grades enable him to stand apart that is the reason to why, he thinks, there should be grades in school; Balkam, et al. (2013, p. 37) had similar findings in their study. They found that students viewed tests to be a form of competition for the highest grade against each other. In addition, Maria reflects on individual differences:

“But then I think that grades can be troublesome, grades can be good. And it is probably a little how you are as a person. If you think that it is troublesome to have [social] pressure on you, then you might lower yourself [in terms of grade level], but if you think that it is, if you don’t feel that the [social] pressure is behind your back, ‘I shall not care of what my parents say’, then you might get better at trying to raise. But that it is probably from person to person.”

Marias' reflection is similar to the results of Balkam's et al. (2013, p. 37) results, which were that students who had low anxiety would perform better on a test if warned that it would be difficult than if they were told beforehand that it would be easy. Students with high anxiety, however, had the opposite reactions, they performed poorer on a test if they were warned that it was going to be difficult than when they had been told beforehand that it was going to be easy.

*Assessment report.* In the second focus group the participating children did a comparison between the assessment reports they have been receiving every year in school and grades; an assessment report assesses if the student is either, below passing level, passing level, or above passing level. The participating students mainly discussed that they did not think that the assessment reports were of any help. For example, Anna said:

“I don't think that the assessment reports help so much, but they, you, on most of them it says that you are in the middle, like, they say nothing.”

Maria furthered the comparison, saying:

“...you have this in your subject, and this you need to improve in. That's something they should really implement because they assess everything in the middle, like I know, they assessed everything in the middle of me. yes, but then when I was in year six I did not receive the same grades, or assessments.”

To this, Anna added:

“It would have been better if they wrote, if they could, if they do want to have the assessment reports then write an assessment, but write a grade on the side as well, like, ‘right now you are around C-level’, and, so you can improve and like, I mean that they would write, ‘what is it we need to practice on more to raise to an A, B.’”

In other words, they see the need for the use of grades in school to further their knowledge of how they are performing in school, as the other system of writing an assessment report has not been helpful to them, in either gaining that knowledge or to prepare them for what their expected grades will be.

*When to begin with grades.* Presupposing that there will be grades in the school, to gain an insight in to when school children would like to start receiving grades, the participating children in the present study was asked when they would like to start receiving grades. In the first focus group Lars answered: “Year four, year five”. To this Anders and Elisabeth simultaneously replied: “Yeah”. In the second focus group, the researcher received similar responses. Maria, for example said:

“Maybe that’s something we should start with in year five or year four. If I found out my grades in year six, how easy is it then for me to, like, fix it in one semester? If you have had trouble with them, for example, if you have dyslexia like I do, then it is difficult to do it in one semester. You need to have about two years to be able to catch up, and that’s what I think we should do early.”

Regarding starting to receive grades in year four, Elisabeth from the first focus group, reflected on what she would think regarding this in year four:

“I would probably not have liked it if I was in year four now, but.”

Regarding receiving grades in year four, Maria, from the second focus group, said:

“Like, at the end of year five, like, I had that, I was terrified of the grades all the time. And so when they have talked about, like, receiving them in year four. I think that people will, like, have that behind them when they go on to year seven, and such.”

Maria is concerned that the pressure of grades might be too much for children in year four to cope with. Furthering this discussion, Anna said:

“In that case if they give it in year five. In year five, that I think I would have been able to handle, like we said before, the [social] pressure and such. But ehm, in that case in year five, you will get to know what you, like, what grades they give and then you get to know what you need to practice on before year six, so you receive a good grade in year six, and then it will be good before year seven, yes.”

Anna, for herself, attempts to find a good balance between the extra time of preparation an early grade will give her and the social pressure that, according to her, is caused by the receiving of grades.

*Criteria for grades.* The criteria for grades refers to the criteria that needs to be met by the student in order to obtain a specific grade (Skolverket, 2015b). In the present study, when discussing the criteria for grades in the two focus groups the participating children appeared to feel frustration over how it worked. In regard to this, Anna said:

“It is really strange, I think it is way too hard with the criteria for the grades, if it is, like, that you have one [point] from, to, like, they [the teachers] fill in a column and then you are supposed to have more than half, let’s say you have all C’s and more than half A’s, then you will receive a B. And so to receive an A you have to have all A’s, and that is very difficult, it really is, it is very difficult to receive all A’s.”

Anna develop this by saying:

“I think it should be more forgiving to receive an A, because there are very many that, we were talking about parents before that, ehm, for them, for them where small, then they had it very easy and, it was like those numbers [an

earlier grading system], and then they had it very easy to receive a five [highest grade] in all subjects and then, and it is not as easy now. Like, it's not easy to receive all A's. so I think they should be more forgiving with the receiving of A's or B's, because, yes.”

In the first focus group Anders, similarly, mentioned that: “It was apparently easier, but it was easier to receive a high grade back then.”.

*Agency.* As mentioned in the introduction above, children have agency when they are capable of affecting the people and society around them (Oswell, 2013, p. 42). In a school setting however, children have a sub-ordinate position, with the teachers reducing their agency (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998, mentioned in James, 2009, p.43). In the second focus group, when the researcher at the end asked the children if they had anything more to add in regard to grades, Anna said that: “...no politicians care about what the children thinks.”. Interestingly, during the discussions in the focus group Anna had not talked about a classified group. In this sentence, however, she classified the group of children in a way to show that they do not have a voice that can be heard by politicians. To this, Maria added that:

“It was the same with this school, they don't even know, they haven't discussed any of this with us, what we think of it/.../someone comes here and discusses it with us, how it really works, and what we think. Because it is not fair to us children, it is us who will live in it, it is us who are going to attend this school. We might not be allowed to do it, but the others [future students] are going to attend this school. Then shouldn't they talk with us about what we think?”

Both Anna and Maria emphasizes that they want their voices to be heard by politicians and the school considering that the choices that are made by the politicians and school officials are directly affecting them, the school children, and their lives.

## Concluding discussion

### *Summary of the main findings*

In the present study, the participating children had varying opinions on receiving grades. There were multiple aspects about grades that they found problematic. Firstly, the children associated receiving grades with nervousness and an emotionally problematic time. However, they reflected on the negative emotional effects of grades to be a cause of a poor grade. They mentioned that if they had received a good grade, they would be happy. Secondly, the children in the focus groups, believed that their perception of the teacher's explanation on receiving grades affected them in way that they felt more socially pressured; which could lead them to losing motivation when doing their schoolwork. The children suggested another way for the teachers to discuss grades with the students in order to reduce the perceived social pressure and boost their motivation. Furthermore, the children said they lacked constructive information regarding what the grades were based on and what they would need to improve in order to raise their grades. As a result of this, the children were not aware of the areas of the subject they needed to improve in, which left them experiencing feelings of powerlessness. Thirdly, the children perceived the criteria for grades to be unfairly harsh and unachievable. They wanted a change in the grading system that would create better opportunities for them to receive higher grades. Lastly, the children discussed having no 'voice' within the political debates, regarding grades in school. They expressed that they wanted their opinions to matter, especially in regard to decisions that will, consequently, affect their school life.

Nevertheless, the children expressed appreciation for receiving grades as well. Their appreciation for grades stemmed from how helpful the grades were in giving them an understanding of how they were performing in school. They found that grades were more helpful than their previous assessment reports in understanding what aspects they needed to

improve to raise their grade because the grades were, according to the children, more precise in their assessment.

However, the children's views of grades would change depending on the grading context. For example, there were a slight change in the emotional effect in the children, before and after they received their grades for the first time. The children expressed nervousness in regard to receiving grades for the first time. The nervousness seems to have been a result of it being a new experience for the children (Lin, et al., 2014, p. 292,296). Therefore, the children did not know how they, for example, should change their behavior, i.e. study more, or if they could continue with their current behavior which left them feeling uncertain. The children also noted that social pressure from peers, from parents, from themselves, and anxieties about the future meanings of their current grades made them feel like they had to maintain a level of performance in school that was out of their reach, in terms of what they felt they were capable of achieving.

According to the results from both focus groups, the governments' initiative to begin with grades in year four in some test schools in Sweden, appear to be a positive initiative. The children regarded introduction of the grading system in year six to be too late because they believed that they needed more time for improvement before attending year seven. However, they did also remark on the harm of social pressure that accompanies the receiving of grades and therefore think that school children in year four, or year five, would be able to cope with that social pressure, and thus is the most optimal time to start receiving grades.

#### *Assessment of the scientific importance*

The scientific importance of the present study is that it attempts to give children a voice and gives an insight into what are the current values and views of schoolchildren regarding receiving grades. The results of the present study can help improve the communication between children

and teachers when discussing grades and help politicians and schools to structure the grading system, in such a way that it will help the children perform better in school. For example, by creating a system that better accounts for individual differences in children's varying experiences of receiving grades.

### *Theoretical issues in relation to the findings*

One theoretical issue in relation to the findings, was that when the participating children, in the present study, discussed their experiences of social pressure it was at times problematic to connect the findings with the previous research because the previous research mainly concerned stress and anxiety. That is, it was difficult to find previous research about how individual perceived feelings of social pressure and how social pressure can affect school children's work and well-being.

### *Limitations of the study*

The limitations of the study were that only seven children participated, and therefore the results are not generalizable to all Swedish school children. Further research would be needed for results with a higher reliability. What would be interesting to further research would be to expand the study to include more children from different parts of Sweden, from different economic backgrounds. It would also be interesting to make a comparative investigation of how the parents' and teachers' values and views are in compared to the children's values and views.

### *Methodological issues*

The advantages of using focus groups as the chosen method, is that it opened up a space for the participating children to freely discuss the topic with each other (Silverman, 2011, p. 460). The disadvantages, however, is that the children might have affected/influenced each other with

their views and opinions which would not have been possible if the children had been interviewed individually.

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## Appendices

### *Appendix I*

#### Fokusgrupper om barns syns på betyg

Jag heter Isabella Schön och är student på Linköpings Universitet och nu är det dags för mig att skriva en masteruppsats inom programmet Child Studies. Syftet med min uppsats är att undersöka vad elever som går i årskurs 6 har för syn på betyg i skolan. För att undersöka detta kommer jag under vecka 16 att ha två fokusgrupper med ca fem elever i respektive grupp. Jag kommer att ställa barnen några frågor om vad de tycker om betygen och hur deras upplevelser av att få betygen har varit. Fokusgrupperna kommer ta mellan 30-60 minuter beroende på hur mycket eleverna vill diskutera de olika frågorna. Som dokumentation av fokusgrupperna kommer jag att använda mig av en ljudinspelare så att jag senare kan lyssna på diskussionerna igen för att transkribera och analysera diskussionerna.

Denna undersökning har blivit godkänd av en etikprövningsnämnd på Linköpings Universitet samt rektor [REDACTED] på [REDACTED] skolan.

Det är helt frivilligt för barnen om de vill delta i en av dessa fokusgrupper. Om en elev har valt att delta men sen ångrar sig kommer vi avbryta den elevens deltagande. Om någon data har samlats in vid det tillfället kommer den att tas bort.

Alla elever som deltar i fokusgrupperna kommer att vara anonyma. Endast jag kommer att lyssna på inspelningarna av fokusgrupperna.

För att eleverna ska få delta i en av fokusgrupperna behöver jag få ett så kallat informerat samtycke från både er föräldrar och från eleven själv. Detta innebär att ni samtycker till att ni vet om och har förstått vad undersökningen handlar om och vad dess syfte är, att ni och ert barn vet om att han/hon kan avbryta när som helst, och att alla som deltar i fokusgrupperna kommer att vara anonyma.

Om ni har några frågor angående undersökningen är ni mycket välkomna till att kontakta mig:

Mobil: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

Email: [isasc322@student.liu.se](mailto:isasc322@student.liu.se)

Om ni är intresserade av att läsa uppsatsen när den är klar kan ni kontakta mig så skickar jag er en kopia.

Om ni samtycker till att ert barn deltar i en av fokusgrupperna och han/hon vill delta var vänlig och skriv under med ert namn och er underskrift nedanför och lämna in det till ██████████ **senast måndagen den 13 april.**

### Förmyndare

Jag samtycker till att mitt barn deltar i en av fokusgrupperna:

---

Namnförtydligande

---

Underskrift

---

Datum

### Eleven

Jag samtycker till att jag vill delta i en fokusgrupp:

---

Namnförtydligande

---

Underskrift

---

Datum

## *Appendix II*

### Focus groups regarding children's views of grades

My name is Isabella Schön and I am student at the Child Studies Masters' program at Linköping University. The aim of my master thesis is to research the views of school children in year 6 regarding grades in school. To research this I will have two focus groups including about five students in the respective groups during week 16. I will ask the school children some questions of what they think of grades and how their experiences of grades have been like. A focus group will last for about 30-60 minutes, depending on the time the children spend discussing the different questions. I will use an audio recording device in order to document the discussions in the focus groups so I will be able to listen to the discussions again later when I transcribe and analyze the discussions.

This study has been approved by an ethical board at Linköping University and the principal of [REDACTED], [REDACTED].

Participation in the focus groups are voluntary for the children. If a student has chosen to participate and then changes his/her mind, we will terminate the participation of that student. If, at that time, any data have been recorded, that data will be deleted.

All students who participate in the focus groups will be anonymous. I will be the only one who will listen to the recordings of the focus groups.

To make it possible for the participations of the students I need an informed consent from both the parents and the student. This means that you consent to understanding that you and your child are aware of and have understood the aim of the study, that you and your child know that he/she can determine their participations at any time, and that all the participants in the focus groups will be anonymous.

You are welcome to contact me if you have any questions regarding the study at:

Phone: [REDACTED]

E-mail: [REDACTED]

E-mail: [isasc322@student.liu.se](mailto:isasc322@student.liu.se)

If you are interested in reading the thesis when it is finished you are welcome to contact me and then I will send you a copy.



### *Appendix III*

Questions used in the focus groups:

- Vad tänkte ni om betyg innan ni hade fått det första gången?
- Hur kändes det när ni fick era första betyg?
- Vad tänkte ni när ni fick era första betyg?
- Hur känner ni om att få betyg igen?
- Tycker ni att det borde finnas betyg i skolan?
  - Varför?
  - Varför inte?
- Om ja, i vilken årskurs tycker ni att ni elever borde börja få era betyg?
- Tycker ni att få betyg har påverkat hur mycket ni jobbar i skolan och med era läxor hemma?

## *Appendix IV*

Translation of questions asked in the focus groups:

- What did you think before you received your grades for the first time?
- How was it to receive grades for the first time?
- What did you think when you received your grades?
- How do you feel about receiving grades again?
- Do you think there should be grades in school?
  - Why?
  - Why not?
- If yes, at what age do you think is a good age to start receiving grades?
- Do you think the grades have affected your school performance?