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# Teachers' Conceptions of Using Peer Assessment of Oral Language Skills

A Qualitative Study from a Swedish EFL Perspective

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Degree essay: 15 hp  
Course: LGEN2A  
Level: Advanced level  
Term/year: VT2018  
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Code: VT18-1160-012-LGEN2A

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Keywords: [peer assessment, peer response, oral language skills, EFL, teachers' conceptions, teacher cognition](#)

## Abstract

Although the amount of research on peer assessment has increased over the last three decades, peer assessment of oral language skills, and teachers' conceptions of using it is still underexplored. Furthermore, there is a lack of research in the Swedish context, despite it being a part of the Swedish syllabus for English. Consequently, this study investigates teachers' conceptions of using peer assessment of oral language skills in a Swedish EFL context regarding their objectives, advantages and challenges as well as what teachers need to bear in mind when implementing this activity. Altogether, five interviews were conducted with upper secondary teachers of English. The results indicate that teachers' objectives with using peer assessment of oral language skills are to activate and positively reinforce students as well as facilitate students' understanding of assessment criteria and learning. Also, the results shed light on certain advantages of incorporating this learning approach such as facilitation of direct feedback, students' understanding and uptake, as well as teachers work, grading, and assessment. A few challenges were also identified namely that peer assessment is time-consuming, that it can be difficult to make students understand the purpose of the activity as well as to develop their ability to provide qualitative response. Finally, the study reveals some necessary requirements and pedagogical implications for peer assessment to become a beneficial learning activity i.e., a clear and thought-out structure of response, a functional classroom climate, and solid preparation and training. Another pedagogical implication identified is that teachers need more time to be able to incorporate peer assessment of oral languages skills as efficiently and ethically as possible.

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## **Appendix A**

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

The primary goal for teachers is to create opportunities for students to learn and develop as far as possible. One way to support students' learning is with formative assessment (Lundahl, 2012), which according to Black and William (2009, p. 8) consists of five key strategies:

- Clarifying and sharing learning intentions and criteria for success;
- Engineering effective classroom discussions and other learning tasks that elicit evidence of student understanding;
- Providing feedback that moves learning forward;
- Activating students as instructional resources for one another; and
- Activating students as the owners of their own learning.

As Black and William (2009) suggests, learning increases when students are activated as instructional learning resources for one another i.e., peer assessment. When students reach upper secondary school level, they have gained a lot of knowledge throughout their years of schooling. Thus, it is essential to take advantage of all the knowledge that exist in classrooms and through peer assessment, students can learn from each other to develop their English skills.

Over the last three decades, a relatively substantial amount of research on peer assessment has been published. A majority of previous research is conducted in higher educational contexts (e.g., Langan et al., 2005; Rotsaert, Panadero & Schellens, 2018) and in Asian countries (e.g., Peng, 2009; Patri, 2002) which entails that there is a lack of research on peer assessment in the upper secondary school level, and in the Swedish context. Furthermore, many previous studies have looked more closely into peer assessment from a student perspective (e.g., Cheng & Warren, 1997; Fazel, 2015) and, consequently, teachers' conceptions of using this learning approach needs to be further investigated. Lastly, peer assessment of oral language skills is still a rather underexplored field compared to peer assessment on writing. All in all, more research concerning what Swedish upper secondary teachers know about peer assessment of oral language skills is needed in order to implement this learning approach as efficiently and ethically as possible.

The Swedish National Agency for Education states that student involvement in classroom assessment can bring positive effects to learning. Firstly, the assessment support

material (Skolverket, 2011a) states that peer assessment contributes to students' understanding of assessment criteria and that students learn to distinguish strengths and weaknesses in their own work by looking at similar work done by peers. Secondly, and more importantly, it is highlighted in all three English courses for upper secondary school that students should, both on their own and with the help of their peers, be able to process and improve their oral performances as well as adapt it to different situations, recipients, and purposes (Skolverket, 2011b). This implies that peer assessment is an important part of the subject English and should be incorporated in all English classrooms around Sweden. However, teachers have a lot on their agenda and often experience a lack of time (Skolverket, 2015) and a recent report, concerning the general attitudes towards the Swedish school, showed that approximately 45 percent of Swedish upper secondary teachers feel stressed at work (Skolverket, 2016). Nevertheless, more knowledge is needed to get a more holistic picture of this learning approach.

## 1.2 Aim and Research Questions

This study aims to investigate teachers' conceptions of using peer assessment of oral language skills in an English as a foreign language (EFL) context in Sweden. More specifically, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are some Swedish EFL teachers' objectives with using peer assessment of oral language skills?
2. What advantages and challenges do some Swedish EFL teachers find when using peer assessment of oral language skills?
3. What do some Swedish teachers define as necessary requirements for peer assessment to become a beneficial learning activity?

## 1.3 Applicable Learning Theories

The theoretical framework behind peer assessment is complex and no clear-cut theory can be found (Topping, 1998). However, some apparent links can be drawn to both metacognitive theory and the sociocultural perspective of learning. Metacognition is generally defined as thinking about one's own thinking (Hartman, 2001) and include metacognitive strategies such as planning, monitoring and evaluating learning (Wenden, 1998). When students process and reflect upon oral production of their peers, they can learn a great deal about their own oral

production and discover aspects that were not visible to them before. Moreover, the sociocultural concepts of *Zone of Proximal Development* and *Scaffolding* can be seen as a theoretical basis for peer assessment (Peng, 2009). Vygotsky (1978) states that we learn by interacting with others' and that people with higher knowledge and capability (e.g., teachers or peers) can support and guide students to acquire knowledge they could not have reached on their own. In other words, peer assessment seems to be based on the belief that greater awareness about one's own learning process (metacognitive theory) and interaction with other people (sociocultural perspective) helps us learn.

## 1.4 Definitions

Within the research field of peer assessment, many different terms are used which represent approximately the same thing e.g., peer evaluation, peer review, peer feedback and so on. Henceforth, the terms peer assessment and peer response will be used interchangeably throughout this study except in quotes when the interviewed teachers equate e.g., feedback with peer assessment. Moreover, it should also be stated that assessment in the present study does not refer to the practice of grading.

For the past 15 years, there has been a growing interest for what Borg (2015) calls teachers cognition. Teacher cognition involve what teachers think, know, and believe in relation to their classroom practice. The term used in this study will be *conceptions of* referring to the same aspects as Borg defines as teacher cognition. In other words, teachers' thoughts, knowledge, and beliefs towards peer assessment of oral language skills.

## 2 Literature Review

Previous research has identified a number of advantages and disadvantages with peer assessment of oral language skills as well as a couple of challenges which need to be taken into consideration when implementing this approach. These aspects will be presented thematically starting with advantages, moving on to disadvantages. Also, important aspects that teachers need to bare in mind when implementing peer assessment will be incorporated. Because there is not sufficient research on peer assessment of oral language skills, and that there are similarities to peer assessment on writing, research dealing with both types will be included even though a majority of studies focus on peer assessment of oral language skills.

Peng (2009) investigated peer assessment of oral presentations among 82 university students in Taiwan, divided into two groups: one high-intermediate (H-I) and one low-

intermediate (L-I). She asked the students to answer a survey twice, first before a peer assessment activity and then afterward to compare the results. A question concerning participation and attentiveness showed that the general participation had increased in both groups. In addition to the survey study, Peng also conducted teacher interviews on the same topic and one out of three teachers reported that peer assessment enhanced students' in- and out-class participation. Similar results were found in a study by Langan et al. (2005) which looked more closely into peer assessment of oral presentations with 41 students from two different British universities. They discovered that students got more actively engaged than before due to the requirement to assess peers which resulted in an increased overall participation. Compared to other types of peer assessment, peer assessment on oral production only provides students with one chance to listen, understand and assess the production of peers which requires high concentration and attentiveness. Furthermore, Langan et al. (2005) found that the issue of timing is essential. Their results showed that students became tired and bored after approximately 20 minutes which implies that the structure and order of the presentations are significant. Another aspect connected to timing is the timing of response. Hattie and Timperly (2007) has come to the conclusion that response is most effective if students receive it as close as possible to their performances.

Another advantage stated by research is that peer assessment can sometimes be superior to teacher assessment. According to Jönsson's (2013) monograph about formative assessment, students might understand each other's response better due to richer explanations, similar language use and that they, to a greater extent, are at the same level of knowledge. Topping (2009) has found similar results in his review and concludes that the reaction of students might differ between response from teachers versus response from peers. Moreover, the relationship between students and teachers is complicated since teachers are assigned the role as both summative assessors and learning guides. Due to the power position that teachers have over students, it could be favorable to exchange some of the teacher assessment to peer assessment (Isaksson & Tallefors, 2014). Nevertheless, Harris and Brown (2013) investigated self- and peer assessment of three teachers and their respective classes in New Zealand. Their result showed that students tended to value the teacher's assessment higher than assessment from peers and since they did not trust their own ability to give accurate assessment, they did not trust their peers' assessment either.

Previous research also suggests that involving students in peer assessment can increase students' understanding of assessment criteria. Fazel (2015), conducted a survey-study on 42 Iranian university students, found that 92.8% of the participating students reported that their



awareness of what is being tested increased. In similarity with Fazel's results, Isaksson and Tallefors (2014) found that peer assessment on oral production helped their Swedish upper secondary students to better understand assessment criteria. Moreover, peer assessment enables students to become more active and take further responsibility for their own learning. According to Cheng and Warren (2005), peer assessment "provides learners with the opportunity to take responsibility for analyzing, monitoring and evaluating aspects of both the learning process and product of their peers" (p. 94) and that students can develop skills and abilities that they could not do in a classroom where the teacher is the only assessor. However, for peer assessment to work, it is essential that students take the increased responsibility given to them seriously (Falchikov & Magin, 1997, investigating gender bias in peer assessment; Langan et al., 2005, a study accounted for at the beginning of this chapter).

Nevertheless, to solely be committed to the task and understand the purpose is not enough for peer assessment to succeed. A vast amount of research states that students need to be prepared and trained in how to assess their peers in order for peer assessment to become effectively incorporated (Cheng & Warren, 1997, 1999; De Grez et al., 2012; Falchikov, 2005; Panadero, 2016; Peng, 2009; Saito, 2008; Topping, 1998). In the same way as teachers, at the beginning of their education, needed help and support in learning how to assess, students also need preparation and training (Falchikov, 2005). Topping (2009) argues that training can make a significant difference and emphasizes the importance of informing students about their own and the teacher's role during the process so that it becomes clear what is expected of students. Moreover, students need to be provided with good examples of constructive criticism to develop their own ability to assess (Lundahl, 2012) and to learn how to respond in a way that does not hurt their peers (Lundahl, 2014).

The issue of time and the fact that peer assessment can be time-consuming is emphasized as a disadvantage by both teachers and students in different studies (Cheng & Warren 1997; Peng 2009; Topping 1998). In a study conducted in Hong Kong, Cheng and Warren (1997) investigated 52 university students' attitudes towards peer assessment. By comparing results from the pre- and post-survey they discovered that students thought that peer assessment was time-consuming. In Peng's (2009) study especially the L-I students and one out of three teachers labeled peer assessment as a time-consuming activity. The teacher expressed peer assessment as time-consuming mostly due the increased interaction between students and, therefore, she believed that smaller groups are favorable to incorporate peer assessment effectively. Moreover, peer assessment should be seen as a supplementary process rather than a substitution for teacher assessment which requires more time (Peng, 2009).

According to Topping (1998) “there might be no saving of time in the short to medium term, since establishing qualitative peer assessment requires time for organization, training and monitoring” (p. 256). However, seen from a long-term perspective, peer assessments can have a facilitating and unloading effect for teachers (Jönsson, 2013).

Another disadvantage with peer assessment is that students may experience anxiety at the initial stage of the peer assessment process (Topping, 2009). According to Falchikov (2005), it is not surprising that students may feel this way since we ask them to become more public and open to assessment, which can be threatening. Possible reasons for why student experience anxiety connected to peer assessment are: threats to self-images, embarrassment, not wanting to hurt their peers, etc. (Falchikov, 2005). Hence, research has also looked deeper into what can be done to overcome such feelings. Vanderhoven, Raes, Montrieux, Rotsaert, and Schellens (2015) investigated peer assessment of oral presentation skills in an anonymous and synchronous setting and found positive effects on students’ perceptions and interpersonal variables. Rotsaert, Panadero and Schellens (2018) also studied anonymous peer assessment of oral presentations but from a transitional perspective, from an anonymous to a non-anonymous setting. They concluded that the transitional approach did not affect students’ perceptions negatively and that the quality of peer assessment increased in the anonymous phase, and over time, remained of similar quality even in the face-to-face sessions. In addition, the classroom climate seems to be of paramount importance to combat feelings of stress, anxiety and for students to feel comfortable participating in peer assessment activities. Løkenstgard Hoel (2001) suggests that it is far from easy to create a favorable classroom climate since all classrooms work differently. However, two factors are needed, tolerance and safety, and if these coexist, opinions and thoughts can be transferred between students which is a necessary requirement for peer assessment to be a beneficial learning activity. Also, teachers constantly need to make well-reasoned ethical judgments so that students do not feel humiliated (Lundahl, 2014).

To summarize, a rather substantial amount of research has been published within the field of peer assessment over the last three decades. However, peer assessment of oral language skills is, in general, still underexplored and therefore this study will focus on this particular aspect of peer assessment. Moreover, a vast majority of the previous research on peer assessment is based on higher education and to give a richer picture of this particular classroom approach, greater school-level variety is needed e.g., upper secondary school. In addition, most studies on peer assessment of oral skills are conducted in Asian countries. Due to differences in both school systems and culture, a European angle on peer assessment,

preferably a Swedish context, is desired. Lastly and most importantly, current research on peer assessment focus on the view of the students and, consequently, there is a lack of research that has looked deeper into this learning approach from teachers' perspective. With background in these research gaps, the present study will investigate Swedish EFL teachers' conceptions of peer assessment of oral language skills by using a qualitative method which will be described and discussed in the following section.

### **3 Method**

In this section, the choice of method will be presented followed by information regarding participants, material and the procedure. Furthermore, the reliability, validity and generalizability will be discussed as well as ethical considerations and limitations of the method.

#### **3.1 Methodological considerations**

For this study, qualitative research interviews were chosen. Since the aim of the study is to find out about teachers' *conceptions of* peer assessment on oral production and to provide a detailed and holistic picture of the interviewee's daily world (Kvale, Brinkmann & Torhell, 2014), interviews is considered to be the best corresponding research method. A questionnaire is another possible research approach since it also investigates behavioral and attitudinal information. However, in interviews, there is the possibility to ask for more information and for the participants to explain the reasoning behind their choices, beliefs and behavior which is aligned with the purpose of this study.

#### **3.2 Participants**

The participants in this study are five teachers, three male and two female, who are qualified and certified teachers of English in Sweden. Apart from the subject English, all participants are also teaching Swedish and one of the teachers has an additional subject. Their years of teaching experience vary from less than five up to twenty years and most of their experience is from upper secondary school. The teachers work at different schools within a 100-kilometer radius from city on the west coast of Sweden.

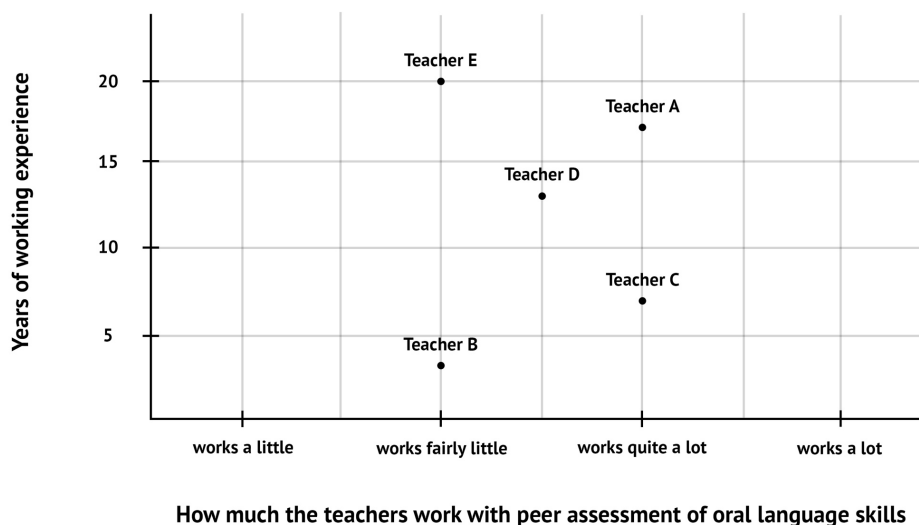


Figure 1. Information about the participants

Above, the teachers' years of experience and how much they work with peer assessment of oral language skills is illustrated to give a clarified, richer picture of the participants (Diagram 1).

The context of the study is hard to define since the schools where the teachers currently work are not necessarily the schools where most of their experience come from. However, what can generally be said, is that all teachers work in the same area, their experience of peer assessment comes from upper secondary school and that the students in most cases were high-performing and motivated for their studies.

The procedure of selecting participants is based on a sample of convenience, criteria selection and snowball sampling. Most of the teachers already had an existing connection to the researcher making them a sample of convenience. However, in order to take part in the study, the teachers had to match specific criteria, namely that they have to be upper secondary English teachers in the selected area with previous experience of working with peer assessment. In addition to this, one of the teachers got involved in the study through knowing one of the other participants, in other words, via the snowball sampling.

### 3.3 Material

When collecting the material, a semi-structured interview guide was used (see Appendix A). The interview guide was divided into themes in accordance with the research questions as

well as a start and ending containing information about the study and ethical principles. The outcome of interviews is highly dependent on the wording of questions (McKay, 2006) and, therefore, a few key criteria were followed when creating the interview guide. First, the questions strived towards being genuinely open-ended without indications that a certain answer should be given in response. Second, yes-no questions and questions that deals with more than one idea were avoided. Third, the questions should be straightforward, especially in the beginning (Kvale, Brinkmann & Torhell, 2014). Therefore, in the initial question, the participants were asked to describe a concrete situation where they had worked with peer assessment of oral language skills and from there, the interview developed into dealing with more complex and detailed features.

The semi-structured form of the interview guide ensures that the same topics are covered for all the participants and, at the same time, enables a certain degree of flexibility since the phrasing and order of questions can differ from interview to interview (McKay, 2006). Furthermore, a pilot interview was conducted prior to the actual interviews to secure e.g., that the technical equipment worked and that the interview guide was well designed and organized (Dalen, 2015). Since all the teachers interviewed were to participate in the real study, the pilot was carried out with a fellow-student who has worked with peer assessment and is somewhat knowledgeable in the field.

### 3.4 Procedure

With a basis in a sample of convenience, five teachers of English that matched the set criteria were contacted. Teacher A and B were asked in person to participate and Teacher C and D were contacted via email or other internet-based communication platforms. The fifth teacher got involved via the snowball principle through another participating teacher. However, this teacher later withdrew due to personal circumstances and another teacher (Teacher E) was contacted using the same principle.

In the initial contact, the participants were briefly informed about the purpose of the study. To eliminate the possibility of prepared answers, no further information about the interview questions was conveyed, except that the teachers were asked to prepare, in their minds, an occasion where they have worked with peer assessment on oral production. When the teachers had agreed to participate the researcher, in consultation with the participants, decided where and when the interviews would take place. All interviews were conducted in the schools where the teachers work to facilitate for them and to make them feel comfortable.

The interviews took place in a room, as secluded and peaceful as possible, to create a safe environment for the teachers as well as to avoid interruptions.

To avoid possible misunderstanding and ease communication, the interviews were conducted in Swedish which is the mother tongue of both the interviewer and the interviewees. The interviews started by what Kvale, Brinkmann and Torhell (2014) define as *briefing* which implies that the researcher, in short, explains the purpose of the interview, that the participants will be anonymous and that a sound-recorder will be used. The interviews were recorded through the researcher's mobile phone and to ensure high sound-quality, the microphone was placed right between the interviewer and the interviewee (McKay, 2002).

The interviews ended in a *debriefing* which entails that the participants were asked if they had anything more to add to the subject (Kvale, Brinkmann and Torhell, 2014). According to McKay (2002), it is important to listen to the recording fairly close to the interview and make notes on interesting sections. The language of an interview is highly vivid, and transcriptions are not only a translation but more a transformation from oral speech to written form (Kvale, Brinkmann & Torhell, 2014). Therefore, it is crucial that not too much time passes between the actual interview and the transcription process so that important nuances, such as irony, can be highlighted to facilitate the analysis. These aspects were taken into consideration and consequently, the researcher went over the recordings closely after completing the interviews.

### 3.5 Analysis

When the collection of material was done the process of transcribing started. The question of how to transcribe has no right and wrong answer but depends on what the study will investigate (Kvale, Brinkmann & Torhell, 2014). After all the interviews were transcribed, the researcher read the data several times to identify main ideas. These ideas were later coded which involves the process of investigating, comparing and contrasting, conceptualizing and categorizing the data. In fact, the analysis process starts during the interviews; nevertheless, it is crucial that the researcher has an open mind when coding the data to not miss out on any critical information (Kvale, Brinkmann & Torhell, 2014). In addition to coding, interesting quotes were picked out from the data that could highlight essential ideas of the result. These quotes were later translated into English and the Swedish translation is displayed as footnotes to facilitate for the reader to check the translation rather than having to turn to an appendix.

### 3.6 Reliability, validity and generalizability

To improve the reliability of the study, certain steps were taken regarding the material, the interviewer, the participants as well as in the process of transcribing and analyzing the data. The pilot interview was a first step to enhance reliability and during that occasion, the researcher was able to practice the interview situation to avoid leading questions as well as checking the trustworthiness of the technical equipment. The pilot interview also gave the opportunity to discuss the interview guide to see if the questions could be phrased differently to avoid misunderstandings. The fact that the same person conducted all interviews enhances the consistency and reliability of the study.

Since the data deals with people, the trustworthiness and reliability of the participants may cause doubts. Due to a sample of convenience, the researcher had some kind of connection to a majority of the participants which could affect the results. However, no signs during the interview would suggest that the participants did not answer truthfully. Another step was to check the transcriptions carefully for misinterpretations and mistakes. The quotes displayed in this study are directly taken from the transcription even though they have been translated from Swedish (see footnotes) and that minor changes have been made to adapt it to the written genre. Furthermore, the process of gathering and analyzing the data has been presented in detail which means that another researcher could replicate it in another setting. However, since the reliability is quite low due to the general scope of the study, there is no guarantee that another study will find the same results.

According to Kvale, Brinkmann and Torhell (2014), validity is when a method investigates what it is supposed to investigate. In this study, previous research within the field was examined to illuminate issues and with background in this knowledge, the research questions of this study developed. To ensure that the information covered in the interviews were in accordance with the research questions, the interview guide was divided into themes where each theme represented one research question (see Appendix A). The validity of the study was also discussed during the pilot interview, and attention was focused on making sure that the questions investigated what they were supposed to.

Because the present study is small scale with a limited number of participants, the findings cannot be generalized to a larger population. Despite this, the results can still provide relevant and useful information that is beneficial for the current field of research. In addition, this study could be replicated in a broader scope to gain higher generalizability.

### 3.7 Ethical considerations

All the participants were informed about the study and its objective twice, both initially and at the time of the interviews. During the initial contact, when the teachers were asked to participate, the consent claim was secured. Prior to the interview they received additional information about the study and their rights namely; ensuring confidentiality throughout the entire process, that their participation is voluntary and that they can withdrawal at any time, both when it comes to certain questions in the interview and from the study as a whole (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002). The researcher also asked for the participants' consent to record the interviews.

To further ensure confidentiality, the participants' names were changed early in the process to aliases e.g., Teacher A, Teacher B and so on. In addition, more specific information about the teachers as the exact subject combination of all teachers was not revealed. The participants were also asked if they were interested in taking part of the finished study (Ventenskapsrådet, 2002).

### 3.8 Limitations

As any choice of method, there are limitations to a qualitative interview approach which needs to be taken into consideration. First of all, the actual interview situation may have affected the results. Even though the interviewer had no position of power over the interviewee, the interview situation per se can make the participants feel observed which can be uncomfortable (Kvale, Brinkmann & Torhell, 2014). However, certain steps were taken in order to make the interview situation as comfortable and secure as possible for the participants (see Procedure) and the researcher did not notice any signs during the interviews indicating that the interviewees were uncomfortable.

Secondly, interviews are based on teachers' conceptions and there is no guarantee that this correlates with the actual reality (McKay, 2006). This signifies that the results may reflect more what the teachers think they should say or what they believe the researcher wants to hear. Yet, due to the non-existing power-relation between the interviewer and the interviewees, there are no foreseeable advantages of being dishonest.

Lastly and most importantly, interviews could be seen as a one-way conversation which aims to find out information about a certain topic and one has to remember that the researcher always has monopoly when it comes to interpreting what the interviewees mean (Kvale, Brinkmann & Torhell, 2014). However, as explained above, the researcher went over the



recordings reasonably close after the interviews to make sure that important nuances were highlighted and commented on in the transcriptions i.e., body language, tone of voice and irony to validate the analysis.

## **4 Results**

The results are presented in the same order as the research questions, starting with the teachers' objectives for using peer assessment on oral production (4.1), followed by advantages (4.2) and challenges (4.3) of incorporating peer assessment as well as necessary requirements for it to work and become a beneficial learning activity (4.4).

### **4.1 Teachers' objectives for using peer assessment of oral language skills**

In this section, the results regarding the teachers' objectives for using peer assessment of oral language skills will be presented. Altogether, five goals that seem to be especially prominent and important were identified.

#### **4.1.1 Activation of all students**

The most common classroom situation in which the teachers in this study use peer assessment of oral language skills is when students are presenting a prepared speech or an oral presentation of certain topics. Since the speeches are presented by one student or in smaller groups the rest of the class become an audience. Thus, teachers claim that one of their primary goals with using peer assessment on oral production is to make the audience more active and engaged. Teacher A believes that when you involve the bigger group of students in assessing their peers "you keep those who are listeners more active than they would otherwise have been"<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, if you have a big class that will present the same lesson, peer assessment can make them stay more focused for a longer period of time. Teacher E agrees that peer assessment increases the overall concentration of students. In fact, he believes that the entire classroom atmosphere changes since peer assessment catches the audience's attention. Teacher B also claims that the overall participation and attentiveness of students increase when implementing peer assessment of oral language skills. She develops the beliefs of Teacher E and highlights the importance of making students understand that they are not

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<sup>1</sup> "man håller de som är lyssnare mer aktiva än vad de annars hade varit"

solely there as a passive audience but that they can learn something from each other's performances.

[Peer assessment] makes the audience a little more attentive [...]. [T]he group of students is not only there as an audience that makes it hard for the person who's speaking but they are there because they can also learn something from the presentation situations. That, I see as a great advantage, making them aware of the fact that you can actually learn as a listener<sup>2</sup> (Teacher B)

#### **4.1.2 Clarification and developed understanding of assessment criteria**

According to some teachers in this study, peer assessment can be used to clarify assessment criteria. Teacher D explains that she sometimes uses an assessment rubric that students can use as a guideline when assessing the oral presentations of peers. Since the assessment rubric she uses is based on the steering documents for the different English courses, peer assessment becomes an opportunity for students to get to know the assessment criteria. Moreover, she claims that by assessing peers out from given assessment criteria, students can reach a greater understanding of what is expected of them and get inspired by the oral presentation of their peers. As a long-term consequence, she believes that peer assessment can contribute to a consensus between students and their teacher when it comes to assessment.

One purpose [with peer assessment] is for students to work with and understand the assessment criteria and to actually learn what to do by looking at someone else.<sup>3</sup>

According to Teacher B, peer assessment can clarify different assessment aspects and when students "are forced to give response [to peers] that is relevant in relation to the assessment criteria"<sup>4</sup> the steering documents are broken down into understandable pieces which will enhance students' understanding of what is expected of them. Teacher A also stresses the fact

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<sup>2</sup> [Kamratbedömning] gör åhörarna lite mer uppmärksamma [...]. [Å]hörarna inte bara är där som en publik som gör det jobbigt för den som talar utan dom finns där för att dom också kan lära sig någonting av presentationssituationerna. Det ser jag som en jättefördel, att man uppmärksammar de saker som man faktiskt kan lära sig som åhörare

<sup>3</sup> Ett syfte [med kamratbedömning] är att eleverna ska kunna jobba med och förstå kunskapskraven och faktiskt genom att titta på någon annan lära sig vad man ska göra själv.

<sup>4</sup> "tvingas att ge respons [till klasskamrater] som är relevant utifrån kunskapskraven"

that peer assessment is a tool for students “to learn how to identify important components of how a good speech should be.”<sup>5</sup>

### **4.1.3 Strengthen students’ confidence and positive reinforcement**

All teachers in the present study mention *two stars and a wish*, or a similar approach, as something they have worked with when it comes to peer assessment on oral production. This approach entails that students will raise two aspects with the performance that worked well and one that could be improved and changed for next time. However, teachers in this study sometimes cut out the ‘wish’ and instead solely focus on the positive aspects of students’ performances. Teacher E and B report that when they have worked with peer assessment of oral language skills, they mostly focused on the positive elements rather than shortcomings. Both of them believes that it is incredibly important to strengthen the students who actually made an effort to stand in front of the class and present something. To receive praise after conducting an oral presentation “does something positive for [the students] who have fought their way up there and been nervous all weekend”<sup>6</sup> (Teacher E). In line with this quote, Teacher B and C express that their students often are highly self-critical and aware of their flaws and, therefore, they needed to hear what actually worked rather than what did not work. Teacher A had similar experiences and wanted students to encourage what their peers had performed rather than reinforce possible weaknesses.

Teacher C claims that it can be psychologically beneficial to boost students after an oral presentation. According to him, most students get nervous and uncomfortable in these kinds of situations and, therefore, positive response is valuable for their self-esteem. Usually, peers are good at strengthening each other and “[e]ven if it is a presentation that could have been better they are good at illuminating the positive things”<sup>7</sup>.

### **4.1.4 Facilitation of learning**

Another central objective of using peer assessment of oral language skills, is that both the students who are presenting and the assessors can learn something from it. Teacher D thinks that the most significant learning potential lies with the assessing students. According to her,

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<sup>5</sup> ”att lära sig att uppmärksamma viktiga komponenter i hur ett bra tal ska vara.”

<sup>6</sup> ”gör något positivt för [eleverna] som har kämpat med sig upp där och varit nervös hela helgen”

<sup>7</sup> ”[ä]ven ifall det är en presentation som lämnar en del att önska så är de varit duktiga på att hitta de positiva sakerna”

oral presentations can be seen as a *product of the subject*<sup>8</sup> and students need to develop their thinking around this product as well as to use the subject terms to be able to give relevant response. To exemplify, she explains that “[students] need to know what structure is to be able to talk about it and use those terms”<sup>9</sup> which is something they can learn from peer assessment. Moreover, she believes that peer assessment can contribute to students’ learning since they need to adapt their response and language to the situation and recipient which is one of the goals stated in the English syllabus.

Teacher B also voiced the opinion that the assessing students can learn the most in peer assessment situations since they learn to become better listeners. Furthermore, students can pick up a great deal of knowledge from the presentations when it comes to the content, language and presentation skills. Teacher C has experienced that if students learn to pinpoint what their peers do well, they become better themselves. For example, he explains that if students can identify where and when a PowerPoint presentation is used effectively, they can implement that in their own presentations.

According to Teacher E, peer assessment should be seen as a learning opportunity for all students. He claims that the aspects that the assessing students highlight often are both relevant and meaningful and, therefore, the students presenting can learn a great deal out of the response they receive. Teacher A conveys that one of his primary goals with peer assessment is for the presenters to become better speakers and for students to learn from each other’s performances. Moreover, Teacher D emphasizes that learning how to express yourself and provide constructive criticism is “a useful skill that [students] will need throughout their lives”<sup>10</sup>.

#### **4.1.5 Implementation of the steering documents**

Lastly, two teachers shed light on another objective behind why they use peer assessment. Teacher B claims that one of the reasons why she has worked with peer assessment of oral language skills is that there is an expectation in the steering documents that she should do so. Teacher C also highlights this aspect and states that “[peer assessment] is included in the

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<sup>8</sup> *Ämnesspecifik produkt*

<sup>9</sup> ”[eleverna] måste veta vad struktur är för att kunna prata om det och använda dom termerna”

<sup>10</sup> ”en användbar kunskap som [eleverna] måste ha med sig i livet”

syllabus, that you should assess each other's and your own performances, so that is a part of our mission [as teachers]”.<sup>11</sup>

## 4.2 Advantages with using peer assessment of oral language skills

According to the teachers in this study, there are several advantages with using peer assessment of oral language skills that can aid both teachers and students. These advantages will be presented below.

### 4.2.1 Facilitation of direct feedback

One advantage with peer assessment on oral production that the teachers point out is that it is a way for students to receive direct feedback i.e., response in close relation to their performances. Teacher B explains that she wants to give her response to students individually but usually, there is no possibility to do this right after the lesson and to give individual direct feedback in class would take too much time. Hence, she thinks that peer assessment is one way for students to get response immediately after their presentations. Similar to the viewpoint of Teacher B, Teacher E profoundly believes in direct feedback. Since oral presentations are often very stressful for many students, he believes that direct feedback can have a positive effect on students' self-confidence.

According to Teacher D, peer assessment is a great way to make sure that all students receive response of a direct nature. In her lessons, peer assessment is often conducted orally, but sometimes students write comments on a piece of paper that the presenting student later obtains in an envelope. Both of these methods result in students receiving response immediately after their performances. As Teacher E stated, many students feel that oral presentations are stressful and Teacher D thinks it is beneficial for students to get some kind of acknowledgment immediately after a performance and that this response does not always have to come from the teacher.

One clear advantage is that nothing gets uncommented if you take help from students [...] and I think that is extra important at oral presentations where there usually is notable stress in one or the other way. Everyone has performed something and you

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<sup>11</sup> ”[kamratbedömning] är ju inbakat i kunskapskraven, att man ska bedöma varandras och sina egna prestationer så det är ju liksom en del av vårt uppdrag [som lärare]”

need some type of response and this does not always have to come from me as a teacher.<sup>12</sup>

#### **4.2.2 Facilitation of students' understanding and uptake**

Even if teachers are educated in providing successful, progressive response there are advantages with peer assessment which sometimes makes it favorable. According to Teacher E, peer assessment can be easier for students to understand and in that students listen and react differently to response from peers than if the teacher would convey the same response. Also, Teacher E expresses that the dependency on the teacher and the power-relation between teachers and students can be problematic. In groups where the students are high-performing and grade-focused "it can be hard to reach across with response that does not entail providing a grade"<sup>13</sup>. For this reason, assessment from peers can sometimes be more beneficial and helpful.

Since teachers are grading students' performances, Teacher D also concludes that it is advantageous that classroom assessment does not always come from the teacher. Similar to what Teacher E reports, Teacher D argues that sometimes when she gives response after oral presentations, students only listen to grading clues. However, if students assess each other, they listen and assimilate differently. Furthermore, Teacher D voiced the opinion that students can be more personal in their response to each other. To exemplify, students can say "I knew that you were super nervous but it was not noticeable!"<sup>14</sup> and "You fiddled with your pen all the time and you have to stop that"<sup>15</sup>. These are aspects she deems as irrelevant to point out since they are not a part of the course. However, this response may be important for students' overall development.

#### **4.2.3 Facilitation of teacher work, grading, and assessment**

According to the teachers in this study, it is not only students who can gain from peer assessment. There are also several advantages for teachers. Firstly, peer assessment can

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<sup>12</sup> En klar fördel är att ingenting blir okommenterat ifall man tar hjälp av eleverna [...] det tycker jag är extra viktig vid muntliga presentationer där det ändå är en anmärkningsvärd anspänning oftast på ett eller annat sätt. Alla har ju presterat något och man behöver ju någon form utav respons och den kanske inte alltid måste komma från mig som lärare.

<sup>13</sup> "det kan vara svårt att nå fram med respons som inte innebär att man sätter ett betyg".

<sup>14</sup> "Jag visste att du var jättenervös men det märktes inte!"

<sup>15</sup> "Du stod och tryckte på pennen hela tiden och det måste du sluta med"

reduce the general workload of teachers. Teacher C admits that it can be very stressful to be a teacher and that peer assessment can be a way to both fulfill the purpose of the English course and to relieve yourself from some work. Likewise, Teacher B expresses that many students often want response from her before on oral presentation which takes a great deal of time. She suggests that if students could practice their presentations and conduct peer assessment before the actual presentation, the workload could be reduced.

[Peer assessment] is one way to reduce certain workload from the teacher since you let the students give response on their peers' presentations first and then they can do the oral performance before the teacher.<sup>16</sup>

Secondly, Teacher C thinks that when the assessment from peers matches his own thoughts, it can feel comforting because if many people in the classroom notice the same things they are probably true. Teacher D feels that when students and the teacher share the same thoughts and ideas about an oral presentation, the grading becomes less stressful and easier to communicate. Moreover, both Teacher C and D think that that the assessment from peers usually match their own. Teacher D states that “[y]ou seldom end up in situations where [the students] have detailed feedback that is completely different from my own”<sup>17</sup>.

Thirdly, Teacher A and E believe that students can show a lot of knowledge when they assess their peers and that teachers can use that information as a basis for their own assessment of those students. According to Teacher A, students may express many wise thoughts in these situations and, ideally, they show things, both when it comes to language and content, that add on to his information about the students.

### 4.3 Challenges with using peer assessment of oral language skills

Since all five teachers in the study work with peer assessment one can assume that their general attitude concerning this approach is positive. However, all of them seem to identify a few challenges with using it in the English language classroom.

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<sup>16</sup> [Kamratbedömning] är ett sätt att minska på viss arbetsbörda från läraren i och med att man låter eleverna ge respons först på sina klasskamraters presentationer och sedan får de göra det muntliga framförandet framför läraren.

<sup>17</sup> ”[m]an hamnar sällan i situationer där [eleverna] har utförlig feedback som står tvärt emot min”

### 4.3.1 Time

One of the most illuminated issues with peer assessment is the fact that it can be time-consuming. Teacher B states that “like everything else [peer assessment] needs to be planned and prepared and thought through before you implement it”<sup>18</sup> and because it takes much time to prepare, she sometimes prioritizes other things instead of peer assessment. Similar to the viewpoint of Teacher B, Teacher D states that peer assessment is time-consuming mostly due to preparation. She believes that teachers need to prepare students a lot before the activity to obtain positive effects from it. Therefore, there are other learning activities that she has prioritized over using peer assessment because she does not have time to put in the work that is necessary.

[T]he disadvantage with peer response is that in order for it to be good, for it to be really good, then you need to talk about it pretty much before [for example] how you can express yourselves and what kinds of examples you can give [...] and you don't always have time for that, especially not in big groups. There are other things that are prioritized that you have to deal with in the course.<sup>19</sup>(Teacher D)

Peer assessment is not only time-consuming in preparation, but also in the actual classroom implementation. Teacher A has experienced that it often takes a lot more time than you think, especially in the beginning of the implementation process. When students are assessing their peers for the first couple of times, it always takes a lot more time than he has planned for and as a consequence, he might have to change the entire course plan. However, after years of experience, he has learned that it is a process and the more you work with peer assessment, the more effective it will become.

That peer assessment takes a lot of lesson time is something that Teacher B agrees with. She believes that for peer assessment activities to work efficiently they have to be adapted to the specific learning situation which takes much time. However, she emphasizes that if you

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<sup>18</sup> ”[kamratbedömning) behöver ju som allt annat liksom planeras och förberedas och tänkas igenom innan man genomför det”

<sup>19</sup> [N]ackdelen med kamratresponsen är att för att det ska bli bra, för att det ska bli riktigt bra, då måste man prata rätt mycket om det innan [till exempel] hur man uttrycker sig och vad man kan ge för exempel liksom [...] och det har man inte alltid tid med, framförallt inte i stora grupper. Det är andra saker som går före som man ska hinna med på kursen.



plan one peer assessment activity carefully, you can have that as a basis for other occasions which can save the teacher time in the planning process.

### **4.3.2 Students' understanding of the purpose with peer assessment**

Another difficulty with peer assessment brought up in the interviews is that students do not take the responsibility given to them seriously. Teacher B states that she has experienced this; nevertheless, she also believes that it has a lot to do with how teachers prepare students for the task. She admits that she might not have prepared students enough and that peer assessment has worked more as a complement than something that was emphasized in teaching. Lack of preparation resulted in that students did not fully understand the benefits of peer assessment.

Teacher A reports that there is a difference in students' seriousness if peer assessment is conducted orally or in written form. His experience is that written, anonymous peer assessment has not worked out so well since students did not take it seriously and commented on irrelevant, personal aspects. According to him, "it becomes much more honest and much more credible if you do [peer assessment] orally right afterward"<sup>20</sup>. Teacher E seems to agree that oral direct feedback is better since "if it is a sane atmosphere in the group you don't say whatsoever in that situation"<sup>21</sup>.

As Teacher B previously stated, it is essential that students understand the purpose and the profits of peer assessment to take it seriously. Teacher D states that it is crucial to explain and emphasize to students that it is an important task that is given to them before conducting peer assessment. Moreover, Teacher D has experienced that her students did not always understand the purpose with peer assessment. She thinks that they understood the gain for the peer who receives response but not that all students, the assessors included, can learn from it. Teacher C and E think that it is hard to know if students understand the purpose, but their impression is that most students appreciated learning what they did right and what can become better next time. Teacher B adds that if peer assessment activities can be done before the actual presentations, the purpose might become clearer since students can use the response right away.

Because students have problems with understanding the purpose with peer assessment, Teacher B voiced the opinion that her students did not value peer's response as much as they valued response from her which is problematic. She understands this reaction since there is a

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<sup>20</sup> "det blir mycket mer ärligt och mycket mer trovärdigt om man gör [kamratbedömning] muntligt direkt efteråt"

<sup>21</sup> "om det är vettig stämning i gruppen så säger man ju inte vad som helst i det läget"

power-relation between students and teachers and that it is the teacher who has the final decision when it comes to, for example, grading. However, she still thinks it is a pity that students feel this way since peers also can provide relevant response. When students have come as far as upper secondary school, they have gained a lot of knowledge and can share useful information with each other. Therefore, it is vital “[t]o get the students to understand that their input is valuable”<sup>22</sup> and for them to believe that response, from themselves and their peers, is relevant.

### **4.3.3 The quality of response given by students**

For peer assessment to become fruitful for students, response needs to be specific, informative and progressive. According to some teachers in this study, it is a challenge to develop this ability in students. Teachers C, D and E have all experienced peer assessment that did not have the desirable quality. Teacher D conveys that she tries to develop students’ ability to pinpoint exactly what is good or bad and how to explain that in a constructive way. Actually, the three teachers mentioned above asked their students to avoid the word *good* completely. Teacher C admits that “[o]f course it is nice [for students] to hear that something was good but maybe there are other adjectives you could use instead if you should be specific”<sup>23</sup>. Teacher E believes that there is always a risk that assessment does not become qualitative and that students only say something because they are told to which usually results in vague and unspecific response.

## **4.4 Necessary requirements for peer assessment to work**

The teachers in this study have identified a few aspects that teachers need to bear in mind when incorporating peer assessment for it to work advantageously and become a worthwhile learning experience for all students. These necessary requirements will be presented below.

### **4.4.1 A practical aspect - the structure of response**

First, all teachers in the present study use some kind of assessment schedule so that the structure becomes clear for students i.e., who assesses who and when. The design of this

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<sup>22</sup> ”[a]tt få eleverna att förstå att deras input är värdefull”

<sup>23</sup> ”[d]et är ju kul [för eleverna] att höra att någonting man gjorde var bra men det finns kanske andra adjektiv man kan använda istället om man ska vara specifik”

structure looks different from teacher to teacher, but they all seem to agree that some kind of framework is needed for peer assessment to work.

Sometimes the entire group assess the student or group that is presenting but usually, a couple of students are given the role as assessors and they need to pay extra attention to what is said (Teacher A and B). According to Teacher A, it is not so important what structure teachers decide on, as long as all students get the chance to both give and receive response. In contrast with Teacher A, Teacher E states that it can be very challenging to organize who will give response to whom and that there are so many aspects that need to be taken in consideration when creating the assessment schedule. In other words, Teacher E thinks that this needs to be carefully and thoroughly planned for peer assessment to be successful.

Teacher C has come up with a structure that he thinks works well. When he works with peer assessment of oral language skills, it is always the student who just conducted his or her oral presentation that assesses the following presentation. The reason for this is that students can then let go of their own performance and entirely focus on the peer they are assessing.

My plan is that when someone has been up there and performed, it is that person who gives feedback next because then you don't sit and think about your own speech but then you can let go of that [...] and relax and focus on your friend<sup>24</sup>

Even if Teacher C has the structure of one responsible assessing student, he thinks it is important to include the entire audience of peers and emphasize that they also need to be active and listen to all the presentations. Teacher D emphasize that teachers need to take time during the lesson to clarify the purpose of the set-up and how it will work, so it becomes clear to students what is expected and when they are supposed to listen more carefully.

#### **4.4.2 Preparation and training**

Second, the teachers interviewed seem to agree that it is crucial to prepare students for peer assessment activities. Teacher D states that teachers need to allow time for preparation if they want students to gain a deeper understanding of the purpose and for the assessment activity to

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<sup>24</sup> Jag har väl den tanken att när någon varit uppe och presterat, så är det den personen som ger feedback sen för då sitter man inte och tänker på sitt eget tal utan då kan man släppa det [...] och koppla av och fokusera på sin kompis

become rewarding. This includes stressing what kinds of elements students can look for, what terms they can use and provide them with lots of examples of how they can express their thoughts.

Working with examples of what to look for and how students can express what they think constructively, is stressed as essential by teachers in the present. According to Teacher C, teachers cannot take for granted that students in upper secondary school know how to give constructive criticism and, therefore, teachers have to provide students with examples of effective assessment. Furthermore, he emphasizes how important it is for response to be specific and that you have to work a lot with training students on how to avoid becoming too general in their assessment. He also states that when peer assessment has not turned out the way he hoped, it was due to lack of preparation which resulted in vague response where students did not specify what was good or what needed to become better for next time. Simply put, “[students] must have some tools with them to be able to conduct [peer assessment]”<sup>25</sup> (Teacher A).

Also, teachers in this study seem to believe that it is favorable to pick out a couple of aspects that student should focus on in their assessment. Usually, these are presented on the board or in the assessment rubric so that students get something to emanate from. Teacher E suggests that teachers should provide students with “some things to look at [...] instead of fishing for everything at the same time. [Because t]hat is probably a mistake I think”<sup>26</sup>. Moreover, Teacher C explains that peer assessment of oral language skills differs from other types of peer assessment e.g., peer assessment on writing since students can only listen to the speech once. This implies that the time for consideration is a lot shorter and that students need to be very focused and concentrated. Therefore, Teacher C and B believe that teachers have to prepare students even more for peer assessment on oral production. Teacher B adds that it is probably favorable to have fewer elements to concentrate on in this type of peer assessment since oral presentations will “disappear” right after the performance.

Moreover, to succeed with peer assessment, it is not enough to work with it once. Teachers in the present study emphasize that it is a process for students to become proficient assessors and that peer assessment has to be a recurrent theme in the English language classroom. Teacher E accentuates that teachers should not give up if the first trials do not turn out as planned but to keep on training students and eventually, the work will pay off. Teacher

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<sup>25</sup> ”[eleverna] måste ha några verktyg med sig för att kunna göra [kamratbedömning]”

<sup>26</sup> ”några saker att titta på [...] istället för att lapa efter allting på en gång. [För d]et tror jag kan vara ett misstag”

E and D suggest that it might be a good idea for students to begin their peer assessment training on oral presentations of students which do not belong to the group. As an example, they propose that teachers can use authentic speeches from *bedömningsportalen*<sup>27</sup> that all Swedish teachers of English have access to. This enables students to practice in a safe environment and to discuss the assessment criteria with each other and the teacher which hopefully result in a common frame of reference (Teacher D).

#### 4.4.3 Classroom climate and group composition

Lastly, the group of students and the classroom climate plays an essential role. Teacher A states that the group of students have to be safe and sound for peer assessment to be a successful and positive learning experience for all students. According to Teacher E, peer assessment of oral language skills has worked out well almost every time but the few times it has not worked, it was not due to the activity as such. On these occasions, it had more to do with the atmosphere, dynamics and harmony of the group since a few other learning activities had not worked out in that group either. Furthermore, he adds that it is has nothing to do with the proficiency level of students but more that the group should not be too dysfunctional. In other words, peer assessment activities need to be conducted in a secure classroom climate to become a positive learning experience for students.

Additionally, Teacher A, C and E voice the opinion that it is paramount that students are trained in giving constructive response to ensure that peer assessment does not become too personal since that will affect both individuals and the classroom climate negatively. Teacher A claims that “[i]f the students are not enough nuanced in their criticism they can easily infringe on [personal space] and assess things [...] which is not relevant”<sup>28</sup>. In groups where teachers fear that students might not be able to give constructive response and that there is a risk for personal insults, Teacher A, B, C and E have asked students to solely focus on positive elements of the performances (see page 14-15). Moreover, Teacher C explains that peer assessment can enhance the classroom climate since “[students] usually are pretty generous towards each other which can wield the class together”<sup>29</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup> The Swedish assessment support platform

<sup>28</sup> [o]m eleverna inte är tillräckligt nyanserade i sin kritik så kan det lätt bli att man gör personliga övertramp och bedömer saker [...] som inte är relevanta”

<sup>29</sup> ”[elever] är ofta ganska generösa mot varandra och det kan ju svetsa samman klassen”

## 5 Discussion

The teacher-interviews have provided insights concerning five teachers' conceptions of using peer assessment of oral language skills. The results of the present study will now be discussed and compared with previous research to discern possible contributions and pedagogical implications.

As stated in the introduction, peer assessment is promoted by Skolverket (2011a) since it can bring positive effects to learning. Therefore, it is quite surprising that only two teachers in this study convey that they use peer assessment since it is stated in the English syllabus for upper secondary school (Skolverket, 2011b) and, consequently, is a part their teaching mission. Another objective with peer assessment, emphasized by both teachers in this study and previous research, is to clarify and develop students' understanding of what is being assessed. The steering documents and assessment criteria can be hard for teachers to explain and for students to understand and, according to some of the teachers interviewed, peer assessment can be used as a tool to reach greater understanding. They claim that when students are forced to assess each other out of certain criteria they familiarize themselves with the syllabus and develop an awareness of what is expected of them. In the long run, this may lead to assessment consensus between the steering documents, the teacher and the students. That peer assessment can increase students' understanding, is similar to what Skolverket (2011a) states and what Fazel (2015) and Isaksson and Tallefors (2014) found in their studies, which indicates that it is an important goal with peer assessment.

As previously stated, a primary goal for teachers is to provide students with opportunities to learn. Teachers in this study have figured out that peer assessment can be used to activate all students in classroom situations where the majority of students would otherwise have been passive, as during oral presentations. They state that by using peer assessment students are forced to listen more attentively and stay focused for a longer period of time. Fazel (2015), Peng (2009), and Langan et al. (2005) investigated this aspect and found that students' general participation and attentiveness increased by using peer assessment which is in accordance with the view of the teachers in the present study. Furthermore, since peer assessment of oral language skills needs to be carried out faster compared with e.g., peer assessment on writing, it requires even greater focus and attentiveness as well as a clear structure (Langan et al., 2005). The teachers in this study also emphasize that a clear and well-organized structure of response is essential.

That peer assessments can contribute to increased learning among students is another objective with peer assessment highlighted by the teachers in the present study. Falchikov (2005) claims that peer assessment holds huge potential for learning and as stated in the introduction, peer assessment is connected to metacognition. Some teachers in this study suggest that by listening, reflecting, analyzing and processing oral production of peers, students can pick up aspects valuable for their own presentations, which indicates an increased reflection of their own learning process i.e. metacognition. Moreover, teachers in the present study suggest that response given by peers usually is both relevant and important and that the students presenting can use this information to become better speakers. This indicates that there are also links to the sociocultural perspective (Vygotsky, 1978) since students help each other to reach higher levels of knowledge. In light of this, there seems to be no doubt, either from previous research or the teachers in the present study, that students can learn from peer assessment. However, Isaksson and Tallefors (2014) conclude that teachers have to clearly illuminate this learning opportunity for students since it was not obvious for the students in their study that they could benefit and learn from their peers' presentations. One of the teachers in this study had experienced the same problem and stated that it is crucial to pinpoint the learning possibility for students.

Furthermore, teachers in this study identify one essential objective with peer assessment of oral language skills which previous research has not addressed. That is to strengthen students' confidence and to use peer assessment as a tool to positively reinforce students. According to them, it is a challenge for a majority of students to stand in front of the class and, thus, it is crucial to give them praise and acknowledgment afterward. They also state that the strengths of students' performances need to be illuminated, more than possible weaknesses, since students already are very self-critical. Along similar lines, Topping (2009) suggests that peer assessment could start off by encountering positive aspects of students' performances and later move on to areas in need of improvement which may result in a greater acceptance of negative comments.

As stated above, oral presentations and peer assessment, in general, can be a stressful experiences for many students. Therefore, teachers in the present study state that the classroom climate and group composition is vital in order for peer assessment to become a positive learning experience. They conclude that the classroom climate needs to be safe and sound and that the group of students have to be functional as well as knowing how to provide assessment in a way that does not infringe of students' personal space. According to Lundahl (2014), it is the teacher's responsibility to create a classroom climate where students can

express both strengths and weaknesses to each other. This entails that teachers constantly need to make ethical decisions so that this activity becomes safe and beneficial for all students. To focus solely on positive aspects in peer assessment activities could be seen as such a decision that some teachers in this study have made. They report that in dysfunctional groups or in groups where students do not have the ability to convey constructive criticism advantageously, they solely focus on peer assessment to be positive and empowering. All classrooms work differently and teachers have to find their own ways of creating a preferable climate (Løkensgard Hoel, 2001). As one teacher in the present study suggests, peer assessment can actually work as a tool to enhance the classroom climate since students often are good at complimenting each other.

Apart from investigating teachers' objectives for using peer assessment, this study also looked more closely into teachers' views on advantages and disadvantages. One advantage highlighted by teachers in this study is that peer assessment can be a tool to make sure that all students receive some kind of response in close relation to their performances. Usually, there is not much time during class and, for different reasons, teachers might not want to give their individual response in front of the entire group. According to Hattie and Timperly (2007), immediate response is the most effective type and if peer assessment can ensure that all students receive direct feedback, teachers might consider using it more due to the possible increase in learning.

Furthermore, there seems to be advantages with assessment from peers compared to teacher assessment. Teachers convey that peer assessment can be more beneficial since students listen differently to response from peers. Topping (2009) and Jönsson (2013) claim that this could be due to the fact that students are at a similar level of linguistic knowledge and that they usually explain more thoroughly what they mean. However, teachers in this study believe this is more a result of the imbalanced power-relation between students and teachers and that it can be challenging to convey response not connected to grading. Isaksson and Tallefors (2014) share similar thoughts and suggest that it is favorable to exchange some of the teacher response with response from peers due to the power position teachers have over students. However, there are conflicting results regarding this. Harris & Brown (2013) came to the conclusion that students tended to value teacher assessment higher than assessment from peers. That students value teacher assessment higher is revealed in the present study as well. In addition, it has been shown that students might not take the extended responsibility given to them seriously which is a necessity if peer assessment is to be incorporated positively (Falchikov & Magin, 1997; Langan et al., 2005). Nevertheless, this seems to be strongly



connected to how much teachers clarify the purpose and prepare students for the task. To make students understand the purpose with peer assessment of oral language skills appears to be challenging for teachers in this study. Hence, it makes it even more important for teachers to take time explaining and preparing students for peer assessment to become a fruitful learning activity for all involved.

Time seems to be an additional issue. Teachers in the present study and previous research (Cheng & Warren, 1997; Peng, 2009; Topping, 1998) seem to agree that peer assessment can be time-consuming both in terms of preparation and the actual classroom implementation. For peer assessment to become a successful learning activity it has to be prepared and planned and teachers in this study admit that they sometimes have prioritized other classroom activities instead of peer assessment due to time constraints. According to the Swedish National Agency of Education, teachers often experience a lack of time (Skolverket, 2015) and feel stressed at work (Skolverket, 2016). One teacher in the present study reinforces this and claims that it can be stressful to be a teacher. However, this study has also shown that implementation of peer assessment can have a facilitating and unloading effect for teachers which is in accordance with Jönsson's (2013) ideas. To exemplify, teachers in this study express that the assessing students can prove their knowledge during peer assessment activities when it comes to both language and content and that teachers can use this information as a basis for their own assessment. Also, if students and the teacher share the same thoughts about a performance it can be comforting. Moreover, teachers in the present study claim that peer assessment is a process and that the work and time spent will pay off eventually. Therefore, from a long-term perspective, peer assessment can be worth the extra time since the potential benefits are greater than the time challenge (Falchikov, 2005).

A substantial amount of research claims that training and preparation is a necessary requirement to incorporate peer assessment effectively in the classroom (Cheng & Warren, 1997, 1999; De Grez et al., 2012; Falchikov, 2005; Panadero, 2016; Peng, 2009; Saito, 2008; Topping, 1998). We cannot expect students to become successful assessors without providing them with training opportunities (Falichikov, 2005) and it is the duty of the teacher to ensure that students learn how to provide constructive criticism that does not hurt their peers (Lundahl, 2014). Some teachers in this study suggest that it can be beneficial to practice peer assessment on authentic, recorded speeches e.g. from the Swedish assessment support platform before they assess each other's performances. Jönsson (2013) suggests a similar approach where teachers could video record an oral presentation that students and teachers could assess together as a training exercise. Thus, students are provided with an opportunity

to discuss, think, and the negotiate assessment with both each other and with the teacher. In addition, teachers in the present study emphasized that it is extremely important that teachers provide students with good examples of specific constructive criticism in the training process to ensure a high quality of the response. Rotsaert et al. (2018) found that initial anonymous peer assessment could have positive effects on the quality of peer assessment. Teachers in this study seem not to share this perspective since anonymous peer assessment did not turn out favorably for them. They claim that oral face-to-face assessment is preferable since students take it more seriously and that the quality of assessment increases e.g., due to not commenting on personal irrelevant aspects. In other words, there are conflicting results regarding anonymity.

To summarize, many aspects addressed in previous research and the results of this study seems to point in the same direction. Nevertheless, contrasting results have been revealed and some aspects that the teachers in the present study highlight as essential, have not been discussed in the same manner or degree in previous research. Hence, when interpreting the findings of the present study, one needs to have in mind that it is a small-scale study and only provides insights from a few teachers. In addition, all teachers in this study have Swedish as an additional subject which might have affected the results since Swedish teachers, in general, are more used to working with peer assessment than e.g. teachers of foreign languages. Furthermore, a fairly large amount of previous research on the topic have a summative approach to peer assessment and consequently focus on the agreement between teacher and student grading as well validity and reliability of peer assessment. However, “reaching high validity and reliability is not the main goal of peer assessment” (Peng, 2009, p. 156) or the focus of this study.

## **6 Conclusion**

The purpose of the present study was to provide further qualitative insight on teachers’ conceptions of using peer assessment of oral language skills regarding objectives, advantages and challenges as well as what teachers need to bear in mind when incorporation peer assessment. To be able to answer these questions interviews were conducted with five upper secondary teachers of English.

Four main objectives for using peer assessment of oral language skills were identified, apart from teachers using it to implement the English syllabus. These objectives include: to activate all students in the classroom, to clarify and develop students’ understanding of

assessment criteria, to positively reinforce students and strengthen their confidence and, last but not least, to enhance students' learning.

In relation to the second question, both advantages and challenges with peer assessment of oral language skills have been singled out. The identified advantages are that peer assessment facilitates: direct feedback, students' understanding and uptake, as well as teachers' work, grading, and assessment. When it comes to challenges, teachers illuminate that it is time-consuming and that it can be difficult to make students understand the purpose of the activity as well as to develop their ability to provide qualitative response.

Although the present study is limited in scale and the results are not generalizable, there are pedagogical implications that can be drawn from the results which might be valuable for teachers who want to incorporate peer assessment of oral language skills in their teaching. Some of these answers are provided in the third research question. Firstly, a practical aspect that seems to be beneficial is to have a clear, thought-out structure of the peer assessment activity so that students know what is expected of them and when. Secondly, since peer assessment is a complex interpersonal process which can be both difficult and stressful for students, they need to be prepared and trained for the activity. This could include solid explanations of the purpose with peer assessment and providing students with good examples of constructive criticism. It is a process for students to become skilled assessors and the more students are trained and prepared the better they will become. Thirdly, it is necessary to have a safe classroom climate and functional group composition in order for peer assessment to become a beneficial and positive learning experience for all students. Lastly, teachers need more time to incorporate peer assessment in the English language classroom. As a consequence to peer assessment being time-consuming, and that many teachers today experience stress and time constraints, teachers might not implement peer assessment of language skills in the way and/or as much as they want. Considering the many advantages shown in this study, this is unfortunate and need to be addressed.

More research is needed to get the full picture of Swedish teachers' conceptions of using peer assessment of oral language skills. A more extensive study with a larger number of participants would be desirable, preferably with greater geographical dissemination in Sweden. Furthermore, since the present study and previous research found somewhat contrasting results regarding anonymity, it would be interesting to investigate this issue further regarding peer assessment on oral production. Hopefully, this study has contributed with valuable insights to the current field of research and that this is just a starting point for a growing interest to find out more about this particular topic.

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# Appendix A

## Starta upp intervjun:

- Information om studien
- Är det okej att jag spelar in?
- Du kommer vara anonym under hela processen.

## Bakgrundsfrågor 1

1. Hur många års erfarenhet har du av läraryrket?
  - a. Hur många års erfarenhet har du i just engelskämnet?
  - b. Hur är din erfarenhet uppdelad på skolnivå?
2. Undervisar du i något annat ämne än engelska?
  - a. Vilket/vilka?

## Intervjuguide

### Tema 1

3. Skulle du kunna beskriva ett tillfälle när du arbetat med kamratbedömning på muntliga färdigheter?
  - a. Inom vilket område/tema var det?
  - b. Hur startades det upp, genomfördes och avslutades det?
4. I vilket syfte använder du dig av kamratbedömning på muntliga färdigheter?
  - a. Enligt din upplevelse, skulle du säga att eleverna förstår syftet?
  - b. Hur har du pratat om syftet med eleverna/hur har du tydliggjort ditt syfte för eleverna?
5. Vad har du för mål med att använda kamratbedömning på muntliga färdigheter?
  - a. Vad, mer specifikt, vill du att eleverna ska lära sig/utveckla?

### Tema 2

6. Vad ser du för fördelar med kamratbedömning på muntliga färdigheter?
  - a. Från elevernas perspektiv?
  - b. Från ett lärarperspektiv?
7. Vad ser du för nackdelar med kamratbedömning på muntliga färdigheter?
  - a. Från elevernas perspektiv?
  - b. Från ett lärarperspektiv?
8. Vad ser du för utmaningar med kamratbedömning på muntliga färdigheter?
  - a. Från elevernas perspektiv?
  - b. Från ett lärarperspektiv?

### Tema 3

9. Vad skulle du säga att lärare behöver tänka på när man ska arbeta med kamratbedömning på muntliga färdigheter?
  - a. Både innan och under kamratbedömningstillfället?
  - b. Finns det något specifikt som man behöver tänka på när man ska göra kamratbedömning på muntliga färdigheter som skiljer sig från skriftlig kamratbedömning?
10. Hur förbereder du eleverna inför själva kamratbedömningstillfället?
11. När det inte fungerade i en grupp, vad skulle du säga att det berodde på?

### Bakgrundsfrågor 2

12. Om du skulle uppskatta, hur mycket kamratbedömning på muntlig framställning har du arbetat med under en termin?
13. Vart skulle du placera in dig i skalan "arbetar mycket med kamratbedömning på muntliga färdigheter", "arbetar ganska mycket med kamratbedömning på muntliga färdigheter", "arbetar ganska lite med kamratbedömning på muntliga färdigheter" "arbetar lite med kamratbedömning på muntliga färdigheter"?
14. Varifrån har du fått din inspiration och kunskap när det kommer till kamratbedömning?

### Avsluta intervjun

- Nu har inte jag några fler frågor planerade, känner du att du skulle vilja tillägga något på ämnet innan vi avslutar?
- Är du intresserad av att ta del av resultatet?