Assessing writers, assessing writing - a dialogical study of grade delivery in Swedish higher education

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A dialogical study of grade delivery in Swedish higher education

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ISBN 978-91-7346-510-6 (print)
ISBN 978-91-7346-511-3 (pdf)
ISSN 0436-1121

Doctoral thesis in Education at the Department of Education, Communication, and Learning, University of Gothenburg.

This thesis is available in full text online:
http://hdl.handle.net/2077/59367

Distribution:
Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, Box 222, 405 30 Göteborg,
acta@ub.gu.se

Foto: Tomma/Siri Meyer-Beining

Tryck:
BrandFactory AB, Kållered, 2019

For Tomma and Siri, as promised

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Abstract

Title:	Assessing writers, assessing writing – a dialogical study of grade delivery in Swedish higher education
Author:	Janna Meyer-Beining
Language:	English with a Swedish summary
ISBN:	978-91-7346-510-6 (print)
ISBN:	978-91-7346-511-3 (pdf)
ISSN:	0436-1121
Keywords:	assessment feedback, higher education, feedback dialogue, response to writing, interaction analysis

Assessment feedback has been discussed as an important resource for providing students with a sense of their current performance relative to institutional expectations and with the information needed to close apparent gaps. Pointing out that this involves complex sense-making processes, recent research has stressed the need to change the nature of assessment feedback from teacher telling to student/teacher/peer dialogues. However, there is still very little empirical research that has explored the sense-making processes that become evident in such feedback dialogues *in situ*.

This dissertation approaches assessment feedback as a unique type of communication and illuminates the issues that become relevant as participants make sense of an assignment and its institutional assessment in the context of face-to-face grade delivery in Swedish higher education. The empirical focus is on the grade conference, a specific type of assessment activity that here involved a student and his or her former supervisor. The analytical work of this dissertation is based on a corpus of ten video- and audio-recorded grade conferences from a graduate module on environmental sustainability assessment where grade delivery was connected to a student-written scientific report. In three separate studies, these recordings were approached from sociocultural and dialogical perspectives, with a particular focus on the ways in which feedback communication was situated in different streams of sociocultural activity and achieved in instances of coordinated communicative action.

The findings suggest that assessment feedback, as a type of communication, involves complex forms of sense-making on two interconnected planes: in the first place, participants in the ten grade conferences made sense of their communicative roles and responsibilities in the current feedback activity. Here, teachers were found to take on a particularly pivotal role, providing guidance for student participation in each meeting. Secondly, participants also made sense of the situated meaning of the performance grade that was being delivered and on the written report on which it was based. This involved intricate negotiations of accountabilities – as student, author, assessor and supervisor – that suggest that this type of assessment feedback provides room for broader, disciplinary, discussions of what it means to be a writer, a student and a supervisor in (Swedish) higher education. These findings give

support to recent calls in the literature for more dialogue in feedback, but also suggest that such dialogical feedback activities need to be designed in a way that permits disagreement and questioning of institutional reasoning, as it needs these instances of uncertainty for participants to lay open and make sense of the many assumptions that underpin the assessment of student writing – as knowledge production and knowledge display – in higher education.

Acknowledgements

Just like any other text, this dissertation is richly populated by the voices of others. Here, I want to thank those whose voices I've heard most loudly, and most clearly, and most necessarily. These are, first and foremost, my supervisors, Åsa Mäkitalo and Sylvi Vigmo. Thank you for taking so much time for reading and rereading and rerereading my texts. Thank you for guiding me into a way of doing research that turned out to be precisely what the project needed. And thank you for having patience when it was most necessary. Secondly, the research environment in its entirety – I know that I have been privileged to be part of an institutional culture that is characterized by great academic generosity. The SDS seminar in particular is a model of collegial support and I want to make sure that everyone who has read and discussed work-in-progress in these meetings knows that I have appreciated their time, effort, and expertise tremendously.

A number of people have commented on versions of this dissertation. I want to thank Liss Kerstin Sylvén for her reading and comments on a preliminary manuscript, Anne Line Wittek for a thorough discussion of a version of this text at the half-way stage and Daniel Persson Thunqvist for his commentary during the final seminar. Prior to the final seminar, Anders Jönsson and Roger Säljö read and commented on parts of an earlier draft of this dissertation, which was very much appreciated. Michèle Grossen and Vera Busse, who has not only been a colleague but a close friend throughout the process, have provided commentary and helpful suggestions on earlier versions of Article 1 and I extend my warmest thanks for that. Ann-Marie Eriksson, thank you not only for providing an excellent corpus to work with, but also for your support at various stages of this dissertation.

My fellow doctoral students: without you this would have been so much less fun. Katka and Niklas, thank you for all the long reading group sessions, for SUAW, and for helping me think. Johanna, without your spontaneous and assertive Yes! to the idea of shutting up and write with me, Article 1 would still be at a draft stage. Thank you from across the B-house. Meike, thanks for Spain and all the lunches. Ann-Thérèse, I get a chance to thank you back for being an unexpected friend and colleague and a wonderful role model for post-dissertation life. Charlott, Elin, Ewa, and Géraldine, you have always been a step ahead of me in this dissertation process. Thank you for modelling

appropriate doctoral student activity and for being quite brilliant at it. Anne and Martin, you know how much I have enjoyed our little sibling group – thank you for all that has involved.

My family and all the friends who have not given up on me by now, I am, apparently, done. It remains to clear away the paper debris and then I will return my attention to you. Thank you for waiting me out.

Göteborg, May 2019
Janna Meyer-Beining

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Part I

Assessing writers, assessing writing

Chapter 1 Introduction

The research presented in this dissertation concerns grade delivery – an inescapable part of learning and teaching at university. In fact, few areas of higher education pedagogy have received more attention in recent years than student assessment. For universities, who are increasingly held accountable by the public and other funding bodies, assessment results provide valuable evidence for measures taken to enable and support student learning (Schneider and Hutt, 2014). Educators, too, are dependent on assessment in their daily practice: partly because institutions demand assessment as a form of quality control, but also because teachers need the information obtained through the appraisal of student work to adjust their teaching practices to increasingly diverse student groups. But the results of institutional assessment are of course most important for the students engaged in different higher education programs – not only are they dependent on the right grades for continued participation in their chosen course of study, for scholarships, or professional careers, they also need the information that assessments can make available to change how they approach a given task, to reconsider previously held assumptions and to present better work in the future.

Performance grades alone cannot provide students with this type of information. While the numerical or letter grades assigned to a piece of work do tell the student something about its quality, this information is meaningful only in relative terms – relative to the performance of peers, or relative to the average performance expected at a particular stage of education (Lynch and Hennessy, 2017). In today's university, where the focus is squarely on giving the students at the center of education the means to structure and sustain their own learning processes, this is clearly inadequate. For students to be able to take charge of their learning within the university and beyond, they need to be in a position to critically reflect on and potentially adjust their current performance to institutional expectations (Sadler, 1998; Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). A performance grade does not allow for this complex type of knowledge production. Instead, it is the way in which assessment results are communicated about, in class, online, or in face-to-face interaction that allow students to make sense of assessment feedback and take appropriate actions with respect to

future work (Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Nicol, 2010; Boud and Molloy, 2013; Carless, 2016).

As two recent review studies indicate, however, institutions of higher education have not always been successful in encouraging productive types of assessment communication (Evans, 2013; Li and de Luca, 2014). In fact, national student surveys consistently indicate student dissatisfaction with the quality and quantity of assessment feedback[1], at the same time as teachers complain that students make too little use of assessment feedback where it is available (Mutch, 2003; Carless, 2006; Walker, 2009). In parts of the literature, it has been suggested that these problems may be related to a lack of communication about the different, often tacit, assumptions that inform teacher expectations in different academic settings (Lea and Street, 2000; O'Donovan, Price and Rust, 2004; Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Since even explicit assessment criteria need to be filled with locally appropriate meaning (Lea and Street, 2000; Sadler, 2009, 2010), however, students need more than be informed about institutional expectations, be it pre or post assessment. Instead, research is increasingly calling for a new approach to assessment in higher education that would engage students in constructive dialogue with peers and teachers (Nicol, 2010; Boud and Molloy, 2013; Carless, 2016) and thus to enable them to "produce meaning from feedback interactions and to use this consciously to influence future action" (Nicol, 2010, p. 504).

Despite a growing interest in these dialogical feedback measures, however, there is little empirical evidence for the concrete ways in which participants engaged in feedback dialogues might produce such meanings. In an exploratory study of written feedback dialogues in an online environment, Ajjawi and Boud (2017) argue that this lack of attention to *in situ* feedback interaction has to be addressed if we are to fully understand how assessment might be effectively used for student learning in higher education. This is a sentiment that has already been raised by Higgins, Hartley and Skelton (2001), more than fifteen years ago. In a short argumentative piece on the state of assessment feedback in higher education practice and research, the authors argued for a reorientation towards researching feedback as a unique form of communication:

[1] See for instance the National Student Survey in England and Wales (Higher Education Funding Council for England 2016); Student Experience Survey in Australia (Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching 2017)

> "instead of asking if the student will take notice of feedback or whether it relates explicitly enough to assessment criteria, or whether the quantity is sufficient, we should be asking how the tutor comes to construct the feedback, how the student understands the feedback (how they make sense of it) and how they make sense of assessment and the learning context in general" (Higgins, Hartley and Skelton, 2001, p.273).

In this dissertation, I address these types of questions in three separate, empirical studies of assessment communication in the context of Swedish higher education. Focusing on individual grade delivery meetings (here: 'grade conferences') in the context of a graduate module on environmental sustainability assessment, each study explores the collaborative communicative work on display as students meet their teachers to receive a grade on an individually written assignment, a scientific report. By focusing on the moment-by-moment interaction on display in ten recorded grade conferences, this dissertation contributes empirical insights into the concrete communicative work involved as participants make sense of institutional assessment at university in naturalistic settings.

Approaching assessment feedback as communication

The assessment practice under discussion in this dissertation is an example of a wide array of practices that are usually subsumed under the unifying umbrella term 'assessment feedback'. 'Feedback' can refer to comments on both formative and summative assessment, that is assessment on work-in-progress and assessment of a final piece of student work. It can be used to denote peer as well as teacher appraisals, and makes no immediate distinction between different modes of assessment delivery (although writing appears to be the most usually employed mode of assessment delivery at least in the English speaking world (Evans, 2013)). Despite this great variation, however, these activities share the common aim of enabling students to narrow the gap between actual and desirable performance (Sadler, 1989).

As previously argued, there is agreement in the literature about the need to involve students in these types of activities in order to support their learning process (Evans, 2013; Li and DeLuca, 2014). There is no agreement, however, on the type of communication this might involve. In parts of the field, 'feedback' is conceptualized as a transfer of information from teacher to student. In these studies, feedback is a distinct product of teacher appraisal, a

specific, self-contained message, that needs to be delivered to a student in a way that assures that the intended information is transferred as truly as possible. Although roundly criticized for relying on an overly simplistic model of communication (e.g. Higgins, Hartley and Skelton, 2001), echoes of this type of thinking still abound in the literature but also in the way we talk about feedback in everyday language, where the word tends to collocate with verbs that suggest a form of transfer (e.g. provide, deliver, receive, ignore).

In other areas of the field, on the other hand, 'feedback' has been conceptualized as a specific type of social and communicative practice, as a set of recognizable communicative actions with particular properties (such as providing high quality information about student performance), involving a specific set of participants (teachers, students, peers) and connected by the overall aim of providing students with an opportunity to change (performance, for instance, or strategies). In contrast to feedback-as-product approaches, where message, sender and receiver are isolated and discussed as independent entities, social practice approaches to assessment feedback emphasize the interplay of sense-making actors in concrete settings over time. Where product-approaches to feedback tend to concentrate on perfecting the feedback message, or the time or frequency of feedback delivery, social practice research in the feedback area concentrates on the "dialogic processes whereby learners make sense of information from various sources and use it to enhance their work or learning strategies" (Carless, 2016, p.1).

As the previous quotation suggests, research in this tradition tends to approach feedback from a social constructivist perspective and has often focused on finding ways to enhance students' individual sense-making in different stages of the so called 'feedback loop' (Sadler, 1989) of producing, assessing, commenting on and changing a student assignment in specific educational assessment settings. The approach taken in this dissertation is related to this type of research by a similar interest in the social nature of learning and communication. However, in contrast to Carless (2016) and others, I place particular focus on the communicative and relational aspects of sense-making in concrete instances of feedback communication. From a sociocultural and dialogical perspective, communication (and sense-making) is not considered as something that people can achieve individually, or in isolation – human activity always takes place in socially and culturally developed environments (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986; Linell, 1998, 2009; Prior, 1998; Säljö, 2000; Grossen, 2010). Academic languages, genres of writing, academic

disciplines or institutions of higher education are all products of long trajectories of social use (Prior, 1998) and thus shape the ways in which participants of grade conferences in the empirical setting make sense of (the assessment of) student writing *in situ*.

To understand assessment communication from such a perspective means to pay attention not only to the content of feedback communication but also to the ways in which participants, in dialogue with each other and the surrounding social ecology, make sense of talk-in-interaction (Linell, 1998, 2009; Grossen, 2010): when we act, we act in response to something that we know something about, by acting, we enter into a relationship with other actors and previous or assumed future actions, and we do all this within contexts that shape what we know but that are also further shaped and developed by our actions. It is a crucial assumption in dialogism that neither of these acts occur or can be fully understood in isolation. Instead, there is an interdependent and reflexive relationship between actors and their context that needs to be accounted for even in analysis – in this dissertation, the overall approach taken to assessment delivery is therefore characterized by a focus on participants' situated sense-making processes and an interest in the generative communicative work of participants who engage in assessment delivery as a common "communicative project" (Linell, 1998, 2009, see below).

Empirical case and contributions

The specific institutional setting discussed in this dissertation is a Swedish university of technology, and the assessment practice in focus is a face-to-face feedback activity that is popular in Swedish higher education, where it is commonly known as *betygssamtal*, or 'grade conference' (my translation). Grade conferences are summative assessment practices between one student and one teacher, and they involve the delivery of a previously set grade on a student assignment. Within the international feedback landscape, this is an unusual practice – grades tend to be delivered, with comments, in writing (Evans, 2013; Li and DiLuca, 2014). For a dialogical study of assessment interaction, however, this practice presents rich material and makes it possible to observe assessment-related sense-making that might be difficult to access in other settings where grade delivery is more dispersed.

A corpus of ten recorded grade conferences has provided the empirical material for the three different studies included in this dissertation. The

dialogical focus on observable assessment interaction in each study has led to results that contribute to existing research in two distinct ways: On one level, they provide a first empirical understanding of the practice of delivering grades in a Swedish grade conference. Not having previously been subject to research, there is as yet no empirical knowledge available on this type of institutional assessment practice. It is one concrete contribution of this dissertation to provide an understanding of the overall communicative frame of this type of assessment activity, including the communicative work it demands of its participants and the tasks it may fulfill within a particular institutional academic setting.

In the ten assessment meetings under discussion in this dissertation, the grades to be delivered are based on a student written report, a heavily supervised, individually written text. From a dialogical perspective, the history of writing and the multiple supervision sessions preceding grade delivery are part of the contexts in which grade delivery is situated. In fact, both supervision and assessment delivery can be considered as belonging to the broader streams of "literate activity" (Prior, 1998) that characterizes academic work in institutional settings. A second contribution of this dissertation, therefore, relates to an empirical exploration of the issues that shape the (delivery of) assessment of student writing in concrete institutional settings. This includes the purpose of student writing in higher education, the accountabilities (Scott and Lyman, 1968; Buttny, 1993) involved in supervising and assessing student writing, and the role of formal criteria guiding appraisal of student texts.

Aim and studies

The focus of this dissertation is assessment delivery in the context of higher education. Previous research in this area has addressed the challenges involved in assessment feedback with an interest in the quality and effectiveness of this type of practice (Evans, 2013; Li and DeLuca, 2014). The principal aim of this dissertation is to complement the results of this type of research with a dialogical study of feedback as a form of communication, focusing in particular on the concrete sense-making processes that dialogical, face-to-face assessment practices might entail.

By allowing observation of participants' sense-making *in situ*, the ten grade conferences used in this dissertation provided material for three separate studies of situated assessment delivery. Each study considers the talk-in-interaction on

display within the specific sociocultural ecology (Linell, 2009) to which it relates and to which it, in turn, contributes. Study I is an exploration of the communicative work that participants pursue as they collaboratively establish, maintain and close each grade conference. In this first study, recordings from all ten recorded grade conferences were used to determine the communicative tasks participants engaged in to achieve the overall work of grade delivery in each meeting and the kind of communicative work this involved in concrete terms. Study II focuses more in depth on the way participants relate to previous educational, institutional and disciplinary activity during grade delivery. Taking advantage of the disagreement at the heart of a single case where the institutional grade was not accepted by the student, this study focuses in particular on the tensions that occur as participants negotiate different accountabilities with respect to supervised student writing. Study III, finally, turns the focus to an institutional criteria sheet that had guided grading and was introduced to students in each grade conference. This study traces the communicative role of this type of institutional document in concrete instances of assessment interaction.

Outline of the dissertation

This dissertation is presented in two parts. Part I includes five chapters that describe the methodology of the overall dissertation project as well as the conclusions drawn from the three studies that form the core of my work. Part II presents the three studies in full.

In Chapter 2, I briefly situate this dialogical study of assessment delivery in the broad field of assessment research. Due to the nature of my project, two separate strands of research are relevant here. Research in the area of assessment feedback provides the necessary knowledge needed to situate the unique practice of scheduled, face-to-face grade delivery within the landscape of assessment practices currently prevalent in higher education. This part of the research review also highlights the issues that are considered to be of particular relevance to feedback and assessment practices in current higher education literature. However, since I am mostly concerned with grade delivery as communicative activity, I also provide information on the kind of talk-in-interaction one usually encounters in similar types of institutional communication, and introduce a small body of research discussing assessment interaction in the context of supervision of student writing in higher education.

Chapter 3 presents in more detail the theoretical foundations of this thesis, in particular the sociocultural and dialogical ways of conceptualizing talk-in-interaction in academic settings and introduces the research questions that have guided research in this dissertation. Prior's (1998) notions of 'literate activity' and 'chronotopic lamination' (Prior and Shipka, 2003) are introduced as a means for conceptualizing text as product of situated writing processes, and I also provide more detailed information on the two dialogical concepts that underpin the analytical work in all three studies: 'communicative activity types' and 'communicative projects' (Linell, 1998, 2009, 2010). Chapter 4 introduces the research design, including an introduction to the empirical material, the analytical approach, as well as the concrete analytical work in each if the three studies. The studies are then summarized in Chapter 5 and the empirical findings discussed in Chapter 6. A final chapter, Chapter 7, presents a summary of this dissertation in Swedish.

Chapter 2 Assessment feedback as pedagogical problem and interactional achievement

As previously described, the main aim of this dissertation is to complement the wealth of existing knowledge in the area of assessment feedback with a dedicated, dialogical analysis of feedback as a "unique form of communication" (Higgins, Hartey and Skelton, 2001) and the sense-making that this involves on the parts of both student and teacher participants. The empirical focus of this work is a particular assessment practice known in Swedish higher education as a 'grade conference', involving scheduled, face-to-face delivery of grades. This kind of oral summative assessment practice is rarely reported in the literature (Evans, 2013; Li and De Luca, 2014; see, however, Rinne, 2014, for an exploration of a version of this activity in Swedish secondary schools). Instead, in academic contexts outside of Sweden, teachers predominantly deliver grades in writing, accompanied by written comments in various analogous or digital formats. While oral grade delivery thus has to be regarded as a unique type of assessment activity, it is also a part of the broader assessment landscape that forms part of the sociocultural environment within which the meetings explored in this dissertation are situated.

As mentioned in the introduction, a key issue of particular relevance for the research presented in this dissertation, which has been addressed in different guises across this research field, is the difficulty that teachers and students experience in creating a shared sense of what is expected of student work at different stages of the 'feedback loop' in specific educational assessment settings. Recent research in the feedback field has located this problem in a lack of communication, and has explored different ways to engage students and teachers in dialogue about institutional expectations (Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Nicol, 2010; Orsmond, Maw, Park, Gomez and Crook, 2013; Carless, 2016). The line of reasoning presented in this area of research is relevant also for the work undertaken on assessment delivery in this dissertation, and will be introduced below in more detail.

In the empirical material used in this dissertation, grade delivery is principally related to a specific institutional assignment, an individually written scientific report on an issue related to sustainability assessment (see Chapter 4, below, for more information). Two areas of research have provided particularly relevant insights into the work that may be involved in establishing a common basis for discussions of quality in student writing in such an assessment setting. These are, in the first place, a number of studies in the field of assessment research that have investigated the situated meaning of formal assessment criteria at different stages of the assessment of student writing. In addition, I have also drawn on a small number of interaction analyses that focus on dyadic interaction in text supervision and provide interesting insights into the issues that are at stake in concrete instances of assessment interaction at the draft stage.

The problem of feedback

Feedback is a buzzword in higher education pedagogy and research. Even before Hattie and Timperley (2007) popularized the "power of feedback" in their widely cited meta-study, feedback on institutional assessment and evaluation was the focus of considerable research activity (Kluger and DeNisi, 1996; Black and Wiliam, 1998). From an institutional perspective, this may be related to a growing pressure from policy makers stressing the need for transparency and accountability in today's higher education (Hoecht, 2006; Cheng, 2009; Lynch and Hennessy, 2017). Responding to these requests, universities are constantly increasing their assessment efforts, and are thus shaping the institutional realities that can then be explored in the literature.

At the same time as institutional bodies have increasingly become interested in assessment for accountability, research in higher education pedagogy has begun to highlight the potential of harnessing assessment activities for supporting student learning (Brown, 2005; Bould and Falchicov, 2007). This reframing of assessment as assessment-for-learning is closely connected to a shift in current pedagogical discourse where previous images of the student as passive receptacle for knowledge have been replaced with a conceptualization of students as "active participants in their own learning processes" (Zimmerman, 2008). As universities and student bodies change and become more flexible and globalized, learning is increasingly considered a lifelong undertaking (Jarvis, 2010), where the learner needs to be equipped with the

necessary skills to self-regulate their individual learning processes (Zimmerman and Schunk, 2001; Cassidy, 2011; Panadero, 2017). In this context, feedback and the possibility to act upon it have been strongly suggested as essential for sustainable student learning in higher education (Boud, 2000; Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Carless, Salter, Yang and Lam, 2011; Boud and Molloy, 2013).

Knowing this, it might seem counterintuitive that feedback, in the research field, is often discussed and presented as problematic: while students engaged in higher education are often reported to understand the relevance of feedback for learning and development, they also consistently report to be dissatisfied with the actual feedback they receive (NSS[2]; Weaver, 2006; Sinclair and Cleland, 2007; Yang and Carless, 2013). University teachers, at the same time, express concern about a notable lack of effect of their assessment feedback on students' subsequent work (Duncan, 2007; Evans, 2013). In other words, feedback practice appears to lag behind its potential – a problem for all stakeholders invested in sustainable learning and teaching in higher education.

Molloy and Boud (2013) trace the origin of this problem to the conceptual plane and to the assumptions that underpin large parts of current feedback practice and research. Based on extensive research and their own professional experience with (discourses about) feedback in the academy, the authors draw attention to four central misconceptions, namely:

1. All feedback is good feedback
2. The more [feedback] the merrier
3. Feedback is telling
4. Feedback ends in telling (Molloy and Boud, 2013, p. 12-16)

On the one hand, the authors here criticize those institutions, educators and researchers that have accepted the truth of the message that feedback is "one of the most powerful influences on learning and achievement" (Hattie and Timperley, 2007) without attending to the caveat: that this powerful influence may be positive and negative (Kluger and De Nisi, 1996; Hattie and Timperley, 2007), and that there might be no influence at all, for instance if teachers' feedback comments are ignored (Mutch, 2003; Carless, 2006). The authors

[2]https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20180103173850/http://www.hefce.ac.uk/lt/nss/results/, accessed Apr 22 2019

therefore also criticize institutional efforts to react to student complaints about current feedback practices with more rather than different feedback (see also Molloy, 2009).

On the other hand, the authors also question the conceptual underpinnings of current research into feedback practice. As previously argued, the term 'feedback' has been used extensively and somewhat indiscriminately in the field. The authors here take particular issue with research that considers feedback as a product to be delivered by teachers to students, in their own words as "a one-way flow of information from a knowledgeable person to a less knowledgeable person" (Boud and Molloy, 2013, p. 7). They are not alone in their critique of this conceptualization (Higgins, Hartley and Skelton, 2001; Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Nicol, 2010; Ajjawi and Boud, 2017; Carless and Boud, 2018), which has been discussed as problematic on several counts: it presumes that there is only one active agent in feedback practices and this is the teacher giving feedback rather than the student receiving it. It also presumes that the most vital element of feedback is the message that needs to be transferred with as little "noise" (Winstone, Nash, Parker and Rowntree, 2017, p. 18) as possible. In this view, a perfect message, produced and delivered by the teacher will lead to the desired outcome almost per automatique.

For Molloy and Boud (2013) as well as a score of other researchers interested in understanding feedback as a complex social practice, this view of feedback is incomplete. Not only does it exclude the student as agent from a process that is ostensibly provided for his or her sake, it also fails to acknowledge the "dynamic and interpretive nature of communication" (Ajjawi and Boud, 2017, p. 253; see also Nicol, 2010) of which feedback is an example. What a transfer-conceptualization of feedback does not account for is the fact that feedback takes place in complex institutional settings, may have different purposes and often centers around tacit criteria and assumptions that students do not (fully) share (Lillis and Turner, 2001; Sadler, 2010; Carless and Boud, 2018). For students to be able to use teacher feedback to check their own assumptions and to find productive ways to close the gap between actual performance and ideal performance (Sadler, 1989), they need to at least have a "sufficient working knowledge of fundamental concepts that are routinely assumed by the teachers who compose the feedback" (Sadler, 2010).

In the literature, it is now frequently suggested that 'telling' alone can never equip students with the necessary skills to manage their own learning processes (Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Nicol, 2010; Ajjawi and Boud, 2017; Carless

and Boud, 2018). Instead, based on social constructivist epistemologies of knowledge and learning, it is increasingly argued that students need to be encouraged to actively make sense of their work and institutional expectations in dialogue with teachers and peers: "I define dialogic feedback as: interactive exchanges in which interpretations are shared, meanings negotiated and expectations clarified" (Carless, 2013, p.90).

With so many stakeholders invested in developing effective assessment and feedback measures, the research field is constantly expanding, contributing with knowledge about existing practices and trialing out improvements at various stages of the feedback process. However, it is only in the last decade or so that research has turned to questioning the assumption that effect lies mainly in the feedback message and has instead begun to explore how students and teachers in and through communication determine what good performance might look like and how these sense-making processes can best be supported. As a consequence, there still is limited empirical research that provides information on the issues that shape feedback communication and sense-making in concrete feedback practice – and there are limited studies that can be drawn on as model for further research interested in exploring learning in "real feedback events primarily designed for pedagogic rather than research purposes" (Ajjawi and Boud, 2018).

In this dissertation, I have been particularly interested in participants' collaborative sense-making in face-to-face grade delivery. Since there is no precedent for similar studies in the feedback field, I will here present two additional areas of research that also deal with sense-making and assessment, but are not generally subsumed under the assessment feedback umbrella. These are in the first a number of studies exploring the role of institutional criteria for evaluation and appraisal of student writing in higher education. This research highlights the difficulties students and teachers have in making sense of such standardized information and draws attention to the challenges involved in filling criteria with locally appropriate meaning. The results of these studies provide interesting contextual information for my own studies of participants' efforts to communicate about the institutional assessment of a student written report in face-to-face assessment interaction where an institutional criteria sheet is a central artefact.

The final section of this chapter, then, introduces research that approaches assessment with a focus on talk-in-interaction. Focusing especially on text supervision, these studies are situated in a research area where writing research

and communication studies overlap. These studies provide interesting information for this dissertation, not only in terms of their results but also with respect to their methodologies, since they all explore face-to-face communication between one student and one teacher in an institutional, formative feedback situation.

Making sense of assessment criteria

In the previous section, I have introduced an area of research that highlights the importance of providing for student sense-making in feedback practices, in particular with respect to the (tacit and explicit) assumptions that guide assessment and feedback in higher education (Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Nicol, 2010; Ajjawi and Boud, 2017; Carless and Boud, 2018). While this focus on sense-making is a rather recent development in the feedback field, the different uses and potential meanings of assessment criteria have been discussed in the assessment literature for some time, often with respect to student writing and written assignments. From a policy perspective, criteria are important tools for monitoring and moderating assessment and they are considered a convenient means to objectively communicate expectations and appraisal, thus aiding student learning processes but also their confidence about the professionalism of institutional evaluation (Crusan, 2015). In Europe and the English speaking world, most universities now work with standards and criteria on different levels of organization, supported by (and generating) a growing field of research that explores and improves these assessment practices but also critically discusses the assumptions behind the rise of criteria-based assessment in higher education.

In this short section, I will mainly discuss research of the latter kind, a number of studies that questions the assumption that more (or more well-defined) standards and criteria lead to better student performance. The critique that is expressed in these studies resembles the critique introduced earlier in this chapter with respect to a simplified conceptualization of feedback. Even in the assessment and evaluation field, the assumptions of policy makers and educators seem to point to an approach to language and communication that locates meaning in the message, rather than in the situated sense-making processes of interlocutors engaged in communication. In the assessment field, a number of studies have challenged these assumptions by exploring different assessment practices with a view on understanding the situated criteria work

that teachers and students engage in actual assessment situations, finding that the meaning of assessment criteria was indeed occasional, often assumed, and changeable (Lea and Street, 2000; Sadler, 2009, 2010; Bloxham, Boyd and Orr, 2011).

Lea and Street (2000), for instance, asked small groups of teachers at two different universities in the UK to explain how they determined what successful student writing looked like in their discipline. They found that teachers tended to talk about 'good' writing in terms of a relatively small but recurring number of criteria (such as 'structure' or 'argument') and easily recognized student writing that displayed these characteristics. However, when they asked teachers to provide descriptors for these criteria without resorting to concrete examples of student writing, teachers were often unable to comply, leading Lea and Street (2000) to conclude that "underlying, often disciplinary assumptions about the nature of knowledge affected the meaning given to the terms" (p. 39). The descriptive tools used by teachers in this study therefore, could not – on their own – provide the necessary information that students needed to write texts that fulfilled institutional expectations. In fact, the interviews that Lea and Street (2000) conducted with students in the same study suggest that they struggled to understand the different conventions governing writing in different courses and areas of study, even though they were often presented with guidelines and other documents intended to support their work.

In this context, Lillis and Turner (2001; also Turner (1999)) speak of a "discourse of transparency", arguing that part of the ongoing problematic of talking about institutional expectations with respect to student writing can be traced to a model of language that goes back to seventeen century efforts to develop scientific rigor and a scientific language:

> "Students who, unlike academic staff, are unfamiliar with the rhetorical conventions of academic discourse are, as it were, held to ransom by the discourse of transparency. Clarity of expression follows naturally from a rational ordering of things, and when the rhetorical metalanguage of this rational ordering is deployed by academic staff, its concepts, for example, structure, argument, definition, are deemed transparent and, therefore, not explicated." (Lillis and Turner, 2001, p. 63-64).

What both Lea and Street (2000) and Lillis and Turner (2001) draw attention to, therefore, is the idea that descriptive tools that are commonly used to communicate about expectations do not necessarily describe generic criteria that apply to all writing in all settings; even generic-sounding criteria like

'argument' or 'structure', in other words, are malleable and only pretend to be unambiguous. From that perspective, it appears rather unreasonable to assume that simply introducing a list of assessment criteria to a group of students will lead to immediate understanding and improved student work. On the contrary, filling criteria with locally appropriate meaning may require students as well as teachers to use a certain creativity of interpretation (Sadler, 2010).

In fact, teachers may approach assessment criteria in a way that turns policy intention on its head. Instead of providing guidance during assessment, Sadler (2009) argued, formal assessment criteria may in fact be more often used as a means to communicate about a process of appraisal that has little to do with the rational ordering suggested in the previous quote. Having observed experienced teachers' marking practices in different academic settings, he argues that the assessment process itself is often holistic rather than structured by external criteria (see also Bloxham, 2009). In his experience, teachers often grade students' texts as "connoisseurs", based on the same unspecifiable sense of quality that Lea and Street (2000) have also reported on. The standards and criteria that were available for teachers in these settings became part of the process only post factum, as a means to account for and communicate holistic judgments.

The issue is further explored by Bloxham, Boyd and Orr (2011), whose small-scale study of university teacher grading in UK higher education is particularly interesting with respect to the work presented in this dissertation. Referencing a range of research on criteria-based assessment (e.g. Gonzales Arnal and Burwood, 2003; O'Donovan, Price, and Rust, 2008; Orr, 2007; Sadler, 2009) the authors approach institutional criterion-based grading from a position of critique. To their mind, the criterion-referenced grading favored by UK higher education policy is flawed in the assumption that highly contextual academic writing can ever be assessed in context-independent ways, i.e. according to generic criteria. To explore this (assumed) gap between policy ideals and actual grading practice, the authors asked twelve lecturers from two different universities to 'think aloud' as they graded two written assignments. These verbal commentaries were audio recorded and explored thematically with respect to the judgements processes participants appear to use. To complement these data, researchers also included field notes, especially on teachers' use of artefacts like institutional criteria, in their analysis.

The results of Bloxham, Boyd, and Orr's (2011) study echo Sadler's (2009) findings, in that teachers' judgments were found to be holistic rather than

analytical, and institutionally available assessment criteria were generally used post-hoc, to "help define 'hunch' decisions" (Bloxham, Boyd and Orr, 2011, p.662), to provide a rational for teacher judgement and/or to determine an appropriate grade. The authors also found that teachers tended to draw extensively on comparison as they decided on the quality of a current piece of student writing, informing their decisions by relating a current piece of student writing to other texts encountered in the same or previous rounds of assessment. Together, the authors argue, these findings suggest that institutional criteria "take on meaning once the staff apply their personal 'standards framework' to them" (Bloxham, Boyd and Orr, 2011, p.666).

Ironically, the explicit criteria employed to add transparency to the assessment process may thus serve to obscure the local, disciplinary and institutional expectations that students need to know about and adjust to in their assignment work (see also Lea and Street, 2000; Sadler, 2010). The authors therefore suggest that proponents of criteria-referenced assessment are mistaken if they believe that teachers only need to be sufficiently agreed upon their expectations for students to consistently produce satisfactory written texts (Bloxham, Boyd and Orr, 2011). Instead of perfecting criteria for student writing, teachers should increase efforts to build shared understanding, "talking more rather than writing more in an attempt to build and maintain consistent expectations" (Bloxham, Boyd and Orr, 2011, p.668). A number of interactional studies (e.g. Eriksson and Mäkitalo, 2013, 2015; Eriksson, 2015) have shown how such expectations are negotiated in concrete instances of talk-in-interaction in text supervision. In this dissertation, I show that such negotiations still occur post-assessment and provide some insights into the challenges of talking about expectations in assessment delivery.

Interactional research on text supervision

Although research in the feedback field has only recently come to be interested in interactional aspects of feedback practice (Ajjawi and Boud, 2017; Esterhazy and Damşa, 2017), there are a number of studies on higher education text supervision that provide interesting insights into participants' interactional work in text-based assessment settings. While these studies deal with work-in-progress rather than a finished text and involve teacher and student as supervisor and supervisee rather than assessor and assessee, they point at a

number of issues that may also be of relevance to discussions of student writing in summative assessment settings in higher education.

An obvious point of departure for this research project is Eriksson's (2014) sociocultural and dialogical exploration of supervision interaction, using data from the same graduate module that also provided the data material for the present study (see Chapter 4, below, for more information on this corpus). In three separate studies, Eriksson explored the supervision sessions that were offered to students throughout the module to support students' writing of the principal assignment, a scientific report, at different stages of the writing process. In this work, Eriksson approached the formative feedback in supervision as a "communicative process of guidance into disciplinary forms of knowledge production" (2014, back cover). Based on detailed transcripts of recorded interaction, but also drawing on ethnographic knowledge of the field, she showed how students and teachers in collaboration encountered and negotiated how knowledge was produced and formulated in the field of Environmental Engineering, how epistemic practices were mediated in these negotiations and how students were guided towards mastering a professional genre like the scientific report (Eriksson and Mäkitalo, 2013, 2015; Eriksson, 2015).

One of the most interesting aspects of this work is the empirical detail in which Eriksson showed how students are socialized into the text cultures of their discipline even as they engage in text supervision (Eriksson, 2014). Observations from naturally occurring assessment interaction provided material for detailed analysis of the communicative means through which disciplinarity (Prior, 1998) was mediated in concrete instances of interaction, for example when students were guided into making claims and presenting conclusions (Eriksson, 2015). In many ways reminiscent of Prior's (1998) exploration of student writing as literate activity, Eriksson's work complicates the notion of student writing as a demarcated process starting with a specific assignment and culminating at a finished text. Instead, her analyses provide empirical grounds for conceptualizing students' writing as a complexly situated introduction to epistemic practices via guided participation in a specific disciplinary genre.

While Eriksson (2014) focused on broader issues of enculturation, a number of studies have investigated face-to-face supervision interaction with an interest on the organizational work this involves. These studies do not pay the same attention to the broader disciplinary contexts of supervision, but approach

interaction from a conversation analytical perspective. Using data from their own doctoral supervision, Li and Seale (2007), for instance, address an important issue in graduate supervision, criticism. Based on rich textual and interactional material, the authors describe a number of interactional strategies that allowed for effective management of criticism between doctoral student and supervisor. Presenting a typology of criticism, as well as a number of strategies employed by both participants to maintain a cordial relationship in the face of sometimes substantial critique, they come to see this managerial effort as "a joint activity that underlies the capacity for supervision to be educationally effective" (p. 511). Their study is particularly interesting with respect to the delicate negotiations involved as participants deal with criticism without interrupting the flow of ongoing interaction.

As a basic premise of text supervision, criticism is also a focus of Vehviläinen's (2009a) study of face-to-face master's thesis supervision. Based on observational data, the author presents cases of resistance to teacher criticism as instances of misalignment that do not allow participants to fully engage with the issues that were considered problematic. In a related study (Vehviläinen, 2009b), it was found, however, that teachers seldom presented unsolicited advice, but generally acted in response to problems in the students' texts or to those established by students' question, showing that student texts as artefacts are not only oriented to as improvable objects of supervision activity, but also as a structuring device for ongoing supervision interaction.

This issue of structure and internal organization of interaction is particularly interesting also with respect to the work presented here. From an interactional perspective, a recognizable discursive practice such as assessment delivery is achieved through participants' successive communicative contributions (see Chapter 3, below). In another conversation analytical study of graduate supervision, Svinhufvud and Verhviläinen (2013) show what this might entail in concrete instances of graduate supervision. Again based on video data, the authors scrutinized the use of textual artefacts in the opening sequences of a small number of MA thesis supervision meetings in Finnish higher education. The authors found that such dyadic supervision meetings were strongly text-mediated, and different documents were non-verbally oriented to even before the meetings were officially opened. While participants discussed different aspects of the students' texts, the authors also found a common orientation towards the student draft as a material sign for the student's progress: "for the participants, the purpose of the supervision encounter is to discuss a thesis that

has progressed based on a document (Svinhufvud and Verhviläinen, 2013, p.160, italics in the original).

This study also supported previous findings about the role of the text as structuring device in supervision interaction. Supervision interaction in the research setting involved an expert participant (the supervisor) and a novice participant (the student writing an MA thesis). Despite students' unfamiliarity with this type of interaction, however, the authors report very little outright discussion of the meeting's agenda. They trace this back to the two different features of the supervision interaction they observed for their study. First, that there were only two overall purposes to this activity, for the teacher to deliver feedback and for the student to ask questions and report on progress. And second, that there was an "implicit pedagogy" (Svinhufvud and Verhviläinen, 2013, p.161) in place during supervision that oriented to student learning via the written document available as artefact in interaction. The problems that were previously located in the text provided a schedule for the interaction that, on the one hand, provided a natural agenda for the meeting. On the other hand, however, this orientation to textual problems was found to limit the ways in which students were able to shape topical development in these meetings. The authors conclude that more outright agenda-talk throughout text supervision might position students in a more active role and might also lead to more targeted teacher response.

As previously argued, these studies of dyadic interaction in text-supervision have provided interesting insights that have informed my own study of sense-making in grade conference interaction. Eriksson's (2014) study of students' enculturation into local and disciplinary text cultures in particular highlighted the complexities of guiding student writing in a new disciplinary genre, and showed that student drafts were discussed in relation to broad disciplinary contexts. This conceptualization of writing has shaped my own approach to understanding the assessment of student writing in all three studies included in this dissertation (see also Chapter 3, below). In addition, her studies have also provided contextual information on the empirical setting, allowing interesting insights into the supervision history that is part of the trajectory of institutional activity leading up to the grade delivery meetings discussed in this dissertation.

Concluding remarks

On the most descriptive level, the grade conference as it is discussed in this dissertation is an institutional activity where a teacher shares his appraisal of a piece of student writing (a written report on an issue of relevance for sustainability assessment) with the student author. The accumulated knowledge about current assessment activities in higher education that are available through the research introduced above was essential for putting the grade conference activity into perspective, while these studies also highlight a great number of challenges that may accompany assessment activity in institutional settings. Some of these challenges can also be observed in the material discussed in this dissertation, where the dialogical perspective brought to the assessment interaction may help to understand how such challenges come about and are handled in concrete situations.

The theoretical perspective and the focus on concrete assessment interaction, then, marks the greatest divergence of this dissertation project from the feedback field. With very few exceptions, research undertaken in this field focuses on individual actors, their attitudes to and recollected experiences of the feedback process. Data is often obtained through surveys, focus groups or individual interviews, or by collection of student texts and teacher written comments. In contrast, I have worked with interactional data, video- and audio-recorded scheduled grade delivery activities and have been particularly interested in the dynamic sense-making processes between teacher, student, and their various contexts that became observable in each moment of assessment interaction. Although dialogic feedback processes are increasingly discussed in the literature (e.g. Nicol, 2010; Carless, 2016; Steen-Utheim and Wittek, 2017), such naturally occurring exploration of face-to-face feedback interaction is rarely the focus of analysis in this field (see, however, two recent studies by Ajjawi and Boud (2017) and Esterhazy and Damşa (2017)).

In this respect, this dissertation contributes to the field a different perspective on what it might mean to engage in feedbacking in higher education. As this very short overview should have made clear, the feedback field is concerned with an enormous range of different activities, linked by the common effort to provide students with a sense of how their work fares relative to the expectations of the institution. Previous research has shown that, in theory, both students and teachers consider feedback in whichever form potentially beneficial, but often find it disappointing in practice. One of the

contributions of this thesis is a closer look at the issues that might be proving difficult. Through dialogical analysis (Linell, 1998, 2009) of the interaction on display in the ten grading conferences that provide the data for this research project, it becomes possible to observe feedback interaction as it unfolds during this particular activity. Rather than relying on what can be narrated (or remembered) by each participant in the aftermath of a feedback activity, this approach allows for empirical observations of the issues that need to be addressed as participants engage in collaborative sense-making *in situ*, not only in terms of the student's written assignment but also with respect to the emerging assessment activity.

Chapter 3 A dialogical approach to sense-making in assessment delivery

The main assumption underpinning this dissertation project is that we, as human beings, are part of evolving, sociocultural environments, which we need to engage in to master, and which we, through our engagement, contribute to and change. Our environments are shaped by the experiences and assumptions we bring to them, by their established rules and traditions, their materiality and the way language is used (or not used) in their common practices – in other words by the "tools for living" (Lemke, 2001) that allow us to make sense of our environments and guide our actions within them. Dialogical perspectives of interaction and sense-making (e.g. Linell, 1998, 2009; Grossen, 2010; Prior, 1998) have placed much stock on highlighting the reflexive relations between the social and the personal and have found different ways to capture the many concrete ways in which we make sense of the world we live in. In the following, I will give a brief introduction to the central assumptions connected to this dialogical approach to sense-making and human interaction, paying particular attention to two dialogical concepts that were prominently involved in the analytical work in the three studies included in this dissertation: 'communicative projects', and 'communicative activity types'.

What dialogue/s?

Firstly, however, I want to address a terminological issue. The principal perspective brought to assessment delivery in this dissertation is generally known as 'dialogical'. Just like the other key concept used in this dissertation – 'feedback' – , however, 'dialogue' is polysemic and has different meanings in the different literatures to which my research relates. To avoid terminological confusion, I will briefly disentangle the different usages of this term in the assessment feedback field and in the dialogical tradition.

In the previous chapter, I have introduced a number of studies that have argued for a need to increase dialogue in feedback practices, defining such feedback dialogues as a "collaborative discussion about feedback (between lecturer and student or student and student) which enables shared

understandings and subsequently provides opportunities for further development based on the exchange"' (Blair and McGinty, 2013). 'Dialogue', in these studies, describes both a specific type of communicative interaction (between co-present parties) and an ideal, an open exchange of ideas that will provide students with an opportunity to actively and productively engage with teacher feedback, their own performance and institutional criteria. In this area of the literature, 'dialogue' is an aspirational notion (e.g. Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Nicole, 2010; Steen-Utheim and Wittek, 2017).

The notion of 'dialogue' that underpins research in this dissertation is substantially different from these conceptualizations. In line with authors such as Linell (1998, 2009), Grossen (2010) and Prior (1998; with Hengst, 2010), the term 'dialogue' is here used to refer to any reflexive relationship that can be observed between actors and their environment. From such a dialogical perspective, all human interaction is dialogical – it is a consequence of living in a relational world:

> "when human beings are involved in thinking, talking to each other, reading texts, working with computers and other cognitive artefacts, or quite simply trying to understand their environment, they are performing cognitive and communicative actions in interaction with others and contexts, and with the contributions and knowledge of others and cultures. Self and other are profoundly interdependent" (Linell, 2009, p. xvii).

'Dialogue', therefore, is in this dissertation not reserved for a specific type of human interaction but refers to "any kind of human sense-making, semiotic practice, action, interaction, thinking or communication" (Linell, 2009, p.5, italics in the original).

This distinction is a necessary one to make, not only for the conceptual differences masked by the term, but also with respect to the normative character of much of the research interested in feedback dialogues (see above). As previously argued, dialogue has been introduced as a pedagogical ideal in some of the research literature. In this dissertation, feedback dialogues are approached without normative preconceptions. Instead, the aim is to trace, empirically, the processes through which participants make sense of assessment delivery in these specific types of feedback interaction, using the dialogical notions of 'communicative activity type' and 'communicative project' (Linell, 1998, 2009) as analytical tools (see below). While the results of these explorations may of course give rise to considerations regarding the pedagogical

quality of these "feedback dialogues", a normative discussion of assessment delivery is not a principal concern of this dissertation.

History, context and talk-in-interaction: sense-making in institutional practices

In the previous chapters, I have introduced a number of research studies that approach feedback as individual sense-making processes in which learners encounter information about their work from different sources and use this information to improve their strategies and future performance (Carless, 2016). This type of research foregrounds the individual sense-maker and relegates other aspects of the assessment situation to the context in which sense-making takes place. As previously stated, the approach taken in this dissertation takes a more collaborative perspective on sense-making in assessment delivery, considering actors, their activities, and the contexts of interaction as deeply interconnected.

From a dialogical perspective, human activity is never isolated, unconnected to others socially or historically – even in solitary activities like writing or reading we find ourselves engaging with the world and the tools through which it is historically and culturally mediated (Vygotsky, 1978; Prior, 1998; Linell, 1998, 2009; Säljö, 2000; Wertsch, 2007). To illustrate the distinction between more established, individualizing approaches to assessment delivery and the dialogical perspective offered here, I will briefly discuss three central assumptions that have informed my work in this dissertation. First, I will discuss human sense-making activity in assessment delivery as a social and historical undertaking, shaped by different streams of sociocultural activity. Second, I will introduce an understanding of context that reflects this sociocultural and historical approach to sense-making and treats context as "not only external, [but] constructed by the subject who actively interprets it" (Grossen, 2010, p. 4). A short discussion of the dialogical understanding of language as a means to engage in social activity will conclude this section.

The sociogenesis of assessment delivery

To begin with, I want to turn to a principal assumption that characterizes a dialogical approach to human sense-making, namely that social practice, and human activity in general, is always situated and part of different streams of social and historical activity (Prior, 1998; Bakhtin, 1986). In the ten grade

conferences under discussion in this dissertation, participants meet to deliver and discuss a grade on a student written report and to conclude a module and seven weeks of course time. Each meeting has its own, specific institutional history of supervision and course work, but is also related to and part of broader streams of social and historical activity: the history of assessing student work and delivering grades in dedicated face-to-face assessment practices; disciplinary and institutional text cultures (Bazerman, 1988; Prior, 1998; Dysthe, 2002), including the practice of writing reports in professional and educational contexts (Keys, 1994; Rude, 1995, 1997); or students' trajectories of literate activity within and outside of higher education (Prior, 1998). To engage in assessment delivery in this specific institutional setting, therefore, means to engage in dialogue not only with other co-present participants but also with the complex of social and cultural histories in which assessment and assessment delivery is embedded.

In the sociocultural, dialogical traditions, this sociogenesis (Mäkitalo, Linell and Säljö, 2017; Prior and Hengst, 2010) of human activity constitutes one of the fundamental explanations for the observation that we can productively align our actions in social situations despite the uniqueness of our personal experiences – that we are able to engage meaningfully in any social practice, in other words, is precisely because other actors before us have established the frames for this practice (Goffman, 1974), have developed artifacts that can mediate action within this practice, have established a common language and a characteristic way to use it. It is because we engage in practices with history that we are also able to anticipate how we might act in them, and what the response to our actions might be:

> "Human activities have a history that starts long before the singular encounter in situ. Knowledge, feelings, meanings and messages are not entirely constituted on the spot, but they are re-created, re-produced, re-negotiated, re-conceptualized and re-contextualised in situ" (Linell, 1998, p.47).

This is particularly evident in institutional settings, such as the one under discussion here, where social interaction is strongly routinized and participation follows well-established patterns. In such settings, participants do not need to establish the rules of engagement before engaging in interaction. Instead, they can rely on previous experience and assume that similar rules are in place even in subsequent interactions of the same kind – as Berger and Luckman (1966)

argue: "habitualization makes it unnecessary for each situation to be defined anew, step by step" (p.71).

A well-established institutional practice, assessment delivery tends to involve at least three elements: there will be an assessor delivering a grade, an assessee receiving the grade, and an assignment on which these assessments are based. How these reciprocal institutional memberships (Mäkitalo and Säljö, 2002) are enacted in concrete instances of face-to-face interaction, however, and what role the student's text plays in these meetings, is not pre-determined and might differ considerably from one meeting to the next. Does the assessor accept student critique as part of grade delivery or is this received as a breach of contract? Do students consider it appropriate to be asked to self-reflect or do assessors need to re-frame their shared activity to include this particular communicative task? From a dialogical perspective, the (historically shaped) assumptions that guide participation in discursive practices are always temporary and subject to re-negotiations; as Studies 1 and 2 (below) show in some empirical detail, it is up to participants engaged in interaction to (re)negotiate these frames, and to orchestrate their communicative contributions as appropriately as possible, each instance of talk-in-interaction at a time.

Contextualizing assessment delivery

A second issue that distinguishes a dialogical approach to sense-making is the way in which it approaches the notion of 'context'. In educational studies, and in the assessment feedback field in particular, 'context' is often presented as a specific set of physical or abstract features that define a space into which actors move and which then becomes the site of activity. A certain university, a particular course of study, or a specific subject are examples for such pre-existing, stable environments that constrain participant actions and efforts to make sense.

On the surface, this understanding of context as constraining factor in human sense-making is shared by dialogism. As Linell states, "words and utterances do not express or contain the meanings actors want to convey in communication" (1998, p. 127). It is only in relation to the surrounding activity, to physical and more remote contexts, that utterances take on their situated meaning(Grossen, 2010; Tanskanen, Helasvuo, Johansson and Raitaniemi, 2010). This is even manifest in the basic unit of analysis formulated for a

dialogical study of human sense-making: the "*actions and interactions*, e.g. the discursive practices, *in their contexts*" (Linell, 1998, 7, italics in the original).

What sets dialogical approaches to context apart, however, is their understanding of what, precisely, these constraining contexts are. Traditionally, as previously argued, context has been considered as an analytic prime (Fetzer, 2010). From a dialogical perspective, however, even contexts are dynamic, subject to negotiation and constructed in interaction. Soundly dismissing a stable, external understanding of 'context', Linell (1998) argues that "nothing is a context of a piece of discourse in and by itself, as it were 'objectively'" (p. 128). Instead, his argument continues, it is through participants' actions in communication that potential contexts become relevant to a specific instance of interaction. In more concrete terms, this means that even within an institutional setting, where actions are qua definition "habitualized" (Berger and Luckman, 1966) and the framing of particular activities may narrowly constrain interaction (Linell and Thunqvist, 2003), participants are still able to foreground or background particular contextual features as more or less relevant for sense-making. Thus, during assessment delivery, participants may engage with or ignore an available institutional criteria document, refer to or ignore an issue previously discussed in supervision, or bring up a disciplinary question that other participants set aside. Each of these decisions changes the "matrix of different kinds of contexts (or dimensions of context)" (Linell, 1998, p.128) within which a particular interaction is embedded and within which particular utterances acquire their situated meaning.

From this perspective, there is no context to talk-in-interaction. Instead, talk-in-interaction is actively contextualized through participants' continuing communicative efforts to make aspects of their environments contextually relevant (Duranti and Goodwin, 1992). To do this, participants draw on contextual resources, which Linell (1998) defines as "potential contexts that can be made into actual, relevant contexts through the activities of the interlocutors in dialogue" (Linell, 1998, p.128). Contextual resources can either be immediate or mediate aspects of the discourse environment: physically present or part of relevant previous interaction, or related to participants' assumptions, knowledge and understanding about ongoing and projected interaction (Linell, 1998).

For example, during assessment delivery in the ten grade conferences under discussion here, participants frequently draw on a written artefact, an individually written, heavily supervised scientific report, the major means of

assessment in this module. As any written text, these reports are the product of multiple layers of "literate activity" (Prior, 2003, p.180; also Prior and Shipka, 2003). When university students write a report for an assignment, they do not invent writing or the report genre from scratch. Instead, they craft the new text out of their previous experiences with (academic) text cultures and in dialogue with other writing activities they currently engage in (Prior, 1998). Students write constantly, not only for one module and not only for credit, but also for pleasure, to communicate with family and friends, or simply to aid their memory. And they also engage with the texts of others: they read textbooks, scour the internet, engage with teacher comments and discuss drafts with their peers. Some of these activities might be directly linked to particular assignments. Others might be just as important will not be so easily identified in hindsight as contributions to the finalized version of such texts. With reference to Bakhtin, Prior and Shipka refer to this complex history of writing as chronotopic lamination, "the dispersed and fluid chains of places, times, people, and artefacts that come to be tied together in trajectories of literate action" (Prior and Shipka, 2003).

During assessment and in assessment delivery, these layers of lamination are latently available as contextual resources. It is possible, for instance, to discuss a finished student text relative to previous drafts and subsequent teacher comments. It is also possible to ignore the local history of student writing and foreground broader disciplinary contexts. In that case, the discussion might focus on the use and genesis of specific concepts, or the way students include the voices of other writers in the field (e.g. Eriksson and Mäkitalo, 2013). With each layer of lamination that is thus made relevant by participants in interaction, the contextual matrix in which their interaction takes place changes slightly and it is up to participants to ensure that actions, interactions and contexts remain aligned in a way that is acceptable within the overarching activity frame:

> "one aspect of the dynamic account of contexts is that it assumes an intrinsic relationship between discourse and context. Rather than being extrinsically caused by contextual features, discourse has an intrinsic dialogical and conceptual relationship to context: the two co-constitute each other" (Linell and Thunqvist, 2003, p.411).

This notion of context as both constitutive of and constituted through human (sense-making) activity has been an important notion in the analytical work undertaken in each of the three studies presented as part of this dissertation. Approaching context as emerging and socially constructed, I show in Study 1

(below) that participants in each of the ten grade conferences activate a range of latently available contexts by drawing on different contextual resources. Two of these contextual orientations – to previous supervision history and to disciplinary audiences and genres – were explored in more detail in Study 2, as a potential source of miscommunication. Study 3, finally, turns attention to a concrete, physically available contextual resource, an institutional criteria sheet, and explores its functions for sense-making in concrete instances of assessment delivery.

Language as a means to engage in social action

To understand sense-making during assessment delivery from a dialogical perspective, then, involves a theoretical recognition of and analytical attention to the interrelatedness of human activity, its histories and contexts. Since grade delivery is also predominantly a discursive practice, this should also involve an account of the ways in which language is involved in these contextualized (and contextualizing) sense-making activities. As I will discuss in more detail in the following chapter, the ten grade conferences under discussion here are steeped in different forms of language use: language is involved in writing the assignment, in grading and in grade delivery. In some form or another, language shapes the academic setting in which grade delivery is situated, it shapes how participants approach the issues that are to be engaged with in the graduate module and it shapes the way participants can and do negotiate the quality of the student assignment in face-to-face interaction.

In the dialogical tradition, language is principally considered as a means to engage in social activities and has been conceptualized as a semiotic tool in the Vygotskyan sense, fulfilling both social and symbolic functions (Linell, 1998; Prior, 1998; Prior and Hengst, 2003). As opposed to more formalistic frameworks, where (the meaning of) language is scrutinized in the abstract, dialogical approaches to language therefore look for meaning as something that emerges through languaging (Linell, 1998) in specific social context – as something that is "not predetermined by the linguistic code but constructed within a certain discursive situation" (Grossen, 2010, p. 7).

Discussing the assumptions underpinning a dialogical approach to meaning making in interaction, Grossen (2010) traces this argument back to Bakhtin and in particular to the twin-notions of 'addressivity' and 'responsivity' (Bakhtin, 1986). Bakhtin introduces these notions as part of an argument against the

(then) prevailing understanding that the form, shape and meaning of an utterance is entirely due to speaker choice, constrained only by subject matter and the language system. In contrast, Bakhtin argues that speakers cannot freely choose their utterances or their meanings because these are constraint by what has been before and what is expected to happen after:

> "Any concrete utterance is a link in the chain of speech communication of a particular sphere. The very boundaries of the utterance are determined by a change of speech subjects. Utterances are not indifferent to one another, and are not self-sufficient; they are aware of and mutually reflect one another. These mutual reflections determine their character. Each utterance is filled with echoes and reverberations of other utterances to which it is related by the communality of the sphere of speech communication. Every utterance must be regarded primarily as a response to preceding utterances of the given sphere (we understand the word "response" here in the broadest sense). Each utterance refutes, affirms, supplements, and relies on the others, presupposes them to be known, and somehow takes them into account." (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 91)

In talk-in-interaction, utterances or other communicative actions are thus always responsive to previous actions and addressed to present (or imagined) others. When we respond to something we always include the projected response in these answers; and we will not fully understand the meaning of what we have said before we know the response (Linell, 1998, 2009). In grade delivery, for instance, a teacher delivers a grade in response to an institutional demand, but also in response to a student having written an assignment, and, maybe, in response to a concrete request formulated by a student in a previous utterance. As Studies 1 and 2, below, show empirically, teachers may also deliver the grade based on an assumed student response and may choose to deliver a potentially disappointing grade in a way that accounts for projected discontent. However, the situated meaning of this grade will only become clear once the student formulates a response (which is, of course, again constraint by addressivity and responsivity).

Conceptualizing assessment delivery from a dialogical perspective

I have previously argued that institutional practices, such as face-to-face assessment delivery, are at the same time situation transcending and unique. On the one hand, each instantiation of a recognizable institutional practice builds

on historical trajectories of (institutional) activity. On the other hand, each instantiation of practice also takes place in a specific institutional setting and is achieved through concrete communicative actions by a unique set of participants. Two dialogical concepts have been used in all three studies included in this dissertation to provide a framework for understanding how participants in concrete instances of face-to-face assessment delivery coordinate their communicative work in practice-appropriate ways and thus re-enact and re-create this practice *in situ*. In all studies, the grade conference is conceptualized as institutional 'communicative activity type' (Erickson, 2004; Linell, 1998; Mäkitalo and Säljö, 2002; Linell and Thunqvist, 2003; Grossen, 2010), collaboratively achieved through participants responsive and productive communicative actions *in situ*. These coordinated actions are, in turn, conceptualized as 'communicative projects' (Linell, 1998, 2009) that fulfill particular communicative tasks necessary for pursuing the work of face-to-face assessment delivery within the activity frames. In the following, I will briefly introduce each of these two central concepts in turn.

The grade conference as a communicative activity type

In the previous chapter, I introduced research that explores different instances of text supervision, educational practices that, just like assessment delivery in a grade conference, are contained, recognizable units of communicative action. "Meet me for a grade conference" is an utterance that makes sense in the Swedish university system and needs no further specification – it is a common practice, involving a predictable task and proceeding along predictable lines. Linell (1998, 2009, 2010) calls such recognizable, routine activities 'communicative activity types', or CATs. In his definition, CATs are habitual patterns of actions, related to specific social situations and expected to fulfill specific purposes (Linell, 2009). Broadly reminiscent of textual genres, CATs provide frames for participants' communicative actions, which participants need to take into account and relate to as they collaboratively find a way to drive their unique communicative agenda within historically established structures.

In that sense, CATs can be considered as 'doubly dialogical', unique in the sense that they involve a specific set of participants, a specific kind of interactional work in a specific setting. At the same time, however, they are also bigger than the situation as they continue a historical trajectory of activities that are somehow related and relevant to the current event. This double dialogicality,

as Linell argues, "makes us see an act or utterance both in its singularity and in its wider sociocultural and historical belongingness" (2009, p.53) and provides participants with the tools necessary to engage in recognizable practices in the first place – the roughly shared sense of what such an activity entails in terms of roles, opportunities and obligations, and the sociocultural resources to accomplish the activity in concrete interaction.

As an analytical concept, CAT thus presents an opportunity to simultaneously pay attention to the recognizable features of an assessment activity such as the grade conference and to the coordinated communicative activity through which these are achieved in instances of situated interaction. In this dissertation, CAT has been used as an analytical tool for exploring assessment delivery in grade conferences in all three studies, each highlighting slightly different dimensions of this activity type (Linell, 2009). The overall framing of the grade conference is particularly foregrounded in Study 1, which focuses on the key tasks that participants engage in in order to achieve the overall purpose of the CAT. The internal organizations and accomplishments of this CAT are a second concern, which was addressed in all three studies: Study 1 introduces the communicative roles and responsibilities on display in the core communicative projects of this CAT. Study 2 presents a more detailed account of the interactional organization of a single case of disagreement, focusing in particular on the re-contextualization efforts on display as participants negotiate the appropriateness of a particular grade, while Study 3 closes in on the role and functions of a central artefact used in this CAT, an institutional criteria sheet. The interrelationship between the grade conference and it surrounding ecology, finally, has been a central interest in all three studies, but especially in Study 2, where the research focus was directed on participants' efforts to situate the emerging activity and their discussions of a written report writing within complexly laminated sociocultural contexts.

Communicative projects as a basic unit of interaction

As the previous paragraph suggests, CATs may guide participation in talk-in-interaction. However, each instantiation of a CAT is also an achievement of the communicative work of its participants, who need to coordinate their utterances and align their actions in locally appropriate ways. As participants engage in any communicative activity, they will encounter a set of interactional tasks or problems that need to be solved in order for the activity to progress.

To engage in text supervision, for instance, might entail the need to create and agree on a problem in the student's text that provides a focus for participants' discussions (Vehviläinen, 2009; Eriksson and Mäkitalo, 2015). Such miniature activities are examples for what Linell (1998) refers to as 'communicative projects'. Just like the larger communicative activity that they help to achieve, communicative projects emerge through collaboration during interaction, are recognized by participants and remain dynamic, that is changeable, until the point where they are considered closed or are abandoned. Are participants familiar with a particular activity type and the kind of interactional work it usually entails, such projects are often established with relative ease. Is the activity unfamiliar and participants unsure of their roles and obligations in these communicative projects, coordinating activity might become a distinct part of interaction as participants re-negotiate the terms of their joint communicative activity.

Depending on participants' familiarity with a particular activity type, as well as their interactional roles and overall goals, communicative projects may therefore require different kinds of interactional work, both in terms of establishing specific projects and in terms of supporting or resisting such initiatives. Generally, participants in any activity may attempt to introduce their own agenda as an alternative project. However, since participants cannot establish and maintain such a task on their own, they need to work to achieve collaboration and alignment from all relevant participants. This support does not have to be substantive. Often, minimal responses or non-verbal contributions is all that is required to allow a project to continue, especially in cases where the activity type is characterized by asymmetrical participant roles (Linell and Gustavsson, 1987; Linell, 1998).

As I have argued in the previous chapter, in feedback studies that approach 'dialogue' as an ideal form of communication, such asymmetries in participation are often considered problematic (Boud and Molloy, 2013; Molloy, 2009). From an interactional perspective, on the other hand, such an imbalance of (verbal) contribution to interaction does not need to imply a disenfranchisement of the less active participant. Instead, asymmetric participant structures may simply be a function of the task in which participants engage, for instance if one participant asks the other for advice or a diagnosis of some form (Marková and Foppa, 1991). In assessment delivery, as in other communicative activity types where an unequal distribution of knowledge is the premise for engaging in interaction (Rommetveit, 1974; Linell and Markova, 1993; Linell, 1998;

Eriksson, 2014), an unequal contribution of participation may thus be understood as part of the activity frame: the assessors' institutional position and their prior engagement with the students' work gives them an epistemic advantage, and thus a position (as well as the responsibility) to close the epistemic gap. Since it is the assessors' knowledge about the quality of the student report that provides the grounds for engaging in the activity in the first place, they also carry a larger share of the communicative work wherever this expertise is at the center of the interaction. While there is of course reason to discuss what this in-built asymmetry means for the way participants can shape sense-making in these meetings (as discussed in Study 1, below, for example), it was here not considered as problematic per se.

Carrying epistemic advantage in this CAT, however, also leads to interactional obligations. The grade conference is an activity with one expressed aim – to deliver a grade on a student written report. Having previously assessed a student's text and having come to a conclusion about its quality, the teacher not only knows "more" about the student's text, he or she is now also obliged to act on this knowledge and deliver assessment. The student, on the other hand, has already delivered a piece of work and may feel no immediate obligation to add substantively to the interaction (see also Eriksson, 2014, who makes a similar point in relation to text supervision). In this dissertation, I have used the notion of 'accountability' (Scott and Lyman, 1968; Buttny, 1993) to conceptualize the obligations and responsibilities that participants take on as they engage in grade delivery.

To an extent, these accountabilities are determined by the overarching activity frame. A teacher engaging in text supervision, for instance, is probably expected to have read the student's text and make reasonable suggestions for improvement. Her student, on the other hand, is probably expected to have produced a draft, but also to listen to and engage with her teacher as she sets out possible future actions. However, since frames are never fully shared and participants need not always adhere to these frames, participants' actions may not always meet their actual or assumed interaction responsibilities. In instances where participants encounter unexpected or inappropriate behavior, they need to somehow bridge this "gap between action and expectation" (Scott and Lyman, 1968, p.46) to be able to continue with their interaction (see Buttny, 1993; Firth, 1995; Mäkitalo, 2003; 2006). In such cases, participants employ accounts, linguistic devices by means of which this kind of bridging is pursued. In the analytical work in Studies 1 and 2 in particular, accounts were considered

a means to access participants' tacit assumptions and underlying expectations about the activity frame and its relevant contexts.

Concluding remarks and research questions

One of the most convincing arguments for adopting a dialogical approach to assessment interaction in this dissertation is the significance that is placed on the historical and contextual nature of human sense-making in interaction in this tradition. To deliver and receive assessment, from this point of view, is not only about formulating a precise message and transferring it, in the most efficient way, to the student. Instead, assessment delivery can also be understood and scrutinized as a collective and collaborative sense-making effort and a type of communicative activity that is situated in complex streams of historical and social activity, re-enacted by participants in concrete instances of talk-in-interaction. Based on the theoretical assumptions introduced above, two broad research questions were formulated to guide research in this dissertation:

1. *How do participants achieve this type of assessment feedback activity through collaborative communicative work in concrete instances of talk-in-interaction?*

2. *How does the laminated history of student writing in the specific institutional setting shape the way participants make sense of the written report and its assessment at the point of grade delivery?*

Chapter 4 Research design

The principle aim of the research presented in this dissertation was to contribute to existing research by exploring assessment feedback as a unique form of communication with a particular focus on the concrete sense-making processes that this might entail for both student and teacher participants. In this chapter, I will briefly account for the interactional approach that was chosen as best suited for providing insights into the concrete communicative work of engaging in feedback communication and will also introduce the data corpus that was selected as best suited as empirical basis for such an interactional study of *in situ* feedback communication. The chapter concludes with a brief introduction to the analytical procedures characterizing research in each of the three studies included in this dissertation.

Approaching assessment feedback from an interactional perspective

As previously argued, research in the assessment feedback field tends to explore feedback retrospectively, often by inviting participants to reflect on previous experience with different feedback practices (Evans, 2013; Li and De Luca, 2014). While these research approaches have provided important insights about the challenges (and advantages) of engaging in feedback in higher education, these types of studies are not suited to capturing feedback interactions as they occur *in situ*. For a fuller understanding of the communicative nature of feedback and the different sense-making processes this involves in institutional settings in higher education, a different analytical approach is needed. In this dissertation, interaction analysis was chosen as a promising approach to exploring the moment-by-moment work of talk-in-interaction in naturally occurring feedback situations, while video- and audio-recordings of naturally occurring assessment interaction provided the empirical material for this type of analysis.

As an analytical framework, interaction analysis has been applied to a set of related but distinct research approaches (Jordan and Henderson, 1995; Heath and Hindmarsh, 2002; Kissmann, 2009). With different roots in ethnography,

sociolinguistics and ethnomethodology and foci ranging from minute details to broader social and institutional activities, these approaches are connected by an interest in the way social order is created and maintained in and through human interaction in concrete situations (Knoblauch, 2009). Common to these approaches is an interest in naturally occurring social interaction, which makes video- and audio-recording a preferred method of data collection (Kissmann, 2009). Video-recording in particular produces data material that can be viewed repeatedly and with differing interests, and can be shared within different research groups as a means to "neutralizing preconceived notions on the part of researchers" (Jordan and Henderson, 1995, p. 44). More specifically, video-recording also provides researchers with more complete records of human talk-in-interaction:

> "Video has allowed scholars to work on a fundamental dimension of human action: its multimodality. Multimodality includes all relevant resources that are mobilized by participants to build and interpret the public intelligibility and accountability of their situated action: grammar, lexicon, prosody, gesture, gaze, body postures, movements, manipulations of artifacts, etc" (Mondada, 2018, p. 86).

In the three studies presented here, information of this kind is considered vital for the analysis of assessment talk-in-interaction in the ten grade conferences that were explored for this dissertation. However, even video recordings only ever present the segment of social activity that camera or microphone are able to capture and the analytical process adds further reduction by selecting specific instances of interaction for particular analysis (Kissmann, 2009). The research presented in the three studies included in this dissertation therefore has to be understood as the result of a complex process of selection that will be accounted for in the following, paying particular attention to the choices that have shaped the data selection and analytical procedures in each study.

The grade conference as research site

Exploring assessment feedback as a unique type of communication necessitates empirical data in which participants' communicative sense-making becomes observable. Bazerman (2008) has argued that "a strategic research site is a place where a problem or phenomenon can be investigated more easily, in greater depth, or with greater clarity than other sites" (p. 304). In this dissertation, the grade conference was selected as particularly well suited for a dialogical analysis

of assessment feedback interaction. To recap, grade conferences are scheduled, mandatory events that center around the face-to-face delivery of a previously determined institutional grade on a student assignment. In contrast to spontaneous office hour meetings that may be more familiar activities of face-to-face discussions of student work in academic settings outside of Sweden, the grade conference is a planned event, which enables repeated and purposeful data collection. Second, the face-to-face nature of assessment delivery in this unique type of assessment activity also provides unique access to participants' communicative sense-making in feedback communication *as it happens*. As previously mentioned, assessment feedback tends to be delivered in writing. While there is no reason why written assessment should not be discussed as communication (Ajjawi and Boud, 2017, provide an example how this might be achieved), the dispersed nature of this mode of assessment delivery makes it difficult to capture the dialogical aspects of sense-making in this type of assessment interaction. Face-to-face assessment delivery, in contrast, allows for a more immediate exploration of feedback communication, including the ways in which "participants constitute the occasioned sense and significance of features of the setting, such as objects, artefacts and the like" (Heath, Hindmarsh, and Luff, 2010, p. 87).

Empirical data

The analytical work in all three studies included in this dissertation is based on a selection of data that was retrieved from a corpus of video and audio data collected by Eriksson (2014). Covering interaction from an entire graduate module on environmental sustainability assessment conducted at a Swedish university of technology, this corpus consists of almost all instances of scheduled interaction that took place during seven weeks of term time. The corpus includes over forty hours of video and audio recordings from lectures, seminars, group work, supervision and grade delivery. In addition, the corpus also contains a large body of text material: the students' written reports in up to three draft stages, teachers' notes and marginal comments connected to these drafts, and students' final reports, but also assignment prompts, course descriptions, an institutional criteria sheet and an excel spread sheet detailing different sub-grades for each student report.

The rich data material provided in this corpus has earlier provided material for a number of studies of situated writing and supervision practices (Eriksson,

2014, 2015; Eriksson and Mäkitalo, 2013, 2015). These studies introduced a number of issues that shaped writing processes in this setting and also provided contextual information for the analytical work presented here. The empirical work in this dissertation, however, is based on a section of the corpus that has not previously been subjected to analysis. The smaller corpus of data used in this dissertation thus contains all nine video- and the single audio-recorded grade conference that were conducted in the module (see Table 1, below). Together with the available textual artefacts that were present in these recorded meetings – each student's report, an institutional criteria sheet (Appendix A), and an institutional grading sheet (Appendix B) – the recordings from these ten grade conferences provide the corpus of empirical data for the dialogical study of assessment feedback presented in this dissertation.

Empirical setting

As previously mentioned, the ten grade conferences that were explored in this dissertation were conducted within an MA module in Civil and Environmental Engineering (7.5 ECTS) which was offered by a Swedish university of technology. Taught by a team of three teachers, the module catered to students from three different programs: environmental measurements and assessments, electric power engineering, and geo and water engineering (see syllabus in Appendix C). The fourteen international students attending this module (of which only ten attended a scheduled grade conference) were introduced to a number of concepts and methods central to the professional engagement with sustainability and environmental issues. The module placed a particular focus on analytical tools related to perception, indicators, and assessment of sustainability in a range of contexts from local to global. These issues were introduced in a number of lectures and discussed in small group seminars. Students were also asked to work in groups with a short simulation exercise and attended at least two individual supervision sessions connected to the course assignment, an individual written scientific report (see Table 1, below, for an illustration of the types of topics assigned in this module).

The scientific report is a text genre that is well established in the field of environmental engineering (Rude, 1995, 1997). In the empirical setting, each student was asked to choose one of a number of topics concerned with sustainability assessment, to analyze a particular issue and to recommend potential measures (see Appendix D for a sample assignment prompt). The

Table 1: Overview of video-and audio recorded data material used in this dissertation

Student	Teacher	Assignment topic	Length of recording	Grade points
Cassandra	Alex	How are urban physical structure and sustainability linked?	58:01	56/120
Christian	Alex	Will there be enough water?	48:45	56/120
Ebba	Stefan	Are the present patterns of production sustainable?	24:40	45/120
Ernst	Stefan	Food and land-use: will there be enough land to feed our children	22:34	89/120
Felicia	Stefan	How is sustainability assessments performed at the city/municipal level (Swedish spoken in grade conference)	08:05	96/120
Ida	Daniel	Acceptably clean air	11:22	57/120
Juni	Daniel	What are the constraints of a Sustainable energy future?	12:58	105/120
Manda	Alex	Is trade always good?	27:58	113/120
Rikard	Daniel	Towards sustainable consumption	16:55	66/120
Sigge	Alex	Is democracy necessarily a part of sustainable development	39:25 (audio)	99/120

resulting reports were usually about 20 pages long and were all written in English. Eriksson (2014) shows that the report was not only used as the principle means of assessment, it also served as a major means of instruction during text supervision, where each student met with a dedicated supervisor (one of the three course teachers) in face-to-face supervision meetings at outline and draft stage, with the option to attend an additional supervision meeting before handing in the final report.

Both teacher and student group were diverse in age, experience, and linguistic background (Eriksson, 2014). Stefan, the course leader, and Alex, a younger colleague, spoke Swedish as their first language. Daniel, the third teacher in the group, was fluent in Swedish but spoke English as his first language. All students attending the module had to achieve at least an undergraduate degree in science and/or technology to be admitted to the module. The recordings suggest that many students in the group were new to the university in question and in many cases even to the country. There are no formal records available for students' countries of origin, language learning histories, schooling, or personal motives for attending the module. However, the recordings suggest that three students in the group spoke Swedish as their first language (Felicia, Manda, and Juni), while the remainder of the groups spoke five additional first languages between them (Eriksson, 2014).

The language diversity that is on display throughout the material is a strong feature of the setting. In the ten grade conferences explored in the three studies included in this dissertation, English was used as lingua franca in all but one case (Felicia), where teacher and student chose to speak Swedish. With increasing internationalization of higher education, there is a growing field of research concerned with the implications of learning and teaching in a lingua franca in higher education, and thus a growing awareness of the challenges this may imply for both teachers and students engaged in such cross-linguistic teaching contexts (for an introduction to English as instructional language in European higher education see for instance Coleman, 2006; Dimova, Hultgren and Jensen, 2015). Compared to the one Swedish-only grade conference, the nine lingua-franca meetings contained in the corpus appeared to develop on a slower pace and to involve more intense communicative work (see also Eriksson, 2014). However, since the corpus did not provide enough data for an in-depth comparison of lingua-franca to first-language interaction, I have here chosen to approach the linguistic diversity in these meetings as a basic premise for talk-in-interaction in this institutional setting.

In each grade conference, one teacher met one student for grade delivery. These pairings were not accidental, as each teacher had previously acted as supervisor for the student in question. Once the final report had been handed in, the supervisor changed role and assessed the report based on a number of institutional criteria, together with a second teacher of the course. Overall, teachers awarded up to 120 points in this module: 100 for to the written report and 20 further points for a presentation-and-discussion exercise where the finished report was shared with the student group just prior to the grade conference. According to the course syllabus, grades were then assigned on a three-tiered numerical scale, 5 being the highest and 3 the lowest pass grade (see Appendix C).

Figure 1: Example for grade conference set-up and camera angle

On the day of grade delivery, students met their teachers in their office, the scene of previous supervision encounters (Figure 1, above). While students came to these meetings empty-handed, teachers brought a number of institutional documents: the student's report, an institutional criteria sheet in Swedish, as well as an excel sheet which had been used in grading and contained the scores from each marker for the entire student group (see Appendix B). It

is important to note that despite the relevance of the criteria sheet for grading and grade delivery, students had to my knowledge been unaware of the existence of institutional grading criteria prior to the grade conference. Only one teacher (Alex) translated this criteria sheet into English for one of his students during a grade conference and worked with this translation in all subsequent meetings. Each teacher handled these material artefacts differently: In some cases, these documents were placed on to the table between the participants, in other cases, teachers had collected them in folders or stapled together and occasionally allowed students access to these documents. Students and teachers remained seated on the table throughout the duration of their meeting and, with a single exception (Rikard), all documents remained in the room when the students left. Nine out of the ten students documented in this corpus accepted the grade that was being delivered in these meetings. The tenth student (Cassandra) disagreed with the institutional assessment but agreed to ask the course leader for a grade review.

Working with interactional corpus data

With technological advances in the production and storage of video and audio data, larger corpora of recorded naturally occurring communication are increasingly becoming available in the field of interaction analysis (examples are the SCORE[3] corpus for classroom discourse, the ARCH[4] corpus for discourse in the health sector, or ViMELF[5] for skype conversations). Many of these corpora are compiled as resource for future research projects, often involving intricate transcriptions, annotations, and coding schemes. The corpus that has provided data for this research project, in contrast, was originally produced for use by Eriksson's (2014) alone and consists mainly of raw recordings and occasional, sparse transcriptions. In hindsight, I believe that this presentation of the data has been advantageous, as it allowed me to access the data relatively un-inhibited by previous interpretation or conceptualization of the interactional work on display in these recordings. However, Eriksson has also been on hand throughout the research process whenever her ethnographic knowledge of the empirical settings was needed for clarification or additional contextual information.

[3] http://corpus.nie.edu.sg/score/index.htm, retrieved 2018-10-18
[4] https://www.otago.ac.nz/wellington/research/arch/corpus/, retrieved 2018-10-18
[5] https://www.umwelt-campus.de/ucb/index.php?id=case, retrieved 2018-10-18

In an introduction to video interaction analysis, Kissmann (2009) has called on researchers in the field to reflect on the ways in which recording practice might affect the data material. Not having been involved in the original recording of the data material for this dissertation, I cannot fully account for the many decisions that shaped the original practice of data collection. However, Eriksson's (2014) detailed descriptions allow for a brief summary of the data collection process: Having been invited to the site by the course convener, Eriksson documented all scheduled events using video and field observations. Participants were then provided access to the collected data and asked to renew their consent in writing. The video recordings of grade conference interaction that were used in this dissertation were obtained via a single camera mounted on a tripod. Usually positioned so as to capture participants' physical orientation to the documents available in the meeting, the camera often shows participants in profile from the waist up. While the documents used were usually visible in these videos, the inscriptions were not always legible due to the quality of the recording and the distance between camera and table top. One case (Sigge) was only available as audio recording with no additional information on the recording history.

While not all research projects are suited to working with this type of corpus data, I have chosen to work in this way for several reasons. First, Eriksson's (2014) corpus provided complete and good-quality recordings of grade delivery in ten grade conferences. Her account of the data production process (Eriksson, 2014) was thorough and all recorded data had been accurately listed and labelled in the corpus. Second, although I cannot fully exclude the possibility that the recordings omit certain aspects of talk-in-interaction, there is little in the (video) recordings that suggests this might be the case. Across the data material, grade conference interaction involved very little movement; in each recording, teacher and student are shown seated at a small table with a number of institutional documents between them (see Figure 1, above). During talk-in-interaction, participants kept their gaze on either the other participant or the table/documents on the table, suggesting that this is the main space of relevant activity, a space that the camera captures fully in most cases. It was therefore reasonable to assume that the fixed-position camera did, in fact, capture the relevant, naturally occurring assessment interaction as truly as possible.

Analytical procedures

Generally speaking, interaction analysis is based on the broad assumption that human knowledge is tied to social practices that can, in turn, provide the data needed to explore how humans come to know and act meaningfully in social settings. Jordan and Henderson (1995), whose seminal text on this approach is still widely referred to, provide a concise definition of the principal goal of interaction analysis: "to identify regularities in the ways in which participants utilize the resources of the complex social and material world of actors and objects within which they operate" (p.41). These goals are congruent with the dialogical perspective to talk-in-interaction applied in this dissertation. In the following, I will present a brief introduction to the analytical work that such a dialogical approach to interaction analysis involved in this dissertation. For the concrete analytical steps involved in each study, I refer to the summaries of each study in the following chapter, Chapter 5.

A brief introduction to dialogical interaction analysis

In accordance with the theoretical assumptions introduced above, a dialogical interaction analysis requires data that allows for explorations of participants' communicative actions in their contexts (1998). As mentioned earlier, the video- and audio-recordings provided in the corpus were well suited for this type of research (see above). Guided by the two overarching research questions that were formulated for this dissertation, analytical work approached interaction on display in these recordings as instances of emerging assessment activity and focused on illuminating how participants, in concrete instances of talk-in-interaction, used the tools at their disposal to achieve the work of grade delivery in these ten grade conferences (Linell, 1998, 2010).

Within interaction analysis, there are different theoretical and empirical approaches that are commonly drawn on to explore these types of issues. For instance, Vehviläinen (2009a,b) and Svinhufvud and Vehviläinen (2013), whose research findings were discussed earlier, draw on conversation analysis in their studies of text supervision and formative assessment and provide intricate analysis of short sequences of assessment interaction. Eriksson (2014), in contrast, also includes ethnographic knowledge in her analyses of supervision interaction and can thus make broader claims about the contextual nature of talk-in-interaction in the institutional and disciplinary setting she explored.

In this dissertation, these and similar interactional studies of assessment interaction have provided pointers and background for my own analytical work. However, I have here mostly drawn on Linell's (2009) broad guidelines for studying communicative activity types (CATs), of which the grade conference is considered to be one example. As previously argued, CAT has been defined as a "comprehensive communicative project tied to a social situation type" (p.201). Conceptualizing the grade conference as such a CAT provided a number of dimensions on which it could be analyzed. Linell (2009) presents the following, non-exhaustive list as an illustration of the three overlapping and interdependent "families of concepts" that may be addressed in this type of analysis:

- *Framing dimensions* (demarcating the specific CATs): situation definitions in terms of (prototypical) purposes and tasks, activity roles, scenes, times, medium, role of language (central vs. subsidiary), specific activity language;
- *Internal interactional organizations and accomplishments* (in the specific CATs): phase structure, core communicative projects, agenda, topics, turn organizations and feedback patterns, topical progression method (e.g. question designs), dominance patterns, positionings, (in)formality, role of artifacts;
- *Sociocultural ecology* (of specific CATs, in relation to the adjacent CATs and organizations): sociocultural history, relation to societal organizations, to larger activity systems, and to neighboring activity types, positions in chains of communicative situations, hybridities, discrepancies in participants' understandings. (Linell, 2009, p. 203)

As the summaries of the studies presented in the following chapter show in more detail, each study focused in depth on one of the aspects that become relevant for understanding a CAT. In Study 1, analytical interest was directed at the core communicative projects through which the activity was accomplished in each grade conference recorded for the corpus. Study 2 focused on the use of contextual resources as a means to explore the relation between assessment interaction and the surrounding sociocultural ecology. And Study 3 explored the role of a specific material artefact (the institutional criteria sheet) as organizational resource in assessment feedback activities.

Having decided on the broad focus of each study, analysis proceeded along similar lines in each study. In all three studies, the analytic process was closely related to transcription efforts. After screening and cataloguing all available corpus data, the ten recorded grade conferences were collected in a separate corpus, together with all relevant documents (i.e. each student's report and all other available artefacts). At that early stage of the project, a basic verbatim transcript was created for each recorded grade conference using the INQSCRIBE software. These transcripts were read multiple times with and without the accompanying recordings, which generated a rough understanding of the topical development in each meeting. These successive topical episodes were roughly indexed.

With these initial transcriptions and screenings of the data as background, the broad analytical interests of each study were specified and appropriate excerpts for more detailed analysis of instantiations of these interesting issues were selected. In Study 1, this involved, first, a cataloguing of each successive communicative project (Linell, 1998, 2009) that participants engaged in in each of the ten cases. This was an important analytical step for the entire research project, as even Studies 2 and 3 drew on this analytical work. How each communicative project was located is explained in more detail in Chapter 5, below. What needs to be pointed out here, however, is the fact that these analytical decisions were not based entirely on my own judgement but are the results of repeated and collaborative rounds of analysis within the supervision team, but also in other research settings, both within and outside of the department at which this project was conducted. As previously argued, such opportunities for calibrating analytical assumptions are invaluable for producing robust findings in interactional analysis (Jordan and Henderson, 1995).

While Linell's (2009) cluster of dimensions provided structure for determining the episodes that seemed of particular interest to each respective study, these were then approached with an inductive interest in participants' communicative activity. In concrete terms, this involved, first, a more detailed transcription of verbal interaction, using a transcription key adapted from Linell (1998, Appendix E). These transcriptions where then completed with a written record of the visible bodily actions accompanying talk in each instance. These transcriptions recorded more general changes in body postures and gaze and also recorded any physical orientation to the physical artefacts available in these

meetings. Table 2, below, provides an example for this type of transcript[6]. Based on these transcripts and the recordings, it was then possible to make empirically based assumptions about the ways in which communicative activity on display in each case under discussion was achieved through the moment-by-moment interaction of participants *in situ*. Even at this stage of the analysis, repeated viewings in different institutional research settings provided possibility to reflect on and adjust analytical procedures and assumptions.

Table 2: Sample excerpt to illustrate transcription of verbal and non-verbal activity

	Speaker	Verbal activity	Non-verbal activity Teacher	Non-verbal activity Student
1	A:	yeah (.) well I think there sh-	Rests chin in both	Pulling slightly away
2		I mean (.) if you would look	hands.	from the table,
3		at what sustainability could	Gestures with both	looks at teacher
4		be (.) I think it's more than (.)	hands	
5		crime or (.) er:: (.) I mean		
6		apart from environmental sustainability		
7	C:	[mhm		
8	A:	[er because there's quite (.)		Turns head and
9		er much on environmental		looks at text
10		sustainability and (.) I think		

Case selection

The corpus of ten recorded grade conferences was used in different ways in each study included in this dissertation. Study 1 is based on the entire corpus of data, since it was the main aim of that study to capture the characteristic communicative work of the activity type, but also to show how this work was concretely achieved in each of the ten different meetings. Study 2 is a single case-study, focusing on the one meeting where student and teacher could not agree on the institutional assessment of the student's report and decided to ask the course leader for a grade review (Cassandra). This single case of disagreement seemed particularly illuminating in relation to the tacit assumptions and problematic issues that may accompany the move from

[6] For publication, these transcripts were altered so as to best serve the purpose of each article. Articles 1 and 2 include transcripts of verbal interaction only, although narratives of non-verbal actions where supplied whenever necessary. In Article 3, which reported on the role of the assessment criteria sheet as artefact-in-interaction, transcriptions of both verbal and non-verbal activity were presented alongside stills depicting short sequences of interaction to better illustrate physical orientation to the artefact in moment-by-moment talk-in-interaction.

supervision to assessment in a module where writing is so closely supervised. In this case, the misalignment that characterized the meeting forced participants to account for their actions and expectations, making the case particularly informative in relation to the tacit assumptions that participants may bring to a grade conference. In Study 3, finally, I have placed the focus on participants' observable orientation to the criteria sheet, the institutional assessment document used in grading and introduced to students in the grade conference. This implied a need for adequate visual data, and I therefore included only those cases in the study where the recordings provided appropriate visual quality. For that reason, both the audio-only and one video-recorded case (Sigge and Ida) were excluded from this study, resulting in a smaller corpus of eight grade conferences for use in this last study.

Ethical considerations

This project is based on corpus data. Ethical considerations therefore apply in two forms: first in relation to ethical conduct in the context of primary data collection, and secondly in relation to the ethical use of qualitative data in this research. The ethical guidelines set up by the Swedish Research Council[7] were used to ensure that all three studies meet the required ethical standards. At first data collection in 2007, all participants were informed about purpose, scope, and potential publication of original research. All informants were of age and signed the appropriate consent forms which granted use of collected material to the university, the researcher and potential collaborators. Student participants were asked to provide an alias in order to protect their identity, all participants were assured that their faces would be obscured in publications, and that their anonymity would be protected. Participants were also informed that the nature of the data obtained would nevertheless carry the possibility that they might be recognized in institutional contexts where data was shown as part of the analytical process. No participant objected to that. While the consent forms give permission for further use of the data in other research projects, this does not imply that a lesser degree of care towards the rights of the original informants to protect their identities was employed in this project. I have therefore taken great care to anonymize the participants in the manuscripts that have been submitted for publication and have assigned new aliases to all participants in the corpus used here. In contexts where the video data was

[7] http://www.codex.vr.se/en/forskninghumsam.shtml, retrieved 2019-04-28

shared with the larger research community, it was always ensured that these viewings were confidential. Where this could not be guaranteed, participant features were obscured.

Chapter 5 Summary of the studies

Study I

Meyer-Beining, J., Vigmo, S., & Mäkitalo, Å. (2018). The Swedish grade conference: A dialogical study of face-to-face delivery of summative assessment in higher education. *Learning, Culture and Social Interaction*, 19, 134–145.

As mentioned previously, teacher assessment feedback is widely regarded as important in relation to developing student writing, although the actual form such feedback might take, how and when it is best administered, and how students ought to deal with it is still wildly debated in pedagogical and research literature. In most tertiary institutions, such feedback is predominantly delivered in written form, in a continuum of genres that can range anywhere from numerical grades, hand-written marginal comments, to lengthy written notes. Usually delivered to students at the end of class, teacher assessment feedback is often criticized as mono-directional, since students are given little opportunity to question or discuss these comments with their teachers. In order to make such feedback more accessible for students, pedagogical and research literatures are increasingly advocating to move the feedback forward, and to make feedback (and the grounds on which this feedback is based) a natural part of in-class activity (Nicol, 2010; Beaumont, O'Doherty and Shannon, 2011; Yang and Carless, 2013; Ajjawi and Boud, 2017; Steen-Utheim and Wittek, 2017).

In Swedish higher education, however, assessment feedback is not exclusively delivered in writing. Instead, grades may also be delivered orally, in a grade conference, a scheduled, face-to-face grade delivery activity. On the surface, the activity appears to be an interesting compromise between a traditional written assessment feedback activity and the face-to-face discussions often involved in formative assessment activities. However, there is as yet little research of the precise nature of such oral assessment feedback activities. Study 1 was developed as a first exploration of this type of activity and was principally intended to introduce its general characteristics based on an observation of its talk-in-interaction in a concrete institutional setting. Three interconnected aims guided this first study: to learn about the interactional work that characterizes

the activity, to learn about the issues that participants deal with in these meetings, and to understand what purpose the activity serves in the concrete institutional setting.

This study explored all ten grade conferences that were contained in the larger corpus of data collected during a graduate module on Sustainability Assessment at a Swedish university of technology by Eriksson (2014). To recap, this smaller corpus of grade conference interaction includes nine video- and one audio-recorded grade conferences, varying in length between ten and sixty minutes. These ten grade-delivery meetings between one student and his or her former teacher and supervisor formed the main data corpus for this study. The dyads recorded in this data used English as a second language, although one dyad spoke Swedish, their common language. The assignment for which grades were delivered was a scientific report, roughly twenty pages long, written individually and supervised by the teacher who later graded the report in conjunction with a second marker and also delivered this grade in the grade conference. As we took special interest in the situated communicative work involved in these meetings, we approached the data from a dialogical perspective (Linell, 1998, 2009) and paid particular attention to the discursive practices the participants engaged in .

From a dialogical point of view, talk-in-interaction is considered a collaborative achievement, made possible through participants' continuing responsive communicative work in the preceding, surrounding and prospective contexts of interaction. Since the purpose of Study 1 was to describe the recognizable features of the grade conference as well as to understand the specific, situated communicative work that engaging in such a meeting entails, we chose two dialogical concepts as guides for our research. First, we utilized the concept of communicative activity types, or CATs, a concept introduced by Linell (1998, 2009, 2010). As previously introduced, CATs are larger, culturally recognized patterns of interaction that are linked to particular social situations and enable participants to accomplish communicative tasks without the need to establish all aspects of this interaction from scratch. A doctoral appointment is one easily recognizable example. In Study 1, we approached the grade conference as such a CAT.

A second dialogical concept was then introduced to capture the concrete communicative work that engaging in such a CAT entails. As Linell (1998, 2009) argues, CATs cannot be understood as somehow pre-existing interaction, as being merely inhabited or acted out by participants. Instead, CATs are

constantly re-established *in situ* through participants' collaborative communicative actions. I have previously argued that these actions usually fulfill subordinated communicative projects (CPs, Linell (1998, 2009)), smaller identifiable units of interaction that in succession allow participants to achieve the overall work involved in the CAT. Doctoral appointment, for instance, usually contain at least one episode where the participants establish a problem, and hopefully also an episode where they establish a solution. In Study 1, we chose to approach the characteristic work involved in grade delivery through identifying the successive CPs in each grade conference, as well as through detailed analysis of the work involved in each of these CPs. Building on these conceptualizations of interactional work on display in these meetings, we formulated two research questions to guide our research in this study:

1. *What are the communicative projects that participants engage in to pursue the grade conference as a communicative activity type,* and
2. *What issues are negotiated within these communicative projects, and how is this achieved interactionally in concrete instances?*

Based on recordings and iterative rounds of transcriptions, we set out to identify CPs in each grade conference, looking for pauses, re-starts, and similar verbal and non-verbal cues in order to decide where a particular dyad opened, closed, or abandoned a particular communicative project. These projects were then catalogued according to the interactional task that appeared to be at the core of participants' communicative work. At this point in the process, we found that participants engaged in a distinct, but relatively small number of CPs that recurred across the material, although no two dyads engaged in these projects in the same order or with the same recurrence. Four projects appeared as core CPs in all ten grade conferences: Inviting student self-assessment, introducing the institutional criteria sheet, establishing a problem, and delivering a grade are tasks that all ten dyads in the material work with in some way during the course of the meeting. In a second analytical step, we then turned our attention to the ways in which each dyad established and worked through each these distinct sets of CPs. This involved a more detailed transcription of specific excerpts, involving both verbal and non-verbal action. This in-depth, cross-case comparison work proved to be a productive way for apprehending how participants understood and worked within the framework of the activity. At

the same time, it also highlighted the issues that were at stake in this activity, not only for the student receiving a grade, but also for the teacher delivering it.

The results of this analysis showed that the grade conference, as it played out in the specific institutional setting, was predominantly geared towards achieving acceptance of institutional grading decisions. While participants worked through similar sets of CPs to achieve this end, the ten meetings did not follow a common agenda, and participants dealt with a wide range of issues in these CPs, including individual, text-specific problems, but also previous supervision activity, projected literate activity, or the textual conventions of the field. The institutional nature of the assessment activity provided the teacher with the dominant role in the activity, and we found that students consistently followed their teachers' lead in establishing CPs and introducing topics for discussion. We believe that this asymmetrical participant structure may explain the fact that even the international students enrolled in the module were able to engage in the activity with relative ease, despite the fact that they were likely unfamiliar with the activity type. Overall, the activity was cordially maintained, even in the one single case where the student openly challenged institutional assessment and teacher and student agreed to have the report reassessed (see Study 2 for a more detailed analysis of this case).

However, we also found that delivering and receiving a grade in this setting involved a number of challenges. First, the grade conference marks a decisive shift from supervision to assessment, involving a renegotiation of institutional roles. The established supervisor/supervisee relationship turns into an assessor/assesse relationship, which also has implications for the kind of issues that are relevant within the framework of this new assessment activity. That this might be challenging became obvious in several cases where dyads moved between guidance and assessment within a particular communicative project. A second challenge were the different accountabilities that occasionally became relevant as student and teacher discussed institutional evaluation of student writing. Since student and teacher had worked together on the written report under discussion, both could be held responsible for any lack of quality in student writing, the student for writing effort and ethical conduct, the teacher for conscientiousness in supervision and assessment. Finally, the asymmetric participant structure, despite its interactional advantages, may also be considered a challenge in this setting. Since the activity type favors teacher initiative, new CPs and new topics are almost exclusively introduced by teachers. Students rarely raised issues of their own, suggesting that the activity,

despite its face-to-face character, may not necessarily be more student-centered than written forms of teacher assessment feedback. However, while it did not necessarily appear advantageous in that sense, the activity also provided much flexibility in terms of what was considered and discussed as relevant to the assessment of student writing in this setting. Based on these findings, we concluded that face-to-face grade delivery in a grade conference was most productive in terms of providing an arena for negotiations of what it means to be a student, a writer, and a supervisor in this local institutional setting.

Study 2: Tracing literate activity: a dialogical study of oral grade delivery in Swedish higher education

Janna Meyer-Beining, Sylvi Vigmo & Åsa Mäkitalo (manuscript)

Students in the engineering module that is the focus of this dissertation needed to learn how to write a report that meets institutional expectations. This was part of their professional training, but also part of their appropriation of the text cultures of their chosen discipline (Dysthe, 2002). In the concrete setting of this module, teachers supported this learning in different ways: they introduced the relevant issues in lectures and seminars, they organized groups work and discussions and encouraged peer-feedback activities, and they asked students to attend at least two individual supervision meetings where a teacher responded to subsequent drafts of the student's text. This type of writing support is no longer exceptional – today's universities recognize the significance of writing for learning and support students in these learning processes, at the same time as texts are still the principle means of assessing in how far students have achieved the learning goals of an academic program.

In the second study, we investigated how this support structure and other aspects of the literate activity (Prior, 1998) that characterizes writing in the local disciplinary text culture became relevant in the assessment of a student's written report. Earlier research into the dialogical processes of student writing in academia has shown that the trajectories of student writing involve complex arrays of activity (Prior 1998, 2003; Eriksson, 2014), of which institutionally organized pedagogical events are just a part. As far as we were aware, however, there is little research that explores to what extent this literate activity is relevant even in the discussion of students' texts, the tangible results of student writing.

Focusing on a single case of grade delivery, we therefore chose to investigate to what extent and in what ways institutional literate activity became relevant as student and teacher shifted from working together on an emerging text to discussing the quality of the finished text as author and assessor.

The case we chose to investigate for this study was the Cassandra case, the only meeting in the corpus where the grade was contested and participants could not achieve acceptance of institutional assessment. The slowly emerging disagreement was considered to be of analytical advantage in this study, since it disrupted assumed consensus and forced participants to bridge the gaps in their fractured interaction through accounts to "explain unanticipated or untoward behavior" (Scott and Lyman, 1968, p.42; see also Buttny, 1993; Firth, 1995; Mäkitalo, 2006). In these accounts, participants made some of the tacit assumptions and underlying expectations about the grounds for assessment of student writing observable. Especially the contextual resources (Buttny, 1993; Linell, 1998) that they drew on in these accounts were considered interesting for this study, as they provided empirical evidence for the role that the trajectory of student writing played in the assessment of students' texts.

With participant accounts as units of analysis, we investigated verbal and non-verbal grade conference interaction guided by one principal research question:

- *What is established as relevant for the institutional assessment of the student's report in participants' successive accounts in this single grade conference*?

Building on the findings of Study 1, we approached the talk-in-interaction observable in the hour-long video-recording once again from a dialogical perspective (Linell, 1998, 2009). Returning to the video recordings and the detailed transcripts of this interaction that were produced in the previous study, we identified the accounts that participants engaged in across the interaction and selected a small number of these accounts for closer analysis. These accounts were selected on the basis of being particularly interesting with respect to the contextual resources that participants drew on in their efforts to realign their interaction.

We had previously found that discussing a disappointing grade in face-to-face interaction was not an easy task for participants in this grade conference (see Study 1), and the closer analysis in this second study confirmed that student and teacher needed to negotiate different accountabilities as they engaged in

this task (see Sabee and Wilson, 2005; Wright, 2012 for other studies of disappointing grade interaction). While participants initially established the conversational roles and responsibilities associated with the grading conference with apparent ease, their disparate assessments of the student written report became apparent rather swiftly, and both student and teacher were faced with having to collaborate on maintaining the activity while at the same time disagreeing profoundly on a key issue.

The contextual orientations on display as participants attempted to solve the disagreement and to account for their divergent assessments of the text suggests that the literate activity that characterized student learning in this module was indeed relevant for discussions of assessment of student writing at the point of grade delivery. However, the analysis also showed that participants did not orient to these layers of activity in the same manner. We found that the teacher, Alex, often activated abstract disciplinary or institutional contexts, frequently using the institutional criteria sheet to structure his arguments, and conjuring up ideal disciplinary text to which to compare the students' effort unfavorably. The student, on the other hand, continuously related to the supervision context or her own personal writing process.

However, we also found that the teacher, Alex, used the report in a way that highlighted student writing activity, indicating a part of the text with gestures but verbally referring to a choices the student took in the writing process. These instances give relevance to Cassandra's retrospective orientation, which is further legitimized by the fact that the teacher never uses his institutional position of authority to contradict her efforts to re-create the writing and supervision history as relevant context for discussing the meaning of the institutional grade being delivered in this meeting. We argue that the teacher's acceptance of the student's contextual orientation was centrally related to the nature of the assignment under discussion and to the local institutional setting in which the student had composed her written report. Having been conceived as a major means of instruction, the written assignment had been worked into the curriculum in various ways, most importantly by offering dyadic supervision. At the point of grade delivery, this study shows, participants did not reduce the report to a textual artefact but also oriented to is as the tangible outcome of literate activity, shaped by the student's personal writing trajectories and the scheduled (supervision) activities provided in the module. In grade delivery, each of these activities were latently available as points of reference in

the discussion of the text, provided this was sanctioned by participants and within the scope of the activity.

What Study 2 shows in empirical detail, is that Alex and Cassandra were not so much engaged in a disagreement about the adequacy of institutional assessment, but more profoundly on what it was that was being assessed in the first place. The teacher's contextual orientations suggest that he found the student text lacking as a piece of disciplinary writing. The student's orientations suggest that she believed it to be a documentation of diligent student effort. Since both approaches to evaluation appeared to be within the frame of the activity, the only option for closing the activity was to suspend grading and call in the course leader as a third marker.

In conclusion, we argue that the disagreement at the heart of this meeting might have been avoided if institutional expectations and the purpose of student writing had been negotiated earlier on in the module. However, we also argue that participants' accounts in this disagreement draw attention to a more fundamental issue at play in the institutional assessment of student writing. Student writing in academia serves as a means to introduce students to disciplinary text cultures. At the same time, the resulting texts are used as a basis to determine how successfully students emulate the genres of their field. This may explain why participants in this study considered both the student writing effort and the finished report as equally relevant objects of assessment in this academic setting.

Study 3: Of course we have criteria: Assessment criteria as material semiotic means in face-to-face assessment interaction

Janna Meyer-Beining (manuscript)

As teachers and students engaged in grade delivery in the grade conferences under discussion in this dissertation, two institutional documents were present in all meetings: the student written report as well as an institutional criteria sheet (in the following CS). In this final study, I explored the role of this CS for the developing assessment interaction in the eight video-recorded grade conferences available in the corpus. Institutional CSs (also known as assessment rubrics or matrixes) are frequently employed in today's higher education, usually

in order to document and communicate the standards against which a particular student assignment is evaluated (e.g. Popham, 1997; Sadler, 2005; Reddy and Andrade, 2010; Dawson, 2017). Having become good practice in many tertiary institutions since the turn of the millennium, such assessment documents are well researched, often with respect to their role in the grading process, for instance in terms of their suitability as assessment instruments (Jonsson and Svingby, 2007; Sadler, 2009; Bloxham, den-Outer, Hudson, and Price, 2016). Further, CSs and similar documents are also studied as a means to advance student learning, as they can provide concrete grounds for discussing institutional expectations in class during formative feedback activities (Reddy and Andrade, 2010; Brookhart, 2013; Panadero and Jonsson, 2013; Jönsson and Panadero, 2017). The video data explored in this thesis, however, provides material for examining a different and rarely considered aspect of institutional rubric use. Focusing on the concrete instances of observable rubric use in face-to-face grade delivery, Study 3 explored the function of an institutional criteria sheet (CS) as material semiotic means in oral grade delivery, aiming to gain a fuller understanding of the ways in which assessment documents like the CS may be implicated in current higher education assessment practices.

In many ways, Study 3 was conceived of as a continuation of Study 1 (see above). Both studies were informed by a socio-cultural, dialogical approach to understanding institutional communication (Linell, 1998, 2009; Mäkitalo and Säljö 2002; Erickson, 2004; Grossen, 2010), and both studies share an overarching interest in the ways in which students and teachers engaged in a grade conference achieve the institutional purpose of the activity. In Study 1, we identified a number of communicative projects through which participants achieved the principle work of the activity type. Introducing the CS was one such project, and in Study 1 we were able to show that this project often provided participants with a means to account for the professionalism of institutional assessment as well as to provide concrete grounds for the discussion of institutional expectations of student report writing. However, the CS appeared as interactionally relevant even outside of these communicative projects. Study 3 was designed to explore the role of the CS in these other instances of CS use. Two specific question guided this research:

1. *How is the criteria sheet made relevant in verbal and non-verbal assessment interaction,* and
2. *What is achieved in these instances of relevant-making with respect to the ongoing work of assessment delivery?*

To answer these questions, I revisited both the recordings and the transcripts of eight video-recorded grade conferences (disregarding two grade conferences where visuals where either not available or of insufficient quality). The analysis involved two distinct steps: First, locating each instance of observable verbal and non-verbal CS use and mapping these instances onto a table listing the successive communicative projects for each of the eight grade conferences. The resulting table provided a number of first results: It confirmed that the CS could be oriented to throughout the meeting. However, it also showed that these orientations where determined by teacher preference, with one teacher orienting to the CS much more consistently than the other two. Based on these initial findings, I then addressed each instance of CS-use in turn. Using detailed transcriptions as well as the original video recordings, I considered these instances of relevant-making in the context of preceding and subsequent communicative action, as well as in relation to each overarching communicative project that participants were contributing to in these instances.

Initially, the results of this analysis confirmed the findings from Study 1, supporting the conclusion that a central role of the CS was to support discussions of and accounting for institutional assessment practice. In addition, however, Study 3 also showed that the CS fulfilled three more roles in this grade delivery activity. First of all, teachers oriented to the CS as a means to find the next relevant thing to talk about. It that sense, the content inscribed on the CS provided structure for a meeting for which participants had not established an agenda. Interactionally, the materiality of the CS was then often used to signal subsequent changes in the structure of the meeting, by pointing at a new criterion, for instance, or by putting the CS to the side and focusing on the student report instead. In a related manner, the CS was also used as a mnemotic device. Since the assessment areas and criteria inscribed onto the CS had previously been used in grading, they provided help for teachers looking to recall specific issues that had been of significance for the teacher's original assessment of the student report. Finally, I also found that the CS was often used as a stand-in or proxy for the student report. In many cases, the issues discussed were of a nature that was difficult to pinpoint. In such cases, teachers,

but also students, turned to the CS and discussed the issue in question relative to the respective assessment area/criterion instead of the actual student text. This was observable, for instance, when a student was asked to self-reflect and indicated that the problem was likely "here", indicating the assessment area "analysis" on the CS. In those cases, the CS was clearly understood as an analogous abstraction of the student report, providing orientation without any need to turn to the actual student text.

In conclusion, Study 3 showed that an assessment document like the CS can be of considerable interactional relevance when it is introduced into face-to-face assessment interaction. On the surface, the CS here fulfilled the functions most commonly associated with institutional assessment criteria. However, once introduced it was also very concretely involved in the moment-by-moment achievement of grade delivery, as student and teacher tried to make sense of the institutional assessment of a student written report.

Chapter 6 Discussion

In the introduction to this dissertation, I argued for a type of research that approaches assessment feedback as a unique form of communication and seeks to understand it not only in terms of its effectiveness but also with respect to the way participants in and through talk-in-interaction make sense of student work in relation to personal and institutional expectations. Drawing on the results of the three studies of grade conference interaction presented here, I want to use this final chapter to account for the insights such an interactional approach to feedback as communication bring to the table. The discussion of the findings provided in each study is based on the two overarching research questions that were presented in Chapter 3:

1. *How do participants achieve this type of assessment feedback activity through collaborative communicative work in concrete instances of talk-in-interaction?*

2. *How does the laminated history of student writing in the specific institutional setting shape the way participants make sense of the written report and its assessment at the point of grade delivery?*

To some extent, these questions anticipate one of the most basic findings of this dissertation: that grade delivery face-to-face interaction involves various strands of concurrent sense-making efforts. Before teacher and student in each meeting are able to make sense of the institutional assessment of a student-written report, they need to establish and make sense of the communicative work this might entail in concrete instances of talk-in-interaction. Each study presented in this dissertation provides some information on how participants make sense of the overarching activity type, its communicative organization and their own communicative responsibilities at the same time as they discuss and make sense of the situated meaning of the student's report and its institutional assessment. In the following, these two intertwining strands of sense-making are discussed in two separate but interconnected sections.

Making sense of communicating in face-to-face grade delivery

In a previous section of this text, I have described communicative activity types such as the grade conference as recognizable, habitual patterns of action that participants in specific social situations engage in for specific social purposes. These activity types are characterized by common communicative tasks (such as delivery of grade), more or less clearly determined participant roles and responsibilities and have a particular place within the surrounding ecology of social activity (Linell, 1998, 2009). Approaching the grade conferences as such a communicative activity type has been a productive way to enter into an understanding of participants' efforts to make sense of assessment feedback in and through communication. In Study 1, the results of dialogical analysis of participants' communicative work in the constitutive communicative projects provided a convenient way to introduce the common features that distinguishes grade conference interaction from other types of assessment activities. In the following discussion, I will draw on results of this and the other two studies to explain what it is that participants make sense of in terms of the communicative work of engaging in grade delivery, and also introduce the communicative resources they draw on in these sense-making processes. To illustrate these points, I will here discuss two aspects of communicative sense-making in more detail: the negotiation of communicative roles and responsibilities and the moment-by-moment organization of talk-in-interaction in this concrete institutional setting.

Communicative roles and responsibilities

As mentioned previously, grade conferences are not a common practice of assessment feedback delivery outside of Swedish higher education. In consequence, it can be assumed that at least the international students engaged in the grade conference had no prior experience with this activity type, and even Swedish students and their teachers needed to make sense of the current version of this activity and the contributions to grade conference interaction that were expected at different stages of this meeting. Despite the relative novelty of the activity, however, participants were found to establish these meetings with ease. With the single case of misalignment (see Study 2) as a notable exception, participants across board fell easily into interaction, did not appear to struggle to align their actions, and found a way to deal with the necessary communicative

projects without needing to resort to outright discussions of specific responsibilities. This apparent ease is here understood as the result of collaborative communicative sense-making activity, achieved by participants' use of a number of communicative and contextual resources.

As Linell and Thunqvist (2003) argue, each activity type "entails certain activity roles or identities to be enacted by the parties" (p. 412), such as teacher/student or, as is the case here, assessor/assessee. In the empirical material, participants were not observed to negotiate these roles outright. Instead, they appear to draw on participation patterns that were likely to have been familiar from previous experience with assessment or learning/teaching practices in higher education. As previously mentioned in the summaries of the studies, Study 1 in particular showed that the meetings were heavily dominated by teachers' verbal contributions to communication. Teachers were found to carry the initiative throughout these meetings, they opened each meeting, introduced new topics and communicative projects, and also initiated the closing sequences. Students, on the other hand, took a more responsive role, often supporting teacher initiative with minimal responses and non-verbal affirmation.

In Study 1, it was argued that this asymmetry in communicative contribution may be related to an asymmetry of knowledge (Marková and Foppa, 1991) that characterizes assessor/assessee relationship in grade delivery. As the more knowledgeable participant with respect to the institutional assessment of the student's report, teachers in the grade conference had an epistemic advantage over the student and there is reason to believe that they might also have felt that the occasion called for an effort to provide students with sufficient information for closing any apparent gaps between students' performance and institutional expectations. A similar participation structure has also been reported in studies of supervision interaction in the same module (Eriksson, 2014; see also Svinhufvud and Vehviläinen, 2013, for similar findings). It appears reasonable to assume that in the absence of an outright discussion of an activity frame for each meeting, participants here made sense of their activity roles by drawing on previous experience with institutional communication in face-to-face teacher/student interaction, using similar activities as models for unfamiliar grade conference activity.

Organization and structuring of communicative work in grade delivery

Apart from providing a general participation framework (Goffman, 1981), the teacher-dominated participation structure also had the distinct advantage of allowing teachers to guide students' talk-in-interaction in this activity. Communicative activity types, as previously introduced, are achieved via a distinct number of communicative projects, tasks that need to be dealt with in order for participants to be able to reach the overall aim of the activity. As Study 1 showed in more detail than can be reproduced here, it was teachers who introduced these communicative projects across the data set, with very few exceptions. By suggesting the tasks to be engaged in and – to a large extent – the topics that were discussed as part of these tasks, teachers made it very easy for students to find their feet in an unfamiliar activity. If the basic response that is expected from the students are supportive tokens and answers to direct questions, there is small chance for students to get it wrong, to misinterpret the activity frame or to need to spend time on realigning participation. From this point of view, communicative asymmetry here constituted a productive resource that helped student participants to make sense of the concrete communicative work expected of them at any particular point in this communicative activity type.

In the empirical setting, this type of guidance was particularly important as participants did not engage in an outright discussion of an agenda for these meetings prior to or during grade conference interaction (although there are a few exceptions, most notably in the misalignment case explored in Study 2). In the absence of a formal agenda and with no discussion about the overall goal of these meetings other than grade delivery, students had no guidelines that would clearly determine which communicative tasks would be considered relevant for achieving the overall work of grade delivery in this activity type. The empirical evidence suggests, however, that the activity provided for some adaptability and that teachers applied a certain amount of ad-hoc planning in these meetings. Study 1 shows that while all student/teacher dyads engaged in similar types of communicative projects (inviting student self-assessment, introducing the institutional criteria sheet, establishing a problem, and delivering a grade being most commonly found), they did not adhere to any particular order or introduced projects in a way that suggested a pre-determined, tacit agenda. Instead, teachers drew on their memory of previous readings of

the student's report and the two textual artefacts that were present in each meeting to locate issues that needed to be talked about.

In their study of text supervision in Finnish higher education, Svinhufvud and Vehviläinen (2013) reported similar findings, and suggested that teachers managed to sustain these meetings by drawing on student's draft texts as a source for new topics to engage with. In this dissertation, participants were found to drawn on the student reports in a similar way – to establish a problem with the report is a recurring communicative project in all ten grade conferences. However, I want to draw particular attention, here, to the role of a different institutional artefact in these meetings, the institutional criteria sheet. Inscribed with a table listing ten areas of assessment, each further explicated by up to six more concrete quality criteria, this criteria sheet had been used by teachers as a tool in grading each report. As Study 3 shows, this artefact becomes an available organizing resource in grade delivery: one teacher in particular tended to turn to the criteria sheet prior to returning attention to the student report and potentially problematic issues. In these and similar cases, the assessment areas inscribed in the criteria sheet bridged previous grading efforts with the current task of providing assessment feedback and provided a list of topics that teachers could make relevant with respect to the student report. In a very general sense, the criteria sheet thus functioned as a form of latent agenda for the meeting and its material form provided additional means to signal topical changes, for instance when teachers pointed at particular criteria, pulled the criteria sheet close or set it aside to make room for the student's report. Previous research in the assessment field found that teachers turned to formal assessment criteria to aid communication of holistic appraisal of student writing (Sadler, 2009; Bloxham, Boyd and Orr, 2011). The results of Study 3 in particular show what form this might take in concrete instances of assessment communication.

Pedagogical implications I

I draw attention to these matters here also for a pedagogical reason. In the research field, where a principal impetus for research is to find a solution to the "feedback problem", the focus of research tends to be on understanding and improving on the different types of information students encounter in dialogues with teachers, assessors, or peers. In these studies, the communicative work that enables engagement with feedback is often taken for granted.

However, as the findings presented here suggest, there is good reason to broaden the focus and also turn to the concrete ways in which such feedback activities are achieved by participants in concrete instances of talk-in-interaction.

Take, for instance, the participant structure that was previously discussed. On the whole, grade conference activity was found to be characterized by a friendly atmosphere and easy, well-aligned engagement between student and teacher. While this may seem a productive basis for constructive sense-making around student writing, a closer look at participants' communicative work in moment-by-moment interaction shows that this may not necessarily be the case. As previously shown, the apparent ease of engagement in these grade conferences was enabled by an asymmetrical structure of participation that favored teacher initiative and thus supported student/teacher alignment. From a pedagogical perspective, however, this type of asymmetry can also be considered quite problematic. I have earlier argued that recent literature in the field has drawn attention to the tendency of assessment feedback to be about "telling" rather than sense-making (Sadler, 2010; Boud and Molloy, 2013; Sambell, 2016). This type of feedback has been criticized for favoring teacher over student agency and for not allowing students the room to bring their own questions to the table. In the ten grade conferences under discussion here, there is some reason to believe that the specific participation structure favored in these meetings might foster this potentially problematic type of telling-feedback.

Being principally responsible for initiating communicative projects and topical episodes, it is the teachers' reading of the students' texts as well as their understanding of the criteria for quality student writing that determines what aspects of their work students will be discussing and making sense of. While students, in theory, were able to introduce their own questions, thoughts, and concerns in these meetings (Study 2 introduces the communicative work this involves in some detail), there is little empirical evidence that suggests that students considered this to be part of their communicative role. In fact, based on the observable communicative activity, it appears likely that at least the student participants in these meetings approached grade delivery as an activity where student-initiative is dispreferred (Atkinson and Drew, 1979).

This is an important finding with respect to calls for more dialogue in feedback. As Carless (2016) argued, the pedagogical aim of providing feedback in higher education is to put students in a position where they "become clearer

about their active role in seeking, engaging with, and using feedback" (p. 5). While dialogue-involving feedback activities have been credited with great potential for supporting this type of active sense-making, the empirical work of this dissertation suggests that 'more dialogue' alone may not be the answer to the feedback problem. To engage in talk-in-interaction can take any number of shapes – the research presented here suggests that there is reason to carefully scrutinize existing (and intended) feedback practices with respect to the ways in which they provide for, or indeed prevent, students' ability to raise their own concerns in concrete instances of feedback communication.

I have initially argued that this dissertation was not principally intended to provide information on how to improve on an institutional assessment practice, but to understand it as a specific type of communication. However, the findings presented here do suggest that grade delivery in this type of activity might need to involve more forthright discussions of expectations if it is to foster the active student role that current research calls for. Without an initial discussion of the intended purpose of the meeting and the roles that students (and teachers) are expected to take in them, student participants in particular may find it difficult to make sense of the concrete communicative work that is expected in an activity that is, after all, unusual – even innovative – in the academic setting. Discussing very similar findings in a formative assessment setting, Svinhufvud and Vehviläinen (2013) recommend recurrent agenda talk as a way to provide space for students to raise their own issues and to take a more responsible role in the discussions of their written work. Their recommendations can only be echoed here.

Making sense of a student-written scientific report and its institutional assessment

A second interest in this dissertation was to explore how feedback communication and sense-making was related to the complex history of the students' written assignments, to previous activity in-class and during supervision, and to broader institutional and disciplinary (Prior, 1998) contexts surrounding this type of assessment feedback activity. By focusing on observable talk-in-interaction as communicative activity *in situ*, the three studies presented here provided interesting insights into the different contexts within which participants situated assessment delivery and made sense of the assignment and the respective grade. The findings of Studies 1 and 2 in

particular suggest that in these meetings, sense-making was not restricted to the material object of assessment, the written report. Instead, delivering and discussing performance grades in this type of assessment activity also allowed teachers and students to raise basic questions that transcended the material object of assessment: what is it that can be concretely expected of a student, a student writer, and a supervisor in a particular institutional setting?

Negotiating responsibilities as student/author and supervisor

Out of all three studies, it was the emerging disagreement explored in Study 2 that provided most insights into the underlying assumptions that shaped how both teacher and student approached and made sense of grade delivery in these meetings. A detailed analysis of participants' negotiations and outright discussions of their various accountabilities (Buttny, 1986; Mäkitalo, 2006) illuminated a complex network of responsibilities that surrounded assessment and discussion of a student-written report in this institutional setting. In an earlier chapter, I have described the concrete set-up of the ten grade conferences in the following way: students came empty handed to the teacher's office where the teacher awaited them, a copy of the student's report in hand, ready to engage in assessment delivery. At cursory inspection, this scene suggests that it is the student who is the accountable one in this situation, and the teacher the one to point out possible accountabilities. In fact, the findings from Study 2 in particular show that teachers were just as accountable as students when it came to assessing supervised student writing in this institutional setting.

Specifically, it was found that students could be held accountable for delivering a report that did not match institutional expectations connected to the genre. They could be held accountable for not paying attention in supervision, for not working on the basis of agreements negotiated in these earlier meetings, or for not fully understanding the scope of the assignment, the situation they were supposed to report on, or the implications their research might have for the way a particular issue of sustainability assessment could be dealt with in practical terms. These accountabilities suggest that participants' sense-making in these meetings was not only directed at the assignment task and the material outcome of assignment activity, but was also directed at students' previous actions as supervisees or writers. While the purpose of grade

delivery in these meetings was ostensibly the delivery of a performance grade, the meetings thus also provided room for negotiating different expectations brought to students' actions as supervisees and writers accomplishing a specific assessment task in this institutional setting.

But, as previously argued, participants did not exclusively focus on student activity in these meetings but also dealt with a number of issues that concerned the role of teachers as supervisors and assessors in these settings. In the increasingly controversial discussions of the institutional assessment of the student's report that were explored in detail in Study 2, both teacher and student drew attention to aspects of past activity that made even the teacher accountable at the point of grade delivery. As teacher and assessor, Alex positioned himself as accountable for any failure to provide adequate guidance in supervision but also for any misapplication of the institutional criteria for assessment during grading. In addition, Cassandra, the student, also held him accountable for not appreciating the quality of the student's written report, for having unreasonable expectations, and for underestimating the complexity of the assignment task. Here, the interactional approach illuminates an aspect of feedback communication that is rarely problematized in the field, and shows that even teachers may have a personal investment in feedback communication, where their professional expertise as teacher, supervisor and assessor is constantly potentially at stake.

While student accountabilities were negotiated in a similar manner throughout the larger corpus, such outright negotiations of teacher accountabilities, however, were rarely observed in the corpus. In part, this may be explained by drawing on findings of Study 1. Here, it was found that teachers used some of the communicative projects introduced in each meeting to establish a common sense of the quality of a specific report prior to grade delivery, so as to prepare students for the upcoming grade delivery. This type of work may also have allowed teachers to preempt potentially uncomfortable discussions of accountability (see also Mäkitalo, 2006). At the same time, it is of course also possible that students actively avoided these types of negotiations. As research in the field of disappointing grade interaction has shown, expressing criticism towards teachers as institutional authority can be interactionally and emotionally challenging (Goulden and Griffin, 1995; Sabee and Wilson, 2005; Sanders and Anderson, 2010; Henningsen, Valde, Russel and Russel, 2011; Wright, 2012, 2013) – for students, it may have seemed the wiser

choice to proceed without challenge or discussion of institutional assessment and reasoning whenever possible.

Negotiating the 'ground rules' of disciplinary activity

The analytical attention given to the dialogical relations between current assessment feedback activity and the surrounding sociocultural ecology in this dissertation presented grade delivery as a highly contextualized affair, situated within and responsive to the needs and requirements of a particular academic setting. Eriksson (2014) has described this educational setting as strongly text mediated – in this final section I want to argue that the face-to-face assessment delivery also allowed participants to continue to make sense of the history of disciplinary literate activity (Prior, 1998) that had characterized work in the module on environmental sustainability assessment at stages prior to grade delivery. Here, the particular type of assignment on which grade delivery hinges needs to be brought into focus: what participants needed to make sense of in each grade conference was not the assessment of just any type of student work – it was the assessment of a heavily supervised written report, an assignment that in this case had been employed both as a means to introduce students to professional and disciplinary ways of creating and disseminating knowledge and as a means to determine the extent to which the student writer met the local expectations connected to this particular text genre.

In a previous section, I have argued that the asymmetrical participation structure that characterized talk-in-interaction in these ten meetings may have prevented students from introducing relevant issues with respect to the report assignment and its assessment. However, the findings of all three studies suggest that the activity type still provided room to continue at least some of the negotiations that had been initiated during the earlier weeks of in-class activity. Across the corpus, participants made sense of assessment and the student report by referring back to previous activity, to supervision discussions and student writing activities – most noticeably so in the controversial case discussed in Study 2 where the analysis illuminated a constant shifting between the students' report and the student's previous writing activity as two relevant objects of assessment. The material object of assessment thus provided participants with the opportunity to reflect on previous activity and to adjust and recalibrate assumptions about the kind of writing that was expected of

students in this particular module in this particular institution at this particular time.

In some ways, the grade conference as it was presented here thus involved two, quite different, types of feedback. On the on hand, the activity provided room for summative assessment of a student written report, allowing teachers to declare their judgement of the tangible result of a writing process that had now come to an end. On the other, the activity also involved formative assessment with respect to the ongoing project of appropriating and becoming part of the disciplinary activity that was characteristic of the institutional setting (Eriksson, 2014). In writing research, it has long been argued that a particular challenge for student writers is to understand the local notion of 'good' writing, which finds expression in local writing practices that are "embedded in the values, relationships and institutional discourses constituting the culture of academic disciplines in higher education" (Lea and Stierer, 2000, p. 2). In the three studies presented here I have shown how even the face-to-face delivery of a performance grade on a written assignment may become part of an ongoing effort to negotiate the "ground rules" (Lea and Stierer, 2000, p. 4) of writing in a particular academic setting – here, for instance via negotiations of the issues that may be made relevant as problematic (or recommendable) with respect to a written report, of the respective responsibilities of student and supervisor during the writing process, and of the kind of expectations one may bring to student writing in a graduate module on environmental sustainability assessment. In that sense, the findings of the three studies presented here are not only relevant with respect to understanding feedback communication, they also provide empirical knowledge about the concrete ways in which (the assessment of) student writing may contribute to academic enculturation (Anson, 1993; Prior, 1995; Prior and Bilbro, 2012).

Pedagogical implications II

As previously described, feedback dialogues have been discussed as important sites for the co-construction of meaning between student, teacher, and the institutional context (Carless, 2006; Nicol, 2010; Ajjawi and Boud, 2017; Esterhazy and Damşa, 2017). The findings presented in this final section suggest that it is a particular strength of face-to-face assessment delivery to enable such productive negotiations of highly relevant but often tacit understandings about the underlying assumptions that govern disciplinary

activity in a particular institutional setting. However, it was only in the controversial case that these negotiations truly came to the fore. Where student and teacher encountered problems of alignment, where the student did not understand her teacher or her teacher did not understand what the student was orienting to – these were the moments where tacit assumptions needed to be disclosed, where accountabilities turned into accounts and where participants put words to the assumptions that guided their actions both prior to and during assessment delivery. Based on these findings, I want to suggest that feedback dialogues such as the ones presented here may not only profit from more constant and constructive agenda talk, they might also profit from an atmosphere where such controversies are actively encouraged.

Previous research on communication has pointed out that most communicative encounters are based on "assumed intersubjectivity" (Valsiner and van der Veer, 2000), a broad trust in the fact that participants are on the same page when they engage in communication (e.g. Rommetveit, 1974; Linell, 1998). While this is a prerequisite for engaging in productive talk-in-interaction, the research presented here suggests that such assumed understandings may also lead to oversights; in this assessment setting, for instance, they might suggest agreement on issues that are, in fact, still in need of negotiation. Talking about assessment and student writing is never an easy undertaking. Studies on the situated meanings of assessment criteria, for one, have highlighted the potential pitfalls of working with generic concepts in settings where a single criterion may refer to a range of different underlying epistemic premises and practices (Lea and Street, 2000; Lillis and Turner, 2001; Bloxham, Boyd and Orr, 2011). The studies presented here suggest that feedback activities may need to be designed in a way that actively foster questioning of what is assumed and discussions of what is considered self-evident – the sense of ease in which participants in nine out of ten grade conferences accomplished grade delivery in this setting might be the opposite of what is desirable if feedback dialogues are intended to lead to productive negotiations and sense-making with respect to the many assumptions that underpin student writing – as knowledge production and knowledge display – in higher education.

As long as assessment feedback is closely connected to the delivery of performance grades, however, this may be difficult to achieve. I have previously argued that grades have consequences for all stakeholders invested in student learning in higher education, not only for the students themselves but also for the teachers, their departments, and the university as such. Providing the grade

being delivered is not considered intolerably unjustified, there is little reason for teacher or student to take the risk of engaging in discussions that may lead to uncomfortable and potentially consequential negotiations of accountabilities. Rather than aiming for constructive disagreement at the point of grade delivery, therefore, I want to suggest here that an earlier stage in the feedback loop might be better suited for such productive 'feedback controversies'.

Final remarks

One of the challenges of an empirical exploration of assessment feedback as a unique type of communication is to find a research site that allows for the exploration of feedback communication *in situ* while also contributing to answering "a question that is broader than the research site" (Bazerman, 2008, p. 304). In this dissertation, the grade conference has proven to be a productive site for exploring the moment-by-moment work through which participants engaged in assessment delivery make sense of the institutional assessment of student writing in a particular institutional setting; at the same time, the empirical work has also illuminated issues that are of relevance to broader discussions of assessment feedback as communicative practice in higher education.

First, the research presented here provides an empirically driven exploration of the interactional characteristics of the uniquely Swedish practice of face-to-face grade delivery in grade conferences. Each study adds another layer of information on the characteristic communicative work and the typical roles and responsibilities participants take on in these meetings. The studies are, of course, based on a small number of cases, all from the same institutional setting. I do not intend for the descriptions presented in this dissertation to be understood as a definite portrayal of the grade conference as it is conducted across Swedish higher education. However, as a particular type of communicative activity, grade conferences are distinguished from other assessment practices by a number of common features (Linell, 1998). The findings presented in Studies 1 to 3, above, should thus be understood as a first attempt at exploring what these common features might be.

Second, the research presented here provides empirical evidence for the assumption that it is in and through feedback communication that students (and teachers) make sense of their own work relative to institutional expectations. Ajjawi and Boud (2017) have argued that "analyzing feedback as interaction

enables a broader interpretation of the functions of feedback", such as professional socialization (p. 261). By exploring assessment talk-in-interaction in the ten grade conferences, this dissertation illuminates a number of issues that become relevant as the material outcome of historical literate activity is discussed in this assessment feedback activity. Here, the results of the empirical studies suggest that face-to-face grade delivery in higher education may be understood – and further explored – as one possible site of disciplinary enculturation (Prior and Bilbro, 2012).

As stated earlier, there is a shortage of literature that explores assessment feedback in higher education from an interaction perspective (Ajjawi and Boud, 2017, and Esterhazy and Damşa, 2017, being the notable exception). The research presented here points to a number of issues that would profit from future research. First, the research highlights that sense-making in feedback dialogues is interactional as well as conceptual: there is need for more research on the concrete communicative challenges that such feedback activities may involve for students as well as teachers. Second, the research points to a need for more research that explores uncomfortable moments of assessment dialogues. At the moment, the available research has mainly explored disagreeing in assessment feedback activities as a communicative challenge (Sabee and Wilson, 2005; Wright, 2012). It would be interesting to also approach instances of disagreement with an interest in the issues that encumber sense-making in such moments of uncertainty. Finally, the research presented in this dissertation highlighted a number of issues that were of relevance to assessment feedback interaction and sense-making *in the moment*. It would need a longitudinal research design to explore how and in what way these negotiations and sense-making efforts will shape future performance and become part of the trajectory of future student writing.

Chapter 7 Summary in Swedish

Inledning

Denna avhandling fokuserar på en kommunikativ praktik inom högre utbildning, nämligen den återkoppling lärare ger av sin bedömning av studenters arbeten. Med tio videoinspelade betygssamtal i svensk högre utbildning som grund, fokuseras särskilt de sätt på vilka lärare och studenter skapar mening i relation till studentens bedömda rapport. Bedömning har länge diskuterats som en central fråga för studenters lärande inom högre utbildning (Nicol och Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Evans, 2013; Li och DeLuca, 2014). Universitet hålls i allt högre utsträckning ansvariga av allmänheten och andra finansiärer för de resultat som vilar på dessa bedömningar, både som en form av kvalitetskontroll (Schneider 2013) och för att informera om hur undervisningen ska justeras. Studenter å andra sidan är beroende av korrekta betyg för ett fortsatt deltagande i högre studier, för stipendier, eller yrkeskarriärer – men de behöver även den information dessa bedömningar kan tillgängliggöra för att förändra hur de tar sig an en given uppgift, för att ompröva tidigare antaganden och för att presentera bättre i framtiden.

I dagens universitet, där lärare i allt högre utsträckning uppmuntras att se studenterna själva som centrala aktörer och som förväntas ge dem verktyg för att strukturera och upprätthålla sina egna lärprocesser, har lärarbedömning och dess olika kommunikativa former för återkoppling lyfts fram som centrala för studenters livslånga lärande (Boud, 2000). Emellertid har forskning alltmer hävdat att detta endast kommer att fungera om studenterna befinner sig i en position där de kan skapa mening genom att engagera sig i vad som bedöms och hur (Nicol och Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Nicol, 2010; Boud och Molloy, 2013; Carless, 2016). I detta sammanhang har det hävdats (Nicol, 2010; Boud och Molloy, 2013; Carless, 2016) att en utökad dialog kring sådana praktiker kommer att gynna studenters meningsskapande om institutionell bedömning och göra det möjligt för dem att agera på annat sätt med avseende på framtida uppgifter.

I denna avhandling presenterar jag tre separata studier som utforskar vad detta kan innebära i konkreta termer. Tidigare har återkoppling av bedömning

mest utforskats i efterhand, baserat på studenters och lärares erfarenheter av och reflektioner kring praktiker för sådan återkoppling (Ajjawi och Boud, 2017). Trots ett ökande intresse för dialogisk återkoppling, finns det fortfarande väldigt lite empirisk forskning som har adresserat konkreta sätt för hur deltagare i sådana dialoger kan skapa den slags förståelse som kan leda till lärande och bättre framtida studieresultat. I en explorativ studie av skriftliga dialoger som återkoppling i onlinemiljö, hävdar Ajjawi och Boud (2017) emellertid att bristen på intresse för interaktion i återkoppling *in situ* måste adresseras om vi fullt ut ska kunna förstå hur bedömning kan användas på ett effektivt sätt för studenters lärande i högre utbildning. Det centrala intresset i denna avhandling är att bidra med empiriskt baserad kunskap och en djupare förståelse för de komplexa meningsskapande processer som ett deltagande i kommunikation kring institutionell bedömning kan innebära.

Empiriskt fokus i denna avhandling är interaktionen vid betygssamtal inom svensk högre utbildning. Den konkreta kontexten är bedömning av en betygsgrundande kursmodul om miljö och hållbarhet, som har genomförts vid ett svenskt tekniskt universitet. Datamaterialet har ursprungligen insamlats av Eriksson (2014), som använde en annan del av korpus för en avhandling kring handledning av studenters texter (2014; se även Eriksson, 2015; Eriksson & Mäkitalo, 2013; 2015). I min egen avhandling har jag arbetat uteslutande med en liten korpus av tio inspelade betygssamtal, inklusive alla institutionella dokument av relevans för interaktionen kring bedömningen, i synnerhet skriftliga studentuppgifter såväl som ett institutionellt dokument med bedömningskriterier.

Med ett brett intresse för deltagarnas gemensamma meningsskapande har jag närmat mig den observerbara samtalsinteraktionen i dessa tio betygssamtal från ett sociokulturellt och dialogiskt perspektiv (Vygotsky, 1974; Linell, 1998, 2009; Prior, 1998; Säljö, 2000; Grossen, 2010) i tre separata studier. Detta har medfört ett särskilt fokus på deltagarnas gemensamma kommunikativa handlingar inom ramen för den specifika sociokulturella ekologi de befinner sig (Linell, 2010) - i samtal kring bedömningen av studentens skriftliga rapport i en kursmodul om miljöteknik för ingenjörer på masternivå. Studie 1 är en undersökning av det kommunikativa arbete som deltagarna ägnar sig åt då de gemensamt etablerar, genomför och avslutar betygssamtal. I denna första studie användes alla tio videoinspelade betygssamtal för att identifiera och beskriva de konkreta kommunikativa aktiviteter som deltagarna deltog i (under varje möte) för att uppnå det övergripande syftet med att tala om vilket betyg studentarbetet

fått, samt vilka slags frågor som kom upp i anslutning till detta. Studie 2 fokuserar mer på djupet hur deltagarna relaterar till tidigare aktiviteter i utbildningen, såväl institutionella som disciplinära när rapporten blir föremål för bedömning. Genom att dra nytta av oenighet, som var centralt i ett enskilt fall, där det institutionella betyget inte accepterades av studenten, fokuserar denna studie i synnerhet på de spänningar som uppstår när deltagare förhandlar kring vem som görs ansvarig för vad i relation till handledning av studenters skrivande av text. Slutligen, i Studie 3 riktas fokus mot ett institutionellt dokument med kriterier som hade väglett betygsättning och introducerades för studenter i varje betygssamtal. Denna studie spårar den kommunikativa roll som detta institutionella dokument får i konkret interaktion om bedömning.

Syfte och forskningsfrågor

Det övergripande syftet med denna avhandling är att bidra med en empiriskt grundad analys kring de komplexa meningsskapande processer som återkoppling av bedömning – som kommunikativ praktik – kan medföra. I enlighet med det teoretiska perspektivet introducerat ovan, involverar detta att rikta uppmärksamhet mot det konkreta kommunikativa arbete som deltagarna engagerar sig i då de inleder, genomför och avslutar bedömningsdiskussionen i varje betygssamtal. Två centrala forskningsfrågor har formulerats för att vägleda detta forskningsprojekt:

1. *Hur genomförs denna typ av aktivitet för återkoppling av bedömning genom kommunikativt arbete i den konkreta samtalsinteraktionen?*

2. *Hur formar de historiskt laminerade aktiviteterna av studentskrivande i den specifika institutionella miljön, det sätt på vilket deltagarna skapar mening om den skriftliga rapporten och dess bedömning vid tidpunkt för betygsättning?*

Tidigare forskning

Som tidigare beskrivits är huvudsyftet med denna avhandling att komplettera rådande kunskap inom området återkoppling av bedömning, med en fokuserad, dialogisk analys av betygsättning som en "unik form av kommunikation" (Higgins, Hartey och Skelton, 2001). I denna avhandling använder jag mig av

tidigare forskning om både återkoppling av bedömning och bedömningskriterier för att motivera detta val av fokus, och introducerar även ett litet antal studier som ställer återkoppling i handledning av text i fokus, för att markera några av de problem som kan komma att bli relevanta för interaktionsanalys av kommunikation i bedömning.

Återkoppling av bedömning diskuteras ofta som något problematiskt: även om studenter inom högre utbildning ofta uppger att de förstår relevansen av återkoppling för lärande och utveckling rapporterar de även kontinuerligt att de är missnöjda med den faktiska återkoppling de får (NSS ; Weaver, 2006; Sinclair and Cleland, 2007; Yang and Carless, 2012). Samtidigt uttrycker universitetslärare en oro över sin egen förmåga att ge adekvat återkoppling och oro över en märkbart bristande effekt av deras återkoppling av bedömningen på studenters fortsatta arbete (Orsmond, Maw, Park, Gomez and Crook, 2013). Detta trots det faktum att flera översiktsartiklar har pekat på en stor positiv potential för återkoppling i bedömning för att främja studenters lärande (Kluger och DeNisi, 1996; Black och Williams, 1998; Hattie och Timperley, 2007).
Inom litteraturen föreslås det numera ofta att en del av detta problem beror på konceptualiseringar av ”feedback” som huvudsakligen placerar återkopplingens värde i meddelandet. Att enbart “berätta” för studenterna om deras resultat kan emellertid inte anses vara tillräckligt för att utrusta studenterna med nödvändiga färdigheter för att hantera sina egna lärprocesser och sin prestation (Nicol och Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Nicol, 2010; Ajjawi och Boud, 2017; Carless och Boud, 2018). Baserat på socialkonstruktivistiska epistemologier om kunskap och lärande, hävdas det i stället i allt större utsträckning att studenter behöver uppmuntras att på ett aktivt sätt skapa mening om sitt arbete och institutionella förväntningar i dialog mellan studenter, lärare och medstudenter (Nicol, 2010; Carless, 2013). Hittills finns det fortfarande begränsat med empirisk forskning som ger insikt om de frågor som formar kommunikationen kring återkoppling och meningsskapande i en sådan dialogisk praktik – det är som tidigare hävdats, ett av denna avhandlings centrala syften, att utforska kommunikationen mellan student/lärare under “verkliga tillfällen med återkoppling, som huvudsakligen har utformats för pedagogiska snarare än för forskningsändamål” (Ajjawi och Boud, 2018).

Interaktionsforskning om handledning av text, såväl som forskning som undersöker den situerade betydelsen av formella bedömningskriterier för studenters skrivande, antyder att dessa kommunikationer inte kommer att vara helt och hållet enkla. Interaktion mellan student/lärare i handledning av text

har visat sig kännetecknas av en asymmetrisk deltagarstruktur och ett behov av att hantera interaktionen samtidigt som man engagerar sig i stundtals känsliga frågor, exempelvis kritik (Li och Seale, 2007; Vehviläinen, 2009; Svinhufvud och Vehviläinen, 2013; Eriksson, 2014). En annan viktig fråga i denna kontext är de begrepp som används för att diskutera studenters skrivande i olika bedömningskontexter. Under betygssamtal introducerar lärare ett institutionellt underlag med kriterier som ett viktigt dokument för betygsättning. Emellertid har tidigare forskning återkommande visat att sådana kriterier inte är generiska, utan ofta betyder olika saker för olika människor i olika bedömningskontexter. Genom att undersöka observerbar återkoppling i kommunikation i de tio betygssamtal som diskuteras här, bidrar denna avhandling med empiriska bevis för de sätt som deltagare skapar mening när det gäller studenters skrivande, lärares värdering och olika kvalitetskriterier då betygen sätts.

Teoretiskt ramverk

Som tidigare nämnts tar denna avhandling ett dialogiskt perspektiv på meningsskapande när återkoppling ges (Linell, 1998, 2009; Grossen, 2010), med hänsyn tagen till att aktörerna, deras aktiviteter och kontexter för interaktion är djupt sammanlänkade. Från ett sådant perspektiv är mänsklig aktivitet aldrig isolerad – att engagera sig i handlingar innebär att engagera sig med världen och de redskap genom vilka den förmedlas historiskt och kulturellt (Vygotsky, 1974; Prior, 1998; Wertsch, 1998; Linell, 1998, 2009; Säljö, 2000). Tre centrala dialogiska antaganden har format det arbete som genomförts i denna avhandling. Först gör jag antagandet att mänskligt meningsskapande vid återkoppling av bedömning är ett socialt och historiskt laminerat arbete som formats av olika inflöden av sociokulturell aktivitet (Linell, 1998; Prior, 1998; Grossen, 2010). För det andra, gör jag antagandet att mänskligt meningsskapande då återkoppling ges, är beroende av de kontexter i vilka interaktionen äger rum. Dessa kontexter har aktivt skapats och återskapas av deltagare som använder sig av och genererar olika relevanta kontextuella resurser genom samtal i interaktion (Duranti och Goodwin, 1992; Linell, 1998). Slutligen, gör jag antagandet att språk principiellt är ett medel för att involvera sig i sociala handlingar, alltid adresserat till en publik och respons på tidigare aktivitet (Bakhtin, 1986; Prior, 1998). Aktiviteter med återkoppling, som det betygssamtal som diskuteras här, anses därför vara ett gemensamt åtagande,

som åstadkoms genom deltagares responsiva och produktiva kommunikativa arbete *in situ*.

För att förstå hur deltagare i konkreta instanser av återkoppling av bedömning, ansikte mot ansikte, koordinerar sitt kommunikativa arbete på lämpliga sätt i den aktuella praktiken och således återupprättar och återskapar denna praktik *in situ*, har jag särskilt använt mig av två dialogiska begrepp. I alla studier konceptualiseras betygssamtal som en institutionell "kommunikativ aktivitetstyp" (Erickson, 2004; Linell 1998; Mäkitalo och Säljö 2002; Grossen, 2010). Detta begrepp redogör för det faktum att bedömningsaktiviteter såsom betygssamtal kan vara både unika och igenkännbara: unika i den meningen att de involverar en specifik grupp med deltagare och ett specifikt slags interaktionsarbete som görs i en specifik kontext. För en person som betraktar detta utifrån, emellertid, känns de ändå igen eftersom de involverar ett vanligt förekommande och därför bekant mönster av kommunikativa handlingar, är relaterade till en specifik social situation och uppfyller specifika uppgifter och ändamål (Linell, 2009).

Dessa koordinerade handlingar är därför ett analytiskt fokus i alla tre studier som ingår i denna avhandling och konceptualiseras här som "kommunikativa projekt" (Linell, 1998, 2009). I likhet med alla deltagare som är involverade i kommunikativa handlingar, möter lärare och studenter som är involverade i samtal om betyg och bedömning problem som kräver en egen hantering i den övergripande interaktionen eller som behöver lösas för att aktiviteten ska kunna fortskrida. Detta kan exempelvis handla om hur man inleder mötet, en diskussion om ett särskilt problem, eller hur själva betyget ska levereras kommunikativt. I likhet med den mer övergripande kommunikativa aktiviteten som de hjälps åt att uppnå, framträder kommunikativa projekt genom samarbetet i interaktionen, de känns igen av deltagarna själva och förblir dynamiska, det vill säga föränderliga, till den punkt då de avslutas eller överges. I denna avhandling har jag arbetat med en liten korpus av videoinspelningar av tio betygssamtal i vilka lärare överlämnar ett betyg på en studentförfattad rapport i interaktion med studenten ansikte mot ansikte. Denna datakorpus gav empiriskt material för tre observationsstudier av de konkreta sätt på vilka studenter och lärare skapar mening kring (den institutionella bedömningen) av en studentförfattad rapport mot bakgrund av de sociala och kulturella aktiviteter som studenters skrivande är förankrad i.

Empirisk kontext och material

Betygssamtalen ägde rum inom ramen för en komplett programkomponent (en 'modul') på 7,5 hp som tillhörde en masterutbildning inom bygg- och miljöteknik och som en grupp av tre undervisande lärare och en liten grupp av fjorton svenska och internationella studenter deltog i. Bedömning inom denna modul baserades i hög grad på en studentförfattad rapport kring en frågeställning om hållbarhet. Datamaterialet som användes för denna avhandling består av nio videoinspelningar och en ljudinspelning från tio inplanerade betygssamtal som avslutade modulen. Inspelningarna är mellan tio och sextio minuter långa. I dessa möten träffar en enskild student en lärare (tidigare handledare) för att få ett formellt betyg. Utöver detta material med interaktion har jag även arbetat med ett antal skriftliga dokument, inklusive studenters slutrapporter och de institutionella dokument som är kopplade till bedömningsaktiviteten.

Sammanfattning av studierna

I tre separata studier utforskades deltagares gemensamma meningsskapande under betygssamtal ansikte mot ansikte. Var och en av studierna kommer att kortfattat introduceras nedan, med ett särskilt fokus på varje studies syften och huvudsakliga resultat. Notera att dessa sammanfattningar baseras på de artiklar som producerats för att sprida resultaten från varje studie, vilka var och en hade sina egna inramningar och forskningsfrågor.

Studie 1

Lärares återkoppling av bedömning anses i hög utsträckning vara viktig i relation till utveckling av studenters skrivande, även om den faktiska form som en sådan återkoppling kan ha, hur och när den administreras på bästa sätt, och hur studenter bör hantera den, fortfarande debatteras livligt i pedagogisk- och annan forskningslitteratur. Studie 1 utvecklades som en första utforskning av hur bedömning för betyg levereras ansikte mot ansikte, som ett potentiellt alternativ till skriftlig återkoppling av bedömning, som har kritiserats för att vara alltför ensidig (Nicol, 2010). Tre sammanlänkade syften vägledde denna första studie: att få kunskap om det interaktionella arbete som kännetecknar aktiviteten, att få kunskap om de frågor som deltagarna hanterar under dessa möten, och att förstå vilket syfte aktiviteten tjänar i den konkreta institutionella

kontexten. Baserat på datamaterial från alla tio betygssamtal inspelade för denna korpus, visade denna studie att återkopplingen av bedömning för betyg i interaktion ansikte mot ansikte, i huvudsak var inriktad på att uppnå acceptans för institutionella beslut av betygsättning. Den institutionella karaktären hos bedömningsaktiviteten tilldelade läraren den ledande rollen i aktiviteten. Studenter introducerade stundtals sina egna ämnen, men valde sällan att göra det. Medan deltagarna i allmänhet upprätthöll en vänlig atmosfär under dessa möten, avslöjade analysen av deltagarnas samtalsinteraktion ett antal utmaningar, av vilka förhandling om olika ansvar föreföll vara mer relevant för diskussionen kring studentens skrivande än till exempel tidigare institutionella aktiviteter under handledning och bortom dessa. Studien sammanfattar att betygssamtal kanske inte kan lösa problemet med att återkoppling är lärarcentrerad när det gäller samtalstopiker (vad man samtalar om). Emellertid antyder den att återkoppling av bedömning för betyg ansikte mot ansikte fortfarande har potential att erbjuda en arena för förhandlingar kring vad det innebär att vara student, skribent, och handledare i den lokala institutionella kontexten.

Studie 2

Studie 2 är en fallstudie av ett enskilt betygssamtal där läraren och studenten inte kunde komma överens om betyget, och efter långdragna förhandlingar beslutade att fråga kursledaren om en betygsgranskning. I Studie 2 valdes detta möte ut eftersom det tillhandahöll intressant material för ett interaktionellt bidrag till en långvarig fråga om att skriva bedömningar i högre utbildning; problemet med att fastställa på vilka grunder skrivande bedöms och bör bedömas. Baserad på videoobserverad samtalsinteraktion i det enskilda betygssamtalet, syftade denna studie till att besvara en övergripande forskningsfråga: vad etableras som relevant för den institutionella bedömningen av studentrapporten i deltagarnas redogörelser och argument så som de sekventiellt utvecklas i detta enskilda betygssamtal? Redogörelser, förklaringar och rättfärdiganden (Scott och Lyman, 1968; Buttny, 1993; Mäkitalo, 2006) är de kommunikativa medel genom vilka deltagare försöker överbrygga de luckor som uppstår när kommunikativa handlingar inte svarar upp mot förväntningar. När detta är fallet kan deltagarna komma att behöva förklara eller försvara sina oförutsedda ageranden. Sådana yttranden används som stöd för de outtalade antaganden och förväntningar som lärare och student hade med sig till den

institutionella bedömningen av studenters skrivande i detta betygssamtal. Studie 2 visade att deltagarna använde sig av en rad olika kontextuella resurser för att skapa mening kring bedömningen av studentens skrivande i denna kontext. Läraren placerade ofta bedömningsgrunderna i disciplinära och institutionella kontexter. Studenten, å andra sidan, relaterade sitt meningsskapande till handledningsaktiviteten och den egna skrivprocessen. I Studie 2 dras slutsatsen att ett centralt problem under detta betygssamtal var en ouppklarad spänning mellan olika möjliga objekt för bedömning, studentens text och hennes ihärdighet som student. Medan detta hade kunnat lösas genom att vara mer explicit kring institutionens förväntningar under skrivprocessen, hävdas i studien att akademiskt skrivande alltid används som ett medel för produktion och presentation av kunskap, och att det kan vara svårt att fullt ut skilja de två åt, även vid tidpunkten för bedömning.

Studie 3

Institutionella kriteriedokument (ibland även kända som bedömningsmatriser) används frekvent i högre utbildning, vanligtvis för att dokumentera och kommunicera de standarder mot vilka en särskild studentuppgift utvärderas (Popham, 1997; Sadler, 2005; Reddy och Andrade, 2010; Dawson 2017). De har undersökts med avseende på deras roll i betygsättningsprocessen (Jonsson och Svingby, 2007; Sadler, 2009; Bloxham, den-Outer, Hudson och Price, 2016) och som medel för att stödja studenters lärande (Reddy och Andrade, 2010; Brookhart, 2013; Panadero och Jonsson, 2013; Jönsson och Panadero 2017). Studie 3 kompletterar denna kunskap från tidigare studier genom en undersökning av bedömningskriteriers roll i högre utbildning som materiella semiotiska resurser vid betygsöverlämning. Två specifika frågor vägledde denna studie. Först, hur kriteriedokumentet gjordes relevant i verbal och icke-verbal interaktion om bedömning. Och i fråga två, vad uppnåddes under dessa instanser av relevansskapande i förhållande till det pågående arbetet med återkoppling av bedömning? För att besvara dessa frågor återvände jag till inspelningarna och transkriptionerna av åtta videoinspelade betygssamtal (bortsett från två betygssamtal där visuella data antingen inte var tillgängliga eller av otillräcklig kvalitet) och kartlade all observerbar verbal och icke-verbal orientering mot kriteriedokumentet. Detta gjordes före granskning av funktioner av dessa orienteringar, med avseende på varje kommunikativt projekt som deltagarna var engagerade i, och orientering mot

kriteriedokumentet. Studie 3 fann dokumentunderstödda deltagardiskussioner kring och redovisning av institutionell bedömningspraktik under hela betygssamtalet. Den visade även att kriteriedokumentet hade en organisatorisk funktion genom att den tillhandahöll relevanta diskussionsämnen och ett materiellt visuellt stöd för kommande byte av ämne. Vidare använde lärare kriteriedokumentet som ett stöd för att minnas frågor med relevans för betygsättning och, använde sig slutligen till kriteriedokumentet som en analog abstraktion av studentrapporten, som kunde tillhandahålla orientering utan något behov av att gå till den faktiska studenttexten. I Studie 2 dras slutsatsen att bedömningskriterier inte bara har (möjlig) relevans för planering och skrivande av studenters texter, de kan även ha en avsevärd relevans för det praktiska arbetet att leverera institutionell bedömning under betygssamtal, ansikte mot ansikte.

Diskussion och sammanfattning

De övergripande forskningsfrågorna som väglett arbetet i föreliggande avhandling rör å ena sidan, deltagarnas gemensamma kommunikativa arbete och, å den andra, de sätt på vilka meningsskapande av studenters skrivande formades av bedömningens historia i den specifika institutionella kontexten. I det avslutande kapitlet, diskuteras de resultat som presenteras i de tre studierna ovan, med hänsyn till dessa två frågor i två olika, men relaterade avsnitt. De första avsnitten beskriver hur deltagarna etablerade sina kommunikativa roller och ansvarsområden och den praktiska organiseringen av samtalsinteraktionen i denna kommunikativa aktivitetstyp. I det andra avsnittet riktas fokus mot de sätt på vilka deltagarna skapade mening för den bedömning som gavs, och fokuserar i synnerhet på hur de gjordes ansvariga som student, lärare och bedömare, och den skriftliga uppgiftens roll som grund för bedömning i detta sammanhang.

Först och främst, baserat i synnerhet på resultaten i Studie 1 och 3, diskuteras den uppenbara lätthet med vilken deltagarna interagerar under betygssamtal som ett resultat av en asymmetrisk deltagarstruktur som gynnar lärarinitiativ och studentresponsivitet. Denna typ av kommunikativ organisering tilldelar läraren mycket ansvar, som använder sig av institutionella dokument såsom studentrapporten och ett institutionellt kriteriedokument i sökandet efter nya frågor att engagera sig i. Medan denna form av deltagande gör det möjligt för studenter att på ett enkelt sätt engagera sig i en obekant

aktivitetstyp, hävdas det även att denna organisering kan problematiseras från ett pedagogiskt perspektiv, eftersom den kan göra det svårt för studenterna att ta upp egna frågor och farhågor. Det föreslås därför att inte alla dialoger om återkoppling placerar studenter i en situation med den agens som efterfrågas i en studentcentrerad syn på återkoppling, men att ett mer kontinuerligt samtal om agendan och förväntningarna på dessa möten kan vara ett sätt att förändra deltagarstrukturen i liknande bedömningsaktiviteter.

Dessutom antyder resultaten från alla tre studier att deltagarna inte enbart skapar mening genom studentens text och dess institutionella bedömning, utan även genom deras egna ansvar och av det faktiska bedömningsobjektet i den institutionella kontexten. Studie 2 i synnerhet visade att studentrapportens historia som en produkt av intensiva handledningsaktiviteter höll både student och lärare ansvariga för den slutliga versionen och dess bedömning: studenten som författare och handledd, och läraren som bedömare och handledare. I andra hand adresserar den en relaterad fråga, den komplexa frågan kring studenters skrivande i högre utbildning och de många potentiella lager av aktiviteter och kontexter som en studentförfattad rapport kan medföra vid samtal om betyg och bedömning. En studentförfattad rapport, hävdas det, kan bedömas som ett stycke studenttext, eller ett stycke vetenskaplig text. Den kan bedömas som resultatet av skrivprocesser eller resultatet av handledning. Utan att fastställa tydliga gränser kan båda dessa skikt bli relevanta som fokus för återkoppling av bedömning, vilken i sig själv inte anses vara problematiskt här, men kan orsaka svårigheter vid deltagares orientering, särskilt - som Studie 2 på ett väldigt övertygande sätt har visat – om deltagare inte är medvetna om det faktum att de orienteras mot olika aspekter av skriftspråkliga aktiviteter under samma tillfälle av samtalsinteraktion.

Det finns även i detta sammanhang, anledning att argumentera för att deltagare skulle kunna dra nytta av mer fortlöpande diskussioner kring förväntningar, både före och under betygssamtal, för att kunna engagera sig i återkoppling av bedömning utan att behöva förstå aktivitetens gränser och det faktiska bedömningssyftet. Den forskning som presenteras i dessa tre studier bidrar med viktig information kring de frågor som behöver etableras som relevanta för att detta ska kunna ske. Prior (1998) har hävdat att skrivna texter är komplexa laminerade produkter av skriftspråkliga aktiviteter över tid och rum – lika mycket som deras tillkomst skiljer sig åt för var och en av de tio studenterna som deltar i modulen kring hållbarhet i denna avhandling, så gör även de frågor som kan komma att bli relevanta om den materiella produkten

diskuteras. Alla tre studier som ingår i denna avhandling visar att deltagarna, särskilt i det enskilda kontroversiella fallet, förhandlar kring olika förståelser av skrivandets syfte och objektet som ska bedömas i denna institutionella kontext, vilket i sin tur bidrar till bredare disciplinära diskussioner kring vad det innebär att vara skribent, student och handledare i (svensk) högre utbildning. I detta sammanhang stödjer avhandlingens resultat, behovet av mer dialog om återkoppling vid bedömning och visar det nödvändiga arbete som deltagare som är engagerade i att utbilda studenter inom disciplinära textkulturer måste engagera sig i, förutsatt att de ger studenter och lärare utrymme för att vara oeniga, blottlägga och diskutera de många antaganden som stödjer skrivande - såsom skapande och redogörande av kunskap inom den högre utbildningen.

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Appendix

Appendix A: The institutional criteria sheet (Swedish original)

Bedömningsmall för projektarbetet

Nedanstående 12 områden poängsätts med 0-5 poäng, där 0 ger retur, 1 är godtagbart och 2 är godkänt. Områdena viktas med 1 eller 2 (enligt tabellen), varför den sammanlagda poängsumman för projektarbetet hamnar mellan 0 och 60, denna summa kommer därefter att läggas till respektive students tentamensresultat varefter betyg sätts med hjälp av gängse betygsgränser; 40, 60 och 80%.

Rapport

Inledning (1x)	Inramning, relevans, motivering Syfte Metod, avgränsning
Beskrivning (1x)	Relevans (fokus, urval) Hur fungerar systemet, och hur bidrar systemet till miljöpåverkan Kvalitet
Jämförelse/analys (2x)	Kvalitet, urval, skärpa Användning av data och figurer ~~Livscykelperspektiv~~ Tydlighet
Slutsatser + diskussion (2x)	Koppling/förankring i jämförelse/analys
Referenser (1x)	Kvalitet på referenserna: - Val av referens (trovärdighet) - Relation till innehållet Förhållningssätt/distans till referenserna
Disposition (1x)	Logik i textflödet: - Det finns en genomtänkt struktur från överordnad idé till mer underordnade och tillbaka till den överordnade. Balans mellan rapportens olika delar
Språk (1x)	Läsbarhet (stavning, meningsbyggnad, sammanhang) Användning av relevanta begrepp Struktur (kapitel-/styckeindelning, rubriker, resonemang) Rapportens stil är: - Anpassad till mottagaren - Enhetlig och konsekvent
Formalia (1x)	Innehållsförteckning, sidnummer Citat Layout (utformning, läsbarhet) Illustrationer (figurer, tabeller)

Presentation + diskussion (totalt 2x)

Presentation	Inramning, motivering, syfte Anpassning av rapportens innehåll till mottagare och situation (dvs. inte bara återgivande av rapporten) Distansering till ämnet Argumenterande karaktär Bildmaterial Sammanfattande avslutning
Diskussion	Inledning riktad mot skribenter och övriga deltagare Relevant innehåll Anpassning till deltagarna och situationen Följdfrågor som skapar dialog Avslutning

Utöver dessa poängsatta områden ställs några absoluta krav på projektuppgifterna:

- Text får inte vara plagierad, eller ligga på gränsen till plagiat
- Korrekt användning av Harvard-systemet
- Bildmaterialet till presentationen innehåller illustrationer och text och är producerat m.h.a. PowerPoint

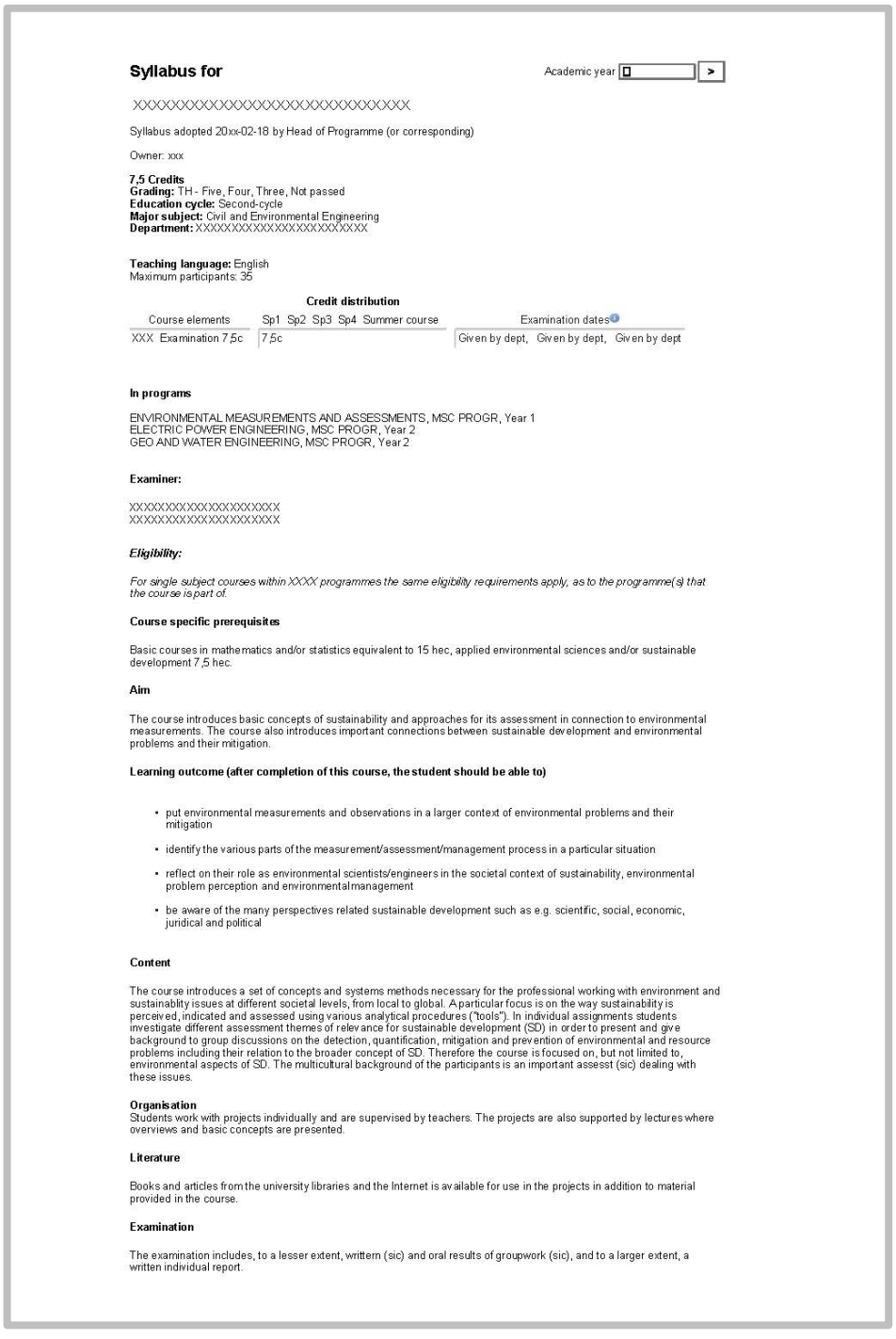
Appendix B: The institutional grading sheet

Grading Assessing sustainability individual assignments

ASSESSOR I	Christian	Rikard	Sigge		Juni	Felicia	Ebba		Manda	Ida	Cassandra	Ernst	Max
Introduction	2	1	4		4	4	1		5	2	2	4	5
Description	2	4	5		5	4	2		5	3	2	5	5
Analysis	2	3	4		4	4	1		5	2	2	5	5 x2
Discussion and Conclusions	2	2	5		4	3	1		5	1	3	4	5 x2
References, credibility and content	2	3	5		4	3	2		4	3	2	5	5
Outline	2	1	4		4	3	1		5	3	2	5	5
Language	2	2	3		4	5	4		5	1	2	4	5
Formalia	2	3	3		5	4	1		5	3	2	1	5
Presentation	3	2	4		4	5	3		4	2	3	4	5
Opposition	5	2	3		4	3	2		5	2	3	2	5
SUM	**28**	**28**	**49**		**50**	**45**	**20**		**58**	**25**	**28**	**48**	**60**

ASSESSOR II	Christian	Rikard	Sigge		Juni	Felicia	Ebba		Manda	Ida	Cassandra	Ernst	Max
Introduction	2	3	4		5	5	2		5	3	2	4	5
Description	2	3	4		4	3	2		5	3	2	4	5
Analysis	2	4	4		4	4	2		4	2	2	4	5 x2
Discussion and Conclusions	2	3	5		5	4	2		5	3	3	3	5 x2
References, credibility and content	2	3	4		4	4	3		4	3	2	4	5
Outline	2	3	4		5	5	2		4	3	2	4	5
Language	2	2	4		5	5	2		5	2	2	3	5
Formalia	2	3	4		5	4	1		5	3	2	1	5
Presentation	3	3	4		4	5	2		4	2	3	4	5
Opposition	5	4	4		5	4	3		5	3	3	3	5
SUM	**28**	**38**	**50**		**55**	**51**	**25**		**55**	**32**	**28**	**41**	**60**
FINAL SUM	**56**	**66**	**99**	**X**	**105**	**96**	**45**	**X**	**113**	**57**	**56**	**89**	**120**

Appendix C: The course syllabus



Syllabus for Academic year >

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Syllabus adopted 20xx-02-18 by Head of Programme (or corresponding)

Owner: xxx

7,5 Credits
Grading: TH - Five, Four, Three, Not passed
Education cycle: Second-cycle
Major subject: Civil and Environmental Engineering
Department: XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Teaching language: English
Maximum participants: 35

Credit distribution

Course elements	Sp1 Sp2 Sp3 Sp4 Summer course	Examination dates
XXX Examination 7,5c	7,5c	Given by dept, Given by dept, Given by dept

In programs

ENVIRONMENTAL MEASUREMENTS AND ASSESSMENTS, MSC PROGR, Year 1
ELECTRIC POWER ENGINEERING, MSC PROGR, Year 2
GEO AND WATER ENGINEERING, MSC PROGR, Year 2

Examiner:

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Eligibility:

For single subject courses within XXXX programmes the same eligibility requirements apply, as to the programme(s) that the course is part of.

Course specific prerequisites

Basic courses in mathematics and/or statistics equivalent to 15 hec, applied environmental sciences and/or sustainable development 7,5 hec.

Aim

The course introduces basic concepts of sustainability and approaches for its assessment in connection to environmental measurements. The course also introduces important connections between sustainable development and environmental problems and their mitigation.

Learning outcome (after completion of this course, the student should be able to)

- put environmental measurements and observations in a larger context of environmental problems and their mitigation
- identify the various parts of the measurement/assessment/management process in a particular situation
- reflect on their role as environmental scientists/engineers in the societal context of sustainability, environmental problem perception and environmental management
- be aware of the many perspectives related sustainable development such as e.g. scientific, social, economic, juridical and political

Content

The course introduces a set of concepts and systems methods necessary for the professional working with environment and sustainablity issues at different societal levels, from local to global. A particular focus is on the way sustainability is perceived, indicated and assessed using various analytical procedures ("tools"). In individual assignments students investigate different assessment themes of relevance for sustainable development (SD) in order to present and give background to group discussions on the detection, quantification, mitigation and prevention of environmental and resource problems including their relation to the broader concept of SD. Therefore the course is focused on, but not limited to, environmental aspects of SD. The multicultural background of the participants is an important assesst (sic) dealing with these issues.

Organisation
Students work with projects individually and are supervised by teachers. The projects are also supported by lectures where overviews and basic concepts are presented.

Literature

Books and articles from the university libraries and the Internet is available for use in the projects in addition to material provided in the course.

Examination

The examination includes, to a lesser extent, writtern (sic) and oral results of groupwork (sic), and to a larger extent, a written individual report.

Appendix D: Sample assignment prompt

12. How are urban physical structures and sustainability linked? (AW)

A growing global population are moving into cities resulting in several challenges for the cities receiving the migrating humans. The purpose of this topic is an investigation of the chances of the 'city' as a means to reach sustainability. Is it at all possible for a 'city' to be sustainable?

What is the trend for urbanization – the concentration of people in urban environments or cities? What is the driving forces? Which are the consequences and possibilities related to a quickly growing urban population rom a sustainability point of view? Which is the physical structure of the large cities of our world (population density distribution, infrastructure localization, housing, means of transportation etc)? Which are the trends? Which are the challenges? Which are the remedies?

Information Resources (examples):

UN HABITAT United Nations Human Settlements Programme: http://www.unhabitat.org/

United Nations development Programme: http://www.undp.org

WHO: http://who.org

International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives: www.iclei.org

Frannie Léautier (editor) (2006) cities in a globalizing world: governance, performance and sustainability. Washington, DC: World Bank

Rees, William and Mathis Wackernagel (1996) Urban Ecological Footprint: Why cities cannot be sustainable – and why they are a key to sustainability

Appendix E: Transcription conventions

(.)	denotes a micro-pause, usually less than a quarter of a second
…	denotes a pause of moderate length (usually less than a second)
(( ))	added contextual information
> <	denotes speech (between the arrows) which is spoken at a faster rate than the surrounding talk
[	on two adjacent lines, the one placed right above the other, marks the approximate beginnings of simultaneous (overlapping) talk by two speakers
-	in the middle of a word denotes that the speaker interrupts herself
:	indicates lengthening of the preceding sound; each additional colon represents a lengthening of one beat

Part II

Empirical studies

Study 1

Meyer-Beining, J., Vigmo, S., & Mäkitalo, Å. (2018). The Swedish grade conference: A dialogical study of face-to-face delivery of summative assessment in higher education. *Learning, Culture and Social Interaction*, 19, 134–145.

Study 2

Meyer-Beining, J., Vigmo, S., & Mäkitalo, Å. (*manuscript*). Tracing literate activity: a dialogical study of oral grade delivery in Swedish higher education.

Study 3

Meyer-Beining, J. (*manuscript*). Of course we have criteria: Assessment criteria as material semiotic means in face-to-face assessment interaction.