

# STUDENT EVALUATION IN THE NEW FINNISH NATIONAL CORE CURRICULUM

Bachelor's thesis  
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| <b>Tiivistelmä – Abstract</b> <p>Arviointi on aihe, jota on tutkittu paljon ja joka on esillä myös perusopetuksen opetussuunnitelman perusteissa. Eri aikakausina vallinneet oppimiskäsitykset ovat muokanneet arvioinnin käsitettä vuosien varrella, ja tällä hetkellä oppimista ohjaavat, kannustavat ja formatiiviset palautemuodot ovat saaneet enemmän jalansijaa perinteisen summatiivisen arviointikäsitteen ohella. Kaiken kaikkiaan käsitystä oppimisen arvioinnista on lähdetty viime vuosina Suomessa muuttamaan, ja se on saanut paljon huomiota erityisesti mediassa. Varsinkin koululaisten vanhemmat sekä asiantuntijat ovat esittäneet mielipiteitään asiasta avoimesti. Koska arviointi osa kaikkien oppiaineiden opetusta, se koskettaa myös kieltenopettajia ja kaikki muutokset oppimiskäsityksessä sekä arviointikulttuurissa heijastuvat myös kielten opetukseen ja arviointiin. Vastikään käyttöön otettu, vuoden 2014 opetussuunnitelma sisältääkin muutoksia muun muassa arviointiin liittyen. Kokonaisuudessaan oppimisen arviointi on murroksessa ja tämän takia opetussuunnitelman arviointikäsitteen muutosten tutkiminen on erittäin ajankohtainen asia.</p> <p>Tämän tutkimuksen tavoitteena oli selvittää, mitä muutoksia arviointikulttuuriin ja -menetelmiin on tullut siirryttäessä vuoden 2004 opetussuunnitelmasta, vuoden 2014 opetussuunnitelmaan ja kuinka nykyinen opetussuunnitelma näkee oppimisen arvioinnin. Tämän tutkimuksen aineisto koostui vuoden 2014 ja tätä edeltäneestä vuoden 2004 valtakunnallisista perusopetuksen opetussuunnitelmista ja aineistoa analysoitiin dokumenttianalyysin menetelmin. Analyysissa kiinnitettiin huomiota kappaleisiin, jotka koskivat varsinkin kielten opetusta, arviointia sekä nykyistä oppimiskäsitystä.</p> <p>Kaiken kaikkiaan tutkimuksen tulokset osoittivat, että uusi opetussuunnitelma tukee oppimiskäsitystä, joka näkee oppilaan aktiivisena toimijana. Analyysin tuloksena voidaan todeta, että uuden oppimiskäsityksen myötä myös arviointikulttuuria on muutettu. Lisäksi näiden kahden opetussuunnitelman vertailun tulokset ja vuoden 2014 opetussuunnitelman tarkempi tutkiminen osoittivat, että uusi opetussuunnitelma on ottanut erityisesti huomioon oppilaiden toimijuuden, oppimisen jatkuvuuden sekä arvioinnin formatiivisen luonteen, muun muassa erilaisia arviointimenetelmiä lisäämällä.</p> |   |
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## **1 INTRODUCTION**

Educational evaluation is a topic that has been widely researched and different assessment methods and learning conceptions have remodelled the way educational evaluation has been seen throughout the years. The concept is not new and, for example, Black and Wiliam have been talking about educational evaluation already in the 1990's. Though the information Black and Wiliam (1998) provided is in no way outdated, more research has followed since then, and some more current research has been conducted by Rambhai Patel (2010). Educational evaluation in general is an interesting topic because it follows the contemporary concept of learning, therefore, having a significant impact on the education system; the schools and their students.

What makes educational evaluation even more interesting is that it has also gained more ground in the new Finnish National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (2014) and it has raised public discussion in media throughout the society. Even though the previous National Core Curricula, NCC, have been previously studied, the research has not widely concentrated on evaluation. Furthermore, because of the novelty of the current National Core Curriculum, the topic has not been yet extensively research.

The aim of the present study is to shed some light into the complexity of evaluation, the basic conceptions that influence the field and to see whether the new National Core Curriculum has taken these aspects into account and if it has, how they are discussed. Furthermore, the previous NCC of 2004 will be compared with the current one to see what changes there are, concerning evaluation.

Additionally, because educational evaluation is an integral part of every school subject, it is vital also for language teachers. Furthermore, every change in the evaluation culture and language perception has an impact on language teaching and therefore, their evaluation. Since this study is conducted as a Bachelor's thesis of English, it will also seek to find out what is said about the evaluation of English language as a subject.

Overall, the current research will first focus on the National Core Curriculum of 2014 and then move on to talk about the concept of evaluation. In more detail, the history, structure and the current concept of learning, as well as some criticism concerning the NCC, are introduced in the first part of the background theory, continuing to the second part that discusses the concept of educational evaluation, the importance of assessment, as well as some approaches concerning the topic.

## **2 NATIONAL CORE CURRICULUM**

The National Core Curriculum is a guideline composed by the Finnish National Agency for Education. It aims to give educational guidance that local education authorities and the schools can implement in their own curricula and education framework.

### **2.1 Brief history**

Malinen (1992: 11-16) claims that, in Finland, the concept of National Core Curriculum has been first taken into usage in a book of didactics by professor Mikael Soininen in 1901, who was inspired by J.F. Herbart's curriculum model called *Lehrplan*. Later, the curriculum was implemented in the Finnish elementary school (*in Finnish: kansakoulu*) in the 1920's. The gradual transition from elementary school to comprehensive school (*in Finnish: peruskoulu*) took place in Finland in the 1970's, and The National Board of Education compiled a curriculum that contained diverse description of common goals, evaluation and other arrangements. Furthermore, it showed signs of influence from the curriculum models of J.F. Herbart but also John Dewey, who invented the Curriculum-model, of which the English word *curriculum* comes from. According to the curriculum drawn up by The National Board of Education, the curriculum was to be implemented in every school in Finland and its purpose was to standardize the implementation of comprehensive school. All in all, the National Core Curriculum has been revised several times, the newest one being published in 2014 and implemented from autumn 2016 onwards.

### **2.2 Parts of National Core Curriculum**

The main parts of the NCC have traditionally consisted of the objectives, core contents of different subjects and the principles of pupil assessment. Furthermore, it discusses the principles of good learning environment and the concept of learning.

As stated in the introduction, the new National Core Curriculum for Basic Education was renewed in 2014 and implemented in schools from August 2016. According to Nissilä (2015), the recently published NCC has a new structure and now every subject entity has been divided into class entities 1-2, 3-6 and 7-9 compared to the previous NCC where the subjects were considered

as one unity. Furthermore, the new NCC now considers parts such as; the significance, mission, goals and operating culture of basic education; assessment; student welfare and support in learning; and special questions of language and culture.

### **2.3 Current learning concept**

Today, the prevailing learning concept in the NCC (2014: 17) is based on a theory that sees the students as active agents. Furthermore, the NCC talks about the conception of learning in a following way:

They [*students*] learn to set goals and to solve problems both independently and together with others... It [*learning*] involves doing things alone and together, thinking, planning and exploring, and assessing these processes in a versatile manner (The National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2014: 17).

According to Tarnanen (2016), the current learning concept is leaning towards constructivism and since the constructivist approach sees learning as building knowledge as a cyclical process by the learner himself (Hongisto 2000: 89), it could be stated that the new NCC has been influenced by the constructivist approach. Furthermore, The National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (2014: 17-18) states that learning happens in interaction with other students, the teachers and other adults, in addition to different communities and learning environments. The idea is that the students learn to set goals and solve problems independently as well as with other people. Learning in interaction is doing, thinking, planning, exploring and evaluating these actions in numerous ways. In addition, students are guided to understand other people and the consequences of their own actions as well as the ability to see and understand other viewpoints.

The current conception of learning also stresses the versatility of learning and it supports the students to explore their interests. As the NCC (2014: 17-18) states:

It [*learning*] also supports pupils in expanding their objects of interests. Learning is diverse and connected to the content to be learnt, time and place. National Core Curriculum (2014: 17-18)



What is more, learning should enhance positive emotional experiences and the students should find joy in learning, all of which promote learning and motivation. Students should also be guided to find their own methods of studying so that they could have an understanding of themselves as learners. The NCC (2014: 17) adds that self-image and the feeling of capability influence the learning of students and, therefore, gaining positive and realistic feedback are also vital elements of learning and an important aspect of interaction.

## **2.4 Criticism concerning the NCC**

Throughout the years, the NCC has faced many changes due to critical discussion of its importance. For example, Malinen (1992: 81-87) has discussed whether the current NCC restricts the teaching too much. Now, the NCC still instructs the schools to teach subjects in systematic concepts that do not see the connections between different subjects. However, if the system embraced a more ‘open learning’ culture, it would mean that the subjects and themes could be chosen according to the students’ interests, which would motivate to study and create more communal atmosphere.

On the other hand, Malinen (1992: 81-87) wonders whether the ‘open learning’ concept provides students with only scattered information that is hard to structure into a whole system of concepts, whereas the systematic teaching of subjects provides clear frames for students and teachers and helps them to organize their knowledge. According to Malinen (1992: 86), the debate between open learning concept and systematic subject teaching could go on forever, but both concepts work when executed well. However, the question remains, does the NCC chain the teaching too much.

Another topic concerning the NCC that has been under heated discussion is Finland’s recent results in PISA (Programme for International Students Assessment) and what might be the reasons for their decline. PISA is an international standardized test system for 15-year olds that provides information about the state of education in OECD countries and for many years Finland has been in the top of the results. However, the results are descending and for example Heller Sahlgren (2015: 62-64) argues that different societal changes and historical processes have led to Finland’s rise and fall in the PISA results. However, he also acknowledges the extensive teacher

training, the high level of trust for teachers and the lack of private schools to be aspects that have given Finland's education system international attention.

Whether the recently published NCC will provide changes to the structure of teaching or better results in Finland's PISA test, remains to be seen. However, since this research is about assessment of languages in the new NCC, I will next introduce some key concepts of evaluation and examine how evaluation is seen in the new NCC.

## **3 EDUCATIONAL EVALUATION**

### **3.1 What is educational evaluation**

Stufflebeam and Coryn (2014: 7) state that historically, educational evaluation has been explained by conducting norm-referenced testing. Fortunately, today, the most prominent view sees evaluation as a process that determines whether certain goals have been achieved or not. Furthermore, the concept of educational evaluation, according to Patel (2009: 11-13) has changed and developed throughout the years and the current, modern concept sees evaluation being more on-going and focusing on the pupil's psychological needs and interests as well as stressing learning rather than teaching. Furthermore, Patel (2009: 13-14) states that the goal of education is for every child to develop themselves and not just to transfer information and knowledge to them. Therefore, it is important for the teachers to be able to give students information about their development and abilities and not just evaluate their final products or other results.

Additionally, Patel (2009: 14-15) says that evaluation is a systematic and continuous process where we determine how well previously identified and defined educational goals and objectives have been met and how effective the learning experiences have been. However, this view also has its limitations since it puts the emphasis on the goals and for the evaluation to work; the goals should be clear, achievable and most importantly, known to the students. What is more, Patel (2009: 14-15) states that a comprehensive evaluation process includes many procedures and according to Stufflebeam and Coryn (2014: 7), evaluation in general should not be associated with only one methodology, but that it ought to include all the required methods that are necessary in the process. As an example, Patel (2009: 15) mentions that in addition to teachers, evaluation should involve parents and students themselves.

### **3.2 The importance of evaluation**

According to Virta (1999: 3, 5-7), the significance of evaluation has been emphasized recently, since the information it transmits is important for the students' future. Pupils plan their further education and careers according to the information that they receive from their evaluation. Therefore, the feedback that students receive in the form of tests etc. have a huge influence on students' perception of what is important and what should be studied. Because of this complexity,

the evaluation can be seen as a hub where the concepts of values, common knowledge and the idea of man unite. Evaluation thus tells the students what is important and worth learning, as well as, what is acceptable or exceptional. According to Pollari (2016), evaluation methods have a massive impact on teaching styles and study methods. Furthermore, evaluation can falsify the learning process if it only guides to study for tests, stresses fragment knowledge and creates stress and anxiety. What is more, evaluation is important because through it, students get experiences of failure and success, both of which are essential in the process of growing up.

### **3.3 Types of evaluation**

There are many different evaluation theories that see assessment in a slightly different way. History also shows that some theories have been more successful than others. Depending on the goal and the process that is being evaluated, one must choose a specific theory to provide valid and suitable information. When we talk about educational evaluation, two major theories usually raise; summative and formative assessment.

#### **3.3.1 Summative evaluation**

According to Patel (2009: 205-206), the term ‘summative evaluation’ indicates giving a grade to a student at the end of a study period. Therefore, summative evaluation focuses on the final “product” of a learning process and aims to give information about the level on students’ competences so far and to make sure that a required level has been reached. It gives information to students about their current abilities and to teachers it provides reinforcement and guidance that they can use to develop and plan their teaching. Pollari (2016) mentions that historically summative assessment has been the prominent method of educational evaluation and according to Patel (2009: 207) summative evaluation has been and still is an effective way to give information to many quarters and it assists students in their decision-making. Overall, the idea of summative evaluation is to give comprehensive feedback to the student that includes and takes into consideration all the required aspects that were under evaluation. Overall, as Virtanen, Postareff & Hailikari (2015) state, summative assessment is an important part of the evaluation process but that it should be complemented with the methods of formative assessment.

### **3.3.2 Formative evaluation**

While summative evaluation is the final assessment of a program, according to Black & Wiliam (1998: 1-3) the function of formative assessment is to promote learning by continuously assessing the development of a learning process. While Black & Wiliam (1998: 6) stress that formative evaluation is helpful for all students, they state that it is particularly helpful with low achieving students since the object is to give pupils a clear understanding of their weaknesses and to provide ways to improve their skills. Black & Wiliam (1998: 6) also state that formative assessment and self-assessment are inevitably linked together. However, what is vital here, is that students must have a clear understanding of the goals that they should achieve.

Black & Wiliam (1998: 6) introduce three elements of the feedback that students get from their efforts, which need to be understood before actions to improve learning can take. These elements include the recognition of the desired goal, evidence of current situation as well as some understanding of the ways to close that gap between those two elements. This means that teaching should be planned to include assessment during the courses, so that students have the possibility to close the gaps. Summative assessment that happens after the course does not give that opportunity.

Formative assessment has usually been a part of practical and art subjects. But, when we talk about languages Black et al. (2003; 72) state that “...we have found that modern foreign languages present the greatest challenges in embedding formative assessment into classroom practice.”

This is clearly a problem and a change in the current trend is vital.

As a conclusion to the both theories just presented, Black & Wiliam (1998: 6) say that feedback is vital to the learning process and it should guide the students forward by giving them feedback about their work.

### **3.4 Versatile assessment**

As Stufflebeam & Coryn (2014: 7) stated, evaluation in general should not be associated with only one methodology, but that it ought to include all the required methods that are necessary in

the process. Therefore, for assessment to be as good as possible, teachers should use different evaluation methods, and for each child to have the experience of success, multiple teaching methods should be used. However, using multiple versatile teaching methods requires the use of versatile assessment methods which include for example self- and peer evaluation.

### **3.4.1 Self-evaluation**

Black & Wiliam (1998: 6) claim that self-evaluation is part of formative assessment and according to Salmio (1995: 20) self-evaluation is the assessment of an individual's own work and actions. As Aebersold & Field (1997: 171-172) point out, self-evaluation is a good assessment method because it makes the students conscious of what is involved in the process as well as making the students a part of the process itself. Furthermore, Brookhart (2008: 60) states that self-evaluation teaches the students where feedback comes from. It helps them to monitor, evaluate, make plans and see what level of competence they have and what still needs to be improved. Self-assessment skills may not come naturally to people and therefore learning them in school is vital. Black & Wiliam (1998: 6) also talk about the problematics of self-evaluation which are that students usually do not have a clear picture of the goals that are expected of them and that they usually are harder on themselves than might be expected.

### **3.4.2 Peer evaluation**

The Finnish National Board of Education (2017) expresses that peer-evaluation is a form of external evaluation. A good peer-evaluation consists of people who work at the same level and have qualities that complete each other's. What is vital in peer-evaluation is that people learn from each other in the process and through peer-evaluation people can find strengths, areas to improve and other good practises.

Furthermore, what Aebersold & Field (1997: 171-172) suggest is that students are extremely capable of assessing each other's' level of participation, attentiveness and work. Furthermore, when students know that they are evaluated by their peers, their meticulousness and motivation to work better usually grows. However, it is vital to explain the students the criteria of what they are evaluating. All in all, engaging students in the whole assessment process encourages them to learn on several levels.

### **3.4.3 Other methods of evaluation**

As previously stated, versatility is a key part in evaluating students and therefore new, alternative methods should be found and implemented into the education system. As Aebersold & Field (1997: 168-172) suggest, for example journals, portfolios and homework are an alternative way to assess students' progress and competence in each subject. Additionally, modern technology gives even more opportunities for students to show their proficiency. For example, videos, websites, blogs and songs could be used as a part of evaluation and would increase multimodality in a classroom. Furthermore, other methods of assessment can according to Amiedu (2004) contain for example oral exams, panels and proficiency tests.

## **4 THE PRESENT STUDY**

### **4.1 The aim and the research question**

Overall, the concept of educational evaluation, as well as the publication of the new NCC, and the changes in it have been widely reported in media within a couple of years. The topic has created discussion in media and among education professionals. Therefore, I assume that the new NCC provides interesting information about this current topic. The aim of this present study is to find out how evaluation of students' schoolwork is seen in the new National Core Curriculum of 2014 as well as comparing the concept of evaluation to the previous NCC of 2004. By also inspecting the evaluation of English language in the NCC, this study will provide essential information for English teachers about the changes that have happened in the evaluation guidelines of their subject, i.e. the objectives and the assessment criteria. Furthermore, the findings are important for language teachers since they should affect their everyday teaching and be reflected on their choices. The research questions are the following:

1. How is the concept and the practice of evaluation described in the new National Core Curriculum of 2014?
2. What differences can be found between the old and the new National Core Curriculum in their discussion of evaluation?

Through this research I expect to find information about the changes that have happened in educational evaluation as well as the current and prevailing learning concept that affects assessment. I believe that the changes have been triggered through the change of the current learning concept. Therefore, the overall learning concept and evaluation are inevitably linked together. As Pollari (2017) stated, evaluation is the field in which the fight over the reformation of national core curriculum is either lost or won. If evaluation does not change, nothing really changes. I believe that this research is useful because it examines the changes that have happened in evaluation and in the concept of learning in Finland and discusses the importance and diversity of assessment in general.

### **4.2 The data**

The data of this study consists of the following selected sections of the Finnish National Core



Curriculum of 2014: evaluation (2014: 47-60), the conception of learning and the aim of basic education (2014: 17-18) and foreign languages (2014: 127-128, 218-223, 348-352). Additionally, the subsequent section from the Finnish version of the Finnish National Core Curriculum of 2004 was studied: student evaluation: (2004: 262-270). The length of the sections altogether is 37 pages. The parts were chosen because they address the evaluation of learning and the current learning concept that are related to each other. In addition, the sections about foreign language teaching on grades 1-2, 3-6 and 7-9 were studied and especially the parts that discussed English language were inspected to find out how the NCC describes the teaching and evaluation of the language subjects.

The Finnish versions of the national curricula are available online on the following web site of The Finnish Board of Education:

[http://www.oph.fi/download/163777\\_perusopetuksen\\_opetusuunnitelman\\_perusteet\\_2014.pdf](http://www.oph.fi/download/163777_perusopetuksen_opetusuunnitelman_perusteet_2014.pdf).

Additionally, the English versions are accessible as hard copies that are available for public to order online.

I first accessed the data in January 2017 and continued with the data analysis until the publication of this research, i.e. January 2018.

### **4.3 Method of analysis**

The method of analysis that is used in this research is a documentary analysis that was also discussed by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2013: 248-255). The document in question has been produced by a national authority, The Finnish Board of Education, and as in a typical documentary research, also here, the document (the data) was produced previously and by another quarter, rather than the researcher here.

As Cohen et al. (2013: 253) state, one of the goals of documentary research is to determine the meaning of a document as well as the information of the document itself. For example, in this research it means the understanding and considering of the broad educational and social viewpoints of the time the document was published.

Moreover, Cohen et al (2013: 254) explain that a document such as an education policy report can be investigated through analysing the content of the document or exploring the newspapers related to the topic and its reception after its publication. In the current research, I have chosen to follow the first method as well as combining it with the comparison between the previous version of the document, the NCC of 2004.

Finally, in this research I will draw on examples from the new National Core Curriculum and how it has been considered in evaluation. Furthermore, I will also compare the NCCs of 2004 and 2014 and discuss their differences and similarities regarding student assessment.

## **5 ANALYSIS**

The main purpose of the present study was to find out how the concept of student evaluation is presented in the new NCC of 2014 and what changes there are concerning evaluation compared to the NCC of 2004. In this chapter the findings of the present study are reported, and I will discuss first how the new NCC sees the evaluation and its importance. Second, I will introduce the objectives of evaluation in the new NCC, and third, the methods of assessment that are used in current education system. Finally, I will discuss the evaluation in the context on language teaching, more specifically English language.

### **5.1 The concept of evaluation in the new NCC**

In this chapter I will discuss the current evaluation culture in the new National Core Curriculum, i.e. what is valued and why?

The Basic Education Act in the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (2014: 49) says that student evaluation emphasizes assessment that promotes learning. Additionally, students' learning, work and behaviour skills ought to be assessed in diverse ways and overall, the goal of student assessment is to strengthen the learning processes and help students to reflect on their progress through self-assessment.

Furthermore, the pedagogical function of assessment has been opened and clarified, compared to the previous NCC of 2004. Even the title has been changed in the Finnish version from "student evaluation" to "evaluation of learning", which takes away a certain baggage from the previous scrutinising of a student. Furthermore, the new NCC mentions that the emphasis of evaluation is on assessment that promotes learning, and this concept is completely new in the NCC. In addition to this, what is different compared to the NCC of 2004, is that it mentions pupil's capability for self-assessment, various assessment methods and assessment that promotes learning.

Moreover, the NCC (2014: 49) states that teachers should guarantee that the students receive continuous guidance and supportive feedback throughout their studies and that good evaluation culture includes cooperation between home and schools. Patel (2009: 15) also says that in

addition to teachers, evaluation should also include students and parents alike and this means that the objectives of school work and evaluation should be discussed with all parties, and homes should be informed frequently about the students' progress and the evaluation criteria. Just as Patel (2009: 14-15) expresses, evaluation is a continuous process where the students' progress in some previously defined objectives are evaluated and it requires students to know what is being evaluated.

As already discussed in Chapter 3, Virta (1999: 3, 5-7) addresses the significance that educational evaluation has for the future of students. Therefore, the school has an enormous influence on how the students see themselves as learners and as humans and the feedback given by their teachers has a very significant role in this process. The new NCC (2014: 49) has also addressed this issue by setting key features for an assessment culture that contain, for example a supportive atmosphere, provision of instructive feedback and versatile assessment.

Overall, evaluation has gained more ground in the new NCC compared to the old one, and the idea of continuous formative evaluation and positive supportive feedback as a part of everyday schoolwork is the common thread throughout the concept of evaluation.

## **5.2 The objectives of evaluation**

The new NCC includes the objects of evaluation that are learning, working skills and behaviour. Learning as an object of assessment contains information about the development of students' studies and their progress is examined and compared to their previous knowledge and competence. The NCC (2014: 51) states, that "progress is examined in proportion to earlier achievements and the set objectives." This statement agrees with Patel's (2009: 14-15) idea of defining objectives beforehand and involving students in this process. Furthermore, what is vital here, is that students should not be compared with others but that their competence should be regarded and evaluated as a comparison to their own former proficiencies.

According to the new NCC (2014: 52), "developing the pupil's working skills is one of the key objectives of basic education." Here, students' abilities to work individually and independently are being evaluated and versatile working methods are also addressed. In addition, the students

are guided to find working methods that suit them and help them to develop their own working skills. Additionally, when evaluating behaviour, the new NCC also points out (2014: 50-52) that it is important to make sure that assessment is not directed to the student's personality, temperament, or other personal qualities. Furthermore, behaviour is evaluated separately, outside other subjects and it does not influence the grading of the subjects even though the data is gathered from the subject classes as well as from the breaks. Good manners and situation-aware behaviour are taught, and the students' get feedback on their behaviour, and the objectives good behaviour come from the school's educational goals. Additionally, also here, the cooperation between school and home is mentioned.

After every school year students receive a school report showing an evaluation on every subject on how a student has reached the objectives of the previous school year. In addition, every municipality decides whether the evaluation on grades 1-7 is written feedback or a number grade. However, number grades should be given after the 8th grade at the latest and on every subject. Furthermore, to guarantee equality in evaluation, the NCC contains also national criteria for the grade 8 (good competence) for each subject and teachers should use these criteria when evaluating students.

### **5.3 Different evaluation methods and methodologies in the new NCC**

Firstly, the new NCC (2014: 50) states that basic education contains two types of evaluation; assessment during the studies and the final assessment, which applies to also evaluation of languages. As also Stufflebeam & Coryn (2014: 7), state, evaluation process should include all required methods of assessment and not be stuck with only one methodology.

The actual feedback that promotes learning is descriptive, analytical and it should help the students see and understand what they are expected to learn, what they have learned and how they can promote their learning and improve their performances. It is notable here, how Black and Wiliam (1998: 6) also address these three elements, when defining good evaluation.

### **5.3.1 Summative assessment in the NCC**

Summative assessment has been a prominent part of student evaluation and has often included giving a numerical grade. Also, the NCC (2014: 53) addresses the concept of summative evaluation in a following way:

Assessment during the studies also contains a summative assessment of the pupil's achievements carried out at the end of the learning process, the results of which are communicated to the pupils in reports, certificates or assessment notes.

The Basic Education Degree obligates at the end of the year for schools to give a school year report to each student. The report ought to contain either numerical or verbal evaluation on how a student has reached the objectives of the subjects that have been studied (2014: 53). This is in line with Patel's description of summative evaluation, that indicates giving a grade at the end of a study period and that it gives an overall description of the students' competences.

### **5.3.2 Formative assessment in the NCC**

Formative assessment has gained more ground in the evaluation chapter of the new NCC (2014: 50-51). Furthermore, it points out that even though summative assessment is a vital part of educational evaluation, most of the evaluation during the studies is formative.

Additionally, the NCC (2014: 52) emphasizes, that assessment during the studies is executed by giving the students feedback as a part of daily interaction and teaching, but also giving them guidance of learning before the final assessment. Furthermore, the NCC (2014: 51) states that, this type of feedback and guidance promote the student's learning by helping them to structure their knowledge into entities as well as developing their metacognitive skills. In addition to this, NCC states, that all feedback should support learning and promote self-assessment and peer assessment skills. This is also true according to Black and Wiliam (1998: 6) who suggest that the function of formative assessment is to promote learning by continuously assessing the development of a learning process.

The NCC (2014: 48) states that teachers gather information about students' progress in all sectors and working environments. Here, it is vital to consider the students' different working methods

and approaches and to make sure that there are no obstacles in showing their progress and achievements. In different assessment and demonstration situations it must be made sure that students know what is expected of them and has enough time to perform. In addition, possibilities for oral demonstrations should be given.

### **5.3.3 Self- and peer-assessment in the NCC**

The NCC also stresses self-assessment in various situations (2014: 50-51). Education should help students to develop their skills in self-assessment by for example giving them space to reflect their learning. This is important in the student's learning process since it forces the students to think back about their starting points, their goals and their progress. Students are guided as individuals but also as groups, and the idea is that teachers help students to understand the objectives of learning and aid them in finding the best methods to achieve these goals. In every stage, self-assessment skills are developed by helping the students to find their strengths and weaknesses and the higher the level, the more self-regulated the process is.

What the new NCC (2014: 49) also points out, is that student assessment is mainly interaction between a student and a teacher and that it is also a part of the interaction between peers:

The teachers ensure that, from the start, the pupils receive feedback that guides and encourages learning and information about their progress and achievements... The pupils are guided to make observations of their personal and shared work and to give constructive feedback to each other and the teachers. This creates preconditions for developing the pupil's self-assessment and peer assessment skills during their time in basic education. (NCC 2014: 49)

Through self- and peer-evaluation students learn vital communication skills as well as ways to critically observe their own learning. This requires teachers to observe and interact with students and to promote self-assessment and peer-assessment. The teacher's job is to create situations where feedback that promotes and motivates learning is given and received together, in cooperation with other students.

Working skills and behaviour skills are a part of evaluation and these skills are practiced in all subject studies. Here, various working methods such as pair- and group work and interaction with

outside school parties are important and because of these versatile situations and operators, diverse evaluation methods are needed.

#### **5.4 Teaching of foreign languages**

As stated earlier, the new NCC is divided into three parts concerning the grades of basic education: grades 1-2, 3-6 and 7-9. Consequently, languages are discussed multiple times within a specific context. What is common with each chapter is that mother tongue and literature, second national language and foreign languages have their own sections and, therefore, it could be said that languages are highly regarded in the new NCC. Furthermore, each chapter addresses the tasks and the objectives of the subject. In the Foreign languages chapters (2014: 127-128, 218-223, 348-352), the sections include raising language awareness, providing materials for understanding and appreciating plurilingual and multicultural identity and developing interaction skills. Teaching languages in grades 3-6 and 7-9 also stress the importance of joy, playfulness and creativity in language learning as well as interacting in authentic environments. Languages are also discussed through gender equality, which means that students are encouraged to make decisions based on genuine interest no matter the gender and by discussing diverse types of topics and by using varying working methods. Working in diverse groups with various people is a skill that language teaching also provides for the students. Furthermore, the pupils are given opportunities to network and communicate with other people around the world that is also connected to the idea of students communicating in authentic situations. All in all, languages are discussed through multiple aspects considering communication skills, language awareness, respect for other cultures and versatile topics and methods. All of which are important in the constructivist learning theory.

#### **5.5 Evaluation of English language**

In this section I will discuss the evaluation of English language on grades 3-9 (NCC 2014: 238-239, 377).

Evaluation of English language in grades 3-9 stresses the encouraging and instructive nature of feedback. Furthermore, versatile assessment methods, such as peer- and self-evaluation are mentioned as a part of evaluation process. Moreover, versatile assessment methods include The



European Language Portfolio, which is a documentation of students' abilities and development in the learning of foreign languages. This can be used as an assessment instrument because of its versatility and its applicability to suit even the needs of students who have linguistic learning difficulties. Furthermore, the NCC (2014: 377), states that:

The assessment is versatile and provides the pupils with an opportunity to emphasise forms of expression most natural for themselves. Feedback that instructs and encourages learning is used to help the pupils become aware of their skills and develop them.

Moreover, students' competences are assessed in the context of local as well as the national criteria. At grades 7-9, The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages and its Finnish application are used. Overall, the evaluation of English language ought to be versatile, supportive and continuous, all of which is an integral part of formative evaluation. In addition to these broad guidelines, the NCC does not mention any specific and concrete methods of evaluation aside from the European Language Portfolio. However, this is more than what the previous NCC of 2004 provides, since it discusses all foreign languages as a whole. Furthermore, it omits concrete methods for evaluating students' performance in language subjects.

## 6 CONCLUSION

In the present paper, my aim was to investigate the current state of educational evaluation in the new National Core Curriculum for Basic Education of 2014. I had two research questions with which I sought to reach my aim;

1. How is the concept and the practice of evaluation described in the new National Core Curriculum of 2014?
2. What differences can be found between the old and the new National Core Curriculum in their discussion of evaluation?

Through this research I expected to find information about the changes that have happened in educational evaluation as well as the current and prevailing learning concept that affects assessment. Moreover, by studying the assessment of English language I expected to raise the awareness of English teachers regarding evaluation and showing that versatile and formative feedback should be a part of language assessment together with summative evaluation.

Based on the present study, it can be observed that educational evaluation has in its entirety, gained more ground in the new NCC. Furthermore, my findings align with those of Patel (2009: 11-15), who sees evaluation nowadays being more systematic and continuous, all of which is at the core of formative evaluation. As a whole, the general evaluation culture presented in this study emphasizes the encouraging aspect of learning as well as its continuity. Furthermore, it aligns with the NCC (2014: 17) as it sees pupils as active agents who should be included into the evaluation process through for example self- and peer assessment.

This study also showed that there are differences concerning the old NCC of 2004 and the latest version of 2014. First, the space given for evaluation is more extensive in the recent version, which implies that evaluation is now considered more important than before. Second, the chapter heading has changed from *student evaluation* to *evaluation of learning* in the Finnish version, taking away some of the pressure from students. Third, the new NCC discusses the English language subject separate from other foreign languages and it gives some broad guidelines for the

assessment of the subject.

The results of this study might interest the students in teacher training as well as teacher graduates in their field of work. Additionally, they can be used in the field of education as guidelines alongside with the new NCC as well as stirring further conversation and providing important justifications for the changes that have happened in educational evaluation. Teachers of English could also benefit from the results of this study by seeing the changes that have happened in the assessment culture and that should take place in their everyday planning and teaching. Moreover, the results that this study found, might inspire future studies to explore how these results are executed in schools. Interestingly, when the NCC discussed versatile assessment methods it mentions only the European Language Portfolio. Therefore, it seems that English teachers are given the freedom to use methods that are favourable to them. However, this might lead to teachers just sticking to those methods that are familiar to them and thus, applying new methods can be challenging.

The strength of this study is its topicality and the combination of two conversation pieces; evaluation and the new NCC, which both have gone through upheavals in the education system. This study has found connections between the current concepts of evaluation and the NCC, and furthermore, it has successfully described the overall state of evaluation in the new NCC. However, since this research was only about the basics of the evaluation in the new NCC, these findings cannot be generalized and automatically connect with the actual implementation of these guidelines that happen at grass roots level, in schools. Therefore, just as Cohen et al (2013: 254) suggest, in the future, the topic could be researched in more depth by for example combining this type of documentary analysis with interviews that would sought to find out how teachers or schools have implemented the content of the new NCC in everyday teaching.

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