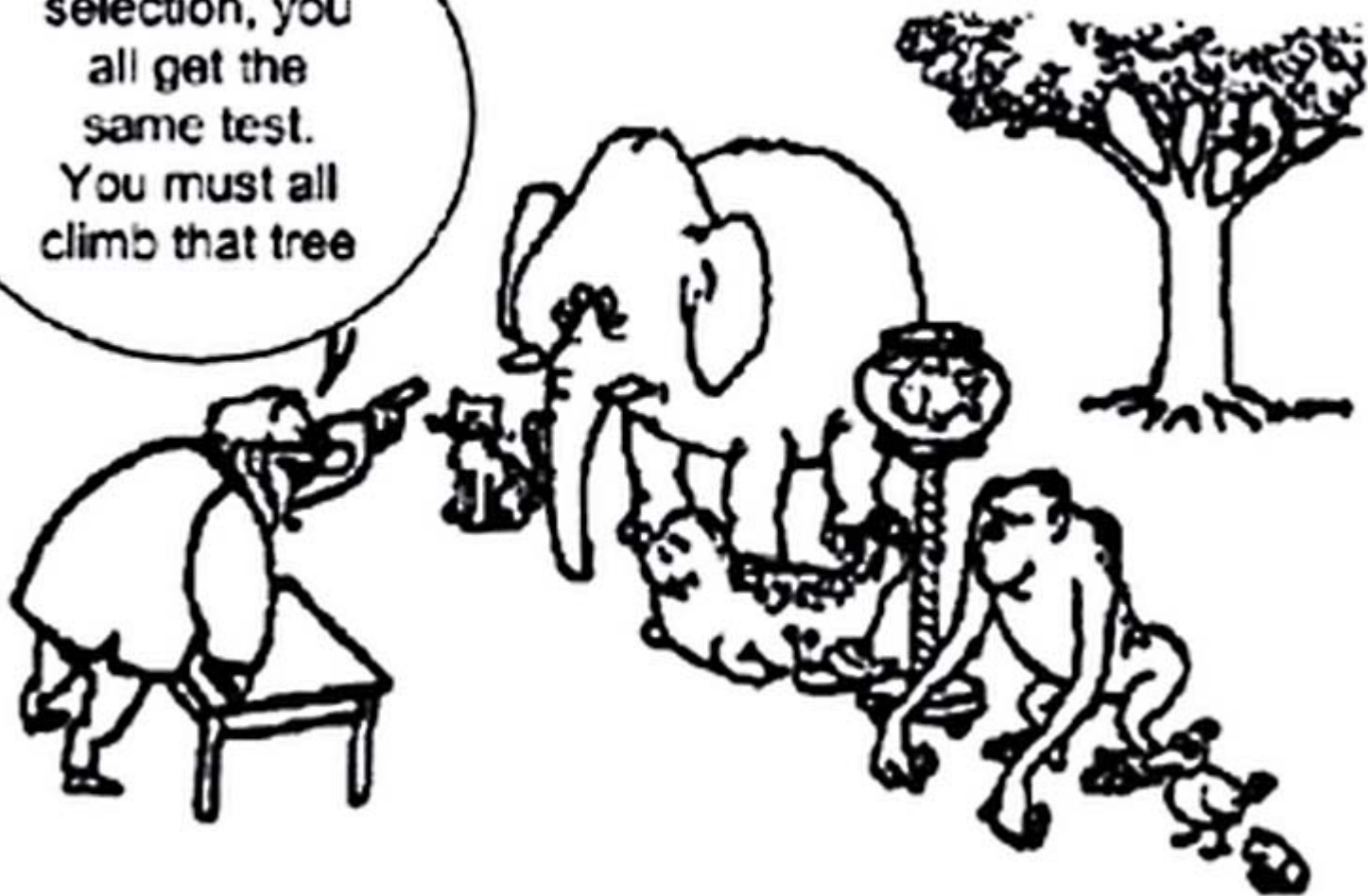


# Tensions and synergies related to the impact of assessment on the classroom

The 6th Annual EALTA Conference, June 4-7, 2009  
Bente Barsnes & Barbara Blair, University of Bergen, Norway

To ensure a fair selection, you all get the same test. You must all climb that tree



# Overview

- Background
- 2004: Tensions and synergies
- The survey
- Current debate
- Future challenges

# Central Issue

Overarching educational goal:

“...to enable children and youths to meet life’s tasks and master challenges together with others. It should provide every pupil with the ability to take responsibility for themselves and their lives, and also the capacity and will to help others.” (LK06 Our translation)

# Norwegian Elementary School

- Class teachers rather than subject teachers
- Aim equal opportunity
  - No special-needs schools
  - No pupils failed or held back
  - No grades given, only feedback
  - Testing only for diagnostic purposes

# Norwegian Lower-secondary School

- Subject teachers as well as class teachers
- Aim equal opportunity
  - No special-needs schools
  - No pupils failed or held back
  - **Grades given, as well as feedback**
  - Testing for diagnostic **and grading purposes**
  - **National examination at end of 10th grade in randomly assigned subjects**
  - **All pupils with grade 10 can apply for a place in an upper-secondary school.**

## Well-being in focus

- Education aims have reflected the egalitarian nature of Norwegian society.
- Achievement of this aim is evident in the results of international pupil surveys:
  - Pisa 2000 report: Norwegian pupils had high scores in social well-being in school.
  - A 2007 UNICEF report: Norwegian school children (11, 13 and 15 year-olds) ranked very high on the statement “like school a lot.”

# Winds of Change

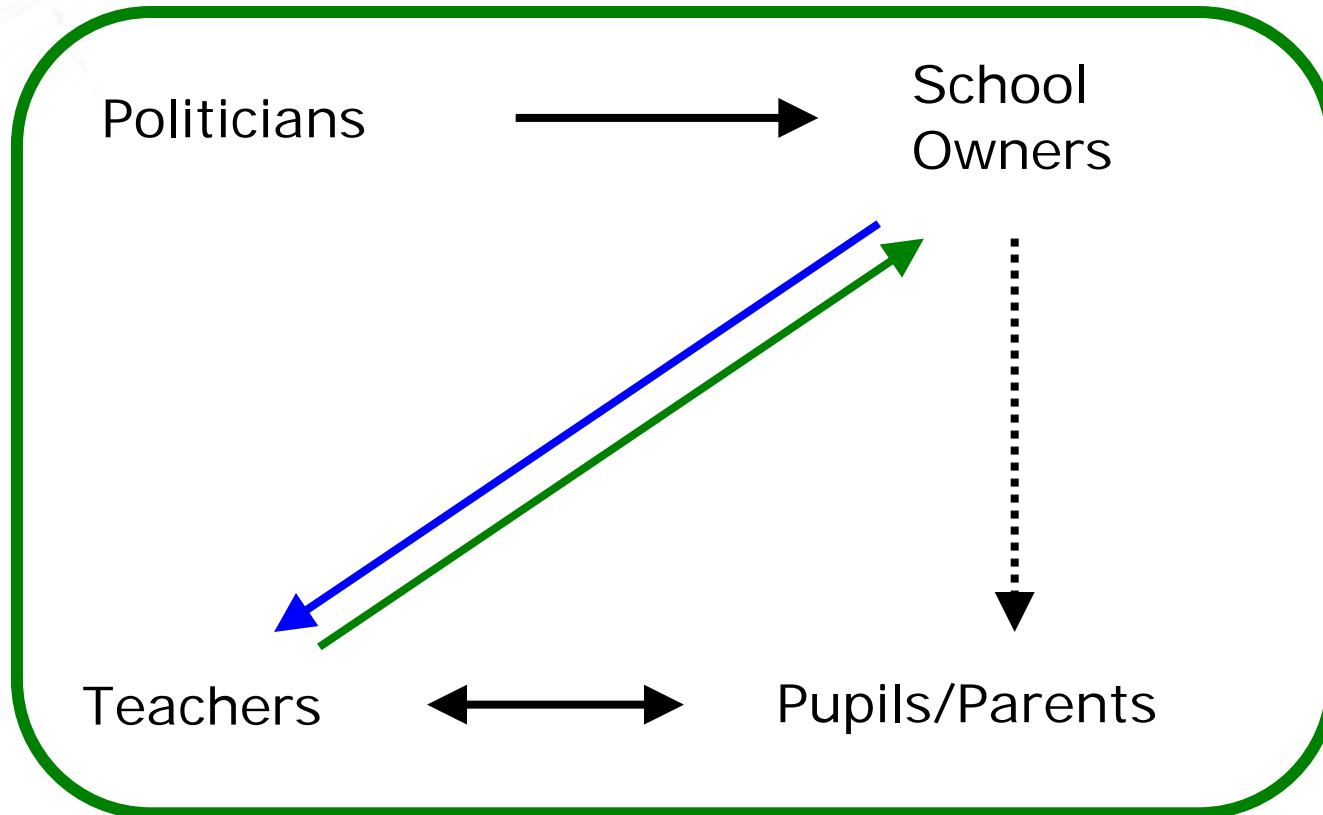
- PISA (2000)
- PIRLS (2001)
- New conservative government (2001)
- Development of National tests
- Large-scale National testing since 2004



# National Tests of English

- Original aims:
  - Pedagogical function
  - Reporting function
- Assessment OF learning dominated; assessment AS/FOR learning secondary

# Stakeholders



## Reaction to tests (2004)

- Teacher reactions
- Negative publicity in media
- Student strikes (some 11th grade pupils)
- Questions in parliament

# Reconsideration of National Tests

- 2005 Pause in testing
- 2006 Recommencement of tests
- 2009 Survey to identify changes

# 2009 Teachers' Survey

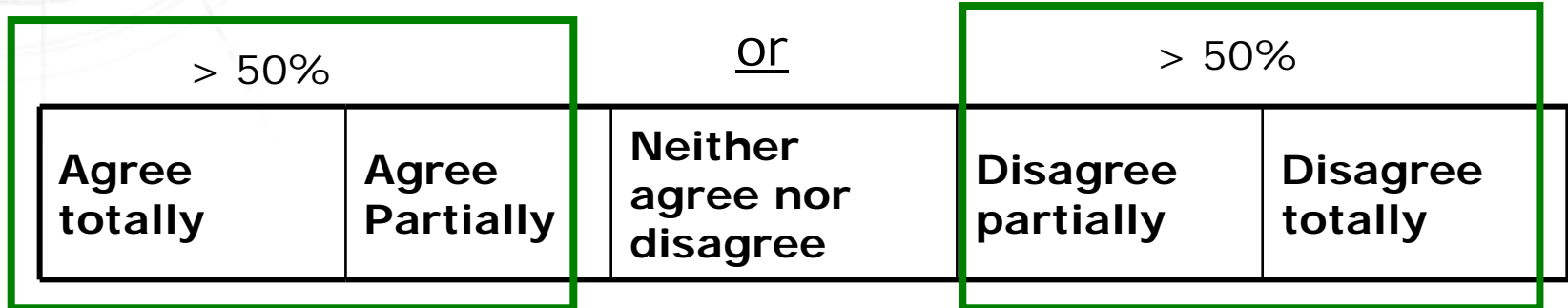
- Questionnaires
- Participants
- 23 statements
- 5 options:

<b>Agree totally</b>	<b>Agree Partially</b>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<b>Disagree partially</b>	<b>Disagree totally</b>
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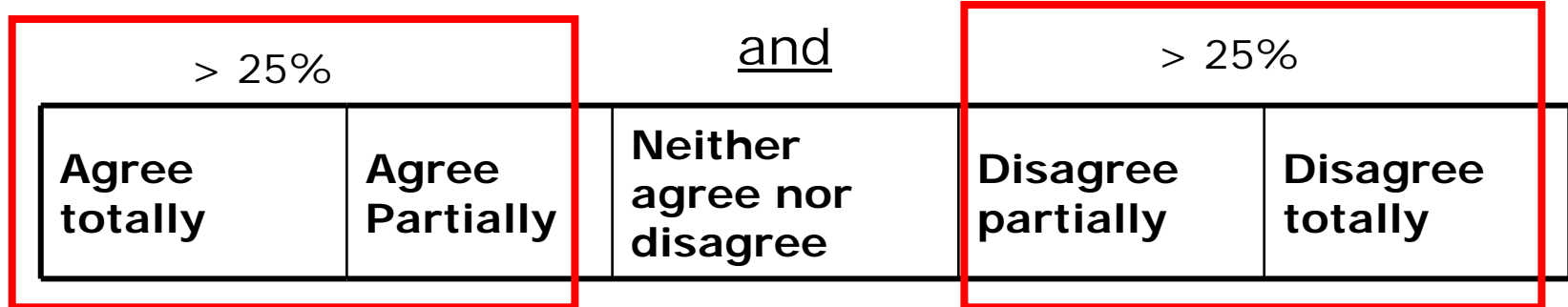
- 162 elementary and 134 lower-secondary teachers responded
- Analysis

# Interpreting the survey responses

## Synergies



## Tensions



## Synergies – Elementary school teachers' views

- In my opinion, the new curriculum and national tests of English have resulted in:
  - Increased focus on subject matter
  - Increased focus on pupil assessment
  - Improved teaching material for English
  - Increased concern regarding teachers' competence in the subject
  - Useful information about pupils' performance
  - Documentation of pupil progress
  - A better basis for differentiated teaching

(Our translation)



# Tensions – Elementary school teachers' views

- In my opinion, the new curriculum and national tests of English have resulted in:
  - Greater emphasis on skills at the expense of well-being
  - Teaching to the test

(Our translation)



## Synergies – Lower-secondary teachers' views

- In my opinion, the new curriculum and national tests of English have resulted in:
  - Useful information about pupils' performance
  - Documentation of pupil progress
  - A better basis for differentiated teaching
  - Improved teaching material for English
  - More frequent discussions of assessment
  - Increased need for in-service courses

(Our translation)

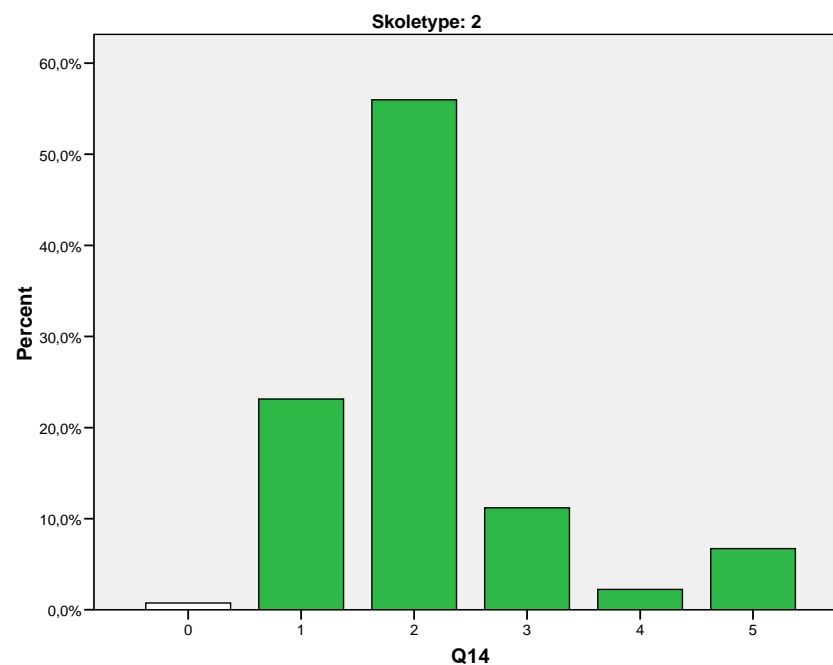
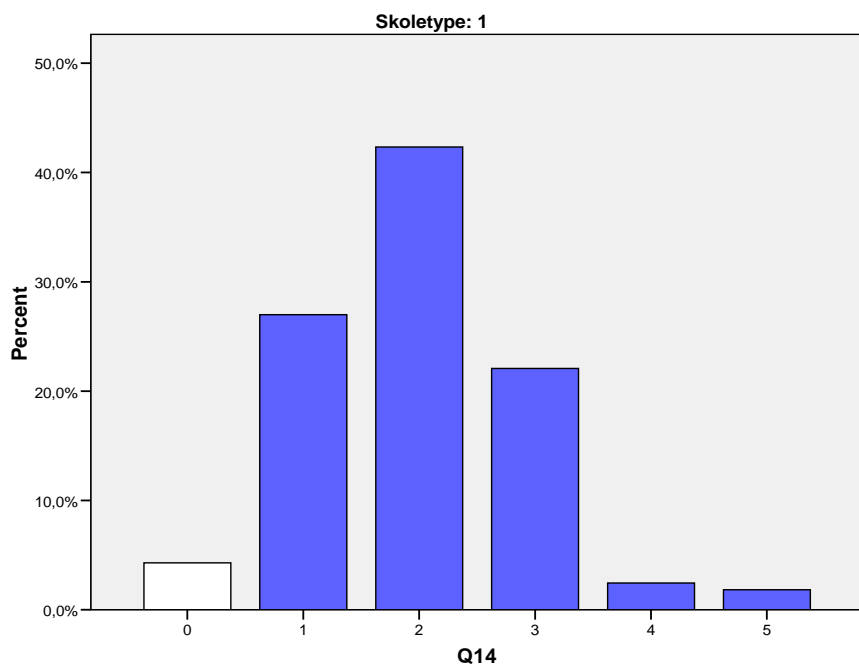
## Tensions – Lower-secondary teachers' views

- In my opinion, the new curriculum and national tests of English have resulted in:
  - **Teaching to the test**
  - Increased emphasis on assessment of pupil performance
  - Improvement in pupils' English and digital competence as a result of practicing for the test
  - More pupil concern about their grades

(Our translation)

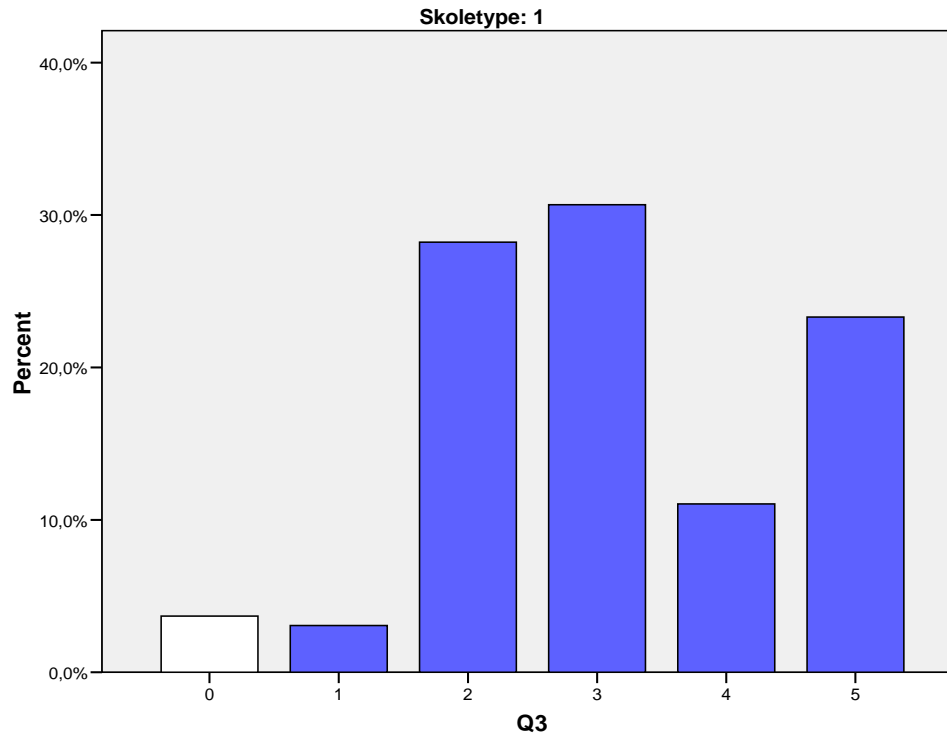
# Synergies – Elementary and Lower secondary

## Useful information about pupils' performance



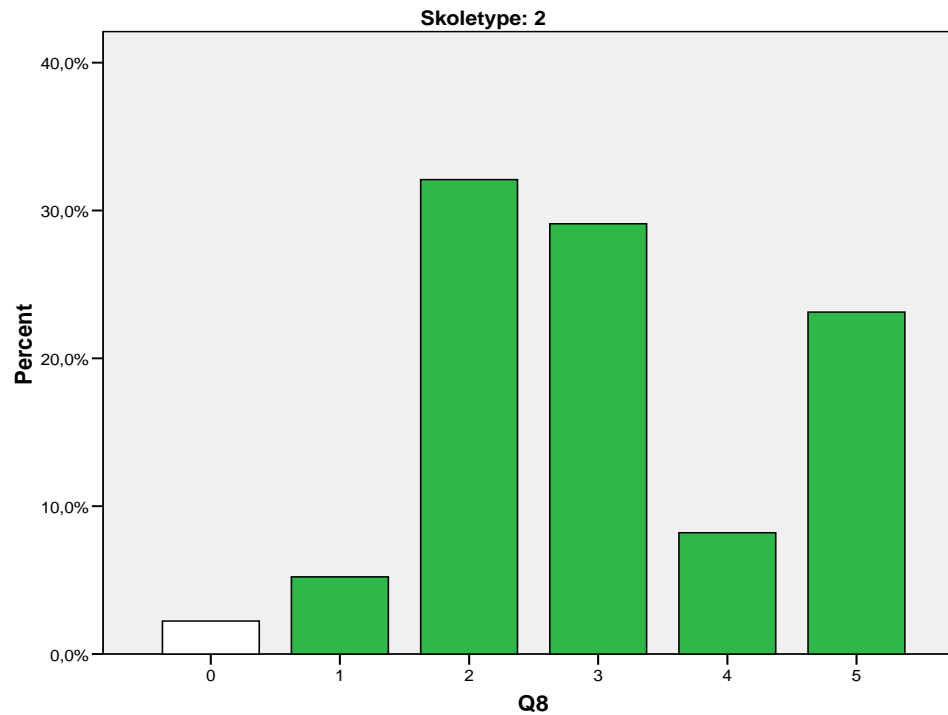
# Tensions – Elementary school

Greater emphasis on skills at the expense of well-being



# Tensions – Lower-secondary school

Increased emphasis on assessment of pupil performance



## Current debate

- Quantity of assessment
  - New diagnostic tests
  - Self-assessment
- Quality of assessment
  - Teachers' competence in assessment
  - Time available
  - Assessment criteria
- Increased control by school authorities

# Back to the Classroom

- Well-being
- Subject matter
- Time
- Teachers' competence

# Challenges

- Will Norwegian pupils continue to "like school a lot"?
- Will there be time to focus on social competences?
- Will it be possible to provide enough in-service courses?
- Will communication in the education system improve?
- Will Norwegian pupils' scores improve?
- Will teacher education meet the new demands?



# THANK YOU

