Assessment has a great impact on students. It determines whether students have succeeded or not and may also affect their future choices, for instance. Therefore, it may motivate students externally but also cause them stress and anxiety. Yet, there is little research on how students experience assessment and its power in general, let alone in foreign or second language studies.

To find out how students at our school experienced assessment and its effects on their learning, agency, motivation and self-efficacy, for instance, a total of 146 students answered a web-based questionnaire dealing with assessment and feedback during their English (as FL) upper secondary studies. The results showed that most students were quite satisfied with assessment and its effects. However, there were also very different experiences. For instance, there were students who felt undermined and distressed by assessment, and, subsequently, some of them had lost their motivation to study English as well as their belief in themselves as learners of English. Then again, some students did not seem to be affected by assessment in the least. What might explain the individuals’ diverse, even contrasting, reactions to assessment and feedback in one school where assessment and feedback methods do not presumably differ very much?

This presentation focuses on four individual student cases that showcase very different experiences of and reactions to assessment and feedback. Although individual students, they also represent larger groups of students with somewhat similar experiences and reactions. The presentation will also look for possible explanations or predictors for these differing experiences and draws on mixed methods and data, both quantitative and qualitative, in its analyses.

Keywords: anxiety, assessment, empowerment.