

TEACHING PORTFOLIO

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1. INTRODUCTION

This teaching portfolio is a part of my application for the Teaching Academy and the teaching reflection part is divided into the following sections: 1) a short outline of my university teaching career which now spans over 20 years. 2) A review of my core teaching principles, which are based on both deductive and inductive reasoning. They are deductive in the sense that I try to use what I know about how people learn and effective instructional methods in my teaching, but they are also inductive as I derived them from my practice, which is also influenced by the context, the subject area, prior educational experience, co-teachers, and other collaborators, and last but not least, the students themselves. 3) I discuss four cases that demonstrate these principles in practice and how they came to be. But also show the breadth of my involvement in teaching and structuring education at the University of Iceland. 4) I present ideas about teaching development moving forward, with a focus on the practical teaching competences I want to emphasize and future developments in my teaching, including reflections on my involvement in the teaching academy if I am accepted.

The appendices in the teaching portfolio include my teaching and supervision CV (Appendix A) as well as examples of course evaluations and student feedback (Appendix B), career development as it relates to teaching (Appendix C), and examples of course descriptions (Appendix D). These will be referred to in the teaching reflection where relevant.

2. TEACHING BIOGRAPHY

I have divided the teaching biography into two sections to reflect distinct periods of teaching development in my career. The first represents the transition from being a student to a teacher and can be seen as the period of indoctrination into the traditional University teaching model. The second represents the period after taking over the program for vocational teachers at the School of Education when starting my current position at the University of Iceland and can be seen as breaking with the tradition and adapting to a different group of students. The process has led to important changes to my pedagogical beliefs; roughly stated, moving from lecture-based teacher-oriented practices towards discussion-based student-oriented practices.

2.1. EARLY TEACHING CAREER: TRANSITIONING FROM A STUDENT TO A TEACHER

I started teaching at the University of Iceland in the fall of 1999, after graduating with B.A. in Psychology, when the dean of the faculty of Psychology hired me as a full-time teaching assistant for a year. During the school year 1999-2000, I assisted and taught in all the first-year courses in the Psychology department. My role varied from being responsible for a course (*Work Methods in Psychological Studies*), running laboratory classes or discussion groups (*Experimental Psychology*, *Sensation and Perception*, and *Foundations of Social Sciences*), to assisting during teaching, drafting multiple-choice questions, and grading exams (*Introduction to Psychology* and *Analysis and Modification of Behavior*). The year being a teaching assistant was a crash-course in teaching at a university level; both through my own experience of teaching and dealing with students, but also by being involved in planning with the teachers and observing from perspective of a teacher instead of a student. Having only graduated from the program myself a year earlier made it interesting to get an insight into why things were done a certain way and what was involved in running courses for a large group of students. At the same time being a teaching assistant for all the first-year courses meant that I got to know the students in this cohort quite well and I was often seen as the bridge between the students and the faculty – which invited confidences from students. At the time it struck me how differently students approached the same material or assignments and used their time. This experience laid the foundation for my interest in applied and educational psychology and was one of the reasons I pursued graduate studies at the *Problem Solving and Educational Technology Lab* at the Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta, US. During my tenure as a graduate student at Georgia Tech I continued working as a teaching assistant in various courses alongside my own studies – again involved in teaching courses, running laboratory or discussion classes, and creating and grading exams and assignments. In addition, a *Teaching Practicum* course, focusing on university teaching, was mandatory for graduate students and the students taught together an undergraduate course (*Introduction to Psychology*). Our teaching was observed by fellow-students who provided written feedback, and the experience then discussed during class. Taken together these experiences cemented my understanding of university teaching as being primarily lecture-based (especially for undergraduate education), supplemented with discussion or laboratory classes for more advanced classes or where hands-on experience was specifically required.

2.2. CURRENT POSITION: VOCATIONAL PEDAGOGY AT UI

After finishing my PhD in 2012, I started working at the School of Education, University of Iceland. A part of my duties from the beginning was to supervise the vocational pedagogy program, which is a 60-credit undergraduate level diploma program to qualify as a vocational teacher, *Teaching Studies for Master Tradesmen*. From the start I have been involved in the majority of the courses in the diploma program and the topics I cover include learning theories, skill acquisition, expertise, assessment, universal design for learning and instruction, structure of vocational education, and the relation between school and working life. I am also responsible for the teaching practicum the students undergo (see Appendix

A.2. for a list of courses taught). In 2014, a new program for vocational teachers was established: *Vocational Education and Training Pedagogy*, which was intended to serve as a bridge to a B.Ed. degree for students with vocational teaching qualifications. The bachelor program was on the drawing board when I started in 2012 and I took on the task of developing this program. This involved, among other things, to write descriptions of the program and courses, create learning objectives, and write the application for the program presented to the University Board. Once the program had been approved, I was responsible for founding and designing the courses for the program. The specialized part of the program consists of three seminars which I both supervise and teach on the history and organization of vocational education, theories on skill acquisition and training, and research on vocational education.

Aside from teaching courses related to the programs I supervise, I also teach in various courses within the School of Education related to my expertise and background in psychology, for example cognitive approaches to learning, assessment and testing, and engineering psychology. I have actively sought out opportunities to engage with different student groups across the School of Education and the University as it provides me with an important counterpoint to the vocational teachers – both in terms of commonalities and differences. It keeps it clear that what I do as a university teacher is always in relation to the students and their mission, and allows me to deliberately try out, change, and adapt teaching practices for different groups. Sometimes this can mean not doing the typical thing for that group – for instance making assignments for vocational teachers more academically demanding or using more discussion-based teaching for students from more traditional academic background and fields. At other times the commonalities of the purpose of different student has been brought home to me. For example, after completing a course for university teachers (*Introduction to Teaching Studies at the University Level*) in 2014 at the Center for teaching and learning at the University of Iceland, I have taught short professional development courses for university staff or been a guest lecturer in courses at the Center (see Appendices A.1. and A.4.). Teaching these short modules has been interesting as they have demonstrated to me the clear limitations of what such short segments can achieve. I have made the mistake of being too focused on research and theories, blinded by the fact that the students were university faculty, where I should have been more practice oriented. But I have also managed to be successful by combining theory and practice in these sessions and this has brought home some of the commonalities of teacher education regardless of the education level taught at.

In my current position I have served as a thesis advisor for 9 graduate and 6 undergraduate students (see Appendix A.3). The undergraduate students I have advised have all been students in the B.Ed. program *Vocational Pedagogy*, and in advising them I emphasize knowledge creation in their field or in vocational education in general, as often very little material is available. The projects can differ in their focus and purpose and have for example been research projects, reviews, or involved creating instructional materials. The master's students I have advised have been associated with different programs. Due to the nature of the programs I supervise, few master's students come my way, especially after a writing a thesis became optional in many programs at the School of Education. Mostly I am approached by students interested in vocational education, educational psychology, or cognitive psychology. The faculty at the Department of Psychology often refer students to me that are in the program *Upper Secondary School Teaching – focus on Psychology* as I am one of few faculty members at the School of Education with a background in psychology. In advising master's students I encourage them to work with topics that interest them and align with their future objectives (in practice or further studies). I also emphasize the value of their research efforts and the importance of contributing what they do to the Icelandic educational research community. Therefore, I encourage my master's students to present their work in conferences (mainly *Menntakvika*, the annual conference of the School of Education), and I have participated in publishing the work of three of my master's students (see Appendix A.3.). I am currently co-advising my first PhD student focusing on recent reforms of academic programs in upper secondary education. I understand being a PhD advisor is different from advising students on shorter projects and I am committed to becoming better at it. I finished the first course for PhD advisors at the University of Iceland and participated in a seminar on International good practice in PhD supervision in 2021. I plan to take the second course for PhD advisor next school year.

3. TEACHING PRINCIPLES

My approach to teaching is based on the premise that the teacher creates the framework and organization necessary to support learning and skill acquisition. The teacher is responsible for designing and implementing the support structure for students to do the work of learning, as learning is an effortful and cognitively demanding process, especially if the goal is long-term retention and transfer (Barnett & Ceci, 2002; Bjork et al., 2013; Low et al., 2011; Schmidt & Bjork, 1992). My approach is on one hand based on using methods that have shown to be effective for learning in general – derived from cognitive psychology and research on skill acquisition (i.e., Bjork et al., 2013; Brown et al., 2014; Chi, 2009; Dunlosky et al., 2013; Ericsson & Pool, 2016; Mayer, 2018; Schneider & Preckel, 2017; van Merriënboer & Sweller, 2005). On the other hand, I believe it is important to adapt teaching practices to the students, their prior knowledge and educational experience, as well as their future goals. Especially as research has demonstrated the importance of motivation, self-regulation, metacognitive strategies, and self-efficacy in the educational domain (i.e., Alexander, 2018; de Bruin & van Gog, 2012; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Hidi & Renninger, 2006). My current approach to teaching is grounded in both my background in cognitive and applied psychology as well as my experience in teaching university students with varied background and in different programs.

In my teaching practices I try to encourage students to become active participants, both in terms of individual classes and in their longer-term approaches and attitudes as students. Being active and engaged is important, both for motivation and self-regulation, but also because actively working with the material to be learned has shown to be effective. I therefore rely heavily on discussions, examples, and group-work. As I mostly teach students learning to become teachers, I try to make the students apply knowledge and skills to real-world problems and situations. I also use lectures, but I try to either integrate discussion into the lecture, to have students actively participate, or to provide short recordings to use as a basis for a discussion session. In either case, discussion questions or assignments allow me to gauge their understanding, correct misunderstandings, and address knowledge gaps. Indeed, formative assessment should be interwoven with teaching. This means that assignments should have a clear purpose related to the goals of the course and feedback should be timely and informative in respect to the knowledge and skills that are being developed in the course or the program. However, I do find that my teaching methods vary based on the subject in question, the student group, the nature of the course, and my role in it. In some courses my role is simply to introduce a particular topic in an isolated module. In those cases, I would assign reading, record lecture(s), and provide discussion/comprehension questions. In other courses, where I am more heavily involved, and the competence focuses on more than understanding or retaining knowledge (i.e., applying, analyzing, evaluating, or creating) I would emphasize group discussions and assignments, independent work (selecting a topic and approach), and connections to everyday or professional situations. The student group, their background and prior experience, also determine the methods I use and how I structure courses or modules – for example, I tend to treat vocational teachers differently than what I would term experienced university students (with an academic background and prior experiences within higher education). However, vocational teachers have surprised me and revealed how dangerous preconceived notions about student groups can be – even with the best intentions. I have therefore been quite interested in moving more towards universal design for learning (UDL) where the needs of learners are met and extraneous barriers for learning are removed, without lowering demands or the quality of the course or program (Scott et al., 2003). Doing so in practice is easier said than done and something I am working on.

I also believe that a key issue in successfully getting students to become active and responsible for their learning is to make sure they know exactly what is expected of them. I therefore take pains to have the course set up and organized as clearly as possible, for example through the syllabus (see examples in Appendix D) and learning management system (Canvas), but also by assisting students in maintaining an overview and context throughout the semester (see student feedback in Appendix B). The context and purpose of courses and assignment should be as clear as possible so that student can understand the relevance of the work they do – this is especially important when you are competing for time with work and family responsibilities, which tends to be the case for most of the students I teach (see section 4.2 and an

assignment example in Appendix E). It is therefore essential to give students the means to direct and organize their learning and the support structure to increase their chances of being successful. Sometimes this can involve methods not always popular with students, for example frequent reading quizzes, reading diaries, or calling on students to share reading discussion questions they were supposed to prepare (see section 4.1 and student feedback in Appendix B). But as the goal is to support their learning, it is important to create a culture of responsibility where expectations are high. I have not always been successful, but my experiences with having both succeeded and failed in creating a good learning culture, has only cemented my belief in the importance of doing so.

4. CONCRETE CASES

In this section, I present four cases that demonstrate my teaching principles and their development. They also show the breadth of my involvement in teaching – from developing approaches to teaching, continually evolving a program of study, and participating in creating policy on teaching and learning at the university level.

4.1. BEING A TEACHER AND A LEARNING SCIENTIST: THE DIFFICULTY WITH APPLYING KNOWLEDGE

My experience with university teaching as a student and a teaching assistant was in many ways quite traditional and based on ingrained ideas that students are responsible for reaching the benchmark set by teachers, regardless of what the teachers throw at them. At the time I generally bought into this narrative and only later did I realize how these ideas were based on my experience in selective programs with an established academic focus. I did, however, often feel a disconnect between the demands made of students and the wide variety of approaches taken by the teachers. As a teaching assistant I observed and participated in great university courses as well as some awful ones. Too often my role became an unofficial translator and a mediator between the students and the teacher, as they did not seem to speak the same language. In these cases, students were usually left to bridge the gap on their own and figure out what they needed to do to acquire the material in question without much guidance, and survival of the fittest seemed to be the motto. However, I also witnessed great teaching and worked with faculty who were ambitious as teachers, for example providing students with different learning resources, engaging them in discussions on good study habits, and learning their names – even if the class numbered over 100 students.

These experiences took on a deeper significance during my graduate career as I focused on learning, transfer, and skill acquisition in my studies. The structure of courses, choice of teaching approaches, attitudes and expectations became examples of both how knowledge about learning can be put into practice, and the strong influence of traditional approaches to teaching at a university have, even on people who should know better – myself included. For example, research has repeatedly shown that distributed and interleaved practice, i.e., returning to topic previously covered later and in a different context, increases the likelihood of later transfer of learning (see Dunlosky et al., 2013 for a summary), but is this rarely put into practice in a university setting. Instead, sequential and segmented treatment of the learning material is the norm. This was even the case in the course where we discussed research on this subject. I have tried to implement this in the overall program for vocational teachers, by introducing topics in one course and revisiting them later in other courses and novel context. For example, assessment is introduced in *Introduction to vocational teaching* (previously *Teaching vocational subjects*, KEN101G), it is one of the topics focused on in *Curriculum of vocational subjects, materials, and assessment* (KEN203G) and revisited in *Vocational pedagogy – Part II* (KEN403G) in the context of their teaching practicum experience. However, I have found it remarkably difficult to do this deliberately, especially within a single course. Students are often quite resistant to going over material that they feel they have already covered, institutional program structure rarely supports it, and neither do traditional textbooks. So even if my background is in the educational sciences of how people learn – understanding when the knowledge applies and putting it into practice is easier said than done, demonstrating the difficulty with transfer of learning.

Furthermore, even if we as teachers sometimes know which methods are optimal for the best results, everyday realities, traditions, and practical considerations do matter. Navigating these, while simultaneously capitalizing on what we know about how people learn and figuring out how to do so while keeping students invested and engaged is what teaching boils down to for me. For example, in the course *Learning theories: Social and psychological perspectives* (MVS009) we used to have a discussion-based group assignment following each lecture and we had found this assignment to be successful to get the students to work with the material and get to know one another. However, due to the class being taken by students in different programs, scheduling became difficult, and we had to schedule it Friday afternoons (from ca. 14:30 to 17). As a result, the assignments did not work anymore; the students were too tired after the week (the majority also worked as teachers) and eager to go home on Friday afternoons. They tried to complete the assignment at other times and complained about the added workload. The goal had been to get students to work with the material, discuss it, and deepen their understanding, while at the same time getting to know their fellow students. In the end the assignment became something else entirely as students tried to divide the work amongst them and then assemble later just to hand it in. The idea behind the assignment was sound, but practicalities intervened, and it did not serve its original purpose as a result. We redesigned the course and to address this issue we created two separate activities to meet the purpose: students do individual assignments to deepen their understanding of the material but also participate in separate discussion groups. That way, our original goals of getting the students to deepen their understanding of the material and get to know and work with their fellow-students are met, but with two different activities instead of one (see Appendix D.1. for the current course syllabus). We have found this solution to be successful and the students have been satisfied as well (see Appendix B.1. for student feedback).

Overall, I attempt to use what I know about how people learn in my teaching – both in terms of course structure and methods – but it is not always obvious what will work in a certain situation and with a particular group of students. My approach now is to use iterative design to develop and tweak courses and modules I teach; taking notes throughout the semester about what works and what does not, as well as relying on student feedback, both formal and informal. I always have a document for each course or module titled “notes for next time” where I collect ideas and notes and which I use when I teach the course again. For example, the first time I taught the course *Learning and design: Engineering psychology* in 2017 I had students write a reading diary for every class (10 times) and turn in at the end of the semester (with the option of getting feedback earlier in the semester). Two things about this organization of the assignment turned out to be unsuccessful: (1) Students complained that they had no idea about how to do this, how detailed each diary entry should be, and what was expected of them, and (2) when grading them at the end of the semester I realized that the diaries provided important information about student understanding and misunderstanding that I would have liked to have during the semester (to discuss and correct) (See Appendix B.4. for examples of some student comments regarding this issue). The next time I taught the course, I revised this assignment based on my notes. I gave the students clear examples of what the reading diary could look like, they had to turn in fewer entries overall (8 instead of 10), and instead of turning the reading diary at the end of the semester, they turned in each entry after the class where a topic or chapter was discussed – thereby getting an immediate and timely feedback on their work. I also changed the grading for the diary entries and now there are three options: 0 (not turned in or unacceptable), 5 (read the material and turned in the bare minimum), or 10 (good work, students show they thought about the material and related to their own experience). This meant that if they kept reading and working with the material throughout the course, they could get 10 for this part of the course (20% in total for the 8 entries, 2.5% each); giving them a clear incentive for doing the work well. I also emphasized that the reading diary – and the discussion questions I provided for each class – would be helpful to complete the take-home exam at the end of the course (see Appendix D.2 for the current course syllabus). After these changes the feedback on the reading diary has been mainly positive, the students understand what is required of them and I get a better insight into where they stand in the course (see Appendix B.4 for student feedback). Using this kind of approach in teaching is based on my background in engineering psychology where iterative-design, user-centered, and universal design approaches are emphasized in designing tools, technology, and environments. During my graduate program, we were also taught to employ these methods in various projects. But I really did not realize how we failed to apply this approach in our

teaching until much later when I struggled with resolving the conflict between my own ideas and beliefs about university teaching with the experiences teaching a truly untypical group of university students: Vocational teachers.

4.2. BREAKING WITH TRADITION: TEACHING VOCATIONAL TEACHERS

Working at the School of Education and overseeing the vocational pedagogy program, changed my outlook on university teaching. The School of Education was established in 2008 when the former College of Education merged into the University of Iceland and the distinctly different culture of a professional teaching college was still evident when I started in 2012. The emphasis on teaching was clear; often taking precedent over research (this has since slowly changed). Courses were regularly co-taught in teams and there was a focus on distance learning and serving students. All this was new to me and required quite a bit of adjustment. Another challenge was working with a group of students who typically do not enter university – those who graduate from vocational programs in upper secondary schools (e.g., master tradesmen). Vocational education in Iceland at the upper secondary level does not lead directly to matriculation, which means that these students usually graduate into working life and are not expected to enroll in universities. The program I oversee, *Teaching Studies for Master Tradesmen*, is aimed at equipping people with a vocational background with the pedagogical skills necessary for teaching their field at upper secondary schools. It is therefore a professional education program and aimed at students who are not necessarily prepared for or have expected to ever enter universities. These students are typically older, with a long and specialized working experience in their field, family responsibilities, and tend to work while studying. Both the goal of the program and the student group presented a challenge, and it was clear that I had to change my approaches and perspectives to make this work.

Therefore, the past 10 years have changed my beliefs on what University education should be and how teaching should be approached. This started with the vocational teachers, but with time I have also changed my approach when dealing with more “traditional” university students. The change is partly the result of cognitive dissonance between prior beliefs about university teaching and the reality I faced in the classroom at the School of Education, and partly the result of reconsidering how I could apply my graduate training to teaching. User-centered and universal design approaches emphasize the perspective that users should be the focus of the design process and their needs taken into account. The difference concerns how you define the user group in question; whether you specify it (user-centered design) or try to design for the widest margins of human capabilities possible (universal design). Applying these approaches to university teaching is not new (see for example Scott, et al., 2003) but for me, realizing that I needed to put these ideas into practice and figuring out how to do so, constituted a paradigm shift. Typical university course setup and structure was impossible when dealing with vocational teachers and the culture at the School of Education encouraged different approaches. The reality is that you cannot set goals the students have no way of meeting. When facing students with little experience of academic work and often low self-efficacy as students, you must meet them where they are and coax them towards where they need to be for the job they are training for. This means creating flexible course structures (e.g., providing different ways to meet goals), while still making requirements clear (e.g., what success looks like). It also means playing to their strengths (e.g., by building on and relating to their fields of expertise, using discussions) while at the same time training them in weaker areas (e.g., writing, reading academic text, using scientific literature). However, these students have surprised me – showing me how dangerous it can be to have preconceived notions about the capabilities of certain student groups.

Overall, my teaching within the programmes for vocational teachers is based on active, constructivist, and cognitive learning approaches. Active learning means that the instruction is designed in a way to maximize active engagement of students with the course material through discussions, group assignments, problem-solving, and applied exercises. Research has shown that any way of making students actively engage with and work with materials in different contexts has benefits for long-term learning and transfer of training (e.g., Bjork et al., 2013; Dunlosky et al., 2013; Schmidt & Bjork, 1992). The emphasis is also constructivist; working with prior experience and knowledge of the students, as these students have varied backgrounds from different fields (e.g., Chi, 2009). The assignments are as a result often flexible so

that the students can focus their work depending on their prior knowledge and field of expertise, for instance by getting them to put theoretical approaches into context through examples and by applying general methods to their specific teaching situation. Cognitive learning approaches are used for example by considering what encourages transfer of learning and minimizes cognitive load during a learning episode (e.g., Dunlosky et al., 2013; Low et al, 2011; van Merriënboer & Sweller, 2005). For example, in the course *Vocational pedagogy* (KEN302G) which is taken alongside the *Vocational teaching practicum course* (KEN303G) the students complete a group assignment where they discuss the readings, connect ideas presented in different sections of the material, and relate to their own experience, especially the teaching practicum (see assignment description in Appendix E). It requires not only that the students understand the concepts involved, and can reflect on their meaning, but also that they are able to apply them in a school setting.

However, for me the most important thing I learned from working with vocational teachers was to understand in practice how both the teacher and the students bring their past experiences, knowledge, and skills into the classroom, and how we as teachers can, and should, create an environment where we accept and even take advantage of this diverse background for better learning. For me, this happens first and foremost through discussion where students are encouraged to adopt the material to their own understanding and extrapolate into the circumstances they are training for.

4.3. PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT: VOCATIONAL TEACHER EDUCATION

In my current position I supervise the vocational pedagogy programs and in this role my focus has been on continually developing the programs to increase their relevance and quality, especially the 60 ECTS diploma program, *Teaching Studies for Certified Master Tradesmen*. In this work I have taken as a point of departure the goal of the program on one hand, or the competencies required for vocational teachers working in upper secondary schools, and the students on the other, their preparation and background. The focus has been on figuring out where to start and this means understanding where the students stand, their prior knowledge, strengths, and weaknesses. From there it involves trying to find a way to get them from that starting point to the program competencies specified. This work is, and should be, an ongoing process and continues to be my goal for the continued development of the program, but so far, the development of the program in terms of major changes has been in two parts.

In 2013-2014 the curriculum committee for the program, which I headed, revised the learning outcomes of the program and courses. First, we analysed and mapped the learning outcomes for the courses in the program. After completing the mapping and then drafting revisions, we held focus group interviews with teachers and students to get critique and feedback before finalizing the learning outcomes. This process resulted in clearer program objectives and an understanding of how course content and organization contributed to this goal. This process helped me understand clearly how competencies of the program emerged from the coursework and content covered in individual segments of the program. It also revealed to me the conflict between program aspirations and practical realities, tensions which cannot always be resolved. This involves questions on quality, expectations, reality, and aspirations. For example, how to create a quality program with high standards, resulting in competent and qualified teachers, without setting impossible goals that students will never meet? Or should the curriculum be aspirational in the sense that we should always push students towards exceeding expectations? And how can we assess that these program competencies have really been met in practice through the building blocks of courses and modules? I do not have clear answers to any of these questions, but in trying to work them out, I have adopted an attitude of optimistic pragmatism: Choosing to believe students can reach the goals sets, knowing that not all can or will, but providing the support needed to carry them as close to the objective as possible given the time we have with them. I want students to complete the program with a sense of accomplishment – to have done work they did not necessarily believe themselves to be capable of. But at the same time, it is important that we graduate competent teachers – and here my struggle has involved trying to figure out how to guarantee the quality of the program. For example, if students barely pass each of the course in the program can they be considered well-qualified? Furthermore, how does the performance in the program relate to later performance and development as teachers? These questions, as well as other practical concerns, were the foundation for the next part of program development.

In 2017 I received a grant from the University of Iceland Teaching Fund to review the program – both in terms of structure and content. This review was done in the winter of 2017-2018 and I, along with a recently graduated vocational teacher recruited to the project, visited 7 upper secondary school in Iceland (3 in Reykjavik metropolitan area and 4 in rural areas). On each visit we interviewed both school leaders and vocational teachers, and discussed the organization, content, and outcome of the program. A special focus was on what competences new vocational teachers need to do the job according to interviewees. Therefore, the program was reviewed through this process by past, current, and future students working as vocational teachers. The idea was to get critical feedback from teachers in the field on how best to prepare new teachers for the job, how to organize the program, and to get a sense of the institutional requirements and the need for new teachers from the school administrators.

The findings of the interviews related to the organization and the content of the vocational teacher program as expected, but they also expanded into discussion on the role of qualifications and purpose of teacher education and further professional development for the teachers. When discussing the organization of the program two issues stood out: (1) the teaching practicum time was too short and restricted for new teachers, but experienced teachers were unhappy to being unable to complete their practicum where they already taught. (2) Making time to attend to the study was difficult for many, especially those who were just starting their teaching career. New teachers often start with a full load of courses they have never taught before and the vocational programs have minimal staffing and, as a result, there is little leeway for the new teachers to attend to their studies. When it came to the discussion of the content of the program the biggest issue was dealing with a diverse student group, but they also discussed the importance of practical knowledge, and connecting theory and practice. It was interesting that in this context the school leaders all talked about the importance of more general skills, such as writing, that related to administrative and policy tasks, for example connected to creating program curriculum.

Based on the findings from the visits it became clear that restructuring was needed. I made changes to the program in 2018-2019, most notably to change it into a two-year, half-time program. Most of the students work while they complete the programme and often have family responsibilities as well. The new teachers were therefore not the only ones who experienced too much workload when completing the program full-time in a single year. Additionally, students who did complete the program in two years reported better understanding and competencies. Changes were also made to the teaching practicum, and it is now longer, both in terms of the hours in the field and the overall duration as it now covers two semesters instead of one. Thereby giving students opportunities to being involved in more courses and different aspects of the school year. Along with the teaching practicum the students also complete an accompanying course focusing on tying together the practicum experience with pedagogy, integrating theory and practice in a deliberate manner. Finally, a course on diversity had been a required part of the program, but the findings clearly established the need for it, and it was reconstructed as a result and offered every year. The first group going through this new program structure is graduating now in the spring of 2022 and the plan is to start evaluating the changes made and tweaking the structure moving forward.

I have therefore, from the start of my career at the University of Iceland, participated in and directed work on developing programs and courses. This experience has served me well and provided me with a good understanding on the structure of the institution and the processes involved in organizing and developing university education. However, developing a professional program is one thing, and university-wide policy another as I soon learned when I was recruited to participate in the development of a policy for enhancing quality of teaching and learning at the University of Iceland.

4.4. QUALITY ENHANCEMENT STRATEGY FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

In the winter of 2017-2018 I was recruited by the rector's office at the University of Iceland to work on the development of the *Quality Enhancement Strategy for Teaching and Learning* (QESTL). My role was to serve as a coordinator and general project manager. As such, I was a member of the steering committee responsible for developing the strategy plan.

The steering committee created the strategy in collaboration with the Academic Affairs Committee ([Kennslumálanefnd](#)). The QESTL was a part of the comprehensive strategy for the University of Iceland, HÍ21, where the vision for teaching and learning had been laid out in general terms but was meant to elaborate on that vision with defined projects and clear benchmarks. The goal of the strategy was to “... encourage continuous development of teaching at the University by better supporting the professional development of teaching staff, fairly evaluating teaching contributions, encouraging the use of IT that enhances the quality of learning and improves student engagement”. Additionally, the strategy needed to tie in with other policies and plans of the University, such as the *Equal Rights Policy*, *Language Policy* and *Quality Assurance Policy*, while at the same time make sure that the projects set out would not increase stress and pressure on the teaching faculty. The project was in two phases: (1) generating ideas and creating outlines of the project and, (2) focusing and reviewing. As the project manager my role was to keep the work going, keep notes, do background research, create drafts, and develop the strategy text based on comments and reviews. The Steering Committee met regularly to develop and discuss the strategy and then progress was discussed and reviewed at the Academic Affairs Committee meetings. Through this process we developed the strategy and then a final draft was reviewed at a seminar including representative of all stakeholders and members of the Teaching Committees (Kennslunefnd) at the five schools at the University. An open consultation process was the final stage before the strategy was formally adopted by the University Council in the spring of 2018. The final QESTL was guided by three focus points at which the strategy aimed, and which were linked to individual projects: (1) UI is home to a dynamic learning community of teachers and students, (2) the quality of teaching and learning is paramount in university operations, and (3) UI serves a diverse society by offering different ways to study.

Being a part of this process was an invaluable lesson, not only in university-wide collaboration, but also in understanding what teaching and learning at a university means on a wider scale than I had previously envisioned. I had been aware, to a degree, of the different cultures between schools and faculties, but not the extent of the variability both between and within these units. For example, having been part of the School of Education, I had lost sight of the fact that the student groups in many other schools differed in many respects from those I had gotten used to teaching (i.e., age, prior experience, academic abilities), resulting in different challenges. This fact was brought home to me through the developmental process, especially as this became one of the focus points of the strategy early on. Discussions on this point revealed differing opinions on the role of university education in general and the University of Iceland in particular. The tension was especially centered on what the mission of the University entailed: Should it be a selective institution where admission is a testament on a students’ abilities and qualities or serve the society by providing the education needed to the population in general (often tied to the idea of the University of Iceland as a national university). In practical terms, this meant discussions often focused on who should be admitted and how much “service” should be provided to the students. For example, whether distance learning should be offered, or lectures recorded. Here the goals (and history) of the university as a selective institution of *higher* education warred with the idea of making university education accessible. These tensions are of course not new but seeing how they played out in the making of the QESTL showed me clearly that I had worked in a part of the university with its own specific culture towards teaching and learning. That said, it was also clear to me that these tensions were not necessarily along the fault lines of subjects, faculties, or schools, but could co-exist, making the complexity of the communities more extensive. And, as a result, getting the teaching faculty to adopt certain practices so much harder. In fact, it became clear to me that (as in teaching in general) there had to be multiple pathways towards the goals, that could be tailored to the mission and history of the faculty and school in question. The School of Education is a good example, as the tension between the legacies of the Iceland College of Education (Kennaraháskóli Íslands) and the ethos of the University of Iceland has been clear since I started working there shortly after they merged in 2008. This has been for example seen in discussions on what teachers should do for students in their courses, the hours paid per course, and balancing research requirements and teaching. Even recognizing these challenges, it does not make it easier to figure out how to reconcile the different sides, especially as the university needs to balance the demands for quality education and the economies of teaching, including finite resources such as the time faculty have to do their work. The first steps, as we discussed when developing the QESTL, are on one hand to make sure that the teaching faculty have the institutional and technical support to be able to implement the teaching practices they

are interested in and on the other to keep the discussion on what these teaching practices should be continually evolving. I believe creating and adopting the QESTL was an important step in taking these first steps – and participating in and encouraging faculty to apply to the Teaching Academy is another.

5. FUTURE TEACHING DEVELOPMENT

My future plans for teaching development involve both increasing my own understanding and skills as a teacher and continuing to develop the programs for vocational education teachers. Continuing development of the programs for vocational education teachers involve collaborating with those working in the field and reviewing the programs internally. The recent changes made need to be assessed and the content reviewed, making sure that the competencies of the program and courses align. In addition, I want to re-evaluate the B.Ed. program for the vocational teachers, as I have not done so formally since it was established. As to my own teaching practices I want to continue my development in this area. After writing this teaching reflection I believe I have a better understanding of where my strengths lie and where I need to develop my teaching skills. I know that many of the things I do work well, but I would like to expand my toolkit. Specifically, I want to learn how to deliberately create a learning community with a culture of responsibility and high expectations. In this context I would be interested to engage more fully in formative learning/assessment practices (especially through effective peer-evaluations). I also want to develop as an advisor, in particular for PhD students, and get a better understanding of how to best guide students through this process. Finally, I want to continually develop as a university teacher that is firm but fair, challenging but flexible, and demanding but supportive. In reality, this might be an impossible balancing act where you often must accept failure. The important part is how to move on and learn from the experience. And this is where the community of teachers is so important, both to discuss experiences and learn from each other. I therefore believe discussing teaching practices is vital, both for one's own reflection but also to get insight into different methods and approaches. As a part of this process, I want to participate in evolving the culture of teaching at the university level and this is one of the reasons why I am applying for the Teaching Academy. Teaching development is a never-ending task; you are never "done" in becoming a good teacher, and in the same vein, approaches to university teaching should be constantly evolving. However, teaching approaches are never implemented in a vacuum. The history and legacy of the subject and the institution is an important influence, students bring their own challenges, expectations, and perspectives, and then there are the organizational challenges of departmental economies, time management, and stress. It is difficult to take all of these variables into account and here I believe the Teaching Academy as an independent entity will be an important resource. By bringing together experienced university teachers, with various background and different trajectories, purposely to discuss and develop teaching practices it becomes possible to focus on the larger picture and issues that often are difficult to address in isolation. The university can do much to support teachers and their development, and I believe the Teaching Academy will be invaluable in encouraging higher education institutions in supporting teacher development as well as advancing ideas on what quality university teaching look like. I would love the opportunity to participate in this process and the community the Teaching Academy offers.

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APPENDIX A: TEACHING AND SUPERVISION CV

Following is a list of the courses I have taught both at graduate and undergraduate level.

APPENDIX B: COURSE EVALUATIONS AND STUDENT FEEDBACK

In this section I listed teacher evaluations (an average grade on the scale 0-10) and student feedback for some of the courses I have taught. I have chosen courses where: (1) I have been the supervising teacher (umsjónarkennari), or (2) responsible for a large module in the course, and (3) course evaluations are available. The comments from students all refer to my contribution specifically. I have included examples of the average teacher evaluation grades and only when more than five students have participated.

APPENDIX C: CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Here is an overview of my career development related to teaching since taking the position in 2012 at the University of Iceland.

APPENDIX D: SAMPLE COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

I have included two sample course descriptions to provide examples of how I have structured and organized courses to support my teaching vision. These are both referred to in the Teaching Reflections.

APPENDIX E: SAMPLE ASSIGNMENT FOR VOCATIONAL TEACHERS