

Teaching portfolio – Rannveig Sverrisdóttir

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Overview

The following teaching portfolio is part of my application to the Teaching Academy. In recent years, I have been active in discussions about teaching at my school and faculty, served on the teaching committee of the School of Humanities and actively participated in forums and teaching conferences. I have also followed and participated in dialogues outside my department, such as at the University of Iceland's Centre for Teaching and Learning, the University's educamps, and the Organisation for Teaching Development at the University Level. With my application to the Teaching Academy, I hope to be able to contribute even more, as teaching is a passion of mine and the most important part of my job.

I will start by (brief) teaching biography, then discuss my teaching principles and hopefully show the connection between my principles and practice with three real cases. At the end I address my future vision in teaching.

Teaching biography

As a child, I always wanted to be a teacher. Probably not a university teacher, but a teacher anyway. The interest seemed to me to be in my blood as I came from a line of teachers, enjoyed school, played

school games and found it easy to help fellow students in their studies, ever since the earliest grades of primary school. After my upper secondary school graduation, I decided to see the world and study languages, which led me to general linguistics where I was introduced to the study of sign languages. After that, there was no turning back for me. Although teacher education somehow never became a reality for me, my position at the University of Iceland's Faculty of Arts immediately following my postgraduate studies meant that I had suddenly become a teacher – and yet I knew nothing! I still remember the words of my mentor who told me that at UI, no one wanted to talk about teaching; that it took place behind closed doors and was not discussed. That was clearly her experience. She also handed me an article she told me to read, and this article has stayed with me ever since. In short, the author of the article described how their teaching had changed for the better when they stopped “performing” and began to see themselves as a peer of the students instead of the all-knowing university teacher. I think this article played a big part in getting me through the challenge ahead: being on my own, a new and inexperienced university teacher in a new subject, without traditions or prepared schedules or syllabi to rely on. I decided to look at the students as my partners. I would certainly teach them, but I would not pretend to know any more than I did. In retrospect, I consider this an approach that supports student-centred learning, but I still had a lot to learn, and I was a long way from being able to say with certainty that my focus was on the student rather than teaching itself.

I teach in the program of Sign Language Studies which is only offered as an undergraduate (BA) program. My teaching experience is therefore almost only limited to the Bachelor level, although I have co-supervised a few theses on a Master level within other programmes and of course almost all BA theses written within Sign Language Studies. I teach mainly courses in linguistics and culture, give lectures but have always tried to make them interactive and in recent years I place more emphasis on discussion in class with different methods, aiming on students' participation.

After 12 years of teaching and administration in my subject, I signed up to study for a postgraduate diploma in teaching studies for higher education. Before that, I had always felt uncomfortable not having studied any educational theory. I was very keen on finding some educational material that might make me a better teacher and attended relevant courses that were offered here at the University. The growth in teaching development was not nearly as great then as it is today and it was more difficult to obtain education, although resources could be sought from the University's Centre for Teaching and Learning. A new world of tools and dialogue on teaching opened up for me in my diploma studies, and I have utilised these ever since. I think it's safe to say that I spend every day thinking about how I can develop my teaching, set better tasks, make the lessons better, mobilise students and help them learn. Looking back, I realised that my teaching was somewhat teacher-centred in the beginning and is perhaps still to some degree - but much less than at first. I found that being teacher-centred makes less demands on the teacher and can be “helpful” when dealing with new and complex issues. I have often had to teach courses that have been on the periphery or even outside of my field of specialisation, in which case there has been a risk that I will go into the “teacher-oriented zone”, so to speak (although teaching something new and unfamiliar can also be useful and instructive). I think it is largely insecurity that puts me in this mode. As a new and inexperienced teacher, you obviously do not know what is best - but you also must guard yourself against mistakes. Lack of time plays a big part there. If I do not have time to prepare my teaching well enough, I can seek cover in this, by teaching as if I know everything and my students' questions don't matter at all. Such classes are a cause of concern for me, but they are fortunately becoming increasingly rare, and I hope I have managed to eliminate them completely. What I have learned in decades of teaching is that the teacher is always learning, “scholarship of teaching and learning” therefore always applies: the work is never done if you want to be “teaching like it matters”, to quote the article that came into my hands 20 years ago.

Teaching principles

In the autumn of 2004, I was recognised for my contribution to teaching at the University of Iceland, and some years later I was asked to give a talk for the Centre for Teaching and Learning on my teaching and teaching principles. This was my first analysis of my own teaching, and I remember how much of a challenge it proved to be. I defined what I felt characterised my teaching and teaching methods, divided into three aspects: a) interest, both in the subjects I teach and in disseminating them, b) organisation and clear messages and c) participation of students. Although I have learned a lot since that principle or thought was put on paper, I think my teaching principles are still based on these three aspects. At the time, this definition of mine was based primarily on emotion rather than theory or analysis. A long time later, I read up on the science, looked at my own teaching and teaching principles and found it interesting to be able to put my feelings into this context. These three factors I mentioned are still relevant to me, but now I can better explain what lies behind them and why they are important. Having the knowledge and experience I do today, I can add that using formative assessment is one of my main principles. As a development of what I called “organisation and clear message” I today find it important to think of event workload and constructive alignment in all my courses. This I hope to show in the cases discussed below.

Kugel's paper (1993) is certainly of its time, but I believe that what he says about the development of teaching or teaching skills is still relevant. Kugel says that this development takes place in stages but the teacher will gradually develop from looking at herself towards looking at the student and “from teaching to learning”, which is the development towards student-centred teaching. Going through Kugel's levels is a kind of self-examination for the teacher, and it is important to consider whether you yourself are stuck on any level. I saw myself completely at level one when I started teaching because I was insecure and hid behind the protective barrier that teacher-centred teaching is or can be. Over time, I have gained more self-confidence in teaching but also adopted a certain serenity that I think is important for teaching to be more student-centred. According to Kugel, it is normal for teachers to be at the “lower” levels (or in the first phase) at the beginning, but that with time, they gain the necessary experience and self-confidence to get them to the stage where they can concentrate on the purpose of teaching, i.e. move from a “focus on teaching to focus on learning” (1993: 321). This change involves replacing “what” with “how”, that it is more important for students to learn “how” to think than to learn “what” they should think. With this, the teacher will stop thinking about covering all the material and think more about making the students active, replying to their questions with other questions in the hope that they will find the answer for themselves. This has been a challenge to me but with time it has become one of the principles I follow. I have done this by introducing organised discussion sessions, reading journals and, more recently, “QCQ”, which are short reflections on the material studied each week¹, that the students submit to an open site and are also used for discussion sessions. I feel that introducing QCQ in first-year courses sets the tone for the academic culture in the subject, i.e. that there is a focus on student-centred learning.

The work I have devoted to reviewing courses, curricula and learning outcomes in recent years has involved a certain amount of introspection (see cases 1 and 2). It is healthy for every teacher to consider what kind of a teacher they are, and this was certainly true in my case. I teach humanities and it was interesting for me to go through the model presented by Barnett and Coate (2005), especially their discussion of curricula in the humanities but also the comparisons with other fields. They believe that the basis of the curricula can be divided into three dimensions, “knowing, acting and being”, and

¹ See, e.g.: <https://bacwritingfellows.commons.gc.cuny.edu/from-reading-to-writing-quotation-comment-question-q-c-q/>

that within the humanities, the knowledge dimension is most prominent and has little overlap with the others. Here, I found especially notable their comments on our tendency to add continuously to the syllabus with the addition of new material, thus enlarging the knowledge dimension. I have taken this into account and tried to introduce more student activity, to have them work with the material instead of me telling them “everything” that I know and that has been studied in the field (cf. also Kugel 1993). Since one programme in my subject offers vocational education (sign language interpretation), it was also interesting for me to consider how Barnett and Coate presented the model for what they call “professional subjects”. Here, there is a much greater overlap between all aspects of the model and the knowledge dimension is relatively smaller, but you can see how the emphasis is on students utilising their knowledge. This is in line with my teaching principle on students’ participation. Barnett and Coate’s discussion about having to think about where we distinguish between curriculum and education studies made me think about how we can get students to apply their knowledge; what teaching methods are best suited to achieve this. That being able to “do” is sometimes more important than “knowing”. With this in mind, I have gradually introduced course assessments where students are shown trust (peer reviews, field presentations, see cases 2 and 3). These discussions by Barnett and Coate have also caused me to make better contact with both students and stakeholders to gain a wider perspective on how the education is useful to the students after their graduation (see the discussion under case 1).

Case 1: Listening to students (and part-time lecturers)

Problem/observation of student learning:

In 2015 it came clear to me that the curriculum of the whole program of Sign Language Studies needed to be reviewed with the principle of constructive alignment as a guideline. To make sure that the quality of the program was maintained and at the same time student-centred learning encouraged, listening to students’ voice was important

What did I do about it (change of teaching):

I find it unavoidable to discuss my work as the administrator of the subject Sign Language Studies at the University of Iceland and the only tenured teacher in my field of study. Although this is not teaching, this supervision, oversight and organisation constitutes a large part of my job, and all of this requires certain teaching principles. I sometimes find it strange to be so “all-powerful” and miss not having colleagues to talk more about the teaching environment in the field, although I have the great fortune of working with an excellent group of part-time lecturers who participate patiently in all my teaching development experiments when they can. The experience and education of these teachers varies, which has also allowed me to learn to listen and not put myself on a high horse. In this case, I would like to look at the work I have undertaken, from reviewing the curriculum for the whole subject to consultation meetings with students during each term and demonstrate how I have dealt with the sometimes complex situation of being the University’s only tenured teacher in this field of study.

The beginning of this can be traced to my final project in the teaching studies for higher education, where I worked on reviewing and developing the curriculum for the subject as a whole and considered the question of how the curriculum could better serve the needs of stakeholders while safeguarding the quality and requirements of higher education. I based this largely on Ashwin et al. (2015), which includes a discussion of the importance of a curriculum while stating that university teachers often have little knowledge of curricula and what they should contain; that they are not merely course descriptions, and that deciding the content of a curriculum means determining what knowledge is

important and what knowledge is less so (2015). With this in mind (and partly inspired by Barnett & Coate 2005, see discussion above), I decided to interview a diverse group including graduates, teachers and people who use services provided by graduates.

At the start of this review procedure, I thought a lot about the statement in Ashwin et al. (2015:163), that “the process of curriculum design will be a cyclical process”, i.e. that the curriculum should be under continuous review. I have kept this in mind ever since and it could be said that this review, that began in my teaching studies for higher education, is nowhere near complete, but that it has rather become a “cyclical process”. After thematic analysis of these interviews, the results were ready to be used to rewrite learning outcomes for all the study programmes but I was still in the position of being alone and did not have an ongoing dialogue with my co-teachers, as I could not pay part-time lecturers to participate in the work. In the spring of 2019, I received a grant from the University of Iceland’s Academic Affairs Fund to continue with the project and, in a way, complete the cycle that began in my teaching studies. That grant solved the financial problem, so to speak, so in collaboration with The Center for Teaching and Learning, we (the part-time lecturers and I) could rewrite the learning outcomes based on the themes that resulted from the interviews (see appendix A). Reference was yet again made to the conclusions of Ashwin et al. (2015) and in its work, the group focused to a large degree on the meaning of graduation (2015:159). Guided by this, new and improved learning outcomes for the subject emerged. The cycle continues, however, and today I am working on yet another teaching development project in this field, with the focus now being on the pros and cons of remote teaching in certain courses. Being granted a reduction in teaching duties to facilitate pedagogical development for the school year of 2021-2022 allowed me to carry on with my work, which clearly shows the importance of giving teachers necessary leeway to develop their teaching, whether in individual courses or entire subjects.

But what about the students? Although highly important, the cooperation of all teachers is hardly student-centred in and of itself! The review of the curriculum was (is) a process that made it increasingly clear to me that the vision of the students and the cooperation with them are no less important. In 2017-2018, my faculty, the Faculty of Icelandic and Comparative Cultural Studies, undertook a self-review and in connection with this, teachers were encouraged to hold consultation meetings with students. I therefore began holding regular consultation meetings with students and part-time lecturers in the autumn of 2018. Initially, the goal was also to help students form closer connections between years and, no less importantly, connect with wider student groups and associations in the university community. It should be noted that I have always communicated well with my students. I’m fortunate to teach small groups most of the time, so I get to know my students well. My door has always been open to students, whether they want to comment on my teaching or assessment or discuss personal issues that affect their studies. With the consultation meetings, however, the teacher-student dialogue became matter-of-course and part of the academic culture. Since the autumn of 2018, I have held these meetings annually, at the beginning, middle or end of the term (it has varied a little from year to year). At these meetings, I felt it was important to discuss the studies as a whole, the requirements and the responsibilities of both students and teachers, and to tell the students that we wanted to hear their voice, whether through teaching and course evaluation surveys or by other means. There were also discussions of study engagement, workload and more. Teaching and course evaluation surveys have been brought up when appropriate, teaching development work reported, and there have been candid discussions of the limitations of teachers and even mistakes they have made. At the last consultation meeting I held, at the end of the spring 2022 term, I found it interesting to note how in step the students and teachers were. The term has been a peculiar one, not only because of the ongoing onslaught of the pandemic, but also because of other disruptions. The students who attended the meeting noted how understanding and flexible the

teachers were and how easy it was to communicate with them. The part-time lecturers in attendance said the same about the students: various circumstances had come up, but the students were always flexible and ready to find solutions. I was happy when I left this meeting, which showed unmistakably that the dialogue between students and teachers is of the utmost importance.

Outcomes of new teaching approach:

The revised learning outcomes for the subject as a whole are today much more in accordance with what we are practically doing and what we expect from a graduate student. The review of the program has therefore led to more constructive alignment, both within courses but also within the program. Regular consultation meetings with students help to keep us on the track of student-centred ways in our teaching.

Reference to evidence (in appendix A):

Final report from KEN004F Kennsluþróun og starfendarannsóknir showing how the revision started and why, application and a final report for the University of Iceland's Academic Affairs Fund 2019 stating how the project was finalised. Original and revised learning outcomes for the program Sign Language Studies showing the changes and how the new learning outcomes are more in line with constructive alignment. Application for reduction in teaching duties to facilitate pedagogical development for the school year of 2021-2022 describing the next steps in teaching development in the program. Example of program for a consultation meeting with students (2018) and comments from students from a consultation meeting (2021) showing contents that are discussed and students' opinion.

Case 2: Development of course curriculum and assessment

Problem/observation of student learning:

In my course in sociolinguistics in sign languages, I had not felt like I was achieving my goals in teaching the course. I know the subject well, I find it infinitely interesting and it falls within my special field. The students found the subject interesting and enjoyable, but the course assessment at the end of the term did not turn out particularly well (not just once but most of the time) and I wondered why. Was I not a good enough teacher? Or did the students not take me seriously enough? Did the material feel fun but not "real" enough? Or was there something wrong with the course assessment? Obviously, something was wrong here, the assessment had to be revised and the thought of constructive alignment put into the course.

What did I do about it (change of teaching):

This case is also partly related to my teaching studies for higher education, where one project included my examination of a course that I had taught almost annually for over 10 years. As had so often been the case, I felt that this, in and of itself, was a cause for reconsideration. In my teaching, I have always tried to find when I have "become tired of myself", so to speak. When I begin to do things mechanically, I feel like it's time to make changes in my teaching, even if it is only to a small extent. I have done this many times, turned courses on their head, introduced new assessments and, of course, new teaching materials. The main goal is for me to feel enthusiastic again and stop sounding mechanical (this goes in line with my teaching principle that I call "interest"). This is part of what is referred to as the *scholarship of teaching and learning*, to be, as a teacher, always learning and improving your teaching,

reviewing, assessing, and engaging in conversations with others. In this context, I think it is right to mention the good culture that has been developing at the School of Humanities where I teach. For several years, we have held what we call “teacher chats” where teachers from the faculty convene to discuss teaching in a wide context. These teacher chats have taught me a lot (e.g. to use QCQ, as discussed above) and I have subsequently been able to adopt new methods in teaching and course assessments. These regular teacher chats therefore maintain teaching development and confirm that I, as a teacher, can constantly learn something new.

As said before, students seem to find this course interesting but the course assessment didn’t show their enthusiasm. I therefore decided to review both the teaching methods and course assessment in the hope that I would be able to better reach students and keep them on topic all the way to the end, so to speak. I compared the course with the model that Barnett and Coate presented for the humanities (2005:73) and thought it fit quite well. “Knowing” made up the majority of the curriculum and students had to learn a considerable amount of material. However, the course also requires students to examine and/or reconsider their attitudes towards the minority group that the course deals with. This involves considerable introspection and critical thinking, similar to what Barnett and Coate call “being”. However, the course was mostly based on “knowing” and therefore fit well with B&C’s definitions, and I realised that this showed clearly that the course did not test students’ activity to a significant degree.

In short, the reorganisation of teaching meant that my role became smaller and the role of students larger. Here I had to learn what I have discussed before that some things can be omitted (cf. e.g. Kugel 1993 and Barnett & Coate 2005). I realised that my thinking (and subsequently my teaching) was that since I knew more about the subject than the students, I had to inform them about everything that I knew without leaving anything out. Thus, over the years, material was added that I felt was essential and reading material increased, as did the number of slides. During the review and the analysis involved, it became clear to me that this was not student-centred learning. It would be better to make selections from the material and emphasise student participation, teach them “how” to think but not “what” to think. In this context, I found the discussion in Toohey (1999) useful, e.g. the discussion on how teachers select the content of a course. Toohey puts forward different curriculum ideologies in teaching and here I found “the socially critical approach” to be consistent with the course, where one of the goals is to develop “critical consciousness”. I therefore changed the organisation of the course from 12 weeks of interactive lectures to 6 weeks of lectures (interactive as soon as the students felt confident to discuss the topic) and 6 weeks of discussion sessions on the same topics. The first part of the term was therefore devoted to preparation, with an emphasis on reading, knowledge and comprehension. Reading journals were used to get students to reflect on the subject, and even their understanding and opinions. There I saw an opportunity to increase students’ self-examination, as this course deals with a minority group and it is important that students (re)examine their attitudes and potential misconceptions. In the second part, when the foundation for knowledge had been laid, the focus turned to explanations, reasoning and discussions in class, sometimes open and sometimes based on previously introduced projects that the students had to work on to prepare for a discussion. This preparation was important, as it allowed students to apply their knowledge and argue their positions. Some of the projects were practical, in which case the goal was for students to realise that theory could be used in practice (examples in appendix B).

One of the greatest conclusions that I drew from this review, and therefore the biggest change I made in the assessment was that the term paper weighted far too much (70%) and that there, formative assessment would be highly appropriate. To give students the opportunity to receive feedback on their paper and submit it again, thus learning from the feedback (cf. Race & Pickford 2007). I thought I was

preparing the students by giving them the essay topics at the start of the term, but later realised that this was a much too big a bite to swallow for first-year students who received minimal guidance. I was certainly receptive when they wanted to meet with me to discuss essay topics, but they never received feedback – not until 2015, when I introduced three deadlines, one for the research question and essay skeleton, another for the draft to receive feedback and finally, the completed version. At this point, after many years of teaching, I had finally made formative assessment a part of the course.

It is no exaggeration to say that the teaching studies opened my eyes and made me aware how teacher-centred I had been. I somehow had to see this in no uncertain terms in order to understand it. Today I find it incredible that I had students write a term paper that accounted for 70% of the assessment, and just assumed that they could and would do it! After this review, the assessment had changed so that the paper weighed 50%, students had two opportunities to receive feedback and were able to complete the project in smaller steps.

I also reviewed all the learning outcomes for the course, based on Bloom's Taxonomy, which has been my guide ever since I was introduced to it in my teaching studies. The learning outcomes became much more realistic and measurable than before (see appendix B). Previous learning outcomes included very vague phrases such as "students should consider" and "gain an insight". The learning outcomes did not seem to me to be in line with the criteria for higher education and degrees, and there was not a connection between them and the ultimate learning outcomes of the programme. The learning outcomes were rewritten with very different and much clearer language, and there were almost no remnants of the previous learning outcomes. The learning outcomes were based on Bloom's model, with each learning outcome reaching a higher level. The first one was primarily focused on knowledge, but then came comprehension, reflection, application and evaluation. With this new framework set by the learning outcomes, it became clearer to me what I wanted to aim for and achieve with the students. The fact that the learning outcomes were measurable made it easier for me to keep the course assessment in line with the teaching.

Although the course had undergone considerable changes and revisions, I was not done developing it (and I'm still not done!). Although theoretical knowledge is important, it is no less important to appreciate how it can be used in practice. After teaching the course with a different structure for two years, I tried a way to achieve that. Instead of all students presenting a discipline to their fellow students, I offered them a choice: in lieu of a presentation in class, students could give a presentation on the subject of the course (or part of it) at a primary or secondary school, e.g., their own old school, or elsewhere in the community, e.g., at their workplace. This gave students the opportunity to show and use their knowledge, present it in a format suitable for those with no prior knowledge of the subject, argue their points and select the most important aspects. Meanwhile, they were also "spreading the word" which is relevant in that a frequent topic of discussion in our studies is the fact that general prejudice against sign languages is largely based on the public's ignorance. I did not attend the presentations myself but received confirmation from the schools/workplaces that they had taken place. Students submitted a written draft of the presentation in advance and a report after it had taken place. In short, the students felt the trust I had and did not betray it. They found the task demanding, useful and enjoyable (see appendix B) and they obviously put in all the effort they could.

Outcomes of new teaching approach:

It is difficult to compare assessments/grades from one year to the next. Students are different and the groups are different sizes. For a period of time, student groups in the course were very small so comparisons could hardly be made. Likewise, teaching and course evaluation surveys are not always significant and are sometimes not even available due to the small number of students. I am therefore

only guided by my feeling that the course has improved, it become more student-centred in all respects, and that students leave it better prepared than before. I have evidence though of a student speaking positively about the project to give presentations outside the classroom (see appendix B).

Reference to evidence (in appendix B):

Syllabi from the course on sociolinguistics of sign languages (TÁK203G) from spring 2015 and 2016 showing changes in learning outcomes and assessment. Description of the task allowing presentation outside class and report from focus group with students for self-evaluation of the Faculty of Icelandic and Contemporary Cultural Studies, both showing how more student-centred this task was as well as students satisfaction with it. Two examples of a projects in class where theory could be used in practice.

Case 3: Formative assessment developed

Problem/observation of student learning:

In one of my courses on sign language linguistics I noticed how difficult essay writing was for the students. Although they received detailed feedback on their completed papers, they found it hard to learn from it and apply the knowledge when writing other essays. That I believed was a formative assessment didn't mean so to the students until I had personal meetings with them.

What did I do about it (change of teaching):

The third case I am going to discuss is how I developed formative assessment in a third semester course. This was some years ago, relatively early in my teaching career - a long time before I knew there was such a thing called formative assessment. As stated by Race & Pickford (2007), it is important that assessment and feedback to students is "fit for purpose". Each teacher needs to decide what kind of formative assessment is best suited to help students achieve the skills that are expected and set out in the learning outcomes for the course (2007:113). I'm fortunate in that I teach small groups, so I do not end up having to assess dozens of projects. But designing a formative assessment so that it is suitable and effective is a definite challenge, whether the students are few or many.

During this time, I taught 10 ECTS course (on third semester) which included continuous assessment of various kinds and I aimed for event workload during the semester. Essay work has long been a source of trouble for students, and this course required them to write three of them. Although none of them were long, each required a certain amount of research. Early on, I made it a habit to make very detailed comments on the first essay that the students submitted, with the aim that students would be able to use the instructions to guide them when writing the next essay. The problem, however, was that they did not seem to do so. They received comments in writing and of course I could not know how thoroughly they looked at them or whether they filtered in as general comments on essay writing, not just comments on this particular project. I realised, after several attempts, that it was not enough to give students this feedback and ask them to learn from the experience. That did not seem to produce the desired results. I then decided to try personal meetings where I met with each student individually to review the comments with them. I felt like I sacrificed a lot when I devoted two to four lessons to these meetings, which each took about 15 minutes. I was still stuck on the idea that lessons were important and each moment precious because the students simply had to hear what I had to say. However, it soon became apparent that the 15 minutes with each student yielded more than the missed lessons would have produced. By having this dialogue with each student and pointing out the

main issues that they had to fix to achieve better results with the next essay, I gained much better understanding from the students. They were grateful to receive such an individualised assessment – “fit for purpose” (cf. Race and Pickford 2007) and when the shortcomings were discussed, and not just written in a margin with red ink, practically all students realised the problem, gained a more positive outlook and were ready to do better the next time around. It became easier for students to see the big picture, and they learned more from the process when they received clear information on what three or four major issues they had to focus on in the next essay.

Outcomes of new teaching approach:

This was a certain threshold that I had to cross as a teacher, I found this somewhat difficult at first and much “easier” to criticize on paper and submit it without having to face the student and discuss the criticism. But I also learned much from this myself and I believe that I subsequently became more targeted in my reviews and found it easier to compile the issues to be commented on. Even though I have not introduced the personal meetings to other courses (maybe as they usually only contain one essay) this work taught me a lot about giving formative assessment. As a result, I began to use formative assessment as a basis for all essays (in all my courses), allowing students to first submit an essay skeleton and a research question, and then one draft for which they received feedback. The last time I taught this course I took the next step: In the last essay of the term, I experimented with using peer review instead of giving feedback myself. The basis for this could be said to be Bloom’s Taxonomy², where students go from knowing and understanding to analysing and evaluating. I was really surprised by how well the students carried this out, how honest they were with their fellow students and how constructive their comments were. I have only done this once, but I hope that with good initial feedback and interviews, students will not only be able to utilise received comments to improve their writing in future projects but will also become more capable of giving useful feedback to their peers.

Here, as is often the case, it is difficult to prove that a change in course assessment (or feedback) has resulted in better performance by students, as comparing grades from one year to the next in small groups like the ones I usually teach will hardly yield statistically significant results. It is unfortunately still the case that many students find it difficult to write their final paper. I may need to take this approach further and work more with self-review and peer evaluation.

Reference to evidence (in appendix C):

A screen shot of the description of the peer review in the course in 2021 (taken from Canvas) showing continuous development in assessment.

Future

After 20 years of teaching I still have the passion of disseminating the knowledge of Iceland Sign Language, its linguistics, sociolinguistics and culture. The projects are endless and I am enthusiastic to involve more people into the field. That I can do by attracting students, engage them and teach them as well as they teach me with their questions and active participation. My aim is to improve the quality of the program I lead, by continuous revision of curricula and teaching methods. That is best done by allowing students to share in decisions and have the courage to try out new things in the classroom. In that sense, I look forward to the changes in classrooms and equipment that the University of Iceland

² https://www.wcupa.edu/education-socialWork/assessmentAccreditation/documents/Blooms_Taxonomy.pdf

is proclaiming as I believe that the classroom should support student-centred learning rather than hinder it, as is often the case now.

I want and intend to continue developing my teaching as long as I have the opportunity to do so, and to continually review my curriculum in line with social developments, new challenges and new research. My work in the teaching committee of the School of Humanities for the past 7-8 years and the good work we have jointly developed there (regular teacher chats and an annual teaching conference), as well as the support provided by the Centre for Teaching and Learning, will continue to be source of support for me in this endeavour. Writing this has reminded me of how rewarding it is for teachers to “learn” about teaching through academic literature, reflection and, not least, conversations with colleagues. I have attended many seminars and meetings but have mostly been active in my field of studies. I hope I can take a more active part in discussions in a wider forum, within UI or the public universities in general, so I can both learn new things for myself and share my own experiences and knowledge, for example by supporting new teachers that might feel like I did at the beginning and help them develop faster from lower levels in Kugel’s sense (see pages 3-4). The fact is that my goal for the future is mainly to learn rather than teach – all the while striving to teach in a way that facilitates learning for my students (and perhaps my fellow teachers).

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