

Intellectual Practicians

*An Exploration of Professionalism among Upper
Secondary School Teachers with Icelandic Mother Tongue
Teachers as a Contextualized Empirical Case*

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So in fact the description “wise” belongs in general to the person who is good at deliberation. Now nobody deliberates about things that cannot be otherwise, or about things he has no possibility of doing. So if in fact systematic knowledge involves demonstration, and there is no possibility of demonstrating the sorts of things whose starting points can be otherwise, since all these things can in fact be otherwise, nor is it possible to deliberate about things that are by necessity, wisdom will not be systematic knowledge, and neither will it be technical expertise: not systematic knowledge, because what is in the sphere of action can be otherwise, and not technical expertise, because action and production belong to different kinds. It remains therefore for it to be a true disposition accompanied by rational prescription, relating to action in the sphere of what is good and bad for human beings. For the end of production is something distinct from the productive process, whereas that of action will not be; here, doing will itself serve as end.

It is wisdom that has to do with things human, and with things one can deliberate about; for this is what we say is most of all the function of the wise person, to deliberate well, and no one deliberates about things that are incapable of being otherwise, or about the sorts of things that do not lead to some end, where this is a practicable good. And the person who is without qualification the good deliberator is the one whose calculations make him good at hitting upon what is best for a human being among practicable goods. Nor is wisdom only concerned with universals: to be wise, one must also be familiar with the particular, since wisdom has to do with action, and the sphere of action is constituted by particulars. That is why sometimes people who lack universal knowledge are more effective in action than others who have it – something that holds especially of experienced people.

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI.5 and VI.7

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Note on translations

Many of the quotes in the current text are statements originally made in a language different from English. This is for example the case with all quotes from the study's empirical material. It has been necessary to translate these and a number of other statements in English. Sources where this applies includes e.g. legal acts, public documents, and other public statements (for example quotes from interviews or speeches).

When possible, I use existing translations. Thus, if I for example refer to a novel which has been translated, I refer to that translation. However, in the cases where no fixed translation has been available, the translations are mine. I do not specify in running text which quotes I have translated myself and which are made by others, but this is evident from the source of data, for in the bibliography the translator is noted in all works which have been translated by others than me.

Abstract

Abstract

The study *Intellectual practitioners* explores an educational practice; more particularly that of mother tongue teachers in upper secondary school in Iceland as experienced and described by some of these teachers.

The study's dual research question runs as follows:

- a. What conceptions do Icelandic mother tongue teachers in upper secondary school have of the Icelandic subject and what implications do they attribute to the professional management of the subject?
- b. What occupational self-concept may be identified in the teachers' descriptions of their work and their own professional *persona*?

To answer the main questions, supplementary questions are explored. These include questions about what requirements and skills the teachers find imperative in the execution of their profession, about the underlying fundament of their notions, and about what may have shaped these notions. The project thus consists of a descriptive part, in which the teachers' descriptions and views are accounted for, and an interpretative and theorizing part, which discusses the knowledge, practice, and professional self-understanding which emerge in the teachers' accounts. In this second part an attempt is moreover made to contextualize the identified conceptions and explore from where they may be derived.

Intellectual practitioners is a qualitative study. The empirical material consists of the participating teachers' personal written and oral descriptions of their own practice and occupational self-understanding. The subsequent hermeneutical interpretation of these descriptions is based on Charles Taylor's hermeneutics. Taylor's specific version of hermeneutics was chosen as the study's theoretical fundament because Taylor has taken an interest in interpretation of social action and interaction. The

Taylorian approach is supported by Pierre Bourdieu's sociological empiricist point of view, particularly as this is expressed in his theory of practice.

The study's main findings and the interpretation of them are presented in the chapters "Teaching as a primary category in the teachers' discourse" and "The teachers and their professional self". In the first of these chapters it is stated that the teachers to a high degree mediate their discourse via the notion of "teaching". This notion is highly dominating in the teachers' discourse, and is used so frequently and so broadly that the term becomes somewhat inaccurate and vague. An analysis of the notion based on the teachers' usage of it was therefore required. Based on this analysis, a division of "teaching" into four separate terms is suggested, and these terms – *teachment*, schooling, wise, and tokener – are used in the further interpretation.

The teachers pay particular attention to the specific didactic activities (*teachment* in the thesis' terminology) and this theme occupies a dominating position in their accounts. Several possible explanations of this are proposed in the thesis. One explanation may be that teaching is both a specific activity and a practice in a wide sense, and that it as such implies a particular logic, i.e. a way of reasoning as a professional agent. Another explanation, *per se* consistent with the former one, may relate to professional positioning; these teachers' basic education is not basically a professional education, since it consists of academic studies at the Faculty of Arts, subsequently complemented by a teacher training course. However, while trained as academics, the participants have chosen a career as upper secondary school teachers, an occupation rather different from that of university teachers, which they might also have chosen to become. The teachers' heavy emphasis on *teachment* may at the same time signalize that they are at home with the codes and forms of knowledge of their occupation, and that they through their specific emphasis and choice of terms position themselves as something distinctively different from university scholars. The teachers' statements about their occupation and the subject they teach seem to support this interpretation.

When the teachers talk about teaching, they speak at length about teaching activities, and they accentuate their educational principles, which e.g. imply emphasizing practical skills as much as theoretical knowledge in their teaching. In addition, they underline that teaching in upper secondary school implies much more than imparting the subject curriculum to their students; it is just as much a matter of preparing students for their future life, according to the teachers. Stimulating students' social and cultural awareness and enhancing their capacity as social agents are key concepts in this context, the teachers find. Consequently, teaching at this level should be regarded an educational activity in the widest sense, and so, the teachers' ethical standards are an inescapable part of their professionalism. Through examples the teachers display how this is implicit in their occupational practice and how it even has impact on their choice of teaching methods and topics. It seems, then, that all impartment of the subject matter is value-laden, and that "objective" teaching seems to be an impossibility. It is claimed that this requires a broad understanding of upper secondary school teachers' professional knowledge; an understanding that acknowledges moral and social judgement as essential teacher knowledge, in addition to thorough knowledge of the subject one is teaching, as well as knowledge of educational theory, and teaching skills.

All the participants express satisfaction with their job. Likewise, although all the teachers emphasize individuality in their self-accounts, they are all at the same time very loyal to their colleagues and the local school administration. The teachers moreover unanimously express a positive attitude to their pupils and a keen interest in didactics and teaching. In light of this, it is something of a paradox that the teachers' accounts are almost completely free of stories about individual pupils. However, rather than classifying this finding as a mere paradox, the contextual interpretation indicates that if one takes the organization of the teachers' work into account, this apparent contradiction may be explained as structurally logical.

The teachers regard themselves teachers of Icelandic language and literature, and upbringers and agents for cultural and democratic education in equal measure. The

latter task relates to what the teachers consider the mother tongue subject's particular responsibility for impartment of the national cultural heritage, which in Iceland is closely connected to the national language and the classic Icelandic literature. Education is furthermore regarded a matter of imparting students a fundamental understanding of their cultural identity, and of providing them with the cultural and social competency required in future education and citizenship.

In their self-descriptions, the teachers accentuate their practical orientation and skills, while their academic knowledge is granted a less prominent position. They are primarily teachers, the participants state, and have all developed increased interest in educational matters during their career.

As for the suggested implications of the study's findings, the first two concern a couple of major concepts in educational discourse: First, it is argued that a refined understanding of the very broad notion of "teaching" is required, and second, that there is a need for a nuanced understanding of the notion of teacher knowledge and professionalism. Next, it is suggested that general education should be accentuated more than has often been the case as part of (upper secondary school) teachers' knowledge and skills. Finally, the study raises the issue of whether the participants' experience of finding themselves to be primarily practitioners in their everyday work, while at the same time regarding their academic background a prerequisite of their practice and a significant element in their self-understanding may be a general characteristic for what is here termed relational work.

Resymé

Studien *Intellectual practitioners* utforsker en utdanningspraksis, og mer spesifikt praksis blant islandsklærere på videregående skole på Island slik denne erfares og beskrives av lærerne selv.

Begrepet praksis brukes i vid betydning i dette prosjektet. Det omfatter både praktisk utøvelse av læreryrket og den kunnskap som ligger til grunn for utøvelsen, og dessuten implisitte og eksplisitte holdninger og verdier som konstituerer denne utøvelsen.

Studiens bærende forskningsspørsmål er todelt og lyder:

- a. Hvilke oppfatninger har islandske morsmåls lærere i videregående opplæring om islandskfaget?
- b. Hva slags faglig selvforståelse har disse lærerne?

Til dette kommer slike tilleggsspørsmål som hvilke forutsetninger lærerne mener kreves for å forvalte faget, hva som ligger bak disse forestillingene og hva som har formet dem. Forskningsspørsmålet består således av en deskriptiv del, der lærernes egne beskrivelser og oppfatninger kartlegges, og en fortolkende og teoretiserende del som handler om hva slags kunnskap, praksis og selv-forståelse som kommer til syne i lærernes beskrivelser av yrket, samt om å sette disse forestillingene i en større sammenheng og finne ut hva bakgrunnen for dem kan være.

Intellectual practitioners er en kvalitativ studie. Det empiriske materialet består av de deltakende lærernes egne skriftlige og muntlige beskrivelser av praksis og faglig selvforståelse. I avhandlingen blir det redegjort for disse beskrivelsene, som så blir tolket på hermeneutisk grunnlag. Fortolkningene har sin teoretiske støtte i Taylors hermeneutikk, siden Taylor beskjeftiger seg mye med fortolkning av sosial handling og interaksjon, men de trekker også veksler på Bourdieus praksisteori.

Studiens hovedfunn presenteres i kapitlene “Teaching as a primary category in the teachers’ discourse” og “The teachers and their professional self”. Ett hovedfunn er at lærerne langt på vei medierer sin diskurs gjennom begrepet “undervisning”. Undervisningsbegrepet er svært dominerende i diskursen og brukes så bredt at det blir noe upresist. Derfor analyseres begrepet på grunnlag av lærernes bruk av det. Med utgangspunkt i denne analysen foreslås en oppsplitting i fire separate begreper, der det skilles mellom spesifikk klasseromsundervisning (*teachment*), lærerjobben som helhet (*schooling*), undervisning som praksis, dvs. som både teoretisk basert og innforlivet kunnen og handlemåte, (*wise*), og undervisning som en egen *logos* eller tenkemåte (*tokener*) som berører alle de tre andre aspektene. Denne begrepsinndelingen blir brukt i det videre tolkningsarbeidet.

Lærerne vier den spesifikt didaktiske virksomheten (*teachment*) spesielt mye oppmerksomhet. Det pekes i avhandlingen på flere mulige forklaringer på hvorfor dette temaet inntar en dominerende stilling i lærernes diskurs. Én forklaring kan være at undervisning i tillegg til å være en spesifikk aktivitet også er en praksis i ovennevnte forstand, og således også impliserer en egen logikk, dvs. en måte å tenke på som yrkesutøver. En annen forklaring, forenlig med den første, kan ha med yrkesmessig posisjonering å gjøre. Disse lærernes grunnutdannelse er et akademisk studium ved universitetets humanistiske fakultet, supplert med praktisk-pedagogisk utdannelse, ikke en profesjonsutdannelse. Men det er forskjell på å undervise i islandsk på universitetet, slik de også hadde kunnet komme til å gjøre, og å undervise i et obligatorisk fag på videregående skole. Den sterke aksentueringen av undervisning kan på samme tid signalisere at man er innforstått med sitt yrkes faglige koder og kunnskapsformer, og at man posisjonerer seg som noe distinktivt annet enn islandskfilolog på universitetet. Lærernes utsagn om eget yrke og eget undervisningsfag styrker denne tolkningen. Når de snakker om undervisning, forteller de om undervisningsaktiviteter, og de framhever sine didaktiske prinsipper, som går i retning av å vektlegge praktiske ferdigheter like mye som teoretisk kunnskap i undervisningen. I tillegg understreker de at å undervise på videregående skole handler

om langt mer enn formidling av faglig innhold. Det dreier seg like mye om å bevisstgjøre elevene og styrke dem som sosiale agenter, mener lærerne. Slik sett er undervisning en oppdragende virksomhet, og dermed en virksomhet der lærerens etiske standard nødvendigvis er en del av hennes faglighet. Gjennom eksempler viser lærerne at dette er implisitt i hele deres faglige virke og har betydning også for deres valg av undervisningsaktiviteter og undervisningsstoff. Det finnes dermed ikke noe slikt som “ren” fagformidling. Det hevdes i avhandlingen at denne innsikten fordrer en bred forståelse av faglæreres yrkeskunnskap, en forståelse som i tillegg til å anerkjenne behovet for undervisningsfaglig og didaktisk kunnskap også anerkjenner moralsk og sosial dømmekraft som viktig lærerkunnskap.

Selv om deltakerne i studien ble rekruttert med henblikk på heterogenitet, er det stor homogenitet i materialet. Alle lærerne uttrykker tilfredshet med eget yrke. Selv om individualitet er et gjennomgangstema i deres yrkesmessige selvbiografier, er de svært lojale mot kolleger og den lokale skoleadministrasjonen. Lærerne er gjennomgående sympatisk innstilt til elevene sine. Dette, sammen med den store interessen for didaktikk og undervisningsmessige utfordringer, får det til å framstå som noe av et paradoks at det fullstendig mangler historier om enkeltelever i materialet. I avhandlingen blir det foreslått at dette har sammenheng med organiseringen av lærernes arbeidshverdag, og at dette fraværet dermed kan forklares strukturelt.

I tillegg til å betrakte seg selv som språk- og litteraturlærere, ser lærerne seg som oppdragere og som dannelsesagenter. Det siste relateres delvis til det de betrakter som islandskfagets særlige oppgave med hensyn til formidling av den nasjonale kulturarven, som på Island er sterkt forbundet med nasjonalspråket og den gammelislandske litteraturen. Men dannelsesoppdraget favner videre, ifølge lærerne. Det handler om at elevene skal gis en grunnforståelse av egen kulturell identitet, og om å gi dem en nødvendig kulturell og sosial kompetanse med tanke på videre utdanning og medborgerskap.

I sin faglige selvbiografi vektlegger lærerne sin praktiske og didaktiske orientering og kyndighet, mens den akademiske kunnskapen kommer i bakgrunnen. De er først og fremst lærere, sier de, og de har alle utviklet økt interesse for undervisningsspørsmål i løpet av karrieren. Lærerne mener den praktisk-pedagogiske utdannelsen var av begrenset nytte når det gjaldt å tilegne seg faglig kyndighet, og de betrakter det å oppnå slik kyndighet som en individuell prosess, som en vei de har gått på egen hånd, som utøvende lærere. Fagstudiet i islandsk har de et positivt, men distansert forhold til.

Det pekes på flere mulige implikasjoner av studiens funn. De to første berører et par sentrale begreper i utdanningsdiskursen: For det første argumenteres det for en bred forståelse av undervisningsbegrepet, og for det andre påpekes behovet for en nyansert forståelse av lærerkunnskap og lærerprofesjonalitet. Videre hevdes det at lærernes beretninger om hvordan oppdragelse og andre elementer som ikke er direkte forankret i pensum i stor grad preger arbeidshverdagen indikerer at disse elementene nok burde fremheves tydeligere enn det gjerne har vært gjort som betydelig innslag i læreres kunnskap og ferdigheter også på videregående skole. Til slutt reises spørsmålet om hvorvidt lærernes opplevelse av primært å være praktikere, selv om den akademiske bakgrunnen er en nødvendig forutsetning for å utføre jobben de gjør og i tillegg er viktig for deltakernes selvforståelse, kan være et karakteristisk trekk også for andre relasjonelle yrker enn det som her er undersøkt.

Samantekt

Viðfangsefni rannsóknarinnar *Intellectual practicians* er starf kennarans, nánar tiltekið starf móðurmálskennara á framhaldsskólastigi á Íslandi eins og tiltekinn hópur viðkomandi kennara lýsir því. Meginspurning rannsóknarinnar er tvíþætt:

- a. Hvaða augum líta móðurmálskennarar í íslensku á framhaldsskólastigi íslensku sem kennslugrein?
- b. Hvaða augum líta kennararnir faglegt hlutverk sitt sem móðurmálskennarar?

Spurningarnar greinast í fleiri liði. Spurt er hvaða eiginleika kennararnir telja að sú eða sá sem kennir íslensku þurfi að hafa til að bera, hver sé uppspretta þessara eiginleika og með hvaða hætti þeir telji sig hafa tileinkað sér þá. Viðfangsefni rannsóknarinnar er annars vegar lýsandi en hins vegar túlkandi. Gerð er grein fyrir svörum kennaranna sjálfra við þeim spurningum sem fyrir þá voru lagðar og viðhorfum þeirra, en jafnframt er lögð fram túlkun á svörum þeirra og fræðileg greining á því hvers konar þekking, færni og sjálfsskilningur kemur fram í viðhorfum kennaranna til eigin starfs. Að endingu er leitast við að setja afstöðu kennaranna í víðara samhengi og grafist fyrir um uppruna hennar.

Intellectual practicians er eiginleg rannsókn. Tekin voru munnleg viðtöl við sjö íslenska móðurmálskennara um faglegan sjálfsskilning þeirra og starf og hver þeirra skrifaði jafnframt skýrslu um sama efni. Í ritgerðinni er greint frá svörum kennaranna, en þarnæst er fjallað um svör þeirra með aðferðum sem kenna má við túlkunarfræði, nánar tiltekið kenningar heimspekingsins Charles Taylor en kenningar hans á sviði túlkunarfræði líta sérstaklega að félagslegum athöfnum og samskiptum, en einnig er stuðst við kenningar Pierre Bourdieu og samfélagsgreiningu hans.

Helstu niðurstöður rannsóknarinnar koma fram í köflunum “Teaching as a primary category in the teachers’ discourse” og “The teachers and their professional self”. Orðræða kennaranna sem eru heimildamenn rannsóknarinnar hverfist að mjög miklu leyti um hugtakið “kennslu“. Kennararnir leggja svo margslungna merkingu í

hugtakið “kennslu“ að óhjákvæmilegt var að greina mismunandi þætti kennsluhugtaksins í orðræðu þeirra í sundur, nánar tiltekið í fjóra mismunandi þætti og er stuðst við fjögur hugtök í ritgerðinni sem hvert um sig tekur til ólíkra þátta í “kennslu“.

Kennararnir ræða lengstum orðum um kennsluaðferðir (*teachment*) sem þeir nota í starfi. Í ritgerðinni eru hugsanlegar skýringar á hvers vegna þessi þáttur er svo áberandi í orðræðu kennaranna reifaðar. Ein skýring kann að vera að kennsla er ekki aðeins ákveðið verklag heldur jafnframt fagleg virkni sem byggir á ákveðinni þekkingu auk þess sem ákveðnar faglegar hugmyndir og gildi búa að baki starfsemi kennarannasem byggist á tiltekinni rökvísi, það er að segja ákveðnum hugsunarhætti sem liggur faglegu handverki kennarans til grundvallar. Önnur skýring sem ekki stangast á við þá fyrstu lýtur að stéttarstöðu kennaranna. Þeir hafa allir hlotið grunnmenntun sína á hugvísindasviði háskóla og þvínæst lært hagnýta kennslufræði, en hafa ekki menntun sem miðar að tiltekinni starfsstétt. Kennsla í íslensku sem skyldugrein á framhaldsskólastigi er hins vegar í ýmsu tilliti frábrugðin kennslu og fræðastarfi við háskóla, slíkt starf kæmi þó vissulega til álita fyrir einstaklinga með þá menntun sem heimildamennirnir hafa hlotið. Áherslan sem kennararnir leggja á kennsluaðferðir kann öðrum þræði að endurspegla hve vel kennararnir þekjja rökvísi kennslugreinarinnar og að þeir telji ástæðu til að undirstrika að starf þeirra sé frábrugðið starfi íslenskufræðinga á háskólastigi. Margt af því sem kennararnir segja um starf sitt og íslensku sem kennslufag á framhaldsskólastigi styður þessa túlkun. Kennararnir greina ítrekað í smáatriðum frá mismunandi aðferðum sem þeir beita í kennslustofunni og skýra frá hugmyndum sínum um hvernig best sé að kenna, og leggja þannig mun meiri áherslu á verklega færni heldur en fræðilega þekkingu. Að auki undirstrika þeir að kennsla á framhaldsskólastigi snýst um margt annað en að miðla faglegu innihaldi. Ekki skiptir síður máli að efla félagslegan þroska nemendanna og víkka sjóndeildarhring þeirra. Í þessum skilningi er kennsla náskyld uppeldi og því er óhjákvæmilegt að siðferðilegt gildismat kennarans sé hluti af faglegum þekkingargrunni hans. Kennararnir tilgreina fjölmörg dæmi sem leiða þetta í

ljós, það er að segja hvernig markmið sem lúta að siðferði og uppeldi ráða miklu um hvaða aðferðir þeir kjósa við kennslu og hvaða námsefni þeir miðla. Af þessu má draga þá ályktun að námsefninu sé aldrei „miðlað“ með hlutlausum hætti. Þótt kennarar sem eru sérhæfðir í tilekinni námsgrein (líkt og tíðkast á framhaldsskólastigi) hefji feril sinn með háskólanámi þar sem þeir tileinka sér fræðilega þekkingu á sviði greinarinnar er sú þekking ekki nema takmarkaður hluti af faglegri kunnáttu þeirra. Siðferðileg og félagsleg dómgreind auk kennslufræðilegrar þekkingar eru ekki síður nauðsynlegur hluti í starfi kennarans.

Þótt leitast væri við að velja ólíka heimildamenn, eru svör þeirra allra að mjög miklu leyti sambærileg. Allir kennararnir segjast ánægðir í starfi. Þótt mikið fari fyrir því að þeir segi faglegan þroska hafa áunnist eftir einstaklingsbundnum leiðum, kemur ítrekað fram að kennararnir telja sig sýna samstarfsmönnum sínum og skólustjórnendum faglega hollustu. Kennararnir gefa með margvíslegum hætti til kynna að þeim sé vel til nemenda sinna. Í ljósi þeirrar velvildar ásamt áhuga kennaranna á kennsluaðferðum og uppeldishliðum kennslunnar er undarlegt að ekki er að finna eina einustu frásögn af einstökum nemendum í svörum kennaranna. Í ritgerðinni er lögð fram sú túlkun að þetta helgist af ákveðnum þáttum í kennsluskipulagi við íslenska framhaldsskóla sem ráða miklu um daglegt starf kennaranna. Auk þess að líta svo á að þeir miðli tungu og bókmenntum líta kennararnir svo á að hlutverk þeirra sé að ala nemendur sína upp og koma þeim til þroska. Þeir líta svo á að móðurmálskennsla sé lykilatriði í menntun á Íslandi, ekki síst vegna sérstöðu menningararfsins sem talinn er vera fölginn í þjóðtungu og fornbókmenntum. Hugsjón kennaranna um að koma nemendum sínum til þroska er þó enn víðtækari, því þeir telja hlutverk sitt jafnframt vera að vekja nemendur til vitundar um menningarlega stöðu sína, og efla menningarlega og félagslega færni þeirra með frekari menntun í huga og jafnframt að þeir standi styrkum fótum sem þjóðfélagsþegnar.

Þegar kennararnir gera grein fyrir því hvernig þeir hafa tileinkað sér faglega þekkingu leggja þeir áherslu á verklega færni og þann áhuga sem þeir hafa á

kennsluaðferðum fremur en fræðilega þekkingu. „Ég er fyrst og fremst kennari“ er dæmigert fyrir afstöðu þeirra, og kennararnir segjast smám saman hafa fengið aukinn áhuga á spurningum sem varða kennslu á starfsferli sínum. Á hinn bóginn segja þeir að námið í hagnýtri kennslufræði hafi ekki komið þeim að miklu gagni. Færni þeirra sem kennarar hafi aukist smátt og smátt, en hver um sig segist hafa gengið þá þroskaleið í starfi sem kennari einn síns liðs. Þeir bera háskólanáminu í íslensku góða sögu, en engu að síður gegnir það takmörkuðu hlutverki í faglegri sjálfsvitund þeirra.

Fjórar meginályktanir eru dregnar af niðurstöðum ritgerðarinnar. Í fyrsta lagi er hugtakið „kennsla“ margslungið og þarfnast ítarlegrar greiningar í umræðum um menntamál. Sama máli gildir í öðru lagi um umræður um „faglega þekkingu“ kennara og „fagmennsku“ í skólastarfi. Í þriðja lagi er bent á að tryggja þurfi kennurum (á framhaldsskólastigi) sem bestar forsendur til að veita nemendum sínum almenna menntun og gott uppeldi. Að endingu er þeirri tilgátu varpað fram að ekki sé síður þörf fyrir verklega færni heldur en fræðilega þekkingu í starfi ýmissa annarra stétta sem eiga í nánum samskiptum við einstaklinga sem eru skjólstæðingar þeirra með einum eða öðrum hætti.

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1. Presentation and background

1.1 Research question

The current study aims at exploring the practice of Icelandic teachers¹ in upper secondary school as this is experienced by the practitioners themselves, based on the following research question: What conception(s) do Icelandic mother tongue teachers in upper secondary school have of the Icelandic subject and what implications do they attribute to the professional management of the subject, how do they talk about their work and what is their occupational self-concept?² Furthermore, I want to understand what lies behind and has shaped these conceptions, and therefore ask how they may be interpreted. The research question may be explicated in the following points:

* Taking a compass bearing

What are the teachers' views on the subject, i.e. on the subject as a school subject as well as the subject as an academic/theoretical subject?

What are the teachers' views on their occupation?

How do the teachers describe the various aspects of their subject and their job, and what kind of practice do they thereby describe?

How do the teachers describe their occupational self?

* Taking stock of the bearing

What kind of knowledge, what kind of practice and what kind of self-concept seem to be exhibited in the teachers' narratives about their job and about themselves as practitioners?

¹ See Appendix VI for clarification of the term "Icelandic teacher".

² The closely related terms "self-concept", "self-image", and "self-understanding" are commented in Appendix VI.

From where may the described conceptions be derived?

The metaphors indicate a division between what might be termed a descriptive and an interpretative and theorizing part. Yet, while both these elements unquestionably are present in the text, and while it seems appropriate to point this out, it is equally requisite to make clear that the two elements may hardly be separated, since they are mutually dependent of each other. I regard this an epistemological insight, a matter of what Popper termed empirical data's theory-ladenness (Thornton, 1997, p. 80), which Bourdieu describes as the high degree of implicitness in what we say about the world due to our own implicitness in the world (Bourdieu, 1999a, p. 16), and of researchers' subsequent theory-ladenness. The latter is a basic point in the hermeneutical tradition, in which this study is founded. According to philosopher Charles Taylor, whose epistemology constitutes the theoretical orientation in the present work, this means that the researcher interprets the already interpreted, as interpretation of our surroundings, our experiences etc. is regarded conditional to being a person. Since they are in themselves interpretations (proto-interpretations in Taylor's terminology), it is in actual reality impossible to draw clear distinctions between informants' narratives or descriptions and researchers' theory-informed ones.³ To avoid naïve or biased interpretations, Bourdieu recommend that researchers assume a reflective attitude to these conditions (Bourdieu, 1999a, pp. 123-124).

As for the empirical material, seven mother tongue teachers in upper secondary school in Iceland have taken part in the project⁴. I regard the study a case study, and so a qualitative study. However, the claim that the study be a case study should be specified. It is a case study in so far as the empirical data is derived from a small group of participants⁵ and interpreted qualitatively. As teachers in upper secondary education, the participants are situated in a similar context but the group is too small for drawing general conclusions even about this limited group. So the thesis does not

³ The term "interpretation" is discussed, e.g. in relation to similar terms such as "analysis", in Appendix VI.

⁴ The ambiguous term "mother tongue" and the corresponding "mother tongue education" are commented in Appendix VI.

⁵ The term "participant" is discussed in Appendix VI.

offer set answers. What it *does* offer, is an interpretation of some professional teachers' practice and self-understanding, based on their own descriptions of these entities. I find it quite possible that this may have transfer value to the participants' peers within their own profession⁶ and in similar occupational categories.

The ambition is to both present and, by raising the descriptions to a theoretical level, to try and understand existing concepts about subject, practice, and occupational identity among the participating Icelandic teachers as these appear in the study's material. Therefore, the informants' statements and professional actions are not studied as isolated phenomena, but seen in the wider context of the school, the educational system and the national society.

1.2 Motivation and scope

There are both general and more specific motives for carrying out a study like the present one. On the general level it may be noted that in many countries, the population more or less voluntarily spends an increasing amount of time on education, whether measured in years or in hours *pro anno*. In such countries, there is a need for a continuous discussion of education, and educational studies seem increasingly important. Such studies should include discussions of both theoretical questions and empirical studies within specific subfields of the large field of education⁷.

As for the first kind, it would be useful to occasionally recur to the principal question – what education is. Following-up questions might be asked from a philosophical point of view (e.g. “what is the purpose of education?”), from a sociological one (e.g. “who benefits the most from the current educational system?”), from a political-

⁶ “Profession” and “professional” are frequent terms in the current text. The current understanding and usage of them are commented in Appendix VI.

⁷ While common in everyday language, “field” is in certain academic traditions also regarded a technical term. Consequently, the current understanding should be clarified. The thesis' usage of the term “field” is therefore commented in Appendix VI.

pragmatic one (e.g. “what kind of education do pupils/society need?”), and so on. Also empirical studies may be of different kinds; we need to know what is going on in our educational systems, we should discuss their stated aims and *de facto* contents, we should take stock of students’ learning outcome and contemplate how they benefit from education and so forth. It is my hope that the current study may provide a small contribution to this discussion.

The focal point of this study is delimited geographically and culturally to the educational system in Iceland, institutionally to upper secondary education, topically to the mother tongue subject, and socially to teachers of that subject. In the empirical material the perspective is that of the social agents, i.e. the participating teachers’.⁸ The interpretation of the study’s empirical material nevertheless implies considerations on the findings which in part address theoretical questions, and so the study may be classified as an empirical-theoretical work.

A main cause for choosing the particular demarcation described above is that several under-researched topics are brought together in this focal point. Most perspicuously, there are few studies of teaching in upper secondary education in Iceland, and there are few studies of mother tongue education. One may therefore, with regard to the institutional aspect, claim a need for descriptive studies of this level of education as well as for theorizing on the basis of empirical studies within this specific (cultural) context – perhaps even for theoretically grounded recommendations to education at this particular level, as an alternative to norms based mainly on political decisions.

As for research on the mother tongue subject, anyone who searches relevant databases or goes through the catalogue at the National and University Library of Iceland may establish that Icelandic as a school subject generally is a little researched topic, and that this is particularly the case with respect to upper secondary education. Consequently, less than one might expect is known about what really goes on in

⁸ The term “agent” is commented in the entry “participant” in Appendix VI.

mother tongue education in upper secondary school, such as what is in fact being taught and how. Less still is known about students' and teachers' attitude to the subject, what students actually learn, what aims teachers set themselves in their work or what attitude they have towards students. So there seems to be a shortage of both descriptions and explanations of the situation. For although The Ministry of Education had a report on Icelandic instruction in upper secondary school compiled in 2011 (S. K. Sverrisdóttir, Guðmundsdóttir, & Daviðsdóttir, 2011), that report primarily aims to evaluate the current situation of the subject (S. K. Sverrisdóttir et al., 2011, pp. 54-57), and moreover to gather information about teachers and their education, attitude and background, and about the subject's position and general attitudes towards it (p. 11). The purpose of the current study could be formulated in contrast to that of the report: The objective of this study is to explore and try to understand the practice of a group of Icelandic teachers, not to evaluate it.

A further and even more important motivation for carrying out a project such as the present one is that having knowledge about a certain social area seems crucial to understanding the activity within it, i.e. in this case the mother tongue education that takes place in upper secondary school, since the teacher naturally is in a key position in this activity. This, in turn, leads to a third motive; understanding schools and their activities from the inside is of importance to anyone who wants to promote quality in education. Naturally, both the teacher thinking tradition and more recent teacher knowledge research are of importance in this area. However, research within these traditions tends to focus on education in primary and lower secondary school, and thus on general teachers and their practice. As there are some important differences between the compulsory education and upper secondary education, at least in Iceland, for example regarding elements such as framework, subject specific pedagogy⁹ and learning methods, as well as the teachers' educational background, it seems rather dubious to draw general conclusions based on research in primary and lower

⁹ The ambiguous term "pedagogy" is commented in Appendix VI.

secondary education and apply it to upper secondary education without further ado; reliable knowledge about the field should rather be developed on the grounds of research carried out within the field in question.

The motives mentioned so far have related primarily to the institutional level in the educational system and the subject. Though important, I have been even more interested in understanding the practice of education at this level, and so I have focused on the educational practitioners as such; the teachers. The reason why I find this group to be of particular interest, is that teachers are the stable factor in the educational system, the personification as well as the carriers of the system, as it were, and so, in Ivor Goodson's words:

In favour of studies of the teacher's life and work is the belief that, by building our knowledge of teachers' perspectives, we can interrogate the experience and reform of schooling in helpful ways. The teacher is a central agent in the delivery of all versions of schooling, and the disavowal of teacher perspectives is a worrying feature of a good deal of recent change and reform. Hence, by studying the teacher's life and work, it is hoped to redress this imbalance.

(Goodson, 2003b, p. 57)

Since the study's focus is on teachers and their practices, and so on their professionalism, the study is also linked to the academic tradition of studies of professions. The reasons given for studying teachers' practice above also apply to the professionalism perspective, and these motives, then, circumscribe the focal point with regard to empirical data.

Describing a domain which has received scarce scholarly attention, such as that of mother tongue education in upper secondary school in Iceland, and thus increasing the knowledge about this domain may be regarded an aim in itself; naturally we want to know what is going on in society. With regard to public institutions, such as the educational system, one could even claim that the public has a particular responsibility and really should know about their practices. In addition, by thus explicating it, the practice in question may appear clearer and easier to understand

both to practitioners, in this case the teachers, and to other involved parties, such as pupils, researchers and educational authorities.

Also the belief that knowledge about teachers, their reasoning and their practice renders possible a discussion about teachers' aims as compared to for example those of pupils, those of parents, those of the authorities and those of society at large has served as a motive for carrying out the study. Do the parties agree for example on the aims of education, or, more specifically, on the aims of mother tongue education in upper secondary school? Even if this question for practical reasons is outside the scope of the current work, it has played a part during the working process, as part of the contextual reflections on the findings. Furthermore, the findings in the present project may contribute to laying the groundwork for such a discussion by providing enhanced insight in the views and reasoning of those who work in the field and know it from the inside. One may moreover hope that, by understanding the actual conditions, it might be easier to imagine alternative scenarios – which may and may not be desirable to the involved parties. If so, a research project such as the present one may contribute to what appears to be the ultimate goal in educational research; improved education for the benefit of future pupils, cf. the claim that studying education is all about understanding how various forms of education and teaching work in various contexts and to figure out what is good, what is less good, and how conditions may be improved (Muschinsky, 2003, p. 63).

In this study, I chose to concentrate on teachers. This choice was based on the assumption that the connection between teachers and subject in practical life is a very close one, due to the fact that teachers are situated in the field over a longer space of time than are pupils. Both for this reason and because they as teachers practice the occupation and the academic subject they have chosen for themselves, I assume that they are likely to feel closer connected to the field than their pupils do. Moreover, the teachers are the culture bearers; it is the teachers who realize and materialize the subject, and who pass on and virtually embody its values. It is the teachers who in practice decide how the subject should be taught and what curricular aims should be

emphasized, and so on. To quote one of the informants: “Naturally, we cannot cover it all, so we have to be selective.” It might, in short, be claimed that the teachers far along the way *are* the subject. So to me it appears that to study teachers, for example of a specific subject, is to at the same time study and learn something about the subject as it is conceptualized in practice and to study and learn something about the education pupils receive. One might say, therefore, that the reason why I, first, decided to do a qualitative study, and, second, to focus on the professional practitioners is that I thought I might learn more through this approach than I would by following a different track. As related above, it has been claimed that to understand (social) reality implies understanding of the fields/domains where the respective social practices take place. This means that to learn something about practical reality, one must talk to those who inhabit it.

From a hermeneutical standpoint one may moreover assume that there exists the possibility that to give members of social groups, e.g. teachers, the opportunity to tell their story, to pay attention to this story and to try to understand its grounds, i.e. to interpret it contextually (historically, socially etc.) may, when re-presented to the members of the group in question lead to a re-interpretation, which ultimately may result in an enhanced self-understanding (cf. Ch. 3.3). In his book *Professional knowledge, professional lives*, Ivor Goodson indicates a possible effect of research on professionals’ stories along these lines.

Like other basic common goods in welfare states, education is generally a public concern. As this is the case, interests, ideas, policies and the economy in society at large will influence and in various ways interact with the educational field. This entails a need for taking the broader societal context into account, both that of the field in question and that of society at large in order to understand the agents’ reasoning and practice. As accounted for in Chapter 3, the view that the cultural, social, and historical webs in which agents live their lives actively contribute to shape their practices and their reasoning may be recognized in the study’s theoretical framework. In Goodson’s words, “the way we ‘story’ our lives (and, therefore, the

way we present ourselves for educational study, among other things), is deeply connected to storylines derived from elsewhere” (2003b, p. 41). So “[s]tories, then, need to be closely interrogated and analysed in their social context. Stories, in short, are most often carriers of dominant messages, themselves agencies of domination. Oppositional stories can be captured, but they are very much in the minority and are often themselves overlaid or reactive to dominant storylines.” (Goodson, 2003b, p. 41). In Chapter 3 I will present the theoretical framework for this study, in which Charles Taylor’s work is given the central role.

Two more comments on the choice of mother tongue education as the study’s case should be mentioned. The first is that, as I will explain in chapter 1.4, this is a field I know well and therefore may enter not only as a researcher, but also as my informants’ peer (cf. "Understanding", Bourdieu, 1999b). The other is that while the study in some respects relates to the discipline which in German is termed *Fachdidaktik*¹⁰ and which is termed similarly in the Nordic countries, the study is not particularly concerned with subdisciplines, e.g. literacy, as is often the case in studies within this discipline.

Most of what has this far been said of social domains also applies to the social agents within those fields. Combining these two statements, I am claiming that professions, and thereby professional knowledge, are embedded and developed socially and culturally. This goes for teachers as for other professionals. In this view, a study of upper secondary school teachers’ *habitus*, i.e. of their practice and attitudes,¹¹ should at the same time be a study of conditions within the socio-cultural space in which they as professionals are situated; of the interaction between themselves as individual professional and social agents, the profession as a social *locus*, and conditions in the field of education as well as in the society at large. I have tried to take this into account, yet not to the degree I might have wished. For it has been necessary to limit

¹⁰ In English, the term “didactics” is not unambiguous, and it is therefore commented in Appendix VI

¹¹ The term *habitus* is discussed in Chapter 3.5 and in Appendix VI.

the work. One of the costs is that I have not been able to study certain contextual conditions, such as that of the teachers as agents in the educational system, as thoroughly as I would have wanted. However, as the work proceeded, I came to see that knowledge about the participants' practice and reasoning might be of more consequence than I initially thought; that, since it turned out that the participants so explicitly regarded general education (as opposed to a more subject oriented engagement) a main concern, by listening to their accounts, one may learn as much about the practitioners' reasoning about education in general as about education in a specific subject. This is another topic I would have wanted to pursue in more detail than I have presently found opportunity to. Again, I have had to content myself with a small contribution, almost limited to pointing to a possible insight which, should there be something to it, may have transfer value to those trying to understand e.g. the practice of other subjects and other levels in the educational system than has presently been explored. Finally, in a time when public debates as well as educational policies are characterized by result-orientation, attainment of objectives, measurability, and standardized (international) tests, a study which focuses on understanding education as a specific cultural activity rather than on evaluation of relatively easily measurable, yet narrowly defined goals may offer a perspective on education different from that of most result-oriented studies.

In the light of what has been said so far, the basis of the thesis could be illustrated as in Figure 1 in chapter 1.3.

1.3 What is already known; a survey of relevant studies

Intellectual Practicians is a qualitative, empirical-theoretical study. It is an interdisciplinary work, influenced and inspired by several academic disciplines. The work draws on both the humanistic tradition and that of the sciences of man, to borrow a term from Charles Taylor, and one might perhaps therefore claim that the

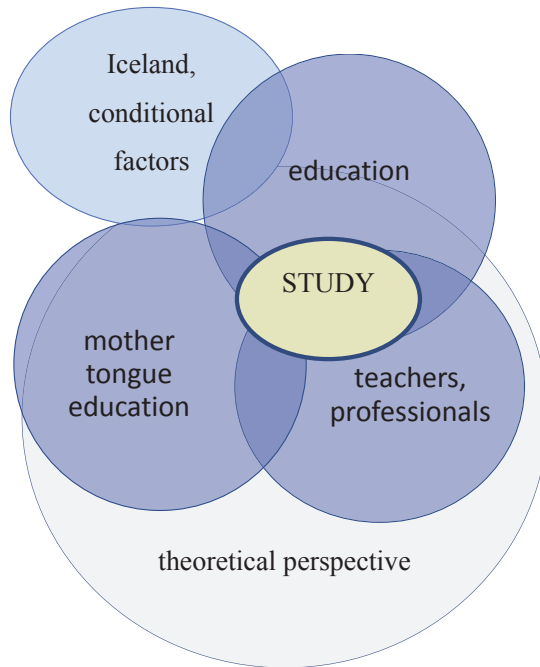
study's perspective be socio-humanistic. In the humanistic tradition, philosophy, literary studies and Scandinavistics may be pointed out as disciplines of influence, while anthropology, sociology, including studies of professional life and work, and educational science, including subject specific education (Ge. *Fachdidaktik*), are the most influential social science disciplines.

While I was quite familiar with some of these beforehand, I have struck further acquaintance with others in the course of this project, partly due to my search for research sufficiently in accordance with the current project to be regarded as belonging to the same academic tradition or discipline. This conduced to broad and extensive reading. There were empirical studies of education, empirical studies of practicians and of practices, theoretical studies on social practices, philosophical studies on education and on teaching, empirical studies of mother tongue education, studies of Icelandic culture and history, and others.

The reading was guided by my search for studies of the phenomena important to my own study; e.g. education, professionals' self-understanding, professional practices, and professional social agency. During this search, I found manifold and diverse studies of these phenomena, most of them instructive and highly interesting. Yet, if the studies I read and the disciplines with which I acquainted myself overlapped with aspects or topics in the current work to some degree, they did not do so to the degree that I found I could rightfully claim these specific works and disciplines to correspond to my own work focally, methodologically, and theoretically. For example, philosophical studies in education and its aims tended to be exclusively theoretical, while studies of subject specific education tended to deal with practical-methodological challenges, and besides, I found an overall shortage of culturally oriented studies of teaching in upper secondary education in Iceland. It seemed clear that I was situated literally *inter* disciplines, and had to fumble my own way. At the same time, the lack of corresponding studies appeared to indicate that there was reason to do what I attempted to do.

One of the challenges inherent to interdisciplinary studies regards the procurement of an overview of the state of the art within research field. What would be the best way to do that in such a work? Should the study be particularly related to one specific academic discipline or tradition after all, on the cost of other disciplines which have played a part along the road, or would it be preferable to present an eclectic selection of works from several disciplines, on the cost of the thoroughness in the presentation of each? While not considering either solution particularly good, I still chose the latter, regarding it fairer than the former. After all, the present study *is* situated at the crossroads between several disciplines and traditions, and certain influence from each of them may be traced in the work. These should rightfully be acknowledged. So below, I provide an overview over sources of inspiration in the main disciplines of influence, distressingly witting that each discipline is accounted for in an insufficient manner. I also mention some works which may not have been of particular consequence in the present work, but which I have found it unsatisfactory to ignore in a survey over relevant literature. As some sort of guide to the overview, I provide Figure 1. Each circle in the figure represents one of the disciplines mentioned in the following, with exception of the one called “theoretical perspective” which is not accounted for in the present chapter since the following one is devoted to that topic.

Figure 1: The thesis' basis



Studies of professions, specifically studies of upper secondary education, teachers' self-understanding, and teacher education

In addition to the other disciplines of influence mentioned in Figure 1, several sociological studies, specifically works within the field of studies of professions have had an impact on the present work. Some of these should rightfully be mentioned among general works in the study of professions include a number of classics within this field. This is the case with Abbott's *The System of Professions* (1988), Schön's *Educating the reflective practitioner* (1987) and *The reflective practitioner: how professionals think in action* (1995), Dreyfus, Dreyfus & Athanasiou's *Mind over*

Machine (1986), and Parsons' theory of action (e.g. Hayes & Parsons, 1987; Parsons, 1978; Parsons & Shils, 2001). These works have been informative and inspiring, and they have contributed to nuancing my understanding of professional practices and professionalism.

Of empirical studies of professions or professionals I mention Goodson's *Teachers' Professional Lives* (1996), *The Weight of the World* by Pierre Bourdieu et al. (1999b), Katrin Hjort's *De professionelle* [*The professionals*] (2004), *Praktikker i erhverv og uddannelse* [*Practices in professional life and education*] by Karin Anna Petersen et al. (2004), and Annick Prieur's study of changes in the professions of the welfare state (2010). What these studies have in common, is that they are influenced by either reflexive sociology, narrative methodology, or both, as for example the articles in *The Weight of the World* and *Practices in professional life and education*. The anthology *Livshistorieforskning og kvalitative interview* [*Life story research and qualitative interviews*] (Petersen, Glasdam, & Lorentzen, 2007) discusses this specific combination in empirical studies of social conditions. Along with the empirical studies, this work, too, has been clarifying as well as inspiring. Among other things, these works taught me that it is fully possible to be interested in agents as subjects while at the same time searching for structural or societal explanations of individuals' practices and reasoning, cf. e.g. the articles by Prieto, Callewaert, and Goodson & Adair in Petersen et al. (2007). This is moreover in understanding with the epistemology and methodological reflections of Charles Taylor (cf. Chapter 3), whose work provides a major contribution to the current project's theoretical framework, as mentioned above.

In addition to this, studies of professionalism and ethics or professionalism and philosophical anthropology have inspired the current work and strengthened the researcher's theoretical fundament. Among works in this category I mention Joseph Dunne & Padraig Hogan's *Education and practice* (2004), Liz Bondi et al. *Towards professional wisdom: practical deliberation in the people professions* (2011),

Phronesis as professional knowledge: practical wisdom in the professions (Kinsella & Pitman, 2012), and Klaus Mollenhauer's *Forgotten connections* (2014).

The works mentioned so far may serve as examples. There is a large independent literature on each of these topics; theories on professionalism, empirical studies of professions and professionals, and professionalism and practical philosophy, and so the examples mentioned are merely demonstrations of my own orientation within these fields.

It has been my stand in the work with this project that upper secondary education teachers' self-understanding is likely to differ from that of primary (and partly lower secondary) education teachers *qua* understanding of their occupational or professional identity for two main reasons; firstly and presumably most importantly, because the educational background of these two groups is different, and secondly, due to the practical organization of their respective jobs; I have assumed that being a general teacher is sufficiently different from being a subject teacher to affect the work as well as the self-understanding of the respective groups. A consequence of this is that many studies of teachers' self-understanding, such as the so-called teacher thinking tradition, have seemed less relevant than it might appear at first glance since their concern more often than not is primary education and primary school teachers.

Another issue regarding former studies' relevance is that of cultural context. Both socio-cultural conditions and the educational system and teachers' educational background differ, and so results from are the same and thus results from studies of this kind will only be transferable from one country to another to a certain degree.

In Iceland, the sociologist Gestur Guðmundsson has studied education in a socio-cultural perspective. His point of view has been close to what may be termed Bourdieuan sociology, which also plays a part as a source of inspiration in the current study (cf. Chapter 3), and, although he has studied youths more than teachers, it has been useful to read his studies (e.g. G. Guðmundsson, 2008; G. Guðmundsson, 2013;

G. Guðmundsson & Mikiewicz, 2012). Among other relevant Icelandic studies I want to mention Atli Harðarson's "Skilningur framhaldsskólakennara á almennum námsmarkmiðum" [How teachers in secondary schools understand the aims of education] (2010) and Árný Helga Reynisdóttir's *Skóli á tímamótum? Viðhorf reyndra framhaldsskólakennara til breytinga í skólustarfi* [School at a Crossroads? 25 Years of School Development in the Eyes of Experienced Upper Secondary School Teachers in Iceland] (2013). I refer to both of these in the study's interpretative part.

Mother tongue education in upper secondary education

Initially, my intention was to relate the study fairly closely to the tradition of mother tongue didactics, and so I early on searched for studies within this tradition. The search was limited in two respects, though; topically and geographically. The first applies to the already mentioned fact that *Fachdidaktik* studies within the field of mother tongue education mainly are subdiscipline studies, and most of them study primary and lower secondary education, while I, on the other hand, primarily was interested in studies of upper secondary education with a wholist approach. I moreover looked for studies focusing on teachers rather than studies of for example pupils or teaching methods. Furthermore, I primarily focused on Iceland in my search, yet with a side glance to Scandinavia. The main reason for this was practical, related to the socio-cultural situation of this field of research; both by attending mother tongue education conferences and from my experience with exchange students I have learned that mother tongue education varies from one country to another. The most apparent reason for this is the subject's close bonds to national and cultural traditions and values; that there is a close relation between language and the sense of perceived cultural community, as demonstrated e.g. by Benedict Anderson (2006, Ch. 3), who terms such communities *imagined* communities. Similarly, when discussing "the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations", Charles Taylor speaks of social imaginaries (2004, p. 23), which might

perhaps in the present context be specified to *national* social imaginaries. However, since the national imaginaries in the Nordic countries after all have much in common, it did not seem unreasonable to look outside the narrow Icelandic context where so few studies are performed within this field of study anyway. And so I looked to Scandinavia.

Scandinavian studies of mother tongue education

I have mainly looked for relevant studies in Norway, but also mention works from Sweden, Denmark and the Faroe Islands. Sigmund Ongstad's *Nordisk morsmålsdidaktikk: forskning, felt og fag* [*Nordic mother tongue didactics; research, field, and subject*] (2012) provides a useful overview over research within this field.

Probably related to the point about the research field's embeddedness in the national culture and imaginaries is the fact that I have been unable to find any studies parallel to the present one in that it explores the field from the outside, i.e. from an outsider's and even foreigner's point of view. The closest I get to such a study is Elf & Kaspersen (ed.): *Den nordiske skolen – fins den? didaktiske diskurser og dilemmaer i skandinaviske morsmålsfag* [*The Nordic school; does it exist? Didactic discourses and dilemmas in Scandinavian mother tongue education*] (2012). Elf, Kaspersen and the rest of their group shared an empirical material of interviews from all three Scandinavian countries; Norway, Denmark and Sweden, and do in this respect transgress national borders. To my knowledge, this is the only existing Inter-Scandinavian study of mother tongue education (mainly) in upper secondary school. Moreover, this project did in fact influence the project *Between Theoria and Practice* in the sense that it was from my acquaintance with the work of Elf and Kaspersen's group Nord.fag I got the idea to turn to Iceland and mother tongue teachers there. While this group studied teachers in the three Scandinavian countries, I realized that there was a shortage of similar studies in Iceland.

The result of the Nord.fag project is an anthology, where each researcher approaches the shared empirical material from his or her specialist point of view; literary education, literacy education etc. Consequently, the majority of the articles are *Fachdidaktik* studies in the predominant sense of the term described above, i.e. studies concerning subdisciplines. However, the book also contains reflections of more general nature. Although inspiring, none of these have directly influenced the current work, as they are all written from a theoretical base different from that of *Intellectual Practicians*.

When looking for educational, subject- and teacher-oriented studies in Scandinavia, I have focused on Norway, since the educational system there is the one which most directly has influenced my understanding of education and so the starting point of my work with *Intellectual Practicians*. Norwegian works of interest include Sylvi Penne's *Norsk som identitetsfag: norsklæreren i det moderne* [*Norwegian as a subject related to identity; teachers of Norwegian in modernity*] (2001), where Penne presents her reflections on teaching the mother tongue subject in modern Norway. Penne's perspective in this book is not limited to the level of upper secondary education, though. The same goes for Jon Smidt's *Sjangrer og stemmer i norskrommet: kulturskaping i norskfaget fra småskole til lærerutdanning* [*Genres and voices in the Norwegian classroom: Culture creation from primary education to teacher education*] (2004).

As in Iceland, it has been hard to find studies of upper secondary school mother tongue teachers' practices and reasoning in Norway. The ones that get closest, are studies of subdisciplinary practices, such as Tove Markussen Wade's *Responspraksis i videregående skole: tre ulike læreres responspraksis av elevtekster i norsk* [*Feedback practices in upper secondary school: Three teachers' responses to pupils' texts*] (2011). Such studies tend to be more concerned with methodology than is the case in my project. To find studies with a more general approach, I have turned to Denmark, where I found Ellen Krogh's PhD thesis *Et fag i moderniteten: Danskfagets didaktiske diskurser* [*A subject in modernity: The didactic discourses of*

the schoolsubject Danish] (2003). In this study, Krogh explores the school subject Danish within a Foucaultian framework. Although she is especially interested in exploring literacy education, and specifically education in writing, her perspective may still be claimed to be more general, with the exploration of *Fachdidaktik* as a particular topic of interest. She explains that her aim is to explore *Fachdidaktik*, which Krogh terms ‘subject oriented didactics’ and to strengthen its position as an independent (academic) discipline:

My first main analytical point is that as a theoretical and pedagogical practise ‘subject oriented didactics’ should be distinguished from the discipline of ‘general pedagogy’ as well as from the understanding of teaching as transmission of scientific branches of knowledge. ‘Subject oriented didactics’ is the specific reflective practise managing the meeting in the classroom of two structurally different approaches to subject knowledge: the teacher’s professional academic approach and the students’ emergent and barrier-breaking approach. (Krogh, 2003, p. 325)

She furthermore wants to

demonstrate that the current productive potentials of ‘subject oriented didactics’ [*Fachdidaktik*] derive from subject oriented didactics’ being a historically and culturally grounded practice sensitive of its object as well as of the fact that this object is historically and culturally conditioned. Therefore I find it productive to specify a subject didactic concept of learning by establishing a distinction between ‘learning’ as the general pedagogic concept and *knowledge production* as the specific form of learning taking place when subjects are taught. (...) As a modern reflective practise subject oriented didactic has the power to produce important insights in the conditions of possibility of teaching and learning in the knowledge society.

Through the design of my analysis of the subject ‘Danish’ I concretize the understanding of subject oriented didactics as a theoretical, reflective practise. (Krogh, 2003, p. 325)

As the quotes illustrate, Krogh’s explicit concern is to explore and develop ‘subject oriented didactics’. As part of this, she for example sees a potential for generalizing her analysis of ‘subject oriented knowledge’ as a field of knowledge in the school

subject Danish to other subjects. While Krogh's focus in this differs from my own, which is on practitioners, yet precisely by listening to practitioners one sees why Krogh's work matters; establishment and development of 'subject oriented didactics' as an independent field of knowledge may very possibly be part of what could render the *locus* between practically oriented general teachers and theoretically oriented academics at university where the participants in *Intellectual Practicians* seem to find themselves to be positioned more expressible, also in terms of being an independent and legitimate position.

In Sweden I found Karin Tarschys' dissertation *Svenska språket och litteraturen: studier över modersmålsundervisningen i högre skolor* [Swedish language and literature: studies of mother tongue education in secondary education] (1955), which enjoys status as a classic within its field in Sweden. A more recent work is Barbro Holmgren's thesis *Svensklärares arbete: om villkor för gymnasieskolans svenskämne* [The work of teachers of Swedish: on the conditions of the school subject Swedish] (2008). In this work, Holmgren discusses questions similar to those in the present one. In her own words, she focuses on "how teachers at upper secondary school in conversations describe and construct their work, values in society and school, structures of power and relation to time." (Holmgren, 2008, abstract). Within the framework of Bourdieu's social theory, Holmgren explores descriptions of work and education among upper secondary teachers in Swedish. Maybe because of her focus on social structures, e.g. (misrecognized) power structures, maybe for other reasons, the outcome of Holmgren's study is decidedly different from that of the present one. Whereas the act of teaching and subject specific topics, such as linguistic skills and literary heritage, are central in the discourse¹² of the teachers who took part in *Intellectual Practicians*, Holmgren finds that when the Swedish teachers talk about work in school the discourse is related to ideals in a global economy: "Decentralization and individualization get new meanings when those words are

¹² The term "discourse" is discussed in Appendix VI.

placed in school environment and activity,” Holmgren comments, and “[e]ffectiveness, flexibility and individualization are words related to economy and they seem to have an effect on education and subjects of Swedish” (Holmgren, 2008, abstract). Alternatively, the discourse may be interpreted in relation to power mechanisms and values within the educational field (in Bourdieu’s meaning of that term). Holmgren finds that “a diffuse power acts on the field”, and that “harmony is a dominant value and a term that influences teachers’ work.” (Holmgren, 2008, abstract).

Another work of relevance in the present context is Vár í Ólavsstovu’s study of mother tongue education in upper secondary school in the Faroese Islands. The study is the author’s doctoral thesis, called *Mellem tradition og modernitet: færøskfaget og den færøskfaglige kontekst i national diskurs: en redegørelse og analyse af fagets ide, praksis og reception i det almene gymnasium* [*Between tradition and modernity: The Faroese subject and the Faroese context in national discourse: an account and analysis of the subject's idea, practice and reception in upper secondary school's general studies programme*] (2011). Methodologically and theoretically Vár í Ólavsstovu positions herself differently than I do (e.g. as a social constructivist and critical discourse analyst), and while the historical analysis is emphasized more than in the current project, teachers’ reasoning and practices are emphasized less. Yet it has been very inspiring to read Vár í Ólavsstovu’s thesis, among other things because the subject is treated in a broad perspective and so she provides a varied presentation of her topic. Similar to the findings in *Intellectual Practitioners*, the author finds the mother tongue subject in upper secondary education in the Faroese Islands to be closely connected to ideas about a national identity and to what the Icelandic teachers call “the national heritage”. She suggests an explanation of this condition, just as the present work attempts to provide an explanation of the similar situation in Iceland. Since *Between tradition and modernity* to a high degree is historically oriented, more attention is devoted to the analysis of historical factors in that work than in the present one. Also, the two works are performed in different countries, exploring

different cultures which are different in much although they at the same time resemble each other in other respects. Nevertheless, some of the questions discussed are similar, and anyway the fact remains that Vár í Ólavsstóvu's work is the closest to a parallel to my own study that I have been able to find.

Also, the international works of IMEN (The International Mother tongue Education Network) should be mentioned. Within this network one has attempted to work across national borders; the studies performed within the network are comparative, and topics such as multiculturalism and multilingualism have been discussed recurrently. The network has moreover aimed at developing generalized knowledge about mother tongue education, as explained for example in the anthology *Research on mother tongue education in a comparative international perspective. Theoretical and methodological issues* (Herrlitz, Ongstad, & Van De Ven, 2007).

While the present project's empirical material is provided from mother tongue education, the study is not comparative. It is different from general IMEN ideals also in being a case study and so focusing on particular instances of teacher practices rather than on what is similar to mother tongue education in other countries. Also, as described e.g. in chapter 1.5, the emphasis in the present thesis is less on *Fachdidaktik* than it is on the teacher's practice and self-understanding.

For the most part, IMEN research has been oriented towards disciplinary studies. However, in the chapter "Imen bibliography 1984-2004", in Herrlitz, Ongstad and van de Ven (2007), Sjaak Kron shows that also more general studies have been within the scope of IMEN's work. Kron's overview moreover shows that Icelandic researchers never have taken part in IMEN projects, so there are no IMEN studies which include Iceland or Icelandic perspectives.

Icelandic studies of mother tongue education

What has so far been related about studies of mother tongue education in Iceland implies that Icelandic studies must primarily be looked for in Iceland. My primary source in doing so has been gegnir.is, the national and university library's search engine. I have also gone through national Icelandic journals, such as *Skíma*, the journal of the organization of Icelandic mother tongue teachers. Although this journal is not an academic journal, strictly speaking, it was useful by means of getting an impression of the concerns and interests of Icelandic mother tongue teachers.

The academic works I have found are first and foremost master theses from the University of Iceland. Those which may be regarded relevant may be divided into three groups: 1) studies of teachers of Icelandic in upper secondary education, 2) studies of the Icelandic subject in upper secondary education, 3) non subject-specific studies of teachers in upper secondary education. In addition, there are studies of primary and lower secondary education, as well as of teacher education. As the latter ones concerns education of general teachers, I do not account for either of these two categories in the below overview. The overview does not comprise a complete list over all potentially relevant works. It is a selection, albeit a relatively broad one, which I have regarded to give a fair impression of this field of study. The relevance of these works to the present one varies, both methodologically and topically, but even those of less relevance have in some cases been of interest, for example in offering perspectives which I had not seen before.

With an exception for a comment on Eyrún Huld Haraldsdóttir's thesis, I do not discuss individual works here, but return to some of them, e.g. Árný Helga Reynisdóttir' study of experienced teachers and Atli Harðarson's study of teachers' educational aims, later on in the thesis.

1) Studies of teachers of Icelandic in upper secondary education

Although there have been written some theses on this topic in recent years, studies in this category are still sparse. In fact, Eyrún Huld Haraldsdóttir's study "*Maður er aldrei útlærður*". *Þróun starfskenninga fjögurra íslenskukennara [One lives and one learns]* (2012), seems to be the only work where teachers of Icelandic have been studied specifically. As Haraldsdóttir moreover studies these teachers' professional development, her study is of great relevance to the present one, although her focus is specifically on junior teachers. Yet, because the present work had already taken its course at the time when *One lives and one learns* was published, I cannot claim that Haraldsdóttir's study has been of direct influence. What I have done, is to try to make the best out of this, and at least compare Haraldsdóttir's results with my own. I find considerable similarity in the results of the two studies, and regret that I have not been able to take more advantage of it in the present study's interpretative part. The similarities include a critical attitude to the teacher training program among the participants in both studies, an expressed emphasis on practical matters/practice, as well as the sense of finding themselves positioned between the logic of practice and that of theory (cf. also the presentation of Krogh's work). In addition, the participants in both studies seek their challenges in practical teaching and express a wish to be in constant development with regard to this. In fact, the title of Haraldsdóttir's thesis, the expression "*maður er aldrei útlærður*" (translated by the author to "one lives and one learns"), which is a quotation from one of her informants, could in fact have been chosen as the title of the present work as well; one of the participants actually uses exactly this very expression when accounting for his view on the profession of education.

2) *Studies of the Icelandic subject in upper secondary education*

Apparently, there has been written relatively few *Fachdidaktik* theses focusing on upper secondary education in Icelandic. In fact, in *gegnir.is* I only found Sveinbjörnsdóttir's study (2003) of education in general linguistics in a specific course and Ragnhildur Reynisdóttir's analysis of general linguistics education in upper secondary school from 2012. My search may have been insufficient, somehow, and other works may be catalogued in categories it did not occur to me to search for. However, typical *Fachdidaktik* studies of this kind do, if they focus on teachers at all, tend to concentrate on teaching methods rather than on the practice and reasoning of teachers as such, and do consequently have a scope different than that of my project.

The most recent work in this category is Svanhildur Sverrisdóttir's doctoral thesis in which the author has studied mother tongue education in Icelandic upper secondary education with particular regard to what she terms "the realization of the national curriculum". However, this thesis was published just before the current work was completed and submitted, and has therefore unfortunately not been accessible in the work with the present project. The title of Sverrisdóttir's study is *Ef að er gáð: afdrif aðalnámskrár í íslensku á unglingsstigi grunnskóla og í framhaldsskóla* [On closer inspection: the realization of the national curriculum in the teaching of Icelandic in lower and upper secondary schools], which was published just before the current work was completed (S. Sverrisdóttir, 2014).

3) *Studies of teachers in upper secondary education, not subject-specific*

This category is the most extensive of the three. A number of theses have been written on teachers' professional development and professional self-understanding, often with a particular focus on the reception of junior teachers. Hafðís Ingvarsdóttir's works are instances of this (e.g. Ingvarsdóttir, 2004, 2009), as are Soffía Sveinsdóttir's (2008, 2009). In fact, this is also the topic of the above

mentioned study of Eyrún Huld Haraldsdóttir, although her study is limited to junior Icelandic teachers and therefore listed in category 1 in the current survey.

Related to such studies are those which focus on teachers' well-fare and work environment, such as Guðmundur Ingi Guðmundsson & Guðbjörg Linda Rafnsdóttir's, Ólafur Jónsson's, Brynhildur Magnúsdóttir's and Guðrún Ragnarsdóttir's studies of Icelandic upper secondary teachers' work environment and job satisfaction (G. I. Guðmundsson & Rafnsdóttir, 2010; Jónsson, 2007; Magnúsdóttir, 2012; Ragnarsdóttir, 2008, 2010). Related to such studies are Hrefna Geirsdóttir's (2008) and Árný Helga Reynisdóttir's (2013) studies of experienced teachers' views on changes in upper secondary education over the last decades. In all these studies teachers' experiences, conceptions and reasoning play a part. This is also the case in Eyrún María Rúnarsdóttir & Sigrún Aðalbjarnardóttir's (2002; 2003) and Atli Harðarson's (2010) studies, although the focus in these studies is on educational aims, and so somewhat different from that in the other examples.

An Icelandic source to which I refer on several occasions in the following, is Sverrisdóttir et al.: *Úttekt á íslenskukennslu í framhaldsskólum* [*Assesment of the instruction of Icelandic in upper secondary school*] (2011). As is evident from the title, this is a report rather than a research project. I have still found it useful, among other things because it has given me an opportunity to compare the findings and interpretations of the current project to other results and understandings.

A more general exploration of the notion of subject knowledge may be found in Ivor Goodson et al. *Subject knowledge: readings for the study of school subjects* (Goodson, Anstead, & Mangan, 1998).

Conditional factors; socio-cultural and historical studies of Iceland and Icelandic national and cultural imaginaries

Part of the theoretical base of this thesis is the view that when attempting to interpret a meaningful entity, such as people's social practices, one needs to take the conditions of this entity into consideration in order to gain an understanding as full and reliable as possible. In the current context, this means that a broader orientation than that of educational or socio-educational studies may be apt. To understand Icelandic teachers' practice and reasoning, one needs to know something about the social and cultural context in which this practice and reasoning unfold; Iceland. I have mainly looked for studies about Iceland as a cultural entity and for imaginaries about the notion of "Icelandic" in two academic disciplines; history and social science (anthropology and ethnology).

With regard to history, Guðmundur Hálfðanarson proved a central source. Hálfðanarson has both explored the advancement of patriotism and national social imaginaries in Iceland in a socio-cultural and political perspective, e.g. (Hálfðanarson, 2000, 2001, 2006, 2012), and he has more specifically studied the role of particular cultural elements, such as the national language, in this process, cf. for instance his article "From linguistic patriotism to cultural nationalism: Language and identity in Iceland" (Hálfðanarson, 2005). Similarly, Gunnar Karlsson has taken an interest in both general national history and in the role of particular cultural elements in the development of national imaginaries (Karlsson, 2000, 2005). An analysis of Icelandic nationalism or national imaginaries may also be found in Jóhann P. Árnason's article "Icelandic Anomalies" (2012), where the author claims these imaginaries to differ from most European national imaginaries in decisive respects. If Árnason is right, there is all the more reason to be aware of this when dealing with an empirical material which relates to these imaginaries.

The anthropology and ethnology studies which relate to similar topics in several cases either make similar claims or analyse such claims. The range of such studies includes

the anthology *Images of the North* (Jakobsson, 2009), which among other texts contains Sumarliði Ísleifsson's "Icelandic National Images in the 19th and 20th Centuries", Kristinn Schram's "The Wild, Wild North", Katla Kjartansdóttir's "Remote, Rough and Romantic: Contemporary Images of Iceland in Visual, Oral and Textual Narration", and Unnur Dís Skaptadóttir & Kristín Loftsdóttir's *Cultivating Culture? Images of Iceland, Globalization and Multicultural Society*. Also worth mentioning is Kristín Loftsdóttir's article "The loss of innocence: The Icelandic financial crisis and colonial past" (Loftsdóttir, 2010). Partly directly, partly indirectly I make use of these studies in the following, both in Chapter 4 where the context of the empirical material is charted and interpreted, and in the interpretation of the empirical material.

1.4 Preconceptions and horizon of understanding

Researchers inevitably bring their own experiences, convictions and way of reasoning, in short, what is in hermeneutic terminology called their horizon of understanding, along into any research project. As this is the case, particularly researchers within qualitative traditions are advised to clarify their own position; to account for their own background and subsequent horizon of understanding. In understanding with this demand, which among other things is based on the conviction that such a self-account increases the transparency of the presented results, for example in that possible biases will be easier to detect, and so, that a reflexive self-account all in all contributes to increase the quality of the research, I will in the following provide a short account of my own position.

I claim to have initially approached the field of study partly in a double perspective; to be almost an insider with regard to the academic knowledge of the field, yet an outsider with regard to the Icelandic school system and Icelandic teachers' ordinary working day.

My own educational background resembles that of the informants in this study. I am a scholar of literature and linguistics, and have specialized in Scandinavian studies. At the time when I wrote my master thesis on an Icelandic author, I spent a semester in Iceland as an exchange student to do my research. Later I have qualified as a government-authorized translator, I have taught university courses in Icelandic, and for some years worked as an editor of an Inter-Nordic dictionary. All of these activities have strengthened my knowledge of Icelandic.

The relationship to Iceland has been cultivated ever since my semester as an exchange student in Reykjavik. I have paid many visits to the country and am familiar with its culture and history as well as with the current situation. Furthermore, I have taught the mother tongue subject in upper secondary school, albeit in Norway and not in Iceland (which means that I at this level in the educational system taught Norwegian, not Icelandic). However, my experience from upper secondary school is limited, and my teaching experience is in fact mostly earned in higher education, where much is different from life in upper secondary school.

In higher education I have taught Norwegian in addition to Icelandic, and my students have often been exchange students. This has stimulated cultural awareness, with regard to the homely as well as to the foreign related to the students' stories and background. The current project's insisting on contextualizing empirical data may partly be rooted in experiences from the exchange student courses.

At Bergen University College, I have taught teachers to be. In my experience, dilemmas and what might be termed struggles of the educational hegemony, for instance related to teacher professionalism, were and are evident in Norwegian teacher education. Observations related to such dilemmas made me begin to wonder what kind of profession teaching really is, and if teaching really is just one profession, despite the very wide span (from kindergarten to higher education) of teachers' scope, and even if different groups of teachers have quite dissimilar

educational background. Such ponderings led me to the theory of professions and other social theories, and to practical philosophy.

2. Empirical material and methodological reflections

2.1 Travelogue or Course of action

In some sense, carrying out a research project may be compared to making a journey; one sets out from somewhere and may have a relatively clear idea of the destination for which one is heading. Yet, if the journey one is undertaking is a long one, it will in the rule be difficult to foresee what may happen along the road. The more meticulous one's preparations, the fewer surprises seem likely to appear *en route*, while a more capacious attitude may involve more unpredicted changes of route or way of travelling. With regard to research projects, accounts of what has been done are often spoken of as said project's method; a term derived from the Greek *methodos*, which originally means to follow a certain path to reach one's journey's end. In present use, method may easily be taken to mean something in the direction of "a special form of procedure or characteristic set of procedures employed (more or less systematically) in an intellectual discipline or field of study as a mode of investigation and inquiry" (Dictionary), which would not be an adequate description of the approach in a hermeneutically oriented project. Hence, I have rather chosen to speak of a travelogue, which includes a description of my course of action. The providing of such information is a matter of transparency, which is regarded as relating to the study's reliability. Reliability, in turn, pertains to research ethics. I will not presently discuss research ethics, but find it necessary to point to a possible research ethical conflict in the current project, namely that between the work's transparency on the one hand and consideration to participants, specifically protection of their anonymity, on the other. I will occasionally draw the reader's attention to this dilemma.

To pursue the figure of speech, one might say that since the current project is a qualitative one, it seemed more sensible to set off in a rather vagabond manner than

to follow an overly well planned route; to approach the material with a mind as open as possible and therefore avoid too detailed plans in advance. In selecting this course, I chose to study the project's empirical material in a hermeneutic perspective, taking the hermeneutic stand that a text or text equivalent is an entity to which the interpreter needs to have an open and enquiring attitude. The relationship between text and interpreter must, in other words, be a dialogical, and thus an open one (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009, Ch. 4). This is the reason why it would not make sense to account for the project's methodology in a narrow sense of that term, and so, the current chapter should rather be considered my travelogue; my description of conveyance and of experiences encountered in the course of travel.

Initially, I was uncertain whether hermeneutics would be the best approach. Based on the view that it seems sensible and fruitful to set out with a considerable degree of open-mindedness when performing qualitative research, I early on considered an approach which would have placed the project within the frames of grounded theory. This, however, was soon discarded since I found it increasingly improbable that I as a researcher could approach my material quite as open-minded as I find the grounded theory perspective to demand (cf. Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009, Ch. 3.1), for I found myself to be embedded in a social, cultural and already (popularly and scholarly) theorized world. While theories may be changed, for example in accordance with empirical findings, I was increasingly convinced that the world may hardly be un-theorized. So I left grounded theory. Next, I for a while considered varieties of discourse analysis, but found that they were insufficient with respect to finding answers to my research questions; some findings could only be explained if I looked to the larger picture, outside the participants' personal discourse or the discourse of the professional group to which they belong, cf. Alvesson & Sköldberg's claim that the discourse analyst focuses mainly on the discursive level, while underlying elements are paid less attention (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009, Ch. 7.1). At this point, I had already collected my data and transcribed it. I knew the material well, and was convinced that to concentrate narrowly on the empirical data such as they were,

would be insufficient. I moreover found it methodologically problematic to perform discourse analysis on a material where I, the researcher, was at the same time one of the participants in the discourse. Consequently, I turned to familiar landscapes, to keep to geographical metaphors, and decided to approach the empirical material from a hermeneutical point of view. With academic background from the humanities, I was already well acquainted with hermeneutics. The hermeneutic view was supplemented with perspectives and analytical tools from reflexive sociology, since, generally speaking, such tools are not provided by hermeneutics. Both theoretical perspectives are elaborated in Chapter 3.

Maybe due to my role as a foreigner, it soon seemed clear to me that the position from which the teachers spoke to a considerable degree influenced their reasoning and their arguments. For example, certain statements struck me as very *Icelandic*. Although I could not be certain of it, it for example seemed unlikely that their peers, upper secondary school mother tongue teachers in Norway, would emphasize the importance of developing eloquence and of cultivating the national language to the degree that the teachers participating in the current study did. Or that the national literary classics should be enhanced among the elements considered most influential in the shaping of national identity. Such views, clearly expressed by the study's participants, may relate to what Anderson calls "imagined communities" and to what Taylor has later termed "social imaginaries" (Anderson, 2006; Taylor, 2004), which concern agents' conception of their social surroundings and "is the common understanding that makes possible common practices" (Taylor, 2004, pp. 23, cf. also pp. 31-32). While Taylor in his analysis of modern social imaginaries finds common features in large parts of the Western world, such as emphasis on independence, liberty and equality, he also points to the invention of "the people" as a new collective agency in the development towards modernism, and he shows that this "long march" takes different paths in different countries (Taylor, 2004, ch. 8), and thus reminds the reader that despite the common features, "[m]odern social imaginaries have been differently refracted in the divergent media of the respective

national histories, even in the West.” (Taylor, 2004, p. 154). In his essay “Nationalism and Modernity”, Taylor discusses these and closely related concepts, such as that of patriotism, and among other things addresses the significance of a “homogeneous language and culture” in this perspective (Taylor, 2011b). Statements on language and “cultural heritage”¹³ in the current study may fruitfully be seen in relation to Taylor’s analysis of modernity and the development of the nation state as part of this.

However, imaginaries may relate to other entities than nationalism, and this applies to this project’s data too. Statements which do not have a specific national value often seem influenced by structural conditions in which the teachers are situated in their daily work, or to the social microcosm of their everyday practice. Accordingly, I found it necessary to contextualize the empirical data; socially, culturally and historically.¹⁴ This brought me to Charles Taylor, who more explicitly and insistently than most hermeneutical theorists argues in favour of hermeneutics as a mode of understanding, both in disciplines where hermeneutics has traditionally been applied, and in the social sciences, cf. the study’s Chapter 3.

Apart from its emphasis on contextualization and on the importance of taking the speaker’s horizon of understanding into account when interpreting meaningful entities such as human speech and action, an additional reason for choosing a hermeneutic approach was that what I wanted to study, was the agents’ own tales; their (occupational) reality as the agents themselves experience it. This is a reason why I did not choose to do observation studies, for example. I feared that had I entered the field of practice, for example classrooms, and made observations, my own view would easily unduly influence subsequent interpretations. Especially since I

¹³ The term “cultural heritage” is commented in Appendix VI and discussed in Chapter 4.

¹⁴ The terms “contextualization”/“contextualizing” are discussed in Chapter 3. For the time being, I merely quote Nyeng, who finds Taylor to hold that to understand human action (and thus utterances) implies to understand the social context in which this action takes place. (Nyeng, 2000, pp. 42, 45, 53)

aimed at thorough interpretations of the material rather than descriptive accounts of the teachers' views, their activities, class-room conditions etc. I found this unfavourable. So I chose to take the teachers' own narrations as my point of departure.

The teachers' narratives and statements were regarded and treated as what has been termed text equivalents or text analogues (Abbey, 2000, p. 60; Ricoeur, 1971; Standen, 2013; Taylor, 1971). Moreover, I wanted to explore the meaning of these tales on the narrators' premises, cf. the research question: "What conception(s) do Icelandic mother tongue teachers in upper secondary school have of the Icelandic subject and what implications do they attribute to the professional management of the subject, how do they talk about their work and what is their occupational self-concept?" While the second part of the research question - how the teachers' accounts may be interpreted and what has shaped them - is an act of understanding which requires contextualizing interpretation, cf. also Bourdieu's device that understanding individuals implies understanding the social field, within and against which the individual has become who he is (Bourdieu, 2008, p. 12), the former first and foremost requires that one listens to the agents.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, I at first considered relating the study disciplinary to the tradition of *Fachdidaktik* studies. For two main reasons I gradually realized that this was a too narrow view. One reason is that, as mentioned in Chapter 1.3, *Fachdidaktik*, or at least mother tongue *Fachdidaktik*, tends to focus on the subject's subdisciplines and on the teaching of these. Relatively few *Fachdidaktik* studies have an overall approach and, to my knowledge, fewer still explore the practitioners reasoning which, because of my findings, came to be central in this study. Nevertheless, the *Fachdidaktik* aspect still is of consequence. While the teachers claim that they are "first and foremost teachers" and that they somehow regard general education matters at least as important as subject specific topics, they also stress that the subject as such is important to them. As they point out, Icelandic is after all the subject they studied at university. I found it likely that this sense of

belonging to a specific academic discipline has impact on the teachers' reasoning, and for example in this, the *Fachdidaktik* aspect is present. At the same time, the practice element in the teachers' narratives was far more prominent than expected. Where I had expected a stronger focus on the subject as such, and a professionalism intimately related to the subject, it turned out that in the narratives about the teachers' (professional) self-understanding and practice, general education, and so ethical, practical, cultural, and social elements were more perspicuous than those directly connected to the subject. This was a fact I had to take into account, and it came to influence the course of the project. This, then, is the other main reason why a *Fachdidaktik* focus seemed insufficient.

The study's research question was from the outset relatively broad. Still, as the work proceeded, somehow the answer to all aspects of it seemed to include practice, and more specifically the act of teaching, and so it appeared reasonable to focus particularly on the notion of teaching. As it became evident that what the teachers most strongly emphasized was practice, and especially teaching, I decided to include a particular interpretation of teaching in addition to that of the teachers' self-understanding. The interpretation of teaching required both 1) an analysis of the concept itself and 2) a descriptive-interpretative part, based on the participating teachers' accounts of their professional practice and their ideas about teaching, and more specifically about teaching the mother tongue subject in upper secondary school as a specific practice within the field of education. The interpretation of the notion of teaching supported the subsequent interpretation of the teachers' self-understanding, which is nevertheless primarily based on the teachers' own accounts; the story about their career, their examples and the metaphors they use. Only some of these are presented in the present thesis.

I came to suspect that the core of the teachers' stressing of practice (usually referred to as teaching in the accounts) is something else, or at least something more, than reflections on practical challenges of passing on a specific curriculum. A practical

consequence of this was that I turned to reflexive sociology, philosophical anthropology, and practical philosophy to employ the empirical material.

Another consequence, also based on the teachers' stories about their education and development as teachers, was that I realized how different teachers' everyday practice is from the education they have received. This was pointed out by the teachers themselves, and among other things offered as part of the explanation why they felt they had been forced to learn their profession all on their own, in the field, so to speak. This was a quite unison view within the group, and one might reflect that this unanimity may indicate that there be reason to discuss teacher education, maybe particularly that of upper secondary school teachers. I address this issue in Chapter 8.2, under the heading "Continued reflections on and discussions of education and its aims".

2.2 Material

The study's primary material is provided by the teachers who have participated in the project. It consists of two parts: teacher logs and in-depth interviews. More specifically, each of the participants kept a log for two-three weeks. They accounted for at least ten lessons of their own choice within this period. Beforehand, the teachers received a guide to the logs, describing what information these were supposed to contain (cf. Appendix V). Besides the actual accounts, the logs contain formal information about the teachers and the lessons, such as at which course each of the described lessons took place, and information about the class attending it, e.g. how many were present in the specific lesson. In addition, the teachers account for the topic(s) of each lesson, the aim(s) for the lesson, as well as for which activities and methods were made use of, and for their motivation for choice of method(s). Furthermore, each log entry contains the teacher's personal evaluation of the lesson.

The interviews were relatively extensive. Each of them lasted for two hours or more. Methodologically, the interviews may be placed between semi-structured and

unstructured. While they were on purpose kept comparatively open, permitting interviewees to go in depth and making apparent detours along the road, in the belief that such narrations in many cases will contain unforeseen yet valuable aspects and elements which a more structured interview might easily miss, a minimum of structure nevertheless seemed sensible, since the intention was to compare the teachers' views on the main issues in the interviews (cf. the research questions).

In addition to the primary material, various additional sources serve as secondary material. These include public documents on education and education policy. Among these sources, the curricula are the most important. The secondary sources particularly serve as framework for the primary material and the interpretation of it. In this, the secondary sources partly constitute the background towards which the primary material is seen and interpreted.

I have also made use of a tertiary kind of sources, namely various area studies about Iceland and the Icelandic society. These studies hail from several academic fields, such as ethnography, history, and anthropology (cf. Ch. 1.3). These sources have been of particular importance in the (re-)construction of the participants' contextual framework. This framework, then, serves as an explicated horizon of understanding for the interpretation of the primary sources, i.e. the logs and interviews. In addition, the tertiary sources have had the function of enforcing the interpretation of the primary material; I find that by both contextualizing the material, in seeing it in a larger context than that of the individual teacher and her classroom, and regarding this larger context from various angles, as it has been seen by different researchers, the grounds on which the current interpretations are founded are stronger and may also stand as more reliable than they would have been had they depended solely on the interpreter's own impressions. Notwithstanding this, my own experiences, and thus a number of informal sources, such as conversations, media presentations, and, more generally, my long standing relation to the country, its culture, its political conditions etc. inevitably are incorporated in the study's horizon of understanding, alongside with the formal sources to which I refer.

Choosing and collecting the empirical material

The study's empirical material is procured in cooperation with seven Icelandic teachers in upper secondary school. I wanted a strategic selection of informants, as I explain in further detail below, and this aim influenced both the choice of schools and that of possible candidates. Initially, I contacted twelve teachers personally per e-mail. The teachers were for the most part selected from a review of the homepages of a number of Icelandic upper secondary schools, but also by help of a contact at the University of Iceland. Next, the candidates were informed about the study and its aims, and enquired to participate in the study. The majority (10 candidates) accepted the invitation.

As briefly mentioned, the aim was to recruit a strategic selection of participants, in accordance with the claim that in a qualitative study, interviewees should be as different from each other as possible (Repstad, 2007, p. 80). This claim is based on the view that since the number of participants never will be sufficiently extensive to establish a representative selection in a group as extensive as for example Icelandic teachers in upper secondary school in a qualitative study, it is recommended that participants are chosen with careful consideration, in order to avoid generalizations based on findings in a group which by accident is unduly homogenous. Furthermore, a heterogeneous, yet relevant selection increases the possibilities of generating data and nuances which offer new knowledge or open new questions. Also, it may be easier to discover nuances and different apprehensions of a phenomenon in a heterogeneous material. The logic of this principle resembles Bourdieu's principle of contrast in his last work, *The Weight of the World*, accounted for in the work's methodology chapter "Understanding" (Bourdieu, 1999b). In both cases the idea is that a phenomenon will be easier to detect and stand as more distinct when the entity where the phenomenon is present is studied in a larger context, either by comparison to other instances of the entity x (e.g. upper secondary school teachers), as in the present project, or by contrasting it to y (e.g. educational politicians on the one hand, or pupils on the other), as in *The Weight of the World*.

In the current study, the variables which seemed relevant in the strategic selection were the teachers' gender, age, and professional experience, the type of school they were employed at (general studies, vocational studies, or both general and vocational studies), and the schools' location. For example, it seemed quite conceivable that an experienced, male teacher at a traditional sixth form school would express views on for instance the aims of Icelandic as a school subject different from those of a graduate female teacher at a vocational school.

However, the participating teachers also share some important features. For example, all the study's informants are teachers of Icelandic, and they moreover all work at the same level in the educational system, i.e. in upper secondary education. Furthermore, while they have pursued partly different paths to their achieved professionalism, among other things because they were educated at different points of time, they nonetheless all have bachelor- or master-degrees in Icelandic from the very same institution, i.e. The University of Iceland, and they all are formally qualified teachers, which means that they have taken the required courses in educational theory and practice (cf. Appendix I, "Teaching in Iceland"). Moreover, it turned out during the interviews that most of the participants showed an interest in their job or their profession exceeding the requirements from their employers. This interest had led some of them to take further education, and some had other additional qualifications; one had been teaching prospective Icelandic teachers part-time at the university, one was actively engaged in the Icelandic teachers' union, and so on. It should be noted that I did not deliberately intend to recruit particularly engaged teachers, and never asked for special engagement in the initial e-mail correspondence.

The fact that all the participants appeared to be both very interested and engaged in their job and/or their profession, may remind us that whether the selection of informants is intended to be representative or strategic, in qualitative studies the research data very rarely provides a picture of the research field which actually mirrors the field itself. Thus, in a study with a strategic selection of participants, one could for example assume that there easily be a tendency exactly in the direction of

engagement and positive attitude among those who actually agree to take part in a project such as the current one. After all, the researcher has very little to offer: no payment, and not even a trifle fame or glory, since all participants are anonymized in the reports. It is actually all depending on the participants' favour and goodwill, of their chances to spare a bit of time, their energy and enthusiasm.

The final group consisted of seven participants. They all kept a log, in which they accounted for ten Icelandic lessons (fourteen in one case). The contents of these logs are described in "The logs" below.

My knowledge of Icelandic meant that all communication could take place in the informants' own language, which I for several reasons have regarded a substantial advantage. For example, there is the psychological aspect: In the rule, a person will tend to be sympathetic to a foreigner who has actually taken pains to learn his language, probably partly because this effort in itself signalizes a strong interest in the language and the culture it represents, and so indirectly in the person himself as a representative for this culture. I may have profited from such mechanisms when addressing the informants in their own language at all stages. (Already when the teachers were first contacted per e-mail they would suspect my being a foreigner, if not for other reasons, then at least because of my un-Icelandic sounding name.) In addition, there is a practical-psychological aspect: To most people, accounting for complex and partly personal matters in a foreign language is considerably more challenging than doing it in one's mother tongue, which may indeed be demanding enough. In addition, when one knows one's interlocutor's language, one also has access to connotations, (cultural) references etc. associated with central concepts in her discourse, and thus may get a richer material than one would get if the communication had taken place in a different language (cf. Ch. 3.3). Furthermore, there is the advantage of having thorough knowledge of the informants' academic field, Icelandic literature and linguistics. During the interviews, the teachers very soon understood that they could use the language of the initiated, at least with regard to terminology, literary works and the subject matter in general, and so they were to

some extent spared the trouble of adapting to more colloquial language and could narrate and reflect more freely.

Moreover, since I do not simply know the Icelandic language, but also Icelandic as an academic subject, I could talk to my informants on something that resembled equal terms, in understanding with Bourdieu's claim that thorough knowledge of the field one is entering is essential in social researchers' meeting with social agents (Bourdieu, 1999b, the chapter "Understanding"). One might assume that in the view of the participating teachers, my reliability have been strengthened by the fact that they saw that although I was a foreigner who did not even live in Iceland, I all the same understood what they talked about and was familiar with their references. This advantage may even be counted an additional reason for choosing to talk to Icelandic teachers rather than teachers representing another subject.

In spite of all this, I still am and always will be an outsider in some respects. First, I am, after all, no direct colleague or peer, and from the outset I knew little about the teachers' working day; I did indeed not even know the basic structure of their work. I *did* have a basic idea, but did not know the details, which also vary from school to school.

I also am a foreigner, I live abroad and so there is much I do not know about current social conditions, at least not at the detail level, as I do for example not closely follow the news the way I would have done had I been living in Iceland. This may all be disadvantageous in some respects, yet it may also have some advantages with regard to the research process and its results. As a foreigner, a guest, I may be less short-sighted or less disposed to what anthropologists call home-blindness than a native researcher may possibly be prone to. Thus, it is supposable that the outsider's non-native horizon causes her noticing other things than the insider would take note of.

With regard to the interviews, the interviewer's foreignness may have another noticeable implication. The fact that both parties know that the interviewer, who also

is the researcher, is not a compatriot, may affect the relation between her and the interviewees: For various reasons, and in spite of the researcher's generally good will, an informant-researcher relation will in the rule be dominated by the latter, who usually has initiated the relationship in the first place, who has defined the relationship and has an agenda, and who is the party that will directly gain profit by the relationship. In addition, there are socio-psychological elements, tied for example to the informant's and the researcher's social position and status, the respective parties' conduct and manner of speaking etc. (Bourdieu et al., 2007). With regard to all this, the codes may be blurred somehow when the researcher is a foreigner and a non-native speaker. As for speech as such, the interviewee obviously has an advantage both due to his or her native speaker competence and to his or her being a scholar of Icelandic. In addition, there is little danger of a foreign researcher's having a hidden agenda in the direction of controlling or somehow serving national authorities. A best case-interpretation of all this could be that it may reduce the degree of "symbolic violence" in the communicational situations (specifically in the interviews), to phrase it in Bourdieuan terms (Bourdieu et al., 2007, pp. 52-78). If this is the case, there may be reason to trust the researcher's overall impression that the atmosphere of the interviews was characterized by a reasonable degree of openness and trust. On the other hand, foreignness unavoidably implies some degree of distance: the foreigner, even if he lives in the culture or country he studies, will always be different from the native who has always lived in the country; either in being incapable of fully adapting to the new culture, or at least in having a double perspective on the topic of study.

In this particular case, it is for instance possible that I as a foreigner stand less in danger than a fellow-countryman, especially one with a background similar to that of the participants, of being *too* partial and sympathetic towards the teachers. On the other hand, studying the mother tongue subject as an educational (sub-)field requires particular knowledge about the corresponding culture, and as pointed out in Chapter 1.3 it appears to be very unusual that such research is performed by outsiders.

Probably for this reason, and also because of the close connection with the mother tongue subject and the corresponding culture and language, it is also unusual to present such studies in a foreign language. As the present study both is performed by a foreigner and moreover presented in a third language, which is neither that of the field's cultural context, nor the researcher's own, at least within subject didactic (*fachdidaktisch*) research the study stands as unorthodox; it opposes the discipline's conventions and is possibly hitherto unheard of. It is quite possible that this position involves disadvantages I have ignored.

Schools and students

Since the material should be the basis of a case study, and since I moreover wanted a heterogeneous material, I made contact with dissimilar schools. 6 schools are represented in the material. As there are not more than 35 upper secondary schools altogether in Iceland, I realize that I must be very careful with the information I provide about the individual schools to protect the participants' anonymity. So I have limited facts about individual schools. Yet to provide a minimum of formal information may also be considered a matter of the study's reliability, and so I present such a minimum of information in an appendical table (Appendix II).

Another way of presenting the fact that six of the total 35 schools are represented in the study is to say that just above 1/6 of all upper secondary schools in Iceland is represented. As the teachers moreover compare their own school to others they know, there are judgements and statements about ca. 1/3 of the country's secondary schools in the material.

Schools all over the country were contacted, because I wanted schools from various parts of the country, and both from rural and urban areas, to be represented in the material. I distinguish between capital area and non-capital area schools, but due to the aforementioned considerations regarding the participants' anonymity, I do not further specify the individual school's location. Likewise, I in general terms classify the schools as either vocational schools, general studies' schools, or combined

schools (i.e. schools which offer vocational as well as general study programmes), while I refrain from specifying the particular courses offered at each school.

The represented schools cover the entire spectre from old-established schools with rich traditions to younger and more modern ones. This appears to be a matter of consequence. For example, the old-established schools are organized differently from the more modern ones; the time table is different, the classes are organized differently, and so is the teachers' work plan. According to the teachers I have spoken to, this in sum amounts to considerable variation in what might be termed the various schools' particular atmosphere and culture. For instance, the many traditions and annual rituals at the traditional schools represent continuity and students' sense of being part of a fellowship which to some degree includes former students as well as the present ones is generally stronger in the old-established schools than in the younger ones, the teachers say. On the other hand, some younger schools have a reputation for having a more open attitude and for offering a more explorative education than the traditional schools, and, according to the teachers, some students choose these schools for that particular reason.

Seen as a whole, the group of students is ethnically homogenous. In fact, with one single exception, the students the teachers taught were Icelandic. The exception is a European student who came to Iceland three years previously, but who made out so well in Iceland that she decided to stay. Furthermore, one of the schools in the material offer special courses for foreign students, but these courses are generally taught by teachers of foreign languages rather than by Icelandic teachers. Apart from the students at this course, the absence of non-Icelandic students is conspicuous. When asked about it, the teachers have no ready answer to why there are no foreign students in their classes. They claim not to have given the lack of foreign students much thought, maybe because this is nothing new; there have never been many foreign students in the regular programmes in most upper secondary schools in Iceland, and so, to the teachers, the absence of foreign students is the rule rather than

the exception. It moreover seems that this has generally not been regarded an issue of importance in Icelandic secondary education.

While upper secondary education thus is homogeneous with regard to ethnicity, the teachers claim it to be heterogeneous with regard to students' socioeconomic background. This must be correct, since practically all young Icelanders proceed to upper secondary education after having completed the compulsory primary and lower secondary education. This does not mean that there is even distribution of socioeconomic resources among schools, though. Students' socioeconomic background is not deliberately brought up as a specific topic in the interviews by the interviewer, but is brought up and commented on by some of the interviewees, who imply that students' choice of school is influenced by their family's resources and cultural and socioeconomic ambitions.

There are both girls and boys in all the groups/classes, but the gender balance is rather uneven in some groups.

Most of the students have followed normal progression through the educational system, and so are approximately 16 years old in first grade in upper secondary school, yet there are some exceptions from this rule. For example, Agnes and Birgit independently mention that the average age at their school is somewhat above that in most schools. Also, the average age in adult education classes is inherently above that in ordinary classes.

The logs

Each of the teachers kept a log, and each log comprises ten lessons. The teachers chose which lessons they wanted to account for within a specified period. The logs were kept in advance of the interviews and sent to me so that I might read them and get an impression of the respective teachers' practice and reasoning, of the groups or classes they were teaching and the topics they were currently teaching before our meeting.

Before they started their log keeping, the teachers received a guide, which was intended to ensure that the logs would all contain similar information and thus be comparable.

Beside the descriptions of specific lessons, the logs contain key information about the teachers; name, age, education, professional experience, name of the school where they were presently employed, which courses they teach the current term, and information about the classes they teach. Information about the classes included information about the size of the classes, to which study programme the students in the respective classes belonged, and information about students' age, gender and nationality. The teachers were also supposed to specify at which course each of the lessons they described was taught, the didactic aims for each lesson, and their topic(s) and activities of the lesson. Moreover, the teachers were asked to include an evaluation of the lesson in each entry.

The teachers generally relate their motives for choosing as they did when they picked lessons for the logs, and some relate their choice to what might be termed their basic view on education and their educational principles. Such a basic view may for instance be recognized in Birgit's explanation:

When choosing lessons for the log, I attempted to pick lessons as different from each other as possible, and thus lessons which represent different challenges. Since we always teach double lessons (i.e. 80 minutes), I find it of great consequence to use several and varied teaching methods within each lesson. I always split the lessons in different parts and do all I can to activate my students. I try to be brief and I try to let students work on their own, for I do not find extensive teacher explanations gainful. It generally pays far better off to walk about in the classroom and help them. (From the introduction to Birgit's log)

After the formal information follows the actual logs, containing information about each lesson; what was taught, how the lesson was planned and why it was planned exactly in that manner, what activities took place, and how the lesson passed.

Despite the guide, the logs are not uniform. Some are on the scant side, others are abundant. Some are written in the style of a formal account, while others are written in a personal style and contain long reflective passages. As an example of the latter style, I relate an evaluation passage from Daniel's log. In this passage Daniel describes a lesson in the first grade of upper secondary school. In this lesson, some students presented a poem of their own choice. In addition, the teacher handed back a test and prepared the students for an approaching essay on a book of their own choosing. The passage is typical of Daniel's style. As a general comment to the passage, it may be remarked that Daniel is usually more content with his lessons than he is this specific day, also when he thinks the lesson relatively speaking proceeded to his satisfaction:

In many respects the lesson passed as it should. We covered everything we had planned to do. Still, things might have fared better – for several reasons.

Some of the student presentations were unaccomplished. Obviously, some students had not taken the task seriously. Only three of the six who were supposed to present today actually were prepared to do so. A fourth one made an attempt to present his project, but due to technical problems he could not play the music which was part of the presentation. Because of all this, the presentation part of the lesson was somewhat undisciplined. Still, the three who presented their work in fact made good presentations. Particularly one of them was really good. I was very pleased that this presentation came the first day in this series of presentations, since it then may stand as a model for a well prepared presentation.

The students seemed generally tired and inattentive today. These are new students, and in the weekend they all went on the school's annual get-together-trip for new students. Reportedly, there was not much sleeping on the trip, and kids of this age in many cases do not stand the strain of lack of sleep very well. The students were pronouncedly restless and tired almost from the outset.

After the presentations we discussed the books of choice they are about to read and the essays they are subsequently supposed to write. That all worked fairly well, although I find that I easily get carried off, that I go on for too long when I attempt to explain the criteria and formal rules for such exercises. In fact, a

student once remarked in the feed backs I regularly let my students write that it would be just as well to drop those long explanations of how such exercises should be written altogether, but in my experience, when I have tried to follow this piece of advice the criteria have not been met in the completed texts. It should be noted that the student who made this remark the previous term was a top-of-the-line student who never made mistakes in his works. Naturally explanations were superfluous for his part, but others may need them still.

Many students had their face fall as the orthography test was handed out. The results were very poor – only 6 of 21 passed the test. Yet, it appeared that many of them cared little about how poorly they had performed. And the general atmosphere was such that I hardly received a single question to the test or the results. (...) There surely were those who noted corrections and comments, but the majority seemed uninterested and quite resigned. I had to remind one particular student, who in fact had laid down on his desk to rest, that he, like many others, in fact needed to take the consequences of the results. Another student started to pack up his stuff and rise from his desk before the lesson was over, so I likewise had to remind him that I would inform them when it was time to pack up.

All in all I was not sufficiently satisfied with the lesson. I found the majority of the students little cooperative and they took little interest in the exercises and my suggestions to improvement. Still, there were those who paid attention and, as I mentioned, I reckon that the traverse first and foremost was caused by lack of sleep and tiredness. (From Daniel's log)

Although I do not explicitly interpret the logs' formal information, it proved relevant and significant to my understanding of what the teachers said in the interviews. The teachers' accounts for their lessons play a similar role; even if the interviews may seem to be of greater significance than the logs in the interpretations, the logs nevertheless resonate in the interpretation of statements in the interviews. The interviews would quite simply have been interpreted differently had they not been seen in connection to the logs. The logs have thereby to some extent moreover served as touchstones of the reasonability of the interpretations.

The interviews

The interviews may be termed open-ended, qualitative research interviews. They were thoroughly prepared through e-mail correspondence with the interviewees, who for example were informed in advance that the main issue was their own practice as teachers of Icelandic in upper secondary education, although they did not receive specific questions in advance. When the interviews took place, there was a brief introduction where some main topics were suggested, but this rough outline was not followed to the letter in any of the interviews, neither did it cover all the topics which were in actual fact brought up in the interviews. The outline was merely meant to offer the interviewees something to navigate by. The idea was to be candid enough to be fair to the interviewees, and I hoped that such concretization would represent certain predictability. A practical reason for choosing this model was that I assumed that a presentation of a couple of main topics might indicate some direction in the interviews and thus that the interviews might be comparable. I moreover thought that such an indication of central topics would add a sense of predictability to the situation. I thought this would be to the participants' good.

All but two interviews took place at the interviewees' school of employment. The reason for this choice was that I thought it might balance the situation; while I was the one who initiated the interviews and chose the main topic in the first place, the interviewees were the ones who were on home ground and in that respect confident in the actual situation of the interview. Of the two interviews where it was difficult to make such an arrangement, one took place at the university campus where the interviewee was a part time student at the time, the other one at the National Library of Iceland, where a room had been booked for the purpose. This was a joint choice of interviewer and interviewee.

To warm up, all the interviewees were asked to describe their personal understanding of the Icelandic subject and its content, and then we gradually proceeded in the direction of more personal topics, such as their own teaching, their personal

motivation, their personal professional ideas and experiences, and their personal professional development.

The aim was to approach the topics in a manner as open-minded as possible to avoid unduly directive influence from my own views or pre-conceptions, since what I was after was the interviewees' own reflections and attitudes. Concretely, this meant that I as far as possible avoided interruptions, that there was room for silence, reflective pauses and for taking one's time to search for the best wording, and that I tried to affirm interviewees' statements and to make it clear that I understood for example by mhm's or nodding, while still letting them continue to speak. Nevertheless it was sometimes necessary to check whether my spontaneous interpretation of statements were in accordance with what my conversation partner intended to explain.

I attempted to perform the interviews in a fair and honest manner. Furthermore, I found that literature on research interviews recommended that the interviewer should be well prepared before performing a research interviews and be able to "carry a well-informed conversation on the topic", and that she should furthermore be capable of structuring and leading the conversation (Kvale, 1997). According to Kvale, the ideal interviewer should be an open-minded and careful listener, yet also critical and interpretative (cf. also Bourdieu et al., 2007). On the other hand, Kvale remarks, it is impossible to make absolute demands to researchers' interview qualifications. Indeed, sometimes such technical guidelines and criteria actually lose relevance. This particularly tends to happen when the topic has existential meaning, Kvale finds (1997, p. 91). This partly applies to the current study, since self-understanding certainly must count as an existential topic.

Kvale furthermore points out that some interviewees are easier to interview than others. A good interviewee is cooperative and motivated, he explains. He is knowledgeable and eloquent, honest and consistent. He answers the interviewer's question in a concise and precise manner, provides coherent accounts and does not

constantly contradict himself (1997, p. 91). The interviewees in the current study should definitely be credited as such “good interviewees”.

Specifying the course of action; dealing with the empirical material

As mentioned above, the logs were written by the teachers themselves, in accordance with the guidelines they received. The logs served as empirical material as they were literally worded by the teachers. I wanted the teachers’ own emphases and their own formulations, so I did not modify or change their accounts in any way.

The interviews were all recorded and then transcribed. For as Ricœur points out: “In living speech, the instance of discourse has the character of a fleeting event. The event appears and disappears. This is why there is a problem of fixation, of inscription. What we want to fix is what disappears.” (Ricoeur, 1971, p. 531). By recording the interviews, the current discourse, such disappearance was avoided. It has been valuable to be able to return to these “fixated discourses”; in a sense they are replicas of the actual discourses as well as of the situations in which those discourses took place. They are verbatim, and, since I can actually hear the speakers, their intonation etc. the atmosphere of then may easily be felt. However, the records were impractical in the phase of in-depth interpretation when I constantly had to go forth and back in the material, so I needed to transcribe the interviews, well aware that certain things would thereby go lost. As Ricœur remarks, when discourse is written down, it is “not the event of speaking, but the “said” of speaking”, that is fixed. “It is the meaning of the speech event, not the event as event.” (1971, p. 532). The general atmosphere, the speaker’s prosodic changes, e.g. changes in intonation or delivery – these elements cannot as such be fixed in writing. Still, I could always return to the recordings if I wanted to check some of this. Which I occasionally did.

While in some research projects transcription of interviews is done by an assistant, I chose to transcribe the interviews myself because I considered that a chance to get to know the interviews intimately, since transcribing oral texts is a meticulous process. One never transcribes at high speed, and sometimes one has to listen to a passage

time and time again to be sure that one gets everything right. So I found that although doing this myself certainly would cost me a considerable amount of time, I would on the other hand really know the interviews from the inside after having transcribed them, and I regarded this an obvious advantage.

It has moreover been necessary to translate parts of the material, either in English or Norwegian, for example on occasions of presentation. This, too, proved profitable. As is generally the case in translation, when translating the material, I needed to reflect on phrases and formulations which I had not in all cases taken particular notice of in the first phase in which I listened, read, and wrote monolingually. This was particularly the case with ambiguous or metaphorical words and phrases, and in fact, sometimes the detour via the second language led me to notice secondary meanings and connotations I at first had failed to see. The challenges which occurred in relation to the translations moreover reminded me that translation and indeed even transcription may hardly be regarded objective deeds; although one aims at reproducing what has been said absolutely precisely and accurately, translation and transcriptions are still acts of interpretation.

The transcripts are verbatim. I also note some extraverbal features in the discourse, such as distinct pauses, laughter, or sighs. However, since this is not a micro level conversation analysis, I do not measure these extraverbal features very minutely, and not all extraverbal features are noted. At later stages I have moreover sometimes made minor adaptations of quotations. I have for instance sometimes left pauses or hesitations out where I have thought that this would in fact give a more correct impression of the situation or the interviewee's narrative. In running text, marking of elements specifically belonging to oral discourse may disturb the reading and the reader's impression of the speaker as well as of the text, and so, leaving these elements out may sometimes in fact give a more accurate picture of the situation and the speaker than including them would.

The next stage of interpretation corresponds to what Ricoeur calls “critical interpretation”, as opposed to the preceding “naïve interpretation” (Ricoeur, 1971, p. 557). At this stage, I studied the individual texts in depth. Although I knew particularly the interviews very well after having transcribed them, I reread the texts closely several times. In doing so, I particularly looked for topics which seemed to particularly preoccupy the interviewees. Indicators of this could be that they were topics the teachers explained in more detail than others, topics they reflected more on than others, or topics to which they returned several times. In addition, I looked for topical lacunas and discrepancies. Were there themes which I would have expected the teachers to bring up which in fact were conspicuous only by their absence, and were there emphasizes and views which were incongruous with my presuppositions? There were indeed, as I will account for in chapters 6 and 7.

Next, I read the material crosswise; I compared each teacher’s oral account with the written one, and I compared teachers to each other. By then I was able to formulate a set of tentative themes in the material. These were studied in the next phase. I could not follow them all up, though, and had to make a selection. I choose to pursue some of the most conspicuous ones, such as the teachers heavy emphasizing of teaching rather than for example of academic knowledge, while also dwelling on some of the lacunas, such as the lack of stories about (specific) students. The results of this exploration are presented in chapters 6 and 7.

Methodicalness and systematicity is a prerequisite in any research project. This does not merely relate to transparency and reliability, but even to the projects’ feasibility. For instance, in an empirical study, one needs to approach the empirical material *somehow*. This *somehow* is the researcher’s method, usually dependent on the work’s theoretical orientation. As for the current project, it has been stated that it epistemologically benefits from Charles Taylor’s thinking, specifically from his hermeneutics. Once the choice to approach the project’s empirical material hermeneutically was made (cf. Ch. 2.1), it became clear that this entrenchment would affect my way of dealing with the material, and so the project’s course of action. It is

my stand as a hermeneutically oriented researcher that while it is necessary to proceed methodically also while doing projects which have their foundation in hermeneutics, systematicity does not suffice to yield perspicacious and discerning interpretations of meaningful entities, such as individual agents' actions and utterances, hence the current study's insisting on contextualization.

To be able to answer the research question from a hermeneutical point of view, i.e. to be able to account for (some) Icelandic mother tongue teachers in upper secondary school's conceptions of the subject they teach, for what implications they attribute to the professional management of this subject, for how they talk about their work, and for their occupational self-understanding, I needed to listen to the agents' own stories about all of this. Although listening and making sense of what one hears is in itself an interpretative act, and so intimately related to hermeneutics, agents' perspective is central also in other traditions. However, part of the present project's aim has been to understand what lies behind and has shaped these conceptions. This goes beyond the individual and her personal experiences and accounts, and thereby is an objective which disagrees with traditions where it is considered sufficient and desirable to limit the academic exploration to the agent and her perspective. In the present study, both Taylor's hermeneutics and reflexive sociology stand as traditions which support and inspire the described approach.

Approaching topics such as (social) phenomena's underlying causes and formative conditions has at least three methodological implications, all congruent with or even derived from hermeneutical reasoning. First, it requires that one goes beyond the agent's descriptions and asks how his accounts may be interpreted. By interpretation, I mean to approach meaningful entities, such as agents' accounts or actions, in a considerate manner, attempting to understand and clarify them, or, as Taylor phrases it, to make "an attempt to make clear, to make sense of, an object of study" (Taylor, 1985, p. 15). Second, it requires that one relates the agent's account to its social, cultural, and historical circumstances. "[S]ocial scientists must take culture seriously: they should treat this as an irreducible feature of human life and indispensable facet

of their inquiry,” Ruth Abbey writes in her account of Taylor’s views on the human sciences (Abbey, 2000, pp. 160-161). In Chapter 3 this is referred to as contextualization of the empirical material. The third implication is that while doing her outmost to understand, the hermeneutic researcher should still interpret her material critically; it is for example Taylor’s view that although man is essentially a “self-interpreting subject” (Taylor, 1985, p. 4), and although his self-interpretation is constitutive of who he is, how he acts, and how he feels (Taylor, 1985, p. 202), it still happens that individuals’ self-interpretations and self-accounts are incorrect. In her work, the researcher must be aware of this possibility. She must also be aware that albeit erroneous, such self-accounts may still be in agreement with how the agent actually understands himself. In other words, when working hermeneutically, one may not always take statements at face value.

The last point leads me to a final remark on this issue. When working hermeneutically, one will never arrive at “ultimate, definite knowledge” of one’s subject (Abbey, 2000, p. 159). For as I will more thoroughly explain in Chapter 3, it is a hermeneutic conviction that humans can never be fully or finally understood (Taylor, 1985, p. 3), for example “because individuals’ self-understanding change, so any understanding of them is necessarily temporary and provisional” (Abbey, 2000, p. 159). One should still strive for what Taylor terms the best account (Taylor, 1989, p. 58) of the entity one is trying to understand. This requires dialogicity with regard to the study object on the researcher’s behalf. Besides, it is necessary to approach this subject from several angles; Ricoeur compares this to viewing for example a cube from different sides (Ricoeur, 1971, pp. 344-345), cf. the change of perspective in the interpretation chapters “Teaching as a primary category” (Chapter 6) and “The teachers and their professional self” (Chapter 7) in the current study.

Since interpretation of meaningful entities can never be final, even a skilful interpretation will always be uncertain and open-ended. Thus, it can also not be proved, Ricoeur explains. Due to the nature of the study object (meaningful entities), any interpretation will be characterized by uncertainty and qualitative probability

(Ricoeur, 1971, p. 349). Therefore, what one may humbly aim for is not the ultimate truth, but merely that one's *mise au point* be interpretatively plausible (Abbey, 2000, p. 155; Taylor, 1985, p. 7) and make sense. "Sense" here should be understood in the meaning explained by Taylor when he writes that "in identifying the contradictions, confusions, etc., we make sense of what they did. And this means that we come to see how as *agents* – i.e. beings who act, have purposes, desires - they came to do what they did, and to bring about what befell." (Taylor, 1985, p. 117).

This is what I have tried to do.

2.3 Presentation of the teachers

The following presentations are intended to do the participating teachers some justice; I thought that each of them should be presented as a real person, if only rather sketchy, as simply letting the participants appear in more or less disconnected quotations in the thematic interpretations would be unfair, maybe even verging upon the dishonest. Also, I hope that the presentations may support the interpretations and increase their credibility. However, portraying real persons in such a small group as Icelandic teachers in upper secondary school in Iceland mounts up to is not without difficulties. Using pseudonyms is far from sufficient protection of the teachers' anonymity, so I must go further to protect them as far as possible. In practice, this has implied holding back what I have judged to be easily identifiable biographical facts. Admittedly, I have not followed this principle consequently, for in this context even age and teaching experience may suffice to identify informants, but I have attempted to be cautious. The cost of following this thumb rule is that relevant information may be lacking in the presentations. In addition, there is a danger that the presentations because of this lack are more indistinct and less characteristic than they should rightly have been, and so do the teachers less justice than was my intention. Also, there is a danger that such excluded information still plays a part in the interpretation; it is inevitably part of what I as a researcher have seen and heard, and so part of my

horizon of understanding. Having made these reservations, I still hope that the presentations may be useful.

There are both significant differences and similarities between the teachers. Generally speaking, the differences apply to practical didactic action and didactic strategies, while the most marked similarities tend to relate to professional ideals and learning theory. The latter is particularly noteworthy, first because each informant presented their professional approach as a result of her personal professional development, not as something the profession as such shares, and second because the informants actually were recruited with a view to heterogeneity. When there in spite of this is a relatively high degree of concurrence in the material, this may indicate that the professional development perceived as an individual experience by the teachers in fact may be considered a collective-individual way of experiencing professional life in upper secondary school. I return to these ponderings in the interpretative chapters and in the thesis' conclusion.

The pseudonyms of the participating teachers are Agnes, Birgit, Daniel, Elín, Fjóla, Hannes, and Jórunn.

Agnes

Agnes is an experienced teacher. She is in her late fifties and she has been teaching for almost two decades. Although she did not start working as a teacher until she was forty years old, Agnes thinks she somehow has nevertheless been in this line from girlhood; as a Girl Guider, while working in kindergarten and elsewhere.

Agnes has been employed at the same school, which is in the present context simply called School 1, all her career. This school is a relatively large school, located in the capital area. Lately, Agnes has been teaching the relatively new subject “life skills”, in addition to Icelandic. According to several of the informants, “life skills” is a subject which does not correspond to any particular university study. However, it is

regarded to overlap with Icelandic, and so it is frequently taught by Icelandic teachers.

School 1 offers both vocational and general studies, but is often thought of as a vocational school by the general public. The school is organized by what has in the present been termed the course model. There are six Icelandic teachers at School 1. The school also offers adult education, and Agnes did actually attend courses in the adult education herself many years ago. These courses were her ticket to university studies. At university, Agnes studied Icelandic and then she took a teacher training course at the university college, the present Faculty of Education at the University of Iceland. However, she considers the latter part of her education, i.e. the teacher training course, as having been rather insufficient. For example, she recalls that the practical training consisted of six lessons, from which her practice supervisor, the class' regular teacher, was entirely absent. "He simply went to the staff room and had some coffee," Agnes recalls. "And I was all left to myself every single lesson."

The reason why Agnes signed up for adult education was that she wanted to retrain and therefore needed a university admissions certification. Agnes was initially trained as a preschool teacher and worked in kindergarten for several years. However, she says, when her own children were small, it simply was too much to take lovingly care of other people's children all day, and then go home and meet with the same demands and needs there. "I felt as if I had nothing left for my own children," she says. The solution, as Agnes saw it, was to retrain. She wanted a job without too much emotional involvement, and envisioned a job within information technology, for example. But Agnes lacked a general certificate from secondary education required to get admission to university, so she had to attend some courses in the general studies programme at upper secondary school level before applying for higher education.

Little by little, Agnes realized that she was not the "computer type", as she phrases it, and that her interests were in the direction of the "human" after all. She wanted to be

surrounded by people rather than machines, she explains. So she left the IT idea in favour of studies in Icelandic; a subject she had loved as a student in the adult education programme.

When she was in her last year at university, Agnes coincidentally ran into her former Icelandic teacher at the super market. This encounter resulted in a job offer for Agnes at School 1. Agnes enthusiastically accepted the offer and has kept this job since then. Yet, she has also for six years held a part time job at the university's teacher training course where she has been teaching Icelandic didactics and followed up students in their practical training. Agnes regards this side-line a source of very valuable experience, and she believes that this experience has had considerable impact on her personal professional reasoning. She is also convinced that it has strengthened her interest in didactic matters.

Over the years, Agnes has developed what she terms "courage" and a professional confidence based on both academic and socio-pedagogic elements, she explains, and she declares that in sum, she is very satisfied at work. She has never regretted her choice, and even if she sometimes finds it a little burdening to read and correct endless piles of pupils' papers and tests, and although she rues what she regards a general underestimation of the educational professions, she asserts that she cannot imagine any better occupation than teaching.

Birgit

Birgit is just above forty years old. She is as experienced as Agnes, and most of the time she has been teaching at School 1. Birgit's stories bear witness to a pragmatic, no-nonsense approach to her job, and, judging from her classroom stories, she seems to be a distinct and predictable teacher. Yet, when Birgit at a point seems to feel that her account is about to get *too* down to earth and prosaic, she assures me that she is not merely a pragmatic, but also a scholar of Icelandic, and as such definitely have certain standards.

After having completed upper secondary school, Birgit directly started her university studies. At university she got to know Agnes, and this acquaintance came to mean a lot to Birgit, particularly in their first years as fellow teachers. The two of them were fellow students throughout their university studies, and so it was only after graduation that their roads parted for a while. While Agnes started teaching at School 1 right away, Birgit got a position as a teacher in the countryside which she held for one year. The school where she was first employed was organized as a class school, not a course model school as the school where she currently teaches, and so Birgit has experience from both main models (see Chapter 5, “Teaching in Iceland” for explanation of the organization of Icelandic upper secondary education). Birgit claims to prefer the course model because there are fewer disciplinary challenges in groups where the pupils do not know each other as well as they do in traditional classes.

About her year in the country, Birgit says that her primary motivation for leaving the city was that it was far easier for a graduate teacher to get a job in the countryside than in the capital: “In those days it was not easy for a young and inexperienced teacher to get a position in the capital area, you see,” she explains. However, when Agnes tipped her about a vacancy at School 1, Birgit’s own old school, she instantly applied for the position – and got it. Like Agnes, she has remained at School 1 since then, and she declares to be really happy to work there. Like Agnes, Birgit used to teach Icelandic exclusively, yet these days she too also teaches life skills.

Birgit has completed all compulsory courses in the master programme in Icelandic, but she has not as yet completed her master thesis, and nowadays she rather doubts that she will ever do that. Her interests have taken a different course, she admits. She does not really longer see the point in investing masses of work in a thesis on “some old fellows and their poetry”, as she expresses it. She would much rather learn more about learning and didactics if she gets the chance to take further education, for example if she should be granted a partly paid sabbatical, to which senior teachers are more or less entitled.

During many years, Birgit has been a very active member of the Icelandic Teachers' Union, specifically of the subdivision for mother tongue teachers. She has represented the union in several national committees, for example one which has been working on the revision of the national curriculum in Icelandic, and she has taken part in international cooperation and attended international courses in mother tongue education, particularly within the Nordic countries. This work has been beneficial and very educational, Birgit finds.

Daniel

Daniel is around thirty years old. Although less experienced than Birgit and Agnes, Daniel has sufficient experience to feel at ease in the classroom. Daniel teaches at School 2, a school in the capital area which mostly offers general studies. As distinct from some of the traditionally oriented general studies schools, School 2 is known as more modern, maybe even as a bit experimentally oriented, even if the latter may be less the case today than it used to be a couple of decades ago. Daniel recalls how the School 2 also in his own school days had a reputation for alternative pedagogy. Like School 1, School 2 is organized as a course model school.

Like Birgit and Agnes, Daniel is currently a teacher at the school where he once used to be a pupil, a fact he finds it worth making a point of and which somehow pleases him, just as it pleases Birgit and Agnes to be working at *their* old school. Daniel feels that he as a teacher benefits from his experiences from his own school days, among other things with regard to untraditional pedagogy.

On the threshold of his university studies, Daniel was uncertain of what to study. He is interested in languages, and so considered foreign languages. However, he also loves to read, and therefore he also considered literary studies. In addition Daniel has a passion for other branches within the aesthetic field, and so he believes that he would also have enjoyed studies which some way or other included these. "In the end, I simply had to make a choice," Daniel explains. "And as I was interested in so many languages, I thought that I could just as well start by studying my own and see

how things developed. And so I signed up for Icelandic.” The Icelandic studies included thorough literary studies too, and so Daniel was quite satisfied with his choice, and found that by choosing thus, he really had it both ways.

Daniel started teaching already in his student years. It is not clear whether his stated very genuine interest in teaching developed as a result of this or whether it is the other way around: that he contacted School 2 and offered his services as stand-in teacher because he already knew that he wanted to become a teacher. Anyway, Daniel says, when he meets his old class mates, they sometimes talk about how he, Daniel, used to joke about returning to his old school as a teacher, and his old mates find it very amusing that this proved to be what he in fact chose to do, Daniel states.

After having graduated as a BA in Icelandic, Daniel proceeded to master studies. However, at this point he chose to turn to the field of education rather than going further into Icelandic philology, and so he wrote a thesis in subject didactics and graduated with a M.Ed. degree. This shift of focus implied that Daniel moved from the faculty of arts to the faculty of education, and so as a post-graduate student he received impulses and was trained within traditions different from those he got to know as an undergraduate. Daniel thinks that this may well have stimulated his interests in the craft of teaching and in didactics, which he claims to be what really interests him these days. As part of this, Daniel expresses a desire to be in continuous development, and therefore he has already been a teaching practice supervisor several times. In addition, he is constantly on the outlook for new didactic ideas and has even more or less developed his own didactic model, which is in the present context termed “the station model”.

Somehow, it is not entirely surprising to discover that Daniel has more or less developed his own teaching model. Daniel’s work as a teacher appears as energetic, systematic and thorough. This is for example demonstrated in Daniel’s log, which is very orderly and easy to follow, and which is far more ample than the other logs.

Similarly, the extensive routines he has developed in his work (for handing in home work, for feed-back, for activities etc.) bear witness to distinctive meticulousness.

Daniel expresses open-mindedness, particularly with regard to the subject matter and to educational methods. Apparently in agreement with this, Daniel is the only informant who distances himself from the Icelandic subject's traditional and still very strong values connected to national sentiments (a phrase all the participants use; apparently with complete naturalness and without any need for problematizing it) and cultural heritage. "I prefer to teach the texts simply as high quality literature," Daniel declares. Although Daniel to a certain degree contradicts himself and quite clearly have not really entirely freed himself of the Icelandic subject's strong traditions, it is still of consequence that Daniel in his self-presentation takes a stand at a fair distance from these traditions.

Elín

Elín is yet another experienced teacher. She is in her early fifties. In the interview, Elín's opinions are stated in a low voice but with clarity and determination, particularly regarding her ambitions on her pupils' behalf.

Whereas the group as a whole appears to have high professional ethical standards, Elín is the only one who explicitly declares to have a deep emotional involvement in her job and in her pupils' academic achievements as well as their welfare. She for example claims to rejoice whenever someone has achieved a personal victory, and to "feel very sad" when she does not succeed in motivating pupils so that they at least make an effort to do something about their own life and their own future.

Currently, Elín teaches at School 3, which is located in the countryside. It is a relatively large school which offers a wide range of study programmes. "All the kids in the area attend this school," Elín explains. "For there is no other. So we have all kinds of students here, poor and good." School 3 is a course model school.

Elín has been teaching at School 3 for some years now, but she has also been a primary and lower secondary school teacher. Before that, she for many years ran her own business. She was very young when she established her business; still she asserts to have managed it well, even if she did not always find it easy to be both a business-woman and a young mother, she explains.

In her student years, Elín had a broad sphere of interest. She attended a wide range of courses at the faculty of arts, and she was very active in the students' theatre. She claims that what she has ever learned about responsibility, about taking action, and about creativity, she learned at the theatre. "I got the chance to be creative, which meant a lot to me, as it still does," Elín declares. She claims creativity to be a resource she frequently makes use of in her teaching, and a resource she eagerly attempts to stimulate in her pupils.

Having grown up in the capital area, Elín nevertheless wanted to live in the countryside, and that was the reason why she many years ago took her young son with her and started teaching in primary school. She still likes it in the country; yet she somehow thinks of herself as an in-between-person; after all these years she still sees the disadvantages of small societies better than the locals who have never lived elsewhere, she thinks. On the other hand, she has stayed in contact with her friends in town, and so feels both closeness and some distance to life there, too.

In primary school Elín used to teach all kinds of subjects, whereas she teaches exclusively Icelandic and life skills in upper secondary school. Moreover, Elín has resumed her studies and intends to complete her master degree in Icelandic. She plans to write a subject didactically oriented master thesis, and so she falls into line with almost all the other teachers in the group, displaying didactic interests as more prominent than those directed towards Icelandic as an academic field.

Fjóla

Fjóla is scarcely 30 years old, and so the study's youngest participant. Fjóla holds a BA in Icelandic. Moreover, she has completed the teacher training programme and is currently doing a M.Ed. part time. She lives and teaches in a town relatively far from Reykjavik, to which she moved with her young son some time ago. Before that, Fjóla taught at a vocational school in the capital area. Her school, School 4, is a traditional class model school.

Fjóla describes herself as a self-disciplined, attentive, open-minded, curious and interested person. "I'm a social person," she says. "I'm very prone to cooperation with other people, I get well on with anybody and I'm usually open to trying something new."

Fjóla grew up in a small town, far from the town where she currently lives. Among other things, this means that Fjóla has a kind of outsider perspective, she finds, both on the town in which she lives and on her working place. Actually, this is frequently regarded an asset at the school, Fjóla thinks. For she is often asked what *she*, the newcomer, thinks about this and that; conditions which have been the same for ages at her school, rich in traditions as it proudly is. In Fjóla's view, this demonstrates the general atmosphere at School 4, which moreover is the school where most interest is taken in curricular development and similar subject specific topics.

As a part time student, Fjóla has to commute to Reykjavik to attend lectures and seminars. She finds this to be quite demanding, since she is at the same time both working full time as a teacher and taking care of her boy. Yet, she finds it all worthwhile. Fjóla claims to take great pleasure in her studies, which also inspire her own teaching.

Initially, Fjóla was not sure that she wanted to become a teacher. She considered other alternatives, such as journalism, and these are alternatives which had followed her from childhood, when she used to dream of becoming a teacher, a journalist, or a

writer. Fjóra is still not sure of what she wants to do. In fact, even if she declares that she loves her work, she is not at all certain that she will remain a teacher. One obvious reason for this uncertainty is simply her age, as she herself points out; for Fjóra, most of her working life lies ahead of her, and Fjóra feels she has plenty of time. One never knows what the future will bring, Fjóra says, and, open-minded as she claims to be, she realizes that hitherto unknown possibilities may wait just around the corner. Nevertheless, her plans point in the direction of some part of the educational field. Otherwise she would hardly have been working on an M.Ed. However, she does not necessarily have to teach, Fjóra says. She imagines that she may just as well choose a position for example in the realm of civil service dealing with educational tasks.

Hannes

Hannes holds a part-time position as a supply teacher at a school in the countryside. He is also engaged in projects in the capital, if not as a teacher. He lives in Reykjavik and commutes to the school where he teaches; School 5. Like School 4, School 5 is a class model school.

Hannes is fifty-odd years old. He is a family man, but his children are grown. Hannes acts and talks with self-confidence, as though he is used to knowing, and even to knowing better than most people in his surroundings – a claim he in fact explicitly lodges on a couple of occasions in the interview. During his entire adult life, Hannes has somehow been in charge of something, be it teaching in a classroom or management of a business.

Hannes took his first teaching job at the age of 20. It was a bit odd, he now finds, to be responsible for the education of pupils who were practically his peers. The fact that he was prepared to take on this responsibility at such young age, may in itself speak for Hannes' confidence. One face of self-confidence may be that of a know-all, and it is perhaps no coincidence that Hannes is the only one among the interviewees who on one occasion corrects a grammar mistake on my behalf. On the other hand,

Hannes' self-consciousness is also relaxed. There does not seem to be much he feels any need to convince me or himself of; Hannes appears to know who he is and on which grounds he stands, and he seems to stand firmly on those grounds. Judging from what I learn about him, Hannes is a predictable and stable, if also somewhat conservative teacher. There is little of the innovativeness and experiments the others find so important in Hannes' classroom.

Hannes' work has been connected to the field of education, but, for the sake of anonymity, his work cannot be further specified. Hannes is moreover by far the best educated teacher within the group. In his youth he received a scholarship, which permitted him to spend several years abroad as a research fellow. Thus, Hannes earned a PhD degree in the field he studied abroad. In addition to this, Hannes holds a MA degree in Icelandic, and he has studied a foreign language. A couple of years ago, Hannes decided to finally attend the teacher training programme and so, at an age of about 50 Hannes eventually formally became a qualified teachers. "It was... well, interesting, this teacher training," he vaguely remarks.

Even if most of Hannes' career has been spent outside the classroom, his teaching experience is very broad. First, he started teaching at very young age and consequently has teaching experience which stretches more than 30 years back in time. That is almost twice as long as any of the other teachers. Second, he has been teaching at many different schools, both within and outside the capital area; of which some are traditional general study schools, while others are vocational schools. None of the other teachers has experiences which compares to that either. Finally, Hannes has through his work got a large network within the sector of education. All in all, this provides Hannes with a very broad experience and an unusually good overview over higher secondary education in Iceland, included education in Icelandic. It seems as though Hannes actively makes use of his varied experiences as a professional teacher; both when accounting for his everyday work in the classroom and when talking about the subject in more general terms, Hannes frequently illustrates his points by giving contrasting examples, for example from city and countryside, then

and now, prestigious and less prestigious schools, and well-educated and less educated teachers.

Jórunn

Jórunn is an experienced teacher of 50. She works at School 6, a medium size school on the outskirts of Reykjavik. The school offers mainly general studies and is basically a class model school. Jórunn has been employed at School 6 since she started teaching, and although Hannes is the most experienced if one looks to the span of time or the number of schools of his experience, Jórunn is nevertheless the one who has spent most time in a classroom. For like Hannes, Jórunn started teaching at a young age, but unlike him, she has been working as a teacher almost all her grown life.

Jórunn holds a master degree in Icelandic and has also attended the teacher training programme. Like Agnes, Birgit and Daniel, Jórunn has been teaching at the same school all along, and like them, she was once a student at the school where she currently teaches. She commenced teaching once she had finished her BA, but a couple of years later she was on leave for several years because she followed her husband, who then held a position at a foreign university, abroad. In these years, Jórunn's children were born, and she was busy being a mother, in addition to writing her master thesis. This thesis was published and could have been Jórunn's ticket to a career in academia, which really was considered the obvious thing to do in those days if you had completed a master degree, according to Jórunn. Jórunn reasons that by writing and publishing her thesis she had shown the world and herself that a career within academia was within reach. However, her interests lay elsewhere, she says. They lay in teaching, and so she chose to go back to teaching. Also, she already held a permanent position at School 6, whereas an academic career was far more uncertain. As she was a mother of young children, such factors doubtless played a part too, Jórunn remarks.

In the interview, Jórunn is attentive and cheerful. Still, she asserts to have reached a “critical point” of sorts in her career and that she is less content than she used to be. Jórunn returns to this topic on several occasions in the interview. She has been used to finding her work both meaningful and worthwhile, and she does not fully understand what this crisis is all about: “Maybe I’m getting to old. Maybe I’ve been doing this for too long,” she says, without being convinced that this is a fulfilling explanation. For she still earnestly believes that teaching Icelandic is a most necessary task and that being a teacher is a very important job. This is stressed several times in the interview. Yet Jórunn wonders if she somehow feels that there is nothing left to try and to discover for her personally. For she has “tried virtually everything” at her school, Jórunn claims, meaning that she has been teaching at all levels, she has been and still is part of the school’s administrative staff, and she has been through several administrative reforms and other changes. Over the past few years Jórunn has even taken part in a local action research project, set up to offer staff members an opportunity of personal professional development for their own and their pupils’ benefit. Even if Jórunn has enjoyed this project very much and found it rewarding, it has not sufficed to neutralize the sense of personal professional crisis.

Jórunn talks about changes; about how society is changing, how the Icelandic tongue is changing, how pupils are changing, and specifically how her school has changed from she spent her own schooldays there. The latter is not a matter of formal changes, but rather a question of who attends it. In Jórunn’s youth upper secondary school was still not quasi compulsory as it has in reality later become. Also, directions for admission to upper secondary school are occasionally changed; while everything for a while depended on pupils’ marks from lower secondary school, currently a quota is reserved pupils from the schools’ neighbourhood. Consequently, in the case of School 6, the average student nowadays has poorer results from lower secondary school and lower academic ambitions than was the case some years ago, according to Jórunn. Consequently, teachers’ challenges have changed too, although their tasks

and aims in principle remain the same. Furthermore, more changes are at hand in upper secondary education, and nobody knows what consequences they may induce.

One may wonder if Jórunn's personal professional uneasiness is connected to these changes; to experiencing that her job is not quite what it used to be anymore, although it has *principally* not changed. In how far do the changes affect her as a scholar and teacher of Icelandic and her values as such? Is her professional development in agreement with her own standards? Jórunn approaches such questions, if very carefully. For example, it is quite clear that she is reluctant to some of the changes at hand, organizational and other, yet she restricts herself and do not criticize them directly. Jórunn divides her time between teaching and administrative tasks, and it is as though she alternates between the role of teacher and that of administrator in the interview. When she talks about the subject, classroom activities etc. it is clearly teacher Jórunn who speaks, whereas she sounds a bit more like an administrator when talking about structures and institutional changes.

3. Theoretical perspectives

3.1 A hermeneutical approach

The Greek word *theoria* originally means (theoretical) consideration, view, intellectual knowledge of a specific topic (Aristotle, 1999, p. 233; Nielsen, 1998, p. 101). Facing a task such as the present project presents, i.e. an exploration of views and reasoning of upper secondary school teachers regarding their subject and their professionalism, several considerations are required and different theoretical considerations stand as feasible frameworks for the study. However, after having considered various approaches to the interpretation of the empirical material as described in Chapter 2, I found that among the options at hand, hermeneutics stood as the most adequate option, and so hermeneutics is the prospective of the interpretation and the spectacles through which the data have been seen. A main reason why I found hermeneutics particularly fit for the purpose is that, as my task actually was to interpret already existing interpretations (of individuals' practices, self-concepts etc.), I needed to explicate and reflect on implications and possible dilemmas connected to such a task. Such reflections are inherent in the hermeneutic tradition. However, hermeneutics is a wide term with deep roots in various strands of academic history. In the present chapter I will outline the particular hermeneutic tradition with which this dissertation aligns itself. At this, I particularly emphasize the philosophical framework offered by Charles Taylor (1931-).

The following presentation is limited to a brief review of the two of its main themes I have found most relevant in the present context; Taylor's anthropology and his claim that hermeneutics be an adequate and advantageous approach in the sciences of man. While the former has influenced the basis of the present work's study of the informants' self-understanding, the latter offers an account of the appropriateness of choosing a hermeneutic approach in an empirical-theoretical study like the present one.

3.2 Charles Taylor's anthropological theory of self-interpreting animals as an epistemological stand

Taylor regards the human condition essentially interpretative (Abbey, 2000, p. 58; Taylor, 1971; 1985, p. 4). However, before I take a closer look at Taylor's account of man as a self-interpreting animal, a brief clarification of his view on the anthropological basic entity, man, is required.

Man, in Taylor's view, is a being with the sense of having a self. This sense consists of several components, of which Taylor particularly emphasises articulation, morality and meaningfulness, thoroughly studied for example in his book *Sources of the Self* (1989). Following from this is Taylor's claim that man is a self-interpreting animal (Taylor, 1985, pp. 45-76), a thesis which in Nicholas Smith's view presupposes a more fundamental one; "that human existence is expressive of and constituted by meanings shaped by self-interpretations" (Smith, 2004, p. 31). Thus, the inescapable self-interpretation relates to our sense-making. However, our sense of self is not static. On the contrary, "[m]y sense of myself is of a being who is growing and becoming" (Taylor, 1989, p. 50), and so in constant development, and thus it constantly needs to be re-interpreted.

Taylor proposes two prerequisites for self-interpretation; articulation and narrative, and he believes that human beings interpret their lives in narrative terms. To interpret our lives as an unfolding story is regarded a means to ascribe meaning to the past and direction to the future (Abbey, 2000, pp. 38-39; Taylor, 1989, pp. 47, 50-52). This means that as self-interpreters we are also self-narrators (Smith, 2004, p. 44). For, according to Kenneth Baynes explanation of Taylor's view, to be a self or a social agent "an individual must locate herself and her action within a larger narrative context; and at least part of what it means to be a self or agent is to engage in (implicit or explicit) acts of self-interpretation and/or "account-giving" (Baynes,

2010, p. 449).¹⁵ Since our understanding of ourselves thus is regarded constitutive of who we are (Fossland & Grimen, 2001, p. 65), much may be learned about individuals' self-understanding and in fact also about who they actually are by studying their narratives about themselves. In other words; from a Taylorian point of view, auto-narratives are important and highly relevant to understanding individuals as well as the nature of the human condition. So, Baynes finds: "Taylor's thesis that we are 'self-interpreting animals' focuses on what has been called the autobiographical self (...) Further, Taylor need not (and indeed cannot) insist on drawing a very sharp distinction between the (autobiographical) self and a self-concept." (Baynes, 2010, p. 450)

In Taylor's own words, "[s]elf-understanding is constitutive of what we are, what we do, what we feel. Understanding ourselves as agents is not in the first place a theory; it is an essential part of our practice. It is inescapably involved in our functioning as human beings" (Taylor, 1985, p. 202), and thus: "To ask what a person is, in abstraction from his or her self-interpretations, is to ask a fundamentally misguided question, one to which there couldn't in principle be an answer" (Taylor, 1989, p. 34). On the other hand, an agent's sense of who he is also is fundamentally dependent on his surroundings; on the dominating ideas in his time and his culture, as well as on other people's views and direct response to him, his actions and utterances (Taylor, 1985). Man may thus be regarded a social animal (*zoon politikon*) and therefore context matters also when we deal with individuals and try to understand them.

It follows from these anthropological reflections that the human sciences in dealing with human expressions of various kinds inevitably deal with interpretations. Since the aim of a research project such as the current one consequently may be defined as to interpret further the already interpreted, one could claim the perspective to be a

¹⁵ Cf. also Appendix VI with regard to the term "agent".

double hermeneutic one (Giddens, 1984b), which in Taylor's account would be the nature of interpretative research at large (Nyeng, 2000, p. 41; Taylor, 1971).

Taylor furthermore argues that not just disciplines which are traditionally associated with hermeneutics, such as law, theology and philology, but also the sciences of man, i.e. sciences which study human action and social life, are fundamentally hermeneutic because they by virtue of studying human action and human utterances are dealing with fundamentally meaningful entities, such as feelings, motivations, judgments, values, opinions, conceptions and personal experiences, and any meaningful entity is by definition prone to interpretation, expressed verbally or in action (Fossland & Grimen, 2001, pp. 173-175; Læg Reid & Skorgen, 2006, p. 321; Taylor, 1971). Furthermore, it should be remembered that no such expressions manifest themselves in a vacuum, but enter into specific socio-cultural and temporal-historical contexts, which we also need take into account in order to understand the individual utterance or action. As Ruth Abbey reads Taylor's *Philosophical Papers I*, it is Taylor's claim that "while the fact of self-interpretation is a permanent or ontological aspect of human identity, the content of self-interpretation varies across cultures and historical epochs" (Abbey, 2000, p. 66). Similarly, the social scientist Sascha Maicher finds Taylor's position to be that

Meaning and significance is the product of inter-subjective dialogue and relations in a society. And when one appeals to meanings and significance one is using the constructs of one's society. Taylor considers these sources to be relative to the society and periods in history in which they are instantiated.

Taylor suggests that cultural contexts provide the framework for other individuals to understand and recognize important aspects of one's own character (...).
(Maicher, 2008, p. 59)

In the present work, the socio-cultural and temporal aspect is generally referred to as *contextualization*. When I use the term contextualization in this sense, the meaning of this term may be regarded some sort of abbreviation for Taylor's account for the

relationship between the meaning of an element/activity etc. and surrounding factors as described in “Theories of Meaning” (Taylor, 1985, pp. 248-292) and in “Interpretation in the Sciences of Man”, where Taylor e.g. explains his understanding of the notion of “meaning”. Taylor on the one hand recognizes the point widely acknowledged among hermeneutics that meaning is embodied. He writes:

Meaning is of something; that is, we can distinguish between a given element - situation, action, or whatever - and its meaning. But this is not to say that they are physically separable. Rather we are dealing with two descriptions of the element, in one of which it is characterized in terms of its meaning for the subject. But the relations between the two descriptions are not symmetrical. For, on the one hand, the description in terms of meaning cannot be unless descriptions of the other kind apply as well; or put differently, there can be no meaning without a substrate. But on the other hand, it may be that the same meaning may be borne by another substrate - e.g., a situation with the same meaning may be realized in different physical conditions. There is a necessary role for a potentially substitutable substrate; or all meanings are of something.

On the other hand, he also reflects on the system of meaning as such, and he finds that

(...) things only have meaning in a field, that is, in relation to the meanings of other things. This means that there is no such thing as a single, unrelated meaningful element; and it means that changes in the other meanings in the field can involve changes in the given element. (Taylor, 1985, p. 22)

Meaning in this sense, Taylor explains, may be called “experiential meaning” and it is meaning “for a subject, of something, in a field” (1985, p. 23). And, Taylor adds in a passage which may lead the reader’s thought to Dilthey’s exploration of historical consciousness: “The range of human desires, feelings, emotions, and hence meanings is bound up with the level and type of culture, which in turn is inseparable from the distinctions and categories marked by the language people speak. The field of meanings in which a given situation can find its place is bound up with the semantic field of the terms characterizing these meanings and the related feelings, desires, predicaments.” (1985, p. 25). In his account of this Taylorian point, Nicholas Smith

remarks that the fact that if meaning-content and relatedness were not integral to the very notion of human activity, there would simply not have been actions to understand or explain. On the other hand, since meaning, purposes and relations *are* integral to human activity, interpretation must be “an essential part of reaching an understanding or explanation of the activity” (Smith, 2004, p. 35).

In Abbey’s words, this simply means that in the sciences of man, culture must be taken seriously, and scholars within these sciences should “treat this as an irreducible feature of human life and an indispensable facet of their inquiry” (Abbey, 2000, pp. 160-161). One might say that realizing and taking this into account is what is meant by “contextualization” in the present work.

It should furthermore be noted that Taylor finds it useful to distinguish between three separate levels of “making sense of” or interpretation:

There is (...) no utter heterogeneity of interpretation to what it is about; rather there is a slide in the notion of interpretation. Already to be a living agent is to experience one's situation in terms of certain meanings; and this in a sense can be thought of as a sort of proto-"interpretation." This is in turn interpreted and shaped by the language in which the agent lives these meanings. This whole is then at a third level interpreted by the explanation we proffer of his actions. (Taylor, 1971, pp. 16-17)

The social scientist’s aim, then, is to perform interpretation at the third level. Such an interpretation should strive to present a comprehensive and plausible explanation of the phenomenon studied. Although humans can never be fully understood, among other things because their self-interpretation changes, and although interpretations in the human sciences hence must necessarily be “open-ended hermeneutical endeavors” (Abbey, 2000, p. 155), third level interpretations may still sometimes offer a more compelling account of actions, practices or self-understandings than the agents’ first and second level interpretations provide. Taylor’s ideal in that regard is what he calls “the most comprehensive account possible” (Taylor, 2011a, p. 32).

Amplification of Taylor's account of the self

Taylor offers an ontological explanation of human existence as such, and so of the human condition. In *Philosophical Papers* he writes that “our interpretation of ourselves and our experience is constitutive of who we are, and therefore cannot be considered as merely a view on reality, separable from reality, nor as an epiphenomenon” (Taylor, 1985, p. 47). Later in the same work he amplifies this point: “Self-understanding is constitutive of what we are, what we do, what we feel. Understanding ourselves as agents is not in the first place a theory; it is an essential part of our practice. It is inescapably involved in our functioning as human beings.” (Taylor, 1985, p. 202).

The view on humanity Taylor presents is a complex one, and Ruth Abbey suggests a distinction between ontological and historicist dimensions in Taylor's concept of selfhood. These are different but complementary aspects in Taylor's approach to selfhood, she finds (2000, p. 56). As for the ontological aspect, Taylor believes there exist certain intrinsic dispositions, but he is not regarded an essentialist in the classical meaning of that term. This means that although he contends that there are some perennial features of the self (Abbey, 2000, p. 56), Taylor does not see human beings as carriers of certain given and stable pith qualities. For example, what is regarded valuable or honourable may vary culturally and historically, whereas self-interpretation “is a pervasive feature of human life” (Baynes, 2010, p. 452). This accounts for what Abbey calls the historicist aspect in Taylor's understanding of selfhood. An example from Taylor's own writing which contains both aspects may be found in “The Moral Topography of the Self”:

I believe that what we are as human agents is profoundly interpretation-dependent, that human beings in different cultures can be radically diverse, in keeping with their fundamentally different self-understandings. But I think that a constant is to be found in the shape of the questions that all cultures must address. (Taylor, 1988, p. 299)

Among the elements Taylor finds that any society must address, Fossland & Grimen particularly call attention to Taylor's accentuating of meaningfulness; an understanding of what makes life meaningful (Fossland & Grimen, 2001, p. 271). The need for meaningfulness is regarded an intrinsic disposition, but the search for meaningfulness is always embedded in a specific (social, cultural, historical) landscape. This means that we do not start out in a void and that the concrete understanding of ideals varies culturally. Regardless of this, Taylor thinks we all need something to navigate by to find our way and that this need is among the fundamental ones, and so, in Taylor's view, this too is part of our perennial human dispositions. For Taylor, then, "a self is an individual that is guided by a set of meanings and an understanding of the significance of certain acts", and he argues that if left without these kinds of commitments we would be in an "acute form of disorientation"; an identity crisis (Maicher, 2008, p. 65; Taylor, 1989, pp. 27-28).

I will return to the aspect of meaningfulness below, and I will also relate it to the participating teachers' narratives. For the time being I merely refer Sasha Maicher's reflection on the issue as a comment to Taylor's view. Maicher finds that Taylor tends to overrate the importance of higher purposes and commitments, and remarks that "[a]lternatively, losing a commitment might be just that, leaving one with no particular feeling on that issue, and not be the 'acute form of disorientation' that Taylor suggest that it might be" (Maicher, 2008, p. 65).

As a general comment to Taylorian anthropology, Maicher remarks that, although he finds it profitable in many ways, he still makes reservations to it, since he finds that what we should really acknowledge is the importance of "lived reality" rather than theoretical entities, e.g. "higher purposes". By contrast, Taylor "[u]ltimately (...) believes that his account makes better sense of our lived experience than other accounts do." (Maicher, 2008, p. 66).

The self-interpreting self

Referring to Taylor's claim that the self is "a being who exists only in self-interpretation", Ruth Abbey notes that for Taylor, "the fact and significance of self-interpretation are human universals and part of the species' distinction" (Abbey, 2000, p. 58; Taylor, 1985, Introduction). In Taylor's philosophical anthropology, self-interpretation may thus be added to meaningfulness as another universal element in human existence, understood as humans in the sense of "persons" or "(social) agents". Another such element is narrativity as constitutive to self-understanding and humans' state of being inevitably fallible beings. In a summary of Taylor's hermeneutic philosophy, Baynes claims that it contains precisely these four distinct elements (Baynes, 2010, pp. 442-443):

- First, there is the "constitutive" thesis, Baynes explains, i.e. the thesis that individuals are at least in part constituted by their self-interpretation.
- Second, there is the "narrativity thesis", i.e. the thesis that we constitute ourselves by constructing more or less coherent narratives about who we are and what we most value and care about. Narrativity as a constitutive element in selfhood is in the present regarded part of what makes up the autobiographical self, and will thus be further commented on below.
- Third, there is the thesis that self-interpretations can sometimes be mistaken; a claim Barnes finds to imply that "some of our self-interpretations constitute our (autobiographical) selves but that others can fail to cohere or turn out to be inadequate for other reasons" (Baynes, 2010, pp. 446-447). Still, even erroneous self-interpretations may be of interest to the interpreter of agents' self-understanding or reasoning; the self-interpretation "does not have to be valid in order to be significant" (Abbey, 2000, p. 59).

- Finally, there is the thesis that the process of self-interpretation is social, and more specifically dialogical; the self-interpretation take place in what Taylor terms a “web of interlocution”.

In his article, Baynes, himself on the whole sympathetic to Taylor, reviews and comments some of the objections that have been raised towards Taylor and his assertion that man be a “self-interpreting animal”. To summarize, one might say that the main objections have been that it is “overly intellectual”, that it, in the opinion of other critics, has (too) heavy moral or ethical dimensions, while others still have claimed that it rests on an untenable model of interpretation, e.g. that it rests “upon an unresolved tension between (...) a ‘subject-centered’ and a ‘social-centered’ model of interpretation, i.e. a model in which the self is constituted either through a process of self-conscious and explicit rule-application or through a non-conscious socialization into a normative order or *habitus* (Baynes, 2010, p. 442).

I will presently neither enter into the details of the criticism nor into Baynes’ discussion of it. This would derail the account into a side-track which would perhaps not lead to an answer to the study’s research question, and maybe not even to the empirical material. However, I relate Baynes’ conclusion, which I find relevant in the current context.

Baynes pays particular attention to the alleged tension between two models for self-understanding in Taylor theory. Baynes defends Taylor’s view that agents actively construct meaningful narratives about their lives. When brought together, several of Taylor’s anthropological claims (e.g. that man is a self-interpreting animal, that the human need for understanding is universal, as is the need for purposefulness), point in the direction of some sort of constructivism (or a “subject-centered” model of self-interpretation). On the other hand, Baynes remarks, Taylor also takes the hermeneutical stand that man is a socially, culturally, and historically embedded being, and that inherited social practices provide resources and a background for an individual’s self-interpretation, and hence, “[a] human being alone is an impossibility,

not just *de facto*, but as it were *de jure*” (Taylor, 1985, p. 8). In other words, man is not just a self-interpreting, but also a social being. So our social reality influences us and our self-interpretation, and the social reality, just like our self-interpretation, is constitutive of who we are as individual agents.

All things considered, Baynes is inclined to dismiss the critique, and he finds that to reject Taylor’s arguments for the claim that we are “self-interpreting animals” would “seem to entail as well a rejection of the claim that human beings have a fundamental need to understand or make sense of themselves” (Baynes, 2010, p. 457). He moreover reminds the reader that in Taylor’s epistemology, there is a close connection between self-interpretation and articulation, since to articulate something requires interpretation and understanding (Baynes, 2010, p. 454; Taylor, 1985, p. 8). This is in agreement with Fossland & Grimen’s claim that Taylor’s concept of articulation is identical to his concept of interpretation (Fossland & Grimen, 2001, p. 93). By consequence, articulation, like self-interpretation, influences our understanding of ourselves. Therefore, it matters both *that* we articulate experiences, views etc., and *how* we articulate them. At the same time, agents are embedded in a social reality – the practices in which they are “always already” engaged. Yet, while these practices influence individual agents and their *habitus*, they are not deterministic. It is rather a matter of interaction. An illustrating example of this could be an agent who fits himself for a new job: While carrying his old self along, it will in such cases often also be necessary to adjust to new conditions. Usually, agents are fully capable of this.

However, despite his general rejection of the critics, Baynes, too, finds a need to “consider more fully what the space of reasons is and how it can be shaped by social and natural factors while still remain a ‘space of reasons’ sustained by the interpretive acts of the self-interpreting animals who inhabit it” (Baynes, 2010, p. 457). To me it seems that this is more or less what Hartmut Rosa has done in his article “Four levels of self-interpretation” (2004), where he presents his “Basic model” for self-interpretation where he incorporates both “subject-centered” and

“social-centered” elements in his understanding of the nature of agents’ self-interpretation, and also acknowledges the impact of external factors (cf. Ch. 3.4).

The anthropological view on which the interpretations of the material in the current study is founded, is that, basically, many factors are at play and must be taken into consideration when one tries to understand social agents and their reasoning and understandings. I find it likely that our reasoning and understanding are based partly on our (constructed) self-narratives, as Taylor claims to be the case (cf. the following paragraph, “Self and auto-biography”), and that there must be a “point” in these narratives, a point related to what Taylor calls purposefulness (cf. the paragraph after the next, “Self and meaning”). In accordance with this, I find it reasonable that such narratives include both self-oriented and other-oriented elements; provided that man is a social being, the self-narrative cannot merely be a story about the solitary self, and so, “how I see myself is shaped by how I am seen by and relate to others” (Abbey, 2000, p. 59). So, provided Taylor’s ontology, the (meaningful) self-narrative must also be a narrative about the self *qua* a social self, and so reflect the self’s relation to his fellows. This means that an individual’s self-interpretation “always points beyond the individual to the wider society and culture to which she belongs” (Abbey, 2000, p. 66). This is part of what it means to be a self-interpreting animal, and this is part of what is meant by understanding our life-world hermeneutically. If this is so, I moreover find it quite reasonable that agents search both inwardly and outwardly for components to the story about themselves. At the same time, I am convinced that external factors influence our understanding of ourselves, although we are not always conscious of it. Such factors may relate e.g. to the culture, historical period, or social institutions in which we are embedded (cf. “On frameworks, horizons and contextualization” below). I find that an interpreter of agents’ practices or self-understanding in the rule should take both the “constructive” and the “structural” aspects into account in her work (cf. also Chapter 3.3, “Taylor’s hermeneutics as an epistemological stand”).

Self and autobiography

It is Taylor's claim that in addition to being self-interpreting, the human self is autobiographical; that it is partly constituted by our narrative(s) about our own life. In his own words: "we grasp our lives in a *narrative*", and furthermore, "[m]y self-understanding necessarily has temporal depth and incorporates narrative" (Taylor, 1989, p. 47 and 50). We do, in other words, inevitably constantly tell ourselves and others the story (or stories) of our own life (Nyeng, 2000, pp. 34-36). Such narration partly contributes to constructing the very self whose story we are telling, while it is also an ongoing attempt to understand ourselves and what happens to us. Putting together the story about ourselves may be regarded an act of self-understanding, and so of self-interpretation, and does in Taylor's view relate to the human desire to know, which he considers a pervasive feature of human life (Baynes, 2010, p. 452). Connecting this theoretical view to the concrete level of the present project, it may be said to suggest why self-accounts were preferred to other methods of collecting empirical material, for example observation of the participating teachers' practice, of what they actually did and said in the classroom. Since the aim was to explore their own (occupational) self-understanding, their own accounts, *qua* self-interpretations, appeared to be the richest source.

To return to the theoretical account, it may furthermore be added that autobiography and narratives in general are closely related to the notion of articulation. This is so not only in that narration requires articulation, but also constitutes a more general point. For both when we articulate a story, as also when we articulate something which is not strictly narrative (a view, an emotion etc.), articulating is part of our self-interpretation (e.g. Taylor & Grimen, 1995, pp. 33-36). Abbey claims that perceiving how important articulation, the act and the human capacity of expressing themselves verbally, is in Taylor's anthropology essential to understanding human beings:

'Man is above all the language animal.' This statement can be seen as providing the overarching feature in Taylor's account of the things that endure despite changes in self-understanding. Because humans are beings with

language, we interpret ourselves. These self-interpretations form part of a person's identity, so that a change in the self-interpretation is a change in the self that is both the interpreter and the interpreted. (Abbey, 2000, p. 69, quoting Taylor's essay "Language and Human Nature", Taylor 1985)

The quote displays a further point, namely that our autobiographical narrative is not a static one and that it is moreover to some extent shaped by both internal and external factors, as Taylor argues e.g. in the essays "What is human agency?" and "Self-interpreting animals" (Taylor, 1985). At heart this is an essentially hermeneutic stand, which may be best understood in relation to other Taylorian claims: First, there are the already discussed claims that man is "the language animal" as well as a self-interpreting and indeed a self-defining animal (Taylor, 1985, p. 55). As has been stated, this means that man understands himself through language, and specifically, in Taylor's view, in the shape of narratives. This is why Taylor can also claim that (autobiographical) articulation and interpretation are fundamentally the same. Furthermore, such self-interpretations and thus autobiographical narratives relate to individuals' experiences and changes in life-condition in a manner corresponding to hermeneutic interpretation and the relationship between part and whole known as the hermeneutical circle. Hence, reinterpretations of the self and revisions of the autobiographical narrative in fact entails "changes in what man is, such that he has to be understood in different terms" (Taylor, 1985, p. 55). The fact that the participants in this study all talk about their former views and practice as opposed to the present ones, may serve as a concrete illustration of this point. The Taylorian point here is that while self-interpretation is a permanent aspect of selfhood, the content of self-interpretation (and so the autobiography) may change over time, among other things because we understand ourselves in a context which changes in the course of our lives. Since this is the case, Taylor asserts that "[t]he community is also constitutive of the individual, in the sense that the self-interpretations which define him are drawn from the interchange which the community carries on" (Taylor, 1985, p. 8). This may furthermore be claimed to address Taylor's point that the self exists in "webs of interlocution" (Taylor, 1989, p. 36). Thus, as Baynes explains, it is Taylor's belief

that our autobiography consists of narratives that, “though constitutive of the self, are never final, can sometimes be mistaken, and always take place against a background of implicit understandings and practices that cannot be fully surveyed or mastered by an agent” (Baynes, 2010, p. 442). Since this is the case, and since living in late modernity implies that “our identities (...) are complex and many-tiered” (Taylor, 1989, pp. 28-29), it may in fact make sense to talk about *plural* selves (Abbey, 2000, pp. 94-99).

Self and meaning

Maicher explains that in Taylor’s view “there is a direct connection between what one values and who one is; and what one values depends on one’s beliefs about what human beings are or should be” (Maicher, 2008, p. 53). And indeed, Taylor himself declares that “[w]hat I am as a self, my identity, is essentially defined by the way things have significance for me” (Taylor, 1989, p. 34). Provided this stand it needs not surprise us that, in addition to the notion of self-interpretation/self-understanding, the notion of meaning is central in Taylor’s anthropology. Terms closely related to, and partly used synonymously with that of meaning, are meaningfulness, purpose and purposefulness, and value, in so far as values inform our practical purposes, as well as our judgements. Furthermore, as purposes in turn inform and may even be regarded constitutive for our reasoning as well as our actions, we must have some understanding of the purposes that directs an agent in order to understand her and her actions (Abbey, 2000, p. 65).

Significance, meaning and sense, then, relate to the above mentioned human desire to know and understand. Therefore, like self-interpretation, the need for meaning and for purposefulness is regarded part of the human basic condition, or at least Taylor finds this to be the case for any *modern* self: “For Taylor the modern individual constantly needs to make ‘qualitative distinctions’ (...) and it is these sorts of distinctions that are at the heart of what it means for Taylor to have an identity.” (Maicher, 2008, p. 54). The “qualitative distinctions” here referred to relate to another

central notion in Taylor's philosophy, i.e. that of "strong evaluations" which, although not discussed here, is closely connected to Taylor's discussion of purposes, values and meaningfulness, and thus of personhood. (For accounts of "strong evaluations", see e.g. "What is human agency" (Taylor, 1985, pp. 15-44), "The diversity of goods" (Taylor, 1985, pp. 230-247), "Inescapable Frameworks" (Taylor, 1989, pp. 3-24) and "Stærk vurdering og filosofisk antropologi" ["Strong evaluation and philosophical anthropology"] (Laitinen, 2007).)

The importance Taylor ascribes to purposes and values relates both to his epistemological stand and so his analysis of understanding, and to what is often termed his *communitarian* orientation, i.e. an orientation in political philosophy whose "general concern is with the bonds of community – their importance, creation, maintenance and reproduction" (Abbey, 2000, p. 102; Mulhall, 2004, pp. 113-121). Both of these elements may be recognized in his statement that "[m]y identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the *frame of horizons* within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose. In other words, it is the horizon within which I am capable of taking a stand." (Taylor, 1991, p. 27).

The hermeneutical concept "frame of horizons" which Taylor here brings up usually describes something in the direction of what is below also termed "framework" or "context", cf. the above comment on the term "contextualization" and the below account for the relationship between frameworks, horizons and contextualization. It is much discussed in hermeneutics, and I shall not recount that discussion. What I want to draw attention to is rather the way Taylor in some sense redefines the concept and makes use of it for his own purposes in relating it to the sphere of morality and our human way of "leading a life". In Taylor's usage, a horizon may thus (also) be understood as "a framework of value that exists somehow outside the individual as an objective fact external to the lived-in world" (Maicher, 2008, p. 60). Taylor thereby extends the concept's realm from the traditional one, namely text oriented hermeneutical theory.

On frameworks, horizons and contextualization

The final point in my presentation of Taylor's anthropology relates to what Taylor often refers to as our social, cultural, and moral frameworks, which might also be described as our horizons, or as our embeddedness in society, culture, time, space etc. Because these frameworks directly influence our selves and our sense of who we are, contextualization is necessary whenever one makes an attempt to understand a person, be it in everyday interaction with other people or as interpreters in an academic setting.

Contextualization is furthermore of importance to anyone who tries to see beyond the person in order to understand why she interprets herself as she does or why she holds certain specific goods to be more valuable or important than others. Why do (some of) the teachers in this study state that "anyone can teach good students" and use this to explain why they find it more valuable to support what they term a "poor" pupil with very low academic motivation than to plunge into the subject's topics accompanied by talented and highly motivated students? Is this a matter of moral values, or may other factors (also) have played a part in the shaping and articulation of this view? Is it for example an act of professional positioning, a slightly shrouded plea for acknowledgement of the requirement of certain specific professional teacher knowledge and skills? Or is it a slightly veiled defence, perhaps not even fully recognized as such, for spending much time on so-called "poor" students at the cost of more theoretically oriented teaching from which primarily the "good" students would benefit and which would consequently mean that less good students would learn little, would perhaps not pass their exams, and would even be likely to drop out of school? Such questions cannot be explored unless the individual who makes the statement is interpreted in her socio-cultural context.

In referring Taylor's point that shared cultural contexts "even provide the frameworks necessary so that others can understand what one considers valuable", that it "is the sharing of an understanding of values that actually creates significance and meaning"

and that the individual subsequently “commits herself to certain beliefs and ways of life that she perceives in the society” (Maicher, 2008, p. 60 and 61) Maicher does, in addition to presenting a point in Taylor’s philosophy, display an illustrative example of how Taylor’s core concepts tend to interlace. It will often be difficult to divide one from the others.

To relate this to the present work, one may reflect that it is possible that the impact of the cultural context is even more noticeable in the current study than is the case in most other studies since participants in this study teach the mother tongue subject. According to both the teachers themselves and to public documents such as the national curriculum, this subject is definitely very closely tied up with the national culture at large, and so the interplay between school subject, the subject teachers’ practice, and (national) society may possibly be of even greater consequence than what I would have found had I studied another subject. At any rate, insofar as it is important to pay attention to contextual factors in studies of education, of social agents and so of social agents within the sphere of education, this is not least the case when the study concerns the mother tongue subject. With reference to the mentioned sources, teachers and public documents, one might claim that this is particularly the case in Iceland. There are particular historical, socio-cultural and maybe even geographical causes for this, as I will account for in Chapter 4.

Another way of putting the point of contextualization is that since there are such strong ties between the mother tongue subject and national imaginaries, some of the insights gained in a study like the current one may be particular and culture-specific, and so principally relate to the culture/nation in question, while, admittedly, others can have bearing on sister subjects in similar countries or on other subjects.

3.3 Taylor’s hermeneutics as an epistemological stand

By taking the stand described above, Taylor places himself in the tradition from Dilthey and Gadamer, to mention a couple of the most prominent hermeneutists in the

tradition which has a relatively broad approach to what hermeneutics is essentially about and pleads a more general hermeneutics than the classical one. This variety of hermeneutics is often termed *philosophical* hermeneutics, and is a theory both of the nature of understanding and of understanding man as an interpretative and understanding being. After Dilthey and Gadamer, Paul Ricœur is among those who have advocated a similar view.

Like Taylor, Ricœur finds that the human sciences may be said to be hermeneutical (Ricœur, 1981, p. 197), and both Taylor and Ricœur are in line with “some of the leading hermeneutic philosophers of today [who are] critical of the contrast between *verstehen* and *erklären* drawn by earlier writers in the hermeneutic tradition” (Giddens, 1984b, p. 225). Considering the present study’s aim with regard to the second main research question, which seeks to find out what kind of knowledge, practice and self-concept that are exhibited in the participants’ accounts, and to understand the background of the described conceptions, this seems a point worth noticing. Ricœur is more explicit with regard to the relation between understanding and explaining than is Taylor, so at this point I quote Ricœur rather than Taylor, although the chapter is a presentation of Taylor’s version of hermeneutics. I find it defensible to quote Ricœur to explicate how understanding and explaining may be unified in hermeneutic thinking since I take Taylor’s stand to be basically in agreement with Ricœur’s. This conception is based on Ruth Abbey’s book on Taylor’s philosophy where she asserts Taylor’s stand to be a combination of understanding and explaining: “His claim is (...) that the social scientist must take these interpretations into account when trying to explain people and their behaviour” (Abbey, 2000, p. 154). She adds that Taylor, “[i]n contrast to the idea that the interpreter must simply accept the agent’s self-understanding as something that cannot be gainsaid, (...) claims that sometimes the social scientist can come up with a more lucid and compelling account of the group or society’s situation or actions.” (2000, p. 154). It thus seems safe to borrow a formulation from Ricœur at this point.

Ricœur finds the distinction between “understanding” and “explaining” little fruitful in a hermeneutic perspective, for it is the concern of the human sciences to understand *and* explain, he claims. He specifies that the act of interpretation entails an inner dialectic which requires both understanding and explanation, and thus: “Ultimately, the correlation between explanation and understanding, between understanding and explanation, is the “hermeneutical circle”.” (Ricœur, 1981, p. 221).

This means that if, for example, the researcher through her interpretation succeeds in obtaining a higher degree of explication and clarity, and thus in making sense of the “object of study”, her work may have the capacity to change the agents’ understanding of themselves, their reasoning, their (social, moral etc.) position, and their practice. The researcher’s articulation of the hitherto unarticulated may in short have a potential to change people’s self-interpretations, and so their values and practices. Thereby, the human sciences may have both an emancipatory and a critical potential (Fossland & Grimen, 2001, p. 93). In fact, Smith explicitly claims that “hermeneutic social science, as Taylor understands it, itself has the goal of emancipation in view” (Smith, 2004, p. 37). It is furthermore Taylor’s belief that a social agent may indeed reach this goal on his own behalf already by offering the researcher his story about himself, his practice(s) etc., since “[o]ur formulations about ourselves can alter what they are about” (Taylor, 1985, p. 101).

One could moreover in Taylorian terms say, however, that because man is a self-interpreting animal which exists in linguistic and normative communities, to study man, social human life or human expressions as the human sciences do, is a fundamentally different sort of activity than those with which the natural sciences are occupied (Elster, 1979, pp. 82-83). Yet, in Taylorian epistemology there is more to this. For philosophical hermeneutics also discusses the role of the *interpreter*, and thus the role of the researcher, the basic message being that like the agents she is studying, any interpreter is historically embedded; she is a living subject who brings her own history, her own socio-cultural prerequisites, her own dispositions and

capacities along no matter where she goes or what (meaningful entity) she studies. In hermeneutics, this is commonly known as the interpreter's horizon of understanding. This horizon constitutes the interpreter's framework, through which she sees the subject studied, and which plays an active part in the act of interpretation. This means that "knowledge gained in the human sciences is "party dependent"" (Abbey, 2000, p. 160), that there does not exist value freedom in the human sciences. However, this need not be a major problem as long as the researcher is aware of this fundamental fact and adapt a (self-)reflective attitude towards her role, the work she is doing and the context in which she is carrying it out.

Moreover, the researcher's inescapable position as a human being and thus a being with values, is in this tradition in fact regarded a requirement for being able to study meaningful entities; one cannot truly understand these without having the capacity of sensitivity and imagination, for example. In Taylor's view, a description of "men and human behaviour as objects among objects" (Dictionary, p. 50) will never lead to true understanding, and besides, it would not recognize human beings as participants, i.e. as voluntary, purposeful, social, moral and emotional individuals.

Interpreting the self-interpreting self; when agents are the subject studied

So far in this chapter, Taylor's anthropology, including his views on what he terms "the self-interpreting self" has been presented, and an outline has been given of his hermeneutic seen as a framework in scholarly interpretation. In the current sub chapter I will combine these two perspectives and present some reflections connected to the specific case when the interpreter studies agents – persons – first with regard to particular considerations which may come to the fore, and second with regard to what one may obtain by such studies.

Implied in the previous is Taylor's claim that the researcher needs to *understand* the agent whose self-interpretation she is interpreting. This, however, does not involve a full identification with the agent, or the view that agent's interpretations must be

taken at face value and may thus not be further interpreted or contradicted. It is rather a matter of a discursive understanding of others which involves the researcher's capacity to make use of or at least to make sense of notions constitutive to their self-understanding and their life-world (Fossland & Grimen, 2001, p. 177). Abbey reminds us that Taylor thinks a self-interpretation should be meaningful and generally coherent to be significant, while it may well be highly significant without being "correct" or valid. Abbey explains her understanding of Taylor at this point as follows:

[J]ust thinking about myself in a particular way does not necessarily or automatically make me that: I can have a deluded or exaggerated interpretation of my sporting prowess or of my intellectual acumen, for example. However, even when someone's self-interpretation is erroneous, the way in which that person understands himself is still a crucial feature of his identity. (...) Nor is there any sense in which Taylor takes a person's self-understanding to be unitary. A person can have multiple and even conflicting ways of understanding herself. These can also change over time; no self-interpretation needs to be fixed and given in perpetuity. (Abbey, 2000, p. 59)

This point of view is the background of Taylor's warning against what he terms "the incorrigibility thesis" (Taylor, 1995, p. 123), i.e. the misunderstanding that, as a methodological principle, "understanding agents" implies that scientific interpretations must concur with the explanations of themselves and their practices provided by social agents themselves provide, and that such self-understanding neither can nor should be corrected. Taylor rejects this stand as a misapprehension of hermeneutical interpretation, Fossland & Grimen claim. Besides the fact that this standpoint often leads to studies of poor value, it seems quite unreasonable to suppose that agents possess an incorrigible self-understanding which may not be improved or broadened by scholarly interpretation, they remark. They find Taylor's position to be in opposition to such a view, and claim that he rather sees the legitimacy of the human sciences in their potential to offer a theoretical account and theoretically based interpretations of human agents' understanding of themselves; understandings which are in themselves rarely sufficiently accurate and exhaustive (Fossland & Grimen,

2001, p. 179). I also acknowledge this Taylorian point and reckon it quite possible that other interpretations, interpretations from a different point of view than one's own, provide different, sometimes informative and enriching perspectives on anybody's story, and that Taylor is basically right in thinking that if the (academic) interlocutor's interpretation of a certain story differs from that of the narrator, by revealing it, the interpreter may contribute to the narrator's extended, changed understanding of his own story. "Our horizon is extended to take in this possibility, which was beyond its limit before," as Taylor puts it (2011c, p. 31). Insofar as this takes place, it could be considered an instance of the famous "hermeneutic circle", which according to Taylor is essentially discursive (2011c).

This last point brings me to the other reason why an explication of my standpoint currently seems appropriate. This is an issue which relates to epistemology rather than to the social agents as such and runs as follows: is it at all possible to understand another human being? Hermeneutics think it is. I turn to Taylor for further elaboration of this stand. In his essay "Understanding the Other: A Gadamerian View on Conceptual Schemes" Taylor explores precisely our possibilities of understanding others, based on Hans-Georg Gadamer's concept of understanding. Among other things, Taylor writes that "[i]f our own tacit sense of the human condition can block our understanding of others, and yet we cannot neutralize it at the outset, then how can we come to know others? Are we utterly imprisoned in our own unreflecting outlook? Gadamer thinks not." (Taylor, 2011c, p. 29). He finds that understanding of others may be possible

when we allow ourselves to be challenged, interpellated by what is different in their lives, and this challenge will bring about two connected changes: we will see our peculiarity for the first time, as a formulated fact about us and not simply a taken-for-granted feature of the human condition as such; and at the same time, we will perceive the corresponding feature of their life-form undistorted. These two changes are indissolubly linked; you cannot have one without the other. (Taylor, 2011c, p. 29)

Although a hermeneutic interpretation can never be regarded the “final” answer of a certain matter, according to Taylor, as the possibility of other equally good or better understandings will always be present (Taylor, 2011c, p. 25), a given interpretation may still be comprehensive, accurate, non-distorted and thorough. Taylor furthermore claims that it is possible to rank different interpretation at any given point of time. The appropriate tool here is what Taylor calls the BA-principle; the best account principle. Nyeng explains this slightly differently in his account of Taylor’s views on what hermeneutics may obtain: “One should of course be able to reconstruct and challenge the human self-understanding in the theoretical sphere, and to provide clarity and overview by help of abstractions. Still, “the agent’s point of view” is and remains the point of departure and constitutes an ineradicable basis in the sciences of man” (Nyeng, 2000, pp. 51-52). Nevertheless, it is also Taylor’s conviction that the academic interpreter may in his third-level interpretation gain insights which have been covered up to the self-interpreting agent at the first and the second level of interpretation.

Interpreting the already interpreted; methodological considerations

The promotion of interpretation and, more specifically, of hermeneutics as an epistemological stand in both social and human sciences has been a main issue in Taylor’s work. In his well-known article “Interpretation and the Sciences of Man” Taylor provides a presentation of his main arguments for taking the point of view that this stand is tenable in these disciplines.

Basically, it is Taylor’s view that scientific work may be regarded a practice. Therefore, when the topic of research is a meaningful entity, the researcher, in confronting such an entity, in much is exposed to roughly the same set of “rules” that are in force in everyday life practices (Fossland & Grimen, 2001, p. 173), and so, in Taylor’s view, what he has to say anthropologically about interpretation is valid also with regard to hermeneutically oriented academic work: like the everyday social

agent, the researcher is embedded in a social, cultural, moral and historical reality, which influences her horizon of understanding (and thereby her interpretations).

Moreover, in dealing with a (meaningful) empirical material, the researcher is, by virtue of being human, prone to respond to this material in a certain way, not very different from the way she responds to meaningful entities outside the professional context. All of this is inevitably the case, as Taylor sees it, and it is important that the researcher is self-reflective and has an awareness of her own (pre-reflexive) preconceptions and horizon in her work, since, as Taylor concludes in “Interpretation and the Sciences of Man” the human sciences “cannot be ‘wertfrei’; they are moral sciences in a more radical sense than the eighteenth century understood” (1985, p. 57). It is all the more important that the researcher realizes this since the alternative to clarification of one’s own standpoint not is to abandon the subjective position in which the researcher finds herself which might lead to a subsequent transition to an objective position, but to take an *imagined* objective position, in which inevitable preconceptions, prejudgments etc. are inescapably included all the same. And so, a high degree of self-knowledge is required from the researcher, Taylor claims. “a freedom from illusions, in the sense of error which is rooted and expressed in one’s own way of life; for our incapacity to understand is rooted in our own self-definitions, hence in what we are” (1985, p. 57).

This point of view may e.g. be compared to Weber’s analysis of the nature of social life, and hence social actors, and of the nature of sociological work, where he concludes that there is a value-orientation incorporated in any social action and reasoning, included the (social) researcher’s work (Weber & Engelstad, 1999, Introduction). A view comparable to both Weber’s and Taylor’s may be identified in Bourdieu’s analyses of academic life and particularly of sociology as a practice, and his subsequent insisting on social scientists’ self-reflexivity and what he terms the researchers’ auto-analysis (Bourdieu, 1999a, 2007b; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2009 (1996)). A hermeneutical parallel to this could be to claim that when dealing (hermeneutically) with an empirical material; a text or text equivalent, one cannot

content oneself with a mere description of the field from which the material is derived and the findings - for instance the views and statements of one's sources. One should attempt to go further, to understand and explain one's findings, Taylor holds, i.e. to put forward interpretative hypotheses about the described practices and views. Yet, although the hermeneutic perspective contains an awareness of the researcher's partiality and accepts no understanding or interpretation as final (Taylor, 2011c, p. 25), an in-depth study, i.e. the result of interpretation on the third level in Taylor's hierarchy, may nevertheless contribute with reflections and insight which few other than researchers have the possibility of offering. For example, neither professional practitioners nor politicians have like researchers possibilities of spending nearly as much time on exploring and trying to understand what lies behind specific practices or narratives. Consequently, one might regard the reflective interpretation of the empirical material and the field it represents the main achievement of a work like *Intellectual Practicians*.

In "Interpretations and the Sciences of Man" Taylor points to the differences which after all may be pointed to between interpretation in everyday life and academic hermeneutical interpretation. Hermeneutics, Taylor here explains, "is an attempt to make clear, to make sense of an object of study" (Taylor, 1985, p. 15). As mentioned above, this implies an interpretation of meaningful entities, and thus of the already interpreted. In explaining this, Taylor distinguishes between three levels of interpretation; at the first level there are what Taylor terms "proto-interpretations", i.e. agents' pre-reflexive self-understandings, at the second level we may identify what he calls "intersubjective meanings", and at the third level we find researchers' interpretations (Taylor, 1985, p. 27). The third level, then, corresponds to what is in hermeneutics regarded the act of (scholarly) interpretation. The second level may need a brief annotation. Taylor accounts for the concept "intersubjective meaning" in his article "Interpretation and the Sciences of Man" (Fossland & Grimen, 2001, pp. 95-98; Taylor, 1985, pp. 15-57). Taylor understands intersubjective meanings as "ways of experiencing action in society which are expressed in the language and

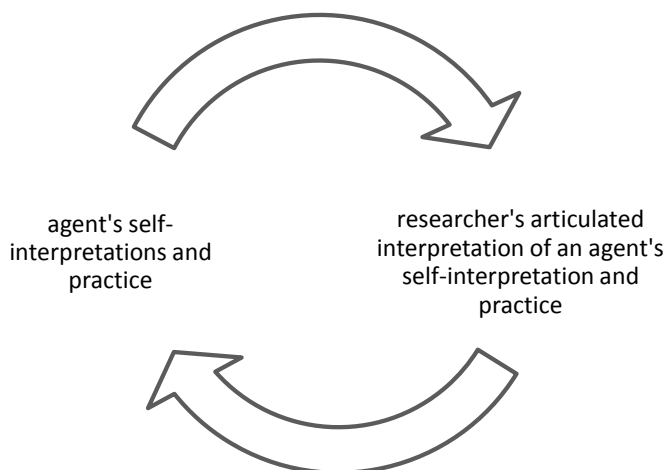
descriptions constitutive of institutions and practices” (Taylor, 1985, p. 38), and since this is so, interpreters, such as social scientists, “have to understand the language, the underlying meanings which constitute them [i.e. the institutions and practices]”, Taylor writes (1985, p. 38). To relate this to the current work, one might say that this implies that in order to be able to adequately interpret the participants’ descriptions of their practices and professionalism, I must understand *more* than the lexical meaning of the words and phrases they use in their descriptions. I must also understand their connotations and symbolical, i.e. their culture-dependent, meaning. I must, for example, try to find out what the participants’ many references to “the cultural heritage” imply. The following chapter, “Icelandic imaginaries and their sources”, is an attempt to explore some of the terms which seem to be constitutive of the participants’ understanding of their practice and their professionalism.

Because it involves this act of double (or triple) interpretation, the result of the researcher’s work resembles the object of her exploration. Consequently, “[t]he text of our interpretation is not that heterogeneous from what is interpreted, for what is interpreted is itself an inter-pretation” (Taylor, 1985, p. 26).

To sum up the reflections on hermeneutics as an epistemological position and a mode of working in the human sciences, I suggest that, on the basis of Taylor’s hermeneutics, the double hermeneutics described by Giddens may be illustrated by help of a slightly adapted version of the traditional metaphor “the hermeneutic circle” or, if one emphasises the processual, but also the evaluative element in the model, “the hermeneutic spiral”, which allows for the epistemological point that (academic) hermeneutic interpretation works on several levels of meaning and interpretation. The hermeneutic circle basically illustrates the point, also put forward by Taylor, that hermeneutic interpretation is dialogical. Yet, there is more to the circle/spiral model, and this addresses both the emancipatory and critical potential of hermeneutic activity described in Chapter 3.3, for example in that interpretations may lead to changes, cf. e.g. the Taylorian claim that “a change in my self-interpretation is at the same time a

change in me: it is a change in the self that is both the interpreter and the interpreted” (Abbey, 2000, p. 69).

Figure 2: The hermeneutic circle as illustration of the interaction between the human sciences and social practices



3.4 Elaborating on Taylor’s theory: Hartmut Rosa’s four levels of self-interpretation

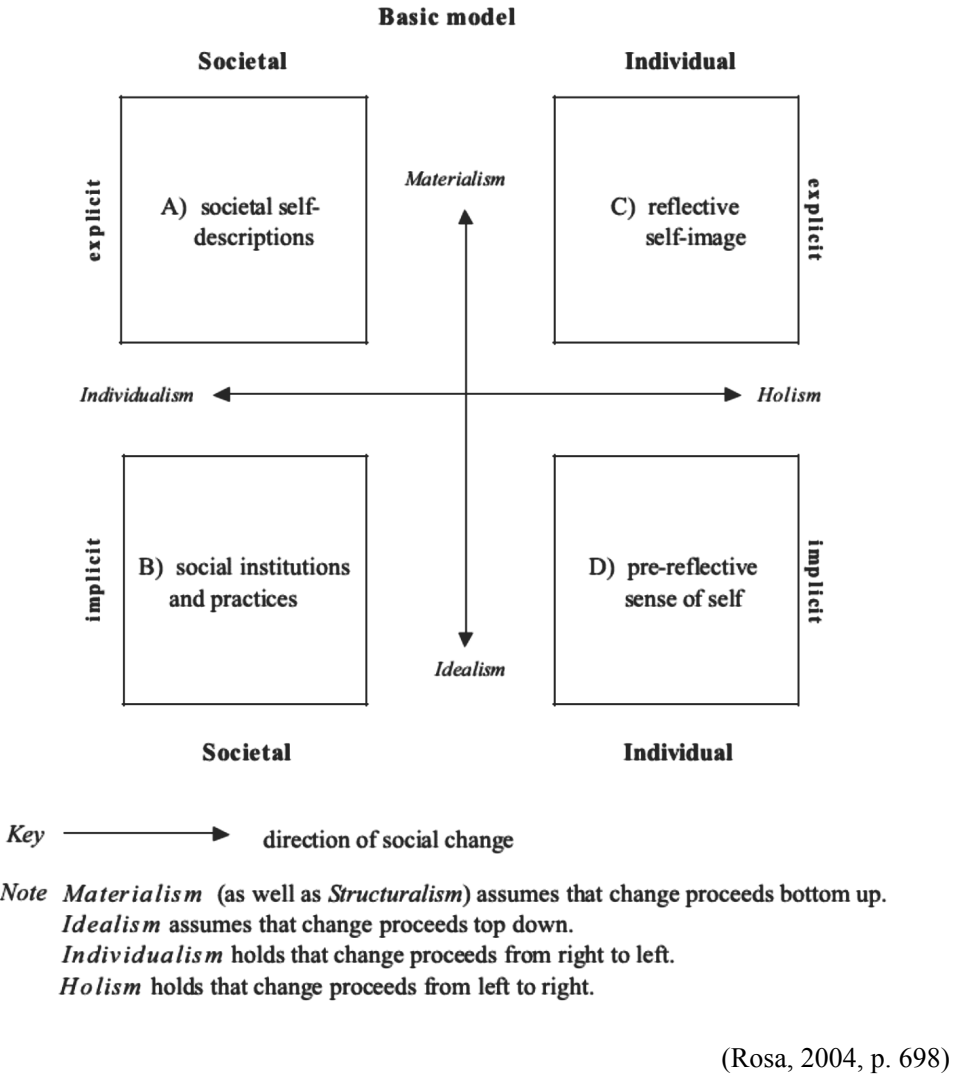
In his study *Identität und kulturelle Praxis: politische Philosophie nach Charles Taylor* (1998), the German social scientist Hartmut Rosa presents a broad analysis of Taylor and his work, including his philosophical anthropology, his political theory and his moral philosophy. In a more recent work, the article “Four levels of self-interpretation: A paradigm for interpretive social philosophy and political criticism”, the focus is a narrower one: here Rosa more specifically focuses on the notion of self-interpretation/self-understanding. Although his analysis of self-interpretation in this article evidently owes much to Taylor (Rosa, 2004, pp. 694-695), Rosa also offers a

sociological extension and specification of this crucial Taylorian concept. Rosa's theoretical assumption is that "the individual reflective self-understanding is molded and changed not only by society's discourses and doctrines, but also by its institutions and practices" (Rosa, 2004, p. 702). And so, in his own words:

[O]n the one hand, subjects are constituted, and develop an identity, with the help of an explicit self-understanding that is represented in their individual language and in the theories, convictions and ideas they hold. (...) But on the other hand, subjects are also constituted by a realm of feelings and body-practices or *habitus*, to use Bourdieu's term, which is pre-reflective and incorporated but which nevertheless carries social meaning and can be understood as a form of implicit, expressive self-interpretation, too. (Rosa, 2004, p. 695)

He finds that, consequently, "[e]xplicit individual self-images as well as habits and feelings are influenced by the dominant social ideas as well as institutions and practices – and vice versa" (Rosa, 2004, p. 697). Rosa claims any self-interpretation to be fundamentally embedded in the social; in social institutions and practices. In his view there is, moreover, an ongoing reciprocal influence between the incorporated and (not yet) articulate level on the one hand, and the articulate and reflective on the other. This is so both on the individual and the institutional/societal level, he finds. Furthermore, there is a similar both-way movement and influence along another axis – that of the individual and that of the institutional and social sphere. Furthermore, such influence may be identified on "unequal levels", such as the expressive-institutional – incorporate-individual or the incorporate-institutional/societal – expressive individual. This is illustrated in what Rosa calls a "basic model" for self-interpretation, which indicates that the act of self-interpretation already at the basic level is a complex matter.

Figure 3: Rosa's model for self-interpretation



What makes Rosa very relevant in the present context is the way he very specifically relates the notion of self-interpretation to practice and to the social sphere. Like Bourdieu, he heavily emphasises the importance of institutional and structural

elements for our understanding of ourselves as well as for what we in actual fact are and have the possibility of being or becoming. In addition, like Taylor, Rosa advocates for a hermeneutical approach in the social sciences (or, in Taylor's terminology, "the sciences of man").

In the present study my enterprise is to do as Rosa suggests: to approach an empirical material hermeneutically, and to make an effort of going beneath the surface in my attempt to understand the social agents, my informants, and their practice. In doing so, I try not to be idiosyncratic, but, in accordance with the recommendation of the theorists referred above, to keep the social aspect and its importance in mind, in the belief that I thus may be able to catch a glimpse of *why* the agents' practice and reasoning is as they report it to be, cf. the research questions.

3.5 Reflexive sociology as a supplementary perspective and a procurer of analytical tools

In addition to accounting for some of the ideas in Taylor's philosophical anthropology and hermeneutics of particular relevance in the current context, it should be mentioned that reflexive sociology,¹⁶ particularly as developed in the works of Pierre Bourdieu, has been a source of considerable inspiration in this work. With its demand of double reflexivity with regard to analytic results as well as the scientist and his position, preconceptions etc., the epistemology of reflexive sociology bears certain resemblance to that of hermeneutics (Bourdieu, 2007b; Bourdieu, Chamboredon, Passeron, & Krais, 1991; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2009 (1996), cf. also "Interpreting the already interpreted; methodical considerations" in

¹⁶ One may also come across the term "praxeology" which overlaps with and may also be used instead of "reflexive sociology". This is for instance the term chosen by the research group at The Faculty of Medicine, University of Bergen (Bergen), which I have followed over the last couple of years, cf. "Acknowledgements".

Chapter 3.3). This tradition therefore stood as a reasonable choice once I saw a need to supplement the hermeneutic approach with specific sociological insights.

The inspiration from reflexive sociology applies both to descriptions of and methodological reflections on interviews and the understanding of them as explained e.g. in *The Weight of the World* (Bourdieu et al., 2007), and to Bourdieu's theory of practice (1977). It moreover applies to Bourdieu's analysis of practical reasoning (1990), and finally to his social theory and his analyses of social structures and mechanisms, generally, and particularly within the educational system, and subsequently to the system of concepts he has derived from his empirical studies.

As a source of inspiration, this tradition has proved very useful. This is so both because Bourdieu analyses more comprehensive entities than traditional, text-oriented hermeneutics does, and because, similar to Taylor (Abbey, 2000, p. 182; Taylor, 1993), reflexive sociology and praxeology recognize bodily and partially subconscious elements of human knowledge as important parts of what we essentially know and thus as consequential for our reasoning and acting. Also, the methods Bourdieu made use of and developed over the years in his own empirical work, may serve as a practicable model for how one may possibly perform the act of contextualization in an empirical study within the human sciences, so strongly recommended by hermeneutists such as Taylor and Ricœur. In the continuation of this consideration, I reckon the terminology Bourdieu has developed to account for his epistemology as particularly useful, and to some degree I make use of some of this theory's key concepts in the present work. Of these, the concept of *habitus* has been especially valuable. It may moreover be noted that I find this approach compatible with that of Taylor, who also acknowledges this concept. Taylor explains *habitus* as follows: "A bodily disposition is a habitus when it encodes a certain cultural understanding. The habitus in this sense always has an expressive dimension. It gives

expression to certain meanings that things and people have for us.” (Taylor, 1995)¹⁷ As for Bourdieu, in whose epistemology *habitus* is a key concept, he has throughout his career offered a variety of definitions of this concept. One is that *habitus* is “socialized subjectivity” which implies that the individual and personal always also is social and collective. *Habitus* is thus an open system of attitudes, constantly exposed to and possibly swayed by new experiences. (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2009 (1996), p. 111 and 118), or, phrased differently, *habitus*es are persistent systems of dispositions, predisposed to function as “structuring structures”; principles which produce and structure practices and representations (Bourdieu, 2007a, p. 92). As Lisanne Wilkens understands it, *habitus* relates to what people do, based on their understanding or interpretation of their own situation, and it relates to the way culture is internalized in individuals and naturalizes their reasoning, attitudes and practices (Wilken, 2008, pp. 36-37). A related term used by both theorists is that of “(social) agent”, preferred by both to similar terms, such as “social actor”.

As shown in Chapter 3.4, I am not the first to see the use of combining the insights of Taylor and Bourdieu. Hartmut Rosa has done this before me and thoroughly explained why he finds this combination useful (Rosa, 1998, 2004). I therefore see no need to develop an epistemological fundament for such combination anew, but follow Rosa’s arguments and merely recount some aspects which made this specific combination seem sensible in the current work.

While it may at first glance be easier to see the differences between Bourdieu and Taylor than the similarities, the two of them nevertheless share an interest in several anthropological and epistemological topics. For example, they both deal with the historic dimension in an anthropological as well as an epistemological perspective. Similarly, they both discuss reflexivity in both perspectives, they both explore social

¹⁷ Appendix VI offers a more comprehensive discussion of the term *habitus* and its history. It is in this comment stated that the term has been used by other theorists than Bourdieu, and although it is often associated with Bourdieuan sociology, it may be used also by others than scholars within this specific tradition, as has been done by others before Bourdieu, and as has been done by Taylor.

practices, they both take an interest in the relation between language, articulation, and tacit and embodied knowledge and practices, and they both discuss relationism in various regards. Unfortunately, a close comparison of the respective parties' anthropology and epistemology would carry this limited account far too far, and I do therefore not present such a comparison. The examples may still serve as an indicator that there are overlaps in the two scholars' sphere of interest which are not often drawn attention to. This does not mean that they agree at all points, though, or that their interests are fully concurrent. In fact, the reason why I have found Bourdieu's theories valuable and inspiring is precisely the fact that his perspective is different from Taylor's and that he discusses other matters than Taylor does.

Although Bourdieu was, like Taylor, educated a philosopher, he is normally regarded a sociologist or an anthropologist rather than a philosopher, depending on one's source. As such, Bourdieu's particular concern through many years was to reveal power and power structures, including the hidden and misrecognized ones. At this, his work is in understanding with Anthony Giddens' assertion that "social theory is inevitably critical theory" (Giddens, 1984b, p. 230). Taylor, on the other hand, has relatively little to say about power and power relations as such, although Nicholas Smith claims that Taylor considers emancipation the goal of hermeneutical social/human science (Smith, 2004, p. 37). In fact, Fosslund & Grimen remark, Taylor's thinking may be claimed to lack a theory of power, and thus also of legitimate power, and they regard this a weakness in his philosophy (e.g. Fosslund & Grimen, 2001, pp. 247, 253, 263).

When studying social agents and their understanding of themselves as professionals, it seems dubious to ignore the institutional (and "structural", in Bourdieu's terminology) level; it seems obvious that institutional frameworks and other workplace conditions influence professionals' interpretation of their work as well as of themselves as professionals. Taylor has little to say about this. The reason for this may partly be that some elements in these frameworks and conditions are covered at the institutional level by the above mentioned notion of intersubjective meanings. But

this is not all there is to conditional factors, and I have not been convinced that the concept of intersubjective meanings allow sufficiently for the total impact of for example unrecognized institutional embedded domination and power. Because I found Taylor to fall short in this regard, Bourdieu's analyses of institutions and of social practices have served as a supplement to Taylorian anthropology at this point, and the stand that conditional factors affect our practices, our reasoning, and our *habitus* directly influences the following interpretation of the study's empirical material. By conditional factors I understand social and cultural environment, including values and hierarchies in the society at large, as well as local factors such as working environment, and personal factors, such as education and personal experiences. Like Rosa, I basically find this to be in agreement with Taylor's hermeneutics.

However, it should be underscored that even though Bourdieu's work has been supportive in the current study, it should not be regarded a Bourdieuan piece of work. For example, I emphasize the power aspect less than Bourdieu does. I for instance think that even if struggles for power doubtless take place in classrooms; between pupils, between individual pupils or groups and teachers etc., it is not inevitably of necessity that teachers' driving force be the wish to take hold of and retain power. At the same time, I realize that the situation is quite ambiguous. For although few, if any, teachers would proclaim power of any importance in their work (S. K. Sverrisdóttir et al., 2011, p. 20), teachers are in force of their position representing the general public, represented by e.g. legislation and national curricula, and thus in some sense in a position of power. This ambiguity may be recognized in the present study: Particularly in Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 I demonstrate how teachers' professional aims are in their own view directed as much towards democratization and empowerment of pupils as towards getting through the reading list (cf. also Noddings, 2003, p. 247); aims identified by Taylor to be among the contemporary *idées forces* (Taylor, 1989, pp. 203-207). I find that such elements should be taken into account, no matter what forces may be in work at the structural level, e.g. because they in

Taylor's view are part of our basis for acting and self-understanding *qua* social agents (Abbey, 2000, p. 34 and 62). At the same time, it seems that due to various everyday classroom challenges, the teachers nevertheless make use of strategies to put themselves in what they regard a necessary position of authority (cf. Chapter 7). So, while certain *idées forces* may be identified in the material, there are also traces of what might be termed some sort of power struggle in the teachers' accounts. Reflexive sociology calls attention to the significance of factors such as that of (hidden or misrecognized) power structures, and so, it has been my hope that this additional perspective may reduce the danger of naïve interpretation of the study's empirical material.

In addition to raised awareness of the significance of social structures, institutional hierarchies, and power relations, I do in this study use some terms which are connected to reflexive sociology, and specifically to Bourdieu's epistemology. This is particularly the case with the terms "capital" and "*doxa*", which I therefore discuss below. Other concepts which may evoke associations in the direction of Bourdieu's sociological theory are "*habitus*" and "agent". However, there may be other claims to ownership of these terms, and so I have chosen to comment on the concepts in "Some remarks on terminology" in Appendix VI. "*Habitus*" has other roots than Bourdieuan sociology, and "agent" is a central term also in Taylor's terminology (see Ch. 3.2). My use of this term includes both Taylor's and Bourdieu's aspects. Finally, there is "field", which is also a central concept in Bourdieu's social theory. However, although the term "field" appears on several occasions in the present work, it is not used as a Bourdieuan term, but in the word's more general, lexicographic meaning. This, too, is specified in Appendix VI.

Capital

As an analytical term, the "capital" is not very central in the current work. But I do refer to the term, and so I will presently give a brief account of my understanding of it.

Roughly, Bourdieu distinguishes between “economic capital” and “symbolic capital”, of which the latter is of most interest in the present context. Symbolic capital, a basic term in Bourdieu’s sociology, is “the shape or condition any capital or medley of capitals may assume when they are brought into play in a social context in which it/they is/are acknowledged and appreciated, and where it/they thereby carries social prestige.” (Esmark, 2006, p. 94; cf. also Moore, 2008).

Symbolic capital may be divided in sub-types, such as cultural capital, linguistic capital, literary capital, social capital and others (Moore, 2008, p. 103). Among these, cultural capital and social capital are probably the best known terms. Social capital may be defined as the social web of family, friends, colleagues and other more or less formalized connections to which a “social agent has access and which (s)he may profitably mobilize, and the prestige (s)he enjoys by belonging to a certain group, whether it be a prominent family, a specific profession, a political party (...), a research group, a supporter club or something similar” (Esmark, 2006, p. 92).

Cultural capital exists in three basic forms; embodied (e.g. taste, style), institutionalized (e.g. diplomas) and objectivized (artefacts; books, pictures, tools and other objects) (pp. 89-92). This is the symbolic capital most evidently at stake in the present study. To specify, one might say that appreciation of the cultural heritage and the merits of the national language policy serves as an example of embodied cultural capital in the Icelandic public. The teachers’ emphasizing of how essential it is that students graduate may be regarded an expression of their appreciation of institutionalized cultural capital, while one possesses objectivized cultural capital e.g. by simply personally owning the literary classics.

Doxa

Doxa is a well-known concept in Bourdieu’s terminology. It is borrowed from Ancient Greek. In Ancient Greek, the concept of *doxa* is opposed to *episteme*; the former referring to common beliefs and generally accepted views, the latter to

(scientific) matter of facts. In modern philosophy, it has been used by Husserl before Bourdieu included it in his terminology (Deer, 2008, p. 119).

Bourdieu defines *doxa* as “a set of fundamental beliefs which does not even need to be asserted in the form of an explicit, self-conscious dogma” (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 16), and it refers to “the unconscious layer of knowledge which it does not occur to us to question; all that is considered a matter of course or *common sense*” (Prieur, Sestoft, Esmark, & Rosenlund, 2006, p. 56). Bourdieu’s own elaboration of this concept may be studied e.g. in *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).

Doxa “is the taken-for-granted commonsense world, the unquestioned consensus, and the invisible organizing category” (Velayutham, 2007, quoting Alleyne 2002), and it “refers to pre-reflexive, shared but unquestioned opinions and perceptions mediated by relatively autonomous social microcosms (fields) which determine “natural” practice and attitudes *via* the internalized “sense of limits” and *habitus* of the social agents in the fields. (Deer, 2008, p. 120; cf. also Holton, 2000, p. 91)

According to Deer, Bourdieu does not use *doxa* as a fixed term, and while it in traditional societies is tacit and non-expressed, in modern societies

doxa takes the form of symbolic power which is mediated by various forms of accumulated capitals (cultural, economic, social (...)). Explicit physical force is replaced by implicit social habits, mechanisms, differentiations and assumptions (...). Symbolic power is embedded in recognized institutions as well as in institutionalized social relations (education, religion, art) (...). *Doxa*, as a symbolic form of power, requires that those subjected to it do not question its legitimacy and the legitimacy of those who exert it (2008, pp. 121-122).

4. Understanding Icelandic self-imageries and their sources

As has been established, it is a hermeneutic stand that to understand a social field or a certain practice, one needs to know something about the context. By “understand” I here mean to “be able to interpret adequately”. To establish a fundament for such understanding, one must first have access to the intersubjective meanings (cf. Ch. 3.3) of the domain one is exploring. Such intersubjective meanings are expressed (or articulated, as Taylor also writes) in key concepts within the domain/community. Taylor explains that:

These articulations are constitutive of the way of life, as we saw, and therefore we cannot understand it unless we understand these terms. But reciprocally, we cannot understand these terms unless we grasp what kind of sensitivity they are articulating. (...) They function, true, to describe social conditions and relations. But these conditions and relations only exist because the agents involved recognize certain concerns, defined in a certain way; they could not sustain just these relations and states if they did not. But the terms are themselves essentials to these concerns, under this definition, being recognized. It is through them that the horizon of concern of the agents in question is articulated in the way it has to be for just these practices, conditions, relations to exist.

Hence to understand what these terms represent, to grasp them in their representative function, we have to understand them in their articulating-constitutive function. (Taylor, 1985, pp. 276-277)

As I read this quote, it supports my own view that to understand a certain domain, as the practice and self-understanding of Icelandic teachers in upper secondary school in the current study, one must have access to the domain’s key concepts, and understand what they imply, their full meaning. This means, first, that real understanding will often be difficult unless one is able to talk to agents in their own language, literally speaking, and second, that a fuller or deeper understanding is difficult unless one “opens” what seems to be the central concepts within the domain/culture and tries to

comprehend their full meaning; including their socio-historical background and common current connotations, cf. also Taylor's claim that a social and cultural context

cannot be fully understood from a detached observer's standpoint. By this I do not mean that you have to be a participant in a society to understand it. But rather, (...) to understand this kind of context, and the kind of difference the term in question could make in it, you have to understand what it would be like to be a participant. (Taylor, 1985, p. 280)

It follows from this that to understand Icelandic upper secondary education and the practice and reasoning of some of those who work there, I need to know something about Icelandic society and culture. In the case of Iceland, among the things which seems necessary to understand in the social and cultural context is the almost unrivalled position of language and literature in public Icelandic self-understanding, challenged only by the country's "unique and magnificent nature", which is often held to influence the Icelandic people in various ways, and which moreover often is related to a corresponding uniqueness in the "cultural heritage"; the national language and literature. The fact that these elements hold a strong position in the public discourse may be ascertained by anyone who keeps up with the course of events in the Icelandic public, and is also established by several scholars. For example, Unnur Dís Skaptadóttir and Kristín Loftsdóttir sum up what could be termed a national Icelandic self-image as follows:

Icelandic nationalistic images have been strongly based on ideas of the purity of the country and its people and language due to isolation, and they often symbolically associated these two. (...) Language is a very important national symbol for defining being Icelandic, and who belongs and who does not belong. (...) Knowing the language is seen as the key to being and feeling Icelandic, giving access to the culture of poetry and the sagas. Claims of purity of Icelandic language from the Middle Ages until the present are often coupled with an emphasis on the uniqueness of the Icelandic Saga literature (Sigurðsson, 1996, p. 46). This emphasis on purity has been reified in the last few years (...), emphasizing pure nature and unique culture (2009, p. 208).

Based on this statement, one could say that in addition to being hermeneutically motivated, there seems to be empirical motives for presenting some elements (or “imaginaries”) in the Icelandic self-understanding as these appear in the public discourse. I will in the following primarily focus on the already mentioned elements; purity and uniqueness, particularly with regard to language and literature (often referred to as the nation’s “literary heritage” or its “cultural heritage”), but nature will also briefly be commented because there in the public notion of the country’s nature and its symbolic value tends to be an emphasis on the pureness and uniqueness of Icelandic nature analogous to what may be seen in the discourse about the national language and literature.

The first motive for dwelling on certain common conceptions about what may be regarded characteristically Icelandic is the simple fact that these specific elements exist in the environment in which the study’s participants are embedded and in which the subject they teach has been shaped, and so they must be taken into account in an attempt to understand the practices and reasoning the participants describe (Abbey, 2000, pp. 66-69). Thus, I will in the following demonstrate, first, that these self-defining concepts exist, and, second, that they are being made use of in a wide range of public settings; in papers, in literature, in politics, and in academic texts, to mention some. The second motive relates directly to the first one. I believe that since these elements are so conspicuous, they have certain force in the Icelandic society, and I believe that there is a mutual interaction between the field of mother tongue education and society at large with regard to these conceptions. I moreover think this interplay may have a number of consequences. For example, the often expressed high esteem of the national language and literature in the general public on the one hand lends legitimacy and value to mother tongue education. At the same time, some of the elements associated with the national language and literature, e.g. purity and uniqueness, draw heavily on “the cultural heritage”, which are intrinsic values in parts of the subject matter as well, and so something teachers and students relate to in their daily work. Teachers may thus, if they teach these parts of the subject matter

doxically and without discussion, happen to contribute to upholding and promoting attitudes inherent to these values, and so potentially be very useful to policy-makers and the Establishment. This interplay has many aspects, which may not all be recognized by the involved social agents. If so, there is all the more reason to point to the notions in question, and also to what may lie behind them and how they have come to gain their strong position. The third and final motive for discussing the socio-cultural context of the study's empirical material relates directly to one of the study's findings; I found that the teachers attached great importance to the cultural heritage in their descriptions of the Icelandic subject. This is discussed in chapters 6 and 7, so currently it suffices to say that I found the degree to which this was emphasized remarkable. I thought such a conspicuous element must be significant, and I started to look for a probable explanation of why this element was so dominating. It seemed insufficient to look into the current situation for such an explanation, and I found that I needed to look into the key concepts (such as "cultural heritage" and "national language") and the qualities associated with them (such as purity, authenticity and uniqueness). This required an analysis of these concepts, and, since they have deep historic roots, I found it sensible to approach this task from a historically oriented perspective. This is what I try to do in the current chapter, organizing it as a cultural historical survey of the issues in question.

My sources in this chapter are of various kinds; I mention works of fiction, public speeches, and academic texts, and I present my own understanding of these. The reason why I have chosen so different sources is that the width I thereby cover in itself is a way of exploring how national imaginaries are expressed and interpreted in the Icelandic public. For some of the sources are artistic or factual descriptions of (a part of) the Icelandic society, while others are texts which somehow make direct use of national imaginaries. Finally, some of the academic texts are explicit academic interpretations and discussions of such conceptions.

4.1 Encircling the socio-cultural context

Iceland is a small country with a population of approximately 325 000 inhabitants – the size of a moderate-size European city (Iceland, 2014). At least in the public discourse the nation’s smallness is often associated with certain vulnerability and subsequent protectionist attitudes for example with regard to the national language, which may at least partly count for professor John Coakley’s finding that Icelanders are more patriotic than other Europeans, stated in his article “Reifying ethnicity? Measuring national identity in Europe” (2011). Thus, when informants in the survey on which the article is based are asked with which geographical entity they primarily associate themselves, there is only one country in which the “majority of the population identify primarily with the country, implying strong national identity” (Coakley, 2011, p. 13). This country is Iceland.

As far as Icelanders are concerned, Coakley’s findings sound credible, for there seems to be a patriotism in the Icelandic public which, despite scholars’ claims that it has been questioned and discussed in recent years (Skaptadóttir & Loftsdóttir, 2009), still appears to be relatively unproblematic among the general public. So, without exploring this topic in any depth, I imply that patriotism generally is a perceivable element in Icelandic self-understanding, and that Icelandic patriotism is strongly connected to “words such as cold, harsh and wild – along with authenticity, purity and uniqueness” which “constantly seem to pop-up whether it is to describe the nature, the culture or even the inhabitants” (Ísleifsson, 2009). In my view, this part of Icelandic self-understanding among other things relates to the Icelandic struggle for independence during the 19th and 20th centuries, and to the subsequent need for a national identity, which ultimately was derived from the image of a former Golden Age – the one described in the saga universe. This universe and the literature in which it is described, is characterized as a main topic in Icelandic education in upper secondary school by the current study’s participants.

4.2 Heading for independence

After several centuries under Danish reign Iceland was in 1874 granted a constitution and limited home rule, which included a re-establishment of the Icelandic legislative assembly, the *Alþingi*. The Icelanders' position was further strengthened in 1904, with the establishment of a ministership for Iceland in the Danish cabinet (Karlsson, 2000, Part III). The next step was the endorsement of the so-called Danish-Icelandic Act of Union in 1918. This act states that Iceland is recognized as a sovereign state in what was termed a personal union with Denmark. The act expired in December 1943, and the following year a referendum was held on the question whether Iceland should terminate the union with Denmark and establish a republic. The vote was 95% in favour of the new constitution, and Iceland formally became a republic in 1944.

Iceland's independency was the result of a lengthy process. Yet, a review of the political events shows merely a small piece of the total picture. Factors such as cultural currents, social development and economic conditions also had impact on the historical evolvement. For example, Iceland was one of Europe's poorest countries throughout the 19th century and well into the 20th century. Yet, the Icelanders had their "authentic" language, they had an unbroken tradition of writing in the vernacular dating from the 11th century, and they had their own classic literature. In short, as National Romanticism emerged in the 19th century, an opportunity to construct a national identity on a basis that already existed presented itself, and so the historian Guðmundur Hálfðanarson may well claim that

The ideas of romantic nationalism found a fertile ground in this group [i.e. exile Icelanders in Copenhagen], because a strong sense of pride in the Icelandic cultural heritage was prevalent among the Icelandic students even before romanticism became a fashion on the European continent.

(Hálfðanarson, 2005, p. 90; cf. also Kristjánsdóttir, 1996)

It thus seems reasonable to see the independence fight as having its roots in Icelandic romanticism, which evolved among Icelandic students in Copenhagen in the 1830s

(Hálfðanarson, 2000, pp. 90-95; 2006, p. 241). Since there Iceland had no university in those days, Icelanders' went to Copenhagen to study. Consequently, they were influenced by contemporary Danish and continental political, intellectual and cultural currents (Hálfðanarson, 2006, p. 241; Karlsson, 2000, p. 201). With background in this milieu Jón Sigurðsson (1811-1879) entered the stage of public discourse by the beginning of the 1840s to take on the role of the political leader of the Icelandic independence movement (Karlsson, 2000). Sigurðsson is an inevitable part of modern Icelandic history and is still regarded a national notability.

Sigurðsson earned his prominent position in Icelandic history for several reasons. First, he strongly contributed to the re-establishment of the national assembly, and second, he was a member of the parliament for 35 years and its president for most of that period. Third, Sigurðsson played a major part in the negotiations about an Icelandic constitution, and finally, he founded and edited the periodical *Ný félagsrit* ("New Society Papers"). By means of this journal Sigurðsson was able to maintain a relation to his compatriots back in Iceland, and to raise their interest in issues which he wanted to improve, ranging from the constitution to the educational system, economy, and public health service. In addition, Sigurðsson was engaged by the Arnemagnean Foundation to gather and edit Old Icelandic manuscripts. Even if Karlsson states that Jón Sigurðsson "was by no means a typical 19th-century national hero" because he "was not an extreme nationalist and, for his time, was rather devoid of romanticism" (Karlsson, 2000, p. 208), the symbolic value of the prospective nation's political leader's direct involvement with the country's most prominent cultural heritage and a major marker of national identity, should not be underestimated. In my view, this is conducive to establishing Sigurðsson as the personification of national liberation, national consciousness, national heritage and national identity. Despite Karlsson's contention, much points to Sigurðsson as a true national hero (Sveinsson, 2003). With regard to the current project, one might claim that to Icelandic teachers in upper secondary school, Jón Sigurðsson is a luminary not only in the independence struggle, but also in their own academic field.

4.3 The importance of language and literary heritage in the promotion of a national identity

In Denmark, the poet Adam Oehlenschläger was among those who paved the way for National Romanticism. Oehlenschläger “turned for themes to the sagas and to Scandinavian history” (Mogensen, 2007), and so he characteristically describes episodes from Norse mythology and old Nordic legends in his poem “Der er et yndigt Land”, Denmark’s national anthem. Also in “Guldhornene” (“The Golden Horns”), the poem which is considered to mark the inauguration of Romanticism in Denmark, myth and the golden age of the past are the poet’s motives. Some decades later Snorri Sturluson’s *Heimskringla*, or *The lives of the Norse kings*, was translated in Danish. In the present context, this event illustrates several points: First, national romanticists took a considerable interest in the idea of the Golden Age, which in the Nordic countries tended to refer particularly to the period from the Viking Age until the High Middle Ages. This golden past was more or less regarded a common Nordic treasure, even if each nation tried to make the most of it for its own sake. In a Danish context this would tend to mean that one saw the Danish union as a whole, whereas Norwegians and Icelanders, each struggling for their nation’s sovereignty, tended to emphasize their respective national heroes and history. Second, we see how Icelanders suddenly found themselves in a culturally privileged position. For although the vast majority of the Medieval Icelandic manuscripts by then were in the possession of The Arnemagnean Institute at the University of Copenhagen and other foreign institutions (The Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies, 2012), Icelanders regarded this literature their own. So, since a major contingent of the preserved medieval manuscripts was Icelandic, Icelanders, through and through poor and famished for centuries, all of a sudden were the originators and moral proprietors of works inestimable both from a historical, a scholarly and an artistic point of view. Gunnar Karlsson finds that romanticism thus “was bound to nourish among Icelanders an increased self-esteem and (...) an enhanced interest in their country” (Karlsson, 2000, p. 200). As will be accounted for below, it seems that this still affects education

in the country's mother tongue subject. Finally, the example provides a simple illustration of how the Icelandic demand for independence is interwoven with political and cultural trends and events of the 19th century.

Danish romanticism was primarily inspired by the German one. To the Icelanders, the philosophical movement from which National Romanticism derived was of particular consequence. For example, the concept of *Volksg Geist* ("national character", Icel. *þjóðarandi*) was developed within this school of thought. This concept, which is ascribed to J.G. Herder (1744-1803), and was vital to national romanticists who believed that a people (nation), like a person, had its own distinctive features, developed as a result of historical, geographical, and other factors, and who consequently saw it as a scholarly task to explore the *Volksg Geist* of the various *Völker* ("people"). This, in turn, led to a reevaluation of folkloristic traditions, such as *Volksdichtung* and *Volkssage*, both genres thitherto generally regarded vulgar and uninteresting. As such genres suddenly were regarded cultural treasures, it subsequently became important to preserve them for future generations (and researchers), and an extensive collecting of these so far scarcely documented traditions was commenced. Herder's *Volkslieder* is an early example of this, the Grimm brothers' *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* a very famous one. In Iceland, Jón Árnason similarly collected folktales and published them as *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og æfintýri*.

National romanticists also took a considerable interest in history, as they believed to find the core of a people's character in its past. In the Nordic countries, this led to a flourishing interest in medieval literature, particularly the sagas, which turned out to be a source to increased Icelandic self-confidence and practically in itself an argument in favour of Icelandic sovereignty. The interest in folkloristic matters moreover was a source of inspiration to academics, e.g. linguists, historians and folklorists. This, too, proved to strengthen Icelandic self-esteem, generally because of Herder's claim that language be among the main characteristics of a people, and particularly because of the assumed "purity" and "authenticity" of the Icelandic language, cf. the Danish linguist Rasmus Rask who visited Iceland early in the 19th century and who was

“particularly interested in the Icelandic language, which he saw as the original common language of the Scandinavian peoples. At the same time he looked upon the language and literary culture of modern Iceland as being one and the same as in the Middle Ages to his own day” (Karlsson, 2000, p. 200). This was quite a reappraisal of the culture of a people who had for centuries generally been judged an uncivilized, merely half-human people (Jakobsson, 2009). This revaluation may be regarded one of the reasons why the national language has been so treasured during the past two centuries; it was transformed into a treasure in which everyone could take pride - as long as it was kept shiny and spotless - cf. the purist preamble of current Icelandic language policy as expressed e.g. by the Icelandic Language Institute. So, National Romanticism’s revaluation of the national languages and of folk culture appears to have been an “invaluable stimulus” to effectuate Icelanders purpose of founding a sovereign state, Karlsson finds. He further reasons that usually, a distinct language will not be regarded sufficient grounds to found a nation. Yet, in the case of Iceland, “the struggle for independence was beyond all doubt raised on the grounds of the language”, and that this was indeed the most important argument in the independency debate (Karlsson, 2005). Similarly, Tulinius claims that

Iceland and the Icelanders fit well into the concept of the nation state. They spoke a language which was highly esteemed because of its authenticity and closeness to Old Norse. They were ethnically and religiously homogenous and they possessed a rich cultural heritage which, even if it was related to the rest of the Nordic countries, still had a defined intrinsic value. (Tulinius, 2010, pp. 67-68)

It may be remarked that this statement implies an almost matter of fact acknowledgement of national romantic values, or at least that these were energetic in the period in question, and Tulinius’ statement may even indicate that such views still be relatively common. This suspicion is reinforced from reading texts by other contemporary Icelandic scholars. For example, when Guðmundur Hálfðanarson comments a passage in an article written by Páll Skúlason, former rector of the University

of Iceland, published in the widely read Icelandic journal *Tímarit Máls og menningar*, such standpoints shine through both Skúlason's and Hálfðanarson's statements:

[Páll Skúlason holds] that the individuals who make up the nation “have collective consciousness and collective will because their mind is formed and nurtured by the same culture where history preserves the customs of the forefathers, the country preserves their endeavours, and the language their thoughts.” What makes the formation of this collective national consciousness and will possible, he continues, is the awareness of the fact that “we share the same history, the same country and the same language.” This comment is a variation on a common theme in the Icelandic cultural and political discourse. Its classic expression is found in a poem by the poet Snorri Hjartarson, where he invokes the true trinity of country, nation and language (...).

(Hálfðanarson, 2005, p. 56)

This excerpt gives an impression of the views of both Páll Skúlason, a leading intellectual, and of the late poet Snorri Hjartarson. In the referred article it becomes evident that also Hálfðanarson basically shares these views. Actually, and of interest in the current context, Hálfðanarson even refers to a talk given by Matthías Johannesson, in which this former editor of *Morgunblaðið*, the country's most prominent newspaper at the time, claimed that it only was because of the Icelandic tongue “that the nation had managed to establish a sovereign and independent state, and thus the language is seen both as a defining marker of the nation and a tool in the struggle for its self-determination” (2005, p. 63). As for the current situation, Hálfðanarson maintains that “[w]hatever opinions we have on the theory of national souls, or *Volksgeist* to use Herder's term, languages continue to be crucial for people's social and political identity.” (2005, p. 63).

The article “Culture as defence” by Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, which is in fact constructed on the poem to which Hálfðanarson refers, provides reasoning along the same lines (Finnbogadóttir, 2010). This additional example shows that the quotation from Skúlason is no one-off in the current Icelandic public discourse, and even more so as the second example is provided by the former president, another prominent figure in the Icelandic public. The point is that there seems to be general agreement on these

views in the Icelandic public, in this account defended by a poet, a journalist and editor, a philosopher and former university rector, a former president, a professor of medieval studies, and a professor of history, several of whom take actively part in the public debate. I have tried to demonstrate that such views have been an important part of Icelandic identity at least from the middle of the 19th century and still have decisive impact on the cultural climate in Iceland in the 21st century.

These points seem of considerable consequence to understanding the discourse of mother tongue education in the country's upper secondary schools, as it is difficult to imagine that elements as strong in the public discourse and as thoroughly rooted in the national self-understanding as the above ones prove to be, and which are at the same time intimately related to the mother tongue subject's curriculum should not have impact on the school subject. It thereby seems likely that there is a dialectic connection between the collective national self-understanding (cf. Taylor, 2011b) and the mother tongue subject, an interplay between the strong position of the national language and literature in the national self-concept markedly and conceptions of the mother tongue subject. It moreover seems that this interplay regards public expectations to the Icelandic subject and teachers' views on their own role as managers of this subject alike.

4.4 Urbanization and headstrongness

While Icelandic students and civil servants in Copenhagen closely followed the political development in Denmark and the rest of Europe and wrote about the events in Icelandic journals and in letters to their families and friends back in Iceland, conditions were gradually changing in Iceland too. Yet, even if Reykjavik had grown sufficiently to be regarded an actual town by the turn of the century, it had no more than 3800 inhabitants, and 87% of the population lived in rural areas (Karlsson, 2000, pp. 292-293). However, throughout the 20th century the tendency to centralization was very distinct, so within another century the picture was completely altered: In 1904, a

quarter of the population lived in urban nuclei of fifty inhabitants or more. In 1920 the percentage had passed 50, and in 2000, 170 000 of the population of 280 000 lived in the urban capital area (S. Iceland, 2012a).

In addition to demonstrating increase of population and an incontestable urbanization, the figures also indicate substantial social changes within a relatively short period, and so, the old ways of life and the modern, urbanized ones lived side by side at least until the post war period. Karlsson recalls that

When my family was compelled to move from its tenant farm in 1943, the year when the ninth child was born, we moved to a farm with a turf house consisting of one living-room (a traditional *baðstofa*) and a kitchen, pantry and corridor. There was no running water into the house for consumption or out of it for sewage, no sink, and no latrine of any kind. Such primitive housing was unusual by then, but it was by no means unique. In 1940, 23% of houses in rural areas were still made of turf. (Karlsson, 2000, p. 292)

Nevertheless, after centuries of cataclysms and famines, the Icelandic society from the first part of the 19th century society experienced a general growth, manifest both in standards of living and in increase of population. Karlsson remarks that “[t]his must have been a period of growing optimism, and it is reasonable to assume that it contributed to the build-up of self-confidence which was needed to make the population of Iceland adopt Jón Sigurðsson’s nationalist policy.” (Karlsson, 2000, p. 227).

Everyday life and the process of urbanization with all its ambiguities is thoroughly described by historians, yet even more vividly by Icelandic writers, and Halldór Laxness’ novel *Salka Valka* (1931-32) stands among the most famous of such descriptions. *Salka Valka* is a politically oriented social realistic novel in which Laxness describes the harsh life of the working-class girl Salka of Óseyri, an impoverished, insignificant small Icelandic fishing community in the first decades of the 20th century, where the local merchant acts like a petty king. However, as we learn how young Salka gradually takes on more responsibility, even for her fellow

villagers, establishes a fishermen's union and challenges capitalism, embodied in the local merchant, we understand that Laxness believes in a brighter future after all, insofar as society adopts more socialistic views. This was controversial in Iceland at the time, not least as a literary theme, and the novel was bound to cause a public debate (H. Guðmundsson, 2004, pp. 364-368). Today this book is much read in upper secondary school, and is included in what may be regarded a national canon; it is a cultural reference one is expected to know.

During the 30s and 40s Laxness wrote several novels that could be labelled social realistic. I want to mention one in addition to *Salka Valka*, namely *Independent People* (*Sjálfstætt fólk*, 1934-35). This book is important, not only because it adds a great deal to the social descriptions of *Salka* and so serves as another portrait of a period in Icelandic history and a way of life, but also because it is more or less mandatory reading in the second year of upper secondary school. It may thus be regarded part of the field of the Icelandic subject. It may hence be counted a common cultural reference within Icelandic society, from which a number of idioms have been adopted in everyday language and to which people are likely to refer in various contexts. Knowing *Independent People*, then, is part of being an Icelander, as is knowledge of *Salka Valka*. These two novels thus provide a further example of how literature affects the nation's cultural and social resources and thereby its self-understanding.

Independent People is set roughly within the same period as *Salka Valka*, but this time the writer takes the reader to the countryside. The novel's protagonist is Bjartur who after 18 years as a farmhand has finally managed to obtain a subsistence farm of his own. The farm is the very realization of Bjartur's old dream of independency; for Bjartur above all wants to be his own man, one who does not owe anyone anything. This is a mantra so frequently repeated throughout the story that it may reasonably be regarded a *leitmotif* in the novel.

The picture Laxness draws of rural life in Iceland in the years before World War is as bleak as it is depressing, characterized by unhygienic conditions, sternness and

suppression not very different from the “urban” and capitalistic ones described in *Salka Valka*, in this case based on a traditionalism on the verge of the extreme which from time to time precludes sensible reasoning and acting. Such was pre-war Iceland in the eyes of the forthcoming Nobel laureate. His impressions were not pulled out of thin air. In his younger years, Laxness travelled widely. When travelling in his own country, he found that life had the look of starvation, unhealthiness and hardship (H. Guðmundsson, 2004, ch. 3 and 4). So when Laxness used his observations in his novels, he inevitably came to tamper with the national romantic picture of rural life that actually was cultivated well into the 20th century. It is relevant to the present study to note that the ideal Laxness meddled with was manifest for example in the national language policy, where not the language of the educated, but rather the language of farmers served as the ideal because of its “purity”, which is evident e.g. from the proportions to an Icelandic oral standard, developed in the 1940s (Guðfinnsson, 1947; Sigmundsson, 2002).

Moreover, independency was an issue in the public debate in Iceland in the years when *Independent People* was published, and so the novel’s ironic ambiguity in dealing with this theme may have been even more evident to the contemporary public than to present readers. In the words of Laxness’ biographer Halldór Guðmundsson “[t]here was an intense dispute about *Independent People* in the early spring of 1936 which continued for the following few years. Halldór had given his reckoning of Icelandic rural culture, its self-image and its myths. He must be prepared for reactions.“ (2004, p. 364).

Bjartur is still part of the collective Icelandic consciousness. *Independent People* is quoted and Bjartur is used as a symbol for part of Icelandic mentality in various contexts, and this is the main reason why I find *Independent People* relevant to the present context. The novel deals with notions often associated with Icelandic self-understanding, yet it does so in an ambiguous way; Laxness tampers with the romantic image of traditional Icelandic country life, but also with qualities in which

Icelanders often take pride, for example individualism, bravery and buoyancy. Below, we shall see how such qualities emerge in various contexts.

In *Independent People*, Laxness makes the unwelcome point that these qualities may be termed otherwise, for example stubbornness or unscrupulosity; and that these qualities sometimes are followed by great human expenses. But even if Bjartur is often seen as a negative figure, obsessive almost to the extreme, he is also sometimes seen as the incarnation of stamina, irrepressibility and determination, all important elements in the national self-understanding, in which the people's struggle for survival under at times extreme conditions and how they always rise anew play an important part (Vasey, 1996, p. 149). Thus, in the article "A parable of two debtors", *The Economist's* commentator Charlemagne in his analysis of the Icelanders' second rejection of the post financial crisis Icesave deal states that "Bjartur's cussedness lives on" in Icelandic mentality (Charlemagne, 2011), and sure enough, even *The Economist* sees a Laxnessian doubleness in the intractability of Bjartur: "There is an epic quality about the way this remote island of glaciers and volcanoes has stood up to powerful states and economic orthodoxy." (Charlemagne, 2011). This "epic quality" could even be traced back to the narratives of the ancient sagas, in which the hero frequently is a headstrong individual, and part of the reason why *Independent People* holds such a strong position may relate to this; it is evident to anyone familiar with the sagas that Bjartur's negative qualities may also be interpreted in a more positive manner. There is an echo of the saga protagonist in the modern notion of what Icelanders are like.

Another illustration of *Independent People's* position in the collective consciousness is to be found in the governmental report *Ímynd Íslands [Iceland's Image]*, in which *Independent People* is the one literary work explicitly referred to. Thus, the report among other things states that: "Independency in thought and action characterizes the individual Icelanders who, because they are so few, all are important in their own way. Bjartur in Summerhouses still lives within each and one of us." (Pálsdóttir & Ólafsdóttir, 2008, p. 28). *Independent People* is also the novel the president of

Iceland chose when he was asked to recommend an Icelandic book in an interview with *The Wall Street Journal* (Henning, 2011).

4.5 Post-war Iceland; autonomy and bravery?

The end of World War II marked the beginning of a new era in Iceland. The country had finally gained full sovereignty, which in itself contributed to an atmosphere of optimism and mettle, and moreover, the process of modernization really shot ahead in these years. In general, there seemed to be good reasons for optimism; Tulinius claims that Iceland has in the post-war period “experienced a welfare unequalled in its history” (2010, p. 72).

Also the post-war period is portrayed in fiction, and also with regard to this period literature provides a rich source of understanding of Icelandic society, different from academic analyses because a different sort of complexity is allowed in art than in academic studies. I will in this context restrict myself to one single example. This example is Einar Kárason’s trilogy *Devil’s Island* (consisting of the three volumes *Devil’s Island* (1999), *Gulleyjan* [“The golden island”] (1985) and *Fyrirheitna landið* [“The promised land”] (1989). The trilogy describes everyday life in the small community that shoots up in the barracks the US and British armies left behind after the war and which are used as apartments in the first post-war years when there was a shortage of housing in the capital area. The author has chosen his protagonists from the lower classes. The novel also thematizes social development and social mobility in the period in question and it could be said to indirectly question the acclaimed lack of social classes in Iceland. This topic stands as a contradiction in terms in a society that insists on being fundamentally classless; a claim related to the notion of the free individual as a typological ideal (Durrenberger, 1996, p. 171), cf. the portrait of Bjartur in *Independent People*.

Devil’s Island also thematizes the American influence, and it throws the national values in relief and implicitly discusses which these values really are.

Fish and bravery

Around 1900, roughly speaking, Iceland turned from being based on an agricultural economy to relying on fishery. Fish thus was the fundament of Icelandic welfare development and economic growth in the post-war period, and it still represents a considerable part of the nation's income (Iceland, 2013). Being so important, fisheries are frequently on the political agenda in Iceland, also as an issue in foreign policy. The most famous example of the latter is the so-called Cod Wars; a series of conflicts between Iceland and several other European countries in the 1970s regarding fishing rights in the North Atlantic, which Iceland won (Thor, 2012, p. 220). This victory was a key constituent in the economic growth in the eighties and nineties (Tulinius, 2010, p. 71). However, the main reason why I mention fishery and the Cod Wars is that they are an important part of Iceland's contemporary history not only for economic reasons but also for the national imaginary. It is David's victory over Goliath once more, and just as the original David won by choosing an unorthodox strategy, this is what Iceland did in the Cod Wars too. What could a country without military forces possibly do in an encounter with the British navy? Not much, apparently. Still, it was Iceland's obstinate resistance which eventually brought the parties to the negotiation table and to agreement. It is no wonder that Icelanders are fond of this story. It is a story about bravery, with the whole nation in the role of the protagonist. The bravery motive may in fact be regarded a motive in Icelandic self-comprehension as such. For example, the story about Iceland liberation from Denmark is another such story and the one about the so-called financial Vikings' great triumphs on the international financial market in the years around the turn of the millennium a third. As the Old Icelandic literature shows, such stories have been told from the days of the settlement, as the stories about the saga-hero Gunnlaugr Serpent-Tongue and his audacious introduction of himself at the Norwegian court, and about Norse mythology's notorious anti-hero Loki and his insolent yet often successful pranks are examples of.

Also, as an overall national reference, fishing is associated with a number of positive qualities in the Icelandic public. Fishing concerned practically the whole population in one way or other for the larger part of the 20th century, being the mainstay of the Icelandic economy, and qualities and characteristics associated with that trade seem to have trickled in to the national collective's self-comprehension. Fish represents Icelanders' bread and butter, both directly (Icelanders still eat much fish) and figuratively (fish is still important both to the national economy). Moreover, fishery is associated with untamed elemental forces, and naturally there are many stories about struggles to survive rough weathers at sea of which some have a happy ending and others not, a condition which only adds to the stories' grandeur. The self-image of Icelanders related to fishery, then, is one of a strong and brave people with stamina and a close relationship to nature.

It may occur to anyone acquainted with the ancient Icelandic literature that the bravery motive may be rooted in what the study's participants refer to as the "cultural heritage". For the imaginary of bravery and boldness as elements in the Icelandic national character may call forth values from that literature, and actually to a high degree resembles the image of a saga hero. It seems as though an echo from the literary heritage has been transmitted to our day and age, still to be resounding in the contemporary concept of what it means to be Icelandic. Thereby this and similar motives directly concern the mother tongue subject. Somehow, in some sense, they must be dealt with at least when classes read this literature.

Financial adventure and financial crisis

In 2008, Iceland was heavily stricken by the international financial crisis, or *hrunið*, as it is commonly termed in Iceland. All the country's major banks broke down, and the national financial system was very close to total ruin. Ordinary people experienced the crisis as an appalling, epoch-making incident which affected them personally in various ways. Prices rose, salaries and so the purchasing power sunk, people lost

their savings, some lost their job and others even their lodgings. Now, some years later, the economy is stabilized, but the effects of the crisis are still noticeable.

When the collapse was a fact, the government was forced to resign. This marked the end of a political area dominated by the liberal-conservative party, *Sjálfstæðisflokkurinn*, which had been in power for 18 years when the crisis struck. Whilst all seemed to flourish, there were relatively few critical voices to be heard, although it had been quite obvious that the whole nation had lived beyond its means and that the extravagances of the new financial elite had been excessive on the border of the inconceivable. Thus, after the breakdown, people confronted the crisis with mixed feelings. While it was a catastrophe which hit the nation fiercely, people still expressed a hope that the blow was severe enough to make both politicians and ordinary people mend their ways with regard to management of finances, and to reconsider both national and private values. So there was a strange optimism in the midst of the misery, a hope of a policy in compliance with the needs of the nation rather than those of the banks. In fact, a grassroots movement, the so-called pots and pans revolution, emerged overnight, arranging demonstrations and meetings where such claims were put forward and where ordinary people's fury found a vent (E. M. Guðmundsson, 2011), but this movement has languished, and although criminal investigations were accomplished, only the former prime minister was prosecuted and found guilty, yet not condemned. In general terms, the confederation of Icelandic employers warned the prosecuting authorities of prosecuting other politicians, because such prosecution would be a threat to the national economy; "there is no use in looking back anyway", the leader of the confederation claimed (Pressan, 2010).

So far, the financial crisis and the cause of it have been viewed in a mainly historical perspective, where economic and political explanations have figured most prominently. By contrast, one could take a socio-cultural turn and emphasize cultural explanatory factors and even ponder on possible reasons why things turned out the way they did in Iceland from that perspective. While there are numerous studies focusing on the former, with far more thorough and sophisticated analyses than the

present one, there are fewer focusing on the latter, which would be of more direct relevance to the current study. I will in the following paragraphs look into some aspects which may relate to Icelandic culture and mentality; the socio-cultural environment of the study's empirical material, starting with a description of the national atmosphere by the turn of the millennium:

On the one hand the accumulation of wealth in a small fragment of the people whereas the disadvantaged experienced no improvement represented a threat to national concord. People would deservedly feel that the nation's common resources as well as its reputation were target to pillage by a small selected group, which became so rich that they had nothing in common with ordinary people any more.

On the other hand, national sentiments were taken fully advantage of by these financial acrobats to gain support among the populace. Whenever financial experts or journalists from other Nordic countries – particularly Denmark, the former imperial power – claimed that the growth in the Icelandic bank system was unfavourable and unfounded, and that a catastrophe therefore was bound to occur, this critique was dismissed as envy, since the Icelandic economy was stronger than those in the other Nordic countries. (Tulinius, 2010, p. 75)

Even a person without particular insight in financial matters will find it peculiar to assume warnings of the kind related above as grounded on a totally non-professional motive such as envy. Nevertheless, Tulinius' report is supported by Kristín Loftsdóttir's claim that even today Icelanders experience a need to prove themselves, which she judges the consequence of a mentality shaped by centuries of colonialism. When seeing envy in their neighbours' warnings, Icelanders are apparently at the same time attempting to demonstrate that they are not inferior to anyone any more, Loftsdóttir finds (2012). If her analysis is right, Loftsdóttir's findings may stand as a supplement to more conspicuous features in contemporary Icelandic self-representation as expressed in relation to the field of finance, such as self-assertion and grandiosity. In this light, the financial Vikings' excess and the reason why their adherents did not and do not take exception to this may be interpreted as partly a triumphant self-celebration, rooted in an awareness of the nation's fundamental

insignificance, historically due to the country's longstanding status as a colony, and currently primarily due to its smallness and so inferiority. It is not hard to find support for such an interpretation in various public statements, both in the media and elsewhere, expressed by financiers, journalists, politicians, and even the general public. Examples of other fields where the same phenomenon may be of consequence are sports, art and entertainment. In addition, the various contexts in which the country's uniqueness is emphasized, such as the above described notion of Iceland as a country quite out of the ordinary may also relate to this phenomenon (cf. Chapter 4.6).

To provide a further perspective on the story about the financial adventure in Iceland, I will for a moment dwell on the very active role the nation's president played in it. I do this because I find it a further example of how the cultural heritage is in an intricate and *doxic* manner entangled in current images of the typical Icelandic. The Icelandic presidency is an apolitical position; yet the president's activity level in the finance adventure went far beyond mere ambassadorial activities on the country's behalf. The president travelled with the financiers in their private planes, he wrote letters pleading their case, he gave speeches both at home and abroad in which he strongly lauded them, and he arranged meetings between Icelandic investors and international investment companies.

In the present context one may note how the president's speeches as well as the general discourse related to the financial prosperity draw heavily on patriotic ideas and national cultural goods. The success was presented as the product of a set of national, Icelandic virtues, which Icelanders have developed *qua* ancestors of the Vikings. Such ideas were promoted not only in glossy presentations abroad, but also at home. For instance, Kjartansdóttir in her article "The New Viking Wave: Cultural Heritage and Capitalism" describes how the president in a public meeting arranged by the Icelandic Society of Historians emphasized the importance of the Viking heritage for contemporary Icelandic society and especially in relation to Icelandic investments abroad. According to the president, this particular heritage could be seen as a

contributing factor to the success of a few Icelandic businessmen, to whom he referred as the Venture Vikings, had managed to gain through their various international investments (Kjartansdóttir, 2011). Kjartansdóttir shows how the president elaborates his point by naming ten specific qualities as the main reasons for the financiers' success – qualities which in the president's view may all be traced back to the financiers' Icelandic cultural heritage, to “our forefathers the Vikings”, and thus to the “true” nature of Icelandic national identity, and he literally claimed that “one of the leading causes for Icelandic success internationally was the role model which the settlement of Iceland and the Viking era had given Icelanders” (Loftsdóttir, 2012, p. 10). Kjartansdóttir provides several quotes from the president's speech, for example the president's claim that:

[T]he key to the successes that we have won in our ventures abroad has been our culture itself, the heritage that each new generation has received from the old; our society, tempered by the struggle for survival in ages past; the attitudes and habits that lie at the core of Icelandic civilization. Our thrust into overseas markets in recent years is deeply rooted in our history. It is a reflection of our common national consciousness, though admittedly changes in the world as a whole have also played a crucial role.

(Kjartansdóttir, 2011, p. 472)

The examples show how the president ideologically links the present with the settler society and assumed specific characteristics of the Icelanders as a whole and how current images of the characteristically Icelandic draw on traditional concepts, specifically the spirit of the Vikings and their vigour, braveness and boldness. The fact that such comparisons are made in public by the nation's president, indicates that he has not regarded them controversial, and so his statements may vouch for relatively strong national sentiments among the general public. Phrased differently, one may say that claims such as the above quoted indicate that patriotism is an element one should not overlook when studying Icelandic conditions. For while examples as the above ones do not *per se* prove patriotism to be a characteristic feature in contemporary images of the characteristically Icelandic, they are also far from unique. So

this is something that provably exists. Whether this indicates that the president and other public orators really believe in these imageries, whether they assume that Icelanders in general believe in them and that it therefore is a good idea to refer to them in public speeches, whether a combination of these two possibilities is at play or whether one should look for other explanations is a question which will not be explored further in the present study. I just establish that these imageries exist and are at play in many different arenas.

4.6 Nature as a symbol of uniqueness and purity

In addition to the cultural heritage, nature features as an emblematic element in notions of what is characteristically Icelandic. Icelandic nature is regarded exotic, pure and sublime, yet also wild and potentially threatening. In addition to the active volcanos, other strong nature forces are also regularly in action. Every year, Icelanders experience blizzards and rough weathers strong enough to blow roofs of houses and cars off the road. Every year, people are injured by such events and fatal accidents occur. Even with modern technology and precautionary measures, the elements are not to be trifled with. The general attitude to this is that this is something you have to accept when living in a climate such as the Icelandic, yet one should make the best of the conditions. In recent years Icelanders have flattered themselves that they collectively possess such an attitude and that they have made use of it when toiling to rebuild society after the financial collapse in 2008, cf. for instance Prime Minister Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir's New Year's speech in 2012, in which she speaks of the nation's sacrifices in the years after the collapse, and how it has all along refused to resign. In this speech, the Prime Minister clearly draws on commonplace conceptions of Iceland as a rough country where the struggle to survive historically has been a persistent and hard one, and thus implying that those who managed must have been made of stern stuff. It is intimated that as a result of this, Icelanders have grown an enduring and strong people. Ultimately, these qualities are tied to the country's nature and the very discernible presence of the elemental forces, and so may be seen as part

of what nature symbolizes in Iceland. In the end, this is rooted in images of “our forefathers, the Vikings”, to quote the president. There is but a small step from such conceptions to the sagas; the literary heritage taught in every school in the country.

Another quality often mentioned in connection with Icelandic nature is purity (cf. e.g. Gunnarsdóttir, 2011, p. 538). More specifically, it is a matter of undisturbed nature, often rough, yet fundamentally harmonic, where man can be but a visitor. However, in addition to symbolizing purity, the spacious Icelandic nature and the wildness of the elements may easily be interpreted as symbols of freedom and independence as well, qualities often associated with Icelanders in their self-representation, cf. also the “Icelandic emphasis on the notion of the autonomous at the expense of conceptualization of the social” (Durrenberger, 1996, p. 171). Insofar as such qualities are believed to have developed as a result of nature’s formative power, we are dealing still with Herder and his *Volksgeist*, which several scholars find to be the matter of fact (cf. e.g. Björnsdóttir, 1996; Ísleifsson, 2009; Kjartansdóttir, 2009). Furthermore, there exist popular ideas presuming that a people obliged to take elemental forces into consideration in their daily lives, even when living a modern, urban life, as most Icelanders do, will be inclined to relate to nature. Often, this relationship is believed to be of a romantic and aesthetic nature. Very prominently in this aestheticized notion of Icelandic nature figure ideas about uniqueness and pureness, combined with those of wildness, magnificence and sublimity. (Schram, 2009)

The two icons “cultural heritage” and “magnificent nature” are brought together in the image of The Lady of the Mountain (*fjallkonan*), a symbolic embodiment of the whole nation and often more specifically of the ideal of national independence (Björnsson, 2007). The first time such a representation was named The Lady of the Mountain, was in Bjarni Thorarensen’s famous patriotic poem, “*Eldgamlá Ísafold*” (“Ancient Iceland”), written in the first decade of the 19th century, which still is among the most popular patriotic songs. Again, we see how Icelandic national symbols tend to be tied to language and literature, and thus to mother tongue education.

Several scholars have argued that the purity of Icelandic nature is an important notion (particularly) in popular representations (Björnsdóttir, 1996; Ísleifsson, 2009; Jakobsson, 2009; Schram, 2009). Since she is closely associated with the country's nature, this quality is transmitted to the national icon, The Lady of the Mountain, and so purity is one of her characteristics. In fact, The Lady of the Mountain symbolically unifies the main domains in which purity and purism play a major part in Icelandic national imaginaries; nature, the cultural heritage and language. Thus, in the first picture of her, the ice-crowned Lady of the Mountain is sitting by the sea with a rune stick in her hand and a roll of parchment lying in front of her. These artefacts were intended to symbolize "our literary and historical country" (Björnsson, 2007), and the picture thus is a demonstration of how The Lady of the Mountain as a symbol of Icelandic purity has traditionally also been associated with the Icelandic language, well persevered from olden times, and with the country's exceptional literary heritage.

According to Kjartansdóttir, the triad nature, literary heritage and language constitutes the core of Icelandic national identity. She writes: "Most Icelandic theorists (...) that have examined the features and meanings of Icelandic image and identity have all emphasized the role of three major elements: nature, language and cultural heritage." (Kjartansdóttir, 2009, p. 273). I have tried to show that this has been the case ever since ideas of selfhood emerged among Icelanders. At least two of these concepts, the cultural heritage and language, relate directly to the Icelandic subject as a school subject and therefore it is in the present context of consequence to understand their symbol value.

4.7 National identity and cultural environment today

Do the reflections and the historical retrospect above indicate the existence of something which could be termed a national identity in Iceland in late modernity or are today's Icelanders prevalingly global citizens, ill-distinguishable from any other

Western citizens? It has been suggested that Icelanders are more patriotic than other Europeans (Coakley, 2011, p. 13), and the fact that nationality to such a low degree seems to be an issue in the public discourse in Iceland may be taken to indicate that there in fact exists a more or less common understanding of what it means to be Icelandic, or at least that it makes sense to speak of a national space and culture.

The fact that Iceland still is a relatively homogenous society may be of consequence in this context. Admittedly, there has been an increase in immigration in recent years. Yet, immigration numbers are not high. The number of immigrants (i.e. citizens with another citizenship than Icelandic) amounted to a percentage of 2, 6% in 2000 and had risen to 3, 6% in 2005. Even if immigration has continued to increase, the total number of inhabitants with foreign citizenship still is not more than a bit above 6% (S. Iceland, 2012b) . Moreover, a high percentage of these citizens generally is little visible and audible in the public discourse, in the media and in prominent positions. It seems that ethnical disparities to a limited degree reach the surface in the Icelandic public. Thus, Kjartansdóttir and Skaptadóttir state that “Iceland is still mostly perceived as a country with a homogenous population.” (2009, p. 211).

Characteristically, there was only one foreign pupil among the total of roughly seven hundred pupils of the informants in this study, and this solitary swallow was a German exchange student. When asked where the teenagers of foreign origin are to be found, the teachers are taken by surprise at the question; they are simply not prepared for it. Two of the teachers, who both teach at a vocational school, offer a theory: They are probably in the introductory class, for such classes are offered at their school. This is a reasonable, yet not sufficient explanation, as an introductory class will be a useful option for newcomers, but not for pupils who have already been living in Iceland for many years, perhaps all their life, and consequently are likely to have good knowledge of the language as well as of the Icelandic society. The probable explanation seems to be that such pupils simply do not attend upper secondary school. If this be the case, it may be regarded an almost shockingly clear

demonstration of Bourdieu's theory of the educational system as an arena of reproduction of social class and inequality (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).

Language and affiliation

Citizens of foreign origin will remain to have little chance to assert themselves among the general public whilst they are without other education than the compulsory and so have no access to any job with requires specific training of some kind. In addition, the Icelandic language's extremely high value as cultural currency should not be underestimated in this context either. Remembering the claim that "[l]anguage is a very important national symbol for defining being Icelandic, and who belongs and who does not belong. (...) Knowing the language is seen as the key to being and feeling Icelandic, giving access to the culture of poetry and the sagas." (Skaptadóttir & Loftsdóttir, 2009, p. 208), it is not difficult to imagine how persons who *lack* such knowledge may easily be marginalized or downright excluded from the public arena, for example with regard to large public spaces, such as the cultural and the political one. It is a matter of at least a double lack of cultural capital.¹⁸ Firstly, one does not have direct access to the literary heritage, such as the sagas or the ancient poetry, unless one masters the language in which it is written. This is all the more serious as this cultural heritage has been and still is regarded a core element in Icelandic patriotism and national self-understanding (cf. Kjartansdóttir, 2009, p. 273), and thereby is intrinsic to dominating social practices and logics in Iceland (Taylor, 2004, pp. 25-33). Thus, secondly, any person with little or limited knowledge of the language, will by definition have rather limited access to the cultural heritage as well, and so is more or less excluded from fields with high socio-cultural prestige. Consequently, one may assume that the meticulous maintenance of Icelandic language and literature, important as it may be, also has a seamy side; it may have exclusionary effects. For as Skaptadóttir & Loftsdóttir point out, anyone, whether

¹⁸ The present work's usage of the term "capital" is commented in Chapter 3.5.

foreigner or Icelander, who does not master the language, risks to be regarded inferior.

This may be illustrated by an example from the current study: Teacher Jórunn emphasizes the necessity of pupils' having a really good command of both written and oral Icelandic, including a wide range of genres and stylistic nuances, since she believes that lack of such command will often bring individuals in embarrassing and ignominious situations. Jórunn may have understood some fundamental (Icelandic) sociolinguistic and sociocultural mechanisms, and she may, as a consequence of this insight, be doing her best to equip her pupils for grown-up life. On the other hand, it is also conceivable that Jórunn expresses habitualized ideas about the importance of eloquence, puristic maintenance of the Icelandic tongue etc. gained by experience, simply by growing up and living in Iceland (Taylor, 2004, Ch. 2-3), just as much as through elaborated reflections. After all, she is herself part of the society in which these mechanisms are *doxa*.¹⁹

Stable icons and a stable national self-understanding?

As has been shown, scholars seem to agree that basically, very little has changed with regard to national symbols, national identity and images of the Icelandic, even if there also are scholars who remind us that public representations do not necessarily merge with people's own experience (Sigurðsson, 1996). Keeping such warnings in mind, it is still a fact that in public representations, the cultural heritage, language and the impressive nature, the uniqueness of them all and sometimes the interplay between them remain the core elements in Icelandic national imageries. Schram writes:

[The] emphasis on the interdependency of nature and culture can still be considered a common feature of discourse today whether we come across it in a presidential address to the people or a magazine interview with Björk. The image of the primitive survival of the Icelandic nation in a harsh and barren

¹⁹ The term *doxa*, often associated with reflexive sociology, is commented on in Chapter 3.5.

land, while preserving and ancient culture of language and literature, is commonly conjured up to get to the heart of what being and Icelander is. The image of raw nature can be seen as a symbol of this. The idea of synergy of Icelandic nature and nation on the one hand and wide angle landscape footage on the other share the connotations of the ancient, the authentic, sublime and pure. All of these have featured prominently in representations of Icelandic national identity and indeed in the selection of what many consider their heritage. (Schram, 2009, pp. 255-256)

Similarly, Daisy Neijman, who has studied conceptions of Iceland in foreign fiction, finds it “[p]articularly striking (...) how little the image of Iceland that emerges appears to have changed (...), going back centuries.” (Neijmann, 2011, p. 509). Similarly, after having related how the national image construction of the late 19th and early 20th century was, in accordance with national romantic notions, founded on the cultural heritage, Kjartansdóttir states that

[M]any of them still seem to be employed to weave a collective national sense in contemporary Iceland. That is to say a very similar emphasis on the nature, the language and the cultural heritage deriving from the Golden Age as the most important parts of the national image and identity can certainly quite often be seen when examining various contemporary visual, textual and oral narrations.

(...) the various images of Iceland (...) seem to fit very well within the traditional image-making of Iceland (...) with a particular emphasis on various highly-exclusive themes, such as masculinity, purity and cultural continuity along with a mixture of traditional “Herderian” themes such as the “natural/biological” entwining of man, heritage, and nature.

(Kjartansdóttir, 2009, p. 274 and 279)

In this context, it is also interesting to observe how Gunnar Karlsson has chosen to end his book *Iceland's 1100 Years. History of a Marginal Society*. The final chapter of the book is called “Break and Continuity in Icelandic History”. Here Karlsson has included some reflections on how Icelandic identity may be understood today. “At first glance Icelandic society seems very modern,” he writes, and he finds it “easy to find Icelanders who care little about the past, and seem to live exclusively in the

present and planning for the future. (...) Nevertheless, we have a national self-image based on our historical heritage - the image of being a literary nation.” (Karlsson, 2000, p. 361). This is followed by a quite detailed discussion of this literary heritage, in which Karlsson provides numerous literary examples from the 19th and 20th century. He particularly dwells on the authorship of Halldór Laxness who, by virtue of winning the Nobel Prize in literature, supplied the nation with a “satisfactory confirmation of its self-image as a literary nation” (p. 362). Karlsson ends his reflection on Icelandic literature by stating that “Icelandic literary culture is obviously, for better or worse, strongly characterized by a consciousness of the literary heritage.” (p. 363). Karlsson pursues this point also in the following discussion of another core nationalist symbol, namely language, which is his topic for the rest of the chapter. He ends the chapter by gathering the threads, and asks himself “whether 19th-century Icelanders would ever have started their struggle for independence if their ancestors had not written and preserved the sagas.” Karlsson muses that:

Maybe they would, because of the large part that Icelandic officials always played in running their country when it was under Norwegian and Danish rule. But would they have played such a role, and done so in their own language, if they had not known and read the sagas? There would certainly not have been a cultural revival in the 17th century if it had not been thought that there was a valuable culture to revive (...). (Karlsson, 2000, p. 365)

Finally, Karlsson observes that it “is no doubt also due to this cultural heritage that the Icelanders have been blessed with neighbours who respected them enough to let them have their way at last, on both land and sea” (p. 365). Karlsson’s reflections are worth paying attention to, also with regard to understanding current Icelandic self-images. I find it noteworthy that these reflections are presented in a history book - not a book on cultural or literary history, not even one on the history of ideas, but actually a book about a country’s general history. Thus, I find that the example demonstrates a central point: When the historian Karlsson chooses to sum up his book by discussing literature and language, it seems reasonable to assume that these elements hold a strong position in the public discourse of his country. In Bourdieuan terms, one could

even argue that these elements possess a status which could be described as *doxic*, for it seems as though most Icelanders, even those who “care little about the past”, in Karlsson’s words, regard much of this as “natural” and take it for granted; in addition to existing on a more or less explicit symbolic level, it belongs to people’s conceptual level and their action level (Taylor, 2004, Ch. 2). For example, a number of campaigns that promote Icelandic goods and services, featuring slogans such as “Icelandic, yes please!” or “Let’s stand together, let’s choose Icelandic!” have been run over the past decades. This mentality was revived after the bank collapse, and the general view was that such acting and such trading showed joint responsibility and was to the benefit of all. Similarly, patriotism and the cultural heritage are made use of for example in films and commercials, and even in informal popular education these are conspicuous elements, cf. the persistent “maintaining the mother tongue”-campaign promoted by the country’s largest dairy producer, promoted on the company’s products, at television and on a special web page (Mjólkursamsalan, 2013).

It may be asserted, then, that national icons, such as language, literature and nature, are cultivated at several levels. There is the academic and the political level, above represented by Vigdís Finnbogadóttir and Páll Skúlason, both easy to identify because they are displayed publicly. A slightly different sphere where the cultural heritage definitely has made and still makes itself felt is that of art. Looking to literature for example, one will promptly find recent novels with Old Norse motives, such as Einar Kárason’s trilogy about the Sturlungar family and the so-called Sturlunga Age (Kárason, 2001, 2008, 2012). Similarly, Svava Jakobsdóttir has sought material for her novel *Gunnlöth’s Tale* (1987) in Old Norse mythology and the above mentioned Jóhann Sigurjónsson used material from *Nial’s saga* in his play *Løgneren* (The Liar) (1917), to mention a few examples. In addition, both some of the most well-known sagas and central parts of the Edda poetry have been rewritten for children in recent years. “As I get to know the old sagas better, for example the people who are given a voice in *Sturlunga saga*, I see that those people were exactly the same as those living today, with the same kind of characters, feelings, ambitions,

humour et cetera,” Einar Káráson once stated (Smugan, 2012), thus implying that the dilemmas, fervours and troubles of people in the 13th century are basically the same as those of our time. The teachers in the present study share this view.

For a final example of contemporary concepts of Icelandic self-images, I will turn to Ísleifsson and his analysis of Icelanders’ persistent understanding of their country and their people as unique. To do the interpretation he offers justice, it is necessary to quote Ísleifsson at some length, all the more useful as the quote sums up much of what has been asserted in this chapter:

In the case of Iceland the smallness of the population, complete lack of power, distance from Western European centres, and a location in the North created utopian and dystopian images of Iceland as a wonder-island – sometimes a devil’s island, sometimes a paradise. Negative images dominated until the early 19th century but because of a strong demand for Nordic cultural heritage in the 19th century, the dominant image of Iceland as the other developed in the image of the Hellas of the North (...).

In Iceland there was also a demand for this image (...); a colony that wanted to be independent – the smallest of small nations, the poorest of the poor – needed arguments to convince the world that it was worth being counted among civilized peoples, (...) It was even better if it could be claimed that this small nation was of importance for the surrounding world, even superior to other peoples.

This kind of discourse was easily understandable 50-100 years ago. But at the beginning of the 21st century, in a world that seems to be completely different from the world of the early 20th century, one would expect that the discourse of the politicians had changed. Can it be explained why this is not the case? (...) Now that the manuscripts are back and the Cod Wars over, the political and cultural leaders of the country have maintained the same pre-War, pre-independence discourse. (...) [I]s the reason that Iceland’s otherness is still intact: (...) Does a feeling of deep inferiority still influence Icelandic politicians? Or are these images actually signs of increasing nationalism in Iceland, the same tendency as seen in several neighbouring countries in Western Europe? This discourse, these images of the national character of the Icelanders, may also just be left-over, because stereotypes act as knowledge

structures which make people see certain characteristics in the target culture and ignore others (...). In this way we see what we are taught to see and our observations also confirm the stereotype. (Ísleifsson, 2009, pp. 156-157)

A couple of keywords have been predominant in the current presentation of Icelandic self-images, among which “uniqueness” and “purity” seem to stand out. In the general conception, these qualities appear to particularly manifest themselves in language, in literature and in nature. In the current context, it is of interest to ask what significance such an understanding of the national identity has with regard to attitudes to the mother tongue, the mother tongue subject, and mother tongue teachers, and, moreover, how it influences the education in the school subject Icelandic. In light of the previous, it does not seem unreasonable to assume that the mother tongue subject must be in a special position as a field for national culture mediation. To some degree this will inevitably be the case with any mother tongue education. Yet, it appears likely that it is very noticeably the case in Iceland because there is so much more to this mediation than a generally accepted close relation between mother tongue and identity. So supposing that the related views on language and literature are *doxic*, as argued above, they must be regarded part of how Icelanders fundamentally understand themselves.

At the same time, language and literature are the backbone of the curriculum. They constitute the core elements in the education, if not in theory, than at least in practice (S. K. Sverrisdóttir et al., 2011). This means that teachers as well as students are somehow concurrently dealing with the immanent (or *doxic*), of which they are perhaps merely partly conscious, and the explicit and expressible. At this, one may remember Karlsson’s claim that Iceland is “a literary nation” and how he devotes the conclusive chapter in his history book to a discussion of national literature and language policy. Somehow, this chapter seems to display the crux of the matter. And somehow, if so, this is bound to be of consequence in mother tongue education. At the very least, it quite obviously affects the curriculum, which in turn is part of what

influences and shapes practices as well as teachers conceptions of the subject matter and their own commission as Icelandic teachers.

5. Education in Iceland

5.1 Backdrop

The Icelandic school system has gone through a radical development during the last century. At the beginning of the 20th century the majority's education was both incidental and very limited. For example, there did not exist any formal education legislation, and school attendance was not compulsory (Markussen, 2010, p. 92). In the years 1903 and 1904 the authorities engaged an advisor, Guðmundur Finnbogason, to inspect the state of educational matters in Iceland. He found 309 ambulatory teachers who taught 4260 children in total, of which 60% were taught for two months or less. As there existed very few schools, this ambulatory system was an important part of the Icelandic educational system right up to 1950-60 (Jacobsen, Jörundsdóttir, & Thorleifsen, 2012). However, far-reaching changes took place towards the turn of the 20th century, and presently there is ten years compulsory school attendance in Iceland, which covers primary and lower secondary school. The vast majority graduates to upper secondary school, and from 2008 young people have a legally established right to upper secondary education. However, it has for a long time been a problem that those who commence upper secondary education, fail to complete it. Yet, those who do complete upper secondary education successfully in the rule attend upper secondary school in the age of 16-20, as most programme options are of four years.

As has been mentioned, Iceland was severely stricken by the international financial crisis in 2008, an event which among other things led to a grave deteriorating of the national economy and subsequent restrictive fiscal retrenchment. This is also part of the backdrop if one intends to study and understand Icelandic school life and educational policy in the period around 2010. As for the school system, the financial crisis meant scarcer resources and a more demanding workday for students as well as for teachers, including larger classes and increased teaching load for the teachers.

The study's participants freely admit that circumstances have in some respects taken a course for the worse after the crisis, particularly due to the fact that the financial situation has worsened both in schools and in the families, and so it has become difficult to „demand something more“, as they say, such as going on excursions where pupils have to pay for the fare to the site they are going to visit. The teachers who mention this also observe that the economic situation in some families is so grave that it affects pupils' lives and welfare, and the teachers feel obliged to act with particular care when dealing with these pupils. On the other hand, both the teacher who in this context is named Elín and the one called Jórunn are of the opinion that pupils see the value and necessity of education more clearly than pupils used to do, and they thus indicate that some of the consequences of the crisis in fact may be positive. Whereas it was quite common in the years previous to the financial crisis that pupils who were tired of school simply quitted and got themselves a job, this simply was no longer an alternative after the crack. There was no flush of jobs any more, and moreover, the jobs available to a person with no more than compulsory education have been more unremunerative than before the crisis. The result of all this is that pupils appear to have a stronger motivation for completing upper secondary school and even for considering higher education than they used to have, these teachers believe. As yet, there does not exist statistically significant material which may confirm or refute this impression, but as a hypothesis it definitely is noteworthy. Another effect of a tight labour market in the years subsequent to the financial crisis is that fewer pupils than previously have part-time jobs alongside their school attendance, which could be expected to be another factor that would facilitate concentration on school work and thus successful completion of upper secondary school.

As discussed above, the years previous to the 2008 bank collapse were characterized by extraordinary economic expansion. Prosperity and large incomes enjoyed prestige in public opinion, while education, was, very generally speaking, not esteemed as having similar intrinsic value, yet it was regarded valuable insofar as it functioned as a ticket to prestigious, highly paid positions. The financial crisis was followed by a

debate of values. Education was discussed as part of this debate. The value of education as a non-material good, independent of external changes, was emphasized. In addition, a discussion of the *content* of primary and secondary education was stirred up. Parents asked themselves what they wanted their children to learn at school, and which qualities they required in the educational system. The Ministry of education as well as teacher colleges took actively part in this debate, e.g. by arranging conferences and popular meetings on educational matters (cf. e.g. Culture, 2010).

5.2 Reformation of the educational system

The Icelandic educational system has been reformed in recent years. The reformation comprised both the curricula and the legislation. In June 2008 the parliaments passed a new act on education which encompasses both primary and secondary education, in addition to teacher education at all levels in the educational system. This act replaced the former acts on education which had been in force from 1995 (primary and lower secondary school) and 1996 (upper secondary school), respectively. The new act came into force in August 2008 and was gradually implemented in the following two-three years (Parliament of Iceland, 2008a, 2008b; Parliament of Iceland, 2008).

One consequence of the new act was that new curricula were required at all levels in the educational system. A novelty in this national curriculum is that it is joint for all basic education, including preschool and upper secondary education. The Ministry states that for the first time, the general part of the national curricula is the same for all levels in the educational system up to higher education. This general part deals with the purposes of the national curricula, the basic principles and focal points in the educational system, teacher professionalism, and assessment (Ministry of Education, 2011). The political aim was to develop a consistent educational provision and to improve cooperation across the borders of the educational levels. To obtain this, one has among other things based the curricula at all levels on the same basic focal

points: literacy in the widest sense of the term, democracy and human rights, equality, sustainability, and creativity (Ministry of Education, 2011).

5.3 Primary and lower secondary school

Compulsory education in Iceland comprises seven years in primary school and three in lower secondary school. Children attend school from the age of six, and children and adolescents aged six-sixteen are both obliged and entitled to education. The school year is nine months long (180 school days). Most pupils complete lower secondary school the year they turn sixteen, but in recent years high-performing students have been encouraged to graduate earlier. More specifically, this means that particularly high-performing students are allowed to graduate from lower secondary school and start upper secondary school a year earlier than their peers.

Students are obliged to attend compulsory national tests in Icelandic every year, and in mathematics in fourth and seventh grade. Similar tests are held in the first part of tenth grade, the last year in lower secondary school, but then there is an English test in addition to those in Icelandic and mathematics (Ministry of Education). Previously students moreover had to take national final exams in up to six subjects in grade ten, but this arrangement was changed in 2008 (Markussen, 2010).

5.4 Upper secondary school

Iceland's oldest upper secondary school, the present *Menntaskólinn í Reykjavík* (Reykjavik grammar school), was established in 1904. This school was closely tied to the old Latin school and its traditions (Jacobsen et al., 2012, p. 323) and was then the only school of its kind. Today there are 34 upper secondary schools in Iceland, of which the majority is public. 15 of the schools are located in the capital area. A handful of the schools are boarding schools, but none of these are located in or close to Reykjavik (Ministry of Education).

All adolescents who have completed lower secondary school are entitled to upper secondary education. Upper secondary school is not compulsory, but 93% of the sixteen years old commence upper secondary school (Markussen, 2010, p. 93). In plain numbers this means that upper secondary education is annually attended by ca. 30 000 pupils (Ministry of Education, 2009b). The right to upper secondary education is in force up to the age of 18 (Ministry of Education). This principle was established with the passing of the current act of education (Parliament of Iceland, 2008b).

The system of upper secondary education is rather complex. Students may choose among 100 programme options, of which 87 are vocational. The rest relates to aesthetics, sports or general studies. The main rule is that one must have completed lower secondary school to apply for entrance at the programmes, but some programmes have special entrance requirements. Likewise, while most programmes are of four years, there nevertheless are programmes which are somewhat or considerably shorter. All programmes qualify for further education, but not all of them give direct access to higher education. Yet, all programmes represent some sort of formal qualification, such as a craft certificate or a General Certificate of Education.

In addition to granting everyone the right to education until the year they turn 18, the education reform appears to set upper secondary education up to be student centred to a higher degree than what has previously been the case. In the ministry's presentation of the act, it is among other things stated that "the schools' work should be planned with a view to students' needs and expectations; the education must be organized in a far more flexible manner, and the education must be adapted so that more pupils may complete the courses they begin" (Parliament of Iceland, 2008). In addition, the government emphasizes a higher degree of local influence in the school system, improved following-up of students and increased accentuating of evaluation. These are presented as attempts to reduce the high drop-out rates which have for years been a problem in Icelandic higher education (Markussen, 2010).

Flexibility, variety and increased local influence are key words in the governmental presentation. Seen from the outside, the Icelandic educational system, and particularly upper secondary education, appears to have been relatively flexible and varied also before the reform. The large number of study programmes is one example of this. In addition, there is considerable variation among schools with regard to the organization of students/groups. Some schools organize students in traditional classes, i.e. fixed groups, while other schools take the respective courses as the organizational basic unit. This is a building block model which is based on a credit-system. The courses usually run for one term, and each course gives a certain amount of study credits. In this model, it is to some degree students' own responsibility to put together a timetable which secures the required amount of study credits each year. They must also take care to include all compulsory courses to obtain their craft certificate or diploma.

The course model is more flexible than the class model. For instance, high performing students may, if they follow the course model, shorten the pathway through upper secondary education, an example which is specifically mentioned and stressed as a positive effect of flexibility by governmental authorities (Parliament of Iceland, 2008). Other examples of flexibility and local influence may be that individual schools to a certain degree may individually decide entrance requirements, that final exams are local rather than national, and that each school develops local curricula as a supplement to the national ones.

As a further example of flexibility in the organization of upper secondary education, which may at the same time be regarded a means to deal with drop-out problems, I mention that some schools offer evening courses and distance education as a supplement to their regular daytime courses which represent their main activity.

5.5 Presentation of the Icelandic subject

By contrast to the situation in Norway, Greenland and the Faroe Islands, the vernacular remained the primary written language in Iceland throughout the centuries of Danish colonialism (Jacobsen et al., 2012, p. 298), and so Icelandic is a subject with long traditions. Although there admittedly were long periods in which the institutionalized education was quite poor, there still was an obligation to home-tutoring, in addition to compulsory preparations for confirmation.

Icelandic is the mother tongue of the vast majority of Icelandic pupils, both in compulsory and in upper secondary education. In March 2010, a total amount of 6, 8% percent of the country's inhabitants held a foreign citizenship, whereas approximately 3, 3% of all pupils in compulsory education had another nationality than Icelandic. More specifically, this means that in an average age group of about 4500 pupils, ca. 150 are foreigners (S. Iceland, 2012a). Most of these are Europeans (S. Iceland, 2012b).

Although Iceland is changing demographically, Icelandic holds an unchallenged position as mother tongue subject. However, when reading the subject's current national curriculum, which was introduced during the years 2007-2011 (Parliament of Iceland, 2008), one still notices an awareness of the fact that even a traditionally very homogenous country such as Iceland is about to become more multicultural. In fact, a separate chapter in the curriculum is dedicated to non-native speaking pupils, and the topic is moreover dwelled upon already in the curriculum's introduction, where it is established that pupils with another mother tongue than Icelandic are entitled to instruction adapted to their individual needs (Ministry of Education, 2007).

All of this is in agreement with the stated general aims, which are that pupils "develop a positive relation to the language and obtain good linguistic skills". For, as the curriculum further states, "[i]t is important that pupils understand how important Icelandic is to their reasoning, their identity, and their future in education and work"

(Ministry of Education, 2007). This may be interpreted as a considerable emphasis on the subject's *Bildung* potential in the Icelandic subject's national curriculum. In the chapter on Icelandic as a school subject, one may thus read about "the cultural values intrinsic in Icelandic and other nations' languages and literatures". Pupils should moreover develop and be aware of language as a marker and carrier of identity:

Language and literature are the cultural heritage of the nation and should be nurtured, respected and developed. This heritage is, without doubt, an important factor in the nation's literacy status and how natural we think it to learn to read, write and produce language that can be understood. Furthermore, teaching the mother tongue has another objective: that of enhancing expression and creativity in both speech and writing, using the language and learning to know its power. A good, rich spoken language is one of the prerequisites of communication, and the same applies to the written language, which is a medium for creativity and for conveying new knowledge. In this way, teaching Icelandic (...) enhances the role of the language as the medium of thinking and of the writer's inner monologue, when necessary.

(Ministry of Education, 2007)

The curriculum mentions four fundamental elements which should be in focus throughout the compulsory education. These are oracy and listening, reading and literature, writing, and finally elementary linguistics. The curriculum lists a number of objectives for each fundamental element at certain stages, specifically 4th, 7th and 10th grade, but it is open in the respect that it does not list specific texts, specific activities or specific methods at any level. Apart from this, the curriculum generally emphasizes varied activities and methods, holistic education and interdisciplinary cooperation. Otherwise, individual schools have considerable influence on their own work since every school writes its own local plan as a supplement to the national curriculum. This, then, constitutes the fundament of Icelandic education in primary and lower secondary education.

In upper secondary school the Icelandic subject consists of a number of independent courses, and the subject curriculum accordingly consists of a general part and

descriptions of the respective courses, yet the curriculum establishes that one should have an overall approach to the subject at all levels, even if it is divided into separate courses. Some of the Icelandic courses are compulsory basic courses while others are voluntary in-depth courses (cf. the overview in Appendix III). Generally, students follow the courses in a certain order, and they in the rule need to have completed a “lower level” course to proceed to a more advanced one. There is certain variation among study programmes with respect to requirements, i.e. which courses students need to attend (Ministry of Education, 1999a).

Students gain two or three credit points per course, depending on the respective courses’ working load. They need four to fifteen credit points, conditioned by the various study programmes. For pupils in the general studies programme, the frame of reference is a total of 140 credit points which they need to get their diploma, normally spread over four years. At least fifteen of these 140 credits should be obtained in Icelandic.

The basic courses that everyone must attend cover topics such as elementary linguistics, literacy and linguistic skills, communication and literature. Those aiming at general university and college admission certification also need courses in language history, culture history, literary history and literature from the Middle Ages onward. As for the in-depth courses, these are more specialized. One deals with Icelandic and general linguistics, another with Icelandic and general literary studies, a third with sociolinguistics. There are also courses in children’s language and culture and communication and rhetoric (Ministry of Education, 1999b, p. 16, cf. also Appendix III).

6. Teaching as a primary category in the teachers' discourses

Already during the interviews it became evident that *teaching* was the teachers' preferred angle, whether they actually talked about the act of instruction or other elements related to their professional life, such as the subject itself, the curriculum, or the students they were teaching and their own relation to them. As this unambiguously is a pronounced tendency in the empiric material seen as a whole, I regard it one of the study's principal findings.

In the research question teaching is not mentioned as a particular focal point. However, since it proved so central in the teachers' discourse and apparently is a dominating element in what could reasonably be termed their practice and practical reason (or practical *logos*), teaching requires special attention. Why do the teachers to such a high degree reflect through concrete examples? Why are general reflections so deeply embedded in teaching? I regard such questions closely related yet subordinate to the general question of Icelandic teachers' understanding of their profession and practice. In the presentation of the research question, I explain that I have aimed at describing and understanding (some) Icelandic mother tongue teachers' conceptions of the Icelandic subject and of their professional management of the subject, the latter including additional questions such as how the teachers talk about their job and their practice.

In the present chapter I claim that at least the teachers in this study talk about their job and their practice through descriptions of teaching in general and through specific instances of classroom situations, virtually always with a didactic focus. This, then, far along the way answers the latter of the above questions; how teachers talk about their job and their practice. At the same time, it serves as a demonstration of the teachers' professional reasoning; how they think as professionals. Besides, although I only have the teachers' own descriptions of how they work, the accounts nevertheless

give an impression of their practice as mother tongue teachers in Icelandic upper secondary education.

In addition to accounting for how teaching dominates the teachers' discourse, I do in the present chapter attempt to explain and contextualize the notion of teaching, believing that since it appears to be so crucial to the teachers' professional acting and reasoning, understanding and explaining this concept must be of consequence. Therefore, I try to examine the concept itself and what teachers actually mean when they use the term teaching. Also, I reflect on possible reasons for the dominance of teaching and on what this focus may mean. For example, it may relate to the profession's character of being a practice (or even a *praxis*, cf. discussion in Chapter 7), it may be due to framework conditions,²⁰ or it may relate to less apparent reasons, such as professional identity or professional positioning.

I have marvelled over the fact that the activity of instruction, subject didactic reflections, and generally the *practical* focus to such a high degree dominated the Icelandic teachers' discourses. After all, teachers in upper secondary school are primarily academically educated, and actually none of them makes much of the practically oriented part of their education, i.e. the teacher training course, which actually was quite a brief course in the case of the more experienced teachers who attended it some years ago. For example, Agnes, who has been teaching for 17 years, recalls that the practical part of the course comprised exactly eight lessons, in none of which her practice supervisor was present. The informants' main subject at university, Icelandic, is taught with a scholarly focus, without any subject didactic or scholastic perspectives to speak of, and upper secondary school teachers do not get any practical training along the road until they do the graduate teacher training course (Björnsdóttir; University of Iceland). Thus, in a sociological perspective, one might expect upper secondary school teachers, or at least teachers in the theoretically

²⁰ The term "framework condition" is commented in Appendix VI.

oriented subjects, to be socialized into academic orientation and reasoning through their education (cf. Appedix I).

In addition, as upper secondary school teachers are teaching more theoretically oriented courses than teachers in primary and lower secondary school, and as they are teaching adolescents and even grown-ups, who are more capable of abstract reasoning than children are, it would not seem unreasonable that they have a certain focus on Icelandic as an academic subject, in addition to the practical subject didactic one. However, generally speaking, the academic aspect is a minor element in the teachers' discourse, even if the curriculum draws heavily on the academically oriented gymnasium tradition (S. K. Sverrisdóttir et al., 2011, pp. 16-18). Moreover, as accounted for by the informants themselves, the professional action, i.e. teaching, is what they pay definitely most attention to as practising teachers. As briefly mentioned in the chapter on the teachers' concept of the subject, it is as though the dominance of the methodical and subject didactic aspects appears striking to some of the informants themselves in the course of the interviews. It is not unlikely that they rarely discuss topics such as the concept of the mother tongue subject with outsiders like me, and so what they say may sound surprising to the speakers themselves. Surely, they teach Icelandic. Yet they hear themselves talk less about the subject than about their practical approach to the act of teaching. Somehow, this may sound different from how the teachers usually think of their practice; as quite specialized educational work. At any rate, a couple of the teachers seem to feel a need to nuance the picture of an apparently very method oriented practice and maybe even to justify themselves. So for example, after having explained how educational theory and didactics interest her far more than Icelandic as an academic subject these days, Birgit says: "But now I fear that you misunderstand me! I'm still very, very fond of my subject, you know. I *am* a mother tongue teacher. That's what I am!"

To all appearances Birgit is right; both she and the other teachers certainly talk about disciplinary challenges and values, too, and it is very obvious that these be important to them. Yet, this does not change the fact that, parallel to the emphasis on practical

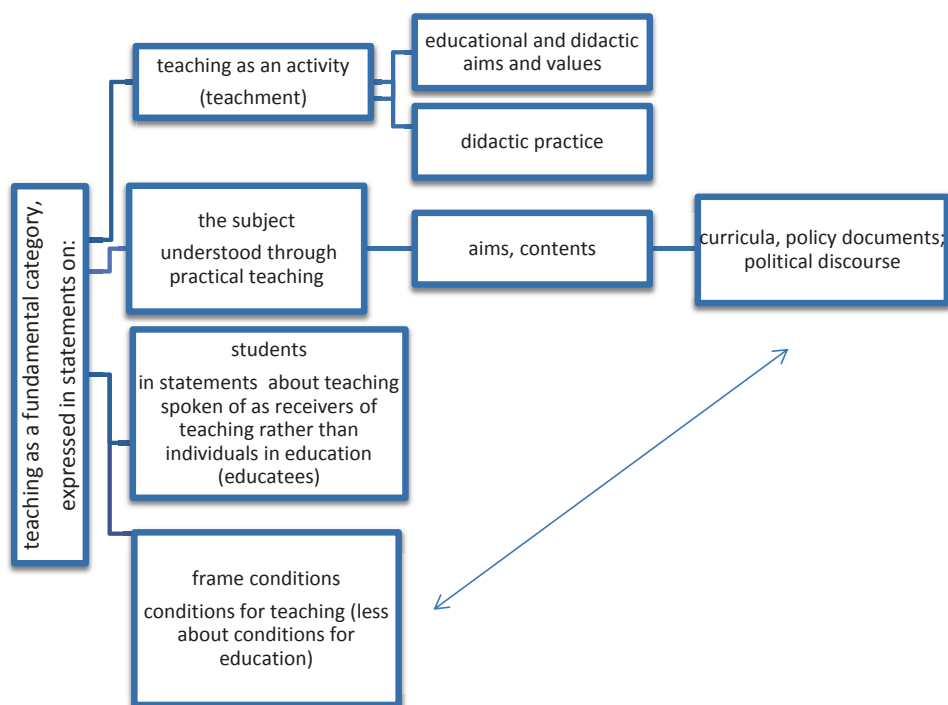
skills in the accounts for the subject's contents and aims, the narratives about teaching Icelandic predominantly are narratives about *activity*, or, more generally, about practices and teaching methods. The data clearly point in the direction of teaching as the absolutely dominating element in the teachers' realization of the subject and their own management of it. This dominance may reveal something crucial about the seven Icelandic teachers' professional thinking and course of action, which will in this context be regarded basically two sides of the same coin. I believe that exploring the teachers' conception of teaching may be a key to understanding the practice of the Icelandic subject in upper secondary school as described by the subject's managers, i.e. the teachers. By learning something about the professional discourse, about how teachers talk about their practice, one may learn something about the profession's mode of working. However, one may also gain insight in the profession's reasoning and values. Hence, exploration of this apparently fundamental concept may contribute to providing understanding of significance both in a descriptive perspective, as regards teachers' first-hand statements about their professional experience, and in an interpretative-reflective one, the latter pertaining to various qualitative and valuative questions which can be derived from the descriptions.

6.1 Teaching as a versatile concept

The act of teaching, specifically understood as learning-oriented activities in the classroom, or *teachment*, as I shall call it below, is the pivot of the Icelandic teachers' discourse. As shown in Table 1, this is manifest in statements about all levels in the educational system, ranging from concrete classroom episodes to relatively general comments on the curriculum. However, the table does not indicate the frequency of the different realms, yet it is very evident in the material that utterances about what is termed "teaching as activity; didactics" in the table to a high degree dominate the discourse. Furthermore, such statements serve as the angle of approach even when

teachers talk about more abstract categories, such as their understanding of the Icelandic subject's aims.

Table 1: Teaching as a fundamental category



One could claim the dominance of statements about the concrete act of teaching to be in accordance with popular understandings of teachers' work; what else does a teacher do but teach? Yet, it is rather surprising to discover that this single category actually completely dominates the teachers' own descriptions of the subject as such

as well as their understanding of their professional task, knowing that the actual time spent in the classroom does not, after all, comprise more than an average of about fifty per cent of their working time. Teachers actually spend much time on preparation, on various kinds of follow-up work, such as evaluation and correcting pupils' papers, and on organizational tasks, such as staff meetings. Admittedly, such tasks are sporadically remarked on in the in the interviews, for example when Agnes says that the only thing she would really want to change about her job is the endless hours she spends on correcting pupils' papers, or when Birgit says that she still, after all these years, often spends incredibly much time on preparation of her lessons.

In spite of such comments, it appears that the teachers themselves still have a clear understanding of teaching, i.e. the act of instruction, as the decidedly most substantial part of their job; so even if all the participants mention some non-classroom activities, it still almost looks as if they hardly find these worth dwelling much upon. Teaching seems to be what really matters, maybe because it is the most concrete and visible, and therefore the most "public" part of the job, maybe for other reasons. This relatively narrow definition of what it means to be a teacher may for example be "neutral grounds", in the sense that this is the common understanding of what it means to be a teacher and thus the one they choose as a joint basis of sorts when talking about their profession and their job to a non-colleague, a person who is not obviously a member of the professional fellowship. Yet, it seems peculiar that the teachers themselves should choose such a minimum variant of the term when for once they are invited by a person with particular interest in their profession and their field to expatiate their professional experiences and reflections, unless, of course, they have actually internalized the common understanding of teachers as professional instructors and little more than that. However, that is a strikingly simplistic explanation, and a highly unlikely one. An alternative could be to regard the teachers' explanations as an expression of embodied professionalism, of the habitualization of teaching, so to speak. Thinking and acting in terms of teaching (i.e. teachment, cf. Table 2 below), appears to be how they, to their own way of thinking, *are* teachers,

how they *exist* as teachers, how they live out their professionalism; in short, teachment is the imprint of the teachers' professional experience as it is incorporated as bodily experience, yet also as the way the task and the characteristics of the profession are perceived and understood, at least at the informal, maybe even *doxic* level, in the professional field as well as in the communal space, and hence teaching has status as the key term in almost any discussion of education as far as teachers' tasks are concerned, and of the profession as such. The teachers' various additional tasks, such as preparations and attending meetings, could in this perspective be interpreted as something teachers simply *do*, and are not as fundamentally part of what they *are* as the (classroom) instruction is. I will develop this hypothesis in the following.

Several factors support the interpretation of teaching as exceedingly important, both in the teachers' practice and as a mediator in their reasoning about education, their own work, or their pupils. For example, the teachers in the present study do as a matter of fact tend to talk about teaching also when asked about units such as Icelandic as a school subject, the subject's contents, or their conception of its aims; not necessarily, as I see it, in the respect that they derail because they prefer talking about teaching to reflecting on the subject's aims, but because such reflections apparently tend to be *mediated* through teaching as a specific kind of activity, and also as a mental and bodily experience. It is as though they reflect on more general aspects of mother tongue education *via* their own practical experiences. So although questioned directly about for example the aims of mother tongue education or more specifically the mother tongue subject, the teachers answer mostly by means of concrete examples from their own classrooms. This feature is not easy to show directly in a presentation of the material, as it really is a matter of the teachers' general professional discourse, and so practically pervades their talk and therefore would require extensive examples to fully do it justice. A short exchange between Agnes and the interviewer may still serve as a relatively typical example. Agnes has

been asked to account for the content of the Icelandic subject and is in the following responding to this request.

Agnes: Right. So you want me to describe the mother tongue subject, then? You mean the course I teach, don't you?

Interviewer: Well, I was thinking of the subject in general, but you may naturally start by the more specific...

A: All right. The content of the mother tongue subject... Well, I'll start by describing the two courses I teach, then.

I: Ok. And then we can maybe proceed to the more general afterwards.

A: Yes. But we'll start with the course ÍSL 202²¹, anyway. At that course, we teach an Old Norse saga, a contemporary novel, and then syntax. And the contemporary novel, well, we change it every second year, so that we actually always teach *recent* books. But, you know. There are so many and so different elements in this course, and the syntax really takes a lot of time. So we have been wondering whether we should rather be teaching more writing. The course is compulsory, and I am not sure if it is right to teach so much syntax. The students' motivation varies a great deal, to say the least, and not all of them are particularly theoretically inclined. Maybe we should simply let them write more. Let them practice writing, all kinds of language usage and styles; formal letters and informal, how to write a text up to the standard... practical matters.

(...)

But then, at the other course, we basically teach literature. Literary history, that is. Which they find rather boring. They think it's loaded with all kinds of details which they have to memorize. But in my opinion it is quite nice to have the literary history alongside with the poems we have chosen from the textbook. Because they are supposed to recognize the characteristics in the texts. That's what I want them to see. And we don't really emphasize the memorizing that much. What matters is the understanding, that they understand what characterizes, say romanticism. What characterizes it, and

²¹ See overview over the various courses in Appendix III.

how can I find those characteristics here, in this poem? That they see the connection. This connection which I find so essential. And this they write a comprehensive essay on, a literary essay, that is. They write five to six pages, and they get strict guidelines for the work. And these are the main items. They read two novels and literary history, and, as they say, a thousand poems.

The example shows the seesaw between the concrete descriptions and the more abstract pondering, how Agnes uses the specific syllabus of her courses as a basis of more general reflections, and this would be typical even of the other teachers' reasoning. One way of putting it, is to say that (the act of) teaching seems to be the lens through which the teachers see most elements related to their own professional practice. However, this does not apply just to the subject they teach, and, understandably, the framework conditions; in fact, even the pupils, and the teachers' own relationship to them, are seen through this same lens. Using another metaphor, one could with Bourdieu argue that teaching appears to be *embodied*, as suggested above, and so it may be regarded *habitual* knowledge. Thus understood, teaching is indeed not just something the teachers *do*; it is clearly also something they *live*. It is part of their personal and professional *habitus*, if we understand *habitus* as "internalized history, which settles in the practical dispositions" (Hastrup, 2007).

Using another approach, one could claim that the teachers' reflecting seems to be of a typically hermeneutic nature; there certainly seems to be a running interaction between the parts and the whole. Practice, understood as classroom activities, is influenced by factors on a superordinate level, such as material conditions, traditions, curriculum, and national educational policy, but at the same time, practice experiences influence the practitioners' view on the curriculum, the subject matter and educational aims and so also their professional development and their professional practice. Changes, for example in framework conditions, may lead to different experiences, revised aims, and so on in a dialectical movement.

Yet another alternative, and a quite different interpretation, would be to emphasize the impression that the teachers apparently tend to scale down the subject itself and

its specific values, that, judging from the interviews, they tend to be more interested in *teaching* Icelandic than in Icelandic as a subject, for there are numerous utterances about teaching in each interview, and numerous concrete examples of how the individual teacher teaches, yet much fewer about the subject as such, in spite of the fact that they are specifically questioned about it. This observation may in turn naturally be related to the habitual nature of teaching, but it may also relate to the specific organization of the upper secondary education. I will return to that discussion below.

What has been said so far, calls for a clarification of the notion of “teaching”. Obviously, teaching is an ambiguous term as used both in the material and in the interpretation of it, and so it denotes at least

- 1) a specific *activity field*, approximately corresponding to subject didactic activities, to instructing, to giving lessons, and to *performing* teaching.
- 2) a *practice*, which should be understood wider than the classroom activities and the term’s concrete performative aspects. As a practice, teaching includes the range of considerations and also the wide range of additional activities which the profession involves, taken into account for example various kinds of follow-up tasks, cooperation, and preparations.
- 3) a *lens* or a *medium* through which most strikingly also the non-didactic elements of teaching life is perceived: Icelandic as an academic field, the syllabus of the school subject, the subject’s superordinate aims, the framework conditions, and even the pupils.
- 4) closely related to 3) is teaching understood as *embodied knowledge*. As such, teaching could adequately be described as part of the teachers’ habitus, seen as a way of reasoning, being, and acting in one’s (professional) life world, which is not

just second nature to the individual, but rather part of (what has come to be) its (professional) self and its *Dasein*, so to speak.

Of these categories, 1) and 2) directly concern the action and process of teaching, whereas 3) and 4) both have reference to the teacher as an acting, reasoning, and perceiving professional agent. However, there is also an important difference between the latter two, as the categories describe respectively external and internal conditions, as it were, and so are qualitatively dissimilar; as a medium for perception it works inwards, whereas as a habitus and basis for action it works outwards. All the same, all categories will constantly mutually influence and shape each other. For example, Daniel, among others, relates how his lessons initially were very traditional, very lecture-like, but how he quickly realized that this was not a very well-functioning or efficient format. Although he never found it difficult to maintain discipline in class, and although pupils did not complain, Daniel decided to do something about the situation. “Naturally, I found it very boring, you know,” he explains. “To stand there, talking on and on, when hardly a single soul really paid attention.” And so he started experimenting, and he started looking for alternative teaching methods. Gradually he took up what he calls the station work model, yet he saw that even if this was very successful in ordinary classes, it did for example function less well in adult education, and so he needed a re-adjustment of his methods in adult classes. In fact, the method is in constant development also in ordinary classes. Daniel makes notes, observes what functions well and what functions less well, and he consults his pupils in order to improve the station work model and other methods, which he also makes use of. Daniel’s station work model, then, is a uncommonly candid example of the interplay between experience, new ideas, traditions (within the field), reflection, new practice forms, new experience arisen from the new practice forms, new reflections, more experiments, search for more knowledge and ideas, adjusted practice etc. What Daniel describes is, in short, a dialectic process, which could be termed a hermeneutic activity and which indeed resembles descriptions of the hermeneutic circle. This process could maybe be termed the coil of practice.

To render it possible to distinguish between the various facets of teaching, I will, when appropriate, refer to the concrete classroom action as *teachment*. Teaching as a practice will be termed *schooling*, which literary means “the (...) profession of teaching in a school” (Dictionary). Accordingly, “schooling” in this specific context means “the professional practice”, seen as a whole, an understanding which seems to be very similar to the way Ivor Goodson, British researcher of education and professor of learning theory, uses this term (Goodson, 2003a). Moreover, there is teaching as a medium, which thereby could be seen as a *tokener*.²²

In a study like the present one, where the empirical data are provided by the participants themselves and actually to a high degree consist of the participants’ own descriptions of their profession and their professional practice, it is difficult to show exactly how teaching works as a medium; as such it is an abstract entity, which, unlike the performative act of *teachment* cannot be observed directly. Yet, the above cited passage from the interview with Agnes, where she accounts for the subject via the concrete courses and syllabus, may serve as an example of this mechanism.

Finally, since it seems clear that teaching to a considerable degree must be regarded *embodied* both as knowledge and as action, even if it also to a very high degree is an explicit category in the practitioners’ professional vocabulary, there is a need to hive this embodied aspect off as a separate category of teaching. This would be teaching as a *habitude*, which in this context will be termed *wise*.²³

Naturally, teaching as a *habitude* relates closely to teaching as *tokener*, yet is distinct from it because it so intimately belongs to the practitioner herself, cf. *Oxford English Dictionary*’s explanation of *habitude* as “a settled disposition or tendency to act in a

²² *Tokener* is derived from the Old English *tācn*, signifying both that which shows something and that which signifies something (Dictionary).

²³ *Wise* means e.g. *manner, reason, condition, style*, and relates even to *wit*, which indicates that *wise* even includes the individuals *ethos*. (Dictionary)

certain way, esp. one acquired by frequent repetition of the same act until it becomes almost or quite involuntary; a settled practice, custom, usage; a customary way or manner of acting” (Dictionary), an explanation which strongly resembles the Bourdieuan concept of *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1977). Thus understood, *habitude* truly is part of the individual, hardly possible to deprive her of, and which indeed may even be difficult to change.

However, when I in the current context prefer to term the *habitude* aspect of teaching the teachers’ *wise*, i.e. their manner, reason, condition, style, and mode, I do so to use a concept which includes more than habitual, embodied tendencies and dispositions. *Wise* does in fact even relate directly to *wit* (Dictionary), and so could be regarded to also include the individual teacher’s *ethos* (Callewaert, 1997, p. 143f.). In other words, as used in the present context, *wise* is a relatively wide term which even includes semi-embodied knowledge and general convictions, and which is dialectically connected with teachers’ deliberate practical decisions and actions. Hence, *wise* describes the professional role the individual teacher has taken on, partly as shaped by his personality, dispositions and influences, partly as a result of his values, beliefs and deliberate choices. Even if the habitual part of practitioners’ *wise* is of importance, as demonstrated for example by Bourdieu, the conscious, intentional element should not be underestimated. For example it seems reasonable to assume that it must play an essential part in the development of *wise* which most of the teachers emphasize: They report that they presently have other ideas about subject matter and education as well as about pupils than they had when they started teaching, and these altered ideas have substantially affected their teaching, they claim. As exhibited by the teachers in this study, then, *wise* very markedly is a dynamic phenomenon, cf. Taylor’s understanding of self-interpretation, accounted for in Chapter 3.2. Also, several of them mention variations in *personal (professional) style*, which would also apply to *wise*, as teaching has been itemized in the current splitting up of the term. For example, Birgit compares herself to a colleague who

teaches some of the same courses as she, Birgit, teaches, and with whom she cooperates a great deal. “We have different styles,” Birgit says. She continues:

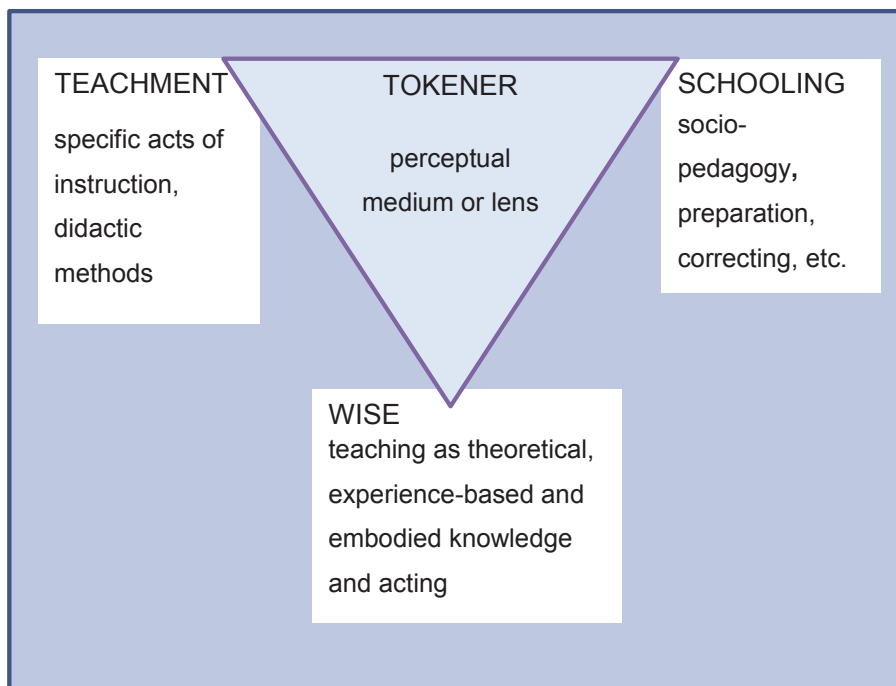
She is much more concerned about the curriculum than I am. I can almost hear her saying “Is this part of the curriculum? Do you consider this part of the curriculum?” Which is just fine, of course. So when she is teaching in the classroom next to mine, I can hear how she makes sure that everything is put across to the students, how she hands out notes and... they don’t miss anything, that’s for sure. I am much more careless about the curriculum.

Yet, there is nothing in the following which indicates that Birgit finds the one style better than the other. She is, on the contrary, making a point of how very different styles can both turn out well and she does in fact specifically mention that it would have been a good idea that I interview this colleague as well, so that I could have compared directly myself.

I do not want to underrate the effect of societal structures and mechanisms which according to Bourdieu strongly contribute to shaping our *habitus*. In choosing the term wise I recognize such mechanisms, while at the same time acknowledging the individual’s autonomy in the spirit of Charles Taylor. For even if for example part of the professional development the teachers describe may be explained sociologically as adjustment to school life reality, as I shall discuss in the following, the teachers’ own explanations relate to professional and ethical reasons.

By analysing and splitting the concept of teaching, it also becomes clear that teaching carries a contextual, situational two-way movement; as it appears in this study, it relates both to the individual agents’ action in-the-world, i.e. an inward-out movement, and the way the world is perceived and experienced by the agent, which could be described as an outward-in movement.

Table 2: Teaching as a multi-faceted concept



Even if the main focus in the present study is on teaching as teachment, and to some degree on schooling, tokener and wise inevitably are parts of the horizon of understanding towards which teachment and schooling are understood and explained by the teachers. Findings related to tokener and wise are explored in other contexts, primarily in the interpretation of the teachers' self-representation in Chapter 7. The most prominent aspects of teaching include the teachers' attitude and relationship to their pupils, which relate both to schooling and wise, and thus in turn influence teachment, and the teachers' personal professional motivation, which primarily applies to tokener and wise. Also of considerable importance, both to schooling and wise, is the impact of framework conditions, which seem to have the function of what

Bourdieu terms “structuring structures” on teachers’ practice as well as on and their professional reasoning.

The examples furthermore illustrate the point that the sub-concepts of teaching as illustrated in Table 2 even include factors which are not necessarily particularly obvious at first glance, and thus inconspicuous in the model. In addition there are non-expressed elements, which may well be as significant parts of the teachers’ knowledge and practice as what they explicitly do express. Much embodied knowledge, i.e. knowledge relating particularly to tokeners and wise, is such knowledge; tacit and habitual, and consequently difficult to show in a written text where nothing can be explained unless it be put into words, nevertheless of considerable importance to the individual teacher’s professional *modus operandi*; his or her way of being, reasoning and acting as a professional.

6.2 Teachment as the dominating element

What the teachers prefer to talk about in the interviews is teaching understood as teachment; how they actually teach. This is so both when the teachers talk about the subject’s and the profession’s general aspects and when they relate specific everyday examples from their professional practice. In the interpretation of the teachers’ accounts I have tried to understand why stories about teaching in general and particularly stories which in the current terminology may be labelled stories about teachment play such a dominating part.

Before I proceed to more specific interpretations, one simple reason for the noted dominance of teachment should be mentioned: It is usually far easier to talk about something concrete, not to mention events from one’s own experience, than about the abstract and general. However, although many of the stories relate instances of classroom instruction and other pedagogical methods, and so apparently should be labelled stories about teachment, they often also serve as illustrations of the teachers’ general opinions about for example the profession, the subject, or pupils, or as a way

of approaching such topics, and thereby these stories turn out to be more than mere descriptions of everyday episodes. It is, as briefly mentioned in the chapter on conceptions of the subject, a *pars pro toto* technique; the part often represents and is meant to shed light on a larger entity. The concrete examples of teachment thus serve as a bridge to abstract reflection on a practice, a field of education, and a school subject. This, then, is what I mean by claiming that stories about teachment serve as a token; the lens through which the practice and the field is perceived.

A couple of participants spontaneously remark that they have found it interesting to take part in the current project, and that they especially enjoyed the interview, particularly because doing so represents an opportunity to reflect on matters of great importance to their professional practice and beliefs which are nevertheless rarely discussed explicitly in busy everyday life. Although such considerations are not pronounced by all the participants, it may perhaps not be unreasonable to assume that what they state might be regarded a tendency in upper secondary school in general. Teachers *are* busy throughout the school day. If this means that the opportunities to discuss the practice and the subject in general or philosophical terms are scarce to most teachers, they will consequently simply be unaccustomed to talking thus about their job; a supposition to which I return in the discussion of the teachers' self-concepts. In addition, the interviewees may have been unprepared for a general discussion of subject and practice. After all, the logs, with which the participants at the time of the interviews were quite familiar, as they had already written them, deal with practical matters, i.e. with specific lessons and thereby with the concrete everyday level, and so this may have been the teachers' horizon of expectations, so to speak, ahead of the interviews. Moreover, the teachers may have regarded their personal experiences to be the most genuine contribution on their behalf to a study of their subject and their own professionalism. In any case, *if* teachers generally find little time for discussing fundamental aspects of education, their own job and the subject they are teaching, it seems reasonable that they take the concrete and familiar as their starting point for general reflections. This is one of the ways in which

teachment serves as a bridge; from the concrete to the more abstract level. This works the other way around as well: Instances of teachment sometimes serve as illustrations of general views or principles already explained.

The simple fact that stories about teaching, specifically about teachment, serve a double purpose, both as the teachers' descriptions of their practice and professional field and as exemplifications of their ideas and ideals of the same, may in itself be part of the reason why teaching to such a high extent dominates the teachers' narratives. Besides, when trying to account for it, one detects that in Icelandic like in English, teaching is a wide term. Thus, in Icelandic, to teach (*að kenna*) both signifies the act of instruction, which has in the present context been termed teachment, and the activities included in teachers' work seen as a whole, which I have termed schooling. I suspect that the lack of differentiation between the two meanings in ordinary speech may have a concealing effect. For example, preparations and afterwork, such as correcting papers, concern classroom activities directly and may so be regarded part of teachment unless one is specifically talking about preparations as a task *per se*. This could possibly be compared to talking about the work of musicians; even the musician herself seldom talks about how she had to spend days practicing certain passages in a specific composition. The most interesting part is the result of her work – the performance. Similarly, the teachers in the present study apparently tend to talk about *their* “performance”, about teachment, and less about the various activities more or less closely connected with what takes place in the classroom. I suspect, therefore, that some of the activities which in the present context would be labelled schooling may have been communicated or presented inadequately because they are regarded inherent to teachment. In addition, the unspecified term teaching is the one in general use and thus the one it seems natural to resort to when talking to someone outside the community of peers. So, all things considered, it is quite possible that the participants for various reasons choose to relate rather concrete instances of teachment than talk about the additional tasks, at least when talking to others than fellow professionals, insofar as they regard the

additional tasks less visible parts of teachers' core activities and so more difficult for the listener to relate to. And after all, although I am not a complete stranger to my participants' professional field, I undeniably still *am* a visitor and an outsider in this context.

In addition, there is a professional-habitual aspect to this, as I discuss in further detail in the chapter on the teachers' self-concept. In short, this applies to wise, to teachers' being and acting as professionals. Teaching, particularly manifest in teachment, seems to be incorporated in the teachers' bodily and mental professional life through education and practice, and to influence their professional reasoning on any level, ranging from interpretation of concrete episodes in class to views on national policy within the field. Again, it seems as though teachment serves as token. Moreover, explicating the abstract or strange by help of concrete examples and of connecting to something familiar is a quite common *modus operandi* to most teachers *qua* teachers, as very clearly demonstrated in the material, especially in Hannes' explanation of his working methods. "I often draw parallels," he says. "For example between the past and the present, between well-known events or persons or films or whatever in pupils' everyday life and the topics they are to study in class. Also, I tell them short anecdotes or curiosities about the topic we are currently studying in order to bring it to life and to draw it closer to the students." This habitual *modus operandi* may possibly be an additional reason why teachment is such a prominent element in the interviews.

At any rate, part of the point of splitting the concept of teaching as I have done in the present chapter is to show how much the apparently well-known term teaching actually comprises. Besides, by help of such splitting it is easier to distinguish between the various aspects of the concept when necessary.

Instances of teachment

The following is primarily a descriptive presentation of a selection of instances of teachment. It is meant to give an impression of which topics the teachers choose in

their examples, and to some degree of their didactic choices. In choosing a presentation with an intentionally low degree of interpretation, I try to offer a summary of classroom conditions as they are thoroughly described by the participating teachers in the logs as well as in the interviews. I try to be loyal to the teachers' own descriptions and to give a fair impression of them, which is not easy as their accounts' are numerous and far more extensive than the summary. So the descriptions are rephrasings of the teachers' own and the summing up is mine, as far as possible without clearly interpretative comments. I am not thereby indicating that the presentation is neutral or objective.

The below descriptions are intended as a base for the subsequent interpretation, and as a general overview over the teachers' accounts of topics they teach and over the *leitmotif* teaching.

Literacy: reading

Reading is a very prominent topic, a fact which basically is in accordance with the curriculum's prescriptions. Clearly, much time is spent on reading. Sometimes pupils are supposed to read for example a couple of chapters in a novel at home, but often they spend time on reading in class. Also, teachers spend time on teaching reading techniques since they regard pupils' reading skills as often being too poor. They are generally concerned about dwindling reading skills and often encourage pupils to read. "I am always reminding them of how important good reading skills are," Birgit says. "'Reading is workout for the brain!' I keep saying. I probably tell them so every day."

Pupils primarily read imaginative literature, mostly poetry and narrative prose, and the emphasis on the national classics is heavy. Consequently, there are many examples connected to the saga literature, the *Edda* poetry, and Nobel laureate Halldór Laxness' novels. The teachers explain that it is necessary to spend time in class on simply helping pupils getting through the texts, especially the old ones, both because many pupils are very inexperienced readers and lack motivation for reading

and because they have difficulties with understanding the archaic language in such texts. Generally, several weeks are spent on a major work, e.g. a novel by Halldór Laxness. In some cases pupils have a certain freedom of choice with regard to which novel to read from a specific period, yet the teachers generally hand out fixed reading lists.

In addition to reading imaginative literature, pupils read some factual prose, particularly in their first year in upper secondary school. Factual prose includes newspaper articles, other short articles, to some degree web texts, and (extracts from) reference books, the selection varying from one teacher to another. Pupils are exposed to various kinds of texts, both to be given the opportunity to actually read various text types, and as part of the theoretical education, specifically genre theory. There is, however, far less emphasis on factual prose than on imaginative literature, although this too varies within the group. Fjóla is probably the one who is most concerned with factual prose. In her classes pupils read both traditional news articles, news articles on the web, and some specialist articles (particularly at in-depth courses). She also tries to accustom her pupils to using reference books, and thus she for example runs a dictionary project, in which she lets pupils one by one present what she has called “word of the week” based on usage of dictionaries.

Interpretation

Closely connected to reading are in-depth studies of texts read in class, the *interpretation and understanding of texts*, which could thus reasonably be classified as literary education. Such work comprises a wide range of exercises and activities, and if listed, one instantly sees that many of them overlap with other curricular labels, such as literacy and oracy. Letting pupils answer questions to a text (a short story, book chapter etc.) is a well-known exercise to all the teachers and one they all make relatively frequent use of in some variant or other, although it appears to be especially favoured by Hannes. Such questions sometimes simply test pupils’ knowledge of the text in question or their ability to use specific literary terms, yet they may also be

more demanding and for example encourage pupils to provide their own interpretation or to compare central themes in the text to similar conditions in their own lives. This is a quite traditional type of exercise. Similar, and also traditional exercises, are those where pupils are asked to write summaries of texts and organized group discussions or plenary discussions. Occasionally there also are excursions, for example to places of literary historical interest. Yet, if the traditional exercises hold a strong position, most of the teachers also like to try more creative activities, such as making films, illustrating texts, dramatizing texts or staging storyline projects. Sometimes creative exercises are less interdisciplinary than these examples imply, and so easier to carry out. Pupils may for example be asked to use texts read in class or the historical period in which they were written as inspiration for writing their own texts. For instance, Elín lets her pupils write about the early medieval period and what it was like to live in Iceland then when her class reads a saga, Agnes lets her pupils re-narrate a *þáttr* (a medieval short story) and illustrate it so that it would suit readers of 10-12 years, and Jórunn encourages her pupils to retell the narrative in the saga read in *her* class from the perspective of one of the characters. Thus, she simultaneously teaches reading, writing, literary history and literary theory.

Multimodal texts

The curriculum states that students should work with an extended conception of texts; e.g. with *films, commercials, web texts, graphs, tables and diagrams*. Although explicitly mentioned in the curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1999b, pp. 11, 31, 33, 36, 38, 40, 41 and 45), this is a very unperceptible topic. Hannes is the only one who on his own initiative mentions that he likes to occasionally show films in class. He finds it useful to do so, he states; a good film may provide an illustrating interpretation of the historical period in which the story is set, which may in turn facilitate pupils' access to the period and to material from the period which they are supposed to study. In addition, films are in many cases adaptations of literary works and may as such also be valuable interpretations of other works of art. The other teachers are reluctant to show films. It is complicated and expensive, they explain.

They need to apply for permission to show films in public, and they also have to pay a high fee for doing so. Consequentially, they rarely make use of films in their classes. By contrast, some of the teachers use the web quite actively. The web is being used for two purposes, first there is the primarily practical one; using the school's internal web as a practical tool, meaning that teachers post hand-outs and other notes in this virtual space, pupils hand in papers and other homework there, teachers comment and hand back pupils exercises electronically etc. Both Daniel and Fjóla use the local intranet for such purposes. In addition, the web, specifically the Internet is used for inspiration and a source of information. For instance, Agnes' pupils find information about India on the Internet when reading and working with Vikas Swarup's novel *Slumdog Millionaire*. Besides, Fjóla mentions that usage of the Internet is a prominent topic when she teaches pupils to be critical in their usage of specialist literature and other sources of information. "Once I let them look up their own school at Wikipedia," she recalls. "And then they read about the school. And then suddenly, they came across a passage stating that 'Anna and Peter are the school's most intelligent and popular pupils...' and more along the same line. And so I asked them: can you trust this information? Do you think you can trust everything else on the web? What is reliable and what is not? How can you tell?" Despite the impression these examples may create, the teachers state that usage of Internet and of computers in general is limited, and that this is how they want it to be.

As for the other genres mentioned above, commercials, tables, diagrammes and graphs, the latter three are not mentioned once in the material while some classes, yet not all, study commercials as part of the genre studies in the basic courses.

Literacy; writing

Writing, very often referred to as an essential linguistic skill, is almost as prominent a topic in the teachers' presentations as is reading and the teachers all claim to spend a lot of time and energy on this topic. It is also a central topic in the curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1999b).

Writing exercises cover a wide range of activities. Some of them are mentioned under “understanding and interpretation of texts” above, the other include quite general topics such as “Who am I?”, “My dream school”, “My hobby” or “The music I love” in basic courses, and topics closely connected to the subject matter, such as writing of formal letters and job applications, writing of reviews, writing a compulsory paper on name traditions in the pupils’ family in 2nd grade in Jórunn’s school, and writing essays on novels or other literary texts, to give some examples. Besides such examples, which all are supposed to result in a text (paper/essay) of some length which in the rule is handed in, corrected and evaluated, there are simpler exercises and creative exercises. By simpler exercises I mean answering questions to a literary text/literary theory/literary or language history etc., practicing writing e.g. practicing writing, and similar activities. By creative exercises I mean for example retelling a narrative, writing short stories, or trying out genres, such as when Jórunn’s pupils choose one letter each which they were asked to draw and present in narrative form for young children.

Hannes often collects even less demanding exercises and corrects them; he explicitly mentions that by doing so he more or less forces his pupils to practice writing, and that he finds it quite important that they do so. Thus, even if these exercises often to all appearances are questions to a current topic which test pupils’ knowledge of this topic, underneath they are in equal degree writing exercises. Daniel’s pupils hand in a written exercise every fortnight, while the other teachers seem to have a less regulated schedule in that respect; writing is sometimes practiced in lessons specifically dedicated to literacy education, at other times it is steered by other didactic considerations. Pupils do for example often hand in papers or other written exercises towards the end of a specific period.

On the whole, the teachers put considerable effort in writing education. As with reading, a main reason for this is pupils’ lacking skills within the field, the teachers all state, and they consider the situation serious. So, as the teachers regard literacy, reading and writing skills absolutely indispensable no matter what profession pupils

may choose later on, the teachers feel a responsibility to do their utmost to ensure that all their pupils achieve as good literacy skills as possible. In doing so, they make use of various exercises. For example, as the lack of writing skills in many cases is quite fundamental, the teachers find it reasonable to give very limited exercises sometimes. Thus, Birgit explains how she splits the process of writing for example an essay up into smaller components and lets pupils practice composition of paragraphs or writing of e.g. introductions or conclusions in separate sessions because she considers it important that a task be manageable. “Then we simply focus on one part at the time,” she explains. “And I often give them a selection of examples to show how, say an introduction, *may* be written.” Birgit finds this method more fruitful than simply handing some topic or other out and expecting pupils to hand in well written, well composed text. That does not work, Birgit states. But by focusing on specific parts, pupils learn to master the various elements a specific kind of text typically consists of and then gradually learn to compose whole texts.

Much writing takes place even in lessons where writing is not the particular topic of the lesson, as the above example from Hannes’ teaching demonstrates, and so writing is practiced in practically every lesson.

Elementary linguistics

For at least two reasons, elementary linguistics is regarded another topic of consequence. First, it is judged an important tool to develop personal linguistic skills. Second, elementary linguistics is regarded as relating to a prominent national symbol, the often mentioned cultural heritage, and to the tending of the national language.

Elementary linguistics includes a number of sub-disciplines; grammar, syntax, orthography, phonology, and language history. These topics are mainly taught in a traditional “chalk and talk” manner: The teachers give presentations of the topics and the presentations are followed up by practical exercises. Rather traditional drill exercises seem to dominate, yet some teachers try other methods as well. Thus, Daniel has tried his station model also when teaching elementary linguistics. He

judges this experiment far less successful than using the station model in literary education, though, and finds it challenging to develop good alternatives for elementary linguistics education. Nevertheless, he finds it worthwhile to try, for he is convinced that pupils would learn more if he could only find a model that works better than the traditional one. And after all, strengthening pupils' knowledge in elementary linguistics would in Daniel's opinion also promote their writing skills.

Education in elementary linguistics takes up a considerable amount of time, particularly in the compulsory basis course ÍSL 202, and the teachers talk at some length about it. In various degrees, they find it rather demanding to teach the linguistic sub-disciplines; while promotion of writing skills may be stated an important reason for teaching both orthography and grammar may, the teachers find it harder to motivate pupils for learning syntax parsing, particularly in classes with generally low academic motivation. "They don't see the point, you see," Birgit admits. "We find subjects and verbals in great numbers. But pupils don't see how knowing how to do this may be useful for them personally."

Oracy

Oracy is another topic mentioned both in the curriculum and by the teachers. However, it is rather more difficult to measure the extent of oracy education than it is to measure literacy education, for when it comes to oracy, a considerable part of the education might be labelled informal or implicit. It is very clear, both in the logs and in the interviews, that there is a fair amount of oral activities and other oracy education in the classes, yet oracy is rarely mentioned as the topic of a lesson; it is more or less embedded in the teachers' general didactic strategy. In this respect, oracy education may be compared to literacy education; pupils are let write and read in every lesson. Similarly, there will almost always be oral sessions of some sort in a lesson.

As examples of oral activities mentioned in the logs and the interviews I list (prepared and spontaneous) plenary discussions, group discussions, oral presentations of various kinds, and occasional (dramatic) performances. Furthermore, there is Fjóla's "word of the week" project, where pupils one after the other present a word chosen from a list handed out by Fjóla and explain its meaning, its etymology and other facts worth knowing about it. This is an example of explicit and quite formal oracy education. Similarly, Daniel runs a project in first grade where pupils one by one present an Icelandic poem of their own choice, in which he has initially very clearly explained the purpose and guidelines for the project, notably both for the preparation and for the presentation.

However, oracy is not just a matter of taking part in a discussion or doing a presentation; it is also a matter of listening. Consequently, learning to listen and to make notes would be regarded part of oracy education, as would other listening activities. So even if almost all the teachers state that they generally avoid what they call "lecturing" as far as possible, they still regard mini lectures useful for practicing listening and training concentration. Fjóla remarks that this be part of the subject's general education aims; to know how to make good notes is knowing a learning strategy which will be very useful in higher education, which her pupils are very likely to get. Likewise, pupils need to learn to follow a (formal) instruction, teachers think. Other types of more or less teacher dominated oral activities are narration and dialogue, for which particularly Hannes is an advocate. In addition to using anecdotes and stories both as appetizers and as a means of connecting the past and the present, he heavily stresses the importance of "talking to pupils", as he phrases it. In his experience, many pupils have few conversations with adults, so he finds it important to stand as a grown person who actually talks to them and take them seriously. I will return to this specific example in Chapter 7.6. Presently it may serve as an example of how various motives and aims tend to merge; while dialogue in itself without doubt may be labelled an oral activity, Hannes' motivation for talking to pupils belongs to

general education aims or social education aims as much as it does to subject curricular ones.

The above mentioned public assessment report judges oracy (*hlustun og áhorf*) a topic poorly taken care of. It states:

This topic seems to be poorly attended to. Occasionally pupils for a very short while listened to music connected to a text read in class. They never listened to the radio or watched television, and they very rarely used the Internet. They never listened to readings of texts they were to discuss. However, pupils did listen to fellow pupils' presentations. Even if nothing was said specifically about the performances, pupils probably learn to appreciate what is well done and deliberate on what it takes to improve oneself. (S. K. Sverrisdóttir et al., 2011, p. 25)

This evaluation is only in part in agreement with my own findings, which are more nuanced than those of Sverrisdóttir and her team. For example, there *are* instances of reading in my material. Thus, Agnes in a lesson on New Romanticism plays a recording of a poet's reading of some of his own poems which the class is supposed to study, and she does not in any way talk of this as if it were a very unconventional thing to do, and certainly not as if she had never done anything similar in class before. Also, several teachers explicitly talk about instructing pupils with regard to oral presentations, and performances are evaluated both by teachers and by the pupils' peers. At least in connection to formal presentations, this includes systematic development of oracy skills, rather than the incidental one suggested by the report. Daniel's poetry project in first grade may serve as an example of this; this project includes both systematic preparations and systematic evaluation of the presentations' contents as well as of their performative qualities.

Furthermore, it seems that there is more common usage of the Internet in the classes described in the current material than in those visited by the authors of the report. Most of the teachers in the current study make systematic use of the Web in their classes, well aware that this is a part of reality with which pupils are very familiar. On

the other hand, it is used strategically and methodically, and thus usage of the Web is also restricted, and pupils are for example not allowed to be online all the time or in every lesson. As for other non-literary media, a topic commented on as “the extended conception of texts” above, the findings in the present study resemble those in the assessment report. None of the teachers talk about usage of radio or television in class. Still, I cannot be certain that they never do so, since I do not explicitly ask them about it. With regard to films, all but one teacher are reluctant to showing films in class, for some reason or other. Nevertheless, even the reluctant ones admit that they in fact have shown films from time to time.

Information retrieval

Students are supposed to learn to retrieve information from various sources, including both general information and information related to the subject matter. Possible sources range from newspapers and magazines to specialist literature of various kinds, books of reference, encyclopaedias, dictionaries, TV, radio and the Internet. “However,” Fjóla claims, “it is absolutely necessary to learn how to use physical *books* in search for information, for in their future studies pupils will sometimes need information that is simply not available electronically. So for example when they write in-depth essays, we demand that they list at least two sources which are *not* electronic.” Fjóla thinks that pupils should furthermore develop a critical attitude towards sources; this, she finds, is part of developing general critical and reflective skills, which she considers one of the subject’s tasks and which she explicitly teach. This, in turn, relates to the general view that mother tongue education should provide general education and prepare pupils for their future lives. Also literacy and oracy education are seen in that context.

Learning to obtain information is a topic mentioned by others than Fjóla, yet not all the teachers mention it expressly. This does not mean that they ignore the topic, yet it may reasonably be taken as indicating that it is not reckoned as important as is

literacy, or at least that less time and attention is paid to this topic than to the more prominent ones.

Rhetoric and argumentation

The next topic, formal instruction in how to present and discuss a given topic, relates both to literacy and oracy, yet it is my impression that it is particularly taught as part of writing education, for knowing how to discuss a matter methodically is regarded as important as a good introduction or conclusion in writing an essay, and so simply as part of mastering the art of writing. Consequently, this is apparently being taught quite systematically. However, there is similar instruction in oral presentation, as the above example of Daniel's poetry presentations illustrates: When the project was introduced, Daniel both presented the general topic (presentation of a poem of one's own choice), and explained how the project might be carried out as well as what he regarded criteria for a good presentation.

Rhetoric and argumentation is spoken of as an important as well as useful topic, but it is not very evident from the material how it is generally actually taught since concrete examples are relatively scarce.

The cultural heritage

The *cultural heritage* and promotion of it are among the definitely most prominent topics in the material even if these topics are principally embedded in the respective subdisciplines rather than taught separately. The cultural heritage is particularly connected to reading, but its significance and the consequent necessity of knowing it are also stated as main reasons why pupils should learn historically oriented disciplines as well as (some of) the linguistic ones. For example, the teachers typically argue that both language skills and theoretical knowledge about the native language and language system is a necessary part of tending the language.

The introduction to the subject curriculum provides an overview over the Icelandic subject. Here six topics are given special attention. These are *reading*, *spoken*

language and oral presentation, listening and watching, writing, literature, and elementary linguistics whereas the national heritage is not listed as a separate topic. Yet, if one reads the introduction, one may note that it is nevertheless referred to on several occasions, specifically in the general part of the introduction and in the subchapter on literary education (Ministry of Education, 1999b, p. 7 and 12), and one may even argue that conceptions of the national and the cultural heritage seems to be an underlying given also in parts that do not expressly refer to such entities. Notwithstanding this, the cultural heritage still seems to play a more prominent role in the study's material than it does in the curriculum. However, I presently confine myself to stating this as a factual finding; for possible reasons for this fact are explored in some detail in elsewhere in the thesis.

There unavoidably and perhaps quite naturally are overlaps between the above categories. The subject is in itself complex, as stated by the curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1999b); a fact which is reflected even at the level of single lessons. Often more than one aim is stated for a lesson, and aims, topics and working methods tend to merge. In addition, some aspects may be implicit. For example, much writing education takes place as an integrated part of literary education, thus we have seen how Hannes regularly let his pupils hand in even rather straight forward and simple questions to texts read in class. In the interview he claims that the reason for this is that he wants to make pupils write as much as possible in order to improve their writing skills; yet he does not write anything about this in his log when he accounts for literature lessons. However, such integrated education is fully in concurrence with the subject curriculum, which states both that the subject should be taught in a general perspective and that there should be focus on writing in all courses, included those where writing is not listed as a particular topic in the course description (Ministry of Education, 1999a, 1999b).

The overview lists topics which are given attention by the teachers. I sum up the overview by underlining that this attention is not evenly distributed; evidently,

literacy (the points writing and reading in the list) and the cultural heritage are by far the most prominent topics in the material.

Teachment as an approach to the reflection on the subject

Since so much is mediated through stories about teachment, teachment becomes a main source to understanding how teachers reason, and to learning something about how they actually work. Teachment, or rather stories about specific instances of teachment, also serve as a mediator for the teachers' concepts of the subject matter, more than anything else in the accounts does, and this is so both in the logs and the interviews. This I have explicated in Chapter 6.2. Presently, I briefly look into the participants accounts for some of the subject's subdisciplines. These accounts partly are presented as some sort of "mini-portraits" of the subject as such, as parts of general descriptions of the subject and its aims, and so overlaps with the previous chapter. In Chapter 6.2 it turned out that the participants go through the particular when asked to describe the general, whereas I in the present chapter realize that the opposite also is the case; in accounts of particular lessons or teachment of specific topics or subdisciplines and in the grounds given for teaching them (the way they do) one may hope to trace participants' fundamental views on the subject and on education

This means that also when talking about the school subject's subdisciplines, such as literacy, linguistics, or literary history, the teachers prefer to relate the practical implementation of the various topics. For example, most of the participants in the current study happen to teach a course where Old Norse literature is part of the syllabus, and they all describe their own teachment of it and the particular challenges which follow this particular topic in some detail; how they make glossaries, how they let pupils write summaries and *précises* of the stories, how they sometimes let pupils draw as a means of interpreting the stories they read and so make them their own, for, as Agnes points out, at some programmes pupils tend to be more visually than verbally or theoretically oriented and many pupils are good at drawing, while they are

perhaps not particularly fond of writing. Moreover, there are class discussions on particular themes in the narratives, role plays, film making, placards, excursions, studies of the historical epoch and other activities.

By contrast to the vivid and engaged descriptions of specific activities both in the logs and the interviews, relatively little is said about this literature *qua* literature and its relevance as such. There may be several reasons for this. One is the obvious fact that it is easier to talk about the concrete and “factual” than about the more general. Moreover, the specific may even have stricken the teachers as more interesting and useful in a research perspective than the more general which the researcher surely could have found out about single-handed and probably already knew much about anyway, even if they do not specifically say anything about that. In addition, there are the more implicit elements. As I have argued in the presentation of the subject’s key concepts and indirectly in the presentation of the study’s socio-cultural context, it is for instance not unlikely that the interviewees take the literary and cultural-historical value of the national medieval literature for granted, that its value stands as obvious and practically *doxic*, and that they therefore see no reason to question it or give grounds for teaching it, except in a pedagogical perspective.

The empirical material provides numerous examples of concrete lessons and definite teaching methods, and so it would not be feasible to do the material justice without seeing into teachment. The teachers relate stories about specific lessons, as Fjóla’s recent experiment with staging a scene from *Nial’s saga*, or Hannes’ experiences with showing films, such as *The Crucible*, when teaching 17th century literary history, a period he feels that pupils do not easily relate to, and which he therefore tries to bring to life and thematizes by help of various representations. Jórunn tells about pupils who write children’s books in elementary linguistics, Elín about writing assignments on a saga, and more instances might easily be added. Such concrete examples, the teachers preferred mode of discourse, display how the teachers’ professional reflexivity in the rule take place on the basis of specific episodes and didactic challenges. Teachment truly is the core of the matter when these teachers

reflect on their professional practice, especially when they talk about how they experience it.

Naturally, there are external factors which affect teaching and consequently opinions of how it should best be conducted. The national curriculum might be mentioned as one such factor, and indeed as one of particular consequence. Other local factors which are likely to influence both actual teaching and teachers' didactic principles and ideals relate to the individual schools; what kind of studies they offer and what kind of pupils the various studies appeal to. It is for example a fact that some schools tend to recruit pupils with relatively low motivation for school work. Many of Elin's, Agnes' and Birgit's pupils belong to this group. This may in itself partly explain why these teachers so strongly emphasize didactics when they basically are explaining matters concerning the subject and its various sub-disciplines.

Taking all of this into consideration, yet acknowledging that there are considerable differences between the schools, one can still note a couple of main topics in the teachers' accounts: First, they spend much time teaching literature, and second they actually spend an equal amount of time on teaching basic skills; spelling, syntax, writing and oral skills. As for elementary linguistics, this is a discipline rarely referred to as one unit. Instead the teachers speak of specific sub-disciplines such as grammar, orthography or language history, and so because it somehow is less visible, general linguistics as a whole may somewhat unfairly be judged less prominent than literary education. Nevertheless, as presented in the logs, it will seem that literary education has a very dominating position, as the teachers often note this or that novel or saga as topic of the lessons. However, as indicated in the above overview over topics, writing and oral skills are knowledge of another kind, they are practical skills, which will not always be taught as specific topics, but which are drilled among other things incorporated in the work with literary texts, and they may easily be less visible in the logs than the "academic" topic of the day.

“It’s crucial that students are active!” – teachment and professional ideology

In addition to the accounts for the specific topics of the various courses they teach, the explanations of didactic-methodological choices and grounds stand out as another main category of concrete accounts of how the informants actually work in their classrooms. For example, all the teachers heavily emphasize the importance of what they call “student activity”, i.e. that pupils do not sit “passively” listening to the teacher, but are forced to do work actively in every lesson; e.g. to answer questions to a certain text, to do exercises, or to discuss or illustrate a literary text. The teachers independently unprompted point out that their belief in and stressing of activity based learning has developed over time. Initially, they used to lecture, they all state, but currently all but Hannes claim that they avoid this teaching method as far as possible.

This attitude is evident even in the logs. For example, most of the teachers explain their choice of lessons for the log, and when doing so, some of them relate their choices to what could be described as their basic didactic views. For instance, teacher Birgit presents such a view when she writes:

When choosing lessons for the teaching log, I aimed at picking lessons which were not similar, and which show different kinds of challenges. As we always have double lessons (...). I always divide the lessons into several parts, and I always strive to activate the pupils. I find the outcome of long lectures to be very meagre. (...) Generally, I think it works far better to just walk about in the classroom and help pupils while they’re working. (From the introduction to Birgit’s log; see Chapter 2.2 for a more extensive excerpt.)

This statement summarizes what seems to be a common understanding of activity based learning as a main didactic principle; for all the teachers have very firm belief in the importance of activating (Icel. *virkja*) pupils, as they formulate it. Fjóla is particularly explicit on this point. “I would say that my teaching is based on the idea of students being active in their studies, and that this is my chief principle as an Icelandic teacher,” she states. However, all the teachers submit numerous examples

of how they actually do this in their classes, and these examples plainly demonstrate that the same general idea may be realized in a number of ways; then again they at the same time they display how this variation takes place within a limited range of the subject's disciplines – particularly writing, literature, literary history, and elementary linguistics.

The explicit reasons given for the substantial stressing of student activity are without exception didactic-pedagogical: The teachers generally are convinced that pupils learn more from such activities than from listening to teachers' "sermons", as Birgit phrases it. Birgit also is the one who claims that it truly is "crucial that the students are active", and she believes this to be decisive both to students' learning outcome and to the degree to which her teaching may be regarded successful. Daniel, the most radical spokesman for activity based learning, even suspects that lectures tend to serve as an excuse for doing nothing, and Elín says something very similar when she states that lecturing encourages little else than laziness and boredom. Hannes' terminology on this score may be elucidating: although apparently sharing the principle the rest of the teachers state, Hannes consequently speaks of *work* (Icel. *vinna*) whereas the rest of the others use the term *activity* (Icel. *virkni*), and he might well thereby communicate something essential. By choosing this particular phrase, Hannes indicates what this all is about: *work* denotes "das Mühsame der Tätigkeit, die harte Anstrengung" (Ritter, Bien, Gründer, Eisler, & Gabriel, 1971), and much more than activity, the word work brings forth connotations related to concentration, toil, strain and maybe even coercion, but also results, importance and identity. Different from activity, work implies that one really has to focus and make an effort in order to achieve results (in this context: to learn something), and maybe even that what demands real effort tends to be valuable, which, if so, in itself contributes to the seriousness and significance of the task in question. In short, at least in Icelandic, "work" implies a higher degree of earnestness than does "activity", which easily brings one's thoughts in the direction of "keeping someone occupied". I do not by this in any way indicate that Hannes is more serious or earnest than the other

teachers; I simply claim that his phrase may initiate some reflections even on the concept of activity.

Returning to the more dominant term, activity, and for practical reasons including Hannes' term work in it, we see considerable disparities in the various teachers' understanding and execution of it. For example, in the case of Hannes, the usage of the term is relatively narrow, and he chooses from a rather limited and conventional range of activities, whereas Elín is open to many kinds of activities. Elín claims never to be happier as a teacher than when she gets the opportunity to let pupils' creative forces loose in big, interdisciplinary projects.

More specifically, most of the activities somehow relate to writing and reading, which is hardly surprising in respect of the curriculum's emphasizing of literature and the subject's traditions. In fact, exercises which combine these two disciplines are particularly conspicuous, and so the teachers let students write all sorts of exercises based on texts they have read, cf. the previous paragraph, "Instances of teachment". Students also write in-depth papers, which may relate to literary texts, linguistic topics or even topics with no specific relation to the subject matter. For example, at Jórunn's school, in one particular course, the pupils always write a paper on onomastic, where the focus is on working with source references and writing academic texts, whereas Daniel always lets his first graders write one paper called "Myself" and another one about a hobby or interest of theirs where the point is not to test whether students master a specific disciplinary topic, but rather that they get some training in writing independent, coherent factual prose, Daniel explains. Parallel to this, pupils in Jórunn's school write for example reader's letters, formal letters, news articles, interviews, principal speeches, childhood memories, and film and book reviews. These are examples of coherent texts which usually are handed in and corrected by the teachers. However, doing plain exercises seem to be an even more widespread activity. In Birgit's classroom these will often relate to developing writing skills. She has for instance increasingly taken to using examples instead of giving general instructions, she says. She hands out texts and makes her students use

these as models for their own texts. Other teachers use similar exercises, very consciously focusing on limited and concrete tasks.

As for reading, most of the attention is given to literary texts. In fact, Fjóla seems to be the only one who to some extent actively uses topical factual prose, such as newspapers, in her classes. Time is spent on actually reading texts in class, even if pupils often are supposed to read at home, too. As mentioned above, it is common to combine reading and writing, and it may be added, not just to offer pupils an opportunity to train their writing skills, but also as a way of realizing the activity based teaching-ideal, the idea being that pupils will understand and remember more of, say, a literary text if they do more than just read it. Discussions and student presentations are other approaches to working actively with (particularly) literary texts. Again, this is at the same time training of basic skills, in this case oracy. Some of the teachers moreover let their students illustrate scenes in stories they read and interpret texts by drawing for example something they consider a main theme in the text. Daniel expresses his conviction that pupils, especially those who actually like drawing, probably learn just as much from making pictures to a text as from writing about it. “After all, drawing is working in-depth, no less than writing is, and an illustration is just as much your own interpretation of it as a text about a text is,” he declares. Agnes, Birgit and Elín, who all are employed at combined schools, argue that it is only fair to sometimes permit students at practical oriented and particularly at creative courses to use methods which really appeal to them and which they on the whole master better than writing, even though they naturally also will have to train their literary and oral skills.

Elín is generally very enthusiastic about working creatively even in theoretically oriented subjects. She believes creative methods bring in qualities which conventional methods will hardly ever be able to provide, and that they therefore are very valuable *per se*. However, the curriculum does not mention drawing at all, so when choosing drawing as a didactic method, teachers do not do so to comply with the curriculum’s demands, but quite simply because they believe in its power as a

learning method. This is also Daniel's and Fjóla's view. None of them teach at vocational schools, yet they both argue in favour of creative methods or activities.

Several of the teachers mention teamwork as a specific mode of activity and often let their pupils work in pairs or groups, believing this to be advantageous to the learning outcome of all parties in a pair or a group, and both Hannes and Fjóla specifically mention making use of the class' own resources as a way of activating pupils. Whenever he discovers that certain pupils take a genuine interest in the subject or have particularly good general knowledge, he always tries to make the most out of this, to the benefit of both these pupils and the rest of the class, Hannes says.

Other activities are less common. For example, there are few examples of dramatizations, even if this absolutely is a creative activity which particularly Elin eagerly supports, and there are also not many instances of what may be termed creative writing. Next, even though the curriculum demands that pupils learn about films, several of the teachers complain that this is an almost infeasible task, as the charges for showing films publicly are so high that the schools cannot afford them. So "activating students" hardly involve letting them watch films. Finally, usage of the Internet may serve as my last example. As mentioned in "Instances of teachment", there is no widespread use of computers in the classes I learn about. Some of the teachers let their pupils hand in homework and other written material electronically, and they use power point slides and similar technology when teaching, but the pupils generally do not use computers in class. "There are so many temptations on the Internet, you know," says Birgit. "And the pupils are so easily distracted. So in our school, computers have for a couple of years generally been prohibited in class, even if we do allow them from time to time. It has been such a relief! Everyone has much more peace to work after we made this decision." Although her colleague Agnes is among those who write about activities that includes usage of the Internet in her log, working on computers in class is not a common activity.

It does not follow from the firm belief in student activity that it should be up to students to suggest or prepare activities; planning, preparation and choice of activities clearly lie with the teacher. So, when some of the teachers consider it valuable that pupils have some influence on the lessons, they obviously do not mean that pupils should actually take part in making plans for the following lessons, but rather that they should have the opportunity to choose among different activities, all prepared by the teacher, and thereby have the chance to work in a way that appeals to them. Among other things, this means that even if the majority of the teachers promptly dissociate themselves from the image of the old-fashioned schoolmaster who stands by his desk, delivering long monologist lectures, they still have a notion of the teacher as the one in charge, the one responsible for what should be done in class and for ensuring that the tasks are accomplished. Furthermore, the stressing of student activity may as a matter of fact easily be interpreted as a consequence of pupils' dependence and immaturity.

The arguments in favour of activity based teaching and learning are prevailingly linked with didactic goals; activity is primarily important for the practical reason that it furthers pupils' attention and learning, not for example because it promotes the school's or the teachers' educational goals. Still it is important to underscore that this is the situation at the explicit level, and that there are several statements and remarks which indicate that in actuality, the situation is more complex, for when talking about the purpose of the mother tongue subjects as such, several of the teachers certainly bring up aims related to democratization and empowerment, for instance. It is also clear that reasons related to pupils' well-being, to their motivation and to their experiencing school work as meaningful are important secondary reasons for choosing activity based teaching.

There is no obvious external source of the activity centred teaching ideology. When I searched the data bases of the Icelandic department of education and the Icelandic teacher union, I found that this or similar phrases are not particularly common, and they do not occur explicitly in any of the course descriptions in the university's

teaching training programme (U. o. Iceland, 2012). However, the principle of activity centred teaching is implied in the national curriculum, which states that “[g]ood teaching methods arouse students’ interest in education and do not make them passive recipients. Teaching methods should not be monotonous (...)” (Ministry of Education, 1999a, p. 16). Also the current curriculum, published 2011, and thus implemented after the data collection of the current study, ascertains that „[a]n effort should be made to make students active and independent in their studies and capable of acquiring knowledge autonomously“ (Ministry of Education, 2012, p. 39). Yet, it is hard to tell exactly how much these short passages influence teachers, especially as teachers in the current group tend to be critical to the curriculum as such and do on the whole not refer much to it. Even if they no doubt do put their best foot forward to do what the curriculum demands of them, they generally are sceptical of its value as a governmental document. This is expressed both in the current study and in the public assessment report (S. K. Sverrisdóttir et al., 2011, p. 20). In addition to this, there is no advice in the curriculum as to how to avoid making students “passive recipients”. So all in all, it is fairly likely that teachers search elsewhere than in the curriculum for practical-didactic inspiration.

My assumption is that this other place may be the Faculty of Education at The University of Iceland, an institution with which several of the informants in the current study incidentally have been in contact over the last few years – Agnes as a teacher of subject didactics (Icel. *kennslufræði greinarinnar*, cf. Germ. *Fachdidaktik*) at the teacher training course, Hannes and Fjóra as students at the same course, Fjóra as a master student of the science of education, Daniel as a master of education student, and finally Jórunn, more indirectly, as a participant in the action research course at her school, run by employees at the Faculty of Education at her school the five preceding years. Jórunn has found this course both interesting and very instructive, she says.

The Faculty of Education is influenced by Anglo-American pedagogical theory. The suspicion that the idea that student activity as a main didactic-methodological

principle stems from the Faculty of Education is strengthened by the fact that the teachers' term *virkt nám* seems to be a direct translation of *active learning*, a concept which has its roots in John Dewey's philosophy and the American progressive education tradition, and which has been of some importance in the Anglo-American world during the last decades. In Iceland, this term is primarily to be found in documents from the public universities and in sources closely related to these. There are also some titles related to active learning at the Faculty of Education at both public universities, but the term is not in general use.

Moreover, as the sources of the term are so obscure, it is also unclear what it is supposed to mean, because, as P.R.J. Simons remarks, there are "multiple definitions of active learning" (Simons, 1997, p. 39), and so one needs to know which one is dealing with in order to clearly understand its meaning in each context. However, a rather open term has its advantages: As it is in common use among the teachers, it must be regarded institutionalized to some degree, which provides certain legitimacy and prestige. At the same time, it is open enough for the individual teacher to attribute the meaning he chooses to it, for as Simons also observes: "All learning is active in a certain sense, but some kinds of learning are more active than others." (1997, p. 19). Thereby, the danger of reducing the term to a buzzword, meaning almost anything else than strict lecturing, arises.

Additional didactic principles

In addition to activating pupils, the teachers consider motivation a fundamental didactic principle. They present this principle by help of concrete examples, just as they do when talking about activity based teaching and learning. Although the descriptions of classroom activities as such are very thorough, and comparatively much less attention is paid to motivation on the explicit level, it is quite clear that the two principles are regarded as closely connected to each other, and so one main argument in favour of activity based teaching is that the teachers believe it to be more motivating than traditional instruction. Furthermore, the general view is that the

learning outcome is diminutive when students are unmotivated and inattentive. Therefore, it is considered absolutely crucial to motivate pupils, and this conviction actually may be considered the grounds for any of the didactic principles mentioned by the teachers. However, this does not mean that it be the grounds for any principle of teachment; there will be principles related to for example social and ethical standards too, principles which have their own value, principally regardless of learning outcome, even if the teachers believe them to nevertheless influence pupils learning and achievements. For example, Jórunn believes that “a secure and unstrained atmosphere encourages learning”. She adds: “The truth is that everyone has his good points, and everyone is able to learn when the learning environment is safe and stimulating.” Hannes’ approach resembles that of Jórunn. He speaks of the importance of establishing a sense of fellowship and a vivid atmosphere: “There is no atmosphere if everyone just sits there, reading his own book. Oh no! That’s no atmosphere. So I talk to my pupils and discuss with them. Try to arouse interest and engagement. Which in turn motivates learning.”

Next, variation is regarded a very important principle, and so Agnes’ declaration that “I try to vary my classes as much as possible,” expresses a general view, which is considerably emphasized. All the teachers explain that they are very conscious of the importance of variation, and that they attempt to vary their teachment as much as possible, preferably even within each lesson. Reasons for variations are partly the same as for activity based teachment; it is a means of engaging pupils and keeping their attention, which several teachers find quite challenging. For pupils nowadays are, for various reasons, very easily distracted, the teachers observe. Also, there is a learning theoretical reason for varying lessons: As individuals learn differently, it is only fair to offer different approaches and different learning strategies in the classroom. Yet, some informants speak of variation as an important principle without supporting it with particular reasons.

In addition to the principle of motivation and that of variation, particularly Elín and Hannes stress the importance of improvisation and of seizing opportunities that

present themselves in class, and, related to this, several underscore the importance of dialogicity, of being in contact with the pupils. Finally, all the teachers find it very important to make the subject matter relevant and up to date

These principles relate hierarchically to each other, with motivation as a more abstract aim, and the practical applications, such as variation, improvisation and dialogicity at a secondary level, serving the abstract aim, so to speak. In accordance with the overall tendency in the material, it is the practical applications the teachers talk about, rather than the chief goals. Yet, variation, for example, which is a principle most of the teachers particularly stress, is not an aim in itself; the main purpose is to motivate pupils, even if this is not always expressed in the specific descriptions of how this principle is put into practice.

Daniel and the group work model he has developed may serve as an example of both student activity and variation as principles for teaching. The model, which Daniel himself calls “station work”, and which he is very eager to demonstrate, is in fact the basic working method at some of his courses. The model basically is a hands on-model, and the general idea is that each station represents a specific activity, such as illustrating a specific literary text, discussing such a text, making notes from the text or looking into for example historic events or social problems related to the literary text the class is reading for term. At the start of each lesson, the pupils choose an activity, a station, for the day, and then they concentrate on this activity the whole lesson, but to secure varied learning inputs, Daniel does not permit pupils to choose the same station/activity twice in a row. The stations are supported by a plenary discussion lesson every week, where the class discusses the curricular topic of the week, but there is very little direct lecturing at such station courses. Yet Daniel feels that his pupils benefit from the freedom of action he gains through this model, as it allows him to follow up each pupil individually to a larger degree than traditional methods permit. In addition, Daniel believes this model to be more motivating than ordinary lecturing, as pupils have more influence on their own learning and work than

they would otherwise had. Daniel contrasts the present atmosphere in his lessons to lessons as they used to be. He says:

It's not that my experience with traditional methods is particularly negative. There never were any particular problems, no fuss. It was just so sad to see how very few pupils paid attention, made notes, and really learned something. The majority was simply passive. They just sat there, and would often not even have read the texts, and so really had not any idea of what I was talking about. Some lay half asleep on their desks; some stared out the window or something. I just found talking to such a bunch so dull, and indeed almost futile.

To Birgit, variation primarily means variation within each lesson. At her school, Icelandic lessons always are double lessons (80 minutes), and trying to deal with the same activity the whole time simply is absurd, Birgit thinks. So to keep her pupils going, she always changes to a new activity every twenty minutes, at the most. Agnes uses strategies similar to Birgit's, whereas Fjóla is still experimenting with various kinds of variation. All the teachers share Daniel's view that variation is a motivating factor.

Another recurring issue is that of improvisation and of seizing opportunities which spontaneously present themselves in class. This is particularly the case in Elín's, Jórunn's, Fjóla's and Hannes' accounts. Apparently, improvisation has nothing to do with being ill-prepared for a lesson. On the contrary, improvising as a means of promoting pupils' learning outcome clearly must be a method reserved for the well qualified, skilful teacher, because it is impossible to extemporize on the base of spontaneous questions and comments, and to do it well, without a thorough knowledge of the subject, a large professional repertoire, and professional self-reliance. It is therefore not surprising that the teachers who favour this didactic principle all are very experienced. In fact Jórunn directly comments that it has gradually become easier to improvise as she has grown more confident. For several reasons, she absolutely takes such spontaneous contributions from pupils seriously, she says, one of the most important being that they often lead to very interesting topical discussions. So Jórunn even scribbles such pupils' questions and comments

down and actively uses them in her planning of future lessons in the class, and thereby makes it a way of letting pupils influence teachment.

Elín, also a very experienced teacher, declares improvisation to be one of her favourite teaching methods. She uses questions and comments from pupils as basis of a topical discussion, she says, relating examples of how questions about the relevance of the Old Norse poem “Völuspá” [“The Sibyl’s Prophecy”], about a specific word, and about slang as a phenomenon have all developed to such discussions. She recalls that:

Once it was even merely one letter! The letter ‘z’. Why this z? Where does it come from? I’ll instantly catch the ball, of course, and presto, we are in the midst of language history! I grasp such moments, without giving my original plan for the lesson a single thought.²⁴

Elín only allows discussions which somehow relate to the subject, though, but if they do, she is more than willing to put her own plan for the lesson aside. “It’s important to take what comes from pupils seriously,” Elín thinks. “Because if you do, and really make use of it, they will benefit much more from that lesson than if you hold on to your own plan.” In contrast to Elín’s strict claim that improvisations must relate directly to the subject, Hannes explains how he often improvises even on the basis of events outside the classroom. He make use of news, film premieres and other current events he assumes the pupils have heard of and which may interest them as basis for a brief discussion, as an appetizer for the day’s work, and if possible as an introduction to the day’s topic, sometimes they even serve as a small break during the lesson. “Just a couple of minutes, mind you,” he says. “Then we turn to the day’s work!”

In the opinion of those teachers who favour improvisation as a didactic method, its strongest point is that it is rooted in genuine pupils’ interests. Such interests may often be somewhat sparse, the teachers feel, and as they believe interest to be a factor

²⁴ «Z» was excluded from the Icelandic alphabet in 1974 on the grounds that it does not represent an independent phoneme.

of motivation, it must be important to encourage and cultivate what they may find of it. Furthermore, by taking pupils' questions in earnest, the teacher also signalizes that she actually takes an interest in subjects and questions which interest her pupils, which in turn equals taking an interest in them as individuals. It is the teachers' hope, that by thus treating pupils respectfully, they may earn their pupils respect in return. Mutual respect is a good basis for cooperation, and the teachers believe that pupils tend to be more willing to make an effort in class if they esteem their teacher and her attitude.

This shows that there actually are several qualitatively very different motives for teachers' improvisation; the more academic ones (interesting discussions, which also are stimulating and motivating), the strictly pedagogic-didactic ones (motivation), and the ethical ones (treating pupils respectfully – and thereby encourage and motivate them). Similar motives seem to underlie dialogue and interplay with pupils as didactic principles, which particularly Elin and Hannes speak warmly of. Yet another didactic principle, which obviously also relates to motivation, is that of making the subject matter and the lessons up to date and relevant to young people, i.e. to show them how the subject relates to and influences their own lives and future. This, too, is implemented in a number of ways. To some it is particularly important to connect the historical disciplines to our own time, for example by drawing parallels from the past to similar current events or problems, whereas others in various ways try to relate the subject specifically to young people's life world because they find it vital that their students see the subject's utility value and that it is of direct consequence to them as individuals, to their life, and, as Jórunn expresses it, even to their possibilities to assert themselves both as private individuals and as members of society. By reasoning thus, Jórunn is touching upon a topic principally qualitatively different from, yet in practical school-life closely related to the methodically orientation of didactics, namely the general educational aspect of teaching.

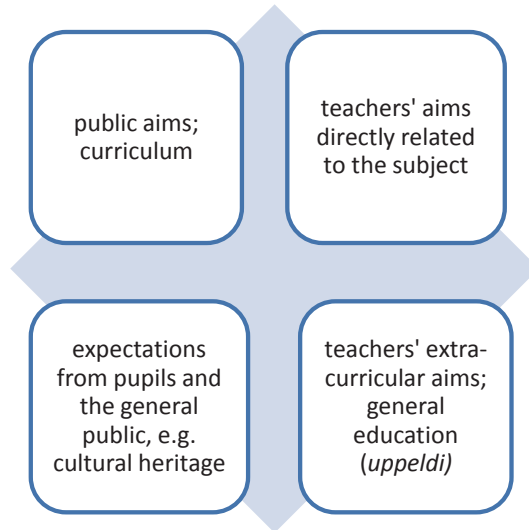
Teachment as “uppeldi”

“The reward is to see them grow up and mature,” Birgit concludes, after having given some examples of everyday challenges in her classroom, and thus displaying her basic view that upbringing be a natural part of teachment; a view she shares with her peers. These days, seeing young people grow up to adult persons and graduate, and so getting their ticket to the next station of their lives, is the most satisfactory part of her job, she declares. In some respects, Birgit finds this to be more important than teaching on a high academic level, which she judges to be a both unrealistic and actually unreasonable aim anyway. The path is certainly not always smooth and straight forward, and it may take both firmness and hard work to reach the goal, Birgit admits, but at the day of graduation, it has always all been worth the price. Several other teachers support this view, and Hannes says that he does not permit himself to judge which is more important; to serve skilful and exacting pupils or to attempt to increase the knowledge of rather listless ones. These are equally consequential, he states. Similarly Jórunn recalls how she used to be very busy teaching her pupils all she knows, as she phrases it. “But these days, I want to increase their understanding,” she adds. “I try to arouse their *interest*. I want them to discover Icelandic as a tool they may make use of, that they make the subject and the subject matter their own. And that they *create* and *understand* on this basis.”

This attitude shows how *uppeldi*, (cf. Germ. *Erziehung*, i.e. approx. upbringing, yet also education) is interwoven with the curriculum’s more specific and concrete subject matter aims, which on the surface seem to be what directs teachment – the teachers’ choices of topics, texts, tests, and so on. Consequently, when the teachers are accounting for their work, what they do and why, the question of general education is brought up and thematised time and again, even if this is indeed in some cases done indirectly, as in Birgit’s statement above, and so *uppeldi* considerations will in practice often conduct teachment. As will be demonstrated below, the material shows very evidently that the teachers in the current group see a connection between the subject matters’ central skills and general educational aims, and furthermore that

they feel a responsibility to promote social and cultural consciousness as well as autonomy and empowerment by help of the concrete tasks of teachment, even if the emphasize to some degree varies within the group. In addition, the teachers feel obliged to meet some of the expectations from the general public, for example with regard to the nation's cultural heritage, cfr. Figure 4. When talking about pupils' expectations, the teachers observe that these tend firstly to be very practical, and secondly to be oriented towards the subject's traditional core topics, such as the literary classics. Pupils' expectations do in short to a high degree overlap with the expectations from the general public. In everyday practice it may sometimes not at all times be clear which aims are being pursued.

Figure 4: Merging aims in the Icelandic classroom



When explaining what the subject matter is fundamentally about, why they as teachers do what they do, and how they do it, the tendency is first, that the teachers mention curricular aims and relate them to pupils' needs and future, and second, that they directly or indirectly take on the role of *uppalendur* (cf. Germ. *Erzieher*). This might be somewhat surprising, since their pupils actually are 16-20 years.²⁵ Still, all the teachers more or less explicitly acknowledge that being a teacher is much more than being an instructor, and also that the general education part of their job is time consuming and demanding, as well as challenging. So when Daniel exclaims that particular the youngest ones are "such babies!" he follows up by describing how he attempts to induce maturity, how he makes students take responsibility and how he tries to incite to independence. He does so even if he otherwise presents himself as a teacher with subject oriented aims, firmly rooted in the curriculum, who otherwise is very reluctant to take on the role of *uppalandi* and (conservative) manager of the cultural heritage, which others regard a very natural part of Icelandic teachers' tasks. For example Hannes directly declares that *uppeldi* is an inevitable part of teaching, and Birgit says: "I think that upper secondary school... well, one teaches so much more than just one's subject!" These are personal views, yet they must be seen in a broader context, for there apparently exists a general agreement with regard to the general educational aims (which even the reluctant Daniel affiliates to in actual practice), and it seems likely that these views form a shared attitude; an attitude embedded in the field of mother tongue education in Icelandic upper secondary schools. Consequently, it seems reasonable to see for instance the heavy stressing of activity based learning and motivation in relation to the general aims the teachers express, as they feel that much more than meeting the curriculum's demands is at stake. Even if the aspect of general education might not be part of their formal education as Icelandic philologists, the teachers do not question it or wish that they could limit themselves to teaching the subject matter as such. As a matter of fact,

²⁵ This will be the age of students who proceed directly to upper secondary school when graduating from lower secondary school. However, at some programs many students are older than this.

Birgit's statement shows that the opposite may in fact be the case: general education is actually considered the most demanding part of the job. This is so among other things because no learning can take place anyway unless students can be "persuaded", as Elin puts it, to make an effort and generally to take some responsibility for their own learning and so for their own lives. The term persuasion indicates why this all is closely connected with activity, practical teaching and *kennslufraeði greinarinnar*, as well as with educational theory.

In continuation of these observations, it is possible to discern four main categories among the non-curricular aims. First, there are aims of the kind Birgit expresses in the quotation above: Although it is not formally compulsory, upper secondary school has become a necessary part of any young person's education, and one does not get anywhere in life without an upper secondary school diploma. Therefore, helping students to get this ticket to the labour market or higher education (depending on the brand of study), is an important part of teachers' tasks. Such a practical oriented aim on pupils' behalf could be termed instrumental. However, this does not imply that teachers reasoning thus lack ambitions, but firstly, their ambitions are on their pupils' behalf rather than on the subject's, and secondly, they are pragmatic. Especially those teaching at vocational schools hold that teachers simply have to realize that there is a discrepancy between the curriculum's demands and pupils' interests and capacity, and to make the best of it. One should have feasible plans and do one's best to help everyone through. At the same time the teachers claim to be truly convinced that much of what they teach has considerable utility value and that even the less practical tasks will come in useful in the long run. For example, many pupils find the classical literary texts difficult and complain loudly when they have to read them in Icelandic class. Yet, these texts are such an important part of Icelandic identity that a certain familiarity with them is almost necessary, the teachers claim. Furthermore, even those teaching at the general studies programme express instrumental aims. For example when Jórunn explains why she regards Icelandic the main school subject, she argues that language, and particularly the mother tongue, be the key to learning, no matter

what you are studying. Also, Jórunn in almost Taylorian terms asserts that one needs language to think and to express one's thoughts and feelings. So the mother tongue truly is fundamental, Jórunn holds.

Then there is the slightly more abstract, yet related aim of autonomy, i.e. encouraging and bringing about independence, responsibility and maybe even integrity, properties which are judged to cause empowerment. As I understand her, this is more or less what Birgit has in mind when she states that seeing pupils grow up and mature feels like a reward. Also Elín, Jórunn, Agnes and Hannes accentuate the importance of qualities related to autonomy, underlining the necessity of having the will and capacity to take responsibility for one's own life. In the teachers' view, this includes for example willpower to endure, willpower to have personal ambitions, and willpower to stand up for oneself. According to the teachers, such ideals may be achieved by help of practical tasks: for instance, students simply need to learn to work, they state. They must also learn to pay attention, which is not at all easy in a world with more distractions than ever. Furthermore, they must absolutely learn to fight the general passivity, which according to the teachers is an increasing problem and a particular challenge to educators because it so impairs and enfeebles their pupils, which is exactly the opposite of the enabling and empowerment the teachers are aiming at. This is also the reason why enforcement of pupils' self-confidence belongs under the aim autonomy. "Just imagine how much easier life is if you have got some confidence!" Elín exclaims, implying that this may possibilite both ambitions and autonomy. Yet, there is no autonomy in our age without certain skills.

A double motivation seems to lie behind the general education aim: On the one hand it springs out from these teachers' view on the general purposes of public education, such as instilling confidence and self-respect, on the other hand it relates to the subject matter and practical teachment, where the latter could be said to serve the former. For example, the teachers claim that the mother tongue subject may contribute to pupils' confidence and empowerment by strengthening their linguistic and literary skills, which they hold to be of considerable significance with regard to

autonomy. Agnes illustrates this point by mentioning the importance of being able to take the floor in a public meeting or writing a proper job application. Similarly, receiving one's diploma, one's ticket to the labour market or higher education, after having successfully completed upper secondary education is a nominal acknowledgement of an achievement which may potentially have considerable empowering force.

With regard to the more general aims, it seems that the teachers deliberately strive for them through their attitude and practical choices. For instance, Elín is continually encouraging her pupils to take responsibility, she says, among other things by assuring that making an effort proves gainful. In this perspective, writing a paper, for example, is not merely a matter of learning more about a specific topic, it is also a matter of *uppeldi*; to understand that sometimes one simply has to do what is required, and that failing to do so inevitably has its price. Yet she knows that merely *telling* them will never suffice. She also needs to *show* them that they actually have a choice, and at times even *make* them act in accordance with their choices. So for example if pupils are obviously inattentive, she reminds them that they actually are free to leave if they want to, knowing that they are well aware of the consequences of such a choice as this is something she frequently discusses, particularly with unmotivated pupils.

There is a gradual transition from the empowerment ideal to the third type of aim, which relates to the notion of *Bildung* (approx. formation and cultivation),²⁶ and which especially Fjóla, Jórunn and Hannes (all working at general studies schools) eagerly promote. They believe that everyone needs to develop an understanding of the larger context in which they are embedded, and consequently that pupils should develop historical, social, cultural and national consciousness. In their opinion, few

²⁶ Like English, Icelandic lacks a fixed term for the notion of *Bildung*. In practice, one will often resort to *menntun* (approx. education). However, as this is an ambiguous term in the present context, the teachers tend to talk about consciousness when referring to education in a broad sense, to *Bildung*.

subjects are more suitable for developing such awareness than the mother tongue subject, and so they as Icelandic teachers feel a responsibility to bring it about. In the perspective of *Bildung*, it is desirable that the individual keeps cultivating herself in her aspiration for true humanity. For several reasons, the teachers think the mother tongue subject is apt to serve this ideal. More specifically, some of the Icelandic subject's core topics, such as linguistics, tending of the national language and national literary classics, are described as particularly important because they contribute to pupils' consciousness with regard to personal and national identity. However, the most weighty reason stated for the Icelandic subject's importance with regard to *Bildung* is that the subject deals with just the mother tongue, which in the teachers' opinion is anybody's primary tool for thinking and reflection, which in turn is crucial to formative personal development. So focusing on the Icelandic tongue as such, increasing pupils' awareness of the mother tongue's significance and concretely contributing to increase their vocabulary is important for *Bildung* reasons. "They will get the chance to muse and speculate a bit," as Elin phrases it.

Also Hannes' arguments in favour of furthering pupils' linguistic consciousness fall into line with the *Bildung* philosophy, yet he does not limit his perspective to the individual level. There is a close relation between linguistic and national awareness, he alleges, and so "a nation that loses its tongue will even lose its soul". Therefore, the Icelandic subject contributes to upholding nationality and the Icelandic culture, plus the nation's cultural heritage and national life in general. Seen in this light, the concern several of the teachers express about what they see as an increasing linguistic impoverishment among young people is quite understandable.

In addition, the Icelandic subject's language education is believed to serve aims related to psychology as well as to *Bildung*; language knowledge and linguistic awareness makes it possible to see how language also is (self)-representation and to make use of the possibilities this insight represents. "It certainly does matter *how* you speak," Jórunn claims. "Other people make up their mind about you among other things on the basis of your speech. For example, they tend to listen more respectfully

to a very eloquent person than to one who formulates himself in imprecise terms, perhaps even in an awkward or unconfident manner. And so, this is in the end also a matter of self-respect,” she says, thereby again relating language knowledge to autonomy.

Much of what has so far been said about language education could be repeated with regard to the subject’s education in literature. Naturally, literature is mentioned specifically when the teachers talk about the subject’s particular responsibility with regard to the national heritage, yet, concerning the Old Norse literature, the responsibility is even over-national, Jórunn holds, as for example the saga literature belongs to world literature. Still, Icelanders are the only ones with direct access to this literature, which leaves them with a special responsibility for knowing and cultivating it, she thinks. Furthermore, there seems to be general agreement on the considerable *Bildung*-potential of both this literature and fiction in general. Encounters with literature are presumed to have the power to raise the reader’s cultural, social and historical knowledge and thereby to nuance and strengthen his identity. Therefore the teachers want to incite a love of reading in their pupils and so stimulate reading in a number of ways in their classes. In that context, some of the teachers call attention to the value of reading as (cultural) experience. In addition, they regard reading beneficial for its potential to increase the reader’s intellectual capacity; for example, all the teachers use discussions as a teaching method when teaching literature, because they think such joint interpretations may extend everyone’s understanding of the text in question, and moreover train pupils’ abilities of reflection and exchange of ideas. Otherwise, reading is profitable because it stimulates the reader’s linguistic skills, for example by increasing his vocabulary, a view held by most of the teachers, although some are less convinced of this effect. Nevertheless, the teachers are in sum firmly convinced that reading be very advantageous, and most of its advantages do somehow relate to *Bildung*. However, there are also aims where *Bildung* aims concur with those of autonomy and citizenship. For example, knowledge of the literary classics is useful to anyone who

attempts to understand the contemporary public discourse, contemporary literature and even informal conversation, which frequently refers to the literary heritage in one way or another.

For these reasons, what they regard pupils' decreasing literacy and their very limited reading is a matter of grave concern to the teachers. Language and literacy are essential to the individual's identity and thus its autonomy, the teachers believe. Therefore, they emphasize literacy and linguistic skills very strongly: "Literacy is the only thing which really matters in mother tongue education," Agnes states – it is the base of everything else.

Finally, some teachers express aims on the subject's behalf which basically relate to democratization and citizenship. Jórunn and Agnes represent this view. In the end, they want their pupils to become more than able, autonomous individuals. They also want them to become active, participating citizens, and they take it upon themselves as Icelandic teachers to contribute to this, since it is in their power to help pupils increase their cultural capital and thus securing their confidence and social status, to put it in Bourdieuan terms. This may be done for example by means of developing oral and literary skills, and by broadening literary and cultural knowledge (Lea, 2012, p. 8f.), and so the descriptions of how *Bildung* may be brought about will apply even to this aim. Nevertheless, there is an essential difference between limiting one's educational aims to the individual level and to connecting them even to social and political responsibility well outside the classroom.

6.3 Why is teachment so central?

The study's findings do not confirm the often stated impression that teachers teach as they were themselves taught in their schooldays (Rasch-Christensen, 2010). For although particularly Fjóla asserts that she finds inspiration in memories about her own most inspiring teachers, the teachers generally look forward much more than they look backward, and they heavily emphasize the development and change much

more than traditionalism with regard to teachment. In the light of these views I find a closer examination of why the teachers are so preoccupied with teachment and didactic issues pertinent.

The impact of framework conditions

So far, the degree to which teachment dominates the teachers' discourse and is their angle of approach regardless the aspects of their job or the subject matter they are actually talking about has been demonstrated. When trying to explain this dominance, there are several factors to consider. To begin with, the framework conditions seem to affect the teachers' reasoning as well as their practice, so it seems reasonable to assume that schooling conditions directly influence teachment. Above we have seen and how for example the double lesson-model at Birgit's school directly affects her teachment, how she makes a point of switching activities every twenty minutes because she thinks this to be the maximum of how long her pupils can concentrate on one activity or topic at the time. The principle of variation is the more important as every lesson lasts 80 minutes, she explains. This example may serve as an illustration of the impact of schooling at the micro level. The individual school's organizational model is another framework condition which directly affects teachment. For instance, those with experience both from class structure schools and course structure schools hold that it tends to be easier to maintain discipline at course structure schools because the pupils do not know each other as well as they do in a class. On the other hand, Elín observes, the course model has the disadvantage that it takes some time in every course before pupils are ready to contribute because they are shy and unconfident the first few weeks of the term. Furthermore, Jórunn observes that the recent restructuring at her own school considerably influences teachment; some courses have been compressed by 50% with regard to number of lessons and space of time, whereas the syllabus is unchanged. "This certainly makes a difference," Jórunn declares. "We used to spend 15 weeks on the saga literature, now we have 8. Naturally we need to teach differently and be very conscious about the choices we make."

Similarly, both Daniel and Birgit relate that their teachment at adult education courses is very different from that at ordinary courses. It is not just that the same curriculum is to be covered in far less time at adult education courses; of equal importance is the attitude of adult students, which they find quite different from that of younger pupils. These students are adults, Daniel and Birgit state, usually well motivated and intent on taking responsibility for their learning. On the other hand, many of these adults will feel uncomfortable if the teacher is too untraditional, Daniel remarks. For various reasons, they are little familiar with the scholastic environment, and also for this reason, the teachers usually chose far more traditional methods at these courses than at the regular ones.

Among the framework conditions, the curriculum naturally represents a momentous factor. It does for example strongly influence the teachers' choice of topics. Nevertheless the teachers feel little need to problematize the matter when the question of topics is touched upon in some of the interviews, maybe because it is considered more or less given by the curriculum. The choices she makes mainly relate to shortage of time, Birgit sardonically remarks. "We have to do a judicious selection, you know," she says. "Because there is absolutely no way we can get through the whole curriculum." Supposing that the curriculum really is too comprehensive, one could argue that teachers still have a choice as to exactly which of the topics mentioned in the curriculum they select for their own classes, but this does not appear to be the teachers' conviction. It seems that they have quite clear ideas about what must be regarded the core topics and what may be given a lower priority. The apparently high degree of accord between the teachers' priorities may indicate that there be a topical hierarchy in Icelandic teachers' understanding of the curriculum. However, what could be termed the local curriculum also is of consequence, as it turns out that several schools have common final tests at the end of each course (i.e. at the end of each term or each school year), which in turn requires common reading lists and teaching schemes. Yet, the teachers still have considerable scope, and they all make their own, individual plans for their classes, even if some of

them see feel the leeway to be limited, principally because of the actual conditions. An excerpt from the interview with Elín may illustrate how the teachers typically reflect on the impact of framework conditions. The excerpt does not contain *all* such conditions mentioned by Elín, yet it shows how she regards a wide range of elements as being of consequence for her and her pupils' daily work. She touches upon pupils' lack of motivation and her own (reluctant) adaption to this fact, she mentions the curriculum, she mentions that local factors influence didactic choices, she mentions the financial situation, and she mentions that factors in the wider society influence the atmosphere and working conditions in the classroom. Furthermore, it seems evident that Elín is critically inclined towards the authorities, yet, she chooses to think as little of this as possible. As she declares on another occasion: "When you stand alone, you're nothing. Zero. There's not a thing you can do against a large institution or the system on your own." In the light of this statement, it appears that Elín has decided to waste a minimum of energy on bothering about things on which she has no influence, and rather make the best of the possibilities at hand. The general lack of references to and comments on authorities, (national) educational policy in the material at large may be interpreted similarly.

E: This term, I actually showed them a short film based on part of *Nial's saga*. I've never done that before. I want them to read the book. Reading... well, you're much more creative when you read than when you watch a film. You imagine the landscape, the characters and what they look like... you know. (...) Anyway, when they later were to write about the saga, I realized that those who hadn't read it, well, they chose episodes or characters from the film. So this is all they know about this magnificent book. (Laughs.) It's not much. But then I thought: Well, it's better than nothing. It is indeed. But my aim is still to make them read the text. And I've often seen that once they get started, the text actually fascinates them profoundly. It's always great fun to see that. It makes one glad.

I: So you read these old texts... because they are great art... or because they're part of a national canon or...

E: Well, both, of course. And also because it's part of the curriculum, and we are obliged to teach the curriculum, you know. (...) As for the choice of this particular saga... it's set in our part of the country, of course. And so we have used to go on field trips to the most important places in the book. But unfortunately, after the financial crisis, the school's economy is poorer, so we can't afford to go anymore.

I: So the authorities don't find it important that you go? To ask somewhat maliciously.

E: Apparently not. Let's not even speak of it! Then we'll sit here till the small hours! (Laughs.)

(...) And it's not easy to ask pupils to contribute either, these days. Many families are heavily stricken and you never know... (...) And it's less common than it used to be that pupils take part-time jobs along with their school work. There simply aren't as many jobs available any more. So in theory, they should have more time for their school work now.

I: I see. And do they? Do you see any change?

E: I really don't know. You know, there are also many other factors at play. If you listen to the news... it's all incredibly negative, so depressing. Cutbacks and reductions and all sorts of pessimism... It's beyond description! These people ought to be called on the carpet. They simply wallow in misery! As I said just this morning: "I wonder whether those people receive a percentage of the sale of antidepressants from the pharmaceutical industry!" (Laughs.) As I say, it's completely beyond description. And of course such elements have influence on everyday life in the classroom too.

In addition to those mentioned above, yet another impact of the organization structure, particularly at course structure schools, is the considerable number of new students teachers meet every semester. The number amounts to some 150 pupils each term, and even if the teachers emphasize the importance of treating them as individuals and learning their names within a couple of weeks, the teachers seem to have a relatively impersonal relationship to their students. The most evident indicator of this is the fact that there actually is not a single story in the material about episodes or pupils that have made a particular impression on the teacher. Even in the logs, all

the accounts are impersonal, even in descriptions of specific activities, and just mention what the class, a group or maybe some pupils did. For example Daniel in general terms mentions how one of the pupils who were supposed to present a certain topic unfortunately was unprepared, but how all still turned out pretty well, as the remaining two luckily were prepared and did a good job. In the interviews, too, the examples are general or invented. So when Fjóla declares it important that teachers' relationship to pupils has a personal touch, she characteristically explains how she would for example say: "Well, Sunna, you play the guitar, I believe. Would you care to..." and then give Sunna a task in which her musical skills are of consequence. Still it is absolutely clear that Sunna does not exist. Both examples indicate a certain distance to the real, individual pupils. Yet, all the teachers think they have a good relationship with their pupils, and Fjóla mentions that she often encounters pupils in the little town in which she lives – and then she naturally greets them and often chats a bit with them, she says.

Naturally, the lack of examples including specific pupils may partly be due to the semi-formal genres, the log and the interview. Still, it is a finding so clear that it may well mean something more. It is for example conceivable, that even if there be a genuine wish to add the personal touch Fjóla describes, perhaps for ethical as well as for professional reasons, the courses stretch over a period of time too limited for developing the relationship to the individuals – especially as teachers need to relate to so numerous pupils. Then focusing on teachment may be a solution; as it turns out to be impracticable to develop a real relationship to 150 new individuals each term or more, this may at least partly be compensated for by a gregarious attentiveness on the teacher's behalf, constantly observing which topics, methods etc. best serve classes', smaller groups' and if possible even individuals' educational needs.

Yet another example which shows that framework conditions directly influence teachment provides Birgit's brief observation that "one naturally uses the resources accessible". This is quite obvious, yet useful to reflect on: if the school possesses one set of laptops, only one class at the time can use these. Pupils attending a school that

has got a school library will tend to visit a library more often than other pupils. Textbooks may promote certain authors or literary interpretations on the expense of others, and so directly influence teachment, etc. In addition, the resources of the wider society have impact on teachment and school life, Hannes believes, and mentions material conditions and pupils' relationship to their parents as examples of factors which his own teachment. For example, if available jobs and other material goods are ample, pupils do not feel the same urge to learn and get themselves a solid education as when such goods are scarce, and so teachers will have to spend more time on motivation under such circumstances. Jórunn touch on something very similar when she observes that pupils were on the whole little motivated for school work in the years previous to the financial crisis; anyone could get a job, even without an upper secondary school diploma, and climb to better, often well-paid positions. Higher education was a tiring path to not so well-paid, and so unprestigious positions, which young people then did not seem to care much for. Then motivating pupils was often a demanding task, Jórunn admits. Hannes moreover provides an example of another kind: If pupils have been left much to themselves by their busy parents, which he often finds to be the case, they may not have had much contact with adults, and so teachers need simply *talk* to their pupils in order to support them in relating to the grown-up world which they are about to enter and to train them in reflective exchange of ideas. Such a conviction naturally will directly affect teachment and so *uppeldi* and perhaps teachers' moral inclination, which he may even consider a part of his professional obligations, may sometimes be the reason why teachment figures so prominently.

At a more general level, it seems likely that the tendency to emphasize the practical implementation, subject didactics, be strengthened by the fact that upper secondary school teachers in Iceland in the rule teach only one school subject, and moreover a very limited range of courses at a time. This is particularly striking at course model schools, where pupils within certain restrictions compose their own schedule each term instead of belonging to a specific class, and teachers tend to teach the same two

or three courses several terms in a row. As a consequence of this model the teachers know the subject matter of their courses through and through, and so they need not pay much attention to this when preparing their lessons; instead they can put their energy in consummating their teachment, and this actually also is where they find challenges and inspiration, according to their own statements.

Since most upper secondary school teachers teach only one subject, one might assume that they relate primarily to their own field or sub-culture. This is virtually confirmed by the informants, for example when they talk about cooperation: Whereas there are considerable disparities regarding the degree of cooperation with other mother tongue teachers, ranging from very close to hardly any cooperation, there is no cooperation with colleagues from other fields to speak of in any of the schools. By contrast, for example in Norway the rule is that upper secondary school teachers teach at least two subjects, and so each teacher has to cooperate with colleagues from different fields. Consequently, each subject will receive impulses from a number of other subjects, and maybe one thereby even sees the qualities and character of each more clearly. As opposed to this, a possible consequence of the Icelandic model could be certain implicitness; that the subject matter appears so utterly familiar to subject teachers that they somehow take it for granted. This could at least partly explain why the teachers talk so much about teachment and so little about the subject on its own terms. It is almost as if it does not occur to them to discuss it, and even when talking about its qualities, such as the above described potential to contribute to pupils' autonomy, the arguments are rooted in teachment and wise, rather than based on the subject's premises as an academic field. The curriculum's quite explicit guidelines regarding the content of the various courses may increase this tendency. Also, the teachers feel very pronounced expectations from wider society, they say. People tend to have quite distinct ideas about the content of the subject matter, and the teachers are frequently asked whether they do not teach the national classics, such as *Nial's saga*, for "the general public wants us to keep up certain standards," says Birgit. There are, in other words, certain public expectations in the direction of seeing

Icelandic teachers as keepers of the national heritage. In addition, there is a very high public awareness of the importance of maintenance of the mother tongue and of thorough oral and literary skills in Iceland, which probably relates both to a consciousness of the vulnerability of a small linguistic society as the Icelandic one, and to a generally strong patriotism among Icelanders (Whelpton, 2000). Thus, it is characteristic when the assessment report *Úttekt á íslenskukennslu í framhaldsskólum* [Report on Icelandic education in upper secondary school] unambiguously shows that school leaders actually regard Icelandic one of the most consequential school subjects (S. K. Sverrisdóttir et al., 2011, p. 50ff.). One of the leaders interviewed in this report even states that Icelandic is and should be the main subject: “I mean, nothing happens if we don’t teach proper Icelandic, and I think pupils are fully aware of this.” (S. K. Sverrisdóttir et al., 2011, p. 50). Such attitudes naturally are very supportive. Yet, it is possible that they also contribute to the above mentioned implicitness regarding the subject.

Also belonging to the framework conditions is *evaluation*. Teachers are obliged to evaluate and mark pupils, and so they need a fundament for doing so. Ordinarily, tests and hand-in exercises provide such fundament. As they consequently are regarded quite necessary, tests and hand-in exercises of various kinds take up considerable time in each course.

Teachment and professionalism

So far, it has been suggested that the reason why what is taught and why is a matter of very little discussion, while all the more attention is paid to the practical challenges of teachment correlates with framework conditions, such as teachers’ very thorough knowledge of the subject matter, the organisation of their work, and the curriculum. As opposed to this, there are the encounters with pupils and the dynamics of the living classroom. For even if the essentials of the curriculum remain more or less the same over time, classes and pupils are not. Thus, some of the experienced teachers reflect on what has changed during their career. “Society changes, and so do pupils,”

Hannes establishes. Therefore, teachment must change. Hannes recalls how it used to work quite well to simply lecture in the old days. Now, however, pupils will often have difficulties paying attention; a fact he sees in relation to changes in the wider society. In addition, there will always be differences between classes. Each group has its own atmosphere and its own disposition. The skilled teacher should continuously take this into consideration when planning her lessons. By thus implying that keeping a strong focus on teachment necessarily be part of any teacher's job, that it is impossible to be a skilful teacher without concerning oneself about teachment, Hannes is actually thematising teachment as teacher professionalism. At the same time, societal development also is part of the educational framework conditions.

Related to the development theme is the question of recruitment, which Jórunn touches upon: As practically all teenagers attend upper secondary school these days, teaching at this level has become more similar to teaching at the compulsory level, yet with the difference that there tends to be a more uneven distribution of motivated and less motivated students at the upper secondary level because the youngest pupils attend a school in their own neighbourhood, whereas upper secondary school students may choose. Consequently, very motivated students tend to choose the most popular and prestigious schools, whereas less motivated students are gathered at less popular schools. This truly represents some challenges, Jórunn thinks. Nowadays her own school is not among the most popular, and she feels obliged to accommodate her teachment to the current conditions. So this example too shows how changes in the framework conditions induce a teacher to make certain (new) demands to herself as a professional teacher.

As reported by several of the teachers, they find the most professional challenges and pleasures in teachment rather than in academic issues. Such challenges may be of social nature or relate to learning models, and they represent an arena for both creativity and professional development. Moreover, teachment orientation seems to be of decisive importance to teachers' professionalism, without which they will not

be able to do the job they are engaged to do; teaching pupils what the curriculum demands of them.

Agnes' declaration that "anyone can teach clever students and achieve good results, but a good teacher can also do something for less clever students," which is in perfect accordance with Birgit's statement that her students' graduation be her reward as a teacher, indicates another reason why teachment is so central in the material; it is also a question of personal ambitions and satisfaction. Furthermore, a main focus on teaching, the means to attain the hope of her pupils' graduation and reaching man's estate, to phrase it in Birgit's terms, goes well along with other of the profession's benefits. For example, Birgit explains how much she enjoys the lively atmosphere of school life and how she feels privileged to spend her days with young people. Focusing on teachment and thus invigorating and developing what is regarded both important and satisfying may be regarded a quite natural consequence of this stand.

It is a common belief, also confirmed by several studies (Britzman, 2003; Kennedy, 1991), that teachers tend to teach as they have been taught. Yet, the stories the teachers in this study tell are rather stories about breaks and change than about continuity. For example, they all²⁷ relate how they started out very traditionally and how e.g. student activity gradually has become increasingly important. Naturally, one might assume that upper secondary school teachers initially are influenced by the academic environment in which they have received their higher education and where the teaching methods tend to be quite traditional, and that this marked their practice as junior teachers. However, this is not what they report. They claim that their practice in the beginning very much resembled the teaching models they met when they were at school themselves, which is in accordance with findings in other studies (Kennedy, 1991). In other words, what they reproduced during these first years was the secondary school methods from their own school days, they say. This is of course quite consistent with understanding emphasizing of teachment as a way of adapting to

²⁷ Fjöla may be an exception. She is the only one who does not specify this.

the field of Icelandic education. On the other hand, it does not agree with the teachers' explicit declarations that these days they teach very *differently* from the way they once were taught, and besides, that their current practice is quite different from their teachment during their junior years, a fact the teachers themselves attribute partly to societal development, partly to their own experiences as teachers. "Becoming a teacher takes time," Fjóla says. At least five years, she estimates, and she judges it quite obvious that her teachment changes as she gathers more experience. This seems to be a reasonable explanation, for it is well known that it takes time to become an expert (S. E. Dreyfus, 2004). Yet it is hardly a sufficient explanation of teachers' professional development, as it does for example not explain what becomes of the role models and the teaching as one has been taught. It simply does not explain the participants' clearly articulated understanding of a break with traditional methods and their very explicit detachment from them (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1992; Goodson, 1996).

Teachment as an ethical act

Also linked up to professionalism is the question of ethics, and much of what is said about teachment in the material may be seen as reasoning an acting rooted in *ethos*. This is particularly the case when the teachers speak of management of teachment, of the grounds for focusing on teachment, and of teachment as *uppeldi*. Thus it may be argued that *ethos* too affects teachers' practice. For in spite of the fact that there are no stories about individual pupils in the material, the teachers still have a strong sense of (moral) duty towards their pupils, and it is quite clear that their ethics is bound more to the human individual than to the (dead) subject matter or the curriculum as such. For example, many statements in the material display that the individual teachers attach great importance to behaving respectfully and kindly towards pupils, yet they accentuate that this is very different from being their pupils' mate. By this they emphasize the professional relationship between themselves and their pupils, and the professionalism on their own behalf may in turn be seen as part of their professional integrity, which inevitably relates to ethics. However, the ethical

responsibility evidently reaches beyond the individual teacher's personal prudent behaviour, and so the explanations of why Icelandic education also inevitably includes *uppeldi*, implies several ethical aspects. The ethical responsibility that goes along with the insight the educated mother tongue teacher has acquired may serve as an example of this: Knowing the power of language and linguistic skills seems to call forth a threefold obligation; the obligation to personally act in accordance with this insight in intercourse with students, the obligation to explain and show that this be the actual situation, and finally the obligation (relating both to the subject matter and to *uppeldi*) to increase pupils' linguistic skills. The example indicates the complexity of teachment, how a number of quite different motives may underlie even simple actions and how ethical motives may commingle with political and professional ones.

It is at any rate quite evident that *ethos* has impact on the teachers' professional aims, and therefore on their practice. *Ethos* is, as the example demonstrates, part of the reason why teachment is so central in the teachers' practice and in their reflections. Also the disapproval of "monologist lecturing" could be seen to relate to ethical values as well as to educational theory: being basically one-way communication it is little other-oriented, little attentive to pupils as subjects, which is unacceptable seen from a moral point of view. In that way, activity based teachment may be attractive also because it permits the individual to take part and have a say in a fellowship, to be recognized as a subject (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1992).

However, whether this morality should be labelled professional ethics is less clear. For ethical judgments in the material are prevailingly implicit, and so it is for example only by hesitation that Hannes admits that his explanations about the connection between the subject and *uppeldi* may be relate to the ethics of the profession. None of the teachers spontaneously use terms such as "moral" or "ethics", and even when hinted at by the interviewer, they are reluctant to notions of this kind. Moreover, this clearly is another part of teaching life which has not been an issue in the teachers' education.

According to Harald Grimen, a person is a moral subject in a professional context if this person is addressee of the moral norms and values of his profession (Grimen, 2008). However, when the professionals do not actively relate to any common professional code of ethics, as is the case in this study, the status of professionals as addressees of professional morality becomes uncertain, and in the current case one may wonder what in the teachers' ethos is due to professional morality and what is due to common (or personal) morality. At least it is easy to identify qualities which are in the rule highly esteemed in common morality; treating other people, including minors, respectfully, acknowledging others as subjects, promoting equality, promoting the weaker party's empowerment, integrity and authenticity. Even if the teachers also do their best to fulfil their more institutional duties; to appear professionally and matter-of-fact-like, to be reliable, to be loyal to subordinates and regulations etc., the subject-oriented morality seem to be more important. Also the fact that (professional) morality is never mentioned indicates that what is in play is a (common) morality deeply rooted in the individual practitioner and so should be regarded part of his or her professional wise. Furthermore it seems that morality by virtue of this has a decisive impact on his or her professional practice, particularly on teachment.

Teachment as professional positioning

There also is the possibility that teachment represents an arena where teachers may develop true expertise, in the field between Icelandic scholars at the university to one side and general teachers to the other. In that case, teachment could in a sociological perspective be seen to also serve as a symbol of teachers' professional position and as constituting their professional habitus. Yet, the dominance of teachment in the Icelandic teachers' discourse could also be approached from the perspective of the study of professions, which seeks to develop theories about the interplay and

intertwining of practical and theoretical knowledge of various kinds in the practices of professionals (Fauske, 2008).

As demonstrated, the teachers develop in part quite different alternative practices, yet there is a common feature no matter which solution they have chosen, namely that they claim to have moved from what they term “monologist teaching” in the direction of more activity oriented methods. Furthermore, the majority points out that this is a development they have gone through on their own. Yet, these narratives are least of all stories about solitude and loneliness. On the contrary, the teachers report the profession’s social quality to be among its essential attractions. Even if they primarily have the relationship to their pupils in mind when they mention this, the teachers are on the whole very sympathetic to their colleagues as well. Therefore, it is unlikely that the stressing of independence in the narratives is meant to reveal for instance loneliness or an atmosphere reluctant to new ideas. However, since the teachers seem to agree on the individuality of their practice development, this appears to exhibit a small bit of the reality of Icelandic teachers. Even if it is not altogether clear what this point displays, it may quite possibly indicate that the field is characterized by individualism rather than group orientation and co-operation with regard to teachers, that there exists a structural expectation of their acting to a high degree independently as professionals, even if the same teachers encourage team work and team spirit in their pupils. If so, this mirrors the individualist tradition, which has been very strong both in schools and at universities, and which seems to still exist in Icelandic education, at least in upper secondary school. Furthermore, by relating to individualism, one does in the upper secondary school context signalize at least two things: first, that one does after all belong to the scholastic and academic tradition, and second, that one has courage and strength to break with conventions and run one’s own course when one judges it right to do so. Of course one is thus also upholding an academic cardinal virtue – the ability to be critical and independent – and so subtly thereby confirms one’s academic background.

As seen from the perspective of theories of professions, the teachers may appear to distance themselves from the collective professional field by stressing independence and so making the narratives about practice development stories about individualism rather than about consolidation and finding one's place within a specific field. This may seem paradoxical, unless one accepts first, that individualism is part of the field's conventions and second, that upper secondary school teachers' need to position themselves between the "pure" academics and the general teachers, who have received their education at a vocational study programme and thus apparently belong to a certain profession, which the (academic) subject teachers in upper secondary school do not. Then it must be significant both to find this in-between position and its characteristics, and to insist on its really being a field of its own which requires a particular kind of expertise – the one agents of the field possess. In consequence, the dominance of teachment becomes quite understandable: While it suffices to compare the diplomas of a general teacher and a subject teacher to see the differences in their education; that the general teacher has a vocational training, that she is certified for teaching children of a particular age, that she has studied educational theory, that she has studied several school subjects too, yet not as thoroughly as the subject teacher, whose force lies exactly in her academic thoroughness, the differences between a lecturer at the university and a Icelandic teacher in upper secondary school may be less obvious as they in fact have the same educational background and even have related jobs; for example they both teach and they both focus on only one subject. Still, upper secondary school teachers possess a certain expertise which is less cultivated at universities. Such expertise relates exactly to teachment, and so it is important to display it.

This interpretation at least partly accounts for the very moderate position subject knowledge is granted in the accounts. The teachers spontaneously talk about teachment, pupils, the schools they know from their own experience, but not about Icelandic as an academic subject. Even when asked specifically about it, the teachers tend to draw a line between their Icelandic study and their current job. This attitude

may be illustrated by Birgit's statement that: "Well, of course you need solid subject knowledge to teach in upper secondary school, but in real school life it is indeed quite important to be good at teaching as well. As for Icelandic, it was a terrific study subject, yet the studies don't prepare you for teaching." Similarly, Daniel seems to distance himself from the university scholars and does not at all see his own job as a sort of echoing the education at the institute of Icelandic at the university, only down-sized to upper secondary school, but as an essentially different activity.

I: You don't mention your university studies?

D: Oh, in educational theory, you mean?

I: Well, I was also thinking of your Icelandic studies.

D: Right you are! Well it's still clear that...

Next Daniel explains how even the educational theory does not play any prominent part in his professional practice. After a while he approaches the Icelandic study, which seems to be even more peripheral:

D: As for the Icelandic studies... well, of course I use my knowledge of... the subject, of texts and all that. But I think somehow... that I haven't benefited much from that experience with regard to *teaching*. And naturally also... you know, very few university teachers are interested in educational theory. They just stand there lecturing and so on. But I obviously have made use of my subject knowledge as a professional basis. Sure. Still I don't exactly think it has influenced my teaching.

Comments on how "everyone can teach good students" and how the professional challenges consequently lie elsewhere may be regarded as another way of demarcating upper secondary school education from university education and as professional empowerment. Most of the teachers make such comments.

Admittedly, the teachers do not explicitly express demarcation motives as those suggested above. However, this does not necessarily mean that they do not be in play. At least it seems to be more than a mere coincidence when teachers from several

schools, spread all over the country, all touch upon these themes. Defending and securing of the professional field seems a reasonable explanation of this, not least with regard to the relatively indistinct and vague position of the profession in question. In this perspective, professionals' stories about change and development may serve as demonstrations of how upper secondary school teachers gradually enter the field of Icelandic education, settle there and eventually become true professionals, as they concurrently depart from the academic field in the term's restricted sense. Entering the profession of teaching and learning to teach is by all the teachers described as being a process any novice must go through. Birgit talks about how one "makes a teacher of oneself", Fjóla declares that "it surely takes time to become a truly professional teacher – that's just natural", and Daniel finds that his experience is what really shapes his practice. In this, the narratives about how the teachers came to see subject didactics, and particularly student activity as the pivot of their practice, resemble a classical *Bildungsroman*; they "deal with the maturation process, with how and why the protagonist [or teacher] develops as he does" (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2012), and they also show who the hero is and which qualities he possesses, in this case in a professional context. The need to thematise this may partly be explained by upper secondary school teachers' non-profession orientated education, and it may well be that professional positioning is more intrinsic in Icelandic education and other academic disciplines than in vocational education where teachers have their traditions of apprenticeship to draw on. Notwithstanding this, it may also be of importance to show that expertise does not come easily; that it takes both time and hard work to earn it.

However, the stories about professionalization and professional development as a solitary journey may be approached from other angles than the sociologically oriented one presented above. One such angle, and one I intend to discuss, relates to professional ethics and human morality. Since these are matters closely connected to the teachers' self-understanding, I will resume this topic in chapter 8, "The teachers and their professional self".

In the present chapter I have discussed and attempted to shed light on the teachers' strong focus on teachment. Regardless my efforts to approach the question of why teachment is so central in the teachers' narratives from several angles, a couple of paradoxes still remain, such as: If traditional lecturing, the "monologist teaching" is such an inadequate teaching method, it is firstly strange that it still is as common as the teachers report it to be. Secondly, it is also peculiar that they all chose this method as their main teaching method as novice teachers, and finally, it is striking that none of them came to the conclusion that monologist teaching is insufficient until they became teachers themselves. One possible explanation of the last point is indicated by Daniel: In any class there will be some pupils who are quite happy with the traditional methods, he says. These will usually be good students; attentive, capable of taking notes, and interested in the subject. As a youngster, Daniel belonged to this group, he admits; not uncomfortable with alternative methods, such as group work, yet quite satisfied with traditional lectures. It is likely that Daniel touches upon a significant point here. It seems quite probable that a young person who deliberately chooses to study Icelandic at university tends to have been an able, theoretically inclined pupil, and so what was never any problem to him in his school days appears to be a challenge only when he sees the classroom and the issue of learning and teaching from the teacher's point of view because it is only from this perspective he realizes what demanding task learning the subject matter in fact is to many pupils.

7. The teachers and their professional self

7.1 Self-concepts

In the current chapter, I attempt to recount the essence of the teachers' self-presentations, yet to go beyond their descriptions and hermeneutically explore and understand them. Charles Taylor has explored the concept of selfhood and self-interpretation. His theoretical perspective guides my approach to the teachers' self-descriptions. Summing up his account of selfhood, he says: "To ask what a person is, in abstraction from his or her self-interpretations, is to ask a fundamentally misguided question, one to which there couldn't in principle be an answer" and "I don't have a sense of where/what I am (...) without some understanding of how I have got there or become so. My sense of myself is of a being who is growing and becoming. In the very nature of things this cannot be instantaneous. (...) My self-understanding necessarily has temporal depth and incorporates narrative." (1989, p. 59 and 50) Self-understanding is in the present perspective considered a hermeneutic process, and in the current chapter my task to an even higher degree than in the previous chapters is to interpret (further) the already interpreted, and so to assume a double hermeneutic perspective, to resort to a phrase often attributed to Anthony Giddens (1984a, pp. xxxii, 348 and 374), yet also recognized and discussed e.g. by Taylor (Nyeng, 2000, p. 41), cf. the account of the theoretical perspective current work given in Chapter 3. Individual self-concepts are regarded the product of self-understanding; a concept as dynamic as the ongoing act of interpretation and strive for understanding requires.

In accordance with such a notion of the concept of self, the teachers were encouraged to describe their professional selves, their professional *persona*, including reflections on their professional development. Typically, I would ask them to describe how they work as teachers and how they think of their role in the classroom. The aim was to find out how they see themselves as teachers (what their professional self-image looks like) and how their present professional persona came to be. Therefore, the

questions were kept open, and the teachers largely decided what they found relevant and wanted to include in their self-descriptions. These narratives tend to be constructed thematically, based on a set of evaluating self-characteristics, copiously illustrated by examples, yet without relating to specific psychological or pedagogical styles or typologies. There is for example an element of temporality in each teacher's self-reflection, containing statements about continuity ("I've always...") or contrast and development ("To begin with, I ..., whereas now I ..."). Such statements seem to vouch for Taylor's claim about temporality as a structuring element in self-understanding. While the then and now-comparisons serve the purpose of establishing the narrator's current self-understanding as the natural result of previous events and development, they also are also part of the background of the self-portraits, composed on purpose to set off the figure in the foreground, the current self.

As accounted for in the initial presentation of the empirical material, the participating teachers were recruited with regard to diversity in order to put together a strategic selection of informants. Nevertheless, the teachers' descriptions of their professional personality and attitudes resemble each other to a high degree. Moreover, there is a distinct tendency in the direction of expressed individualism in the descriptions; all but one teacher accentuate that they have found the way to professionalism on their own. This becomes particularly clear in descriptions of professional development; the changes are generally described as considerable and based on personal experiences, whereas little is made of their university studies. The result of this may seem to be what could with an ostensibly self-contradictory phrase be regarded a collective individualism. However, since the self-descriptions are drawn partly by means of concrete class-room examples by which the teachers intend to show how they actually work or to contrast former methods with those they currently prefer, it also becomes evident that although the teachers seem to share a professional code, despite their insisting on individuality, there nevertheless are noticeable differences at the concrete level of teaching, both in methodical choices and in emphasis with regard to disciplinary topics as well as teachers' professional and personal values.

Qualified by Hartmut Rosa's previously described distinction between four levels of self-interpretation (cf. Figure 3), we can here distinguish the teachers' reflective and individual self-interpretations, articulating their personal choices and values, and their collective self-interpretations that seem to be grounded in and informed by their sharing certain practices and working within the same institutions. In Rosa's words:

[O]n the one hand, subjects are constituted, and develop an identity, with the help of an explicit self-understanding that is represented in their individual language and in the theories, convictions and ideas they hold. (...) But on the other hand, subjects are also constituted by a realm of feelings and body-practices or *habitus*, to use Bourdieu's term, which is pre-reflective and incorporated but which nevertheless carries social meaning and can be understood as a form of implicit, expressive self-interpretation, too. (2004, p. 695)

Consequently, "[e]xplicit individual self-images as well as habits and feelings are influenced by the dominant social ideas as well as institutions and practices – and vice versa" (Rosa, 2004, p. 697). In the present context, this understanding of the social and individual self may for example account for why each teacher insists on her having developed her current practice and ethos on her own; if one assumes there be a collective/societal practice and ideal of teacher independence and individualism in Icelandic upper secondary education, it does not seem strange or unreasonable that the teachers independently insists on such individualism. For in such a reading, individualism is both the ideal towards which the skilled and professional teacher must be assumed to strive, and the experienced practice. As upper secondary school is organized, teachers do in fact work individually most of the time; both in class and at their desk. At the same time, notions such as the need for individuality and uniqueness, are in Taylor's view characteristic for the modern self (Taylor, 1989, p. 28), and Goodson similarly finds that "[t]he version of "personal" that has been constructed and worked for in some Western countries is a particular version, an individual version, of being a person" (Goodson, 2003b, p. 26). It is definitely

possible that such underlying cultural understandings be in play in the stories about how the teachers have gotten where they presently find themselves on their own.

Main elements in the teachers' self-understanding

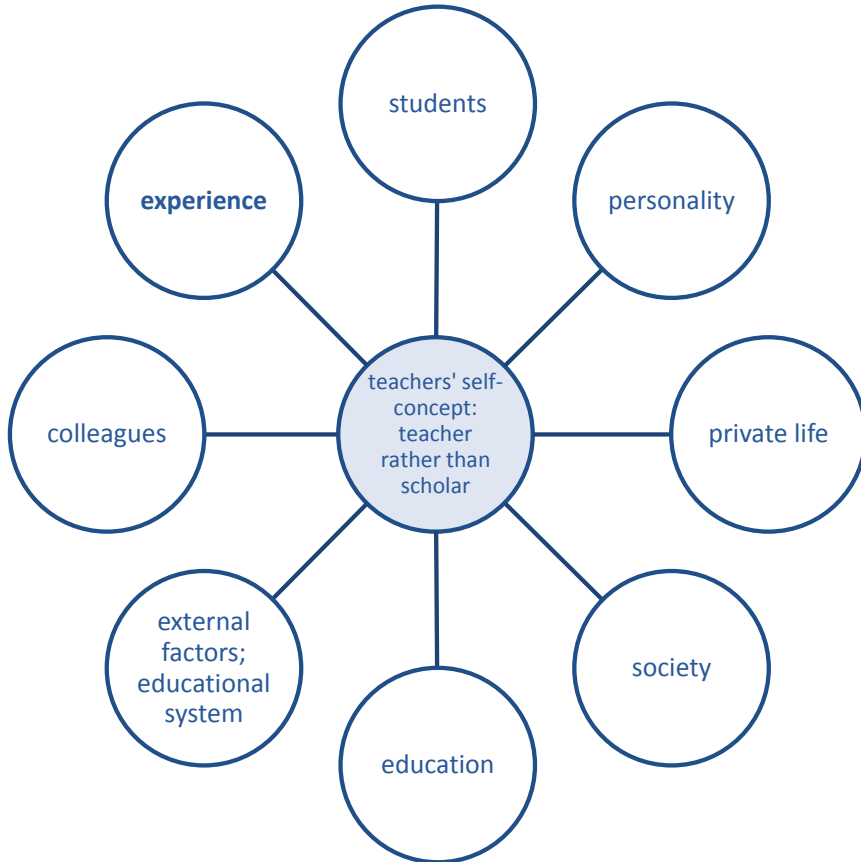
From what the teachers say about their class-room conduct, about how they understand themselves as teachers, how their present teacher self has come to be, and how they understand the educational task they are charged with, one may reckon the following elements as significant in the teachers' self-descriptions and their presentations of themselves as "teachers rather than scholars":

- 1) Personality and personal involvement
- 2) Private life; stage in life, private wishes etc. have influenced career choices and are of ongoing consequence
- 3) Societal embeddedness, e.g. perceived expectations, specifically related to cultural and national values
- 4) Education, particularly studies in Icelandic; not accentuated by the teachers, yet undisputably a formal and knowledgeable prerequisite for the job they are doing
- 5) Formal frame conditions, e.g. organizational and administrative factors from local organization of courses and groups to national standards etc.
- 6) Informal frame conditions, e.g. colleagues
- 7) Personal professional experience; the paramount factor in the narratives and the reported fundament of current ideas about teaching
- 8) Students; the regard to their educational success and general welfare, and interaction between students and teacher

The list is visualized in Figure 5 below. The figure is a simplification, for the self-presentations are far more complex than the figure indicates, and there are also differences among the individual narratives. Nevertheless, the figure may capture essential common features. Yet, it does not offer any suggestion as to how the

practice narratives and the fact that these specific elements stand out may be understood. In the current chapter, I try to get closer to such an understanding.

Figure 5: Elements which appear to influence the teachers' self-concept



A hermeneutic exploration of some key expressions

It may be noted that when providing descriptions of themselves and their professional code, my informants to a high degree employ descriptions of practical life experiences: specific lessons and classroom episodes. Such concrete descriptions are connected to more general statements. For example, when talking about their own professional *persona*, which the individual teacher often also relates to her or his personal character in general, the teachers tend to describe themselves as being “strict and firm”. When explaining their strictness, the teachers typically talk about how they demand that pupils really make an effort to perform in accordance with their capacity, that they hand in papers on time, or that they pay attention in class. For example, Birgit explains how she demands that pupils come prepared to class and bring along textbooks and whatever they should need for the lesson. “If they repeatedly fail to do this, and if they show no interest in what’s going on, I plainly say that they may leave. No one forces them to sit in class, so they’re free to leave if they’re not interested in being there.” Similarly, Hannes describes how he explains to his pupils that “if they don’t hand in their homework or fail to do other things they’re supposed to do, it simply will hit back on themselves. I get paid to teach them and read their papers or whatever, and I’ll put my best foot forward to do all of that. I make no fuss. If they don’t follow up, I make no fuss. I record it as a small minus in my notes, and it’s garnered up along with the rest of my notes.” Furthermore, he appeals to pupils’ sense of decency when he urges them to concentrate or at least keep quiet in class: “Show your classmates some respect, I say. You disturb the others if you keep chattering like that. So stop it, for they might after all be trying to learn something!” Also Daniel’s system of reward and punishment with regard to homework, for example, may be regarded an instance of the strict-but-fair reasoning. The terms and phrases used when the teachers describe this reasoning provide an occasion for me as a researcher to hermeneutically reflect on how work situations are experienced in terms of certain meanings, and to explore how a teacher’s self-interpretation is, in

Taylor's words, "shaped by the language in which the agent lives these meanings" (Taylor, 1971, p. 16).

My informants stress that they consider themselves "strict" (Icel. *strangur*), while they at the same time strive to be "reasonable" and "just" (Icel. e.g. *sanngjarn* and *réttlátur*). They all elaborate this point; usually they also illustrate it by help of specific examples. It should be noted that these elaborations are explanations of what they mean by "reasonability", while they give very few reasons for *why* they find this a sensible stand. There are no references to a professional code or to any public documents. It is all presented as a personal conviction. What, then, is the origin of this discourse of reasonability, this conviction that one should act reasonably towards pupils, and why do the teachers feel a need to accentuate that they do so? There are no evident answers to these questions in the material, yet one may possibly trace some leads, and so the interpreter is not left entirely to her own reflections. One such lead is the simple fact that reasonability and fairness is thematized by all the teachers; this seem to be a matter of importance to them, and, precisely because they all mention it, one may suspect it to be a matter of importance on an intersubjective and perhaps even collective level, to borrow Taylor's terms from his analysis of the concept of meaning and meaningfulness (Taylor, 1985). Considered in this perspective, "strict-yet-reasonable" is an attitude which complies with several of the aspects which Taylor regards distinctive of the modern individual: First, there is the "ethical imperative" to be true to one's particular self (Abbey, 2000, p. 80), for which the reasonability accounts; it may be assumed that most people want to see themselves as reasonable with regard to their way of dealing with others. Once this is settled, the strictness, which might not sound too positive in the first place, may be perfectly acceptable; if a teacher is strict, not for the sake of strictness, but sees it as a means to act reasonably towards her pupils, it may be all right to be strict. In that case, her strictness may be seen as something she is forced to, despite her fundamental reluctance to such behaviour, when pupils fail to follow the necessary rules regarding hand-ins, classroom behaviour etc. Indeed, if the teacher *fails* to react

firmly in such situations, she may at the same time act unfairly and unreasonably towards the rest of the group; those who conscientiously hand in their homework, also in cases where they know they have not really been able to do their best due to other obligations or because they were not quite well the previous day etc. and thus could have made good use of an extra day for writing the specific text etc. In classes where pupils generally have a low motivation, as seems to be the case in many of the groups the teachers in the current project teach, the teachers may often find it necessary to resort to a strictness mode which they may not be particularly fond of. Yet, if regarded as serving the higher purpose of reasonability, strictness may still be considered acceptable. This is even more so if the necessity is linked to practical aspects as well; the teachers may argue that certain strictness is required simply in order to get through the curriculum, i.e. in order to help pupils achieving their diploma. Thus, there may be a connection also between strictness and purposefulness: while to the students, the purpose of attending upper secondary school is basically to get their diploma, the teachers' purposes are more complex, as has been demonstrated. In addition to helping pupils achieve their diploma, which is in itself a legitimate purpose, the teachers have ambitions with regard to general literary skills, to imparting the cultural heritage, and to general education. These are ambitious aspirations which may contribute to teachers' sense of purposefulness in their daily work, which must in a Taylorian perspective be considered of great importance, since Taylor regards having purposes that have special significance for them a necessity for all persons. It is, in fact, constitutive for selfhood, he claims, and being so the particular purposes a person sets himself play an important part in the sense of who he is, Taylor believes (Abbey, 2000, p. 62).

The teachers relate the concept of "strict-yet-reasonable" to that of friendliness. The teachers accentuate that they want their pupils to regard them as friendly and sympathetic, yet they explicitly underscore that they are not speaking of a friendship among peers but rather of what could perhaps be termed a hierarchic amity; basically, the descriptions of friendliness seem to equal the attention any person in authority

should judiciously give her subordinates. As Agnes puts it: “Well, friend in quotation marks, actually. Naturally, they’re not my friends at Facebook or anything, but it should be ok for them to come and tell me that “today I haven’t been able to do my homework because...” something or other. That happens from time to time, of course. And they’re very loyal and they’re personal and they write you and tell that... well, all sorts of things.” By saying this, she does in my view also mark an ethical standpoint: As a professional, she should know that having a teacher-pupil relation is different from having a private social relationship. She has a clear notion of the demarcation line between the two, and acting as the pupils’ private friend is not on the right side of this line, in Agnes’ view: “One spends the days among young people and so one simply *has* to be able to talk to them. One must have the courage to be their friend, but also, one needs the courage to act as a grown person, to keep the distance that follows one’s role as the older and more experienced person in the group, who is furthermore its foreman. Indeed, that’s how I primarily see myself. As a foreman.” Both Birgit and Jórunn express something similar, while Hannes says that he has always both consciously and unconsciously, as he words it, tried to behave as a companion in class. For, as Hannes explains: “Already as a junior teacher I found that if one’s haughty and puts on airs, it will influence both the communication and the teaching negatively.” Jórunn does not speak explicitly of friendliness, but she states that:

Generally, I try to keep up good relations to them. By that I don’t necessarily mean *personal* relations. For I find that *very* important. That, you know... I... don’t want to be in a friendship or... to be their confidant. I’m their teacher. Yet, I take an *interest* in them. And I show them *respect*. And I want that to be fairly reciprocal, I must say. (...) And I try to serve as an example in that. In my behaviour towards them. I want similar behaviour in return.

The main example used to illustrate the (professional) attitude of reasonability and friendliness, and the realization of it, is the individual teacher’s explanation of how she wants her pupils to have confidence in her as their teacher (and a reasonable person) and for example come to her whenever they have problems of any kind,

whether to talk about their problems and concerns, or simply to explain why they happened to come unprepared that particular day. And, importantly, the teachers claim: pupils should not need to fear retaliations because of such confessions, and they should trust that their personal histories are treated confidentially.

However, even if several teachers accentuate their wish to be forthcoming, there nevertheless seems to be a difference in degree regarding how inviting they really are in such matters. There is Elin who declares that she really bears deep solicitude for her pupils' welfare, who says that she constantly tries to act attentively, and who also on a regular base or whenever she sees a need for it calls for private teacher-pupil conferences. There is Agnes, Birgit and Jórunn who strongly accentuate the difference between a private friendship and professional friendliness. And there is Daniel who, albeit his declaration that he wants to be reasonable, for example with regard to hand-ins, if there are evident reasons for being so, does not seem to encourage pupils in any way to confide in him, maybe due to lack of time or interest (which would be a sensible enough explanation since Daniel for some reason teaches more pupils than anyone else in the group), or simply because he does not regard it his duty to do so. (The latter suggestion is, I must add, certainly not to say that he would reject a pupil in need.) Next, there is Hannes, who hardly mentions friendliness explicitly, but who talks at great length about the importance of getting on well with pupils and of really talking to them, and finally there is Fjóla who in her own words by disposition is a positive, sociable and open-minded person. This is also part of her teacher personality, she finds. Maybe this is the reason why Fjóla finds little reason to discuss friendliness as a topic. Friendly, cheerful and open-minded is how you should generally be towards other people, Fjóla feels. "Whenever I look back, trying to remember which teachers I liked the most and which has meant something special to me, I find that the ones I remember the best, are the cheery and brisk ones, and those who had a personal touch. (...) That's the kind of teacher I want to be too." Nevertheless, a second explanation might also apply: In some respects Fjóla still regards herself a novice who is fully occupied with her studies and with developing a

professional style and a professional selfhood. Although the attitude to pupils is a matter of concern to all the teachers, both Fjóla's and others' accounts indicate that there tends to be a change of emphasis; a reorientation from teaching the subject matter to teaching pupils in the teachers' professional development. Seen from this angle, one could suggest that Fjóla still focuses on teaching the subject matter.

It should moreover be noted that "friendliness" and "reasonableness" seem to be slightly ambiguously framed within the group. For, whereas it relates intimately to pedagogics and teachment, for example in Agnes' case, to Hannes it is primarily a matter of general education, and to Elín it is to a high degree an ethical question. However, all three elements may, in various degrees, be identified in each of the accounts of amity, and the examples are principally demonstrations of the concept's various aspects in the teachers' usage of it.

Regardless of the various motives for friendliness and reasonability, it appears that the wish to appear friendly is a genuine one in each case. Indeed, it almost looks as though it is related to notions of the profession as such; that a conception of the friendly and understanding attitude as belonging to teacher professionalism may be recognized in the accounts. This is not expressed directly, though. Yet, as has been thoroughly demonstrated in the previous, the teachers do not at all see themselves as distant and absentminded lecturers (a kind of teacher they regard old-fashioned and outdated), but rather as active educators with a wish to engage and understand their students. In such a frame, inattentiveness is hardly an alternative. In general terms one could claim that the professional's attitude to his "client" is of importance in any relational profession and thus part of what professionalism in these professions should include, and that this also relates to the degree of trust which is required in such relations (Abbott, 1988; Grimen, 2009).

I have just asserted that remarks about reasonability are linked to statements about friendship and friendliness. This may imply at least two different interpretations. Firstly, statements about reasonability may be regarded a specification of those about

friendliness; it is a way of asserting that they are talking about some sort of a *professional* friendship. This may in turn both mean that they feel a need to draw a line between their professional and their private life, and that they feel a similar need to draw a line between their own role as grown-ups and that of the pupils as minors, between teacher and pupils, between themselves as persons in charge in everyday classroom-life and their pupils' role as inferiors. Secondly, statements about friendliness and reasonability may be a way of disowning a supercilious or patronizing professional attitude. Whichever alternative applies to the individual teacher, an adequate interpretation may be to suggest that it relates to morality, at the very least in the sense of what could be synthesized as "a conscious wish to act correctly and properly towards pupils", probably also in the sense of "prudence", i.e. "[t]he ability to recognize and follow the most suitable or sensible course of action; good sense in practical (...) affairs; discretion, circumspection, caution. In early use: the wisdom to see what is virtuous, seen as one of the four cardinal virtues" (Dictionary), which in turn is closely related to the usage of the Aristotelian term *phronesis* in the current work.

There are, however, elements in the practice narratives which seem incongruous with friendliness and proximity as thematic elements in the teachers' discourse. For example, most of the teachers accent the importance of learning pupils' names. This may appear to relate to the teachers' wish to appear friendly and to show individual pupils interest. But this does not seem to be in keeping with the fact that there is hardly a single story about individual pupils or specific pupils in the material. This fact is all the more remarkable as the teachers generally reason and reflect on the basis of practical teachment. What might be termed the paradox of the friendliness-motive may be illustrated by the contrast between the teachers' accentuating of the importance of learning-pupils' names on the one hand, and the lack of stories about individual pupils on the other.

"I make a point of learning pupils' names," Agnes says. "I do in fact try to learn them all within the first week of a new course." Similarly, Fjóra describes how she, too,

tries to learn pupils' names as soon as possible, since she regards knowing their names a matter of showing pupils respect. "If I just say, "hey, you in the red pullover, could you..." something, I'm not showing that pupil respect. By using her name, I signalize that I care and am interested in her, as a person."

Apparently, then, knowing pupils' names relates to the teachers' professional code, manifest in the wish to be friendly and to recognize pupils as fellow human beings and showing them respect as such. As Fjóra explains, she believes that if pupils feel that she esteems them, they are more likely to listen to her, with the result that their learning outcome improves. So apparently, the name learning strategy is not only a matter of moral code. It seems to also be rooted in a psychology oriented learning theory. Even that might not account for the quite heavy accentuating of the importance of knowing pupils' names. Why mention it at all? Is it not a matter of course that one learns the names of people with whom one works over some time? These are questions I asked myself because I found the stressing of this element noteworthy. I came to conclude that, in fact, this may in fact not always be a matter of course. Not, for example, if your pupils, your "collaborators", amount to 150-200 a term, as is the case for some of teachers. Then, knowing the name of each individual pupil in groups which are as homogenous as school classes actually are, telling pupils apart, and indeed, knowing each of them sufficiently well to be able to evaluate him justly may in fact be a challenge. Seen in the perspective of the teachers' actual working conditions, then, it turns out that the teachers may concern themselves less about with individual pupils than one might believe on the first impression. The emphasis they put on learning pupils' names may still be regarded a matter of professional code, yet it may as much be a question of necessity, something the teacher is in fact forced to do in order to perform her job (e.g. evaluation), as it is a matter of professional code in the narrower meaning of moral standards in intersubjective interaction, although the teachers' presentation of the motive indicates the latter to be the main one. It is, moreover, indeed possible that this is their only

conscious motive; as both Taylor and Bourdieu point out, motives and reasons for acting as one does are frequently misrecognized by the agent himself.

In pursuing the friendliness theme, I discovered that the teachers tend to contrast their stated friendliness to strictness, which they also uniformly claim to be an element in their teacher self. Thus, the statement “I’m strict, yet reasonable,” is characteristic for the common view within the group. In the self-presentations, there seems to be a continuum from “friendly” at one end, via “reasonable” and “consistent” to “firm” and “strict”. The teachers’ linking of strictness, reasonability, consistency and friendliness does in my view support an interpretation in the direction of morality as an essential element in the teachers’ work ethos; their idea of what a teacher in upper secondary school should be and do, maybe simply by virtue of being human and thus what Taylor terms a “moral agent” (Taylor, 1985, Ch. 2; 1989, p. 27). In the very least, when seeing how the teachers connect these notions (friendly/reasonable/consistent/firm/strict), I consider it an indicator of even strictness as fundamentally being about something else than mere regulations or obedience.

However, in addition to regarding it as conveying the teachers’ ethical standard of professionalism, the contrast friendly – strict may also be understood as voicing the profound dilemmas and conflicts the teachers find themselves facing daily. The contrast, which might possibly be considered an incoherence, may in this perspective rather be regarded descriptions of the situated practice very much in touch with practical reality: Since the teachers are confronted with a reality far from the ideal classroom filled with eager, interested pupils, they have to adjust their well-disposedness to reality, where pupils are often uninspired, ill motivated and lacking in basic skills and knowledge. In this verity, strictness seems to be required in order to get anything done, whether one speaks of reaching curricular aims or aiding pupils completing upper secondary education. In Bourdieuan terms, this might be regarded an instance of acting and reasoning in accordance with actual circumstances and possibilities (Bourdieu, 1984, Ch. 7), whereas Taylor goes further. For in Taylor’s view, persons (and so professionals in relation oriented professions) are not merely

agents; they are “beings with purposes that have special significance for them, playing an important part in their sense of what they are” (Abbey, 2000, p. 62). By including strictness as a moral dimension in their occupational self, the teachers grant themselves a more comprehensive, and so a more purposeful task than what traditional lecturing comprises, namely that of engaging themselves in helping their pupils through upper secondary school, and, as a result of the immaturity and lack of motivation they daily meet, that of general education. Strictness, fairness, reasonableness and friendliness may all be regarded attributes to the teachers as persons; beings with a fundamental need for purposefulness.

It may seem, then, as though the various elements in the teachers’ self-descriptions have different underlying motives; whereas reasonability may apply to value orientation as an essential aspect of the state of being a human agent (Taylor, 1989, p. 29), strictness, which at first sight might seem to contradict the expressed want to be reasonable, is compelled by classroom conditions, such as lack of motivation and conscientiousness. Fairness may be regarded a quality which vindicates strictness, to which the teachers are basically somewhat unsympathetic; as long as one makes sure that strictness is exercised fairly and justly, having reasonability as one’s seamark, it may be justified.

Interpretation of a master metaphor: “I see myself as a foreman.”

Interpreting the strict-yet-friendly-mode as a result of adjustment to actual conditions, one could furthermore claim this apparently somewhat disparate self-presentation is closely related to another recurrent element in the self-presentations, specifically in the shape of a metaphor; the teacher as a working foreman. This metaphor is interpreted and explored below.

According to Lars Qvortrup, a teacher’s authority may be of several kinds (Qvortrup, 2009). First, she has certain *institutional authority* in her capacity as employee in a public institution with a specific assignment. Furthermore, she does as subject teacher have certain *professional authority*, being the one who has knowledge of the subject

as well as skills to impart it to others. Finally, she may also have *personal authority* which primarily asserts itself in the teachers' actions and her communication with students.

It does not occur to any of the teachers to account for or explain the institutional or the professional authority; both seem to be regarded self-evident and practically as part of the conditions on which the teachers are engaged. So it is the personal authority they describe when characterizing themselves as for example "strict, yet friendly", and this is the perspective I will take below. For although I have above explored the "strict-yet-friendly" theme to some degree and suggested that such statements relate to professional code as well as to purposefulness, I will presently expand the exploration and interpret this theme with a view to professional legitimacy, specifically as addressing teacher authority, while also linking it to statements which more directly thematize authority. The foreman metaphor, employed by several teachers, does in the present context serve as some sort of collective term for such statements.

Variations of the phrase "I consider myself a strict, yet friendly teacher" recur in the self-descriptions. Such statements are followed by examples and elaborations on what they mean by "strict" and "friendly", respectively, which in turn is connected to the teachers' understanding of themselves as both legitimate authority, the only adult among around 30 teenagers at a time, and a significant other to many of their pupils. One of Jórunn's reflections illustrates how this includes substantially different elements:

I want to show them kindness. So that they may have a sense of security. They should not feel that I am constantly... criticizing them our being destructive or... Naturally, I have to be brusque from time to time. If pupils are rude or... you know. One does sometimes need to resort to that.

(...)

But then I am also... well, I'm also trying somehow to be forthcoming. And I want to listen to them. And I want to be flexible. Yet I also try to set clear limits. (...) There are deadlines for handing in homework, and I want them to respect those deadlines. And I want them to... well, there are certain basic rules that I want them to respect. I am strict in that sense. Yet, I am prepared to listen to them if I... you know, if they talk to me, for example, and say "I was unable to hand in my essay because..." I just want them to provide their own explanation on such occasions. And then I listen. And consider. Whether there is something I can do. But I constantly see...well. This is a bit difficult... to stand by one's words. Towards the group. (...) There's a subtle line between considerateness and unfairness.

As has been shown, the moral aspect is accentuated in a number of ways, and in a number of wrappings in the material, and is a far more prominent element in the teachers' self-descriptions than I would initially have guessed. However, since it proved to be so central in the teachers' accounts, it proved necessary to look more closely at this element. Gradually, I came to regard morality a quite prominent element in the teachers' professional self-understanding. However, whether it really is correct to speak of a specific *professional* self-understanding here, of a self-understanding generally shared by professionals in relational professions, or rather of an understanding of oneself as a human being in accordance with Taylor's understanding of modern selfhood (Abbey, 2000, pp. 79-80), which nevertheless tends to evolve and to stand as a particularly important matter in relational professions, calls for further examination.

I will return to the question of morality in the concluding part of the current chapter where I discuss it in relation to elements such as power and meaning in the teachers' professional lives. For the time being, I merely note that this finding was part of what made me aware of the need for a nuanced and clear conception of teacher knowledge in upper secondary education. Yet it should be noted that the emphasis on friendliness, fairness etc. might also be interpreted from a somewhat different point of view, since this particular finding does in fact also relate to the reflections on teachment and its dominance, discussed in the previous chapter. For one could

reasonably claim that by taking this clear professional stand, the teachers place themselves in the above recounted discussion about focus on teachment as a means of social positioning. When so distinctly accentuating elements such as reasonability, friendliness, fairness and firmness, they position themselves close to a discourse of care and general education which is more common in basic education than in higher education, i.e. in academia, where employees have an educational background which in its basis resembles that of upper secondary school teachers more than regular teacher education does. Taking a slightly different point of view, one could claim that the teachers in their relatively strong accentuating of attitudes and conduct draw near to *praxis*, if one envisages the academic *theoria* and the action oriented *praxis* as opposite ends on a continuous scale. There are numerous statements about friendliness, about how the teachers want the best for their pupils etc., i.e. notions which relate to the original meaning of *praxis* as actions performed for their own sake, such as benevolence or care, and which therefore serve their own aim (Aristotle, 1999, p. 231). Yet, there are also statements which may lead to the view that the teachers' motives for the expressed pupil orientation are moral and practical in equal measure, that although the reason why they want to be reasonable and friendly may be that they generally regard themselves reasonable and friendly and believe this is how one should behave towards other people, there also seems to be a practical need for gaining pupils' favour, without which it is difficult for teachers to do their job satisfactory due to e.g. widespread lack of motivation among pupils. One might claim, therefore, that *praxis* inspired actions and attitudes, such as amiability and benevolence, appear to have become necessary elements in the practice of (mother tongue) teachers in Icelandic upper secondary school, if practice is taken to mean the way they carry out their work (*A-Z of Social Research : A Dictionary of Key Social Science Research Concepts*).

Furthermore, the interpretation of (professional) friendliness and so of attentiveness as being included in the concept of teachers' practice or proficiency is in agreement with the picture of the teacher as a foreman or overseer which particularly Agnes and

Daniel present as a model for their own professional practice, and as, in their view, definitely preferable to the classical image of the teacher as an instructor or “preacher”, to borrow Birgit’s expression. “I see myself as a foreman rather than as a lecturer,” Agnes states, and she elaborates her point by explaining what this implies from her point of view:

And I take on this role by asking: “Should we do this today? And then we’ll divide the topic so and so, and if we do that, we’ll carry it into execution so and so.” And then they may answer that they don’t want to do it that way. That it sounds boring. And then I’ll ask: “What does the foreman do? Isn’t he the one who decides how things should be carried out?” And if they say no, which they rarely do... (...) Well, I get the final say. I’m the foreman, and I don’t allow them to deprive me of my power.

The foreman metaphor turns out to be ambiguous. Evidently, in Agnes’ case, it is quite likely that her choice of metaphor plays upon the practical orientation at School 1; the workshop is a familiar entity to pupils in vocational courses, and Agnes may even expect that she obtains increased authority by comparing her classroom to a workshop (which will often be regarded more prestigious than an ordinary classroom in her pupils’ opinion) and herself to a workshop foreman. She may for instance hope that the analogy increases students’ understanding of the necessity to take theoretical subjects seriously, just as they need to take training in the workshop in earnest. And just as they need to respect the workshop’s foreman, they need to respect the Icelandic teachers’ instructions. As Agnes herself points out: she gets the final say, and she does not allow pupils to deprive her of her power. Already this brief outline indicates several possible interpretations of the metaphor, but it also soon becomes clear that the metaphor is in some respects imperfect and incoherent.

If the teacher may be compared to a foreman, the analogy for the classroom is a workshop. In a workshop, the workers are peers, with the foreman as the first among equals. So, the teachers’ comparison of classrooms with workshops, may be regarded a sign of their democratic attitude and their sense of fellowship with their pupils. In practical action, this manifests itself in the teacher dismounting of her desk to spend

her time “at the floor”, among her pupils. I find that the foreman metaphor contains more than the shift of position in a literal sense, i.e. stepping down from the teacher’s desk. For this step, the reduced physical distance between teacher and pupils, seems to involve an increased figurative proximity as well. By this I refer to the already mentioned obligingness and accommodating attitude on the teachers’ part. Furthermore, this figurative proximity seems to include various degrees of attentiveness and care, in some cases even more so than one might expect from a foreman. Still, a working foreman will usually to a higher degree be regarded his fellow workers’ peer than a traditional, academic lecturer is considered by his students. So a higher degree of equality seems to be *one* benefit from the foreman way of thinking, provided that a relatively close relation between teacher and pupils, more personal than the role of the traditional lecturer is assumed to be a boon, which one might assume that those who promote the workshop model regard it to be. In fact, when talking about the teacher-pupil relationship, Agnes quite explicitly states that she finds “understanding and mutual respect to be of crucial importance”. It moreover seems that the foreman style of teachment, what might be termed the workshop model, implies that the teacher must relinquish the sense of controlling lessons in detail. This is not necessarily a big sacrifice; as Daniel discovered, the teacher is by no means as much in control when lecturing as one might assume, anyway, since it turned out that very few pupils paid real attention when he was lecturing. Nevertheless, a chalk-and-talk classroom is still easier to inspect and overview than a “workshop classroom”, where pupils may be engaged in a variety of activities. Thus, part of the reason why the teachers state that they started out very traditionally, may be that one after all needs to be relatively confident, familiar both with the subject, the courses, and the craft of teaching before one is ready to give pupils freer reins. Daniel’s description of his own development may illustrate this possibility: Daniel’s perspective seems to be slightly different from that of Agnes when he muses: “Well, how do I teach? I teach... or rather, how do I *not* teach? I teach as little as possible in the form of long lectures, long monologues from the

lectern. I think I may say that I try to avoid that. (...) The idea is to be some sort of a foreman and supervisor rather than an instructor.”

In accordance with the general rejection of chalk-and-talk teachment, even the rest of the group has taken up a style of which the foreman metaphor could at least partly be appropriate, particularly if understood in Daniel’s sense rather than in Agnes’. For, as in the case of Daniel, non-monologist teachment seems to be mostly a matter of adjusting to actual conditions and of taking on an accommodating attitude, of which neither is consciously associated with the notions of authority or power.

It has been suggested that the foreman metaphor may, when presented to pupils, be intended to display the teacher’s solidarity and appeal to their own sense of fellowship, resulting in an enforced sense of a common “we” where everyone is obliged to contribute, which at best may increase pupils consideration for both their classmates and their teacher. Yet, I have indicated that the metaphor be somewhat incoherent. For, taking it into consideration, one realizes that a classroom is a less egalitarian location than a workshop, and that teachers are not really *primus inter pares* in their classroom, that they may in fact more adequately be regarded privileged members of the group. Teachers are not their pupils’ peers. They have knowledge of the subject they teach quite different from that of the average pupil, and it is the teacher’s responsibility to ensure that proper teaching and learning take place. Ultimately, therefore, the teacher will usually be the one who in practice makes decisions. This is very plainly demonstrated in Agnes’ statement about how she tries to persuade her pupils to take part in activities – suggested by her – and how she, should they be reluctant, sees to it that she gets the last word anyway. In her own words, she does not “let pupils deprive her of her power”. This comment may be a key to understanding why the teachers resort to the foreman metaphor although it is not fully in agreement with actual classroom conditions; the metaphor may be understood in the light of power and authority.

Recurring to Qvortrup's authority categories, teachers' knowledge of the subject, considerably more expansive than that of her pupils, may be considered part of her professional authority, while her power, e.g. her right to make decisions relates to her institutional authority. Yet, leaning on her professional and institutional authority does not seem to suffice in everyday school life; things still do not proceed automatically. It is she, the individual teacher, who encounters the students every day, not "the profession" or "the institution", understood as an active party. Authority needs a face, so to speak. Therefore, the authority must be carried by her, the teacher. It seems, however, by capacity of being professionals, teachers' personal authority is dependent on both the professional and the institutional authority, in Qvortrup's terminology. As I see it, the categories interlace, and may thus in fact be less distinct than one may at first sight be led to think, although they may be useful as analytic categories. This observation may be regarded as being in agreement with Rosa's interpretation of the social field. As his model for self-interpretation shows, he divides this field into four main categories (cf. Ch. 3.4). Yet, as the arrows in the model indicate, these categories are constantly influenced by each other. This may well be the case with the notion of institutional/professional/personal authority as well.

Admittedly, although he is in certain respects his colleagues' peer, the foreman, too, in some sense personifies authority; it is, for example, his duty to see to it that work gets done in the workshop, and done properly. In addition to the top-down aspect of the foreman metaphor, i.e. teachers as the personified institutional and professional authority, one may, as I will explicate, discern a bottom-up aspect where the metaphor is derived from the actual situation in the average upper secondary school classroom. It is known that a large amount of pupils still have low motivation for their studies, evident among other things in the high drop-out rate in upper secondary education, and they consequently find it hard to concentrate in class, to prepare for class, to do their homework etc. There are numerous statements about this both in the logs and the interviews, and it is quite plain that these factors make teaching more

difficult. Indeed, how do you teach a person who does not want to be taught? How can this person learn anything you attempt to teach him? Teachers can respond to challenges of this kind in various ways. One way is to put effort into motivating and encouraging the young people. According to the teachers in the current study, they spend a considerable amount of their time on such activities. A possible supplementary strategy is to establish *personal* authority in addition to the professional and institutional one. The foreman metaphor may partly be used as a means to establish such authority.

Possessing personal authority may quite possibly be regarded a necessity by the teachers. For although they do not exactly complain about their work conditions, it becomes clear that students' lack of motivation has impact on everyday work in the classroom. In this situation, the foreman metaphor may come in handy. The metaphor contains several positive connotations. First, it signals fellowship and equality of the "we're-in-this-together" kind, and thus that the teacher stands by her pupils. Second, it connotes to seriousness; the foreman and his co-workers do in fact *work*. They earn their own living and are not fussing around. Similarly, education may be considered work, several teachers point out. It is not make believe. It should not, in their view, be regarded a place where young people are being kept while they wait for their real life to begin. As the teachers explain, they keep reminding their pupils that it is not surprising that they find studying hard. Knowledge does not come from nowhere. It takes hard work to achieve it. "I tell them that it is like digging a ditch," Birgit explains. "It's hard work. But you have to endure it to get your ditch. It's the same with studying. You need to work to achieve knowledge." This example shows how the foreman metaphor may be tied to the parallel studying/job, and thus it is also possible to appeal to pupils' demand for learning something useful; if pupils are reluctant to doing their homework, for instance, the teacher can at least point out that doing so prepares them for working life, where having certain standards of work ethics is a necessity.

The bottom-up aspect of the foreman metaphor thus seems to be of prevalingly appellative character. If the students accept the metaphor, they will probably be more likely to have a positive attitude to their teacher. This in turn is likely to imply increased willingness on the students' behalf to respect and listen to their teacher – and to do what she requires, just as workers are supposed to do what the workshop foreman requires. At this, it is also clear that although the foreman metaphor appeals to the sense of fellowship, is not intrinsically a matter of equality, but may just as well be regarded a teacher strategy for attributing oneself the authority required to render it possible to perform one's work.

In actual fact, few doubts are expressed about the foreman style, yet, when looking to Hannes and his teachment, certain remonstrance may be sensed. For, it seems that Hannes tends to see each class as a unit which may in certain situations favourably be treated as a whole. For example, Hannes is a narrator. He loves telling stories and anecdotes. The workshop model is not an ideal arena for storytelling, and even if Hannes for some reason had chosen to introduce the workshop model, yet kept telling individual pupils or small groups stories, his narrating would hardly have had the same effect as when told to the class as a unit. It would for instance hardly strengthen the classes' sense of community. In other words, if one supports the idea of welding classes and cultivating team spirit and a sense of community, some opportunities of doing so are probably lost in the workshop model, since this can barely be done unless one treats the group as a unit much of the time. Now, it is in this context noteworthy that the most eager representatives of the workshop model are employed at what I have termed course model schools, not at traditional class model schools. As explained, pupils at course model schools are placed in different groups in each school subject, and the groups are changed every term. Consequently, spending much time and resources on building team spirit would make little sense in such schools.

When describing their professional selves, the teachers maintain that they make demands to their pupils. A wide range of demands are mentioned, the most prominent of which relate to expectations to pupils qua pupils, such as attending lessons, doing

homework and handing it in when expected, bringing text books and other required material to class, taking some interest in one's work, participating in class, not disturbing one's fellow students, and behaving politely towards fellow students and the teacher. When expressing such demands, the teachers apparently often resort to their pupils' common sense and good breeding. "I mean what should one do?" Daniel asks rhetorically. "Of course I don't enjoy surprise tests and such stuff. Still, I'm always struggling with these matters, as we all are. I notice that they come unprepared. That they haven't read what they were supposed to read at home. And, well, I try to appeal to some sense of moral obligation, some sense of decency. And you know, I say things such as: "Well, we'll have no fun in our classes if the majority comes unprepared, and half the time, or a lot of time is spent on skimming the text without knowing the least about what we are actually doing and... so on." All the teachers provide similar examples, which simply show that they do not always succeed in bringing their demands about. This frustrates the teachers, mainly for two reasons. Firstly, it impairs the teachers' efforts to treat pupils as equals (and also therefore as someone to whom it is reasonable to make demands). Secondly, it simply makes it difficult for the teachers to do their job – to teach. The former goes along with the expressed wish to treat pupils decently and respectfully, and could consequently be regarded a matter of morality, while the latter implies practical challenges and may be seen in relation to the much discussed focus on teachment and to the above mentioned adjustment to actual conditions as well as to the strong emphasis on encouragement and motivation supported by everyone, yet particularly advocated for by Elin, Birgit and Jórunn. Both frustrations relate to various aims of general education expressed by the individual teachers, and so to morality even in that respect.

What has been recounted so far in the present chapter, may be accounted as part of the background of statements such as "my aims as a teacher do to a high degree relate to the general education part of the job: to see my pupils succeed, to see them graduate, to see them mature, to see them articulate some aims for their own lives..."

and “I see myself as a teacher more than as a scholar of Icelandic”, and “I am first and foremost an educationalist”; statements which may all indicate an orientation towards *praxis* at the expense of *theoria*.

With so said, it is almost as though the teachers suddenly recollect themselves, feeling that they give an incorrect or inappropriate image of themselves, and so they hasten to assure that they definitely are professional *subject* teachers, and so state that “I truly care for my subject as well”, that “Of course I am an *Icelandic* teacher. That’s what I *am!*” or that “We still teach Icelandic as an *academic* subject, though. Of course we do.” The apparent need for making such statements may be interpreted in various ways. It may for example stem from a need to assure the interviewer and researcher that proper work is being performed in their classrooms. Yet, it is also possible that they hear themselves providing a description of their own self and their practice which somehow surprises them; in their own narrative of how they work and which aims they have as professionals, there is no clear picture of a scholar of Icelandic. Expressed slightly differently, one could say that they possibly draw a picture of their professional selves which they recognize as being in accordance with their *praxis*.

Connected to the image of themselves as subject teachers, are remarks on how the individual teacher regards herself “a language teacher in a broad sense of the word” and a literature teacher. There is also the somewhat more general, yet clearly subject related image of themselves as promoters of the national heritage. As I discussed possible reasons of why the teachers take this task upon themselves in the previous chapter, I will presently refrain from further reflections on this topic.

A couple of teachers express a feeling of being constantly overworked, more due to a heavy load of preparations and follow-up work than to teaching, yet there are generally very few complaints. The teachers are in fact much more eager to assure me that the profession is important and that being a teacher is very fulfilling than to complain.

Next, there are several reflections on the road to professionalism. In that regard, the teachers all agree that practice, rather than formal education, is the name of that road. I will return to further exploration of the teachers' professional development below.

To sum up the overall impression of the teachers' self-descriptions, and for the time being allow myself to disregard deviations, I would claim that the descriptions display a group of confident and sincere professionals who clearly know their subject, who are practically oriented, who are willing to adjust to actual classroom conditions, who are well disposed towards their pupils and generally consider general education to be a substantial element in their work. The teachers do primarily regard themselves to be teachers with all this role involves, and they do indeed appear to be firmly seated in an educational discourse. By their reiterated claim that they consider themselves educators rather than scholars, they distance themselves from the academia where they received their education, as discussed in the previous chapter. On the other hand, they also distance themselves from lower secondary school teachers, for example by reiterated statements about how ill prepared many pupils are for higher secondary education when they enter it, for instance by means of alarming lack of knowledge of the Icelandic subject and a similar lack of literary skills. As I see it, such statements are at least as much an attack on the teachers' colleagues in lower secondary education as on pupils; it is indicated that when pupils to such a degree come unprepared to higher secondary education, it is not unreasonable to hold their previous teachers at least partly responsible for this. A couple of teachers imply this quite directly. This double detachment may be regarded symptomatic of the Icelandic teachers' self-image; it appears to be easier to draw by means of negations than by confirmations. This is also evident in their statements about their own workplace; they dissociate with teachers of other subjects – they regard themselves different from history teachers, French teachers, geography teachers etc., and so, what remains is a small group of Icelandic teachers, with whom they declare that they have a limited cooperation. Partly, the latter may be regarded a result of framework conditions, or possibility conditions; since, first, each teacher teaches only one

subject, and so there are few obvious arenas of cooperation and few obvious common focal points within the teaching staff, and second, as Daniel points out, the possibilities of cooperation are regarded limited even within the group of Icelandic teachers because everyone's schedule is so full. This, then, is also part of the background of the prevailing discourse of individualism which the teachers all touch upon. So, while one may claim that the discourse of individualism serves the purpose of presenting the teachers as strong and independent, it may at the same time be an instance of what Goodson, referring to Norman Denzin, points out: Storytellers may tend to neglect the structural context of their lives, or interpret such forces from a biased point of view. "Many times a person will act as if he or she made his or her own story, when, in fact, he or she was forced to make the history he or she lived." (Goodson, 2003b, p. 28).

Returning to the dominating practical orientation, I note that it also comes to light in the almost total lack of references to educational theory in any sense. Also noteworthy is the aforementioned lack of concrete stories about pupils, of reflections of any kind on the local administration and management, on (national) educational policy, and on financial matters.

Also almost absent are statements about the profession's negative aspects. There surely are some comments on time consuming preparations and follow-up-work. However, these comments are not numerous. In addition, they are almost commonplace; everyone familiar with teaching knows these factors are time consuming. So, provided that the teachers expect me, the researcher and their conversation partner in the specific context of the research project, to know anything about teaching, they really tell me very little by telling me about these time consuming factors – or, maybe they tell me what they assume me to expect from them. While not complaining, they explicitly assert the importance of their profession, and most of them also emphasize how much they appreciate their job. "It is the best profession in the world!" Agnes exclaims in the middle of the account of her foreman metaphor. Similarly, Birgit states that she "couldn't imagine a better

job”, Hannes claims that apart from parenthood, there is no more important job than teaching, and Jórunn asserts that when finding herself at a crossroads in her career, she chose to be a teacher rather than a scholar because she found the former more interesting and engaging.

Despite these assenting testimonies, one might in the spirit of critical hermeneutics ask whether this to all appearances harmonic condition really is as idyllic as intimated, or, taking a different approach and stressing the point that even the unspoken may be of significance, one may ponder on the meaning of that which is *not* related.

Ivor Goodson is among those who accentuate this aspect, and in Goodson’s view, things are not always what they seem to be (2003b, pp. 41-47). In the present context one might thus for instance ask why there is hardly a single remark about the local school’s management or about national educational policy in the material. It does not seem likely that these are factors of no consequence to the teachers or their job. But it is quite possible that they do not feel particularly closely related to the local management, and it is furthermore possible that they do not agree with national politicians on their educational policy. It is even possible that they moreover feel alienated and disacknowledged by those instances. If so, the silence on such topics may be interpreted as a matter of power/powerlessness; rather than acknowledging a sense of powerlessness or non-power towards issues of this kind, it may look as though the teachers detach themselves from such issues and choose to tell a story of empowerment, namely how they have managed to develop their professionalism and practice more or less on their own. Thus, in addition to being part of an institutional and social understanding of what teaching is like (cf. discussion above and Rosa’s model in Figure 3), the observed individualism discourse may be understood as the result of an attempt on the teachers’ behalf to refuse impoverishment; stories about how one has actually managed to gain a footing as a professional and to keep this position, more or less on one’s own, may in this understanding be regarded an act of personal empowerment and strength, yet it may at the same time conceal a perhaps

unrecognized sense of loneliness, of having been entirely left to fend for oneself, or of unfulfilled wants. This would be in accordance with Goodson's findings. He quotes Molly Andrews in claiming that "[m]asking the limits of individualism, such [i.e. teachers'] accounts often present 'isolation, estrangement, and loneliness . . . as autonomy, independence and self-reliance'" (Goodson, 2003b, p. 27).

7.2 What kind of professional practice is revealed?

If regarded as a whole, the group's praxis-orientation appears to be directed particularly towards methodology and didactics. The teachers talk much more about practical matters than about academic or political ideals, and more about methods than about (curricular or subject) aims, and so one might claim that they are practice- and method-oriented rather than aim-oriented. Part of the reason for this might be situational: In the logs, the teachers were explicitly asked to account for the lessons' aims, topics, activities and outcome, and also in the interviews the teachers may have expected that I was interested in their stories about everyday life in the classroom. They may for example not have felt any need to account for or provide their personal understanding of the curriculum in any detail, since the curriculums as well as other public documents, such as the Education Act, after all are accessible to everyone, and so I could as well read them myself any time.

In addition, aims stated in such public documents may be regarded a "given", part of the practice's basic conditions which they find little point in discussing. However, the latter is no fulfilling explanation, as the curriculum was due to revision at the time when the interviews were conducted. Nevertheless, merely one of the teachers reported that there were any local discussions to speak of on that matter, even if this specific teacher claimed that individual schools had considerable influence on the details in the new curriculum. Somehow, the stark contrast between this statement and the lack of reflections or comments which indicate that similar discussions were going on in the other schools at the time, seems to indicate a lack of such discussions,

and so that the teachers generally accept the curriculum as a framework condition they simply need to make the best of. There seems to be a *this-is-simply-a-condition-by-which-we-live-and-work* attitude towards it. There is not much to do about such basic conditions; consequently, spending time on bothering about them will be a waste of time. Better, then, to focus on matters one *does* have influence upon – such as one's own teaching.

Moreover, it seems likely, judging from the teachers' narratives, that there exist some sort of implied and partly tacit understandings of the mother tongue subject and its aims. It is not unlikely that this understanding at least partly is a field specific one, shared primarily by mother tongue teachers. Yet, as this shared understanding appears to be habitual, part of both the teachers' *wise* and of the token-aspect of teaching Icelandic, it may not occur to them in a conversation on professionalism, and their own professional selves that this shared understanding is more or less unknown to their conversation partner. Taking into account the easily found examples, among scholars as well as in mass media, which I have demonstrated in Chapter 4, of how strong the position of the shared image of a common Icelandic national heritage and of the subsequent importance of tending the national language as well as the national literature is, the mother tongue subject's superordinate aims may seem pretty obvious to an insider, for example an Icelandic teacher. Also formal requirements, such as exams, may stand as being so evidently a part of the practical conditions that it be unnecessary to account for it – although the practical arrangements and the contents of such a test do in fact differ in Iceland due to the fact that there are no national exams.

All these more or less implicit conditions taken into consideration, there is still one prominent element which remains unexplained, i.e. general education, which is quite heavily emphasized as an important part of the individual teacher's professional aims. Although mentioned in the Education Act as well as in the curriculum, the wording is rather general, and does not account for the degree to which the teachers bring general education into prominence. While general education is not accentuated in the

specific aims for the individual Icelandic courses, and hardly belongs to the practice's basic conditions either, at least not in a narrow meaning of this term, the teachers' accentuating of general education is different from their accentuating of for example linguistic skills or the national literature. I see therefore a need to examine this particular element closely, and try to do so, and to approach it from several angles in the present chapter.

Table 3 below shows the teachers' emphasises as these are expressed in the material, and which will be commented in the following. While some of the labels, such as "academic engagement" or "graduation" are mine, the topics as such are generally not introduced by me. More often than not, they are brought up by the teachers as specification and further development of more general themes.

It should be noted that a broader material might have displayed a more representative and perhaps somewhat different profile for the individual teachers. Since the material comprises a limited amount of participants, I do not know for sure to what degree the table is representative, but realize that it is in any case partly based on coincidental factors, such as which topic the respective teachers were teaching and accounting for at the time when they kept their logs, or the direction the individual interviews took.

Table 3: What do the teachers emphasize in their accounts of their own professional practice?

	Agnes	Birgit	Daniel	Elín	Fjóla	Hannes	Jórunn
considerable emphasis							
some emphasis							
little emphasis							
not discussed							
I. Personal engagement (moral and/or emotional)							
II. Academic engagement							
III. Curriculum							
IV. Cultural heritage							
V. Linguistic and literary skills							
VI. General education/upbringing							
VII. Graduation							
VIII. (Methodical/didactic) variation							
IX. Activity oriented learning							
X. Creativity							
XI. Improvisation							
XII. Reviving and updating the subject matter							
XIII. Dialogue and dialogicity							

Discussion of the apparent tendencies in Table 3

I Personal engagement

The term “personal engagement” is mine; it is not used by the teachers, even if many statements witness such engagement. “Personal engagement” may be understood in at least two ways; either as “personal engagement in the job” or as “personal engagement in pupils”. All the teachers express various kinds of personal engagement in the job, while there is a higher degree of variation with respect to their engagement in pupils, and the category in the table primarily refers to the latter meaning.

While all the teachers apparently are professionally well-disposed towards their pupils, there still are relatively few explicit statements in the direction of benevolence, and the grounds on which such statements are founded seem to differ. Thus, Elín and Jórunn in several instances seem to carry a partly emotionally motivated involvement, talking about how “glad” or, in other cases, how “sad” they sometimes are on their pupils’ behalf, while Hannes takes a moral stand, talking about the obligations he considers himself to have to his pupils in capacity of being their teacher. In all three cases, conceptions of “general education” and “empowerment” may be traced.

Also Agnes and Birgit express a sense of good will towards their pupils, and, as in the cases of Elín, Jórunn and Hannes, some of their motives appear to relate to general education and empowerment. Agnes for example talks about the importance of mutual respect between teacher and pupils. Yet, similarly to what was suggested in the interpretation of the foreman metaphor, one might in a Bourdieuan approach suspect that the good will, in addition to concerning elements such as interpersonal respect, also is a matter of habitually making the best of conditions which may in part be challenging: Birgit’s declaration that she always gets the feeling that it has, after all, all been worth the effort on the day of graduation, she both implies that graduation rather than outstanding results is what she can aim for on (some of) her

pupils' behalf, and that her engagement to a high degree relates to actually helping them getting there. It is a Bourdieuan conviction that agents opt for what is in fact achievable. In the case of a good few of Agnes', Elín's and Birgit's pupils graduation is, according to their teachers, almost more than they can hope for, and so what the teachers can reasonably aim for, is to helping their pupils getting that far. Consequently, they commit their engagement to this task. To stick to the case of Birgit her engagement may in agreement with a Bourdieuan approach be regarded a practical-instrumental one (how to help her pupils through), adapted to actual conditions at her work place. It is, however, also a humanistic-democratic engagement, in my view, since Birgit regards it of considerable personal and social importance indeed that pupils graduate from upper secondary school.

There is a gradual transition from Agnes' views to those of Fjóla, who believes that an encouraging and acknowledging attitude on the teacher's behalf in fact promotes pupils' learning. Thus, Fjóla and Agnes may be considered to relate their engagement to their ideas about learning and didactic strategies. This is even more so in the case of Daniel. For, while Fjóla and Agnes also imply views on interpersonal relations in general, Daniel restricts himself to the teachment situation, and whose engagement consequently may be regarded instrumental-professional to a higher degree than that of Agnes, Fjóla and Birgit. On the other hand, Daniel fetches out a high degree of what was above termed "personal engagement in the job", which is very evident when he talks about teachment methods, his way of following up students' exercises, his didactic experiments etc. - elements which are explored and commented elsewhere in this thesis.

II. Academic engagement

The teachers do not mention academic engagement particularly often. However, once they mention it, they tend to make a point of its importance, both as an element in Icelandic education and to themselves, personally. This is why I have estimated this element as being "somewhat emphasized" (yellow) in Table 3, despite its relatively

low frequency in the material. Hannes' score is estimated to 2.5 because Hannes, partly due to his teachment style, seems to focus more on the subject matter itself and less on didactic matters, and partly because his particular style allows him to frequently draw on his own knowledgeability, gained through extensive reading and academic education.

As has previously been indicated, there is a certain ambiguity in the teachers' statements about the subject they teach. While talking about practical matters and practical challenges, the teachers all the same want to present their professional persona and their professional aims as being (also) academically oriented: after having talked at length about for example literary skills or how they constantly have to make an effort in order to make pupils pay attention, they hasten to assure me that they are really fond of their subject, that they appreciate the national classics, that they definitely do teach the subject "as an academic subject" etc.

This ambiguity may be interpreted in several perspectives. Particularly in the interviews, the teachers are drawing a portrait of their own professional selves. However, this is something they have not prepared in advance; and so one could speak of some sort of spontaneous self-portraits. In drawing the outlines of these self-portraits, the teachers all start out by describing their practice; what they do in class and how they do it. As has been shown, the result of this is that accounts for teachment have an absolutely dominating position in the material. The teachers may themselves be a bit surprised by this. It almost seems as though they experience some sort of self-confrontation through their own narratives: what they hear themselves say, appears to be different from how they usually think of themselves, and so they feel a need to correct themselves or at least nuance the picture. If this is what takes place, at least two things may be at stake. Firstly, the practical focus in the narratives may challenge the teachers' picture of themselves as academics, and secondly, the strong focus on practical teachment may sound disadvantageous to their competency as skilled and professional teachers of Icelandic; as such, it must surely be reasonable that they focus on the subject itself?

In exploring the teachers' academic engagement; the degree to which they emphasize the subject's academic values, one may furthermore note that the dichotomy skills – knowledge (equalling the Aristotelian terms *techne – episteme*) repeatedly reappears. When referring to the subject curriculum, the profession's main executive document, the teachers only mention its academic aims. It seems therefore that they see the curriculum as primarily oriented towards such aims. In addition, they see it as very comprehensive, and traditionalistic, i.e. as heavily stressing the national cultural heritage, as accounted in chapter 7. However, if pupils generally lack intrinsic motivation, and even basic knowledge and skills, the teachers are likely to experience the curricular demands as unrealistic. The teachers seem to find teaching the more academic topics problematic when there is a shortage of both motivation and *techne* – the subject's basic skills among their pupils. Academic knowledge is, in other words, in this context to a high degree regarded conditional on skills, and so, the dominating focus on practical skills in the teachers' accounts could be explained by the teachers' view on them as a requirement for operationalizing the curricular aims, which they are obliged to meet. The philosophy, quite expressly voiced by Agnes, for instance, is that teaching somebody to run is of little use unless this somebody is already capable of walking. Such reasoning is understandable. Nevertheless, it is puzzling that the teachers never refer to the curriculum when talking about practical skills and their importance, since the curriculum in fact lists a number of specific "technical" (*techne*) skills among the subject's aims (Ministry of Education, 1999b). On the other hand, exactly the perceived need for extensive training of practical skills, may contribute to challenging and maybe change the teachers' professional self-image. Their numerous statements about how they have changed in the course of their teaching career, how they nowadays regard themselves "first and foremost a teacher", or how they have gradually developed an interest in matters concerning practical teachment rather than "some bunch of old fellows writing poetry no one reads anymore", vouch for this. I will get back to that issue below, in the discussion of the teachers' professional development.

III. Curriculum; reaching the curricular aims

In accordance with the comments to the previous point, there is relatively little about the curricular aims *per se*. The teachers occasionally refer both specific aims and the curriculum as a whole, but this is no main issue in their accounts. Generally, the teachers do not question the curricular aims and their relation to them, as to the curriculum as a whole, seems to be close to a *doxic* one. The need for a curriculum is taken for granted to the degree that an alternative arrangement never occurs to anyone, and the specific current curriculum and its central point is also generally accepted as a given. The curriculum thus structures teaching and education in Icelandic in general, both at the superordinate level and under the surface, in influencing the teachers' active choices in their everyday practice. The curriculum seems to be generally regarded as defining the possibilities as well as the limitations of education within the subject. Consequently, the teachers generally are obedient to the curriculum and do their best to implement it.

Certainly, some sceptical comments may be identified in the material. For example, Birgit states that reading texts is a profitable activity, yet she permits herself to doubt whether it is fruitful to read as much literary history as the curriculum demands. "And what about the texts from some of the older periods?" Birgit rhetorically asks. "Pupils have difficulties understanding them. And literature is dead if there's nothing in it that appeals to you. On the other hand, the Old Icelandic literature works well. That's literature for the sake of its literary value, not for the sake of literary history." Birgit is also the one who claims that meeting all the curriculum's demands simply is impossible, and that one consequently has to use one's discretion in one's everyday practice, lest nothing at all should be done properly. One should not feel too committed by the curriculum, Birgit thinks, and by voicing this view, she is the only representative for heterodox reflection on the curriculum in the group. It seems reasonable to see these reflections in connection to Birgit's gained experience with pupils so low motivated that they have difficulties completing the Icelandic courses.

In courses where these pupils constitute a certain proportion of the group, fulfilling the curricular aims will be totally unrealistic, she finds, and so Birgit must prioritize.

Other objections to the curricular aims may also be found in the material, such as Agnes' questioning of the amount of syntax, which she would like to replace with more literacy training. Nevertheless Agnes in her own account is quite faithful to the curriculum and in actual fact relatively uncritical of it. This become evident in statements about how useful literary history at what she calls the "x course"²⁸ (which Birgit severely criticises) really is, and that she actually find most of the subject's topics, and so the curricular aims, important. It is therefore quite possible that the mild criticism of the curriculum that Agnes voices is just as much a scepticism for the researcher's benefit as it is an expression of genuine doubt about the curricular aims. This quasi-scepticism might be termed sympathetic scepticism, and may be found also in the accounts of Daniel and Jórunn.

It may also be noted that the teachers who talk most expressively about curricular aims are those who probably must work the hardest to help their pupils to a course diploma, i.e. to even complete the compulsory courses in Icelandic. This may reflect these teachers' practical professional reasoning, possibly in part directly initiated by their pupils. In classrooms such as those described by particularly Agnes, Birgit, and Elín, pupils are not likely to accept the learning content without much ado; they question it. "In fact," one of the teachers says, "the question "why do we have to learn this?" must be the most frequent question in any classroom." She implies that the question is frequently asked for the sake of argument rather than of genuine interest in the answer. In such cases, another teacher asserts, she refers to the curriculum. It may thus seem that teachers at least occasionally resort to instrumentalist reasoning, and so refer to the curriculum rather than to for example the topic's intrinsic value, or to the intrinsic value of knowledge in general. It is

²⁸ A local course, therefore not listed in Appendix III.

furthermore possible that the more often a teacher has to answer this question, the more likely the answer is to influence her own professional wise.

Finally, it may be noted that those who most often refer to the curriculum and its aims, are those whose teachment seems to tend towards the very well organized, such as Agnes and Daniel, the two who independently describe themselves in terms of the foreman metaphor.

An interpretation of the teachers' degree of emphasizing the curricular aims might lead to the assumption that strong accentuating of curricular aims goes along with a well-organized and "technical" (in the Aristotelian sense) didactic style. In addition, teachers who teach pupils who are particularly low-motivated might tend to accentuate the curricular aims they attempt to reach and use them as "light houses" in their teachment; these are the aims teacher and pupils in cooperation need to strive for, this is what the individual pupil needs to know in order to complete a specific course. In such cases, focus on curricular aims seems to be as much a strategy for finding a practicable way through the course as it is a matter of the teacher's (professional) personality. Nevertheless, even such practice strategies may in the long run come to relate to one's (professional) *habitus* and so become part of one's habitual professionalism.

IV. Cultural heritage

As demonstrated in the exploration of the teachers' accounts of the mother tongue subject and its aims, the teachers are very concerned about the subject's role in imparting and maintaining the national cultural heritage. This is also brought up in chapters 7.2 and 7.3 in the discussions of teaching as a dominating category and of the reason why teachment is so central in the material. The teachers talk much about promotion and maintenance of the national cultural heritage as an important component in Icelandic education in upper secondary school, and this *leitmotif* has been thoroughly discussed above, and so, there is no need to repeat this discussion. However, because of its prominence in the material, impartment of the cultural

heritage must necessarily be mentioned in an overview over what the teachers emphasize in their accounts.

The teachers relate several reasons for emphasizing the cultural heritage in their teaching of Icelandic. As stated, I will currently not explain this in any detail; therefore I just list some of the central reasons and indicatively illustrate them with quotes from the material.

1. The national cultural heritage promotes and strengthens national identity and *Gesellschaft*, which is considered crucial to sustain the small and vulnerable Icelandic nation.

Fjóla: “We [the Icelandic teachers] discussed the revision of the curriculum at a meeting the other day. And we all agreed that the Old Icelandic literature must remain a main issue. It’s so very distinctively Icelandic. Our heritage. Which we must carefully attend to, of course. Because this is... well, it is the basis of the struggle for independence, in a sense. What we used then, the literary heritage and that old culture, as a main argument for why we should be an independent nation.”

Fjóla: “When they ask why they have to learn Icelandic in upper secondary school, I often tell them that... well, we are Icelanders. And we should be conscious of the nation’s history. And literature displays history, of course, for literature reflects the time and the society in which it was written. For example the old mythology. And the saga literature. It’s all highly descriptive of Icelandic society as it was in those days. So this is a main reason for reading those old texts.”

2. Knowledge of the national cultural heritage is regarded an important part of knowing oneself, for one cannot know oneself without knowing one’s roots. Such self-knowledge relates to *Bildung*.

Fjóla: “What is it that makes us Icelanders? And what makes us a united nation? Why... or, *how* have our life and our culture developed throughout time? Everybody should have a certain awareness of that. (...) It’s a matter of knowing the cultural heritage, of course, and also of self-consciousness.”

Hannes: “One tries to point out the connections. For instance, in Iceland, Romanticism was closely tied to the struggle for independence and... well, maybe one relates this to the present situation, maybe... “Today Icelanders experience hard times once more...” and relate it to the financial crisis. And they’ll listen to this and, well... (...) So what should we do? Should we give up all that’s ours and renounce our language and rather speak English? (...) That would marginalize us, of course.” And: “Knowing the cultural heritage is part of knowing oneself as an Icelander.”

Jórunn: “One of the main aims is that pupils develop an understanding of themselves in this specific cultural context.”

3. The literary and linguistic heritage play a particularly important role in Iceland since the country possesses few other cultural monuments.

Jórunn: “In Iceland, the literary sources are what national cultural heritage we have got. We should tend it well and impart it to the young, lest we will collectively lose our sense of history and so the firm grounds on which we stand as a nation. Since ours is a *literary* cultural heritage, the responsibility for imparting it to future generations rests with the mother tongue subject.”

Elín: “This simply is what cultural heritage we’ve got in this country. The language and the Old Icelandic literature are our cultural relics.”

4. Knowledge of the national cultural heritage is part of general education, and thus necessary to anyone who wants to assert oneself and gain respect from others. In this, knowledge of the national heritage relates to both *Bildung* and personal autonomy.

Fjóla: “I think that one can hardly consider oneself an educated person unless one has some basic knowledge of one’s history. That’s what I think.”

Fjóla: “And also, you know... it [i.e. the national heritage/the national classics] also relates to the capacity to take part in the society in which you live.”

5. The cultural heritage provides a historical perspective on language, literature, culture, and reflection, which may broaden pupils’ perspective and deepen their understanding. This view is closely related to the *Bildung* aspect on the cultural heritage.

Jórunn: “Well, young people’s language is generally quite limited. And we think, anyway *I* believe that if we let them read texts which are, you know, a little bit above...well, their everyday language. A little bit above that. Then we’ll little by little improve... their skills and their understanding, and so prepare them for more and more complicated... well, areas of knowledge.”

6. The cultural heritage, specifically the literary classics, has stood the test of time.

Birgit: “I prefer the Old Icelandic texts, texts which really have something to tell, not those which we read just because they were written in a certain period.”

The teachers do not question the national heritage’s role as a carrier of a collective/national identity or the value of patriotism. With the exception of Daniel, who is the only one explicitly reluctant to promote a specific national identity, all the teachers seem to consider the subject’s, and so their own, role as promoters of the national heritage as a self-evident matter. Truly, a couple of the remaining teachers put forward apparent objections too, but these do not seem to be very serious, and are contradicted by the teachers themselves within a couple of minutes. For example, when Agnes muses that the old literature may possibly *not* make pupils better citizens or strengthen their national sentiments, and so it is even possible that too heavy emphasis is being laid on this literature, yet, she shortly afterwards underlines how important she finds it that all pupils read a saga, and she underscores the importance of knowing the cultural heritage. The objection thus may reflect the fact stated by practically all the teachers, that pupils find the old literature difficult to read, or it may simply be an instance of Agnes’ accommodating to the (assumed) expectations in the interview. The examples may thus be considered to display that the teachers generally are inclined to see themselves as promoters of the national language and literature and as public cultural educators, although there is also a certain ambiguity with regard to this part of the job, particularly on Daniel’s behalf.

V. Linguistic/literary skills

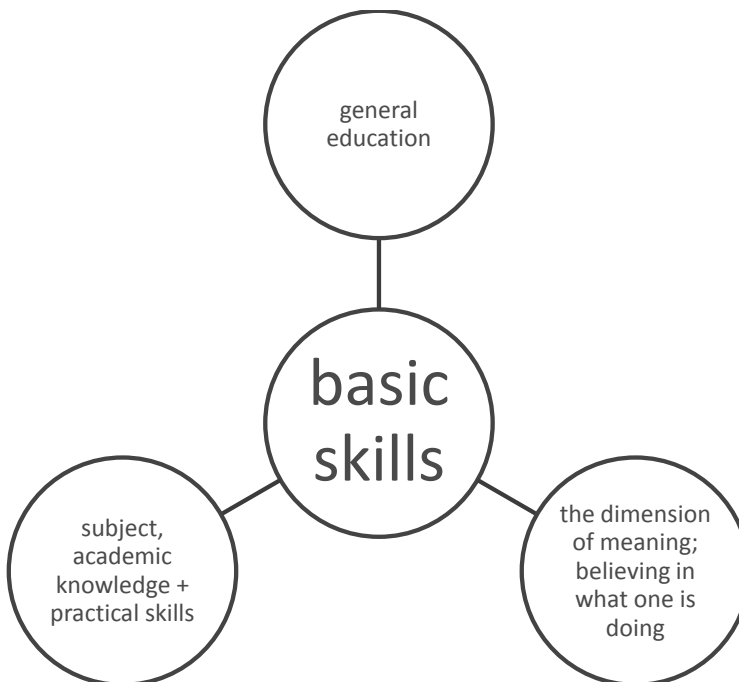
When talking about their professional practice, there is hardly anything to which the teachers give more emphasis than linguistic and literary skills. There is a host of descriptions of their teaching of such skills, and also numerous statements about the reasons for stressing linguistic and literary skills so heavily. “In actual fact,” one of the teachers states, “literacy and oracy are the superordinate aims in all Icelandic courses in upper secondary education.” According to this teacher, the ability to express oneself adequately orally and literally is indeed “the only thing that really matters in mother tongue education”. Provided that this, too, be a view shared by the others, the heavy emphasis on practical linguistic skills in the teachers’ accounts is understandable. Adding supplementary views, such as Agnes’ expressed conviction that there is a connection between linguistic skills and self-confidence, this emphasis becomes even more understandable. Agnes phrases this view as follows: “The better linguistic skills, the better you express yourself, the stronger your self-image. If you are capable of expressing yourself, you may account sufficiently for yourself. And if you have good command of the language, you act with more assurance, and weight is attributed to what you say.” Similarly, there are statements such as “a rich vocabulary allows you to express your feelings”, “one should develop sufficient eloquence to be able to courageously speak in public with passable fluency of speech”, and “literary and oral skills put you in position to get a higher education”. Such statements, although relating to entities as different as feelings, academic capacity, and personal autonomy, might all be understood in an empowerment perspective; all relate to (social) empowerment and so to the concept of cultural capital.

In addition to Agnes, Jórunn is the perhaps most prominent representative of opinions such as the ones related above. Yet, as the table shows, everyone is concerned about literary and linguistic skills, even if the grounds given for this differ a bit. For instance, statements concerning the ambitious aim of promoting pupils’ (future) capacity to take the floor in an assembly or other public arenas, which may be understood in an empowerment or democratization perspective, are explicitly

promoted by merely 2-3 teachers. Nevertheless, the focus on practical (literary and linguistic) skills is conspicuous in all the accounts.

The accentuating of literary and linguistic skills is far more evident in descriptions of concrete teachment and the grounds given for specific didactic choices than in the teachers' more general accounts for the subject's contents and aims. As has been demonstrated, the arguments for this accentuation are of two kinds: On the one hand there is a negative argument that the lack of basic literary and linguistic skills among pupils is generally considerable, and on the other hand there is the positive argument that strengthening literary and linguistic skills promotes pupils' confidence, autonomy, and so democracy, and may thus be regarded an act of empowerment. Second, I propose the hypothesis that the notion of "skills" has a symbolic and unifying function, that it works as a crux, as it were, in which major elements in the teachers' practice in fact come together, as roughly suggested in the below figure.

Figure 6: Emphasis on practical skills - a practice unifier



VI. General education

There are numerous statements in the material which could be labelled as relating to general education, although this idea is presented in various wrappings: There is the general idea that education should develop independence and autonomy, there is the closely related idea of empowerment, and there is the idea of citizenship and democracy. For instance, Elin talks about how she always tries to strengthen pupils and their self-esteem – which may otherwise be termed an act of empowerment. “You need that, you know,” she says. “In life. Just imagine how much easier life is once you’ve got a little bit self-confidence, and find that you manage something. ... So I find it important to impart self-confidence, and I emphasize that a great deal. (...) It’s all a matter of life skills, of course.”

The excerpt illustrates the stand of Elin and others that it is the mother tongue teachers’ task to make use of the possibilities the subject represents regarding pupils’ development of independence, judgment, reasoning, and critical reflection.

In addition, there is the learning theoretical (and methodical) idea that pupils principally have and therefore should take on a responsibility for their own learning, and there is the idea of general education (or *Bildung*), which in turn is closely related to that of promoting the cultural heritage. Daniel states: “So that’s also one of the subject’s aims. To make an effort to present that which means... well, that which everyone should know. Which everyone should have read.”

According to the teachers, students find it easiest to deal with simple textbook knowledge. As Agnes phrases it, “they find the why-questions far more difficult than the what-questions”. Basically, the teachers agree in this. Encouraging reflection and emphasizing the general education aspect is more demanding, they admit. Yet, they also find it more satisfying and more purposeful. Elin’s statement about self-esteem bear witness to this, as does Agnes’ explanation that “when the answers may be found in the book, then no actual learning is taking place. Then they’re not active, and then they don’t reflect. They just look the answers up in the book. But if you

chose a different path and ask: “How dears... why did this character develop as she did in the book, what in her situation caused a change in this or that direction?” Then they have to think. They find it terribly hard. These are difficult questions. It is difficult to present judgments and it is difficult to answer questions one cannot look up in the book.”

Generally, I find general education in the broad sense of the term far more accentuated than one would expect on the basis of the curriculum. As indicated above, there may be several reasons for this. Particularly those who relate to the subject’s general education aspect, which all the teachers mention in one way or another, rather than to instrumental or learning theory aims, must be considered to relate to the teachers’ understanding of themselves as public educators; as *opinberir fræðarar*, in Hannes’ terminology, which they find an important part of their professional assignment. Since this is not put forward as a substantial point in the curriculum or other official documents, the explanation of why the teachers so clearly take on the role as educators must be sought elsewhere, for example in history or in the profession’s current shared discourse.

VII. Graduation

All in all, there is not much focus on the pupils’ graduation or their successful completion of their education in the material. Four of the teachers do not touch upon the subject at all and one mentions it quite briefly. However, the two who do bring it up as a specific topic talk about it in some depth, and they both claim to be quite concerned about it. These two both teach courses where graduation in itself is a challenge. Many of their pupils have an expressly poor motivation, according to their teachers, and it is therefore not at all a matter of course that they complete upper secondary school. Bearing the high drop-out rate in Icelandic upper secondary school in mind (Markussen, 2010), this concern does not seem unreasonable. It is also reasonable that the teachers who worry the most are those who teach in schools where

low motivation and high drop-out rates seem to be more of a problem than it is in the other schools. This is in agreement with what I pointed out in the comment to the teachers' degree of emphasis on reaching the curricular aims, namely that the teachers who talk most about the formal instrumental aims, such as pupils' graduation, are those to whom reaching these aims to a high degree is a true and persistent challenge.

I find it quite possible that the remaining teachers find the fact that pupils' graduation be the aim of their education is practically too obvious for words, and so they may see no need to even mention it. Also, the lack of discussion of this topic may indicate that the subject matter is regarded superordinate to formal-instrumental aims in teachers' everyday practice; that what matters the most to them is that pupils master the subject's theory and practical skills at an acceptable level. Besides, whether pupils pass a course at the first attempt does not seem to be of vital importance to the teachers; it is clearly not all that unusual that pupils need to resit a course anyway, and so this appears to be regarded a relatively undramatic event.

Finally, there is the structural-institutional explanation that these teachers are subject teachers, not general teachers. One difference between subject teachers and general teachers is that the former (specifically those who teach general subjects) teach far more pupils each term than a general teacher does. In some schools they even teach each group just one term. Consequently, subject teachers will generally not know their pupils nearly as well as general teachers do. Another implication might be that since subject teachers teach their pupils merely a small part of the time pupils spend in class, subject teachers feel less responsibility for the individual pupil than a general teacher, with whom her pupils spend almost all their time during a school day, would be likely to do.

In addition, the course of study is less straightforward and uniform in upper secondary school than in primary and lower secondary school, and teachers thereby have less overview over individual pupils' educational pathway. In other words, due

to a relatively fragmented organization model in (many) upper secondary school(s), the teachers' sense of proximity to the classes/groups they teach, and their personal involvement may be reduced accordingly, if compared to general teachers. As an assumption, this is in agreement with what the teenage girls interviewed in the chapter "A Paradise Lost" in Bourdieu et al. *The Weight of the World* (Broccolichi, 1999) express when accounting for their education so far; in addition to experience a "sharp devaluation of their educational value when they get to high school", the girls are also troubled by the far more remote relation with their teachers in high school than in lower secondary school and with the subsequent "impossibility of bringing up their problems with adults at school" (Broccolichi, 1999, pp. 441-442). A relatively weak sense of involvement may in turn have the effect of confirming the teachers' understanding of themselves as subject teachers with a limited responsibility for anything else than the subject matter and the teaching of it. If so, this tendency works in contrast to the teachers' elsewhere expressed understanding of themselves as (general) educators and as being "first and foremost a teacher", i.e. teachers who do not focus on the subject matter, but also care for their pupils and their welfare. Moreover, a relatively weak sense of involvement may partly account for the lack of stories about individual pupils in the material.

VIII. Methodological/didactic variation

Agnes states: "So this is what I try. To vary the lessons... variation. Yes, I try to vary the lessons as much as possible." Here, Agnes may be regarded to speak for the majority, for the teachers make a major point of variation as a didactic principle. This has already been discussed, yet it cannot be ignored in an overview over what the teachers emphasize in (their descriptions of) their practice.

There are descriptions of variation on a general level as well as on the specific level of individual lessons. For example, Birgit explains that: "In our school, each lesson is 80 minutes long. That's a long time. So I section them. Divide each lesson into three parts, to make sure that there is some variation."

It seems likely that the eagerness to vary teachment relates to the above related challenges connected to pupils' low motivation, yet it is quite possible that there is more to this. For instance, varied teachment may be regarded an indicator of modern, up to date, or engaged teachment. Furthermore, variation may at another level represent an arena for the teachers' own continuous professional development. In this, I see variation as applying to what may be termed teachers' creation of a personal professional scope of action.

IX. Activity oriented learning

The focus on so called activity oriented learning; "that pupils are active", as the teachers say, is comparable to that on variation. Like focus on variation, focus on activity oriented learning seems to be a buzz word which signalizes that one is a modern, updated, and development oriented teacher. In this, the scope of action aspect applies, just as much as it does with respect to motivation. Moreover, there is a parallel to the accentuating of variation with regard to motivation challenges. It is quite evident that a main reason why the teachers are so keen to "activate" their pupils relates to such challenges. Furthermore, activity oriented learning is stressed for reasons relating to the teachers' view on learning: "How could anyone learn high jumping by reading about it in a book?" Agnes asks when explaining why she favours activity oriented learning, and she continues. "You need to practice. At first, you don't jump all that high. But gradually, you jump higher and higher, and if you keep practicing, you may end up a high-jumper. The same goes for writing. And reading."

This declaration of faith in activity oriented learning is shared by the other teachers; as shown above, in the account their descriptions of their professional practice and self-image, the belief in "student activity" is repeated almost as a mantra, and has the function of a superordinate didactic principle. Elín, who thinks that having initiative is really more important than being active (not to speak of being activated), relates an example very similar to Agnes' high jump example:

To take an example: If you intend to teach someone to use a sewing machine. And you sit there with your sewing machine. And you say: “And then you do so and so!” And everyone is simply watching you, without doing anything themselves... I mean... who would ever learn to use a sewing machine from that? No one. They need to sit and try it out themselves, to have a go and... exert themselves. Not to speak of what it takes if to make a smart piece of clothing.

In addition, activity is a matter of well-being, in Elin’s opinion, and so relates to her view on human life: “I just imagine...well, when you *create* or... *discover* and so on, then you’re feeling good. Then it’s fun. (...) But if you’re just... passive, then everything is terribly boring.”

Even behind Hannes’ unperturbed attitude to the term itself, a belief in participation, work, and so, some sort of active acquisition, may be recognized. However, stressed as it is, the term does in itself not uncover what is actually going on in class. To learn anything about that, one needs to search for descriptions of specific activities or lessons, in the interviews and in the logs, as “student activity” is a very general term, meaning anything else than monologist lecturing, and indeed, by turning to these descriptions of specific lessons and activities, I find that the teachers’ concept of “student activity” varies more than the uniform term indicates. In this respect, the homologous usage of the term conceals the different understanding of it.

Furthermore, it may be noted that activities in what the teachers think of as traditional and even old-fashioned teachment, such as exercises of various kinds, tend to be somehow concealed in the student activity discourse; it sounds almost as though traditional teachment contains no activities at all, which is evidently far from the truth. In fact, both the oral accounts and the logs display that many activities would easily be recognized by most “traditional” teachers, and so it is definitely possible that the difference between traditional teachment and modern, activity oriented teachment for some reason is to some degree exaggerated in the accounts. However, I do not by this imply that the teachers consciously mislead me. Judging both from the individual narratives and the fact that there is a joint discourse regarding activity

learning within the group, I rather tend to think that the discrepancy between what they say and what they do indicates that there simply is a lacking accordance between conception and action, perhaps because the activity learning discourse has come to be both dominating and normative in the field of secondary Icelandic education.

It is moreover a fact that the teachers repeatedly meet their former selves as they talk about activity learning. Most conspicuous is the contrast between their insisting on definitely wanting to avoid monologist teachment, and their admission that they “of course” still must resort to lecturing relatively often, even if they do very strongly refrain from the lecturing teacher type. For example, Birgit explains that she “sometimes have to “preach” a bit, after all. For example literary history, it’s just necessary, somehow. (...) And else they would just sit there with a thick book to read. And they find this book to contain an enormous amount of facts, and somehow, you know... one must take these facts and transform them to *teaching material*.” All the other teachers state something similar. Yet, such statements are secondary, put forward after the declaration that they are sworn opponents of chalk-and-talk teachment. Similar to when they hear themselves emphasize their interest in practical teachment, and come to hear that it may sound as this interest is at the cost of an (academic) interest in the subject, there are second thought reflections also when the teachers talk about activity oriented learning, and so they admit that they are “still very fond of their subject”, as Birgit puts it. It is almost as though they, by voicing their didactic believes, hear that what they say and what they have held to be does in fact not seem to be fully correct.

A final remark to the point of activity orientation would be that it is clear that although they are activity oriented, some of the teachers have a very firm grip on the various activities, and it is quite clear that “activity” should by no means be confused with anything in the direction of slack discipline, and also not with “entertainment”.

X. Creativity

Creativity is far less stressed than is the more general term student activity. Some of the teachers do not mention it at all, yet those who do so declare that they find creativity an important and enriching element in teachment. In their experience, creative teaching and learning methods are beneficial to both teachers and pupils.

The term creativity includes a wide range of relatively traditional didactic activities, such as drawing, dramatizing, creative writing, which have to a varying extent been associated with upper secondary education. In addition there are less traditional activities, such as Daniel's station model and his plans regarding an ambitious storyline oriented prospect at a course he does not teach at present, but which he would fancy to try soon. "Everyone complains so much about it, you see. And I really don't think it can be all that impossible to do it in an engaging and interesting way. So I want to try," Daniel explains – and has in fact already made an outline to how he would like to teach it; a small episode which gives an impression of how Daniel thinks in terms of creativity, in addition to indicating something about his attitude to his work.

Elín is the most prominent spokesman for creative teachment. Like Daniel, Elín confesses that creativity means a lot to her as a person, and she brings this interest into her classroom. She states, for instance:

I've always wanted it to be creative. I want to spur on the kids' creative power. And am always... searching for that. And they may use... we use all sorts of things, you know, visual arts and... I'd like to make more use of film-making and... (...) all sorts of art. In education. I find that very interesting. And then I'm very enthusiastic about holistic education. (...) I think that, too, is a basic principle. (...) It takes a lot of preparation, of course. But then.. once you've done that, and they begin to... It's sometimes a bit difficult to get started, but then, usually, then they're so...it's like some sort of *fermentation*... and, well, simply *blossoming*! And then the teacher's part is simply to say: "Yes! Precisely!" And encourage and... "Excellent! Good work!" And then, then I'm

simply totally happy. Then they're just working and... "May we...?" and "Should we...?" and all that.

XI. Dialogue

The teachers' usage of the terms "dialogue" and "talk to" (Icel. *umræða* and *tala við*) is ambiguous. To Agnes and Daniel, dialogue is first and foremost a didactic method; a classroom activity, and Daniel even remarks that it is one of the skills/activities mentioned in the subject curriculum, and so something he *should* do in class. In addition, Daniel uses dialogue and student evaluation as tools for further development of his practice.

To Hannes, however, dialogue means something quite different. Hannes primarily speaks of the importance of "talking to pupils", and he sees this as part of his general education aims rather than as a didactic activity or method. This will be commented below, in the paragraph, "Polyphony; diverging voices".

To Elfn, dialogicity is basically a matter of her relationship with her pupils, both regarding the subject and at a more personal or human level, as the below quote gives an impression of. As for the first, she regrets that it is often rather difficult to initiate a real dialogue or discussion in class, partly due to the organization model (the course model) at her school. Because of this model, pupils do not know each other well, she explains. And so, they are shy in class.

But once you get them involved in a discussion, then it's a lot of fun. For example yesterday, when they were reading The Sybil's Prophecy, and we talked about it and one of the pupils said: "Hey, teacher! Do we really need to know this if we're planning to apply for the economy or engineering programme? Or if we, well, if we're in that programme?" And so I said: "We-e-ell, what do you think? Do you think that economists and engineers need to know some of this old literature or to know something about it? Or is it just fine to know nothing about it?" And then, you know, he... Oh, it's so fun then! Precisely what really matters! To discuss such things. (...) And the boy got

very pensive, you see. He understood how absurd the question really was. And... (...) generally, I think there's a considerable want of scope for action in this regard. To *talk* to them and... (...) It's so important! And we just have to *take* the time sometimes, although it may mean that we'll have to skip a short story and don't get through the entire curriculum.

Generally, dialogue is associated with openness, and also with confidence. A confident teacher is regarded more prone to dialogicity (to borrow a Bakhtinian term) and openness than a less confident one. "It's partly a matter of having the courage to open up and to explore," Agnes thinks. "The only limitation is me, really. What do I dare? When don't I dare anymore?" Otherwise, dialogicity is a matter of taking a personal stand and of involvement on the teachers' behalf. In addition, there are learning theoretical and didactical views connected to dialogicity; some of the teachers believe that when pupils, through dialogicity, get the impression that the teacher takes them seriously, they respond by acting as responsible individuals. In addition, there is the belief that, both in taking on more responsibility for their own education, and in being respected as individuals, dialogicity may directly and indirectly promote learning.

XII. Improvisation

Particularly two teachers, Hannes and Elín, have a strong belief in what they refer to as improvisation, whereas others find improvisation a rather uncertain way of conducting teaching. In understanding with this, it is worth noting that neither Agnes, nor Daniel or Birgit, teachers who all teach in the terms of the foreman metaphor, are particularly enthusiastic about improvisation as a teaching principle; they very much welcome activity and certain creativity in their classes, yet they find it important to keep the situation within control. Discipline is important, Agnes states, and she basically also finds it to promote learning. For if the situation gets out of control, there is no way to tell which direction things would take.

Hannes and Elín have a view very different from this. To them, improvisation goes along with dialogicity, and does at least partly rest on the same philosophical basis as

dialogicity. It may thus be regarded to relate to the principle of taking pupils earnestly, in addition to being a pedagogical method, which they explain as “seizing the opportunities which present themselves”. In this, also improvisation is, among other things, a matter of motivation, as also of “meeting pupils’ needs”, as teachers and other educationalists sometimes proverbially express themselves.

XIII. Reviving and updating the subject matter

Birgit finds it important to “relate the subject matter to pupils and their reality”, and Hannes, too, stresses this point. In fact, Hannes brings this subject up several times, and it appears that it has a considerable influence on his practical teachment. The same goes for Jórunn, who states that:

I try to be open for what’s going on, well, you know, here and now. (...) So if some writer is awarded some prize or some interesting fellow is making a film of someone’s latest novel... to try and...to be vigilant and wakeful. Always alert to everything that relates, you know. To literature and to culture and so on. To the subject.

Bringing the subject up to date is a matter of showing pupils the relevance of historically oriented disciplines and theoretical disciplines, as well as of linguistic and literary skills in today’s society and in pupils’ own everyday life. This appears to be a question of motivation, similar to what has been demonstrated in the comments to activity oriented teachment and variation. However, like in those cases, there is more than this to the belief in the consequence of reviving the subject and bringing it up to date. Particularly to Hannes, it is an aim to engage pupils on a more general level; not only does he want his pupils to discover the subject and its riches, he also wants them to take an interest in the world around them as it presents itself in the news, in our everyday practices etc. and so he often introduce a topic by referring to the morning’s news, recent films or even gossip from the society columns as his starting point. He may for example relate to the current situation, where “Iceland is under pressure once

more”, as he says, when teaching language history and wants his students both to learn their language history and to understand *why* it is important to know these matters. This, then, is a main reason for bringing the subject up to date, in Hannes’ view.

It seems, then, that general education is a major point on Hannes’ agenda, and remembering that he is both a historian and a scholar of Icelandic, it may not surprise us that Hannes so clearly thinks in terms of historicity and finds historical consciousness to be an important part of general education, identity, and socio-political consciousness. This is for example in agreement with Taylor’s interpretation of national sentiments in modernity (Taylor, 2011a, pp. 81-104 and 124 -145).

7.3 Individual professional style

In Table 3, “What do the teachers emphasize in their accounts of their own professional practice?” and the subsequent discussion of it one may eye the contours of the respective teachers’ professional style. Two questions seem to be of particular relevance in the further exploring of the teachers practice, their self-concept, and their teaching *persona*: 1) How may the differences among the teachers be explained? And 2) To what degree do factors such as (professional) personality, individual professional ambitions and aims, and individual professional style influence education in specific subjects? The two questions intertwine with one another, and, in various ways, I try to find possible answers to them in the current and the following sub chapters in Chapter 7.

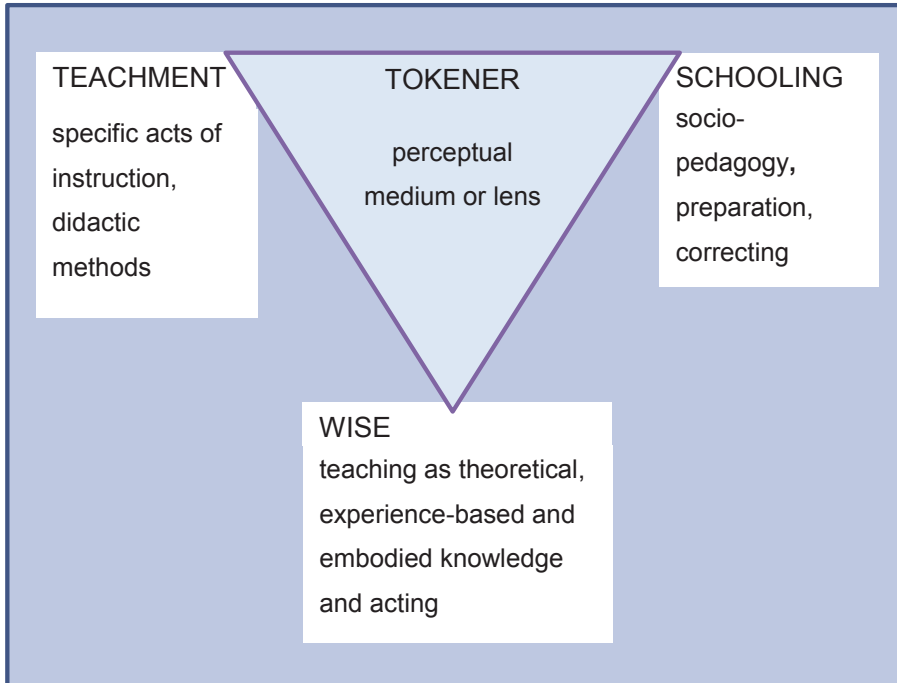
As I see it, the answer to the first question may be sought partly in internal, partly in external factors. There are elements such as the individual teacher’s educational and didactic conviction and fundamental views. This is a factor which has, more or less directly, already been touched, and which cannot in a contextualistic interpretation be regarded simply a matter of the teachers’ idiosyncrasies. It is to an equal extent a question of external conditions, such as what kind of school the individual teacher is

employed at; how it is organized, how motivated pupils in this school generally are etc., and a question of the teacher's own social background, her personal values and so on. Moreover, elements such as experience, confidence, and personality are of consequence. This is in agreement with the theory on *habitus* in the praxeology tradition, more or less following Bourdieu, which regards practices, included our professional life, the embodiment of historical and social experiences (Olesen, 2007, p. 178). In Callewaert's words, the practitioner is "led by his practical sense which in turn is being led by strategic orientations in various arenas of life which incorporate accumulated experience" (Callewaert, 2004, p. 132). Similarly, Schön describes practice (or practitioners' "practice world"), as a result of an ongoing interaction between practical problems and practitioners' response and adaption to the situation; practitioners develop their role and they construct practical situations that enable operationalization of the role they have developed, he claims (2000, pp. 265-266), while Goodson discusses the importance of personal elements such as vocation and ideals directly related to education and teacher professionalism (2007).

In this perspective, the individual teacher's academic orientation and her personal aims, emanated from her social, political, professional etc. dispositions, will also enter into the interplay between practical situations, practitioners' response, and the constant development of practice.

These descriptions of professionals' practices relate to what I have previously described as the multifacetedness of teaching; as illustrated in Table 2, which I here reproduce for the reader's convenience:

Table 2 revisited: Teaching as a multifaceted concept



In this model, teaching, and specifically teaching seen as a practice, contains practical as well as cognitive and dispositive elements, in which teachment and partly schooling correspond to manifest practice, and wise to dispositive, cognitive, and so even reactive elements, whereas tokener represents both the mental and physical space in which the above described interplay takes place, and the possibility conditions for this interplay.

7.4 Ambitions and aims

To deliberate the second element in the question about personal factors and teachment; the interplay between the teachers' individual professional ambitions and

aims on the one hand and their practice on the other, I again turn to the material itself to find out what the teachers expressively say about their ambitions and aims.

Quite a number of statements about the teachers' individual practice aims may be identified in the material, in addition to those derived from the curriculum, to which the teachers also refer when talking about their aims. Several of these statements have already been referred in other contexts, and do typically address topics such as pupils' successful completion of their upper secondary education programme, development of practical skills related to the mother tongue subject, and general education, for example through knowledge of the cultural heritage.

Regarding the chances to reach such aims, Agnes declares that: "At School 1, the challenges lie particularly in the heterogeneity. Difference in age, many study programmes, differences with regard to motivation and capacity." This heterogeneous situation constitutes the basis for Agnes' professional aims, and may possibly account for her orientation in the direction of practical teaching. She explains this orientation as follows:

Any teacher can teach clever students and achieve good results. But a *good* teacher has also the capacity to do something for less clever pupils. It is no problem to teach clever students. They do whatever they are instructed to do. They do their homework and all that. But here! Here there are challenges every day!

Others make very similar statements. For instance, there is Jórunn's declaration about how she "initially thought I must teach them everything I knew myself. But now I don't think like that anymore". She explains how a number of factors have contributed to changing her view on this point. Some of them relate very directly to external circumstances and terms of practicability. There are recent changes in the organizational model at Jórunn's school, which entails a reduction of 50% teaching time in Icelandic at some courses, a situation Jórunn finds demanding, especially since neither she nor her colleagues are allowed or prepared to renounce on the subject's standards, and they have undiminished obligations towards the curriculum.

Similarly, the recruitment model has been changed, with the result that her school these days recruits generally less motivated students than it used to do. In addition, there is the fact that the educational situation has changed over the past few decades, Jórunn points out: These days everyone attends upper secondary education, while pupils who were tired of school formerly tended to take a job after having finished compulsory education. All of this has contributed to change Jórunn's aims as a teacher. Nowadays, she finds it important to arouse pupils' interest and to deepen their insight:

Nowadays, I find that to be the main issue. Perhaps I thought differently ten years ago. Then I thought I should teach them everything I knew. Now, however, I find it more important that they *discover* Icelandic as... their own tool. That they may make things their own. That they make literature or the learning contents their own. And create something on that basis and develop their understanding out from this. On their own. (...) And then they somehow see the point. The point of learning all this stuff.

In trying to understand the change in attitude and practical teaching which both Agnes, Jórunn and others claim to have gone through, one might turn to Bourdieu and regard this change an instance of “making a virtue of necessity” (1979, p. 433), which he for example in *Distinction* argues that agents habitually tend to do. For in Bourdieu's view, social agents typically choose “the necessary”; agents adapt to actual conditions and develop their rationality and aims in habitus dependent understanding with the actual possibilities (Bourdieu, 1979, Ch. 7; 1984; Olesen, 2007). In the present context, making a virtue of necessity would regard the change from quite academic aims (cf. Jórunn's former ambition of teaching her pupils “everything *she* knew”, by which she means everything she knew of Icelandic as an academic discipline) to rather more practical ones (cf. the emphasizing of linguistic and literary skills, and the even more basic aim of helping pupils to in fact complete their upper secondary education), and their often repeated claim that these days, the teachers are far more interested in teachment than in academic captiousness (cf.

statements about teachers' understanding of themselves as "first and foremost a teacher").

In a sociological perspective, one could in this see some sort of a harmonizing development of the professional self (or the professional habitus), which entails accommodation to actual conditions, or *habitat*, in Bourdieuan terminology (Olesen, 2007, pp. 179-181), and which is not merely a matter of decay, as Jórunn's explanation above might be understood to imply, but also a matter of meeting and responding to the unexpected (cf. Schön, 2000); the general view among the teachers is that they were ill prepared for the practical reality they encountered at the time they left university and started teaching. The teachers report that this realization gave rise to reflection and reorientation; gradually they changed their practice and their aims in a direction that fitted the landscape better than the traditional "lecturing on a topic" attitude did. So, in addition to the above related "The Times They Are a'Changing"-motive, the individual development of professionalism and of a sustainable professional self seems to be at stake in the teachers' accounts about their present aims and about how and why they are different from the former ones.

As I interpret it, aims and ambitions considering the teachers themselves rest on two major elements; first, there are aims relating to professionalism and professional conduct of one's job, and second, there are aims relating to individual ambitions. The first ones bear on the individual teacher's development of a professional basis or ethos; it is a matter of finding stable ground in one's professional life, or, possibly more correctly, as a professional. Thus, orientating in one's *habitat* and adapting one's *habitus* in accordance both with the *habitat* and one's own convictions, capacities etc., in short, establishing a professional *persona* that works in practice, will also include evolving and defining aims which seem reasonable, sensible, and meaningful, all things considered. This includes for example deliberation of what may reasonably be obtained, in the specific context, or *habitat*, in which the teacher is situated, and contextualized prioritizing, and involves contemplations such as "how do I balance my own ideals and formal/structural demands when these discord?", or

“what do I find most important to impart to these specific pupils, in this particular programme, here and now?” Some of Elín’s reflections may serve as an example here. As has already been shown, Elín is not afraid to deviate from her schedule or from the curriculum, for that matter, if something interesting or important happens in class. Elín claims that she on such occasions without hesitating “seize the opportunities that present themselves”, and she finds pupils’ engagement, interest, and curiosity far more important than curricular reading lists, as described in the comment to the point “improvisation” in Table 3. Similarly, when she finds a topic or some material unengaging, she plainly discards it and finds another way, or makes her own material. Following the trackway is something purposeless, in Elín’s view:

For example, at the refresher course... I could show you the books we’re supposed to use there... And suddenly I just thought: “No! This is simply... it’s simply dreadful, you know. It’s killing pupils with boredom!” And then I just threw it away. (...) So, whenever something like that happens, I simply think: “No! I’ll do this my own way!”

Jórunn is of the same opinion:

Pupils find the text book [in language history] extremely boring. And difficult to read. You know, the text book as such. So... but they like to learn through playing, and they enjoy games. (...) They love quizzes, for example. And I often let them... improvise, do drama exercises in connection with such topics. Some of them love it, other pupils find it horrible. For they’re so shy, you see. (...) As I see it, it’s all right to have a playful attitude, to play with the subject matter and... to approach it in a jocular manner from time to time.

The second point, teachers’ individual ambitions, relates to that of professionalism and a professional ethos, yet one may say that personal elements are at play at an even higher degree when talking about individuals’ ambitions and aims on their own behalf. In the current group, individual aims are not linked with career prospects or other external motivation, but rather with personal inner motivation. As stated in the chapters on teachment, the teachers typically talk about their wish to develop as

professionals, and they relate this development to practice and teachment rather than to their academic discipline.

In the extension of this, one may identify the frequently mentioned motive *relation/relationship* (Icel. *tengsl*, which also means “connection”, “link”; meanings which are therefore likely to resound also when one talks about *tengsl* as a relationship). This motive is brought up in various contexts, and *tengsl* is in each of these presented as an aim – something it would be favourable to establish. With regard to the teachers’ individual aims and ambitions, *tengsl* concerns the teachers’ social and moral relationship to their pupils, as well as their hope that pupils succeed in relating to both the learning content and the subject matter, and to the cultural heritage, for instance.

As accounted for in the overview over the teachers, the teachers have various kinds of experience in addition to their experience as teachers; one was a shop owner for many years, one has been (and still is) part of the administrative staff at her school, one has held a part time position in the teacher training programme, one has been very active in the teachers’ union etc. Still, none mention these experiences when talking about their ambitions and aims. Instead, the teachers’ ambitions as professionals do, in short, relate to developing and improving their skills as *teachers*, not as academics, nor as administrators or union careerists. In other words, the teachers claim to be satisfied in the job they presently have, and this goes even for the couple of them who mention the possibility of changing course at some point, such as Fjóla, who would still fancy “something in the field of education”, and Hannes, who holds a vacancy and who has after all spent most of his life outside the classroom. The teachers assert that teaching is “the best job in the world”, “the world’s most important job, next to parenting”, and “the only job I’d ever fancy”, and so, they do not aim at anything else.

When they talk about developing professionally, the teachers apparently mean development of their teachment. This is what the teachers find purposeful and thus

worthwhile. One might wonder, though, whether also the stated general education aims should be regarded development aims as much as aims on pupils' behalf, although this is not expressed by the participants themselves. As has been established, general education aims are as much embedded in a cultural and social context as in the curriculum, and so may easily overlap with what the teachers consider their individual (professional) aims and ambitions. As has also been shown, the teachers accentuate the general education aims as something that really matters to them, personally and professionally.

Apparently, there are several conflicts and contradictions in the accounts about professional aims, especially if individual and educational professional aims are viewed as a whole. As is the case with other elements' in the teachers' narratives, e.g. their accounts for their professional development, the accounts for professional aims are presented as individual, yet to a quite high degree they do appear to constitute some sort of a common discourse. Moreover, in addition to sharing some of the major aims, the ostensible contradictions in the accounts are also generally concurrent.

Some of these contradictions or conflicts are easier to explain than others. It is for example not unreasonable that public aims, such as those of the curriculum, may sometimes be in conflict with teachers' personal convictions and aims. However, such conflicts are not the only ones that may be identified in the material, a fact which is actually not unreasonable, since the teachers are supposed to meet expectations and demands from a number of instances. For instance, there are external ones, such as (culturally and historically founded expectations from) the society at large, there are semi-external ones, such as employer and curriculum, and there are structures and hierarchies at the local schools. In addition, there are internal ones, such as the ones described above regarding pupils and their motivation, and there is the individual teacher's relation to Icelandic as an academic discipline. Moreover, there is the human factor, strongly accentuated by Elín, for example; the sense of having a moral responsibility towards one's pupils, and the sense of having obligations towards oneself. All of this influences the teachers' practice and the aims

they set themselves. To account for the teachers' aims, then, is really to be able to answer the question: What is it in actual fact that one as a subject teacher should answer to at the end of the day? This question does really require one answer for each of the elements listed above. It is therefore not surprising that the teachers' listing of their professional aims do at first sight seem to be quite differing and even contradictory. This is as a matter of fact in full agreement with the teachers' occupational everyday life.

When scrutinizing the stated aims and the grounds given for them, I find that the teachers' ambitions go far beyond the notion of "getting through the curriculum", even if one in this includes following-up work, such as correcting pupils' home work. The ambitions also exceed instrumental aims such as "pupils' successful complement of upper secondary education" which, although mentioned by three of the teachers, is far less conspicuous in the material seen as a whole than is for instance the emphasizing of general education, cf. Table 3. In this, Birgit's general education remark that "I find it important to let my pupils work with *language*, to let them read and write. Especially at the advanced courses. And in my opinion, exactly *what* they read is really less important than *that* they work with demanding texts. And I wish that they develop a joy of reading." is far more representative for the statements about professional aims than her statements about pupils' graduation.

I have stated that there are numerous statements about the teachers' aims and ambitions in the material, and I have demonstrated that the aims are many and differing in kind. There are, for example aims related to formal requirements, aims related to pupils and their welfare, and aims related to the teachers' own ideals. I have also claimed that it sometimes seems as though the various aims discord with each other, for example because they belong to different levels in the logic and the ethos of teachment and wise. This heterogeneity; the various levels and the aims' dissimilarity may perhaps at least partly account for the reason why I find it oddly difficult to grasp the aims and ambitions and point to what they essentially are about, despite the many statements on this topic. It is almost as though the teachers are so busy

teaching; i.e. so concerned about the particular and the practical that they sometimes lose sight of their general aims, and so, what they really and fundamentally aim at may, at least in their accounts, seem a bit unclear.

7.5 Professional standpoint and development

Judging from their own explicit declarations, the teachers share a very enthusiastic view on their job. Thus, Agnes, for one, exclaims: “It is the only occupation I’d ever fancy! It is the best occupation in the world!” Elín expresses exactly the same view, and Birgit elaborates how life as a teacher is so very vivid and varied, and how she personally loves spending her time with young people, whereas Hannes explains how education, as far as he is concerned, is more important than any other occupation.

When describing their professional basis, the teachers emphasize that reaching the standpoint they currently defend has been a process. Getting there has taken time, they state. Such observations are in agreement with theories about development of expertise in the field of study of professions, for example the classic five-stage novice-to-expert or skill acquisition model of Dreyfus & Dreyfus (1986, cf. Table 11). In very general terms one could in the specific case of Icelandic teachers in upper secondary school claim that this process might be considered a transformation from freshly educated scholars of Icelandic to mature (subject) teachers, cf. statements such as “I am first and foremost a teacher” and “I find that one teaches much more than just the subject, and so I definitely regard myself a *teacher* more than an *Icelandic teacher*”.

The novice-to-expert model primarily illustrates how the expert acts and reasons, as opposed to the novice, and how the novice typically reaches the stage of expertise through certain intermediate stages, based on Dreyfus & Dreyfus’ belief that our basic understanding is a knowledge of *how*, rather than a knowledge of *that* (*H. L. Dreyfus et al., 1986, Prologue*). Similarly, statements in the current study witness to development of teachment, yet one should note that this development seems to affect

the teachers' (professional) aims as well as their acting. Besides, it may be noted that various statements about development moreover illustrate how the teachers' professional self-conception, the core of what they regard their professional self, is very closely tied to the act of teaching; to teachment.

When elaborating on how reaching their current standpoint has been a process, the teachers tend to emphasize the importance of practical experience; this, if anything, is what has influenced their practice and their reasoning. They characteristically describe in detail how they have gradually learned what works in class and what does not, such as the already presented examples of how they have come to prefer student activity based teachment to talk-and-chalk. Such experience based development is fundamentally regarded an individual experience; a journey each teacher feels she has travelled on her own. Indeed, the insisting on the individual is quite conspicuous, to the degree that I will return to this motive below and comment it as a specific theme. Although the element of individuality is mentioned by all the teachers, particularly Birgit, who proved to be a very close colleague of Agnes', nevertheless thinks that cooperation has meant a great deal to her and her development. In addition, Birgit calls attention to her engagement in the teachers' union, and she believes this to have been of consequence to her reasoning as a teacher. Among other factors of consequence, Agnes and Daniel both mention continuing education courses for teachers under the auspices of the university or the mother tongue educator association, and Agnes mentions her part time engagement at the teacher training programme.

As called attention to in the exploration of the concept of teaching and its dominating position in the teachers' discourse, the teachers do not stress their formal education in Icelandic or the effect of the reasoning, values, methods etc. they were exposed to in their university studies when they talk about themselves *qua* Icelandic teachers, and this is even so when they respond to explicit invitations to reflect on this relationship. As a matter of fact, there seems to be a tendency among the group to make relatively little of the Icelandic studies' importance to the job they are doing, although they

check themselves once they find that their spontaneous descriptions actually diverge somewhat from the picture of what one might expect an academically educated Icelandic teacher to be.

I believe the spontaneous and the modified descriptions to be equally true, and that they simply represent different layers in the teachers' self-understanding. More specifically, to me it seems as though the spontaneous descriptions depict the surface, the everyday self-understanding, whereas the attuned or adjusted ones voice even underlying, less conspicuous elements which ordinarily tend to be tacit. Knowledge of the subject and various degrees of incorporation of the values it represents culturally and nationally are examples of such elements.

My hypothesis is that the spontaneous descriptions are worthwhile listening to, partly precisely because they are spontaneous. As such, I think they may be regarded as testifying to the teachers' actual practice; it seems likely that what comes first to their mind is what they experience as their practical reality; as what they *live*. The other, the adjusted and more nuanced versions which also contain specific statements about the teachers' knowledge of and studies in Icelandic, may be regarded more official, but also more reflective renderings. As stated, I do not find them less veracious for that matter. For even if the more elaborated versions may be adjusted and attuned to what seems appropriate in the (formal) situation of the research interview, it may nevertheless at the same time work as a reminder of elements which really are of importance to the teachers, although they might not consciously pay them much attention in their everyday practice, and so, they urge me to "not misunderstand them" and ensure me that they of course still cherish their subject as such, too.

A further comment on the tendency to fixate on the practical aspects of teaching, which also vouches for the veracity of the adjusted versions, would be that the teachers would hardly have been able to devote so much energy and attention to teaching unless they had very thorough knowledge of the syllabus. For such knowledge is an indispensable part of their skills as subject teachers. It is my

hypothesis, however, that in everyday working life, the consequence of *theoria*, academic knowledge of Icelandic, be shrouded by circumstances in the practice itself, such as practical tasks which necessarily must be dealt with at the moment when they occur. This is, in my view, also a matter of structural conditions, especially conspicuous in the course model: Due to the structural organization of this model, the teachers know the syllabus through and through and need not put much effort in remembering or reviewing it. Thus, they can afford to focus on other aspects, specifically on practical matters and indeed on *praxis*, which they indeed do, according to the teachers' numerous statements about how they regard themselves "first and foremost" teachers, how the interest they have taken in teachment as such has developed and grown over the years, and so on. In my reading, there are at least three distinctive reasons for this practical focus.

The first relates to what has already been indicated: that since the syllabus is so well-known, the syllabus in itself does not in the long run represent any real intellectual challenge or impetus, especially as it is impossible to go deep into the specific topics in the various courses. Consequently, intellectual stimulus must be sought elsewhere. Since there are fewer prescriptions for how teachers should teach than for what they should teach, teachment is a relatively open field, which the individual teacher may feel comparatively free to explore.

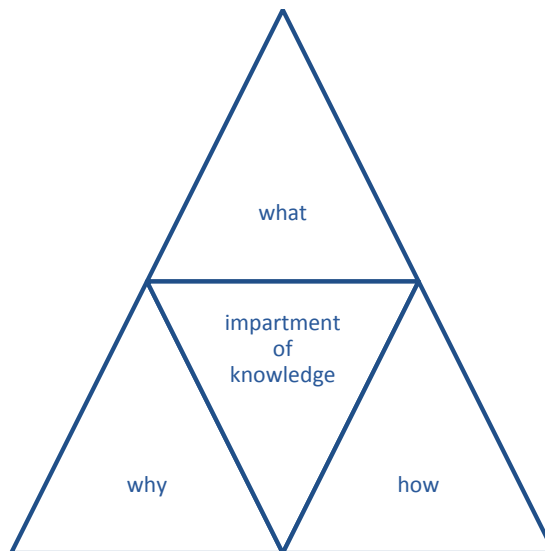
In addition to being conveniently within reach for teachers who seek new challenges, there is the other main reason for the practical focus and subsequent understanding of oneself as a practitioner, as first and foremost a teacher, namely that of necessity, to which the statements of pupils' low motivation, of how many of them still "are such babies", and of how their span of attention does not last at a time bear witness. In other words, there is a marked *need* for focus on *praxis*.

What I assume to be the third reason for the observed *praxis* orientation, is a desire on the teachers' behalf to be what they term "a good teacher"; a term which includes a wish to teach well so that pupils learn what they ought to learn, as well as a wish to

be a honourable person and a decent adult among a flock of youngsters, cf. teacher statements about gentleness, cheerfulness, reasonability and friendliness on the one hand, and fairness, strictness and predictability on the other.

In didactics, the so-called “didactic triangle” is a central term. “The didactic triangle” is intended to illustrate how teachment consists of three main elements; the topic (*what*), the grounds for teaching this specific topic (*why*), and the chosen method for teachment of this topic (*how*) (cf. Figure 7). To rephrase what has so far been stated about the teachers’ self-concept as basically being teachers rather than scholars of Icelandic, one could in terms of “the didactic triangle”, say that the *what*’s and indirectly to a high degree *why*’s are given by the subject curriculum, and so, what remains for the teachers to influence and decide are the *how*’s.

Figure 7: A didactic triangle; elements in teachment of a specific topic



Notably, the preoccupation with teachment as the central element in teaching and as the core of the teachers' self-conception may, in addition to being a matter of challenges and of ethics, in a certain perspective also be regarded a matter of *productivity*. As for Iceland, it is public educational policy that education be efficient, i.e. that pupils graduate as soon as possible (cf. for example the Ministry of Education's annual report, Ministry of Education, 2013), and so these are demands teachers are obliged to meet somehow, whether they like it or not. As mentioned in the description of education in Iceland, "flexibility" is a buzz word in Icelandic educational discourse. The term primarily means that able students should get the chance to finish upper secondary education in less time than the standard four years, although it also is used when looking for opportunities for drop-outs to return to school and complete upper secondary education. Jórunn offers some examples of how her school has met with demands of "flexibility", and she depicts some of the consequences of these accommodations in the mother tongue subject. For example, she describes how courses are more compact than they used to be, how she finds that teachers and pupils accordingly have to rush through the syllabus, that the subject's former continuity has been disrupted, and that pupils' opportunities for personal maturation and *Bildung* through mother tongue education consequently have been impoverished.

A result of the authorities' reformation of upper secondary education, among other things in order to make it more flexible, is that the teachers are forced to ask themselves some rather utilitarian sounding questions such as: How may I maximize the benefit of mother tongue education for as many pupils as possible? What should I do to get as many as possible interested in the subject? What can I do to help as many pupils as possible through the syllabus? These are perfectly legitimate questions which may well be asked in an educational perspective, as Jórunn does when she declares that "I want to arouse their enthusiasm, you see. To teach in a way that may generate their interest. That they take some interest. In literature or in the Icelandic language. And that they get some... Well. So I want to instil an *attitude*. Alongside

the rest". Yet, if one asks such questions primarily in order to meet governmental demands, they easily gain a rather hollow ring, and so it is well understandable that the teachers prefer to relate such questions to their own inner motivation rather than to external requirements. The latter would be in danger of injuring the teachers' autonomy as well as their self-respect.

When describing their own professional self, the teachers strongly emphasize that getting where they today find themselves have been a journey, or as a process. As mentioned, the teachers generally describe this process as a change from focus on subject matter to focus on teachment. In addition, it is a development from the freshman's insecurity to the experienced teacher's far more confident attitude and behaviour. Jórunn explains this as follows:

As for me, I now try to pay attention to the *group*. And to keep the group... alive as some sort of unit, so to speak. I didn't use to think like that. I think it changed as I gained more experience. In the beginning, as an inexperienced teacher, one is less confident. And then one just wants to follow one's schedule. In those days, I did what I had planned to do. I certainly wasn't up to... for unforeseen questions may turn up, all sorts of things may be thrown in unexpectedly, just... well, some issue that they want to discuss and which you may have very little knowledge of. Or... and then... to *dare*, you know. To still go into... well.

(...)

But now that I am more experienced, I *dare* listen to the group of pupils... and to be open to their questions, their ideas, and their... well, understanding. Of the topic or something related to it. And to allow them to somehow make it *their own*. And I have for example... well, I find it interesting to use something that comes from *them* later, in teaching. Simply use it as teaching material.

Jórunn also mentions her profound knowledge of School 6 as a factor that has influenced her development. She used to be a pupil there herself once, and she has been employed from the day she started teaching. The same goes for Agnes and Daniel. Like them, Jórunn has been content with that, and she moreover used to

consider it an advantage. Thus, she has regarded it a circumstance which influenced her and her teaching in a positive manner. Yet, now, she does not have that feeling anymore. Now, she would like to try a different job or to teach in a different kind of school in order to continue to develop and to avoid stagnation, she admits. I will return to Jórunn's doubts below. For the time being, the point in her narrative I want to draw attention to is the close connection she sees between experience and development. Yet, as becomes clear from her account, these may still not be regarded synonyms, for they only follow each other to a certain point; beyond that, she will still gain more experience, yet she may possibly not develop very much, in her own judgment.

On hindsight, none of the teachers feel that their studies prepared them for teachment and schooling. Jórunn recalls that the teacher training course

was very primitive. It was, when I attended it, then we learned... well, the practical training was very limited, and we learned no subject didactics. We just learned some psychology and... the theories of Piaget and... well. It was all very... remote. Or so we thought. (...) It was a comprehensive course, though. Lasted for an entire academic year. And they taught... a bit of everything. But somehow it wasn't... I found none of it particularly useful. Later. When I started teaching.

Jórunn goes on by giving further details about the course and how things developed as she finished the course and started her career. The story resembles that of Agnes and of Elín, and even of the relatively fresh teacher Daniel. It illustrates their shared opinion that they may well have been certified teachers at the outset of their teacher career, yet they do not consider that former self a skilled practitioner. "It takes five years to become a real teacher, you know," Fjóla states. "And I haven't even finished those five years yet." Related to Dreyfus & Dreyfus' model, one could say that the teachers in the current group do not start out as "advanced beginners" (cf. Table 4), which the Dreyfus brothers claim to be the typical position for professionals, but closer to the novice stadium.

Table 4: Dreyfus & Dreyfus' Skill Acquisition Model

Five Stages of Skill Acquisition

Level	Components	Perspective	Decision	Commitment
Novice	Context free	None	Analytic	Detached
Advanced beginner	Context free and situational	None	Analytic	Detached
Competent	Context free and situational	Chosen	Analytic	Detached understanding and deciding; involved outcome
Proficient	Context free and situational	Experienced	Analytic	Involved understanding; detached deciding
Expert	Context free and situational	Experienced	Intuitive	Involved

Note:

Components: This refers to the elements of the situation that the learner is able to perceive. These can be context free and pertaining to general aspects of the skill or situational, which only relate to the specific situation that the learner is meeting.

Perspective: As the learner begins to be able to recognize almost innumerable components, he or she must choose which one to focus on. He or she is then taking a perspective.

Decision: The learner is making a decision on how to act in the situation he or she is in. This can be based on analytic reasoning or an intuitive decision based on experience and holistic discrimination of the particular situation.

Commitment: This describes the degree to which the learner is immersed in the learning situation when it comes to understanding, deciding, and the outcome of the situation—action pairing.

(redrawn after S. E. Dreyfus, 2004, p. 181)

The teachers' main points when talking about their professional development; that it has been like a journey, and specifically a journey they have made on their own, are in accordance with the Dreyfus brothers' thinking. A conceivable interpretation of these recurring points is that due to their academic, non-practical education, as junior teachers, the participants discovered that schooling and teachment contained elements for which they were quite unprepared. As they were much left to their own devices, they found that they individually had to figure out what the job involves and gradually get a satisfactory grasp of the profession. To compare one's professional development to a journey may also imply that the teachers have come to see professionalism as a non-static condition, but one that demands that the practitioners constantly is open to the prevailing situation.

When accounting for their development as teachers, several of the participants go back to their experiences from their school days. "Well, what formed me..." Jórunn reflects, "that's in the first place simply my own experience. Of being a pupil, that is." I nod and say "uhum", and Jórunn goes on: "In the beginning. Then I was influenced by my own teachers. As some sort of role model, perhaps. Later my colleagues were of some consequence. But I still believe that my partaking in, well, challenging... challenging projects have been... Such as the Comenius project ten years ago." Later, Jórunn has taken part in an action research project at her school, and she thinks that both projects have contributed to her changed focus, i.e. from the subject matter to learning orientation. Also Fjóla explicitly mentions her former

school teachers as some sort of models or sources of inspiration, while she takes a quite poor view on the educational skills of her university teachers in the department of Icelandic.

Another common motive in the teachers' stories about career and development is that of chance and coincidence. Although some of them reflect that in retrospect, one may suspect that some things are less coincidental than they have tended to believe; Agnes muses that she has perhaps always been some sort of teacher, ever since she was a Girl Guide in her youth, and Fjóra dreamed of becoming a writer or possibly a teacher already in her school days. However, in spite of such examples, the stories about chance are more conspicuous. Jórunn returned to her old secondary school "just to try it" – and has remained there for more than 25 years. Hannes started teaching to fund his own university studies, and has been teaching on and off for more than 30 years. Daniel was uncertain of what to choose when he started his university studies. He was interested in literature, languages, art and architecture. When he decided to go for a language subject, he thought "alright, then, why don't I simply start by my own language? Why not study Icelandic?". Then he got a vacancy (by incident, or so he has used to think of it, at his own old school) once he had obtained his BA degree, and that was more or less it for Daniel's part. When he later proceeded to post graduate level, he chose to do a M.Ed. instead of a traditional MA, since he already knew that his heart lay in teaching. Elín, who ran her own business for a long while before she completed her BA, studied a variety of subjects. Among other things she was very interested in drama, and she had no particular intention of becoming a teacher. Yet, at a certain point she wanted to live in the countryside, and then teaching offered itself as the obvious opportunity to realize that wish. She has been teaching ever since. After many years of teaching, Elín, too, has decided to take up her studies and complete her master's degree. Like Daniel, she had no doubts about the choice of orientation in her master's thesis; it must relate to subject didactics, even if she is enrolled at the department of Icelandic studies. For she does not do a master because she wants to change the direction of her career. Elín wants to stay

where she is. Finally, there is Birgit. To all appearances, Birgit is the only one who was convinced that she wanted to become a teacher already when she left secondary school. What is incidental in her case is that she ended up as a subject teacher in Icelandic rather than, say, a general teacher. “I didn’t want to attend the regular teacher education programme, you see,” Birgit explains. “For I didn’t want to be in a class with just girls. And there are mostly girls in the teacher education programme, you know. So I went to the university instead. And there I studied Icelandic.” It seems from this, that in Birgit’s case, *teaching* rather than subject was the core of the matter already before she chose her field of study.

In the social sciences, life story or autobiography research has attracted increasing attention over the past few decades. However, different traditions read such narratives differently. For example, in reflecting on the teachers’ statements about coincidence in their life trajectories, one may contrast Bourdieu’s view that our choices tend to be less coincidental and indeed less free than we are apt to believe, due to the fact that we choose what is in fact possible to choose, that our actions are based on “a practical rationality that makes the possible sensible” (Olesen, 2007, p. 179), to Thomas Ziehe’s theories about the necessity of constant self-construction and self-awareness in our age (e.g. Ziehe, 2004), or to Anthony Giddens’ understanding of the self and of self-understanding in late modernity. I choose Giddens as my main example in this context. He writes:

In the post-traditional order of modernity, (...) self-identity becomes a reflexively organized endeavour. The reflexive project of the self, which consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives, takes place in the context of multiple choice as filtered through abstract systems. (Giddens, 1991, p. 5)

And:

Each of us not only “has”, but *lives* a biography reflexively organized in terms of flows of social and psychological information about possible ways of life. Modernity is a post-traditional order, in which the question, “How shall I live?” has to be answered in day-to-day decisions about how to behave, what

to wear and what to eat – and many other things – as well as interpreted within the temporal unfolding of self-identity. (Giddens, 1991, p. 14).

I quote Giddens at this point both to demonstrate that Bourdieu's stated views on choice and self-understanding do not hold a hegemonic position, not even within the field of sociology, and to provide an example from another social theorist of how very different from Bourdieu one may in fact understand the concept of the modern self and its narrative about itself. Coincidence or the impression that "it all just turned out that way" are not left much space in Giddens' understanding of self-identity (and thereby our story of our lives) as a continuous "reflexively organized endeavour", whereas such experiences may be explained by Bourdieu's *habitus* theory, according to which conscious or strategic intention rarely is the basis of action (Prieur et al., 2006, p. 48). Choices and action may in this perspective rather be considered spontaneous adjustments, rooted in a *habitus* which is adapted to the surrounding reality, Annick Prieur explains. In this, we have incorporated certain practical schemes for perception and acknowledgement which lead us to see certain choices as the "natural" ones (2006, p. 47), and thus do not always feel that our choices or actions are the result of a deliberate strategy or conscious long-term plan. This goes even for important choices, such as choosing a career.

As the stories about how it all started reveal, there is a tendency in the direction of stability in the teachers' careers. Agnes, Jórunn, and Daniel all work at the schools where they once used to be pupils, and none of them have ever taught elsewhere. When she left university, Birgit, who was very young when she started teaching, was unable to get a position in the capital area, which was what she really wanted, and so she had to take a job in the countryside for two years before she got her present position at School 1. She has held that position for approximately 15 years. Like Agnes, Elín gave up another career for teaching. After taking up teaching, she has taught at a couple of schools, and so, she has in that respect been less stable than the others. Fjóla is still establishing herself and her career, and does not hold a permanent posi-

tion, whereas Hannes' career has in several respects been quite different from all the others.

Bourdieu's *habitus* theory emphasizes the weight of tradition, continuity, and reproduction rather than that ruptures, mobility, and change, which is often stressed in analyses of modernity. Since *habitus* is an incorporated set of dispositions of which we are to a relatively high degree unconscious, neither individual nor social and structural changes come easily, in Bourdieu's view (Prieur et al., 2006, pp. 42-43).

This supposition may possibly account for the stability in the teachers' occupational life, or at least indicate why the teachers express a general satisfaction with their lot. Apparently they do not yearn for promotion, nor do they crave for fame and glory. This is not as strange as social theories inspired by economic theory or by utilitarianism may find it, Bourdieu argues. Exactly because our choices and actions are to such a high degree conducted by our *habitus*, they will frequently be based on other motivation than that of strategic reasonability or profit. For instance, Bourdieu points out, a momentous aspect of social life is that of establishing meaningfulness, without which life is little worth. This is in fact a view he shares with Taylor, who believes that "individuals necessarily interpret their lives in narrative terms; they make sense of their lives as an unfolding story in a way that gives meaning to their past and direction to their future" (Abbey, 2000, p. 38). A similar conviction may be recognized in Ricœur's *Time and Narrative*; a work on which Taylor actually draws in developing his own view on selfhood. As for Bourdieu, he points out how being expected, popular, loaded down with work and engagements is, among other things, essentially a matter of meaning something to other persons, of being *important* to them, and so important *per se*; in short it is a matter of making a difference, of having a purpose, and of leading a meaningful life (Bourdieu, 1999a, p. 249).

The teachers' descriptions of how they have taken an increasing interest in teachment, about how they care for their pupils, and about how they find pupils' progress and success rewarding, may be interpreted as stories about meaningfulness

in the above described sense. So, if the teachers find their work meaningful, why would they give it up for the unknown, for a maybe less meaningful job? Why would one let go of something as precious as meaning once one has found it? In the perspective of *habitus* theory, the observed stability, which stands in stark contrast to current ideals of mobility, change and ladder climbing, should perhaps not be interpreted as an expression of teachers' regressive attitude. It may fundamentally be a question of meaning.

Individualism is another common motive in the narratives. In this chapter, where the focus is on the teachers and their self-conception, it seems appropriate to discuss it anew, in that particular perspective, since individualism, the sense of having travelled alone most of their journey as teachers, appears to be constitutive for the teachers' self-conception. In other words, the teachers find that they have been marching the route to where they presently find themselves as professionals on their own, and they generally feel that the march has been a fairly long one and that their relatively traditionalistic point of departure is far behind them. The professional development is particularly discernible with respect to teaching, the teachers state, yet it does also comprise views on education and upbringing, and on the subject itself, cf. for instance Birgit's statements about how she has come to believe that "exactly *what* they [pupils] read is really less important than *that* they work with demanding texts". This means that the individualism motive is connected both to the day's work, i.e. to *praxis*, and to professional development.

A general comment to the emphasizing of professional development as an individual and solitary matter might be that as far as it is correct, their development in this respect deviates from the pattern suggested by the Dreyfus brothers, which is a master-apprentice model. It is precisely the *lack* of a master or a mentor that characterizes teacher development and professionalization as it is described in the current material.

In a positive sense, one might understand the motive of individualism as a symbol of the individual teacher's sense of strength and autonomy: they feel they have got where they are practically on their own, and so they also feel that their ideals are genuinely their own and something they wholeheartedly answer for. Less positive is Ivor Goodson's observation that such narratives, apparently about strength and independence, tend to be disguised stories about loneliness (Goodson, 1996).

According to the teachers themselves, the factors which most strongly influence them as teachers are the public commission as it is expressed in the curriculum, their own experience, and their individual personality traits and qualities. Moreover, some of them mention the interplay with their students as being of explicit significance for the development of their teaching. Among the personal factors, particularly creativity is considered consequential. Thus, those who most expressly stress that personality plays a crucial part in the shaping of their teacher persona and that it constantly influence their practice, are the same ones who want to allow pupils to work creatively in class, and so particularly these teachers think their personality definitely affects practical teaching.

In addition, the teachers find personality traits to be of consequence to their conduct in class. In this, they do in my view extend their perspective from the practical one to a *praxis* perspective. For example, when Fjóla talks about how she considers herself an open-minded person and believes this to be for her pupils' benefit, she apparently does not primarily think of the relevance of this quality for teaching or education. At least she has to think twice before answering my question whether she believes her open-mindedness to affect her pupils' learning: This is not Fjóla's main reason for behaving as she does. It is all simply a matter of interpersonal relationship. Such a view is in agreement with *praxis* as the term is being used in this work, i.e. in understanding with Aristotle's definition of *praxis* as action which aims at "a good life", rather than at some sort of production (Gustavsson, 2000, p. 33).

I believe that what the teachers describe when they contrast their former teacher *persona* to the present one could among other things be regarded a proceeding from (mere) teachment, which could be compared to Aristotle's *poieisis*, to *praxis*; while they initially were uncertain and eager to keep to the schedule, as Jórunn expresses it, and to "teach the syllabus", the teachers gradually have become more flexible and able to include other perspectives than that which strictly relates to impartment of a certain topic. It seems that in developing an increased interest for teachment as such, the teachers have also developed their sense of the (human) complexity of the classroom. What matters to the experienced teacher appears to be far more than the freshman's concern about his own performance or about remembering everything he knows about the topic he is teaching. At least, it looks to me as this is part of what the teachers imply when stating that they are "first and foremost teacher[s]" and so on.

As previously accounted for, the teachers generally express a high degree of job satisfaction, and talk about how teaching is the best and most important job in the world. Still, there are disturbing elements in this idyllic picture of the profession. The most prominent example of this is Jórunn's story about how she of late has come to feel some sort of uneasiness about her job. It is, in fact, a story about doubt. For Jórunn is the only one who voices concern about her future as a teacher. Although Hannes considers returning to what has been his main occupation and Fjóla, who does not even consider herself a fully developed teacher yet, is uncertain of whether she will remain a teacher or whether she will look for another education related job, neither of them present these reflections as a result of doubt with regard to the job they are presently doing or with regard to themselves as teachers. Jórunn, however, expresses such concern. "I've been here for so long," she says. "And I've grown that old... I somehow feel... a bit..." she does not finish the statement, but as she talks, it becomes clear that Jórunn has a fear of stagnation. She gets back to this, and states for example that "there is a considerable danger for stagnation. And that's something I do absolutely not want!" She laughs, and then goes on: "And it's really... to ask oneself, what sort of teacher am I? That's something one should cautionary ask

oneself. And to be in motion. I want to be in motion. I don't want to burn out. And I can feel that... I'm being *nourished* when I challenge myself.”

One might wonder if this is partly the underlying reason when for example Birgit and Daniel talk about professional development; is it grounded on some sort of hunger, like the one described by Jórunn even though they do not themselves say anything that may explicitly confirm this? What is evident, is that the teachers, all of them, feel encouraged, indeed, awarded and nourished, to use Jórunn's expression, whenever they feel that a lesson has turned out well, meaning that pupils have been responsive and taken part in activities proposed by the teacher. In this respect, a good lesson is a lesson with a high degree of interaction.

In this reading, it seems that interaction is being connoted with motion and development. In this understanding, having to think things over, to make decisions, taking on a conscious attitude towards one's work has a replenishing and stimulating effect. By contrast, routine and non-responsiveness is regarded wearisome and enervating. While the other teachers express this merely by negations, Jórunn positively states a fear of withering, of reaching a state where she no longer has anything to offer, of losing sight of what she is doing, and of stagnating. This may be regarded to relate to the meaning dimension of the teachers' occupational life.

Both Taylor and Bourdieu write about the human need for meaning. Bourdieu even raises this issue in his reflection on autobiography and the narratives we tell (others as well as ourselves) about ourselves, which in turn is part of becoming a self. According to Bourdieu, an autobiographical narrative will inevitably be marked by our need to ascribe meaning to our lives and to the world around us, to find some sort of logics in our life story, and to see our life as a linear narrative. We search, Bourdieu claims, meaning when we try to demonstrate connections and contrasts in our stories, when we try to prove understandable relations between various elements in the narrative, when we seek to prove causality between different conditions and phases and consider them a necessary development. This is not, however, the truth,

Bourdieu claims, but rather a construction or explanation in which the narrator believes (Wilken, 2011).

7.6 Diverging voices

As has been stated, I found an unexpected degree of unanimity in the teachers' accounts. Nevertheless, to indicate that there is no diversity in the material would definitely be misleading, for despite common features in the accounts, a distinct polyphony may easily be identified when considering the material as a whole. Without making this a main point, I still find it right to point it out as a matter of fact and to demonstrate it. In addition, in bringing out second or third voices, to stick to Bakhtin's metaphor of textual polyphony, even the main tendencies (or voices) may be thrown into relief and so be understood more clearly.

Hannes' account - a counterpoise to the general impression of the material

In interpreting meaningful entities one should be aware of individual variation, conditional to personal and contextual factors, to avoid undue generalisation. In the current context, Hannes' account stands as a counterpoint to the general impression of the material. For even if he shares central educational values with his colleagues, Hannes nonetheless stands as a contrast to the general impression in several respects, although it is in some cases a matter of nuances rather than outright contrast. For instance, Hannes *does* share the common belief that pupils should be active, yet he has a view on so called monologist instruction or lecturing quite different from that of the other teachers. Being able to pay attention and to listen should be part of any pupil's skills anyway, in Hannes' view, and so he regards his short lectures training of that capacity. I have found it valuable to discuss Hannes' views and relate it to the other accounts because I find that by seeing the subject and practice from his point of view, the others' views are brought out more clearly.

It is almost as though Hannes has not picked up the apparent buzz words in current Icelandic upper secondary education, such as “activity oriented learning”, “student centred teaching methods”, and “methodical variation”, for he does not refer to them once and he does not seem to relate to them. As I mentioned above, he does not even use the high-frequency term “activity”, but prefers to talk about “work” when describing pupils’ active participation in class and at home; the difference here comprises more than merely a choice of vocabulary, for the two terms are not used fully synonymously. When Hannes talks about work, it reflects his fundamental belief that education does not come of itself, which he claims to repeatedly tell his pupils:

One needs to make them take their education seriously. I keep trying to... well, education is hard work. There is no one so talented that he doesn't need to work. No, sir! That's futile. Let's say that a very gifted person... well, if he doesn't work, then he simply doesn't know anything. As I many a time and oft tell them.

This, then, is the fundament for Hannes’ practice of “letting pupils work”; working, in his sense of the word, is learning, and you do not learn unless you work. In Hannes’ terminology, work in the upper secondary classroom seems to mean principally writing, reading and paying attention until one has done what one has been asked to do, and learned what one is supposed to learn – or at rate has done one’s utmost to learn it. As Hannes uses the term, work always has a purpose, tightly connected to “taking education seriously”. By contrast, “activity” is used in a broader sense. While there is no doubt that also activities have a purpose, this purpose is often understood in a broader perspective than work is. It seems quite clear that the fundamental intention is that activities should lead to learning, and this would constitute a relatively narrow definition of the term activity. However, the term is frequently used in the broader sense “anything that is done in the classroom or at home and is somehow conducted by the teacher”. Even this definition relates to learning, but not always as directly as Hannes’ term work or the narrow definition of activity. Thus, some of the activities in the broader sense of the term will at best lead to motivation and to pupils’ willingness to actually show up in class and to pay

attention – which is a precondition for learning. Yet, it seems that some activities almost are an end in themselves; that the aim sometimes is to occupy pupils. This will be the case in particularly unmotivated groups, as demonstrated by Daniel, who contrasts unmotivated regular pupils to the generally highly motivated ones in adult education courses, where there is a strict focus on the subject matter. From regular classes there are also many instances of what might be regarded the next step: activities motivated by the philosophy that it is after all better that they learn *this*, although it may not seem very ambitious, than that they do not learn anything at all. Some of the reasons given for letting pupils draw instead of studying a text in depth, answering questions to it, or writing about them are along this line. Again, I turn to Daniel: “I started out in a quite traditional manner also with the regular pupils,” he explains. “But I realized that most of them gained little advantage of traditional methods.” He consequently changed his teaching in the direction of more activity oriented learning, and is confident that this has been a change for the better:

They *transfer*, I believe. If they draw... then they transfer something from the book into the picture. And they discuss it in the groups and they consider how they should draw this and that. And I really find that at least as good as... for example with regard to remembering episodes from a book. Remembering that it was fun in class. Remember that... maybe they feel uncomfortable when they need to raise their voice in class. But if you are good at drawing... or something like that... So really, I allow myself to justify the fact that I... that we... well, that we don't always go very deeply into things, or that what they do does not always lead to particularly impressive outcome. That's how it is.

Daniel, as a representative for the rest of the group, here seems to approach challenges of pupils' low motivation, lack of academic ambitions etc. quite differently from Hannes. While Hannes' responds to such challenges by insisting all the more on general education aims, such as the need to develop some standard of work ethic, since education after all is not very different from other work, the other teachers to various degrees seem to adapt to actual conditions. *Their* answer has been a more student oriented approach and more activity based methods, while still not giving the curricular or subject matter aims up altogether. Thus, Jórunn ensures that

she always has the academic disciplines present, also when choosing “pupil-friendly” methods, and Birgit jestingly and slightly (self-)ironically tells her pupils: “I know that you are not *all* planning to become scholars of Icelandic. Not quite all. Still you’ll need to...” for example learn some skills or other.

From the logs it is evident that even in activity oriented learning classrooms many of the activities are in actual fact quite traditional, with a traditional subject matter focus. It might still be of some consequence that they are frequently described as activities instead of for instance exercises, questions to the text, presentations etc. This may suggest that using the term activity indeed goes along with a certain way of professional reasoning and perhaps also with a certain set of professional values.

As briefly mentioned above, Hannes is not afraid of monologist lecturing and so, by contrast to the others who very explicitly distance themselves from this method (although they in fact practice it), Hannes states that he sometimes talks “for quite a while”, and “talking to pupils” is indeed his preferred method for arousing interest and establishing a good atmosphere in the classroom. He also has less need for the methodical variation that the others strongly accentuate, even if he believes in going back and forth between “talking” and “working”. As another example, Hannes mentions that also using films has the favourable spin-off of representing some variation. However, Hannes has got the impression that pupils need to practice writing, and so he often lets them write. They answer questions to texts, they write summaries, they write essays, and do other quite traditional written exercises. In addition, Hannes encourages class-discussions, and he occasionally shows films in class. This is quite sufficient variation, in Hannes’ view.

As the reader may recall, Agnes offers the fact that many pupils at her school have low motivation for theoretical subjects whereas they are much more interested in creative activities as an explanation of why she finds it sensible to sometimes let pupils draw instead of write, or to combine the two activities. For several reasons, Agnes believes this to be a good method in her classes, and more efficient than very

theoretically oriented ones. Also Daniel, Jórunn and Fjóla have a firm belief in creative methods. These three all teach at general studies schools, as does Hannes. Why, then, does Hannes not share this view?

Hannes' descriptions of his pupils are not very different from those of the other teachers, and as far as I can judge, Hannes' pupils are not fundamentally different from the other teachers' pupils. In fact, Hannes claims to have noticed that "pupils have changed", notably in the direction of lower motivation and inattentiveness. He reflects that

[i]t used to be easier back in my student days. It was far easier in those days to give short lectures. But now that is far more difficult. And if one talks for too long, pupils can't be bothered to pay attention, you know. So although they don't necessarily start talking to each other or to disturb, it's easy to tell that after merely three or four minutes, then they are in fact tired of listening. So I just... well, I simply tell them: "Now I have told you about this...", often I will also have announced the subject in advance: "Now I'm going to tell you about..." some subject.... And then I have some exercises for you afterwards. (...) And then they start working. And I look it over afterwards.

The quote demonstrates that Hannes' regard of his pupils is not very different from that of the other teachers. On the other hand, Hannes on several occasions describes *his own* interest and particularly his knowledge of the subject matter as well above average, also when compared to fellow mother tongue teachers, and still, almost forty years after he taught his first class, Hannes is eager to impart any amount of this knowledge to his pupils. "Naturally, I've read a hundred times more than they have," Hannes says. He regards himself a knowledgeable person, and feels an obligation to let his pupils benefit from his knowledge. Regarding his colleagues, he has noticed that

a teacher who doesn't hold a BA in Icelandic, not to mention a master's degree, well, he has no leg to stand on. He simply hasn't sufficient overview, you know, over literary history and... he's not as well educated in linguistics or in the subject's other disciplines. So... while to me, teaching in upper

secondary school is something I take in my stride. And my knowledge is hopefully far, far more extensive than what is required for teaching at this level. These young people. As far as that goes. However, all knowledge is of use. Some time or other. Now and then and throughout the year.

These are but a couple of examples of how Hannes, to quite a different degree than the other teachers regards himself an academic. Thus, when he enters the classroom, he does so as a scholar, if also as a teacher.

Hannes both holds a master's degree in Icelandic and a Ph.D. degree in an additional discipline. He is by far the best educated of the teachers, and although he has not been working in academia after graduating as a Ph.D., he has been in touch with the educational field also when working in the private sector. All in all, Hannes' *habitus* might well be regarded that of an academic. Indeed, it seems to be so to the degree that where the others so strongly emphasis linguistic skills, Hannes speaks little of such matters and more of instilling pupils an interest in the subject matter and in learning in general. After all, one is employed as a public instructor, Hannes states. "And one's trying to *inform* them. To arouse their interest and simply to motivate them to receptivity towards that information." This is an aim Hannes maintains, regardless of the experience he shares with the other teachers, that pupils sometimes lack motivation, ambitions, and stamina, and so one could perhaps claim that Hannes displays his academic *habitus* also in refusing to immolate his relatively traditional academic professional wise and to resort for example to an activity learning oriented one, perhaps more similar to those promoted in general teacher education.

Furthermore, Hannes' academic *habitus* may be recognized in the display of a strong confidence which allows the professional with thorough knowledge of her field, the privilege of certain humbleness which an insecure teacher would hardly permit himself:

H: I realized at a very early stage... actually as early as in my first year of teaching, that no one knows everything, and it's of little use to pretend that one does.

I: Well, that sounds like a fairly good strategy? To simply admit it?

H: It is. Definitely a good thing to take note of that, I reckon. And even if I may be an expert of Scandinavian philology, well, there still is a lot that I... I've often said that "I need to look it up!" And I've told them: "I've done all kinds of textual work and... on my own behalf and I've also assisted others. All sorts of textual work. And still I *often* need to look things up in dictionaries! Not just English... or Danish and Norwegian and German. Even *Icelandic* dictionaries!" I've told them: "Occasionally there are *Icelandic* words that I'm not fully clear about. I'm maybe uncertain of their meaning and... old perhaps or... and then I look them up." Indeed. Everybody needs to know this. To realize that... we are merely human beings. And don't know everything. Not at all.

As for the theory of Hannes being out of tune with didactic trends, this is in fact not an altogether improbable explanation, for Hannes has spent more of his working life outside classrooms than inside them. The position at School 5 is a temporary one; Hannes has stepped in for one year to fill a part-time vacancy. On the other hand, Hannes' other jobs have related to the field of education, and so, he claims to have a very broad network within the sector, he has also recently attended the teacher training programme, and he has, after all, from his student's days and up to the point of the interview every now and then temporarily returned to teaching. Hannes is in other words very familiar with teaching and with educational trends. In sum, this might indicate that Hannes has either deliberately chosen his teachment style, that he is conservative and prefers to stick to familiar, well tried methods, or that he does not find it worthwhile to change his methodology since he is employed for merely one year – that his heart is only partly in what he does.

Hannes himself does not express himself regarding matters of convenience. They may and may not be part of the grounds for his choices. For a choice it seems to be. For example, Hannes repeatedly underscores the importance of "talking to pupils". This is not as much a question of talking privately with them as it is a question of class talks, and it seems safe to regard this "talking to pupils" as Hannes' way of dealing with social challenges, which Hannes partly judges to bear the stamp of our

time. He speaks of how many pupils are unused to talking to adults, how many parents are too busy to actually talk to their children, how many teenagers have been brought up in material abundance, yet in relative intellectual scarcity, and how they are consequently unaccustomed to reflective reasoning and relational consideration. One of Hannes' explicit aims is to rectify some of these deficiencies, for example by talking directly to pupils, and by talking about subject matters in ways that make pupils see the larger picture, and that at best make them capable of relating this larger picture to their own reality. Whether he succeeds in his intention or whether all this talking just makes pupils passive, as Daniel believes, is not easy to estimate from my material. What is evident is that "talking to pupils" in the case of Hannes is a method chosen deliberately, based on the conviction that it will have effect. This conviction appears to be not very different from the well-known Danish bishop N.F.S. Grundtvig's belief in "the living word" ("N.F.S. Grundtvig," 2014). Grundtvig's educational ideas influenced all the countries that in his day were under the Danish crown and continued to do so long after his death in 1872. Perhaps the parallel is incidental, yet it may also be that Hannes is an example of a continued influence even up to our day.

Returning to Hannes, it may furthermore seem as though a combination of the conviction that one should talk more to pupils, as Hannes himself would say, and his academic *habitus* is constitutional for his belief in sticking to giving talks rather than taking up the activity based methods the others swear by. His thorough knowledge of the academic field of Icelandic language and literature seems to allow Hannes to really excel in the style he has made his own. This is evident even in the interview. Even there he is a fountainhead of anecdotes and facts, and nobody would doubt that he is at home in the subject.

Hannes' teaching methods seem to be more conservative than the didactical approach that may be identified in the rest of the group. However, this does not necessarily mean that Hannes disagrees with the others' basic educational values, and thus it may be that for example Elín, who distances herself very explicitly from the

traditional monologist teachment after all in some respects has more in common with Hannes than with the other expressed opponents of monologist teachment or traditional lecturing when it comes to practice. For instance, Elín declares that one of her favourite teaching methods is to seize the opportunities which present themselves in everyday classroom life, to use spontaneous questions and comments from the pupils as basis of a topical discussion, and I recall her example of how for example questions about the Old Norse Edda poetry or about a specific word have led to such discussions. I repeat the story about the letter “z”, previously related in Chapter 6.2: “Once it was even one single letter! The letter “z”. Why this z? What is its origin? I’ll instantly catch the ball, of course, and *presto!* we are in the midst of language history! I grasp such moments, without giving my original plan for the lesson a single thought.” In other words, just like Hannes, Elín improvises, and like him, she believes in what might be termed “dialogic teachment”, i.e. with interplay with pupils. They both see improvisation as an act of forthcomingness and attentiveness, a way of communicating with pupils, a way of motivating them and so a way of promoting learning. Actually, it is in my view especially in their dialogism and in improvisation as a means to reach such dialogism that Hannes and Elín reveal themselves as very confident professionals, both as teachers and as academics; improvisation on an academic basis is not easy unless one has thorough knowledge of the subject. In addition, one needs a solid pedagogical platform, for example in the shape of experience, to have the courage to let go of the (sense of) control that a strict plan represents. Probably, personal factors are at stake as well. Due to what has already been said, it seems reasonable to assume that improvisation be a method more preferred among self-confident and experienced teachers than by inexperienced or insecure ones.

Daniel – a pronounced advocate for activity based teaching

I let Daniel serve as the second main example of polyphony within the group because he in certain respects seems to represent the other extreme along the line where Hannes might be said to represent the first one, both with regard to professional wise

and to teachment. For instance, whereas Hannes pays methodology little interest, Daniel takes a very keen interest in didactics, and whereas the open, improvising style represents some sort of ideal to Hannes, Daniel reports his lessons to be full of buzzing activity, yet strictly conducted by the teacher. Moreover, Hannes' paternal and confident manner is a contrast to Daniel's eager enthusiasm. Indeed, even their logs seem indicative of the contrasts in style: While Daniel's is both the most copious and the most orderly and systematic of all the logs, Hannes' is definitely the shortest and most careless one.

Daniel stands as some sort of a liberal rationalist or perhaps a utilitarian educationalist. The aim is that everybody is kept active, and so everyone will learn *something*, even if the interested minority may perhaps not learn as much as they would otherwise do. It seems that Daniel's professional ideals above all relate to teachment, of which he talks with great enthusiasm. He wants his classes to be filled with activities and with vigour. He wants dialogue with his pupils; but in stating this, he means something quite different than what Hannes means by "talking to pupils". It is evident from his descriptions that in Daniel's case, the dialogue is primarily a practical-didactic one, and that he is considerably less concerned with general education than Hannes is.

Like the other teachers, Daniel prefers to talk about teachment. Daniel is particularly preoccupied with what I have termed "the station model", which is by a long way his own invention. It seems worthwhile to take a closer look at what Daniel says about the station model, both because this model represents an alternative to other methods described in the material, and because it seems indicative of Daniel's professional wise.

Daniel explains that the station model has its roots in his noticing that traditional methods made most pupils passive and inattentive. He set out to find a way to activate them, and ended up with the station model, which he still elaborates in order to improve it and make it suitable in other disciplines than literature, where it has so

far been most successful. The station model is intended as an alternative to regular lecturing. It is a kind of group work model, where each so-called station represents a specific activity related to the literary text the class is currently reading. Examples of activities may be illustration, discussion and making notes to the text. Daniel says that

pupils have sometimes been dropping hints. Suggesting that it would be nice if I'd agree to give the occasional overview talk, pointing out the main points. (...) But I simply disagree with them. Because I think... well, then *I* play the leading part again, somehow. The one who tells them what's important and what is not. For... well, it's just so interesting to see what *they* notice.

So far, Daniel is very satisfied with this method. "We make very good use of the time this way," he states, and contrasts it to his previous traditional monologist teaching, which he now judges as having been a waste of time to most pupils. Among its advantages he mentions that the new method stimulates pupils to work independently, that it is an easy way of varying teachment, that there is cooperation within the groups, and that the teacher is much more at leisure to attend to pupils when he is not "chained to the blackboard" any more. "And there is such a vigorous atmosphere in the classroom!" Daniel adds. "I really enjoy that." As for the question whether pupils learn what they are supposed to learn by means of this model, Daniel declares that he permits himself to disregard that. This statement seems to indicate that the didactic experiment as such is as important to Daniel as the learning outcome. This may be regarded a view very far from the professional stands I expected to find among upper secondary school teachers.

Daniel's descriptions of the station model demonstrate that he whole-heartedly supports activity oriented learning, whilst equally whole-heartedly rejecting monologist teachment. However, just like in his colleagues' accounts, it is evident both in the interview with Daniel and in his log that there is certain discrepancy between the non-monologist ideal and what is practiced. The log strongly indicates that also Daniel's lessons be a mixture of (monologist) instructions and lectures, on

the one hand, and various student activities on the other, despite the strong non-monologist stand. Both Daniel and other activity oriented informants voice this dilemma; although they have a strong belief in activity based learning, they nevertheless find it necessary to instruct and lecture part of the time. For instance, Daniel reports that he, despite the faith he has in the station model, presently finds himself more willing to provide overviews over a specific text or subject matter in the shape of a lecture than he used to be when he first introduced this model. This adapted model is also more in understanding with pupils' wishes, he states.

Daniel primarily uses the station model in literature education in the students' second year in upper secondary school. In addition he has introduced other models based on the same principles; that pupils should be allowed to influence their learning, for example by having the possibility to make some choices, and independent student activity also in the higher classes. Daniel for example describes an ingenious system for hand-ins, where pupils are allowed a certain degree of co-writing, where they may even skip a paper or two as long as they have filled the minimum quota. Daniel hands out plans for the entire course at the beginning of each term, which he also shares with his colleagues, and he has a consistent system for hand-ins and tests. There are also special arrangements for how pupils may improve grades even after having handed in homework, provided they actually improve their text in accordance with the teacher's corrections and comments. I could go on recounting examples, but think the point is already proven: Daniel appears to be a very systematic teacher. Behind his very energetic appearance ("The kids find that I'm always rushing ahead!"), one may perceive a very methodical and laborious professional, for Daniel's courses are directed in minute detail, his systems are so thoroughly prepared and his following up is so exhaustive that he must spend a considerable amount of time on both. This is how he describes himself, and his log is in keeping with this description.

Daniel's evaluation practice, including various systems and routines for pupils' handing-in homework, and his own following-up of such work, provide an additional example of Daniel's meticulousness. Daniel himself speaks of this in rather utilitarian

terms; methodicalness is regarded a means to achieve “the greatest happiness of the greatest number” (Bentham, Burns, & Hart, [1776] 1988, p. 3), which in this context might be translated into “the greatest knowledge of the greatest number”. This is illustrated for example by Daniel’s arguments in favour of rationality, for instance when talking about how he thinks the teacher should use his time sensibly for the benefit for pupils: “The station model allows the teacher to be much more flexible than traditional lecturing does, and I find this a boon. It’s easier to pay attention to what’s really going on in the classroom and to give individual advice.” Also in agreement with his professional code, Daniel makes considerable efforts to accommodate and improve pupils’ learning conditions. At the same time he is reluctant to taking on the role of general educationalist. However, just as he expresses reluctance towards taking on the role of promoter of the national heritage and of the traditional lecturer, there seem to be discrepancies between how Daniel describes himself as a professional and what he apparently actually does. In this case, there are several demonstrations of how he sometimes acts as a general educationalist, although he officially refuses to take this part. I am not at this claiming that Daniel’s self-descriptions are false, and this is indeed not what I think. I believe that they are intended as sincere descriptions of himself as a professional. Yet, our practical life is more than our understanding of ourselves, and so, the descriptions of the actual practice do, when collated with the self-descriptions, give a broader understanding than a self-description on the one hand or practice observation on the other would reveal. In a collation, the complexity becomes more evident.

In addition, Daniel explains and exemplifies how he is constantly reflecting on what he is doing and considering how he may improve the courses he teaches:

D: These days I’m pretty satisfied with much of what I do, and the kids are satisfied too, but naturally I still want to continue to elaborate my teaching. Of course I do.

I: Yes. There are some reflections about this in your log too.

D: Yes, there are. About these matters.

I: And maybe something about how you... what you do about their papers?

D: Right! Exactly. I do... well, I have developed a system there as well. After the intranet was introduced here at School 2... well, I use that a lot. Actually, I'm probably among the teachers who use it most. In this school. Anyway, I really use it a lot. I both put everything I hand out in class at the intranet, and pupils hand in all their homework electronically. So really... well tests, such as the orthography test we talked about... these days I'm pondering on how I may possibly do that differently. Basically, that's the only thing that I have still not changed. Everything else I read electronically. And I comment it electronically too (...).

Daniel does, in short, seem to be very engaged in his work, yet it is quite clear that subject didactics rather than Icelandic as an academic subject be his chief sphere of interest and so, by contrast to Hannes, Daniel is among the teachers who makes relatively little of his Icelandic studies:

Well, the Icelandic studies... oh, well of course I make use of my knowledge of the subject and the texts and so on. Still, I somehow think... well, that experience hasn't come of particular use with regard to *teaching*. I mean... very few of the teachers at the department of Icelandic, at the university, that is, have some sort of educational theory. Chiefly, they simply lecture and... well, you know. But of course, what I learned there has been useful as a knowledge base in the subject I teach. Still, I don't think it has *formed* my teaching. As a professional background.

Comparing the extremes and framing of the in-between

As has been shown, there are discernible disparities between Daniel and Hannes. The differences concern both teaching and wise. In the introduction to the current section I stated that contrast may be used to throw impressions into relief and thereby to make them more distinct. This was my reason to present Hannes' and Daniel's diverging voices. As they could at the same time be claimed to be the extremes on the line of accounts, had I presented them thus, these two accounts also in some sense

frame the practices and views presented in the material. The others' views and practices may in most cases be placed between those of Daniel and Hannes. This goes for emphasis on skills and on academic knowledge, for didactic ideals and general education ideals, for attitude and relations to students, and for professional ethic code. In the following, I briefly compare Hannes and Daniel with regard to these points without referring explicitly to the others, but conclude each point with a general comment on how the others' views may be placed in relation to those of Hannes and Daniel.

Practical skills and academic knowledge

I have dealt thoroughly with the teachers' views on the subject matter, specifically on practical skills and academic knowledge above. To relate the general impression to the comparison between Daniel and Hannes, one may simply state that the difference between them is relatively small with concern at this point. Although Hannes evidently emphasizes academic knowledge more than Daniel does, one could nevertheless in metaphorical terms say that the imaged line between Daniel and Hannes is short with regard to their views on practical skills and academic knowledge.

Didactics and general education

The teachers' reflections on teachment/didactics and general education have also been thoroughly discussed. Roughly, one might say that Daniel on the one hand stands as the most eager spokesman for activity oriented and innovative teachment, but at the other hand expresses certain reticence towards the general education aims. By contrast, Hannes thinks that contributing to general education, such as raising historical consciousness among students as a means to enable them to deal with current personal, national, political and national matters, is among the aims of public education. At the same time, Hannes is academically oriented, and so his professional aims relate both to the subject matter and to general education. Generally speaking, one might say that if two lines are drawn; one which measures emphasis on specific

teachment and another which measures emphasis on general education, Daniel stands as some sort of an ideal with regard to teachment and didactics, while Hannes is in a similar position with regard to general education. In other words, the other teachers tend to orient themselves in Daniel's direction with regard to teachment, while their views on general education resemble Hannes'.

Attitudes to students and professional ethic code

Although he neither describes himself as "strict", nor as "friendly", Hannes frequently refers to the general education part of teachers' work in normative terms, and his opinion in this matter is clear. In brief, he finds it necessary to have certain classroom rules, yet these rules are simple, and they are not numerous. They are simply set to make the working condition in the classroom acceptable, and not grounded in intricate pedagogic theories, he explains. By contrast to Daniel's elaborate systems, Hannes generally leaves the responsibility for handing in homework, paying attention in class etc. to the students; he finds it sufficient to explain the consequences if students fail to do as is expected of them, and does not see any need for detailed rules or punishment, since he holds that getting lower grades than one's gifts imply, or worse, getting no grade at all, is punishment enough. Just as his belief in "talking to pupils" is a means of taking students seriously, this, too, is in Hannes' view a way to trust them and take them in earnest. To me, it seems that this is a reasoning Hannes can allow himself because he stands as a confident teacher with little need to justify his methods or his views.

Daniel, on the other hand, expresses more of a matter of fact-relation to his students: In the daily practice of teachment, he is the teacher, employed to teach a specific subject, and the students are his students. That is more or less all there is to it. At this, it is evident that Daniel takes his job seriously and indeed makes considerable effort to create a stimulating and motivating learning environment. However, Daniel does not consider himself a general educationalist. He is reluctant to the assignment of general education; at any rate, this is what he says, and in all likelihood also what he

thinks. In actuality, however, there are many statements which indicate that he nevertheless often *acts* as a general educationalist. For example, he talks to some length about teaching pupils to take responsibility, that they must “learn to work”, and that he tries to make them realize that their learning outcome to a high degree is up to themselves, a fact which he finds is plainly demonstrated for example in his arrangement that pupils in his classes have the opportunity to improve their marks simply by thorough following-up of their homework. Yet, Daniel does not talk of anything that resembles empowerment or autonomy, as the other teachers do. Teaching his courses and meeting the demands of the curriculum is what Daniel considers his task. At this, Daniel is also reluctant to promoting the national heritage as part of students’ general education or *Bildung*. “I teach the classics simply as high quality literature,” he declares. “It’s *they* [the pupils] who insist on these books being part of something particularly Icelandic,” he insists, while nevertheless furnishing motives which may easily be recognized as closely related to standard arguments in the national debate about tending of the national language when he speaks of literacy education and about teaching elementary linguistics, and thus to *Bildung*.

So while Hannes is concerned about pupils’ needs as young people living in Iceland in late modernity and hence talks at some length about general education, Daniel sees his pupils first and foremost as students and less as individuals, although he strongly emphasizes his wish to treat them with respect. This honour code includes reliability, predictability, reasonability, and candour. As Daniel describes his stand with regard to his pupils, it may be interpreted as sympathetic, yet matter-of-factly. His wise might thus be considered dominated by teachment and subject related aims in a relatively narrow sense, whereas general education plays a minor part. In keeping with his stand, Daniel for instance emphasizes the importance of being in dialogue with pupils which, it becomes clear, means something very different from Hannes’ belief in “talking to pupils”. When Hannes says that he wants “talk to” his students, it is rooted e.g. in his impression that parents generally have little time for their youngsters and talk far too little to them. Hannes takes it upon himself to be an adult

person who can and will have conversations with the young people he meet, particularly those he meets at work. Hannes' purpose is to have an ongoing *gebildende*, reflective, indeed a Socratic, conversation with them, and he expresses concern for his pupils as individuals. This all relates to Hannes' description of what he considers teachers' concerns and responsibility. Hannes sees teachers as "public educators", which implies that "there is no profession as important as teaching", and teachers' commission as educators (Icel. *kennarahlutverkið*) is definitely one to be taken seriously. While definitely relating to *Bildung*, this aim also may be understood to involve human compassion and commitment.

By contrast, in Daniel's classroom, the dialogue is didactically oriented intended to address curricular topics, and when he talks about moral qualities, the reflections are directed to himself and how he should behave as a professional. There is, therefore, a strong element of self-observation in remarks which relate to this matter, whereas the others tend to relate (the necessity of possessing) moral qualities of this kind as much to the other party, i.e. to pupils and their needs and rights as such and as human beings, as to themselves and their professional code of ethics.

The other teachers are apt to agree with Hannes in his views on general education. In principle, they also tend to share his attitudes to students, but it may seem as though they in their day to day practice to a greater or lesser degree follow a course more resembling Daniel's than their descriptions at first sight indicate.

Professional style as a mixture of various elements

To sum up the contrast between Daniel and Hannes, it seems as though Daniel's methodological and systematic approach makes him a well-organized, predictable teacher. Although Daniel's classes are varied and full of activities, the pupils will invariably know what to expect, whereas Hannes' more traditional teachment in some respects stands as more unpredictable. His anecdotic style, his sudden excursions to current issues, his capricious comparisons; although Hannes declares that he has a purpose with it all, this may not always seem as clear to his pupils. In this respect,

too, Daniel and Hannes seem to constitute the extremes, while the others are positioned somewhere in between. A couple emphasize orderliness and organization, like Daniel, while others point to the advantages of “seizing the opportunities, like Hannes. However, elements of both strategies may be identified in all accounts, so there is just a difference of degree as to what is esteemed more highly, and these differences may well be the result of a mixture of components: personality and inclination, frame conditions, principles, and theoretical influences.

7.7 To keep balance between institutional demands and students’ individual requirements

Sociological versus philosophical-anthropological perspectives on the teachers’ auto-narratives and self-understanding

In Chapter 6.3 I wondered why teachment is so central. Related to Figure 5, the question might be rephrased to: Why do reflections on teachment, the school subject and cultural values dominate over reflections on personal elements in the narratives? One possible response is that although this seems to be the case, it is not necessarily so. At least in Bourdieu’s understanding, talking about practical matters will often be our way of talking about more abstract entities, such as our understanding of our (occupational) self. It is often when agents talk about concrete experiences, about what they have known and seen that one gets access to aspects of their ethos, including underlying values and convictions. Furthermore, as such values and convictions are in Bourdieu’s view often misrecognized anyway, going through accounts about specific experiences will often provide access to a fuller understanding of the practice and the practitioner(s) one is trying to comprehend (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990; 1999b, pp. 607-626; Callewaert, 2004). From this point of view, the focus on lived experiences and practical episodes seems reasonable, and as stories about concrete experiences moreover are regarded the gateway to understanding a specific reasoning or *habitus*, there is every reason to pay them thorough attention.

In the previous I have stated that teaching is at the centre of the teachers' attention and interest. It is obvious, however, that not only the didactic *how*, but also the *what* (cf. Figure 7) is a matter of interest. For the teachers evidently emphasize certain topics and skills far more than others. As has been demonstrated, there is for example a particular stress on linguistic skills - whereas for example general linguistics is paid less attention. It is difficult to tell for sure why the teachers seem to be more concerned about the linguistic competencies or linguistic skills than about other curricular aims, and any suggestion on my behalf will be uncertain. Yet, the teachers themselves provide some possible explanations, the main of which (both in the logs and the interviews) is that there simply is a great demand for training of basic literacy and oracy competencies. As the teachers themselves explain: To ask pupils to account for, say, characters and plot in an Icelandic family saga, is of little use if even reading the text causes quite a few pupils in the class difficulties, or if many pupils' writing skills are so insufficient that they have great difficulties writing a tolerably coherent text, as the teachers claim to be the case. How may they then be expected to account for the topic given, not to speak of complicated texts? Thus, as the teachers reason, it is absolutely necessary to strengthen the basic skills, both in order to render teaching of the literary works in the curriculum possible and because such competencies are of essential importance in a society where everybody reads and writes more than ever before, regardless their social status or profession. Through the latter argument, basic competencies are tied to democratic values such as autonomy and citizenship, which are expressly regarded very important by the teachers. Some even state explicitly that although they do their best to get through as many of the course description's (theoretical) subject matter aims as possible, they to some extent prioritize the basic competencies on the expense of the course aims because they regard such competencies absolutely crucial – and knowing that they will not be able to get through all the course aims anyway.

This means that even if the teachers' expressed aim is to be faithful to the curriculum and teach the aims stated in the respective course descriptions, there still seems to

exist a more or less tacit understanding that this loyalty may be counterbalanced with the students' most urgent needs as well as with democratic values, towards which teachers also have some obligations through the general part of the curriculum. As the above examples show, this understanding leaves its traces in the logs' accounts and explanations of the respective lessons' teaching objectives. I believe that this displays a glimpse of a certain educational practice, which I take to be a cultural-professional rather than an idiosyncratic one, as various examples of it may be identified in all the logs, and moreover in all the interviews, even if the interviews also show more clearly than the logs that the points of efforts vary to some extent.

One possible interpretation of such a practice is that the teachers sense a certain tension between their role as institutional representatives for the educational system and their role as individual practitioners – the latter very likely closely connected to what might be termed the teachers general understanding of themselves as persons (or “agents”, in the present terminology). Provided Taylor's anthropology, as social agents, we are relational beings, prone to interact with each other. Thinking with Taylor, one would assume that the teachers therefore will be inclined to find it purposeful and thus important to meet their students' requirements. In this understanding, it makes sense that the teachers seem to adapt to actual conditions, for example in emphasizing the need for and importance of teaching practical skills when it proves difficult to pursue the more theoretical oriented curricular aims.

In a Bourdieuan perspective, I would regard it a double practice when teachers declare themselves loyal to the course descriptions, yet apparently accomplish their task as they find it most suitable, considering the circumstances - an important part of the participating teachers' practical sense. Phrased somewhat differently, one could in Aristotelian terms speak of a practical wisdom developed by the skilled practitioner, and thus accentuate even the moral aspect of practical skills and social action. Aristotelian practical wisdom relates to *hexis* (Aristotle, 2002, VI, 5), which in turn strongly resembles Bourdieuan *habitus* (Callewaert, 1997, pp. 137-146). In addition to accentuating the habitual aspect of practice, both terms acknowledge individuals'

ability to adapt to prevailing conditions, and this is precisely how I interpret the apparently self-contradictory statements about institutional loyalty on the one hand and about class-room practices which are not solely focused on the curricular descriptions of the respective courses after all, since “it is impossible to cover the entire curriculum anyway”, on the other.

However, as has been shown above, there is more than one reason why the teachers find covering the entire curriculum an insuperable task: In addition to the curriculum’s extensive reading lists, there is the matter of pupils’ skills, which the teachers often find deficient, and their alleged (in many cases) limited motivation. Facing such challenges, the teachers appear to put the practical concerns before the curricular demands, apparently without having any sense of neglecting their duties. It is possible to interpret this as a sign of the teachers’ sense of professional autonomy; while not indicating that they have any intension of sidestepping the curriculum or other formal criteria, the teachers still feel to be quite within their rights to prioritize, at least within the limits of the national (non-course specific) curriculum. In such an interpretation, it seems reasonable to judge the teachers’ professional self-esteem as fairly good. They demonstrate confidence in their own judgments and act as much in agreement with these as with formal demands. While such independence has often been seen as characterizing experienced practitioners (e.g. H. L. Dreyfus et al., 1986; Lave & Wenger, 1991), even the most inexperienced teacher in the current material talks about such considerations; a fact which may indicate that the self-esteem is institutional, as it were, and belongs to the professional discourse as such. Furthermore, this interpretation is in agreement with the professional wisdom approach which I discuss in the paragraph “Morality and meaning” below.

In the present study, the teachers’ practice philosophy is based on practical grounds, yet it seems that it also relates to their individual habitual standing, and thus in the last resort to morality. Provided that this be a tenable interpretation, the sociologically oriented analysis of teachment and its prominent position in the teachers’ narratives proves insufficient because it tends to understate the consequence of personal and

culturally shared sense of morality as part of our understanding of humanity and the human condition. However, this is an ill measurable entity, particularly as it will often be part of the individual's tacit understanding of himself and his own being in the world, a topic that is not much discussed in reflexive sociology, the sociological perspective I draw on in the present work. What it *does* discuss, however, is our experience of meaningfulness, which I consider closely related to moral concepts, such as that of "a good life". Yet, in this specific sociological view, even our understanding of meaning and meaningfulness may be regarded ultimately a product of the individual's socio-cultural conditions, cf. chapter 7 in Bourdieu's *Distinction*, where he discusses how and why we choose "the necessary", as he words it (Bourdieu, 1984).

In the current context, Bourdieu's explanatory model has proved a tenable approach in attempting to understand and explain the dominance of teachment in the teachers' narratives. However, in the interpretation of the teachers' occupational self-images, it seems that certain elements, in particular those relating to morality, elude the model. There did, in short, seem to be a need for complementing the habitus theory which proved useful in the above interpretation of the dominance of teachment, and so it appeared necessary to discuss other aspects than the sociological ones drawn up in Bourdieu's theory.

By contrast to Bourdieu's habitus-as-result-of-necessity argument, Taylor and other philosophers argue that although socio-cultural conditions are of considerable importance in the individual's development of a self, there are nevertheless some "perennial features of the self", as Taylor phrases it. We are, for example, "inherently moral entities", since "selves are always situated in moral space" (Abbey, 2000, p. 56). In a Taylorian view, a choosing-the-necessary-explanation will therefore be deficient. Taylor writes:

I believe that what we are as human agents is profoundly interpretation-dependent, that human beings in different cultures can be radically diverse, in

keeping with their fundamentally different self-understandings. But I think that a constant is to be found in the shape of the questions that all cultures must address. (Taylor, 1988, p. 111)

Units in the constant to which Taylor here refers are for instance a need for meaningfulness, which we predicate of our life stories, and a subsequent close connection between morality and identity (Abbey, 2000, p. 38; Taylor, 1989, Part I). These are views Taylor shares with Aristotle (cf. the below paragraph “Meaning and morality”), who also regards meaningfulness part of human goods, and so, in Aristotelian terms, of virtuous living. This should imply that in any reasonably satisfied individual’s autobiography and self-understanding, meaning and meaningfulness will play a part. I have indicated that the teachers’ self-reported focal turn from academic issues to practical teaching may be interpreted in this perspective.

However, it is not altogether clear whether the fundamental motive for this turn relates to morality and altruism, or is basically an attempt to meet the individual narrator’s personal need for meaning, which in Taylor’s view is indeed in itself as crucial as it is legitimate, since “in order to make minimal sense of our lives, in order to have an identity, we need an orientation to the good” (Taylor, 1989, p. 47). Taylor furthermore holds the narratives about our own lives to be the gateway to self-understanding: “My self-understanding necessarily (...) incorporates narrative” (Taylor, 1989, p. 50), and he concludes that “I see these conditions as connected facets of the same reality, inescapable structural requirements of human agency” (Taylor, 1989, p. 52). If I see the teachers’ narratives against this Taylorian backdrop, I rather suspect that the narratives may to a considerable degree concern these agents’ attempts to make sense of their (professional) lives. This does not mean that I hold statements about, say, how it feels rewarding when a student who has somehow struggled through upper secondary school finally graduates, to be in any sense untrue. Nevertheless, such stories may serve a more complex purpose than what is evident at first hearing. At a general level, they are edifying stories about how even ill-

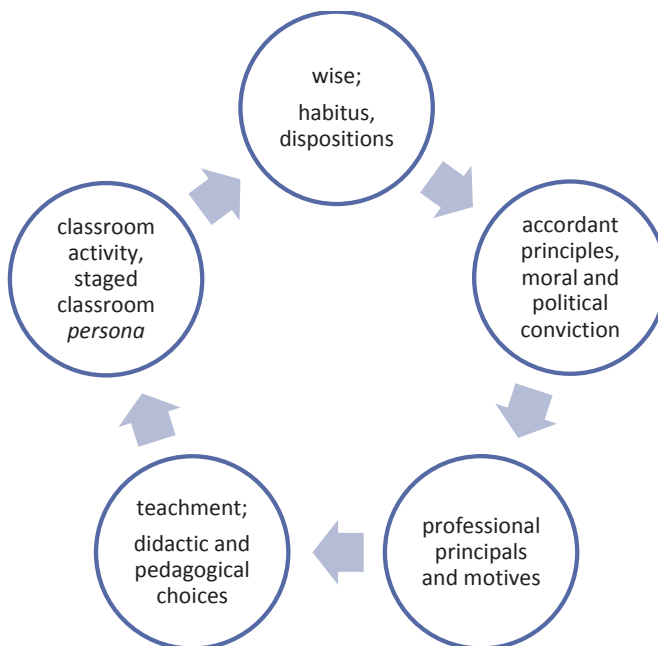
motivated students may reach their aim. To the teacher, they are moreover elevating stories about how she may actually make a difference to pupils, and about, so saying, how challenging, yet important (and so meaningful) teachers' work in fact is. At this, such stories at the same time serve as examples of what could be termed teacher morality, including the capacity of being affected by other people's lives and of altruism as part of this, and as significant in the sense-giving narratives of the teachers' own lives; demonstrations of how what they do is good and meaningful.

The reason why I reckon the latter to be at a high degree at stake is the fact that stories with other-oriented motives tend to be relatively general. As a matter of fact, while stories about teachment to a high degree dominate the narratives, not a single specific teacher – pupil episode is related. There are numerous generalized stories about a collective “they”; pupils as a category, and the teachers' impressions of them and aims on their behalf. There are also more specific, yet depersonalized incidents where “some” did this and “others” said that. In addition, there are hypothetical cases where the teachers refer to imaginary pupils, such as the above related example where Fjóla constructs a conversation with the imaginary Sunna. Yet, as noted, there are no real stories about individual pupils in the material, although the teachers between them have taught thousands of pupils. Above I have pointed to possible structural explanations of this. Here I may add that an accessional explanation may be that stories that display teachers' favourably inclination to their students as inherent to their wise could be regarded an expression of what Taylor calls “the ethic of benevolence” (Taylor, 1989). For while the lack of stories about actual pupils fits badly into the teachers' self-concept of themselves as relation oriented and concerned with their pupils' welfare, the more general descriptions of such values become understandable, given Taylor's explanation of the relationship between the good, meaningfulness, and the role of narratives in human self-interpretation.

Teaching as praxis

In the teachers' declarations about how they have come to find teachment more interesting than further studies of Icelandic (as an academic subject), one may recognize a Taylorian need for seeing one's own life as meaningful. At the same time, I find that both general statements of this kind, and the large number of specific descriptions of teachment suggest that teaching at this level in the education system should be considered a practice in a Bourdieuan as well as a Taylorian meaning of the term, for teaching is something one acts and lives, and only actually lived teaching may be interpreted and induced meaning. At this, the narratives about change and development in the course of their career may also be considered stories about how a practice was adopted and gradually incorporated. Figure 8 is intended to illustrate this process.

Figure 8: Development of teachers' professional persona



It seems pretty clear from the narratives that the practice of teaching is a condition for which the teachers were fairly unprepared as they started their career – perhaps partly due to the fact that they were educated as academics, i.e. that they were not primarily trained as teachers, but as scholars of Icelandic. Thus, the strong accentuating of individuality, for example in stories about autodidacticism; how the individual teacher feels that she has travelled the journey from novice to confident teacher on her own, may be understood in this light. However, as practice little by little becomes habitualized, it at the same time becomes part of the “I”, the agent’s identity, and so of the narrative about the self which, according to Taylor, we tell and interpret, and then retell and reinterpret, time and again. Provided that Taylor’s assumption that our sense of meaning relates directly to the life we actually live is right, there must be a close connection between practice, meaning and meaningfulness. Expressed slightly differently, one might say that lest the individual teacher tells the narrative about her practice in a way which demonstrates that what she does is meaningful, she may easily come to doubt what she is doing.

Yet, the Taylorian focus on morality and meaning should not imply disregard of structural conditions, such as power relationships or the impact of organizational perspectives. Rather, I find the philosophical and the sociological interpretational approach to complement each other and result in a “thicker understanding”, to take Clifford Geertz’ term (Geertz, 2000, Ch. 1) a step further. So, for example, while the teachers’ accentuating of how they have taken an increased interest in teaching makes sense in light of Taylor’s declaration that the universal need for understanding ourselves, cf. his statement that man be “a self-interpreting animal” (Taylor, 1985, Ch. 2), and his claim that we have a need for seeing meaning in the lives we lead (cf. Ch. 3.2), the sociological approach seems to have the capacity of displaying for instance mechanisms of structural adjustment as well as of reproduction, both among the teachers themselves and in the education of the coming generation.

Moreover, standing at the intersection between the two approaches, one may notice aspects of which one might have remained unaware if one had confined oneself to a

solitary perspective. In the present context this does for instance imply that I wonder how the fact that the teachers recurrently resort to moral categories (in a wide sense) should most adequately be interpreted. In a moral philosophical perspective, one might understand them as rather unambiguous expressions of judgement, of practical wisdom, and of the teachers' ongoing strive for the good (or benevolent, to relate to Taylor's understanding of the modern self) on their own as well as their pupils' behalf, whereas a sociological perspective might lead the interpreter to regard such incidents for example in a socio-structural power perspective. Thus, one could ask whether the teachers resort to (general) moral categories when there is little else at hand. The teachers do for example state educational aims which relate to qualities or properties associated with human goods, for instance with autonomy and democracy. But are these aims in actuality pursued in practical classroom life, or is the act of furnishing them as ultimate aims for one's educational practice a lofty, if consoling, wrapping which conceal other, more practical motives derived from everyday challenges in the classroom? When asking thus, one could for instance speculate whether appealing to morality is more an act of arrogating necessary authority than it is a matter of educational ideals relating for example to general education and *Bildung* than one might tend to believe at first sight. Moreover, one might in such a perspective wonder whether this, if it depicts the actual situation, is a condition of which the agents themselves are not fully aware; whether it is in fact misrecognized by them. If so, they may well truly reckon motivating and activating pupils as pedagogic principles, and so as strategies they have chosen simply in order to promote pupils' learning, although part of what they do within this framework does at the same time function as some sort of soft instrumentalism and disciplining which both defines the power relations in the classroom and at this contributes to make teachment practicable. If so, these strategies thereby also function as a means to reproduce such relationships in the educational system at large. As a matter of caution, I repeat the sociological point that this may all well take place even though the practitioners have never aimed at it, and may indeed well be unaware of the social forces at play. At this, one may also keep Taylor's analysis of *Bildung*, decorum, and

civility in mind. Although we tend to regard these notions highly desirable qualities, Taylor points out that they have historically nevertheless had the function of disciplining people, and so of serving the rulers (Taylor, 2004, Ch. 3).

In understanding with a critical sociological perspective, one might furthermore look closer into the autonomy motive. For while the teachers state pupils' autonomy as an aim in mother tongue education in upper secondary school, they also seem to aim at autonomy and integrity on their own behalf, as teachers. What, then, is the relation between, for instance, the teachers' self-reported lack of institutionalized training and the autonomy they have achieved? Are they more conscious of the need for autonomy because they started teaching without any thorough teacher training; without having been socialized into their future occupational field and its reasoning during their education? Is it possible that moral categories become particularly important to the teachers precisely because they have a strong sense of having had to develop their professional standing individually and on their own? Is it possible that general morality is what upper secondary school teachers have at hand when there is no prescribed way to take on the role for the neophyte, and when one does not, as is the case in some professions, become part of a working community where one may to begin with be allowed to be in the position of apprentice (cf. Lave & Wenger, 1991), but is left to one's own devices from the start? Or is autonomy a more individual process than social scientists tend to think? It is difficult to answer such questions in a qualitative study. Yet, since motives which may appear to concern autonomy and morality are so prominent in the material, there is reason to call attention to these themes.

However, there is also reason to point out that while they may be rooted in socio-structural conditions, it is not at all certain that these matters should be reduced to a mere product of social conditions. If one acknowledges claims as that of Taylor that man is by nature a moral being, one must also look into the consequences of this basic condition in any given context. In the present material, this does for example imply a double perspective on the teachers' self-descriptions: while they may be read

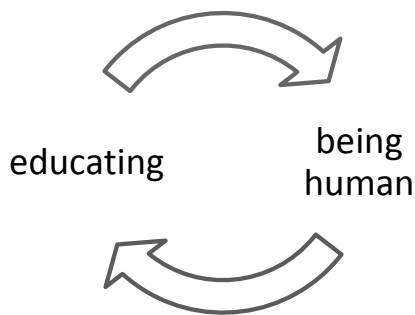
and interpreted as stories about professional positioning between university academics and general teachers in compulsory education, or about more or less recognized everyday challenges at work (e.g. regarding students' lack of motivation or the teachers' struggle for authority), they may at the same time be read as stories about the teachers' ongoing strive for meaningfulness. Statements about the importance of imparting the cultural heritage to the coming generation, about how the teachers are as much concerned about general education as much as about the subject's curriculum, or about how they make a point of treating their students kindly and considerately may well be understood as extortions of this strive.

7.8 Meaning and morality

Through such a close reading of the interviews and the logs as a hermeneutic interpretation requires, it has become clear that morality is a strong element in the teachers' concepts of their occupational self. Furthermore, it seems quite clear that normativity is a factor of importance. Thus, normativity is quite evidently an issue with regard to the teachers' schooling as well as their teachment: Their work is regulated through a set of administrative arrangements spanning from the Education Act and the subject curriculum to administrative structures at their local school. In addition, there are informal norms, such as the public expectations referred to by the teachers themselves and discourses both within the field of secondary education as well as that of Icelandic language and literature. In addition, there is the subfield of mother tongue education in upper secondary school, which can exist as a relatively autonomous one, on the one hand because Icelandic upper secondary school teachers generally teach only one subject and thus relate relatively little to other subjects in their daily work, and on the other hand, since Icelandic is a compulsory subject in all study programmes, the general tendency will be that Icelandic teachers are sufficiently many to constitute a separate group at individual schools where the "Icelandic teacher discourse", including both values and norms of its own, may be cultivated.

In addition to such external regulations and norms, the teachers' practices are conducted by personal values and beliefs. When referred to, these values and beliefs are sometimes warranted by references to didactics or general learning theory, yet they may just as well be regarded part of an partly shared, partly personal ethos on which the teachers seem to stand firmly. This seems to relate both to their perspective on humanity and their understanding of their role as "public educators"; factors which are correlative to each other in a similar way as the part relates to the whole in the hermeneutic circle, as illustrated in Figure 9.

Figure 9: Educating and moral being



The teachers' ethos appears to be interwoven with their occupational self-concept; this is the grounds on which the teachers base their ideas about good teaching and education. The view that these elements relate to the individual's way of being or existing in the world and her ideas about "a good life" and "the highest good" in an Aristotelian sense of the term is more than indicated, although none of the teachers refer directly to Aristotle. This is an observation which furthermore mirrors Charles Taylor's view that "[s]elfhood and the good, or in another way selfhood and morality, turn out to be inextricably intertwined themes." (Taylor, 1989, p. 3). Like Aristotle, Taylor sees the conceptions of morality and meaning as closely related to each other,

and as profoundly related to the human condition and to the individual's (human) authenticity (Abbey, 2004, pp. 81-89).

One could moreover argue that normative statements in the material and statements which relate to morality to a high degree are in understanding with Aristotelian ethics, and so it seems fruitful to interpret the teachers' self-concept as well as their reflection on their practice in an Aristotelian view. Thus, Aristotle for example regards the individual's everyday practices and decisions as bound by a moral-political obligation (Gadamer, 2010, p. 288). Similarly, the teachers acknowledge the external regulations, e.g. the national curriculum, and relate to it. They consider themselves obliged by these regulations, and regard them the frames of their practical acting (teachment and schooling). This is a relatively simple example. More important, however, is the apparent similarity in the teachers' realization of their role, their living practices, and Aristotle's conception of virtuous and therefore good acting and being.

In an Aristotelian perspective, in order to be a good teacher and indeed a good practitioner of any relational profession, one must be a moral person, since we do in Aristotle's view by definition, or rather, *naturally*, have moral obligations to each other as fellow human beings. By relational professions I mean professions where relations to other people are a characteristic component of the practice, i.e. practices which in Andrew Abbot's terminology deal with "clients" (Abbott, 1988). A good person is a knowledgeable person, and accordingly, a good life, is a life based on knowledgeability, according to Aristotle. However, in Aristotle's view, one should distinguish between qualitatively different kinds of knowledge. Thus, there are in Aristotelian terminology for example both intellectual and moral virtues, or moral excellences, as is sometimes held to be a more appropriate contemporary translation of *arête* (Aristotle, 2002, Book VI; Dunne, 1997, p. 246). For example, craftsmanship or skills may serve as an example of an intellectual excellence, specifically of what Aristotle terms *téchne*. Such knowledge is termed "technical expertise". It is characterized by being teleological, and "has to do with production, not with action"

(Aristotle, 2002, Book VI. 4). When talking about teachers' knowledge, one could regard teachment as such "technical expertise". Dunne explains the notion of *téchne* by contrasting it to *phronesis*, the other type of practical knowledge in Aristotelian terminology:

Production (*poiēsis*) has to do with making or fabrication; it is activity which is designed to bring about, and which terminates in, a product or outcome that is separable from it and provides it with its end or *telos*. *Praxis*, on the other hand, has to do with the conduct of one's life and affairs primarily as a citizen of the *polis*; it is activity which may leave no separately identifiable outcome behind it and whose end, therefore, is realized in the very doing of the activity itself (...).

To these two specifically different modes of activity, *technē* and *phronēsis* correspond, respectively, as two rational powers which give us two quite distinct modes of practical knowledge. (Dunne, 1997, p. 244)

This means that, by contrast to the practical skills which aim at production, there is moral knowledge, which lacks a particular aim, in relating to the virtuous (read: good) life in general (Gadamer, 2004, p. 318). Such knowledge is fundamental, yet also always situational, since man is always situated in some context or other. In other words, there is the essential human condition of man as "always already involved in a moral and political context" and thus he "acquires his image of the thing from that standpoint" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 318). This is why Aristotle himself speaks of moral knowledge, *phronesis*, as *political* knowledge; it is knowledge related to living in *polis*, i.e. to living and existing in community. Moral knowledge is knowledge about "the human world" and relates to our social life, to coexisting and interacting with other human beings. In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer comments on the difference between *téchne* and moral knowledge as follows:

For we find action governed by knowledge in an exemplary form where the Greeks speak of *technē*. This is the skill, the knowledge of the craftsman who knows how to make some specific thing. The question is whether moral knowledge is knowledge of this kind. This would mean that it was knowledge of how to make oneself. Does man learn to make himself what he ought to be,

in the same way that the craftsman learns to make things according to his plan and will? Does man project himself on an *eidos* of himself in the same way as the craftsman carries within himself an *eidos* of what he is trying to make and embody in his material? (2004, p. 313)

(...)

It is obvious that man is not at his own disposal in the same way that the craftsman's material is at his disposal. Clearly he cannot make himself in the same way that he can make something else. Thus it will have to be another kind of knowledge that he has of himself in his moral being, a knowledge that is distinct from the knowledge that guides the making of something. Aristotle captures this knowledge in a bold and unique way when he calls this kind of knowledge self-knowledge – i.e. knowledge for oneself. This distinguishes the self-knowledge of moral consciousness from *theoretical* knowledge in a way that seems immediately evident. But it also distinguishes it from *technical* knowledge, and to make this double distinction, Aristotle ventures the odd expression “self-knowledge”. (2004, p. 314)

Gadamer furthermore finds that “[w]here there is a *techne*, we must learn it, and then we are able to find the right means. We see that moral knowledge, however, always requires (...) self-deliberation. Even if we conceive this knowledge in ideal perfection, it is perfect deliberation with oneself (*eubolia*) and not knowledge in the manner of *techne*.” (2004, p. 318).

As I see it, while teachment may be compared to *téchne*, what has above been termed the teachers *wise*; the more-than-technical (i.e. more-than-*téchne*) elements in their practical acting and reasoning, are closely related to the Aristotelian notion of self-knowledge. For it seems to me that precisely such “deliberating with oneself” as Aristotle and Gadamer describe is what takes place when the teachers account for their ethos and their day-to-day reflections about subject and practice. Fundamentally, it is clear that all the teachers hold teaching to be something else or something more than a *téchne*. For while they definitely talk a lot about what could be termed teachment skills and the necessity of having such skills, they at the same time explain their (increased) interest in teachment with their want to communicate with pupils, to

raise their interest, and to act as “public educators”, which are aims that are neither directly nor teleologically related to teaching the subject matter. I would argue that they in this have a double aim: presenting the subject matter and helping pupils to understand and learn it on the one hand, and engaging and educating pupils *qua* young persons on the other. The latter considers morality or moral knowledge more than *téchne*.

Aristotle specifies that “moral excellence” is a capacity one achieves by experience rather than by scholarly learning, and that such capacity is moreover a deeply personal kind of knowledge. The latter is so both because, unlike epistemic knowledge, it is not a matter of entities which exist independently of human actors, and because it is connected to the individual’s personality, which in turn is the result of “lived life” (Aristotle, 2002, II, 1). The view that man through how he acts and through his interaction with his surroundings becomes a being disposed to act, react and reason in certain ways, the Aristotelian concept of *hexis*, may be recognized in Taylor’s philosophy as well as in the Bourdieuan key concept *habitus*. In Aristotelian thinking, such dispositions are of considerable importance in achievement of moral knowledge, *phronesis*, which “is personal knowledge in that, in the living of one’s life, it characterizes and expresses the kind of person that one is.” (Dunne, 1997, p. 244).

If one, in returning to the teachers, their self-concepts, and their views on their practice, sees this in the light of Aristotle’s explanation of moral knowledge and how it is achieved, one may discover an additional explanation of motives such as the stated individualism and the teachers’ reluctance to acknowledge their university studies’ utility value with respect to their occupational practice; as has been established, the teachers find that they “became teachers by teaching”. This directly echoes Aristotle’s claim that “we acquire the excellences through having first engaged in the activities, as is also the case with the various sorts of expert knowledge – for the way we learn the things we should do, knowing how to do them, is by doing them.” (Aristotle, 2002, II.1) In an Aristotelian, as indeed also in a

Taylorian perspective, it both makes sense to claim a sense of having made the journey on one's own, and to have changed one's views in course of the journey.

Both Aristotle and Taylor would be likely to assert that these be adequate descriptions of the actual facts. For in Aristotle's view, the practical wisdom to which descriptions like Jórunn's explanation of how she constantly has to weigh each particular situation and her general "rather strict" principles, for instance with regard to pupils' handing in their homework bear witness, cannot be taught, according to Aristotle. It is unteachable and must consequently be achieved personally and individually.

However, the teachers may at the same time have learned something from their occupational practice and/or simply from their life experience that makes them regard moral categories as increasingly important. The latter would be a true Aristotelian interpretation of this finding, and as such relate to practical wisdom.

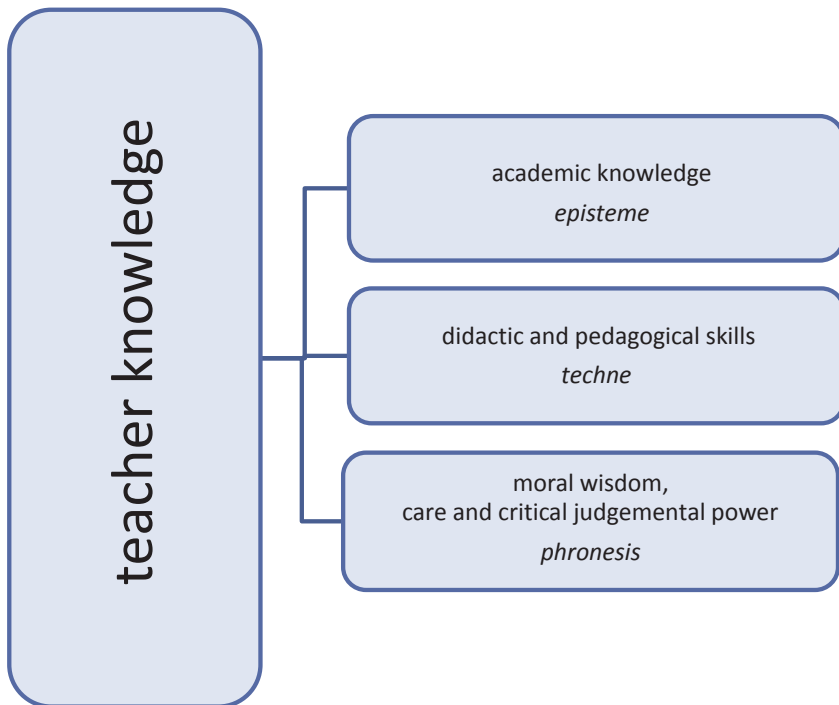
It is also an Aristotelian view that our being is situated, and hence, it will at any time be bound to concrete and practical situations. Practical knowledge must therefore imply understanding what the concrete situation demands from us. This means that the acting individual must consider the concrete situation in light of general practical and moral demands (Gadamer, 2004, Ch. 2, IIb). Following this line, one could speculate whether the experienced teachers' stronger emphasis on moral issues may be explained by the fact that they have actually had to consider more concrete situations than have the less experienced ones. This would be in agreement with Gadamer's interpretation of Aristotelian practical wisdom, which Gadamer takes to be a matter of insight and discernment. He writes:

[t]he person who is understanding does not know and judge as one who stands apart and unaffected but rather he thinks along with the other from the perspective of a specific bond of belonging, as if he too were affected. (...) We say that someone is insightful when they make a fair, correct judgment. An insightful person is prepared to consider the particular situation of the other

person, and hence he is also most inclined to be forbearing or to forgive. Here again it is clear that this is not technical knowledge. (2004, p. 320)

I find the teachers' descriptions of how they want to be reasonable and to show goodwill etc. to have considerable resonance with Gadamer's description of Aristotelian practical wisdom. This might leave us with the below model of teacher knowledge, which allows morality and social judgement a more prominent position than is usually the case in descriptions of teachers' knowledge.

Figure 10, Teacher knowledge



Returning to the original text, one may note that Aristotle moreover takes practical wisdom to be a matter of experience. In his own words, “the objects of wisdom (...)

include particulars, which come to be known through experience” and it is “quantity of time that provides experience” (2002, VI.8). In this perspective, the individualism in the teachers’ self-accounts may be regarded a necessity: practical wisdom *is* in fact a personal and individual matter, which is only earned over time.

In a modern version, we find the view on practical wisdom and social relations (as that between pupil and teacher) as knowledge achieved by experience and as fundamentally personal in Michael Polanyi’s book on tacit knowledge, *Knowing and Being*. In her introduction to this book, Marjorie Grene writes:

(...) knowledge is always personal. The impersonal aspect of knowledge arises from and returns to personal participation in the search for and acceptance of the object to be known. For only the explicit, formulable core of knowledge can be transferred, neutrally, from person to person. Its implicit base (since it is not verbalized and cannot be formulated and so impersonalized) must be the groping of someone. (Polanyi & Grene, 1969, p. x).

Notably, Polanyi regards all kinds of practical knowledge as personal and thereby individual, if not private or solipsistic. Thus, also having something at one’s fingers’ ends, both literally and figuratively speaking, is knowledge of this kind, according to Polanyi. This, then, includes craftsmanship, *téchne*, and thus, in the present context, skilled teachment as well as social and relational competency, such as having an eye for what is going on around you, or for what the adequate reaction in a given situation would be.

8. Conclusion

In the initial presentation of this study in Chapter 1 I stated that *Intellectual Practicians* aims at exploring the practice of Icelandic teachers in upper secondary school as this is experienced by the practitioners themselves, based on the following research question: What conception(s) do Icelandic mother tongue teachers in upper secondary school have of the Icelandic subject and what implications do they attribute to the professional management of the subject, how do they talk about their work and what is their occupational self-concept? It was moreover stated that I furthermore wanted to understand what lies behind and has shaped these conceptions, and this is the reason why I have asked how the teachers' descriptions may be interpreted.

To conclude the treatise, I will relate the study's main findings, starting by the most concrete, i.e. the teachers' views on the subject, and proceeding via views on the profession and on experienced practice to self-understandings. First, I sum up the findings and the interpretations of them, then I point to some possible implications of the findings, and finally I suggest possible follow-up studies.

8.1 Findings and understandings

Homogeneity

Despite my attempt to recruit participants with regard to heterogeneity, the homogeneity is more marked than the differences in the material. A possible explanation of this is that although the schools where the teachers are employed are different with regard to courses offered, organization and more, the teachers nevertheless seem to face joint challenges. Furthermore, the fact that the teachers have a very similar educational background may also contribute to the homogeneity. By consequence of this, a clearer picture than I expected has been crystalized.

Teaching as a key concept

The teachers talk more about teaching than anything else, and I have regarded “teaching” the pivot of the teachers’ self-understanding as well as of their professional discourse; their way of talking about their practice and about themselves as professionals. However, in addition to being dominating, the term “teaching” appeared to be used in a quite broad sense in the material, and so an analysis of this concept was required to clarify what it really covers in the teachers’ discourse and thus to understand the teachers’ reasoning in the logs and the interviews.

The analysis revealed that in addition to notifying a specific activity, teaching must be regarded a habitual way of professional reasoning and acting. Four distinct aspects were identified in the teachers’ use of the term “teaching”: First, there is teaching as a classroom activity, which I have in this study termed “teachment”. Second, there is the wider understanding, in which the whole span of teachers’ duties (writing reports and attending meetings etc., in addition to teachment) is included. This has been termed “schooling”. Third, there is teaching as a way of understanding one’s surroundings; teaching as a lens through which the world is perceived. This element is in the present context termed the “tokener” aspect of teaching. Finally, there is teachment as “wise”; a habitual way of reasoning and perceiving one’s surroundings. Below implications of this analysis are suggested.

1. Views on the subject

When talking about Icelandic as a subject, the teachers sometimes refer to the school subject Icelandic, while they at other times refer to Icelandic as an academic field; their own major subject at university. Although they definitely distinguish between these two realms, the limits between them are nevertheless undefined in many cases. Roughly speaking, they regard the latter their knowledge base, while teaching of the former is what they do for a living. Their focus is primarily at the school subject, while conceptions of the academic subject are mostly implicit.

Simplified, one might claim that the teachers attribute four superordinate aims to the subject they teach: practical skills in literacy and oracy, impartment of the national cultural heritage, general education, and promoting students' civic autonomy.

Literary skills

Among the curricular aims the teachers find especially important, mastering practical skills at a certain level is regarded the most fundamental curricular one, partly because it is considered a prerequisite for achieving other curricular aims.

The emphasis on training of students' literary skills, is mainly regarded a result of the teachers' impression that students' skills in this field are insufficient and that improvement is required. However, when explaining why they devote so much time to teaching practical skills, the teachers list a number of additional reasons; that such skills are a prerequisite for achieving other aims in Icelandic and in other subjects, as well as in students' further education and future occupational life. While this may be absolutely true, it may at the same time be an indirect way of justifying why such considerable amount of the courses' scant time is spent on development of students' literary skills, which the teachers think students should really have had good command of by the time they enter upper secondary education.

The cultural heritage

As the second main element in the teachers' descriptions of which curricular aims they regard especially important, the teachers list impartment of the national cultural heritage, particularly understood as the Icelandic language and the classical national literature. This is probably regarded so important partly because it is collectively in Iceland considered the nation's main cultural treasure, and so one that should be tended well. This concept is underpinned by an apparently strong patriotism which does not seem to be challenged much in the contemporary Icelandic public. This means that in Iceland there is a close connection between patriotism and

acknowledgement of the cultural heritage. In the study, cultural, historical and social factors are suggested as explanations of this.

Next, the cultural heritage is associated with self-knowledge and identity, also at the individual level; to know the cultural heritage is to know oneself, and so an aim in itself, in the teachers' view. Thereby the cultural heritage is also related to general education and *Bildung*.

Additional explanations of why the cultural heritage is so heavily emphasized are e.g. first, that pupils tend to find some of these topics, such as the medieval literature, convoluted and inaccessible, which means that achieving an understanding of them requires time and much effort; and second, that because of this heritage's strong position knowledge of it is regarded valuable social and cultural heritage; and finally, there is the simple instrumental explanation that the curriculum demands that students have certain knowledge of these topics.

The heavy emphasis on the cultural heritage in society at large appears to influence reasoning and values in the mother tongue subject directly, very likely because this heritage is so intimately intertwined with core elements in the subject curriculum, and it is quite clear that the mother tongue subject is granted authority by force of its position as the subject which promotes maintenance of the cultural heritage. In a critical interpretative perspective, it may be remarked that this is an advantageous position which the teachers are not likely to waive; being able to refer to external *doxic* understandings may no doubt sometimes be advantageous. However, it should also be noted that the teachers are likely to use this authority with certain naïveté, since the views and imagery they refer to are at the same time part of their own *doxic* understanding, and so not easily discernible as something that might profitably be discussed from time to time.

General education

Equally conspicuous as the accentuating of the importance of imparting the cultural heritage is the teachers' emphasis on the third aim, general education or *Bildung*. The concept of general education comprises a wide range of desirable skills and qualities, including e.g. elements of consequence in everyday life at school, such as work standards and group solidarity; elements of consequence to personal achievement, such as self-discipline and endurance, and elements related to development of intellectual capacity, such as reflexivity, awareness, and critical thinking. General education in this sense is not much emphasized in educational steering documents.

Autonomy and citizenship

As for the fourth aim, promotion of students' autonomy, there is more variation in the individual teachers' approaches than there is with regard to the other aims. While some primarily emphasize the concepts social elements, such as "citizenship" and "democratic participation", others accentuate psychological elements, such as "self-esteem" and "purposefulness", and still others mention both aspects. It should be noted that although promotion of students' autonomy is mentioned in public documents, such as the national curriculum, it is not given much attention in those sources, and so, similar to what is the case with general education, the teachers' sense of obligation to take this task seriously, must be derived from somewhere else.

In addition to the expressed aims, the teachers point to the subject's utility value, e.g. that literacy and oracy skills are necessary tools in other classes too, as they will be in students' further education and future occupational life.

2. Teaching; noble standardbearership or a constant solitary struggle?

Experience and individualism

The most apparent elements in the teachers' descriptions of their profession are their enhancement of practical teaching and of experience, as opposed to formal education, as the pathway to professionalism, and their accentuating of this as a solitary and individual journey; the teachers stress that they have had to find their way to professionalism on their own, and that they are moreover mostly left to themselves in everyday work. These may sound like stories about independence and strength, but Goodson claims that stories about autonomy and independence will often be concealed stories about being left to one's own devices and about loneliness. In reality, the teachers cannot depend on anybody but themselves in their everyday work. Considering the professional challenges the teachers describe, often indirectly, in accordance with their principles of loyalty and their stated positive view on their job (cf. the following paragraph), I have presumed that the exhibited independence is real, yet vulnerable: Although some support would not have been amiss, one copes when one has to cope. That, however, may be tough at times. And it does not prevent vulnerability or loneliness.

I have regarded the teachers' emphasis on experience and individuality the result of several contextual factors. First, it is clear that the teachers found the content and organization of the teacher training course unsatisfactory, and that they felt that they consequently had no other choice but figuring things out on their own. Only one of the teachers distinctly pronounced the view that her peers' support was of consequence in her junior years, and even in that case it was mostly *one* of her colleagues, namely the one she knew beforehand, who was of particular importance.

Furthermore, the way the courses and so the teachers' workdays are organized also stands as a factor which is bound to influence the teachers' reasoning and views. It is evident from the accounts that the teachers' work days are very busy; they teach many courses, the classes are full, and so some of them need to relate to well above a

hundred students each week. Considering that a course lasts for only one term, and that teachers receive new students every term, this seems a lot. Also additional tasks, such as preparations, reading students' papers etc. are reported to be time-demanding, even by experienced teachers.

Due to the organization of the teachers' workday, there is little room for cooperation (except of the very practical kind, such as joint tests), whether in the shape of co-teaching, discussions, or otherwise, so the teachers to a high degree work solitarily. The teachers' descriptions of their professional development as an individual process must be seen in the light of these frame conditions. That this experience may also regard solitariness and loneliness, and that it furthermore perhaps not at all is the shortest, or the most advantageous way to professionalism is not mentioned by anyone.

In addition to the explanations mentioned so far, I have regarded the accentuating of practice and independence an act of professional and social positioning. At the one hand the teachers display certain academic self-awareness when they establish that their academic background is part of their self-understanding, and so keep distance to primary school teachers who have a more practically oriented educational background. At the other hand, the teachers distance themselves from academia by claiming to be teachers, "first and foremost". Thus, the study's participants quite distinctly position their work as a vocation different from primary education, on the one hand, and from higher education, on the other.

Enthusiasm; purposefulness

The teachers generally speak of their profession in positive terms. They claim to enjoy their job, and they regard teaching a consequential and satisfying profession. Furthermore, the teachers are generally very positive and loyal to their colleagues. The participants claim to get well along with their peers, while they at the same time assert that they do not see very much of them in busy everyday life. There is a similar

loyalty towards the local school's administration, while some participants permit themselves a few critical remarks towards the national policy makers.

Very few inconveniences or disadvantages are mentioned in the descriptions of the profession; none, unless questions about this are explicitly put forward. Only one teacher confesses that she finds that her work sometimes drains her energy more than one could reasonably expect.

In addition to independence and individuality, the teachers accent their view of the profession as being very purposeful. The participants' accentuating of their satisfaction with and belief in their work is in the interpretation regarded an act of positioning at several levels. To position oneself as a person who has made good choices in her own life may be important vis-à-vis the interviewer from outside, but is no less important with regard to one's self-respect, which partly also is established by means of the self-image one presents towards the external world. In this specific context, the major choice is that of occupation. In the sense described, it is vital to have made a careful choice, to have chosen a purposeful occupation, and thus to maintain a conception of this occupation as a consequential and important one. Seen in a sociological, and moreover a Bourdieuan perspective, one will assert that there is a particular need for this if the occupation in question is under pressure, for example socially, and that it is quite imaginable that upper secondary school teachers experience such pressure. To explain how this may be the case, I resort to Bourdieu's concept of capital: At the outset, the teachers' cultural capital was equivalent to that of their former fellow students at university. Later, when some became e.g. university teachers, while other became upper secondary school teachers, it is less obvious that their status is equal, for the former group holds a higher cultural capitalization than the latter, and so members of the latter group have to fend for their value by referring to other currencies than academic knowledge. The value of working with young people in a vital environment, and the value of being a person of consequence to young peoples' formation are regarded examples of such currencies. These and similar currencies may at the other hand also stem the pressure from other quarters

than that of social prestige; namely those where economic capital is highly valued. For teachers are not particularly well paid. Again, reference to other currencies is a possible strategy to compensate for low capital of a specific kind. If one's salary is relatively low, one will tend to emphasize other rewarding aspects than the economical, in the current case that one has the "best profession in the world", and so has the daily satisfaction of doing a job one regards personally, culturally, and socially rewarding.

Finally, it is possible that the participants found it more important to signal their positive attitude towards their profession in a formal interview with an outsider than in an informal chat with colleagues, who moreover share pleasures with and carry some of the same burdens as the interviewees. In other words, both statements about job satisfaction and the accounts as a whole may be coloured by the situation, i.e. the participants' awareness of the researcher's position as an outsider. I regard this possibility part of qualitative studies' inherent uncertainty, which is hard to get around.

3. Characteristics of the presented educational practices

When talking about their job in terms of what they specifically do and how they do it, the teachers first and foremost talk about practical teachment, although they also touch on other topics, such as frame conditions and their relationship to their students, and generally, the teachers accent similar elements in their descriptions of their everyday practice.

Orientation towards the practical: Practice is shaped by actualities

As described in Chapter 8.2 and summed up in Chapter 9.1, the teachers emphasize motivation, variation, and activity orientation when they describe their practice. The descriptions of practical teachment entail accounts of some of the subject's topics, but particularly dwell on specifications of what is actually done in class and how it is done; on teaching methods. All the teachers make a point of engaging their students,

both in the sense that they see a need for putting much effort in motivating their students, since a considerable proportion of them have low motivation for school work, as also in the more concrete sense that they try to “activate” students in class, as they phrase it. The latter is based on the teachers’ experience that most students pay little attention to traditional lectures, and that it is far more profitable to “learn by doing”. However, the teachers moreover find that students have difficulties in concentrating on the same issue or the same activity for more than a short while at a time, and so they claim to emphasize variation almost as much as they emphasize activity based teaching.

Another aspect of the activity orientation is the teachers’ above described experience that many students need to improve their oral and literary skills. Such improvement can only take place through training.

It has been suggested that while the teachers explain their practical orientation with their views on education and learning, the reasons for their choices may also relate to everyday challenges connected to students’ lack of motivation and interest in school work, and their limited power of concentration. Both explanations may be regarded to relate to teachers’ experiences, and both seem to indicate that real life experiences and frame conditions influence practice quite strongly, how teachers conduct their teaching, as well as their reasoning, including their orientation and interests. Also elements in the organization of upper secondary education and teachers’ jobs may serve as examples of how frame conditions shape practice and reasoning. Thus, the discontinuity in teacher-student relations due to the common model where teachers specialize in certain courses, which each runs for only one term, and, by consequence of this, the large amount of students each teacher needs to get to know, to teach, and to evaluate every term is bound to have impact on the teachers’ work. For example, this organization model has been suggested as one of the reasons why teachers express a strong and increasing interest in teaching, while it seems less important to discuss the subject matter. To recall a second example, I mention that it has been suggested that the organization model may account for the discrepancy between the

teachers' statements about how important it is to see the individual in each pupil and the fact that they hardly relate a single episode from their experience where specific students appear. One may even suspect that it indeed is because of the impersonality intrinsic to this model that they see a need to express this view, although this impersonality is perhaps not consciously recognized by the teachers themselves.

The teachers may thus be understood to indirectly imply that their interests are conditionally affected and swayed by practice, and that their professional focus is accordingly influenced by their practical experience. This means that practice experiences over time alter the teachers' practice as well as their reasoning and values, which accounts for the teachers' view that they are "first and foremost teachers". Thus, they all describe a gradually increasing interest in educational matters; both in such related to general education and in such related to practical teaching. The teachers tend to believe that other teachers think differently, that other teachers "usually have their heart bent on the subject". The participants' enhanced interest in education is reported to partly take place at the expense of their interest in Icelandic as an academic field. Although they still find this interesting too, they feel that they possess the knowledge of the subject required and more, whereas they constantly face new challenges with regard to practice and daily encounters with pupils, and therefore feel spurred to develop their practical teaching skills.

Entrenching authority and striving for humanity

The teachers' descriptions of their professional style have also been seen in relation to their everyday challenges. The teachers claim to be firm, even strict, yet friendly, and a couple of them illustrate this by comparing their job to that of a foreman. In this metaphor the classroom features as the workshop, the students as the workers, and the teacher as the working foreman, and the teachers relate that they sometimes use this metaphor in the classroom.

In the teachers' view, being "firm, yet friendly" is a matter of the standards in interpersonal relations (and specifically those of teachers and students), and may thus be

regarded to relate to their professional ethos. It is, among other things, a matter of inclination and wish to do what is regarded good and prudent. This may in turn be regarded to convey what Taylor considers ontological aspects of the human condition, which in the case of modern selves includes e.g. “imputation of dignity and respect to all persons”, and an “ethic of benevolence” (Abbey, 2000, p. 80). In Aristotelian terms, one might say that in basically presenting education as *praxis*, the teachers at the same time signalize the “ethic of benevolence” Taylor describes, i.e. a wish for *eupraxia*.

Also related to ethos, is the need for purposefulness, which Taylor considers as yet another aspect of the human condition (Abbey, 2000, pp. 62-67). Provided that the claims regarding respect and benevolence are valid, it makes sense that teachers should pursue prudence and benevolence; to do so is more purposeful than it would be to desist to do so.

As I interpret them, the practitioners’ descriptions of themselves as strict, yet friendly etc. may moreover be seen as capturing the complexity of the teachers’ everyday practice: due e.g. to many students’ limited interest in the subject matter and limited efforts, the teachers need to assign themselves necessary authority so that they may with moral legitimacy deal with these challenges, while at the same time displaying an equalitarian spirit and their goodwill and respect for their students as individuals. However, these matters are not established once and for all, so the teachers constantly need to negotiate their position, for example by reminding the students of the teacher’s role as a “workshop foreman”.

4. Professional self-image; practitioners more than scholars

Generally speaking, there is a relatively high degree of convergence in the teachers’ accounts, both with regard to descriptions of teaching and with regard to their self-understanding. For, while each narrative is unique and different from the others as life-stories, the stories nevertheless contain some common central points, and the teachers also seem to share occupational values. This finding was not at all given in

advance, and it partly seems to stand in contradiction to the teachers' own explanations of busy workdays with few opportunities of cooperation and sharing experiences with their peers. In fact, one of the elements which may be identified in every one of the narratives is the above related insistence on individuality; on how the teachers have matured as professionals and developed their professionalism individually and on their own rather than as members of a collective. As this stands as a joint claim, it seems just to assume it to be true, either primarily as a description of how the teachers experience their job and professional development, or primarily as a collective experience of these entities, or as a mixture of these two explanations. Since the insistence on individuality appears collectively, it appears reasonable to emphasize explanations two and three the most.

Professional position

In the accounts of their professional self-understanding, the teachers very distinctly declare that they regard themselves teachers rather than scholars of Icelandic. This was an unexpected, yet easily discernible finding; so prominent that I regard it the study's main finding with regard to the teachers' self-image. The anticipatory hypothesis was rather that due to the participants' education and the organisation of their work, which is specialized to a high degree, their self-images would lean heavily on their status as scholars of Icelandic, but this hypothesis proved erroneous. For when asked about their conceptions of themselves as professionals, the teachers all assert that they are teachers and practitioners more than they are academics and scholars of Icelandic. However, this does not mean that they disown their background as scholars of Icelandic. They explicitly *do* acknowledge this background as a crucial part of their professional self. Despite the maintenance of this claim, the teachers nevertheless talk very little of their studies in Icelandic and the significance these have for the job they do as mother tongue teachers; they are indeed almost reluctant to thematize this, and it is as though they distance themselves from their former university milieu. It seems then, that the teachers distinguish quite clearly between the school subject Icelandic and the academic subject Icelandic as qualitatively and

epistemologically different practices; the one dominated by *praxis*, the other by *theoria*. According to this view, teaching in upper secondary school takes place in a *locus* different from that of primary school teachers at the one hand, and that of scholars at a university at the other. This *locus* may be considered the intellectual practitioner's room. The practice that may be identified in this room differs from that of primary school teachers in having a more conspicuous theoretical orientation, due to upper secondary school teachers' higher degree of specialization within a specific academic field, and it differs from that of scholars in having a more conspicuous practical orientation.

Self-images; generalists and specialists at the same time

While the teachers claim to acknowledge their studies in Icelandic, both as part of their background and as a necessary qualification for performing the job they are doing, they on the whole make little of the compulsory teacher training course, which they regard as having been of little significance to their professional development. The teachers thus agree that while the teacher training course served as a job ticket, it was not through their formal education, but by teaching they became skilled professionals. The teachers' accent on how they regard themselves self-made practitioners; that they have reached their current views and practice by their own devices is regarded a distinctive common theme in their autobiographical narratives.

Furthermore, part of what the study's participants find characteristic of their practice as upper secondary school teachers is that they, in their own regard, are general educators and Icelandic teachers in equal measure, and so that there is considerable complexity in their occupational tasks. "I do much more than teach Icelandic," as one of them states. By consequence, the teachers' occupational self-image is dominated by their role as educators rather than by their academic education, and this is the main reason why their practice may be regarded *praxis* oriented to a relatively high degree. This relates both to the practical task of contributing to qualify students for adult life as autonomous individuals, and to act in accordance with what one regards right,

even from an ethical point of view, i.e. *praxis* understood in the direction of *eupraxia*; “good and benevolent practice”. The teachers moreover separately, yet unanimously mark teachment as their current main professional sphere of interest.

While the accentuating of their role as general educators as well as that of their interest in teachment may pertain to the above described social and professional positioning, as well as what has above been termed challenges in everyday practice, it may also relate to the individual teacher’s professional experience and their sense of having gradually gained a grasp of their art. In this perspective, the emphasizing of their interest in teachment may be regarded a symbolic expression of professionalism. In addition, emphasis on practice, particularly connected to gaining experience and becoming an experienced practitioner, may be regarded discursive narratives about professionalization, about entering the professional field, step by step, and establishing one’s position within it, more or less in agreement with Dreyfus & Dreyfus’ model of professionalization.

The above interpretations of the participants’ descriptions of their occupation, their own practice, and their professional self-image, mostly relate to social and structural conditions in the teachers’ professional life. However, according to Taylor, one may moreover interpret social practices and personal narratives on the basis of what he considers perennial elements in the human condition, which he regards a likely source of some of our views and actions. For example, the apparent inclination in the direction of *praxis* may in a Taylorian perspective well have its roots in conditional social factors, while at the same time be related to perennial elements, such as the inclination to make sense of one’s life. It will for instance appear more meaningful and so more sensible to most practitioners in professions where interpersonal relations are a central element to engage in these relationships at some level than to refrain from doing so. In fact, such engagement may indeed even be a prerequisite for succeeding in such a profession. In the case of this specific study, the teachers’ engagement lead to their discovering e.g. students’ lack of motivation for school work, to which the teachers react by enforcing their interest in teachment and

teaching methods; by orienting their teachment in the direction of activity oriented methods and variation, and so trying to motivate their students and establishing a positive relation to them, all of which is profitable, and so purposeful, to both students and teacher. A couple of participants moreover display strong emotional engagement, but due to organizational factors, conditions are not favourable for such engagement. What all the teachers share, however, is a declared engagement in general education, which they among other things relate to students' empowerment and their development of autonomy – aims to which it must be satisfying and meaningful to contribute.

8.2 Implications

1. A refined understanding of the notion of “teaching”

As explained above, the concept of “teaching” is very conspicuous in the teachers' discourse. It appeared to be used in a very broad sense, partly with address to different conceptual fields, and it seemed requisite to reveal its practical meaning. Through analysis of the participants' usage of the concept, a model for a refined understanding of it was developed (cf. Chapter 7.1). According to this model, the concept contains four main elements: 1) *teachment*, i.e. specific acts of instruction, 2) *schooling*, the total of the teachers' practical tasks, including correcting pupils' homework, preparation, and socio-pedagogy, 3) *tokener*, teaching as a perceptual medium or lens, a way to experience the professional life-world, and 4) *wise*, teaching as theoretical, experience-based and embodied knowledge and acting. Wise may count as the reason why the teachers tend to talk about all aspects of their occupational life as well as of their professional self-understanding in terms of teaching. It seems that wise represents a habitus distinct for the teachers' specific position between *theoria* and *praxis*.

2. A broad understanding of teacher knowledge and professionalism

The teachers' accounts, both the oral and the written ones, bespeak a many-sided job. The participants emphasize practical teaching skills at least as much as scholarly knowledge, and they regard it essential to cultivate the general education element in their teaching practice. To be able to fulfil these aims, the teachers need different kinds of knowledge; theoretical/academic knowledge about the subject they teach, skills in the art of teaching, and finally, the practitioner who also wants to be a good general educator will need morality and judgmental power. By consequence, a broad concept of teacher knowledge is required. In Chapter 7.8 the Aristotelian epistemological model is suggested as serviceable to illustrate the concept's complexity, in which the teachers' scholarly knowledge corresponds to *episteme*, their teaching skills correspond to *techne*, and their care and critical judgmental power correspond to *phronesis*. The study indicates that these elements be mutually interdependent in the skilled professional's practice.

If we are to take the broad concept of teacher knowledge seriously, one must ensure that there is sufficient awareness in education and in the field of practice of the concept's various aspects as well as of the impact of each of them and how each aspect should be nurtured.

3. Consequences regarding teacher-education and practice?

The teachers agree that the compulsory teacher training course was of limited value with regard to acquiring teaching skills, and that acquisition of such skills is an individual process which each of them finds that they have gone through on their own, as practicing teachers. In the interpretation of the latter, it has been pointed out that statements about individuality might be veiled stories about loneliness. Teachers seem to be much left to themselves, both as juniors and as experienced teachers, and do not seem to have the opportunity to pay much attention to each other's work. This leads to several conceivable implications:

- The teacher training course should be revised. It would for example possibly be regarded more relevant if it to a higher degree related to the broad notion of teacher knowledge, or if the degree of interaction with practical school-life is enforced. It would for instance be possible to develop a model where students divide their time 50/50 between a teacher job and teacher training studies.
- Routines for reception and following-up of novice teachers should be revised, for example by means of close and mandatory mentoring.
- Considering stories about individuality/solitude and lack of professional cooperation in an Aristotelian perspective, this seems an unprofitable practice, both with regard to the teachers' welfare and to their professional development. In an Aristotelian view, professionals develop their skills and knowledge through dialogical reflection on one's own and other's action. However, conditions for peer reflection on e.g. one's own practice, development, and educational ideals seem to be quite limited, and there may be good reason to make those conditions far more favourable than they currently are.

4. Continued reflections on and discussions of education and its aims

Based on the study's participants' stories about how general education is a conspicuous element in their practice and the subsequent proposed interpretations as to how teacher knowledge may be understood, it appears that general education might profitably be accentuated more than has often been the case as part of (upper secondary school) teachers' knowledge and skills. This, as well as other elements in the participants' accounts, in turn calls for reflections on and a broader discussion of education and its aims, both in general terms and in connection to more specific educational policies, e.g. policy makers' statements about the importance of "high quality" in education. Naturally, such statements sound good; it would hardly occur to anyone to be against quality in education. Yet, it is often rather unclear what this quality is taken to mean or who is supposed to profit from this quality. Is it for example the teachers? Or is it students, politicians, parents, or universities? In short;

how may quality in education be defined, and how may education be defined and understood if one takes views such as those revealed in the current study into account? In a hermeneutic perspective as well in a philosophical anthropological one, these questions cannot be answered once and for all. They must continually be debated, and conclusions may quite possibly sound differently in different times and under varying cultural conditions. It is therefore my hermeneutic view that it is only through such continuous discussions any society can define the aims and qualities of “good education”.

This discussion should probably deal both with practical matters, such as what sort of knowledge and skills upper secondary school teachers need, and with philosophical ones, such as what the aims of education should be in our time. Another observation from the material might be taken into account with regard to such a discussion; the most experienced teachers point out that much has changed since they first started teaching, and that this goes for pupils as well as for society at large. The teachers moreover claim that teaching different courses requires different approaches, which suggests that there is no simple answer to the discussion about teachers’ skills or the aims of education. Both points indicate that the discussion of education and its aims should be a continuous one.

5. Understanding relational work

Basically, the participants’ reflections on the importance of general education may be seen to be connected to their concern for and relation to their students, much rather than it is connected to the subject matter. Based on the interpretations of the participants’ descriptions of their practice and their occupational self-image, one may speculate how unique this really is. During my exploration of the current study’s empirical material, of what the participants accentuate and the reasons they give for doing so, I have come to suspect that the teachers’ views and ideals are not particularly unique, but rather concordant with the main orientation of many practitioners in professions in which interpersonal relationships are a characteristic

element. If this is the case, it seems necessary to take the insights from philosophical anthropology into account to secure robustness and sustainability (particularly) in relational work and relational activities. Such insights concern e.g. self-interpretation, beliefs and purposefulness as prerequisites for selfhood and self-understanding, as well as the constitutive role of dialogism and contextualism with regard to selfhood. Insights of this kind are in the current work related partly in the presentation of Taylor's philosophy, partly in the summing-up of the teachers' self-understanding (cf. chapter 9.1) Sustainability may in this context be specified as principally social and human sustainability, which directly and indirectly also regards the deliberations on quality in such work.

8.3 Possible follow-up studies

The findings in *Intellectual Practicians* may lead to further studies. Partly, I would have liked to explore some of the questions in this study in more depth, partly I wish that I could have treated the empirical material more thoroughly, and partly the search for answers to one set of questions lead to new and different questions. I will conclude the study by indicating some of them very briefly. I suggest studies on the axis empirical – theoretical supported by empirical cases, and start with the mainly empirical ones.

- The empirical material of the current study is not fully turned to account. For example, the study hardly deals with specifically subject didactic statements, of which there are many. This rich material could profitably be explored.
- The strong conviction of the present study's participants that they have become professional practitioners through their practical experience rather than through their education might be explored further, for example
 - * through comparative studies of the practice and reasoning of teachers with different educational background, e.g. M.Ed. candidates and M.A. candidates

with supplementary teacher training course; to find out whether the respective groups have concurrent views on this matter.

- * through comparison of future teachers' education and the occupational reality they later encounter; to find out whether there are undue discrepancies between the two fields, and if so, whether one or the other accordingly should be changed, or if there is reason to keep the current models in the respective fields.
- Sociological studies, set up to explore in more depth how upper secondary school teachers have come to fall between two stools (they neither fit in to characteristic descriptions of classical professions, such as lawyers and doctors, nor to those of semi-professions, such as general teachers or nurses) and how this unclear position affects the group's collective self-understanding and *habitus* might bring about a deeper understanding of the field, beneficial to anybody who sets out to promote quality in education.
- Over the last decades, an excessive growth has taken place in higher education. More students also mean a more heterogeneous mass of students. Subsequently, new tasks and responsibilities are imposed on the academic staff, including whetted demand for student orientation. Yet, little is actually known about the practice of academic teachers. Based on a motivation similar to the one stated in the present study, it may be about time to explore the practices of higher education more exhaustively than has hitherto been done.
- The present study displays that the participating teachers' practice rests upon a complex platform of knowledge. The study's interpretation of the teachers' accounts indicates that the complexity has developed in another space than that of the teachers' formal education, and in an attempt to understand this complexity it has been implied that focussing narrowly on a specific practice may be insufficient, and that it might therefore be profitable to widen the perspective and

ask whether a complexity similar to the one identified in *Intellectual Practitioners* is characteristic of professions where theoretical knowledge encounters a practice based on interpersonal relations. This question might be explored in case-studies or theoretical studies of knowledge-based relational professions.

- The present study displays that the participating teachers regard general education equally important as impartment of factual knowledge, and that their practice rests upon a complex platform of knowledge. The insight this finding entails could be the starting point of a number of significant discussions of education and educational aims. One might for instance ask what educational buzz words, such as “quality” should mean if one takes the teachers’ experiences and views into account, and moreover, how educational quality might on this basis reasonably be stimulated. Other such buzz words; “attainment of objectives”, “evaluation” etc., might be scrutinized in a similar manner.

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Appendixes

I. Teaching in Iceland

Teacher education

There are several paths to the teacher profession in Iceland, yet from 2008, when the teacher education was changed, it has been a formal claim that all teachers, including nursery school teachers, hold a master degree. The school system distinguishes between nursery school teachers, primary and secondary school teachers and upper secondary school teachers. Nursery school teachers work in nursery schools. Primary and secondary school teachers are educated at what is currently termed the Faculty of Education at University of Iceland and have generally qualified to teach several subjects in the compulsory education, i.e. grades 1-10, whereas upper secondary school teachers are specialized subject teachers, either in vocational subjects, practical-esthetical subjects or academic subjects. Both “primary school teacher” and “secondary school teacher” are titles protected by the government, according to the Education Act, and authorization is provided by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (Parliament of Iceland, 2008).

Considerable changes have taken place within the last few years, particularly with regard to teachers in kindergarten, primary school and lower secondary school. The education has been extended to a master degree education. Together with the authorization arrangement, one could claim that there have been attempts to turn the teacher profession(s) into classical professions – which may be recognized among other things on the basis of such formal criteria. To put the current situation in perspective, it could be mentioned that a hundred years ago, most teachers in Iceland lacked any formal training as teachers. A statistical survey from 1903/1904 shows that only 6% of the teachers were trained teachers and 35% had no formal education beyond primary school (Jacobsen et al., 2012, p. 319), and so one could really speak of an educational revolution in Iceland in the course of the 20th century.

The most recent revision of the teacher education took place in 2008. From then on future upper secondary teachers of Icelandic may choose among the following models:

BA-degree in Icelandic + two years of master studies in pedagogics and subject didactics, leading to the title M.Ed. (five years in total)

BA-degree in Icelandic + one year of subject didactic studies, including a subject didactic oriented master thesis + additional teacher training course (five years in total)

MA-degree in Icelandic + additional teacher training course (six years in total) (U. o. Iceland, 2012)

While the most recent teacher training reform without any doubt entails increased demands to formal qualifications in kindergartens as well as in primary school and lower secondary school, the situation is less clear with regard to upper secondary school. If teachers to be previously to a high degree have limited themselves to a BA-degree and a teacher training course, the reform will imply an enhancement of competence even in upper secondary school. If, however, many of those educated before 2008 hold a master's degree, such as M.Ed., or, in the case of Icelandic, even a MA-degree in Icelandic and a teacher training course, it is less clear in how far the reform represents an equivalent upgrading at this level. However, I have not been able to find any overview over upper secondary school teachers' formal qualifications, and so I can draw attention to this point, yet not draw any conclusions about the actual state of affairs.

Working as a teacher in upper secondary school

All qualified, permanently employed teachers in Icelandic upper secondary school are employed on the same terms, which for example means that they have the same teaching duty (24 lessons per week) and that time for preparations and afterwork is the same, regardless which subject the teachers teach (Ministry of Finance & union,

2005; Ministry of Finance & union, 2009). As far as I understand the collective agreement, the size of the groups is not of consequence for the number of lessons per week.

Most teachers in upper secondary school teach just one subject. Accordingly, in the case of Icelandic teachers, this means that they hold at least a BA-degree in Icelandic (a MA- or Med.-degree if educated after 2008), as described in the chapter on teacher education. To be more specific, this means that they have generally studied the subject they teach for at least three years, in addition to attending a one-year teacher training programme. According to the current organization of the teacher training programme, at least 1/6 of the study (i.e. 10 of 60 ECTs) should be in subject didactics.

One consequence of the organizational model in Icelandic upper secondary schools is that teachers have very thorough knowledge of the subject they teach; another consequence will generally be that there tend to be relatively few teachers in each subject group as each teacher's workload is attached to only one subject, implying that each "specialist group" is relatively small. Thus, approximately 175 – 200 Icelandic teachers are employed in upper secondary education. This in turn implies that there altogether are comparatively fewer mother tongue teachers in the Icelandic upper secondary school system than there are in the Norwegian one, for example. Furthermore, statements in the interviews in the present study suggest that teachers to a relatively high degree relate primarily to their own peers; teachers who teach the same subject and even the same courses as they teach themselves.

At least at the schools with which I have been in touch, there seems to be a further tendency in the direction of specialization in conjugation with the convention that teachers generally specializes in one subject, as most of the teachers limit themselves to teaching relatively few courses over some time.

At traditional class model schools teachers often teach their classes for a whole academic year, yet it also occurs that classes change teachers in the middle of the school year because teachers are affiliated with specific courses rather than with classes. The relatively obvious alternative; that the class be regarded a more fundamental organizational unit than the courses as such and that teachers consequently follow classes throughout upper secondary school, from the start to graduation. I have not been in touch with or heard of schools where such a model is used as the organizational unit, or even been discussed or wished for.

At schools of the course model type, the tendency in direction of pupils coming to the course and the teachers, rather than teachers coming to the classes and the subject, even more pronounced. In practice, this means that an Icelandic teacher generally teaches two or three courses per term, and which she in the rule also will teach the following term, in new groups. Even if there is some variation, either because the teacher herself wants to change one course for another or for technical reasons, this is an organizational model which gets everything set for a high degree of specialization among upper secondary teachers. For it all means that the individual teachers really may become experts of “their” courses and so they are very likely to appear as professionals with very good knowledge of their field. It is also quite possible that this model eases teachers’ everyday work: teaching the same courses several times in a row means that they will constantly have the curriculum and the texts for “their” courses present to their mind, and so the time spent on preparation may to a high degree be devoted to didactic and pedagogical matters, while the other main model, where teachers follow classes throughout their years in upper secondary school also requires that they spend time on refreshing and maybe updating their topical knowledge, since they do not teach each topic as often as teachers working at course model schools do. And if so, there will naturally be less time for didactic considerations and other tasks. In other words, it may seem as though the course model makes apparently very heavy work load of those teaching academic subjects

with much after-work in addition to the preparation, somewhat more tolerable, since it implies that teachers know their curricula very well.

On the other hand, they may need to spend all the more energy on social relations and on establishing a good working environment in their groups in the course model. Learning everyone's name in some three to seven groups each time is a challenge in itself. Since each group consists of ca. 30 pupils, a teacher may well need to teach more than 150 new pupils each term. Teachers whose socio-pedagogical ambitions reach beyond learning their pupils' names (which is the case with the teachers in the current study), such as getting to know their pupils as individuals, to promote general education aims, such as acting respectfully towards one's class mates, to encourage participation, even in groups where pupils do not know each other well (which will often be the case, as pupils choose new courses every term), to impart discipline and a high standard of work ethic, for example with regard to submission deadlines, such teachers may earn themselves quite demanding working hours. In addition, there are numerous other obligations, such as to read and correct pupils' papers, attend meetings, follow up individual pupils, and register absence.

II. Overview over upper secondary schools referred to in the material

The overview lists schools where the participating teachers are employed or which are mentioned by them in the interviews.

School	Programme options	Size	Location	Class model or course model	Occurrence in the material
School 1	General studies Commercial and business studies Vocational education Visual arts and crafts programme Sports and physical education Health and social care education	Large	Capital area	Course model	Agnes Birgit
School 2	General studies Performative arts education	Relatively large	Capital area	Course model	Daniel
School 3	General studies Commercial and business studies Vocational education Visual arts and crafts education	Large	Outside the capital area	Course model	Elfn

	Sports and physical education				
School 4	General studies Visual arts and crafts education	Relatively large	Outside the capital area	Class model	Fjóla
School 5	General studies	Small	Outside the capital area	Class model	Hannes
School 6	General studies	Relatively large	Capital area	Class model	Jórunn
School 7	General studies Vocational education Visual arts and crafts education	Medium	Outside the capital area	Course model	Mentioned by Elín and Hannes
School 8	General studies Commercial and business studies Visual arts and crafts education Sports and physical education	Medium	Capital area	Course model	Mentioned by Fjóla
School 9	General studies Commercial and business studies Vocational education Visual arts and crafts	Large	Outside the capital area	Course model	Mentioned by Fjóla

	education Sports and physical education Health and social care education				
School 10	General studies Commercial and business studies Health and social care education	Medium	Capital area	Course model	Mentioned by Fjóla
School 11	General studies	Relatively large	Capital area	Class model	Mentioned by Hannes and Jórunn
School 12	General studies Commercial and business studies	Large	Capital area	Class model	Mentioned by Jórunn

Comments to the overview

1. For an overall overview over upper secondary schools in Iceland, see <http://menntagatt.is/forsida/>.
2. On stipulation of size: > 500 = small, 500-750 = medium, 750-1000 = relatively large, < 1000 = large.
3. Several Icelandic upper secondary schools are (partly) boarding schools. It seems likely that this condition has impact on the schools' culture and their social life, for instance on organizational activities and school specific traditions. I have chosen not to comment on that and not even specify which schools are boarding schools to protect the teachers' anonymity.

4. In addition to the study programmes mentioned in the table, some schools have specific programmes for disabled students, and some offer “general” programmes for students who have not yet chosen a more specific study programme. This is not specified in the table, for the same reason as I have omitted information about boarding schools.
5. Hannes has experience from other schools than those mentioned in the table. However, he refers to some of those schools in relatively general terms, and I did not find it necessary to specify them all.

III. Overview over Icelandic courses in upper secondary education

Code	Credits	Course	Category
ÍSL 102	2	Literacy, writing and oracy	Compulsory
ÍSL 202	2	Literature and elementary linguistics	Compulsory
ÍSL 212	2	Language history and cultural history	Compulsory
ÍSL 303	3	Literature and language from the settlement to the reformation	Compulsory
ÍSL 403	3	Literature and language from the reformation to 1900	Compulsory at the general studies programme
ÍSL 503	3	Literature after 1900	Compulsory at the general studies programme
ÍSL 603	3	Icelandic and general linguistics	In-depth-course at the general studies programme, language studies
ÍSL 613	3	Novels and general literary studies	In-depth-course at the general studies programme, language studies
ÍSL 623	3	Sociolinguistics	In-depth-course at the general studies programme, social science studies

ÍSL 633	3	Children's and adolescents' language and culture	In-depth-course at the general studies programme, social science studies
TJÁ 102	2	Rhetoric's, language usage and communication	Optional course

Comments

1. The overview is based on the national curriculum, and detailed course descriptions may be found there.
2. Local schools are moreover entitled to design additional Icelandic courses.
3. Besides the descriptions of the specific courses, the curriculum contains a general part, in addition to separate curricula for Icelandic as a foreign language, Icelandic for deaf and hard-of-hearing, and Icelandic sign-language for deaf and hard-of-hearing.

IV. Overview over teachers with brief biographical information

Name	Agnes
School	School 1
Age	Scarcely 60
Teaching experience	<p>Has been teaching at School 1 for ca. 18 years.</p> <p>Has mainly taught Icelandic, in recent years also Life skills (LKN).</p> <p>Has for several years taught part time at the compulsory teacher training course at University of Iceland, along with her job at School 1.</p>
Teaches	<p>ÍSL 2024, two groups</p> <p>ÍSL 5036, one group</p> <p>LKN 1036 in an introductory group</p>
Education	<p>Preschool teacher</p> <p>BA in Icelandic</p> <p>Compulsory teacher training course</p>

Name	Birgit
School	School 1
Age	Mid-forties
Experience	Has been teaching at School 1 for ca. 17 years. Has mainly taught Icelandic, in recent years also Life skills (LKN).
Teaches	ÍSL 2024, two groups ÍSL 5036, one group LKN 1036, one group
Education	BA in Icelandic Compulsory teacher training course Has completed all compulsory courses at the master programme in Icelandic, but not finished her thesis.

Name	Daniel
School	School 2
Age	Ca. 30
Experience	Has taught at School 2 for a bit more than five years. Has several times been practice supervisor for teachers to be.
Teaches	ÍSL 103, four groups; 2 regular groups 1 intensive education group 1 adult education group
Education	MEd, with Icelandic education/subject didactics as major subject

Name	Elfin
School	School 3
Age	Just over 50
Experience	<p>Worked one year as a teacher in lower secondary school just after having completed upper secondary school.</p> <p>Went to university and was off teaching for a long time.</p> <p>Returned and has been teaching full time for ca. 17 years at all levels in the school system.</p> <p>Taught all sorts of subjects in primary and lower secondary school.</p> <p>Teaches Icelandic and Life skills in upper secondary school.</p>
Teaches	<p>ÍSL 303, two groups Icelandic at the U-course (U-course: a refresher course for students who have not completed lower secondary school.) Icelandic at a S-course (S-courses are vocational education courses)</p>
Education	<p>BA in Icelandic and social sciences, additional courses in art history Compulsory teacher training course Is currently working on a master thesis in Icelandic/subject didactics.</p>

Name	Fjóla
School	School 4
Age	Barely 30
Experience	Has taught for 3 ½ years, at School 8 the first year, later at School 4.
Teaches	ÍSL 202, three groups (one of the groups is a class for gifted students who have commenced upper secondary school one year previous to their peers) ÍSL 303, one group ÍSL 633, one group
Education	BA in Icelandic Compulsory teacher training course Working on her master thesis for the MEd degree

Name	Hannes
School	School 5
Age	Mid-fifties
Experience	<p>Has taught for approximately 17-18 years all in all in upper secondary school Started teaching as an unskilled teacher shortly after upper secondary school Also extensive experience with other education related work</p> <p>Has taught in many different schools</p> <p>Teaches Icelandic, but has also taught other subjects</p>
Teaches	ÍSL 403, several groups
Education	<p>MA in Icelandic</p> <p>PhD in an additional subject (which cannot be specified out of consideration for Hannes' anonymity)</p> <p>Has recently completed the compulsory teacher training course.</p>

Name	Jórunn
School	School 6
Age	Ca. 50
Experience	Has taught at School 6 for 20 years.
Teaches	ÍSL 303, two groups Has for some years also been part of the school's administrative staff.
Education	MA in Icelandic Compulsory teacher training course Has taken part in a further education project locally at School 6

V. Guide to the logs

The below is a copy of the guide to the logs as this was sent to the group of participants who were interviewed in the autumn term, 2009. The guide was sent to the teachers in June, just before the summer holidays, so that the teachers might have enough time to plan their participation in the research project and their log writing. The participants who were interviewed in the spring term in 2010 received the same guide, but with changed dates. This guide moreover included an additional point, in which the participants were asked to also evaluate each of the lessons they accounted for. This point was included in the autumn logs as well, but the request was made in one of the e-mails to the teachers, not in the guide. This e-mail was sent in June, shortly after the guide.

*Leiðbeiningar um skráningu kennsludagbókar**[Guide to the log]*

1. Formlegar upplýsingar

[Formal information]

Nafn

[Name]

Aldur

[Age]

Menntun

[Education]

Starfsreynsla

[Professional experience]

Skóli

[School]

Kennsla í vetur (2009/2010)

[Courses taught in the academic year 2009/2010]

Upplýsingar um bekkina sem þú skrifar um í dagbókina, t.d. braut, stærð, kyn og þjóðerni.

[Information about the classes you write about in the log, e.g. study programme, the classes' size, and students' gender, age and nationality]

Dagbækurnar verða vitaskuld nafnlausar í ritgerðinni. Það á heldur ekki að vera hægt að sjá við hvaða skóla þátttakendur vinna.

[Authorship, other personal information will naturally be anonymized. It should also not be obvious at which school the respective participants are employed.]

2. Dagbókin [*The log*]

Þátttakendur eru beðnir um að velja 10 kennslustundir á tímabilinu ágúst-september sem þeir skrá í kennsludagbók. Í framhaldi af þessu, sennilega í október, verða tekin viðtöl við alla kennarana sem taka þátt í rannsókninni.

[All participants are asked to choose 10 lessons in the period August-September for which they account in a log. The logs will be followed up by individual interviews with each participant. The interviews will probably take place in October.]

Í dagbókina eigið þið að skrá upplýsinga um innihald hverja kennslustundar og ykkar eigin athugasemdir um kennslustundina.

[The logs should contain information about each lesson, besides your own comments and reflections on the respective lessons.]

Spurningar til hjálpar:

[Guiding questions]

1. Innihald, efni

[Topic, subject matter]

(Hvað kenni ég?)

[(What do I teach this specific lesson?)]

2. Framkvæmd

[Implementation]

(Hvernig er skipulag kennslutímans?)

[(How was the lesson organized and implemented?)]

3. Rök fyrir kennsluaðferð

[Explanation of choice of method]

(Hvers vegna kenni ég þetta efni með þessum hætti?)

[(Why do I teach this specific topic the way I do?)]

4. Markmið

[Aim]

(Hvað vil ég að nemendur læri um þetta efni/í þessum tíma/af þessari kennslu?)

[(What do I want students to learn about this topic/in this lesson/from working with this specific method?)]

Mælt er með að þið skrifið um eina blaðsíðu fyrir hverrar kennslustundar.

[The accounts should be approximately one page per lesson.]

Vinsamlegast sendið mér dagbókina á rafrænu formi fyrir 5. október 2009.

[Please send me the logs electronically before October 5th 2009]

Bergen, júní 2009

[Bergen, June 2009]

Bestu kveðjur,

[Best regards]

Kjersti

Kjersti.Lea@hib.no

VI. Some remarks on terminology

In an interdisciplinary work, the danger of using terminology in a manner that may easily be understood differently by readers from different academic traditions is considerable. So, to be as clear as possible I provide the below list of comments on terms I have regarded particularly liable to misconception. The terms are presented in alphabetical order.

Cultural heritage

In Bourdieuan sociology it is recommended that researchers avoid adopting key concepts from the vocabulary of the agents or field they are studying; that they *break* with the apparently obvious in the agents' perception of reality (Nørholm, 2008). Although this study does not make pretensions to be a Bourdieuan study, it is nevertheless asserted to be inspired by this tradition. Therefore, when referring as much too particular key concepts as the case in the current text is with "cultural heritage", there is a need to clarify the usage of this term in the current work.

I have not accomplished a Bourdieuan break with the term, but the discussion of the concept as part of Icelandic imageries (Ch. 4) resembles what is in Bourdieu's epistemology termed "objectifying". Elsewhere in the text, the concept is primarily used in a referential sense, implying the participants' or ordinary Icelanders' understanding of it as presented in Chapter 4.

Didactics

The term "didactics" needs to be defined because it is understood differently in different academic traditions, and because it moreover seems to have different usage in different countries. According to *Oxford English Dictionary* "didactics" means "the science or art of teaching" (Dictionary). I let this account for the regular English meaning of the word. However, the Nordic countries have largely adapted the term from German, and since I am rooted in the Nordic tradition, my use of "didactics" is influenced by the German-Nordic usage of the term, which is at the same time more

concrete and wider than what seems to be common in the English tradition. The German dictionary *Duden* relates the following explanations of *Didaktik*:

1. Lehre vom Lehren und Lernen; Unterrichtslehre
 2. Theorie der Bildungsinhalte; Methode des Unterrichtens
 3. Abhandlung, Darstellung einer didaktischen Theorie
- ("Didaktik," 1999)

The Icelandic word for “didactics” is *kennslufræði* which is in the encyclopaedia *Íslenska alfræðiorðabókin* defined as “[an] academic discipline dealing with the purpose and aims of teaching and education and with teaching methods“. (*“fræðigrein sem fjallar um tilgang og markmið kennslu og skólustarfs og um kennsluaðferðir“*) (Hafsteinsdóttir & Harðardóttir, 1990). So the Icelandic definition roughly corresponds to points 1. and 2. in *Duden*’s explanation. The Icelandic definition also corresponds fairly well to the English one, although the Icelandic explanation may be regarded more specific than the English.

The participating teachers use the Icelandic term *kennslufræði* and I assume that they use the term in a sense close to the encyclopaedia’s definition of it. This definition is what one should have in mind when *kennslufræði* in participants’ statements has been translated to “didactics”. For the sake of consistency, I have aimed at using “didactics” in a sense equivalent to that of the teachers also when speaking on my own behalf.

The adjective “didactic” should be regarded a derivative from “didactics”, and thus mean “in understanding or correspondence with (the theories of) didactics”. For example the phrase “teachers’ didactic aims” would mean approximately “educational aims which are in understanding with the teachers’ views on the purpose and general aims of education, specifically within the subject they teach” or “educational aims which are in understanding with the teachers’ views on appropriate methods for teaching the subject and particular topics”, depending on the context.

Parallel to the term “didactics” is the term “subject didactics”, which could, taking the Icelandic definition of the former as a starting point, be defined as “academic

discipline dealing with the purpose and aims of teaching and education and with teaching methods within specific school subjects“. However, since this term is at least as ambiguous as “didactics”, I often use the German term *Fachdidaktik* to reduce the ambiguity when not quoting participants,.

Discourse

In a Scandinavian context, the term “discourse” tends to be regarded a technical term, associated e.g. with the linguistic method discourse analysis, or with Foucault’s notion of discourse as institutionalized reasoning, closely related to his analyses of power structures. This is less evident in the English speaking world, where the word has a far broader meaning. Thus, *Oxford English Dictionary* mentions e.g. “communication of thought by speech”, “talk, conversation”, and “a spoken or written treatment of a subject, in which it is handled or discussed at length” (Dictionary).

In the current text, “discourse” is not used as a methodical term, but in a meaning which resembles that of *OED*, combined with Ricœur’s explanation that, by contrast to language as system, “discourse alone has not only a world, but an other, another person, an interlocutor to whom it is addressed” (Ricoeur, 1971), and so “discourse” in Ricœur’s view denotes a “language-event” or simply “linguistic usage”. So, by “discourse” I mean a general understanding of something or a general way of talking about something within a given context, for example the general public in Iceland or the narrower circle of Icelandic teachers.

It may seem controversial to use the term “discourse” in a work inspired by Bourdieu since Bourdieu himself avoids the term. However, this avoidance only concerns usage of “discourse” as a technical or methodical term. For *discours* is not an uncommon word in French as it is in English, and I therefore regard the common usage of it uncontroversial also with regard to the project’s sociological inspiration.

Field

Like “discourse”, “field” is at the same time a common word in everyday language and a theory laden academic term. Thus, in a work where Bourdieu’s theories play a part, the current use of this word should be commented. For, while this study does not make use of field analysis/correspondence analysis as a methodical tool, the understanding of “field” as an epistemological concept has nevertheless been of inspiration. For instance, I think it makes sense to talk about the field of education, for example, and of sub-fields such as upper secondary education or, at a still more subordinate level, about mother tongue education. Bourdieu’s “field” concept moreover makes it easier to discern the interaction between the field of education and other major societal fields, such as that of culture and that of politics, which clearly influence the field of (mother tongue) education in various ways.

Since the term “field” is so broad and since it so common in everyday language, one can hardly get around it, regardless one’s connection to Bourdieu. This study’s use of it is more general than Bourdieu’s, and usually in understanding with Oxford English Dictionary’s notations II, 12 a, c, 13, 14 a, b, III, or 18b (Dictionary). Provided e.g. Thomson’s account of Bourdieu’s term (2008), his usage clearly overlaps with the OED notations. So the current use of the term is not contradictory to that of Bourdieu, it is merely more general. For in the present work, “field” is used in a broader, less technical term than is often the case in Bourdieu’s works where a field is understood as “a relatively autonomous social microcosm, in which a specific human activity or practice takes place” (Sestoft, 2006, p. 158) which “exists when a limited group of people and institutions fight about something which they have in common” (Broadly, 1991, p. 266).

Framework conditions

“Framework conditions” is a relatively broad term. Generally, it refers to practicability; the conditions which at the same time limit and possibilitate a practice, e.g. (institutional) education. In the present context, such limits and possibilities are

primarily regarded from the teachers' point of view, and so "framework conditions" here primarily means the conditions for teachers' professional life and work. "Framework conditions" may vary with regard to degree of formality or regulating force. One way of clarifying it, is to show how it relates to several hierarchic levels, as exemplified in the list below.

1. Material framework conditions
 - a) Local and spatial conditions; environment, architecture and technical standard of school building, classroom and furnishing
 - b) Economic conditions and teaching material; text books, computers, various equipment for other methods than "chalk-and-talk", possibilities for dual teacher system, funding of excursions etc.
 - c) Size of class/group
2. Socio-educational framework conditions
 - a) Pupils with special needs
 - b) Pupils' academic motivation and capacity
 - c) Pupils' socio-economic background
3. Institutional/organizational framework conditions
 - a) Class model or course model (cf. Chapter 5.4 on organization of upper secondary education)
 - b) Mixed classes (several lines of study in the same group) or homogeneous groups
 - c) School policy; local educational aims and strategies
4. Political framework conditions
 - a) National aims in educational policy
 - b) Legal and other regulations, e.g. the Education Act
 - c) National curricula
 - d) Exams and other tests
 - e) Funding
 - f) Teachers' salary
 - g) Teachers' work-load
 - h) Opportunities of supplementary education (for teachers)

One might reasonably argue that the list ought to contain an even more basal category, concerning personal issues such as mutual trust, mutual acknowledgement, reasonable work effort from all parties, and teachers' professional knowledge (of the

subject as well as of teaching). However, although crucial to the quality and efficacy, these issues are addressed otherwise in the present work, and are therefore generally not included in the current concept of framework conditions.

Wherever I make use of the term “framework conditions”, several such conditions are at stake; in the rule also several of the noted levels. On the other hand, if I have very specific conditions or one particular level in mind, I specify this and use more precise expressions, such as “institutional framework conditions”. When discussing one particular condition, I use the according term, such as “organizational model” or “the course model”.

Habitus

The term “*habitus*” occasionally appears in the current work. “*Habitus*” is often associated with Bourdieu’s sociology, and since this is furnished as a source of inspiration in this work, there is a need to clarify my usage of the term *habitus*.

The current usage of “*habitus*” is roughly in understanding with that of Bourdieu, but as accounted for in the comment on “field”, Bourdieuan terms are not strictly speaking used as methodical tools in this study. Moreover, although “*habitus*” is often associated with Bourdieu’s terminology, Bourdieu is neither the only nor the first scholar to make use of this notion. In his exploration of this concept, Staf Callewaert demonstrates how it for example plays an important part in Aristotle’s *Nichomachean Ethics* (the Greek word for this notion is *hexis*) as well as in Thomas Aquina’s *Summa Theologica* (Callewaert, 1997, pp. 137-173; 2014). Callewaert shows how also other scholars, e.g. Durkheim and Elias make use of the term, and how *habitus* is moreover the common French translation of the German *Habitualität*. In the present context it is also of interest that Taylor sometimes uses the term “*habitus*”, and for example states that a “bodily disposition is a habitus when it encodes a certain cultural understanding. The habitus in this sense always has an expressive dimension. It gives expression to certain meanings that things and people have for us” (Taylor, 1995, p. 178).

While stating that the term “*habitus*” has been used in contexts as varied as related above, I still owe much to the Bourdieuan concept. It has been of and so I will briefly specify my understanding of the Bourdieuan notion of “*habitus*”.

Bourdieu regards “*habitus*” “a system of stable dispositions, of *structured* structures, which are suited to serve as *structuring* structures in the sense that these dispositions generate and structure conceptions and practices (Bourdieu, 1977; Prieur et al., 2006, p. 39). The concept implies that the individual and personal is at the same time social and collective (Qvortrup, 2009, p. 111), or as Bourdieu phrases it, “*habitus*” is “socialized subjectivity” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2009 (1996), p. 111). Thus, conceptions and practices may be tuned to their purpose and appear to have regularity, although they have not emerged as a result of the agent’s conscious efforts to follow certain rules (Prieur et al., 2006, p. 39). But although the world is always experienced from a certain social position (with regard to class, ethnicity, history, age, gender etc.), and although we are thus situated beings (c.f. also e.g. Taylor, 1989, 2004), we are not in Bourdieu’s view *determined* by this situatedness. For rather than a set of rules, it is a generative principle for action that causes agents’ tendency to act in certain ways, and since “*habitus*” and the closely connected notion of practicality/common sense (*sens pratique* in Bourdieu’s terminology) are something agents *live*, and so, there is ample opportunity for variation and creativity (Bourdieu, 1990; Prieur et al., 2006, p. 40).

Moore mentions that although the formation of “*habitus*” initially takes place initially within the family, “for Bourdieu, the most important agency is education where capital assumes an institutionalized form.” (2008, p. 105). If Bourdieu is right, there should be good reason to take “*habitus*” into consideration in a study of education and of educationalists reasoning and practices.

Icelandic teacher

In English the term “Icelandic teacher” is ambiguous. It both means “a teacher from Iceland” (Icel. *íslenskur kennari*) and “a teacher of Icelandic” (Icel. *íslenskukennari*).

This is parallel to the term “English teacher”, whereas there is no similar problem when one speaks of subject teachers in mathematics or geography. It would be inconvenient to use precise yet cumbersome formulations like “subject teachers of Icelandic” every time I refer either to the study’s participants or to the group of teachers of Icelandic as a whole. Even the term “mother tongue teachers” is inconvenient as a general term. “Mother tongue teacher” is moreover also an ambiguous term, which both means “teachers of Icelandic” and “teachers teaching pupils with a foreign background their respective mother tongues”. I nevertheless sometimes speak of “mother tongue teachers”. I have found it defensible to do so because it is after all quite common, and because it in fact is unambiguous in the context where it is used. Yet I have chosen to mainly use the simplest term, i.e. “Icelandic teachers”, even if I also occasionally use this phrase in the meaning “teachers from Iceland”.

Interpretation

In this study “interpretation” is generally preferred to other resembling terms, such as “analysis” in descriptions of how the empirical material has been dealt with. This choice relates to the study’s hermeneutic fundament. Thus, it is also discussed in Chapter 3, “Theoretical perspectives”. Still, a specification of the current understanding of this term may be of use.

To clarify what the term “interpretation” signifies in the present text, I will start by contrasting it to the related term “analysis”. In the current understanding, a researcher who seeks to analyse a text or text equivalent aims at representing its content. This may for example take the form of “qualitative assessment of the words and terms used” (Brewer, 2003a, p. 44). The reasoning behind the judgement that analysis may not be sufficient and that interpretation may be required is the belief that data do not necessarily speak for themselves, among other things because the analyst’s/interpreter’s perspective influences what (s)he sees. This means that to deal with texts or other meaningful entities implies an active construction of meaning. This act of construction is what is in the current text called “interpretation”.

Brewer explains “interpretation” as “the process by which meaning is attached to data” (Brewer, 2003b, p. 165), and Hurworth states that “interpretation” is required to make sense of data (Hurworth, p. 210). She establishes, that qualitative researchers “aim to find out more about people's experiences, their thoughts, feelings and social practices. To achieve this aim, we need to ask questions about their meaning and significance (...), we need to make the data meaningful through a process of interpretation.” (2005, p. 210). Interpretation “is a response to the question “what does this mean?” and it is concerned with generating a deeper and/or fuller understanding of the meaning(s) contained within an account”, Hurworth explains (2005, p. 210). She follows up by providing an overview over possible achievements of scholarly interpretation:

- A better understanding of the author's intended meaning (i.e. a clearer sense of what he or she was trying to express).
- A better understanding of the author's unconscious (i.e. unintended) communication (i.e. an understanding of what may have motivated the author to say what he or she said or did even though he or she may not be aware of this motivation him- or herself).
- A better understanding of the social, political, historical, cultural and/or economic context which made it possible (or indeed necessary) for the author to express what he or she expressed.
- A better understanding of the social and/or psychological functions of what is being expressed (i.e. an insight into what is being achieved, in relation to other people or the self, by what is being expressed).
- A better understanding of what the account may tell us about the nature and quality of a more general concept such as ‘human existence’, ‘social progress’ or ‘human psychology’. (Hurworth, p. 210)

As for the nature and results of the interpretative process, I quote Brewer and Given, respectively:

Interpretation is a creative enterprise that depends on the insight and imagination of the researcher (...). [I]nterpretation, the way in which the researcher attaches meaning to the data, is not mechanical but requires skill, imagination

and creativity; Norman Denzin once described it as an art. As such there have been no attempts to codify the process of interpretation as there have been for analysis. (Brewer, 2003b, p. 165)

[I]nterpreting qualitative findings begins with a researcher's own assumptions regarding the world, life, and people. In this manner, worldviews tend to influence how one comes to make meaning or sense of data acquired from a research study. Nobody lives in a philosophical or worldview vacuum; the paradigms that a researcher comes to accept as true tend to color the results of his or her research findings. (Given, 2008, p. 459)

In Taylor's understanding interpretation is exploration of texts with the intention of giving what he terms "the best account" of them, i.e. the most reasonable account for how they may be understood (e.g. Taylor, 1989, p. 74). This is the aim of hermeneutic work, Taylor finds.

Mother tongue

Apparently, the term "mother tongue" is relatively unproblematic. It refers to a child's first language; the one it learns at home. Even if the situation increasingly is more complex in many families, this may work as a tentative definition. However, once one starts making compounds, like "mother tongue subject" or "mother tongue teacher", the situation is less clear. What is the mother tongue subject of a pupil whose parents are Polish, who speaks Polish at home, but who also speaks Icelandic fluently since she has lived in Iceland all her life? It is still not unreasonable to consider Polish this pupil's mother tongue. Yet, Icelandic is very likely to be the subject she studies as her "mother tongue subject" at school. Especially in primary and lower secondary school there are more and more pupils like this (invented) Polish girl in Iceland as in most Western countries. Still, it is in the rule possible to establish the mother tongue of these children at the individual level. It only gets problematic when one uses the mother tongue term on a general and institutional level. For example, many pupils with a foreign background are entitled some education in their (individual) mother tongue – Polish, Hindi, Italian or whatever it might be. Such education is termed "mother tongue education". Yet, this term is also in both formal

and informal contexts used as a synonym for the Icelandic subject, which is the mother tongue subject of most pupils. The term has been used thus since long before any alternative mother tongue education existed in Iceland, and if not specified, most people still associate the term “mother tongue subject” with the Icelandic subject. This is also how the participants in this study use the phrase. When I refer to matters concerning Icelandic (language), the school subject Icelandic or Icelandic teachers, I have chosen to use this common term myself. I chose to do so first, because this is in agreement with the participating teachers’ usage of the term, which is in turn in concordance with that of public documents, such as the Icelandic subject’s national curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1999b) or statements from the Icelandic Language Council (Council, 2009, 2010, 2011). It is evident that in Iceland, “mother tongue” is generally understood to mean “Icelandic”.

Furthermore, and related to the first reason, it is a fact that the participants’ classrooms are populated by ethnic Icelanders. There simply are no foreigners to talk about, and since Icelandic is the only language to which the teachers relate in their work, it does not even appear to them that “mother tongue” could be a problematic term. This also means that the term in fact is unambiguous in the current material.

Another reason for my choice is that it has been convenient to be able to quote the participants, also in reported speech, in their own words. Thereby, it also becomes easier to relate their reasoning and views on the subject, their profession and their practice. This should not be regarded equivalent to an uncritical adaption of my informants’ use of the term.

Finally, I have chosen the term “mother tongue” because there is no adequate alternative. Internationally one has tried terms such as “the national language” as opposed to individuals’ “mother tongue”, and “L1” (“Language 1”) as an alternative to “mother tongue”, but I do not find any of them less ambiguous than “mother tongue” in practice. The first one may function in homogenous countries, but is not less problematic than “mother tongue” in countries with more than one official

language. As for “L1”, it might be quite precise if defined to mean “any individuals first language”, yet one will still need a term for the general level. So all things considered, I have not found reason to discard the established “mother tongue” until an adequate and precise alternative has been produced.

Participant

When I refer to the teachers who took part in the current study, I usually use the phrase “participants” if I do not speak of “the teachers” or use the individual teacher’s pseudonym, but occasionally I use other notions. “Informant” would be an example of this. Yet, although “informant” sometimes seems to be the most appropriate expression, I generally prefer “participant”, essentially because I see it as less alienating than “informant”. In my understanding of the terms, the teachers are regarded actual persons with individual opinions, experiences and will as long as they are thought of as participants, whereas “informant” easily is associated with something impersonal; a source of data.

I also use the term “agent”, but not the resembling term “actor”. I prefer “agent” because this is a term used by both Taylor (cf. e.g. Abbey, 2000, p. 57) and Bourdieu, and I follow their reasons for using this specific term. In the current work, “agent” tends to mean “social agent”, and is primarily used when I want to accentuate theoretical aspects rather than that of teachers as participants in a research project, for example.

Pedagogy

The term “pedagogy” is closely related to “didactics” (q.v.), and just as connotations to the latter varies among countries as described above, this is the case also with “pedagogy”. As everyday usage of the term seems to be ambiguous in the English speaking world, I have tried to limit the use of it in the current text.

The understanding of the term in the present context corresponds to the definitions in two English dictionaries, namely *Oxford Dictionary of English* and *Oxford English*

Dictionary. The definition in the former reads: “Pedagogy *n.* the method and practice of teaching, especially as an academic subject or theoretical concept” (“discours,”), whereas *Oxford Dictionary of English* defines “pedagogy” as “the art, occupation, or practice of teaching. Also: the theory or principles of education; a method of teaching based on such a theory” (Dictionary). Correspondingly, the adjective “pedagogic” in the current context means “relating to teaching” or “relating to pedagogy”.

As the dictionary definitions indicate, there is an overlap between “pedagogy” and “didactics”. In the present work, the term “pedagogy” is regarded the more general term, and it is prevalingly used about the “academic subject or theoretical concept” (Icel. *uppeldisfræði*), whereas “didactics” designates motives and activities on the practical level, i.e. regarding instruction and classroom activities. So, as specified above, “didactics” is used in a sense roughly corresponding to *Duden*’s “*Lehre vom Lehren und Lernen; Unterrichtslehre*” and “*Methode des Unterrichtens*”, cf. Icel. *kennslufræði*.

Practice and praxis

As any dictionary may demonstrate, “practice” is a broad concept in everyday language as well as in specialist usage, and so calls for clarification. In this thesis the concept is used in understanding with Taylor’s definition: “By ‘practice’ I mean something extremely vague and general: more or less any stable configuration of shared activity, whose shape is defined by a certain pattern of dos and don’ts, can be practice for my purpose. [...] And there are practices at all levels of human social life.” (1989, p. 204).

“Practice” relates to activity and action (as opposed to theory), but also to procedures and habitual ways of doing things. The word also relates to “praxis”. Like “practice”, “praxis” *inter alia* has to do with action, and moreover with “action entailed, required, or produced by a theory, or by particular circumstances” (Dictionary), the latter implying that “praxis” is not just any action, but a specific sort of action for which one may need to train. Moreover, the epistemological background of “praxis” is the

Old Greek *praxis*, which also means action, but more specifically action which is an end in itself because it is good as such (Aristotle, 1999, p. 231). This concordant aspect is part of the reason why *praxis* rather than “practice” was chosen as a superordinate term in the categorization of the teachers’ professional life. For while they certainly stress the practical aspect of their work as opposed to theoretical academic studies, they at the same time repeatedly accentuate that general education is a substantial part of their work. As become evident from their accounts, they consider general education to involve values relating to humanism at large, and so to *praxis*. The meaning of “practice” and “praxis” are discussed further below, in the comment on “profession”.

Since Bourdieuan sociology is a declared source of inspiration in this work, a brief comment on his notion of “practice”, specifically related to his “theory of practice” is required. Basically, Bourdieu’s theory of practice, developed over decades and accounted for e.g. in *Outline to a Theory of Practice* and *The Logic of Practice* (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990), is an epistemological theory in the sense that it argues in favour of the “logic of practice” as a specific kind of knowledge. At the same time, Bourdieu uses it to mark his epistemological position as distinctly different from structuralism-oriented theories on the one hand, and subjectivist theories on the other (Prieur et al., 2006, p. 27). Worth noticing in this context is Bourdieu’s comment that researchers should note that what an agent tells about his practice, for instance in an interview, may differ from the actual performance of the practice. This is so because practices are usually carried by practical rather than articulated logics (Prieur et al., 2006, pp. 27-28).

Profession

Two comments are required on the term “profession”. The first regards translation, the other the contents of the term.

To start with the translator comment, I observe that the English term “profession” is a wide one. In Icelandic, by contrast, one needs several, more specific terms to describe

what is covered by “profession”/“professional” in English. There is e.g. *atvinna* which means “job”, *starfsgrein* which means both “(academic) profession” and “craft”, *fag* which means “trade” or “profession”, and *stétt* which means “occupational group”. This discrepancy represents certain translator challenges. For while “profession” or “professional” will in the rule be a correct translation of terms such as the related ones, nuances will be lost in such a uniform translation; it may for example be difficult to relate the distinction between “professional” as “relating to the profession” and “professional” as “(relating to) professionalism”. Such inaccuracies are particularly bothersome when one is trying to recount another person’s statements as accurately and respectfully as possible.

I have also found the term “professionalism” useful. However, “professionalism” is rather an academic term than a common word in everyday language (cf. e.g. Goodson, 2003b), and it will rarely be an adequate translation of the teachers’ own expressions.

The second comment regards the contents of the term “profession”, which is not altogether unambiguous when the professional group one is discussing is that of teachers since teachers constitute a heterogeneous group of professionals, spanning from pre-school teachers to university teachers. Their assignment and responsibilities varies greatly, as do their educational background. Is it then meaningful to use the same designation for them all, and does it make sense to regard teaching a profession, for example in the perspective of studies of professions? The short answer is that if one focuses on basic education, teachers in compulsory education generally meet the criteria of e.g. Abbott’s definition of “profession” (1988), whereas this is less obviously the case with teachers in upper secondary education. Nevertheless, I have for the sake of convenience chosen to call them so in this text.

Self-concept, self-image, and self-understanding

Terms such as “self-image”, “self-understanding” and “self-concept” are used synonymously in this thesis. While it may in some contexts, be of importance to distin-

guish between them, I have not found this to be the case in the current one. At this, I take Taylor's stand as my point of departure. Regarding terms such as "self", "person" and "subject", as well as "selfhood" and "identity"

Taylor does not share some philosophers' interest in differentiating these terms from one another, and according them precise meanings. For him, all these terms relate to the wider question of what it is to be human. As such, they touch on some of the same issues that used to be raised under the rubric of human nature or what now fall under investigations of philosophical anthropology.

(Abbey, 2000, p. 57)

In my understanding of them, the terms "self-concept", "self-image" and "self-understanding" to a considerable degree overlap. They all denote subjects' sense of who or what someone or somewhat is, usually as described by themselves. This means that the terms are closely related to self-representation. The entity in question may be an individual or a group, such as teachers or Icelanders. Furthermore, all three notions are relational and often contain a contrastive element; descriptions of individuals' or groups' self-characteristics often stress the distinctive and thus implicitly distance them from other people or other groups. Thus, in the present context, either term designates an individual's or a group's notion of her own characteristics or of common features within the group; what makes it sensible to talk of a common "we", cf. Taylor's term "imaginary" (2004).

This all means that the usage of "self-image" etc. in the present text is non-essentialist; as neither of the terms is meant to describe the essential nature of someone or something. When talking about someone's "self-image", I do not imply that this necessarily is how this person or group essentially *is* as teachers, Icelanders etc. merely that this is how they present themselves.

Should the text at some point seem to indicate that I imply an essentialist understanding of either "self-concept", "self-image" or "self-understanding", despite my efforts to avoid this, I may have treated the concept too carelessly after all. To be

as precise as possible, I *could* have specified that I have not intended to be essentialist in each case where there could be any room for doubt. I have not done so, and so I state my intentions here.

As I have found “identity” a less clear concept than “self-image” etc., I have tried to avoid this term, at least when talking about individuals’ self-understanding. The main reasons why I found this concept difficult to deal with are, first, that I find it less clear than “self-image” etc., largely because its usage is so broad, being in common use both in everyday language and within several academic disciplines. Following the first point, is the fact that the term is used in partly very different sources. I have found it for example in scholarly articles, news articles, and reports from the Icelandic Language Council, as well as in the national curriculum for upper secondary education. More often than not the term is taken for granted and not discussed by the author or speaker, and so one must simply try to derive its meaning in the individual cases. As meanings partly diverge, there is a danger that by referring others’ usage of it my own account appears unclear where my intention has been to contextualize my material by showing various interpretations of the Icelandic in order to display social and cultural circumstances in which the Icelandic subject has been developed and in which the participants in the study live and breathe. In attempting to do this, the term “identity” has been inevitable. This is particularly the case in discussions of what is often termed “national identity” and “cultural identity”. For example, I do in chapter 4 write about the study’s social and cultural context. In the description of this context, I refer to several studies of the Icelandic society to show how the Icelandic collective self-imagery *may* be interpreted. These studies are mostly performed by historians and anthropologists, and both groups are prone to use the term “identity”, frequently also “national identity” or “Icelandic identity”, and so it seems natural to use similar phrases when referring to these scholars. It may moreover be regarded a point in itself to illustrate how these concepts pop up in all sorts of sources: To demonstrate this and thus to show in how strong a position the

notion of a national cultural identity is may in my view be regarded part of the contextualization of the participants' accounts.

VII. Affirmation of permission from Dr. Prof. Hartmut Rosa



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Affirmation of permission

I, Prof. Dr. Hartmut Rosa, hereby grant permission to Kjersti Lea, PhD student at the University of Bergen, Norway, to reproduce my “Basic model of self-interpretation”, derived from my article “Four levels of self-interpretation; A paradigm for interpretive social philosophy and political criticism”, published in *Philosophy & social criticism*, Vol. 30, 2004, in her PhD thesis.

Hartmut Rosa

**Errata for
Intellectual Practicians**

*An Exploration of Professionalism among Upper Secondary School Teachers
with Icelandic Mother Tongue Teachers as a Contextualized Empirical Case*

Kjersti Lea



Thesis for the degree philosophiae doctor (PhD)
at the University of Bergen

(signature of candidate)

(signature of faculty)

May 21st 2015

Errata

Page 14 “teacher” – “teachers”

Page 33 “research field” – “all concerned research fields”

Page 38 “*Between Theoria and Praxis*” – “*Intellectual Practicians*”

Page 113 “agent’s” – “agents”

Page 114 “themselves provide” – “themselves”

Page 128 “the “capital”” – “capital”

Page 144 “World War” – “World War I”

Page 210 “rest of the others” – “others”

Page 231 “and how” – “how”

Page 247 “chapter 8” – “Chapter 7”

Page 253 “see feel” – “feel”

Page 263 “self-representation is” – “self-representation to be”

Page 284 “Hannes’ score is estimated to 2.5 because Hannes, partly due to his teachment style, seems to focus more on the subject matter itself ad less on didactic matters, and partly” - “Hannes seems to focus more on the subject matter itself and less on didactic matters, partly”

Page 315 “Table 11” – “Table 4”

Page 379 “8.2 and summed up in Chapter 9.1” – “6.2 and summed up in Chapter 7.1”

Page 386 “chapter 7.1” – “Chapter 6.1”

Page 413 “even more” – “is even more”