

ON TEACHERS' KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND WISDOM – AND THE INEVITABILITY OF LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the concept of knowledge with a view on L1 teachers. Influenced by Aristotle's epistemology, it explores how teacher knowledge could be described and understood.

The empirical foundation of the article is a case study of seven Icelandic L1 teachers.

The article analyses the concept of teachers' professional knowledge and discusses questions such as: What kind of knowledge do the teachers actually possess and value? How do L1 teachers deal with the complexity of their work? Does their knowledge cover the needs of their profession?

The analysis indicates that the L1 subject in some respects is in a special position: In addition to being a school subject, it relates to cultural traditions and values. Moreover, the subject relates to pupils' development both as individuals and citizens, and so even deals with citizenship in a fundamental way. Furthermore, L1 is a tool for any subject: pupils need to read and to express themselves both in writing and orally in all classes. Besides, the subject often treats themes which affect pupils' personally, e.g. due to the close connection between language and identity. Therefore teachers' knowledge should include morality, in addition to academic and pedagogic skills.

KEY WORDS: Teacher knowledge, Aristotelian concept of knowledge, practical judgement, construction of knowledge, wisdom

1

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1. INTRODUCTION

This article will focus on the concept of knowledge with a view on the mother tongue teacher and his or her professional self-concept. Inspired by Aristotle's epistemology and ethics it will explore how teacher knowledge, particularly the L1 teacher's knowledge, and teacher identity could be described and understood in what will be termed a broadened Aristotelian perspective. This implies a somewhat uncommon combination of the field of pedagogy and that of philosophy of education, motivated by the belief that competent and skilled teachers are of invaluable importance to pupils, both as learners and individuals, and that it therefore is crucial to develop and explore the notion of teacher knowledge and teacher competence. Consequently, the question what it takes to become a "good teacher" must be of great importance. This is both a normative question, rooted in educational philosophy, and a practical pedagogic one, which calls for empirical studies. It is a fundamental presumption in this article that educational research will benefit substantially by combining these two perspectives. However, teacher professionalism and a well-developed concept of teacher knowledge are also important factors in pursuing a high quality mother tongue education. In the following, I shall argue that even normative and moral questions, rarely discussed in the pedagogy related to the subject¹, should be included in the concept of teacher knowledge and professionalism. It is a basic view in this article that such a broad understanding of teacher professionalism demands a high consciousness on the teachers' behalf, and that purposeful development of such consciousness must be mediated through the language.

The empirical foundation of the article is a case study of seven Icelandic L1 upper secondary school teachers, based on individual interviews and the teachers' own written reports from their classes, and supplied with mandatory guidelines, such as the national curriculum.

The exploring and interpretation of teachers' statements and other examples from this material are hermeneutically based; hence there is for example a persistent attempt to see the mother tongue subject and the epistemology of the teachers in a holistic perspective, without losing sight of the particulars. The hermeneutic approach also entails an acceptance of subjectivity as an unavoidable quality in interpretative research, and this both applies to the empirical material, e.g. informants' statements, and to the researchers' understanding of human expressions.

The article's aim is to explore the concept of teacher knowledge, broadened with and with particular accent on that of teacher wisdom. The concept of wisdom,

¹ *In many European countries, the term used for subject specific pedagogy is, literally translated in to English 'didactics', which word has specific connotations in English. Despite these connotations, we will use didactics throughout this paper as reflection of the Non-Anglophone use of the word.*

as understood in the present context, does basically correspond to Aristotle's concept of *phronesis*, and so Aristotelian epistemology and ethics have been a useful support in the interpretation of the Icelandic teachers' professional knowledge. The article will also offer some suggestions as to how such knowledge and wisdom may be developed. This aim is in accordance with the superordinate purpose of the research out of which this paper has emerged, which is to enhance the understanding of the knowledge and practice of mother tongue teachers.

2. PRESENTATION OF THE TEACHERS

Seven teachers have contributed to the current study. They are all educated at the University of Iceland, and so they have a more homogenous educational background than teachers of other subjects, who are in many cases even educated abroad. Most of the informants teach Icelandic exclusively, as is in principle the case of almost all mother tongue teachers in upper secondary education. This is the general pattern even within other subjects. Yet, there are teachers who teach two or even several subjects. In the case of Icelandic teachers, such an additional course will typically be the subject "life skills". This applies to about half of the participants in this study.

The teachers were chosen at random, in the sense that I did not know any of them beforehand. Yet, I wanted to make a strategic selection, and picked candidates accordingly, the aim being to collect a material which contains data with a maximum potential of conveying good and relevant understanding of the topic of research (Malterud, 2011). Diversity was thus pursued in the recruiting, in order to collect a rich material and at the same time to avoid ill-founded generalizations. This principle of selection proved quite practicable: After all, some variables, for example those related to gender and geography, are quite transparent, even if one does not know the candidates. It suffices to go through the schools' staff lists. Finding out about the candidates' age also proved quite feasible. The result is a group which consists of both male and female teachers, some of whom are experienced and some relatively inexperienced. Furthermore, there is a difference in age of approximately 30 years between the youngest and the oldest teacher. The teachers were moreover recruited from both vocational schools and from sixth form colleges and they come from all over the country, even if the majority lives in the capital area. All the teachers have studied didactics in addition to Icelandic. Some of them have also studied other subjects, some even at postgraduate level, and several of them have experience from other professions than teaching.

The teachers all wrote logbooks about ten of their lessons, in which they accounted for a number of details, such as the lessons' content and aim, and at which course they were taught. Moreover, the teachers provided their own evaluation of each lesson. As the teachers had handed in the logbooks, a date was settled for an in-depth-interview, and each teacher was interviewed. The interviews could be

classified as semi structured, yet more open than in the model suggested by Kvale, for example (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

3. ICELAND: EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM AND SOCIO-CULTURAL CONDITIONS

A fundamental assumption in this article is that there are some significant differences between L1 as a school subject and most other school subjects. One of these has to do with the considerable complexity of the subject, its multi-layeredness, which I will show in some detail in the following. Another important aspect is the fact that the mother tongue subject as a rule deals with the standard language of the community in which it is taught, and thus is closely connected with the official codes and the way of thinking in the community in question. In most cases the subject is also closely related to the pupils' mother tongue and thus with their own ways of reflecting, with their world view, with their base of knowledge and with their development of a personal self. All of this could be regarded essential conditions of the subject, and could probably be recognized in most countries. Still, it would be a simplism to assume that we deal with the same subject when talking about L1 in, say, Germany, Greece and Iceland, as demonstrated for example at the IAIMTE conference in Hildesheim, 2011, where the presentations showed quite clearly how the conditions, traditions, and even challenges vary a great deal from country to country, even if some of the mother tongue subject's core values may be similar in many countries. In accordance with van de Ven's discussion of the educational discourse in an international perspective (van de Ven, 2007), I think it very wise to be aware of socio-cultural differences among the countries. In the long run, realizing the differences will probably deepen the understanding of both the L1 education in the respective countries and of which values, aims and challenges we actually share.

I will therefore start by giving a brief overview over some characteristics of secondary education in Icelandic. The Icelanders have experienced a tremendous increase in the standard of living during the post war period. The country is basically an egalitarian society, with very low unemployment, and a well-functioning welfare system. Generally speaking, the Icelandic educational system is very well developed as well. The country has a ten-year compulsory primary and lower secondary school. In addition, everyone has a legal right to attend upper secondary school, which still is voluntary.

Upper secondary school, where the empirical material to this study has been collected, covers both vocational training and courses equivalent to those in sixth form colleges in Britain. Even pupils who attend vocational schools have the opportunity to supplement their education with general courses, which will qualify them for higher education. In general, upper secondary schools offer four-year studies, but some of the vocational courses are shorter. There are compulsory courses in Icelandic in all study programmes, but these courses are more comprehensive in the programmes for general studies than in the vocational programmes.

The general level of education is high in Iceland, and nearly all young people proceed to upper secondary education after graduating from lower secondary school. Yet, for many years the drop-out rate has been quite high. This has been regarded a problem, particularly after the financial crisis in 2008, as it has become increasingly difficult to get a job, especially for young people without any occupational training (Markussen, 2010).

4. THE MOTHER TONGUE SUBJECT IN ICELAND

The L1 subject is probably in a somewhat special position in any country. In addition to being a school subject, based on a closely related academic field – English, German or, in the research I base this article on, Icelandic, it is also closely related to social, cultural and ethnic traditions and values, aspects that have to do with the notion of *Bildung* as well as with the development of a historical and national consciousness. This is not least the case in Iceland, as becomes very evident in the Icelandic teachers' statements about the L1 subject's content and aim(s).

It may seem contradictory, but the fact is that in the almost bankrupt neo-liberalistic Iceland, the medieval Icelandic literature, such as the sagas and the Edda verses, is still regarded the most important part of the national heritage in the public discourse, and hence has got a very prominent position in the Icelandic subject's curriculum in upper secondary school (Science and Culture Ministry of Education, 1999). Having read, and actually knowing the national literature is thus clearly an inevitable part of any Icelander's education and *Bildung*, as is a good command of the very literary written language as well as formal usage of oral Icelandic, which is quite different from everyday language. The fact that linguistically founded cultural expressions, such as the literary classics, the language as such and the very careful maintenance of it, are so highly estimated in Iceland, is sometimes explained by the fact that the nation lacks other powerful cultural-historical artefacts, for example from the realm of architecture or art. As we also know, the medieval Icelandic literature is generally considered part of the world literature, and so the Icelanders find very good reason to be proud of it and read it. Of course it takes some motivation to make the pupils take an interest in this old literature, the female teacher Jórunn admits. As for herself, she usually appeals to their pride and their self-esteem, she says: "Just think of it, I say to them. You are experts in this field by birth and nationality! Scholars all over the world spend years just learning the language of the sagas, whereas you can read them almost effortless already in upper secondary school!" The example indicates how Icelandic as a school subject very markedly is supposed to be the carrier of the national culture, of a national identity and of a set of national values even in the 21st century, when such entities increasingly are regarded as problematic in a number of countries.

In addition to having this culture-bearing role, the subject is, according to the teachers in the current study themselves, related to the pupils' development both as individuals and citizens, which in turn is dependent on the more instrumental

parts of the subject, like the development of literacy and oral skills. The latter, i.e. the development of linguistic competency, understood as both literacy and oral skills, is emphasized by all the teachers and could clearly be regarded a main theme in their discursive conception of the subject matter.

4.1 The mother tongue subject and its academic elements

As mentioned in the presentation of the teachers, the participants in the current study all teach in upper secondary school. In Iceland, all L1 teachers in upper secondary school are educated at the university. In other words they are *not* trained at a vocational college, but study Icelandic at the faculty of humanities, where they take their degree, and then study didactics at the faculty of education for one year. Consequently, when they start teaching, junior Icelandic teachers' "professional knowledge" is primarily based on academic studies in Icelandic language and literature. This is a major difference between this group and teachers educated in a general teacher training programme, who know from the very beginning that they are training for a specific profession, and so every discipline in their college studies will be seen in the light of this future profession. I find it useful to keep this difference in mind. Likewise, the fact that the professional aspect as such is absent in upper secondary school teachers' academic studies until their last year at university is worth remembering when attempting to understand this specific group's professional self-concept and reasoning, and how the traditions, contents and organization of the subject they are teaching have come to be.

Just like the sister subject in the other Nordic countries, Icelandic as an academic discipline has got a number of sub disciplines, often roughly divided into the study of linguistics and the study of literature, which will typically include studies in disciplines such as literary analysis in general, thorough studies in medieval Icelandic literature and language, literary history, language history, sociolinguistics, phonology, morphology, syntax, textual linguistics, stylistics, rhetorical analysis and Icelandic as a second language (University of Iceland, 2011). In Iceland, it is compulsory for undergraduate students of Icelandic to study both literature and linguistics.

This is the teachers' educational equipment as they set out for "teaching life". This is what they really know and what they are very well educated in. On the other hand, Icelandic teachers' education includes rather scant studies in didactics and pedagogy, and the students have very limited practical training. Consequently, they teach what they themselves have been taught, and so the study of linguistics and literature remain the central disciplines, at least in upper secondary schools, as they have been from the days of the Latin school. This is reflected in the curriculum as well (Sciences and Culture Ministry of Education, 1999). Most of the content listed in the curriculum could be described as academic knowledge. Furthermore, a recent report on Icelandic teaching in upper secondary school ascertains that the tendency to emphasize literature and linguistics be very evident in the data of this report (Sverrisdóttir, Guðmundsdóttir, & Davíðsdóttir, 2011).

There exists, for very understandable reasons, a very long and very strong tradition for thinking and working rather academically in Icelandic in upper secondary school, and I would actually presume that the academic disciplines are what most people associate with the school subject Icelandic; they are what the subject is all about, in the general opinion. Yet as a school subject, the mother tongue subject deals with much more than this. For example, as will be demonstrated below, most of the teachers in the current study feel they have a professional responsibility to contribute to their pupils' personal and social development, to teach L1 skills as general, academic, developmental and democratic tools.

In addition to the academic disciplines, the training in basic skills, like literacy and basic orality, may appear rather self-evident parts of the L1 subject. The targets of these disciplines are several: Very obviously, knowing how to read and write is an absolute necessity in late modernity, both at school, at work and in everyday life. The entry of IT even in social life has strengthened this tendency markedly, of course. Thus, literacy is more important today than it has ever been, which in turn implies that literacy education should be emphasized more than ever, even in secondary education. One might perhaps assume that this is a task for primary and lower secondary school teachers, but at least in Iceland, considerable time and energy is apparently spent on basic skills, such as grammar, "decoding" texts, basic rules for text composition and text production, and, on learning oral presentation and group discussion, in upper secondary school as well, particularly during the pupils' first year there.

It may seem strange that disciplines like orthography and grammar are emphasized so strongly at this educational level. The explanation could, at least partly, be found in the Icelandic literary standard as such: It is the general impression of the teachers taking part in the current study as well as of scholars of Icelandic and the ordinary man and woman that the difference between the written language and young people's everyday oral language be considerable, particularly stylistically, a fact representing a challenge to the widely agreed Icelandic language policy which *inter alia* aims to preserve the Icelandic tongue and, which has changed comparatively little from Old Norse, at least morphologically (e.g. Kristinsson, 2001). This aim is supported by most Icelanders. Furthermore, it is widely agreed that language probably be more important to Icelanders' identity than anything else: the shared language is what really units them (Whelpton, 2000). So teachers' enthusiasm for Icelandic language is grounded in the general view on its role and importance as well as in the curriculum and in public language policy. In addition, the written standard's orthographic principles make learning Icelandic spelling a rather tough job, partly due to the linguistic authorities' policy, emphasizing the etymological principle in Icelandic orthography, whereas correspondingly less priority is given to the principle of orthophony. The fact that the relatively complicated inflexional and conjugational system seems hard enough to master to perfection, even to native speakers, also contributes to the necessity to pay close attention to grammar even in upper secondary school.

In sum, this may partly explain why the participants in the current study, both those who teach at vocational schools and those who teach at sixth form colleges, to such a high degree emphasize the importance of basic skills training. Yet, there is more to it; in the teachers' own explanation, the main reason to stress linguistic skills is that such skills have directly to do with *life skills* and with *citizenship* in the teachers' opinion.

4.2 *The mother tongue subject's aim, as seen by the teachers*

Anyone who cannot read properly will be unable to cope in his own life, teacher Jórunn, who works at a sixth form college, states. For similar reasons, Agnes, who teaches at a vocational college, stresses the importance of mastering orthography and stylistics to some extent. To be able to write a job application or a reader's letter, and to do it tolerably "irreproachably", as Agnes puts it, is of great importance to the individual, she claims, and thereby implies that knowing and mastering at least some basic genres, too, is a matter of practical importance. According to Jórunn, this relates to fundamental requirements for the autonomous person. In Jórunn's opinion, it all has to do with being taken seriously as a responsible human being, with being respected as such, and with self-respect, in short with what could otherwise be termed *self-concept* and *integrity*, or simply with the pupils' development of an autonomous self. Almost all the teachers imply that the L1 subject deals with such matters, and thematize them time and again, more or less explicitly. As mentioned above, the accentuating of linguistic skills actually is notable in all the interviews, and interestingly, all the teachers link such skills to entities related to empowerment and meaningfulness, even to happiness in the Aristotelian meaning of the concept.

The correspondence between the ability to express oneself on one hand and life skills and citizenship on the other is also one of the reasons why orality is of similar importance as literacy, in Jórunn's opinion: Any person should know how to express him- or herself under various circumstances, she says. So Jórunn feels that the pupils should get the chance to train their oral skills, too, and that they should learn how to take part in a public debate, how to present an academic subject, and how to deliver a speech, for example. Not surprisingly, her arguments for this are the same as her arguments for spending rather much time on literacy: It has to do with self-respect, with coming of age, with being respected by others, in short with citizenship and with *Bildung*, to use my own terms rather than those of Jórunn, especially *Bildung* understood as Martinsen and Eriksson do, namely as "a kind of training in seeing oneself in relationship to others" (Martinsen & Eriksson, 2009). To be sure, Jórunn admits to meet resistance among her pupils – they can't see why they should learn to formulate themselves differently from what they are used to in informal contexts. But there is no helping it, Jórunn says. They will have to learn to distinguish between informal and formal, between principal speeches, kitchen table discussions and job interviews in order not to make a fool of them-

selves in a number of situations in their future lives. Any person should both be capable of using formal language and of interpreting the context as to choose the appropriate style and language in whatever situation he finds himself in, Jórunn thinks.

Surely, what Jórunn is talking about here, has to do with life skills as well as with *Bildung*. At the same time, the statement offers a clear example of how important the linguistic dimension is in the teachers' view. For example, teacher Agnes clearly shares Jórunn's view, and even goes further when she states that to assist the pupils in developing their ability to express themselves, orally and literally, actually is the L1 subject's main aim, among other things because the subject's more abstract aims, such as *Bildung*, democratization, autonomy and empowerment, can only be reached through language and linguistic skills.

Most of the teachers repeatedly return to the linguistic dimension in the interviews. It is possible, of course, that these statements express a rather formalistic view on mother tongue education, where what matters is correct orthography, mastering the morphology, technically well composed essays, and little more. Yet, they could also reveal a quite essentialistic understanding of the concept of language, and particularly of the mother tongue, rooted in the belief that all cognition is dependent on language. In my interpretation, the teachers' statements about language, orality and literacy are founded on this conviction: You do not think except through language, you do not learn except through language, you do not communicate except through language. No wonder, then, that they fundamentally see the linguistic dimension as the heart of the subject, and that they find it of such vital importance that the pupils develop good command of their mother tongue. Thus interpreted, the training of linguistic skills really is far from formalism, but is rather a practical conveying of a quite ambitious educational ideal.

Similarly, Hannes, an experienced male teacher, accents the importance of a general sense of decorum and a certain general orientation. Hannes wants his pupils to relate what they learn to matters in their own life and in society in general. That is why he always seeks to contextualize the topics he is teaching, he says. He draws parallels from the romantic 19th century novel to films the pupils know, he makes use of current national and international political events when he discusses linguistics or the relation between the national language and personal identity with the pupils, and he makes them reflect on the usage of spelling in after-school life. In general, Hannes feels that young people today are alarmingly disengaged in social and political matters. He sees it as one of his major tasks as a L1 teacher to make his pupils aware of the importance of understanding and becoming involved in society, to provide them with some basic knowledge which will make them capable of such partaking, and to contextualize the syllabus of Icelandic and make it relevant to them as educated, reflective persons. Thus it is necessary with more than mere basic literacy skills. One needs to really master those skills, and one needs to know the culture in which one lives. The term *Bildung* does not exist in Icelandic. Still, it is easy to recognize Hannes' descriptions as an education in *Bild-*

ung and citizenship, even if they differ from, say Agnes' descriptions of the aims of L1 education.

The far younger and relatively recently educated teacher Fjóra supports Agnes' and Hannes' views. "The subject's main aim is to make the pupils more conscious", she says. "Of themselves, of the national heritage, of their own culture and their own language... (...) Yes, to know their culture and their history, to be able to participate as citizens – to be conscious. That is the most important." She elaborates these thoughts throughout the interview, and says for example that "Icelandic is an interdisciplinary subject. It influences everything!" To Fjóra too, then, the L1 subject fundamentally deals with general education; with citizenship and *Bildung*, as it has been termed above.

It follows that the disciplines of literacy and orality deal not only with technical skills, like spelling and decoding text, in the basic meaning of this term, but also fundamentally with *interpretation*, with perceiving, constructing, and expressing *meaning* and *significance*. Interpretation actually could be considered one of the basic activities of the mother tongue subject. Somehow, interpretation plays a role no matter which of the subject's sub-disciplines one is dealing with, be it language history, reading an article in the newspaper or even syntactic analysis. Interpretation as such, does of course in turn relate to the field of *Bildung*; to self-awareness and identity, and even to the development of critical and reflective thinking. After all, reflection and interpretation are two sides of the same coin. These are skills which naturally are of considerable use in everyday life, and moreover part of the ticket to higher education.

To develop skills in critical and reflective reasoning and interpretation, could in fact be regarded a main task in advanced literacy and orality education, as part of learning abstract thinking. It is also, however, intertwined with the subject-specific teaching of the mother tongue subject. Furthermore, subject specific knowledge includes the pupils' ability to accommodate to subject specific demands in their own work, even in other subjects than L1. Naturally, the subject specific genres and conventions must be a task for the teachers of the respective subjects. Still, teaching the basic competences remains the L1 teachers' responsibility. So, in addition to dealing with subject specific topics, the mother tongue subject also serves as a tool for any other school subject. Thus, thorough knowledge of one's mother tongue and its structures, for example facilitates learning of foreign languages, Fjóra remarks. In addition, pupils need to read, to write, and to give oral presentations in all classes.

As seen by the majority of the teachers in the current study, developing young people's orality and literacy, implies to equip them with a set of very useful tools, which strongly contribute to their personal development. However, linguistic skills are of great value at a super-individual level as well: There seems to be agreement among the teachers that development of linguistic skills evolves a general intellectual understanding and thereby stimulates the pupils' sense of responsibility as civil

citizens; that linguistic skills improve young people's capability to take part in democratic processes.

Even if such skills are mentioned in the more general part of the curriculum, they are dealt with rather superficially (Sciences and Culture Ministry of Education, 1999). In everyday school life, they might neither be a very "official" nor a very strongly accentuated part of it, but rather interwoven with the teaching in the more subject-specific themes, as demonstrated by Hannes. And this is very much the nature of the L1 subject in general, in the teachers' opinion: Somehow, its various parts tend to interlock. Thus, overwhelmed by her own reflecting upon the topic, Fjóla exclaims: "Oh, it's actually all so complex! I could have drawn a mind map or something – to show how very much it all is about *connecting*, too. Culture, history, democratization, consciousness... The subject really consists of so many parts that do not exactly deal with Icelandic!" Actually, this statement is almost a quote from the curriculum, which asserts that "Icelandic is by nature a complicated and tangled school subject" (Science and Culture Ministry of Education, 1999).

Fjóla elaborates her point by explaining how she hopes to stimulate her pupils to develop for example their reasoning, and emotional as well as human relations alongside their work with the subject-specific topics. One cannot but agree in her conclusion: "It really is a complex job!"

4.3 *The mother tongue subject, democratization and socialization*

It has already been demonstrated how elements which are paid very little attention in the subject's curriculum play a major role in the teachers' opinion of its core values and aims. In their view, the limits between the subject's content and its aim are somewhat ill-defined. On the whole, they relate the subject's content to what they see as its purpose. Most of the teachers do not find it interesting *per se* to teach grammar or composition, for instance. What makes the teaching of grammar as a *school subject* meaningful is that it will be useful to their pupils. So the teachers do *not* state the Aristotelian argument that grammar, as any "pure knowledge", is of great interest in itself. It is the higher purpose that is of importance. As for grammatical knowledge, it is necessary to write well, which in turn is a tool for reflection and thinking, for civil partaking, and which furthermore plays a part in the process of *Bildung*. None of this is accounted for in any detail in the curriculum, and so could rather be said to apply to the more philosophical basis of the subject. In Aristotelian terms, one could speak of developing the specific human excellences, of aiming at true humanity, which in the Aristotelian view relates exactly to various kinds of knowledge (particularly academic knowledge), reason and sociality (Aristotle, 2002).

Agnes, for instance, provides an example of developing social skills. She regards the classroom a kind of workshop, she says, and emphasizes positive relations between the "workers" as well as an orderly, industrious and cooperative atmosphere. Personally, she has got the role of "foreman". By virtue of foreman, she

serves a model for the mentality she wishes to encourage, she thinks, and specifically mentions the importance of a positive and friendly attitude.

Sociality, then, is yet another aspect of the subject's complexity expressed by Fjóla above. That this, too, be part of the mother tongue teacher's tasks, is also clearly demonstrated by teacher Daniel. Daniel has five years of teaching experience. He holds a BA degree in Icelandic and a M.Ed. degree with the didactics of Icelandic as major topic, and so it is perhaps not surprising that his main professional interest lies in pedagogy related to this subject ('didactization'). He appears to be very creative and continuously working on the improvement of the didactic model he has developed in cooperation with his pupils.

There is very little traditional lecturing in Daniel's classes. Instead of listening to the teacher and making notes, the pupils work in small groups much of the time. Each group is supposed to focus on a particular activity – for example illustrating an episode in the novel the class is reading, writing a summary of specific chapters, collecting background material about the book, or some other activity, which will always be defined by the teacher beforehand. For periods of time, such group work will be the main working method in the class, even if the class will also gather on a regular basis and for example discuss characters in the books, its structure or something else. The main motivation for working thus, Daniel says, is to activate the pupils, to make them really work in class as much of the time as possible, instead of sitting passively and listen to the teacher. He is convinced that activity is the key to learning.

At first sight, Daniel's focus may seem rather technical, but if one takes a closer look, it becomes clear that qualities like cooperation, respect, independence, self-motivation, self-evaluation and reasoning are highly valued in Daniel's classes, in addition to activity, which Daniel himself highlights as a main point. In fact, it is quite apparent that what could possibly be termed Daniel's didactic project relates considerably to general education, and particularly to pupils' socialization. Thus Daniel emphasizes the value of cooperation in the groups; he makes a point of mingling in the classroom, and hence does not for example permit the pupils to choose the same group/activity twice in a row. He hopes the method will help his pupils establish good working habits, he says, and he even thinks it may support them in developing a higher degree of independence. "They're so immature, you see," he says. "Especially the freshmen." So Daniel takes the clearly educational view that it is necessary to teach pupils to take responsibility, and to work.

4.4 Summing up the contents of the subject

Before proceeding to the more teacher specific knowledge, I will recapitulate the content of the L1 subject in upper secondary school in Iceland as I interpret the teachers' presentations of it:

- 1) The subject deals with a number of academic disciplines, partly parallel to those university students of Icelandic learn about. Some of these relate to ra-

ther complicated entities, such as cultural heritage and basic values, in quite intricate ways.

- 2) The mother tongue subject has got some very practical aspects, which could roughly be labelled as dealing with language through development of both literacy and orality.
- 3) Teaching the subject's practical skills is demanding and time consuming, but the teachers nevertheless tend to regard it of extraordinary importance, because such skills are crucial to any subject-specific understanding and development in the L1 subject, and they are necessary tools for the pupils' learning in all school subjects. Agnes even claims that supporting pupils' acquirement of practical skills is the subject's most important task by far.
- 4) Any grown person needs competence in orality and literacy at an acceptable level in everyday life and in order to have the chance to become an active member of society in which he or she lives. Therefore, the mother tongue subject is also about citizenship in a fundamental way.
- 5) In addition, purposeful and conscious work with texts of any kind relates to the pupils' construction of meaning.
- 6) Points 4) and 5) in sum imply that training of pupils' life skills is an implicit part of the L1 subject.
- 7) Developing oral and literary skills means sharpening one's thought and developing one's critical reflection, which in turn relates both to citizenship and to *Bildung*.
- 8) The teachers hold that subject specific activities, such as various kinds of class presentations, academic discussions and projects which depend on cooperation do, if the teacher manages them skilfully, stimulate pupils' social capacity and promote their ethical awareness. These qualities apply both to the concept of citizenship and that of *Bildung*.
- 9) For several reasons, above all because of the close connection between language, particularly the mother tongue, and identity, but also because the subject's close connection with ethnical, cultural and even individual values, the mother tongue subject often deals with themes and exercises which in some way or other affects pupils and their private selves.

The contents of Icelandic as it is taught in Icelandic upper secondary school could also be represented graphically, as shown in Figure 1.

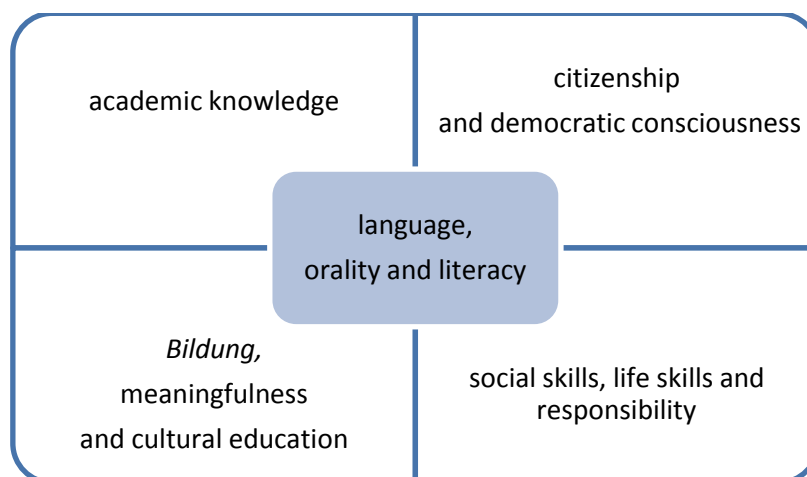


Figure 1. Dimensions of knowledge in the subject Icelandic in upper secondary school.

5. L1: THE SUBJECT AND THE TEACHER

So far, some of the mother tongue subject's complexity has been demonstrated *qua* school subject. We have seen that the subject's disciplines are wide-ranging and that its aims are several and multi-layered. It follows from this that the teachers' challenges must be multiple, every single day, and this is clearly the case even before taking into account extra-subjectal factors, such as pupils' general welfare and socio-pedagogical challenges. Still, everyone knows that such elements inevitably are part of any teacher's everyday practice. Consequently we could speak of the subject-related complexity as a supplement to the professional complexity, where the latter would naturally include aspects as the above discussed contents of an academic field and its corresponding school subject, didactic and pedagogical knowledge and practice, but also the national educational discourse, the socio-cultural context, the historical context, local and national claims regarding evaluation, practical conditions at each school, and even establishing and cultivating a fruitful relationship to the pupils as group and as individuals. In addition to all this, teachers need to maintain certain ethical standards. All of these elements enter into the concept of teacher professionalism and influence each teacher's ideas about teaching. Therefore, it must be of crucial importance that we treat and develop the notion of teacher knowledge in a holistic perspective.

How, then, does the Icelandic teachers' education apply to the challenges they face in their professional life, and what do they altogether need to know as teachers of Icelandic in upper secondary school? There might not be a simple answer to such questions, yet I will suggest some tentative answers, starting with the latter question.

The fundamental hypothesis is that the above described complexity of the L1 subject plays a part in teachers' professional self-concept, and thereby in their professional practice. It is my conviction that a consequence of this complexity must be that teachers' knowledge should cover more than the traditional academic and didactic skills, such as morality and ethical awareness, and moreover that it is of vital importance that the teacher is aware of the complexity, knows it and acts on grounds of her insight. Put in Aristotelian terms, this means that the teacher needs a threefold epistemological base, including academic knowledge (*epistēme*), practical skills (*technē*) as well as moral wisdom (*phronesis*), as illustrated in Figure. 2.

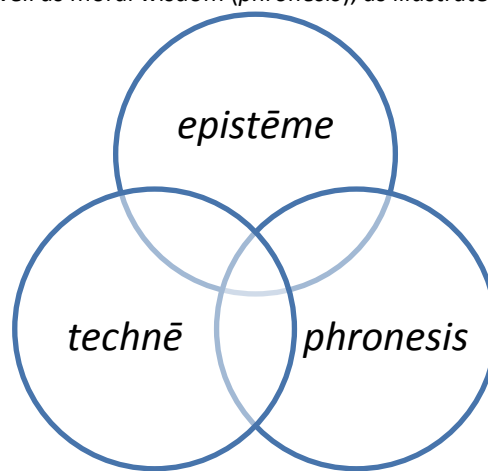


Figure 2. The classical Aristotelian concept of knowledge.

Academic knowledge would primarily include knowledge acquired during university studies within a certain field – in this case of Icelandic. An upper secondary school teacher obviously does not get very far without such epistemic knowledge. As for *technē*, one tends to classify it as precisely a *technical* kind of knowledge, but the everyday use of this term does hardly do justice to the Aristotelian concept. *Technē* is often described as know-how or as the knowledge of the craftsman, broadly understood. It is the knowledge of the skilled carpenter, the talented musician – or the gifted teacher. The well-constructed table, the unforgettable concert and the spellbinding lecture are manifestations of *technē*, we tend to think. I find such an understanding of the notion somewhat narrow and think we should be aware of the more abstract cognitive elements of *technē* as well.

Actually, *technē* necessarily includes both cognitive and reflective aspects in addition to the practical and literally embodied ones. When a musician prepares for a concert, she will not just start off rehearsing it in her study, but probably by studying the music sheet and considering the possibilities of interpretation on the background of her knowledge about for example the composer and the historical period

in which the music was written. She will of course also be aware that it is important to know the circumstances regarding the concert – where she is going to play and for whom. Similarly, when preparing the next lesson, a teacher needs more than thorough (epistemic) knowledge about the topic. For instance, there will be a number of ways to approach the topic. When choosing, the teacher will probably ask himself what the best approach to this particular topic could be, given the specific class he is going to teach, previous experience with various methods in this class, previous experience with the actual topic and so on. If the teacher is a proficient practitioner, his didactic choices will be based on a number of such reflections, as is clearly demonstrated by several of the Icelandic teachers. Teaching the same syllabus both in ordinary courses and in adult education, they choose quite different didactic strategies, they say. Firstly, because they have fewer lessons in adult education courses, even if the required reading is the same, and secondly, the students are different. Grown up students are more determined, yet less confident and playful in the classroom. Even teachers who claim they hardly give lectures at all at ordinary courses choose to lecture when teaching adults. This may serve as an example of how skilful teachers combine practical experience and technical dexterity with epistemic knowledge and didactic theory in a dialectic way, which in turn means that *technē* includes much more than mere technical-instrumental skills: even a craft's or a profession's practical elements implies quite advanced cognitive processes.

As a general rule, there therefore seems to be a connection between awareness of the various elements of *technē* knowledge, such as didactic competence, and the development of it. There apparently is an element of *mimesis*, or re-presentation (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2012), in *technē*; that is why it partly is tacit knowledge, and much dexterity is rooted in practice and in the observation of other able practitioners. This probably is the explanation of teacher conservatism, in the sense that teachers tend to teach the way they have been taught themselves. So as a teacher (as in a number of other practices) one can indeed reach a certain level of mastering through reproduction of one's own experiences in the field, combined with some basic didactic and pedagogical theory. Still, one will in all likelihood get much farther by help of and reflection, including reflection on one's own methods and ideals, which in turn necessarily means stepping out of the field of tacit knowledge and into a larger field, which includes both practical skills and a verbalized *technē*, which provides the possibility of explaining one's choices, reflecting on one's practice, and actively search for further knowledge.

This all applies to the third Aristotelian type of knowledge, *phronesis*, as well. In English, *phronesis* is traditionally translated as “prudence”, “practical wisdom” or “practical judgement”; the capacity to act in accordance with what is good in a specific situation of humanity in general (Dunne, 1997, p. 246). This means that *phronesis* relates to ethics, which in turn be described as the philosophical discipline which explores the notion of true humanity. Over the last decade, the professional code of ethics, included practical judgement, as part of professional skills has

been discussed and recognized in a number of professions. This has particularly been the case in the health professions, but also in other professions. For example, the Norwegian scholar P.O. Brunstad has argued that even military officers need practical wisdom (Brunstad, 2007).

Stephen Kemmis, Australian professor of education, has been researching a wide range of topics. He has for example been interested in the study of professions in general, and also in action research as a method of researching the professions, for instance to find out how an expert professional practitioner reasons. Kemmis is among those who acknowledge the *phronetic* dimension of professional knowledge. Kemmis' own term is "practical reasoning". Above it was demonstrated how teacher knowledge is a very complex entity. Kemmis claims that practical reasoning is of help when meeting such complexity in any profession: "[Practical reasoning] involves drawing on more than a "store" of knowledge. It also involves drawing on understanding about one's own and others' intentions, understandings, meanings, values and interests, and on one's own and others' reflexive, unfolding understandings of the situation in which one is practising at any given moment." (Kemmis, 2005, p. 392)

In the current context the focus is limited to teacher knowledge and teacher practice, and thus narrower than that of Kemmis. Accordingly, *phronesis* will in this context be defined as the ethical dimension of teacher knowledge. Lars Løvlie, professor emeritus of philosophy of education, states that morality is incorporated in all education. Therefore, teachers cannot and should not be objective or value-neutral, he claims (Lyngsnes & Rismark, 1999). The bottom line here must be that *if* all teaching involves imparting values, as Løvlie asserts, teachers should be aware of this. Realizing that one is imparting values through one's work and reflecting on how to respond to this fact, is more ethical and professional behaviour than pretending that one is merely giving a "neutral" presentation of some topic or other and refusing to see the moral implications of teaching practice. "No matter how much she [the teacher] strives to remain "in role", she unavoidably expresses "who" she is", the philosopher John Dunne, claims (Dunne, 1997). Thus, it is important to see that values are at play even in what could seem a strictly "technical" context, for example in the presentation of language history. Because it is inseparably intertwined with everyday practice in the classroom, *phronesis* belongs to the realm of both professional ethics in education and even to that of subject didactics. Subject didactics relate to the *praxis* of teaching a subject matter. As Kemmis and his Swedish colleague Mattson remind us, "*praxis* means action, practice, habit, cultural tradition and form of life. Referring to Aristotle, *praxis* can be understood as morally informed action aiming at achieving some ethical good" (Mattsson & Kemmis, 2007, p. 187).

From an ethical point of view, all human interaction involves morality. This is not least the case in non-symmetrical relationships like those between teachers and pupils, where the teacher inevitably is in the position of power, regardless his intentions or moral standards. Even a teacher who has nothing but the best inten-

tions has by definition more power in the classroom than his pupils, being a representative of the public educational discourse, being the one who has got the last word as to what should be taught and how, and being the one who eventually decides the marks. In some sense, the pupils will therefore inescapably always be at their teacher's mercy. I find it crucial that teachers be aware of this, among other things because it is more likely that they avoid unfavourable behaviour when aware of the actual danger of such. A *phronetic* teacher will see such dangers and mechanisms, and she will do her utmost to act wisely and justly. Professional ethics often focuses on relatively general moral issues, and usually much less on subject specific ethical questions. Actually, subject specific ethical questions are practically invisible even in subject didactics, and so not included even in relatively complex didactic models (Lyngsnes & Rismark, 1999). Yet they clearly are part of the subject, as implied by Lars Løvlie. Thus, it is time we include *phronesis* in the notion of subject didactics.

As accounted for, the mother tongue subject deals with citizenship and *Bildung*, in addition to the subject's traditional epistemological knowledge. We also know that a number of L1 activities seem to generate personal involvement from the pupils – and in many cases this is even encouraged, for example in written essays or in class discussions. Reading and interpreting a novel will easily lead to discussion about some of the book's more general themes. If this theme relates personally to adolescents, they will easily be emotionally affected and, often lacking the mature adult's ability to detach themselves from the topics in question, young people are in many cases quite vulnerable. Moreover, to elaborate the essay example, it will not always be easy to know what to do as a professional when pupils reveal personal worries or distress in a written exercise. Especially if the text is of poor quality in a professional perspective, the situation easily becomes delicate: Negative feedback is particularly unfavourable under such circumstances, yet the teacher cannot possibly give good marks simply because she pities the pupil. A *phronetic* solution could be to distinguish very explicitly between the text's lack of formal quality and its personal content in the comments – and to be careful not to ignore the latter, but actually comment it in some depth. However, the teachers must have access to the appropriate tools in order to do good craftsman's work. She needs moral as well as academic and didactic education in order to act professionally and wisely.

Naturally, situations similar to the one described in the essay example occur in any class. Yet, it is more likely to happen in L1 classes, simply because of the subject's nature. As demonstrated above, the mother tongue subject in Iceland deals thoroughly with the development of pupils' language skills, both orally and literally. In various ways, the evolution of language skills takes place in almost every sub discipline in Icelandic. Evolving such skills depends on development of other skills, such as critical thinking, judgement, interpretative competence, and general orientation; qualities which in turn presuppose capability to abstraction, but which also tend to include morality. Apart from this, we know there is a close connection be-

tween language, especially the mother tongue, and social identity and self-identity. Teacher Jórunn brings these aspects up when she talks about language skills, and her views illustrate very plainly the importance of including *phronesis* in subject didactics:

Well, I think linguistic skills are of great importance because language... they must gain self-confidence. (...) It's their mother tongue. And they must be quite... *brave* to dare use it. And that's why I find it so *dangerous* if the teacher, you know... pulls the rug from under their self-confidence by saying things like: „Well, you speak far too... you speak so incorrectly, you are not able to write, you...“ So I find it important to try and rather... praise them and... let them feel that it's perfectly *ok*, you know, to make mistakes. And they should not be afraid of that. Still, they should *learn* too. To take criticism. And that criticism is for their own good. (...) The criticism is not *personal*; it is just review of a text. (...) Because Icelandic... well, it is all so personal. This tool. This tool of communication. They sometimes feel that the teacher crosses the border to their sphere of integrity. (...) So you see; it all must be treated with care.

(...) Well, they are thin-skinned. (...) they are about to enter the grown up world. And in the grown up world there is a different language. (...) So this is also... because the way they express themselves is so closely connected to their own self, they have sometimes difficulties with *distinguishing* the subject from their own self and the way they talk and write. And so they perceive the criticism as something personal.

Jórunn's reflections show how important it is that the teacher develops a professional meta-consciousness which includes an awareness of how the subject's *phronetic* aspects are part of teaching, even when one is dealing with apparently purely academic subject related activities. One could easily argue that Jórunn herself is a reflecting and skilled teacher who clearly possesses practical judgement, and that this actually is a quality not at all uncommon among Icelandic teachers. According to Kemmis' findings, reflexivity and practical reasoning are the expert professional practitioner's hallmark, and he states that "expert practitioners are well aware of this reflexivity" and deliberately explore it (Kemmis, 2005, p. 392). However, this is not altogether obvious among the Icelandic teachers who take part in the current study. When teachers demonstrate practical judgement, they do not use professional terminology, as they do when they talk about literary history, for example, and so it seems to be the individual person who speaks on such occasions, just as much as it is the professional teacher. Therefore, it would probably be more correct to speak of practical knowledge, partly understood as tacit knowledge, than of (active) practical reasoning, understood as a conscious cognitive act, i.e. as *praxial* judgement. Knowing that teachers in upper secondary school to a very high degree work individually and that the professional discourse therefore is likely to play a less active part in the formation of the individual's professional practice than is the case in some other professions and even among primary school teachers, it is also reasonable to assume that upper secondary school teachers' practical knowledge will tend to be individual, not shared and collective at the same degree as in some other professions – for instance among kindergarten employees. Furthermore, such qualities as practical wisdom do not seem to be an issue in the lunch breaks or at staff meetings. Actually, Daniel claims that discussing

professional matters is generally unpopular among a number of his colleagues: They do not want to work in their lunch break, he says. They want to relax! Thus, teachers' development of a sense of *phronesis* and broad professional skills may seem almost fortuitous; they may develop it, and they may not. As we ordinarily do not even enter most upper secondary school teachers' classrooms, it is hard to tell, really, and much seems to depend on individual qualities and background. In my opinion, too much is thereby left to chance. Steps should be taken to make mother tongue teachers aware of the importance of practical judgement and reasoning, and to support the development of practical wisdom in the professional discourse. As upper secondary school teachers do not work in teams in the classroom, such knowledge cannot possibly be transmitted primarily practically and through the professional community's practices. It must be developed through language, through the professional discourse.

As the above quotation states, Jórunn implies that the social dimension is significant, both to the interplay in the classroom and to the pupils' self-identity. This in turn relates to the teachers' emphasis on citizenship: It eventually has to do with developing a social and political self. Being a social/political creature, it is crucial that man partakes in political life, Aristotle asserts. And so, the teachers' efforts to stimulate their pupils' development of citizenship could actually be interpreted as an attempt to support development of true humanity.

The social dimension is of similar importance as the *phronetic* aspect, yet not concurrent with it, and thus should profitably be regarded a specific kind of L1 teachers' knowledge. *Phronesis*, the "practical wisdom", is to a large degree *situational* and intimately bound to an attitude to other people as Others (or Thou's, as understood by for example M. Buber), an attitude which will often even foster wise and tactful behaviour. Yet, it is fundamentally dealing with particulars; particular situations and individuals. However, a broader understanding of contextual and social factors is likely to strengthen our understanding of both the individual as such and as part of her familial, social and cultural background, which in turn is probable to facilitate and strengthen *phronesis*. Also, such contextual and social moral knowledge will obviously be profitable when reasoning and acting at the super individual level. Even if it is clearly closely related to *phronesis*, it may be useful and clarifying to differentiate between *phronesis* on the one hand and contextual and social understanding on the other. This will clarify important differences between the two kinds of knowledge (and action) which, after all, are at hand, and enable a more precise and exploring discourse on both. This, however, implies an extension of the Aristotelian model, as illustrated in Figure 3.

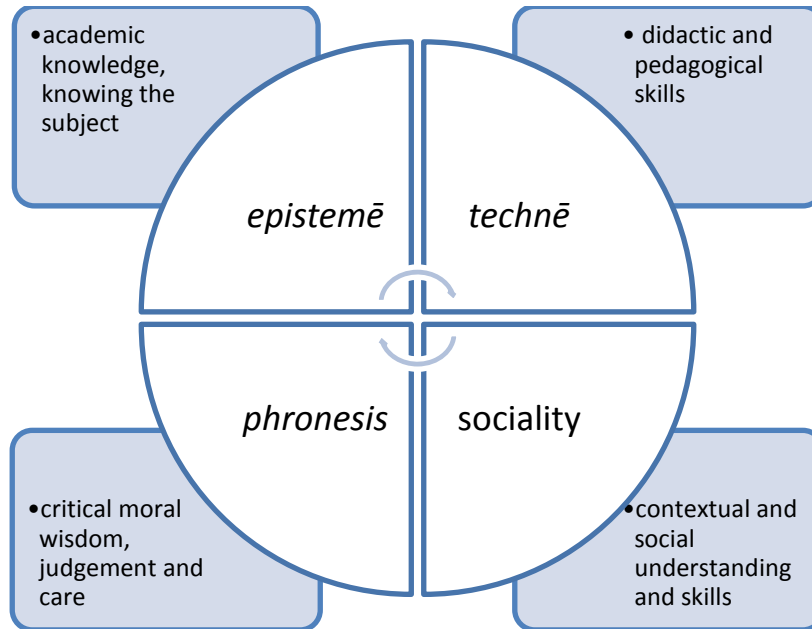


Figure 3. An extended Aristotelian model of L1 teachers' knowledge.

Like the *phronetic* dimension, the social or contextual dimension of teacher knowledge is rarely dealt with in subject didactics. Yet, socio-cultural knowledge is a very useful tool in a teacher's epistemological toolbox. Socio-cultural knowledge implies consciousness about changing and variable conditions and the impact such variables have on didactic practice. Thus experienced teachers will for instance easily see the *historical* aspect, noting how teaching today is different from teaching thirty years ago, because society and pupils have changed, and adapt their teaching accordingly. Other aspects of socio-cultural teacher knowledge would be those regarding socio-economic and socio-cultural differences within the classroom and between schools. Yet another aspect could be that of ethnicity, which is particularly noticeable in multicultural classrooms.

Some of the socio-cultural aspects might easily be ignored at times, simply because we tend to be blind to the very obvious: We tend to be unaware of our basic values and beliefs, much as fish are unaware of the water in which they swim. So cultural, ethnic and national values may be so much part of a person's *habitus*, both as a member of a society and as a professional that he simply does not see them, and so questioning them will hardly occur to him. Such attitudes can be observed among the informants in the current study, maybe even in a higher degree than among L1 teachers in some other countries. This probably relates to the Icelandic subject's role as carrier of the culture and the national heritage. The teach-

ers find the subject's culture-bearing task a very important one, especially as they feel the Icelandic culture as such, including the Icelandic language and ethnical identity, would be threatened unless they as Icelandic teachers manage their responsibility conscientiously. In fact, a couple of the teachers actually rank this task as the mother tongue subjects most prominent one. None of the teachers finds the subject's role as maintainer of cultural heritage and values as particularly troublesome or even as a matter of discussion; it is all more or less a matter of course to them. The only possible exception is Daniel, who claims that the pupils stress the importance of knowing the (national) classics, for example, much more than he does. What is important to him, he states, is to introduce the pupils to high quality texts. Nevertheless (and according to the curriculum!), even in Daniel's classroom considerable time is inevitably spent on what could be regarded "national" literary and linguistic issues; after all the Icelandic language and Icelandic literature is more or less synonymous to the national language and literature of the *nation* Iceland, and making an issue of the theoretical difference between them would seem both unnatural and rather ridiculous.

The Icelandic teachers consider both their language and their (national) culture vulnerable, being so small and constantly under massive Anglo-American influence, and therefore judge it their duty as L1 teachers to contribute to the preservation of the Icelandic culture, with the language as its most prominent symbol and tool, through their teaching. Essentially, it is a question of cultural and personal identity, of the inferior party's fight for his right to preserve his distinctive character. This gives the Icelandic teachers a point of departure quite different from that of L1 teachers in bigger countries. For example the lack of a discussion of the national canon may be seen in this light; there is a major difference between fighting for one's (cultural) survival and living in a globally influential and even dominating society. Another aspect of interest in this debate is the fact that Icelandic upper secondary school classrooms according to the participants in this study still are practically monolingual and monocultural. It would be naïve not to assume that this, too, has impact on the discourse. In other words, knowing the context is in more than one respect part of knowing the subject. On the other hand, not knowing the context *too* well, or seeing it from the outside, also influences what one actually sees. For instance, it is quite possible that what strikes me, the outsider, as rather heavy emphasize of the national, could have been considered simply and uncontroversially "natural" by a native researcher.

6. ARISTOTLE AND THE ICELANDIC TEACHERS

How, then, does the extended Aristotelian model of teacher knowledge apply to the teachers' own self-concept and ideas about teacher professionalism? As demonstrated above, the teachers are particularly preoccupied with the more pragmatic parts of the mother tongue subject, more specifically with linguistic skills of various kinds. Even more striking is the fact that they speak very little about

what has in this article been called academic or epistemic knowledge, both when asked about the content of the subject and when asked about their own professional identity. With a view to the fact that all the informants have got at least a BA degree in Icelandic and that the majority have been taking postgraduate courses or degrees as well, the presumption was that the academic knowledge would form a significant part of their professional identity and of what they emphasize in their teaching. However, this is not what the teachers themselves claim. Even when asked what has formed their professional identity, they more or less refrain from mentioning the Icelandic studies. Yet, it becomes very clear both from the interviews and the teacher journals that the teachers are very well-informed in the field of Icelandic, and so there is an apparent contradiction between what they *say* and what they *do*.

A possible explanation of this could be that they are so very familiar with the academic content they teach, that it has practically become part of their *habitus*, and thus something they are in some sense virtually unaware of in everyday life. Of course they know that they know, still it is almost as if a “home-blindness” comes to the fore here, to borrow a term from social anthropology, similar to that described in relation to ethnical and national values. This could at least partly be explained by the schedule most of the teachers follow: They will typically be teaching two-three courses each term (or possibly a whole year) in circa five groups. The next term, the pupils will be doing new courses, whereas the teachers will be repeating the same courses in new groups. This naturally means that the teachers know the curriculum absolutely by heart and do not need to put their energy in refreshing the curricular content of the course. Instead, the challenges will mainly be of socio-pedagogic and didactic nature. It is not easy getting to know so many new students each term and establishing a fairly good relationship with them. It is also striking how the teachers seem to be unceasingly working on the course design and on improvement of their teaching.

The organization of Icelandic upper secondary schools and the rhythm of the school year may therefore be part of the explanation of why most of the informants are so very interested in practical knowledge, and also in discussing it. *Technē*, they feel, is the tool they need to impart theoretical knowledge to the pupils, and even to make this knowledge valid to them. By this, they do not particularly talk about the “highest degree of happiness”, which Aristotle attributes to *epistemē*, i.e. to “pure” academic knowledge, but rather the practical value of epistemic knowledge in Icelandic. Once again they accent the importance and worth of citizenship, which they cannot promote without thorough practical skills, they say. Thus, they prefer to specialize in the field of didactics or some educational science rather than in that of Icelandic: Fjóla is doing a master in educational science, Daniel has got a M.Ed. degree, teacher Elin is doing a master in Icelandic/subject didactics, teacher Birgit has an almost finished completed master thesis in the drawer of her desk, but says that she has lost interest in it and would much rather study didactics than literature these days, and Agnes has been teaching didactics at the

university's practicum department. Yet, it seems that this interest does not have much to do with their education. When asked from where their didactic skills be derived, the teachers generally do not mention their university studies, not even the postgraduate teacher training programme they all have attended. "Oh, it was all interesting enough, you know," Agnes says about this programme. "Still, it was relatively theoretical and there was very little practical training." Truly, Agnes is an experienced teacher, and things have changed from her days as a junior teacher. Yet, her statements are characteristic for most of the group, and all the teachers agree that they learned how to teach by *teaching*. Didactic skills, in other words, are evidently acquired through practice. This is a point the teachers make very clear, and so they evidently share Aristotle's view that "the way we learn the things we should do, knowing how to do them, is by doing them" (Aristotle, 2002, II,1, 1103a33-34). Yet, as argued above, even practical knowledge in the sense of *technē* has a theoretical side. This applies to practical teacher knowledge too, and the majority of the teachers clearly take an interest in such theory. Interestingly, though, this interest seems to be secondary to the practical experience. It is only when teachers have got some classroom experience and thus understand the relevance and value of them that the theories about teaching and about teaching L1 become of interest. This seems at least to be the case in the current group. Should it be the case in more general terms, it would seem prudent to consider possible implications for the educational system.

As for *phronesis*, this is a quality which according to Aristotle may be understood as "a true disposition accompanied by rational prescription, relating to action in the sphere of what is good and bad for human beings" (Aristotle, 2002, VI, 5, 1140b5-6). Whereas the Aristotelian conception of *epistēmē* is ontological, *phronesis* is practical and personal knowledge. In a teacher's professional practice, it is a substantial part of the knowledge she needs to deal with her pupils and her classes. *Phronesis* includes knowledge which is difficult to measure, yet important. Even if she does not explicitly use the term, Fjóla is displaying a phronetic attitude when she states: "Naturally, people are different. Still, I have somehow always been able to accept people as they are. And I think that's a considerable advantage, and a quality which particularly teachers need, in order to show the pupils obligingness; to show them respect and interest."

In the interviews, *phronesis* comes to the fore both at the practical level (in the teachers' stories about how they teach) and at the abstract level (in statements about the subject's aims, for example). However, practical wisdom is neither accentuated in the curriculum of Icelandic, nor in the teacher training programme, and so one asks oneself where the teacher's sensitivity for these dimensions derives from, how it is developed and how it should be dealt with at a superordinate level. As for the former, it simply seems to be part of the Icelandic subject's discourse in upper secondary school. This is indicated by the repeated references to linguistic skills being necessary for democratic participation and personal autonomy.

As for the latter, however, it seems that Aristotle is proved right in the claim that *phronesis* is a personal quality, which is primarily achieved through experience and non-academically: Most of the teachers reveal phronetic qualities in their accounts on personal practice and professional values. However, none of them describe these qualities in professional or philosophical terms; they describe them in quite ordinary figures of speech, and frequently even reveal them only indirectly, when explaining something else. Yet, even those who clearly have developed a high degree of practical wisdom, lack a professional language to describe and discuss it. Even if *phronesis* according to Aristotle is a "practical attitude", which is mainly based on personal experience, morality as part of teacher professionalism is far too important to be left to chance, which actually seems to be the case. Professional, moral teacher conduct should be a public responsibility, which means that it should be treated at an institutional level and that there be developed an adequate language for dealing with this competence both at the institutional and at the individual level.

Obviously, professional ethics and self-reliance are included in *phronesis*. In addition, teachers' classroom narratives demonstrate interplay between such qualities and thorough academic and didactic knowledge, and so a professional *phronesis* appears to be impossible without *epistēmē* and *technē*. It even seems that the interaction between the different kinds of knowledge strengthens *phronesis*, or the professional wisdom. The example of Agnes who regards herself a "foreman" in the classroom illustrates this. Agnes teaches at a vocational school, and so the foreman metaphor relates to the pupils' life-world; some of them actually spend much of their time in the school's workshops. By using this metaphor, Agnes both clarifies her role towards the pupils and develops it in her own mind, which is clearly demonstrated in the interview, where she several times rephrases her explanation of the metaphor: She wants to cooperate with her pupils, yet she, by virtue of foreman, has the final word in the discussion; she wants to befriend the pupils, yet she underlines that she is by no means trying to be an intimate friend of theirs.

Agnes also is one of those who are concerned with social conditions and their impact on classroom practice. Thus, when teaching pupils with a very weak motivation, it is important that the teacher takes the consequences of the actual situation, she believes. As a professional, she is principally not ready to renounce on the academic standards. Still one must prioritize: sometimes learning to write a proper job application may be more important than writing an essay on a literary classic. Others speak along the same lines, and so imply that knowing a bit about the pupils and their background is of importance both pedagogically and morally. In the long run, meeting the pupils on their academic home ground, as it were, and treating them respectfully, taking both their personality and social conditions in consideration, will actually even lead to better academic results, Elin thinks. She concretely relates this to the financial crisis, which in her opinion affects both individuals and local societies. Teachers cannot ignore this fact, she says.

If we accept the statement that teachers' social skills matter, this competence must also be included in teacher knowledge. And if social skills really matter, this is so because even this relates to human morality in general, and, insofar as having impact on teachers' didactic thinking, they ultimately concern pupils' chances to learn and to graduate, and thus, with regard to what has above been stated about citizenship, concern democracy and social justice.

Viewed as a whole, the Icelandic teachers' knowledge includes such competences as academic knowledge, didactic knowledge, pedagogic knowledge, creativity, social skills, empathy, and moral knowledge, which all interact with the teachers' personal professional self-concept. Yet, this is of course a somewhat simplified image of the actual situation: Firstly, not *all* the teachers display all the competences, and even the competences they actually do display, they accent in varying degrees. Secondly, it is far from certain that the participants in the study are *typical* representatives of their profession in every respect, as mentioned in the presentation of them. It may for example well be the case that those willing to spend time and resources on partaking in a research project have an interest in their job above the average; such elements are naturally parts of the individual's professional identity and attitude, and will naturally influence and indeed be part of his or her ideas about the profession and the subject matter.

7. CONCLUSION

The teacher statements in the interviews indicate that the model where students start by taking a university degree, which they complement with additional teacher training, can hardly be ideal. Most of the teachers are so confident about their epistemic knowledge that they offer it little thought in their statements. However, as junior teachers they were quite uncertain of themselves as practitioners, much due to the fact that they did not, in their own opinion, actually learn the trade of teaching in the course of their additional training, partly because it was mainly theoretically oriented. What they really needed as teachers-to-be, was practical training, they feel, cf. Agnes' statement that "you learn to be a teacher by teaching". Nevertheless, they found some of the pedagogical and subject didactic theories interesting and even useful.

This might imply that teacher educators should scrutinize the teacher training programme, asking themselves what could be done to make it more relevant to students about to enter their professional life as teachers. How, in short, can they educate *teachers*? One could, for example, envision drastic *structural* changes, looking to the arrangements in comparable professions, such as that of medicine and that of law. It is not at all impossible to imagine a rearrangement within the teacher training program parallel to, say, house officer training. Junior teachers could even be provided with a personal mentor, recruited from the school at which they are employed, for example the first year after receiving their training diploma.

Schemes of this kind has been tried out e.g. in Norway, and the experiences so far are generally positive (Olsen et al., 2011).

An in-service arrangement would correspond to the teachers' judgements about how their didactic competence has been developed, namely through practice. Consequently it seems reasonable that a closer cooperation between the institutional teacher training programme and the field of practice be profitable to trainee teachers' learning and development during their trainee period.

All of this applies mostly to the *technē* dimension of teacher knowledge, traditionally understood as pedagogical and subject didactic skills. However, it has been demonstrated in this article that Icelandic teachers aim at a lot more than teaching the syllabus of Icelandic in the restricted sense. Even if it is not particularly obvious in the national curriculum of Icelandic that these be among the mother tongue teachers' tasks, it seems quite clear that the teachers' professional ambitions include promotion of critical judgement, as well as of social and moral citizenship, and even of moral standards in general. However, to be capable of passing such qualities on to others, the teachers must possess them themselves. Similar to what they observe in the classroom, namely that students need to develop their linguistic skills both in the scholastic context and as a preparation for adult life, mother tongue teachers need advanced linguistic tools, i.e. a moral philosophical language which their Icelandic studies will generally not have provided them with in order to develop ethical professionalism. Truly, Aristotle claims that *phronesis* is part of our *habitus* and consequently almost unteachable, and so it must be realized through our social life; the way we behave among other people and interact with them. However, even if it is difficult to lecture, *phronesis* can still be learned, especially if we associate with phronetic models and painstakingly practice prudent action (Aristotle, 2002, Ch. VI, 5). Yet, it is my claim that we as a rule are considerably more capable of understanding a matter, of developing our understanding, and of reflecting on the matter in question when we possess a language which can serve as a tool to our reflection. I think this to be the case also when it comes to *phronesis*. At this, I am not implying that Aristotle was mistaken. *Phronesis* must be embodied and basically belongs to practice. Still, I do not think it altogether impossible to express, explain and discuss practical wisdom verbally. As I also think it concerns the mother tongue subject in a number of ways, and even the practical teaching of it, I consider it very natural to incorporate practical judgement in mother tongue didactics. Yet, *phronesis* is not acquired in a flash; just like morality in general, practical wisdom, is earned through a dialectic process which must simply be developed in interaction with the experience we gain in the course of life. Therefore it could never be very satisfying, or sufficient, to confine ethical education to a limited course in a teacher training programme. It would rather seem reasonable to take the idea of life-long learning seriously and to include follow-up courses and colleague based groups for professional development and supervision in the teachers' contracts of service, and thus allow teachers time even for maintenance of their

ethical professional knowledge, just as they are allowed time for updating of their academic knowledge.

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