Education, Experience and Endurance

*A study of teaching methods in secondary schools*

Ritgerð til B.A.-prófs

Arndís María Kjartansdóttir

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Abstract

Viewing the teaching of others with an open mind is important. Comprehending the reasons why some teaching methods are chosen above others is also an important factor, beyond trends and a large selection of new teaching methods in the teaching profession. Examining the choices to be a certain kind of a teacher, can be both enlightening and revealing, when it comes to the teaching profession to newly graduated teachers.

In this study the main concern was, to find out which teaching methods teachers in secondary schools are using, whether they are using various teaching methods, are willing to take up new methods and/or are teaching the way they themselves were previously taught in their own studies? The study that is reported here focused mainly on the teaching methods of two secondary school teachers. They answered both a questionnaire and underwent an interview to reveal their thoughts on the matter. The aim was to explore whether the two teachers used versatile teaching methods or mainly focused on the teaching experience they had gained from their own studies. The results showed two teachers who were content with their teaching and used methods that suited their style and personality.
Table of contents

1. Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 2

2. Theoretical framework ......................................................................................................... 3
   2.1 Teacher education ............................................................................................................. 4
   2.2 Teaching methods ............................................................................................................ 7

3. The study .............................................................................................................................. 10
   3.1 Participants ....................................................................................................................... 11
   3.2 Study method and material ............................................................................................... 11
   3.3 Interview results .............................................................................................................. 12
      3.3.1 Teaching skills and further education ........................................................................ 12
      3.3.2 Teaching methods ...................................................................................................... 15
      3.3.3 Looking at themselves .............................................................................................. 16
      3.3.4 Other Teaching Materials/Methods ........................................................................... 18
      3.3.5 Work satisfaction ...................................................................................................... 20

4. Discussion and conclusion .................................................................................................... 22

5. References ........................................................................................................................... 26

Appendix ................................................................................................................................... 28

Appendix I .................................................................................................................................. 28
Appendix II ................................................................................................................................. 35
1. Introduction
The General Curriculum Guidelines for secondary schools in Iceland are clear on the importance of using various teaching methods in teaching a foreign language. In the English section of education and teaching in the Curriculum, the importances of various teaching methods are pointed out. The Guidelines state that it is important that students are exposed to many and varied teaching methods as possible and get accustomed to computers, teaching programs, audios, videos and multimedia as possible tools in their language studies (Aðalnámsskrá, 2007, p.20).

This essay is mainly constructed around a questionnaire with twenty-seven questions and an interview frame of twenty-six questions that were answered by two secondary English teachers. First, the education of future teachers, the requirements they have to fulfil and what standards they have to meet in order to graduate are described. There is a difference in requirements between school levels and that is further explained. Secondly, the teaching methods that are emphasized at the School of Education in Iceland are described. Furthermore, there are different views of experts on teaching methods and their opinions are presented. Thirdly, there is a short summary of the participants, their education and background and how these factors come through in their teaching. Fourth, their teaching methods are examined, as well as their experience with various teaching methods and the changes in teaching methods over the years. Then both of the teachers look at themselves in a critical light, comment on refresher courses and other teaching materials which they have used in their teaching and also on the teaching methods they have not used. Finally, they comment on their feelings towards school administrations, students, the parents of their students and their work in general.
In this study the main concern was, to find out which teaching methods teachers in secondary schools are using, whether they are using a variety of teaching methods, are willing to adopt new methods and/or are teaching the way they themselves were previously taught in their own studies?

2. Theoretical framework
The General Curriculum Guidelines for foreign languages for secondary schools in Iceland cover a wide range of teaching methods that should be provided to students learning a foreign language. The Curriculum for foreign languages mentions the four important skills as reading, writing, speaking and listening, and also that it is essential to use English in instruction as much as possible. Also, that studying a foreign language is an individual process and therefore the projects should be appropriate to the ability of individual students (Aðalnámsskrá, 2007, p. 20).

The Curriculum for foreign languages also states that, it is important that students are exposed to as many teaching methods as possible and also by using them enhances learners’ autonomy (Aðalnámskrá, 2007). The Curriculum has a focused aim in foreign language teaching. It states that knowledge of English is an important factor for every individual in a modern society. Further, it demonstrates that for Icelanders, English is a key factor in international communications in business and politics, higher education as well as tourism, computer communications, to name only a few (Aðalnámskrá, 2007 p. 20).

Conversely, Sigurborg Jónsdóttir (2005) claims that communications between nations grow and become more important and the EU urges education in languages, the plan in Iceland is to reduce teaching of foreign language in secondary schools (p.17). Sigurborg also emphasises that diversity and flexibility are keywords in teaching (p.16).
Similarly Hafdis Ingvarsdóttir (2004) points out that research of the “good” language learner show that some students not only learn faster, they learn because of factors like skills in addition to using versatile learning strategies (p. 155).

The University of Iceland provides future teachers with a variety of courses in their studies, according to the course catalogue of 2010 at Ugla (2010). To become a teacher in a foreign language in Iceland today, one must study pedagogy for three years and study additionally for a MA-degree for two more years according to the Ministry of Education and the new educational policy on teachers’ education (Menntamálaráðuneyti, 2010 www.nymenntastefna.is).

The content of the teacher education courses indicate that it is important for students to become acquainted to various teaching methods in their studies of foreign language education. There is no mentioning of exactly how many methods are needed, or which ones are more effective than others. Consequently, the idea is to introduce the students to a variety of teaching methods so they can possibly find a method that would fit their needs. However, the education of teachers that begin their studies in the year 2010 has changed. It now takes five years for a student to receive a teaching licence, instead of three years before. In the next section the teachers’ education in Iceland will be further explained and what is involved in the education itself is described.

2.1 Teacher education
According to the undergraduate programme guides available in the Teacher Education Department, there are courses that relate to different approaches in teaching methods for the students. These are courses such as: problem solving for pleasure, critical thinking, life skills, cooperative learning, creative thinking and research and teaching. Then, there are courses that relate to interests and other activities of the future teachers to meet
the need of their future students’ different intelligent area. To name only few, there are courses like: computer games, environmental studies, making movies, arts and multiculturalism, making instruments and music in school, astronomy, mask making, drama, stories and history. Finally, there are courses that particularly relate to teaching a foreign language. That might be for instance courses like: spoken and written language, how language works; sound and word, British literature, British history and culture, American history and culture and teaching English to young learners. Equally the courses are an aid to the future teacher to present the studies in a diverse manner.

There are some courses that are mandatory, others that are relatively elective and others that are purely elective as described in the course catalogue of the University of Iceland. Courses as Developmental Psychology, Introduction to Teaching and Learning, along with Spoken and Written language and Curriculum and Instructions are all mandatory, but course like Tutoring Academic Writing are elective. Some courses are restrictive elective and they are for instance courses as Sociology and History of Education and The child in the early grades of primary school to name only a few (Háskóli Íslands, 2010).

To sum up, the education is quite versatile and the courses available in the teachers’ educational studies seem to relate to different areas of interest that might help future teachers to relate to multiple intelligences and interests of their students, with various teaching methods. However, the landscape of teachers’ education is changing. According to the amendment to the bill of law number 86/1998 there are some major changes imminent in the teaching profession. Up until now, the University of Iceland demanded that secondary school teachers had three years BA-degree in a certain subject and were obliged to add one year to their studies in pedagogy, when the elementary
school teacher had to study pedagogy for three years in order to receive a teaching licence (Ugla. 2010). This has already been accepted and implemented.

The new regulations state that after the year 2011 all teachers must finish a MA-degree in their field of expertise in order to receive certification to teach at every level of the school system: in kindergarten, in elementary schools and in secondary schools. In addition there will be a possibility for teachers on different school levels to teach at various school levels. A secondary school teacher might have the opportunity to teach in the last classes of the elementary school level and the elementary teacher could teach in the first classes of secondary school level. Additionally, the kindergarten teacher could teach in the first classes of elementary school. The flow of human resources will be made easier between school levels and teachers’ education will be expanded (Menntamálaráðuneyti, 2010).

Karl Kristjánsson at the Department of Education, said that secondary school teachers will most likely have to finish their BA-degree in a certain subject, followed by a year in pedagogy. Upon completion they will have to finish an MA-degree in their field of expertise. Furthermore, he added, that there is no final solution nor fully decided how this will be implemented by the government so this is not official at this time and has not been fully decided, nevertheless changes are imminent (Karl Kristjánsson, personal communication, 03. Júní 2010).

Education of teachers in Iceland is relatively versatile and the diversity of the courses that are available in the teachers’ education of the University of Iceland are set out to meet international standards of education. The landscape of the education is changing and the demands are being raised. However, these changes have not been fully realized, but the focus seems to be on a longer education and including the MA-
degree in the studies for future teachers. In the next section, a further discussion will be made on certain methods and the demands that need to be fulfilled by teachers that are teaching a second language.

2.2 Teaching methods
This chapter focuses on the changes that have taken place in teaching methods in recent years. The teaching job requires skills from the teacher in various fields. According to the book *Fifty strategies for teaching English language learners* by Herrell and Jordan, the landscape of the teaching profession has changed in recent years. The authors say:

> In recent years, research addressing effective teaching strategies for English learners has grown as more teachers are experiencing the need to prepare themselves to better serve this population. Basic techniques to help support English learners in the classroom have been employed widely. These techniques include such things as slower speech, clear enunciation, use of visuals and demonstrations, vocabulary development, making connections to student experiences and using supplementary materials (Herrell & Jordan, 2008, p.5).

To fulfil the requirements of teaching today there are some key strategies that teachers must use to be able to support their students’ learning. Herrel and Jordan (2008) list the following strategies as crucial:

- Planning language objectives for lessons in all curricular areas
- Building academic vocabulary development into all lessons
- Building and activating background knowledge
- Providing opportunities for extended academic English interaction
- Integrating vocabulary and concept review throughout lessons
Providing both modelling and feedback related to language usage in both speech and writing (p.5).

The question is whether teachers in secondary schools are using teaching strategies such as the ones that are counted here above in their classrooms? In the book *Success in English teaching*, the authors, Davies and Pearse, point out that,

Successful teachers tend to have certain things in common. They usually:

1. Have a practical command of English, not just a knowledge of grammar rules
2. Use English most of the time in every class, including beginners’ classes
3. Think mostly in terms of learner practice not teacher explanations
4. Find time for really communicative activities, not just practice of language forms
5. Focus their teaching on learners’ needs, not just on ‘finishing’ the syllabus or coursebook (Davies & Pearse, 2000, p. 2).

The new teaching methods appear to focus much more on the students, the way they feel in class and the way they absorb the teaching material. The modern international society expects more from graduated students and the language skills that are required in higher education are also becoming more advanced. Birna Arnbjörnsdóttir and Hafdis Ingvarsdóttir (2007) claim:

Globalisation, improvements in transportation, technology, changes in patterns of travel and radical changes in communication and technology has called for better and different command of the English language as English is increasingly being accepted as a world language within fields including, business, tourism
and science. These changes have a direct bearing on the work of the English teacher in Iceland (p.332).

Wright (2007) likewise points out that, “it’s a condition of being an English teacher, whether in training or in post, that you want to be better” (p.1). He emphasises that “conscientious English teachers feel guilty most of the time. The job is never finished to perfection, the demands can never be fully met; schools are places of permanent compromise...” (p.160).

Nonetheless being worried about the job is not the same as doing a good job, Gewirtz, Mahony, Hextall and Gribb (2009) give an insight into this statement by mentioning the requirements that teachers need to fulfil: Teachers will need skills of enquiry and evaluation, skills of analysis, synthesis and action. They will need to be able to contribute significantly to the development of education policy and practice, through network of professional discourse, research and development (p. 226). At the School of Education in Iceland a variety of teaching methods are taught but according to Ingvar Sigurgeirsson (2008) no one teaching method is better than another. The key is to realize that the methods are different by nature and their goals are different. In other words, what is suitable for one teacher and one class may be impractical for another. Students nevertheless need a certain amount of change or diversity in their studies (p. 10). Ingvar Sigurgeirsson (2007) further points out that because of the complexity of human skills it is important to seek a way to develop each and every one of those talents in teaching. For instance, Ásta Laufey and Sólrun Inga (2008) declare that games are not only usable to finish classroom time, they can also enhance language skills of students and moreover that most language teachers in Iceland are well aware of the
importance of games in language studies (Ásta Laufey Aðalsteinsdóttir & Sólrún Inga Ólafsdóttir, 2008).

Also Lilja M. Jónsdóttir (2007) points out that it is not as rare as one might think that teachers use methods they were accustomed to from their own school days. They tend to use the same method, familiar from their own school days, in their own teaching and there are further indications that teaching this way is still very common in Icelandic schools. But as Lilja points out, there is no teaching method so good that it is sufficient all by itself (p. 6).

To close this chapter it is fair to say that teaching methods in today’s teaching are many and varied. Teachers have many methods to choose from and the novice teacher of the new millennium must be able to decide which method suits his students best. Accordingly it is up to the teacher to decide the number of methods, to meet the goal of preparing students as well as possible for the future.

3. The study
A qualitative method was chosen for this study. The subjects were two teachers who teach English in secondary schools in Iceland. The study was conducted in the spring of 2010. In this study the main concern was to find out which teaching methods teachers in secondary schools are using, whether they are using a variety of teaching methods, are willing to take up new methods and/or are teaching the way they themselves were previously taught in their own studies? First the subjects were sent a questionnaire and after returning it, the researcher conducted an interview with the subjects at their place of choice. That was done in order to make the subjects feel at ease and comfortable in their own settings. The interviews lasted from about forty minutes to an hour and a half.
Below, the two teachers who took part in the study will be described, as well as their education and teaching experience. Secondly, the tools that were used in the study will be presented. The questionnaire, the interviews and where the study took place will be described. Thirdly, the results of the interviews will be presented, including use of teaching materials and work satisfaction of the participants.

3.1 Participants
The participants are two teachers who teach English at secondary school level in Iceland. They are both non-native speakers of English and therefore the interview was in Icelandic. They are both male and have both taught English over a long period of time at different school levels. In order to identify the answers from each teacher the participants are characterized under the aliases John and Mark. John has taught for 34 years and is 60 years old and Mark has taught for 18 years and is 57 years old. John has a BA-degree in English and took a year in Pedagogy in order to receive his teaching licence and Mark has a BA degree in English and Spanish and a MA-degree in Spanish. John mainly teaches English and Danish and Mark teaches English and Spanish. John has the right to take his pension in the year of 2010 if he chooses to do so. Mark can start taking his pension at the age of 67, so he will be working for at least ten more years or even longer.

To sum up, both teachers who were interviewed have a long and vast teaching experience and both of them have a college degree in English.

3.2 Study method and material
The participants were sent a questionnaire beforehand and then interviewed (see appendix II) after they handed in the questionnaire (see appendix I). They underwent the interviews at their place of work to make them more comfortable. Appendix I was a
questionnaire of ten pages, which included twenty seven questions. The questions covered the background of the teachers, their education and their teaching methods. Two thirds or about twenty questions were mainly about the teaching, the teaching methods and other factors involving the teaching job. Appendix II included the questions that were used in the interviews. These questions were in many cases similar to the ones in Appendix I, but gave the interviewer a further possibility of detailed answers. The questions were about the teachers’ background, their education and former experience. Also which teaching methods they used in their classrooms, their interactions with parents of students and with the school administration? Furthermore, there were questions about refresher courses taken, distance learning and new teaching methods. In the next section, the participants’ education was covered, as well as their experience with refresher courses and their view of them.

3.3 Interview results
3.3.1 Teaching skills and further education

The interviewees’ goal concerning teaching seems to be the same; to prepare students for higher learning or to prepare them for studying at University in the best way possible. John finished his studies in 2005, it took him over thirty years to complete his education and he feels he knows what is expected of University students today. He believes that his experience can come of use in the classroom and he knows what to focus on and what the purpose of the teaching should be.

Mark and John equally feel that there is plenty to go around in the field of refresher courses in English, but neither of them is too keen of undertaking these courses. John because he simply isn’t interested in them at all and he thinks that the refresher courses that are available are not suitable for his way of teaching. Mark feels
like it is too much trouble and a great deal of a problem to attend refresher courses. He points out that the courses could also be held outside the capital, perhaps in the rural areas of the country. He mentioned as an example the course he took last year. Over ten people had to travel from his home town to Reykjavík every month, while the instructor could just as well have come to them. The cost and the effort would be much less for the teachers and the government. Mark made a remark about the difficulty in receiving information about refresher courses for teachers. They always seemed to be advertised in e-mail or on web sites and he confessed that he had not seen any advertisements of any sort because he doesn’t have the skills to look for them on a computer.

Their usage of the refreshers courses is somewhat different. John has only been to one course since he started his career and decided that after receiving his BA-degree that he was not going to go to school again. He emphasized that this was the way in his days, people went to school, finished their education and that was that. People were not taking refresher courses like they do today. The last time John took such a course in English was in 1978, on how to teach English in Africa. John has not taken a refresher course since and as he pointed out, he isn’t interested in doing so. That one course was excellent, according to him and he learned there to look at teaching as a form of acting, teaching with enjoyment and trying to bring that joy into the classroom and allowing his students to learn that way, through games and acting. This one course he has attended has affected his whole way of teaching over the years.

Mark took a different angle on his education and went straight on to finish his MA-degree after finishing his BA-degree and since then he has tried to attend some refresher courses every now and then since he graduated. The last one he took was in
the year 2009. It was an ongoing course throughout the year for language teachers and it lasted for two semesters. It was designed for language teachers all over the country to help them get ideas from one another and to communicate more with each other. Mark thought that this course was probably the best one he had attended through the years. Mark used the knowledge about vocabulary development from another refresher courses he has recently attended. Mark mentioned how the refresher courses used to raise the salary, but that had all changed and there are no special benefits for taking refresher courses anymore, but despite that, he has not given up on them.

Both John and Mark maintain their skills in English by reading, mostly during the summertime. In addition Mark tries to refresh his knowledge in grammar during the summer and revaluate his course books. He is very precise and wants to know more than the students. He needs to know the answers to every question that he might be asked. In that way he feels he has control over the class and through that he identifies himself as a teacher. He also mentions that he tries to keep up in his subjects, doesn’t want to get rusty in his knowledge. Neither one of them has taken a refresher course abroad. But both of them would really like to attend a course abroad if they were given the opportunity.

In brief, the views Mark and John have on refresher courses are not the same. Mark tries to attend some courses, but John hasn’t attended a course for decades. Nevertheless both of the teachers stay on their toes in their subject and study on their own terms during the summer holiday by reading English literature. Both Mark and John are aware of their goals in teaching i.e. to prepare students for higher learning. Both of them try to use their experience from the refresher courses they have attended into their teaching.
3.3.2 Teaching methods

John starts every new school year with a test and refreshes the students’ memory in grammar at the beginning of every semester. Mark starts teaching the course book right away and does not have a review in grammar as he teaches only in the higher level of English and feels there is no need to check the status of the students beforehand. But he makes a very detailed syllabus and he believes that it helps the students to understand the expectations of the course and what will be their task during the semester.

Both teachers depend on the use the course books for support and they serve as a base for their teaching. Both of them have been teaching the same course books for years and feel now that there is a need for a change in that area. They are changing the course books next semester and Mark will be preparing for that during the summertime. John feels that he has the confidence to teach without a book and would easily find other teaching materials because he has taught for such a long time. Mark said he would not feel confident enough and said that the textbook creates a certain framework for his teaching and he thinks he would not be able to control the students if he wouldn’t have a course book in class. John and Mark both think that the main focus in teaching English has gone more from listening exercises to reading comprehension exercises. The days of drilling grammar exercises are mostly over, but John uses them occasionally. John also thinks that students reading comprehension is sadly poor and not only in English, but also in other subjects. He has the comparisons because he teaches various subjects, from Icelandic and Danish to English. In addition, John believes that students are exposed to a lot of English in their daily lives, through music and television, but they lack the comprehension component.
Mark differs from John in the way he feels about the interest the students show. He believes they are not motivated to learn the language and do not participate in things where they have to put effort into. He feels that students want to finish the courses in the easiest way possible with the least amount of effort. He thinks that this was not the case when he started teaching. The students’ lack of work ethic really affects the teaching techniques he can use. He does not trust the students to learn autonomously and strongly believes they would stop learning immediately if they were not in a teacher controlled class. He says that he also wants to keep the control in class. He feels that he would lose all control if he could not decide how the time is used in class.

To conclude there is a difference how the teachers start of their school year. That can be related to the courses they teach. John teaches beginners and Mark teaches more advanced students. Both of them think that the course book is an essential thing in their teaching, but John could do without it if he had to. Both Mark and John feel that there is a lack of preparation on behalf of the students and they would like to see them better prepared for secondary school.

3.3.3 Looking at themselves

The last section of the questionnaire was about the participants and the description of their methods of teaching. In this section they examined themselves as teachers.

John likes to act when he teaches. He likes to look at teaching as a game and is certain that he needs to be somewhat of an actor to get the message across to students. He is not at all into introducing new teaching methods, he is not interested in them and only uses what he likes and has served him well over the years. He believes teachers should not be forced to implement new teaching methods, just because they are
available. He wants to maintain the image he has created and looks at his work as fun and wants to have fun while he teaches. He strongly believes that students learn more if they have fun doing it. John furthermore emphasises on the fact that he likes his job and would not have lasted as long as he has done, if he didn’t enjoy his work and loves teaching.

Mark mentions that he is conservative and somewhat old fashioned when it comes to teaching, and would rather use few effective teaching methods that have served him well, instead of using as many methods as possible. He believes more is not always better. Mark added that he has to be in control, both of his class, the students and a head of the game in his teaching. He has to know all the answers upfront and likes to be well prepared. Preparing a strong and detailed syllabus means everything to him.

Mark and John were in sync when asked about standardized tests. Both of them thought they were good in their own way and would mean that the students could be accepted into the classes based on the same test or evaluation. In similar manner they would like to see some form of standardized tests again. They really would want to get them back or at least in some form. Neither one is fully content with accepting students into the classes, based only on their school grade, which can be inconsistent from school to school.

Neither John nor Mark are interested in teaching distance learning courses, Mark doesn’t feel comfortable with using computers, nor does he believe he has the skills to use the technical equipment that is needed for that type of teaching. John thinks it is too impersonal and would never go into that way of teaching. He also states that distance learning should only be available for students that cannot attend classes because of
residence, not for over achieving students. Everybody should mandatorily attend school if they live in the vicinity. Distance learning should not be used to avoid attending classes.

John does not think that students are well prepared or interested in their education, when attending secondary school. Their lack of interest and ambition shows clearly from the first day. Mark, on the other hand, has different view on the matter. He says he notices two groups that enrol in secondary schools. One is well prepared and enthusiastic about the studies, eager to do well and finish school as soon as possible, has the ambition and is clever enough to use their skills in their studies. The second group seems unmotivated and does not have the ability to do well in secondary school. They lack the preparation that is needed and their work ethics are not good enough. In addition, he mentioned the group of students that are clever enough and could do well, but do not have the ambition nor the skills to do anything about it. This group usually stays far too long in secondary school.

To conclude Mark and John both enjoy their work. They enjoy the way they teach and do not want to change that. They are not too keen on new teaching methods and are satisfied with the ones they use. They think it is essential to have some kind of entrance examinations or standardized test to evaluate the students before they enrol into secondary school.

3.3.4 Other Teaching Materials/Methods

Mark uses alternative materials in his teaching besides the book; he uses newspapers, novels, videos and other written materials. He tried once to use theme work, it went poorly. He lost control of the students; they did not work as they should have and did
not show any real interest in the theme work and asked constantly if they could leave instead of doing the work. He doesn´t want to try it again. He is certain that students do not want to do anything that requires independent work on their behalf, and he has mostly stopped trying to present such work to students. John also uses other materials in his teaching, mostly written material; for instance reading comprehension exercises, drilling exercises in grammar and so forth. He feels there is a lack of interesting teaching material in listening exercises so he rarely uses them. He wants something that is appealing to teachers as well as students in that area. He mentioned a book he had of listening exercises over twenty years ago and he still misses that book. It is the only good book with listening exercises he has come across in all his years of teaching, but he somehow lost it.

Neither John nor Mark makes use of the English proficiency that their students bring to the classroom. They teach proper English and neither of them sees any use nor purpose in changing that. They want to teach English that will be of use to their students. Mark, for instance, does not want to integrate slang to his class. He feels that there is enough of bad English out there and he does not want his students to use that kind of language in his class. That is not the type of language that will serve his students in the future or in their further studies at University.

To summarise the teaching experience of both teachers are lacking some training when it comes to introducing or experiencing new methods. But John and Mark use other methods that have served them well over the years. In the next section, the teachers’ view of their workplace will be examined, their enjoyment in their work and with their employees, as well as how they see the well being of their students.
3.3.5 Work satisfaction

Both John and Mark are satisfied with the opportunities for further education and the understanding of the schools administration to make it possible for them to attend such courses if they chose to do so. Moreover they are content with their facilities at their work place. Mark and John both have their own computers in the classroom, their working space is very good and they are quite satisfied with just about everything at their workplace.

Their opinion about what the work means to them and what satisfaction they draw from it is quite different. John mentions the freedom of the job, the possibility of being one’s own boss, being able to reign in his classroom and being able to act the way he wants to act, to be himself. He is used to do what he wants, leave when he wants and work when he wants, while not teaching classes. He would never be able to work in a job that required his presence the whole day through.

Mark on the other hand finds more enjoyment in teaching and loves his job and thinks it is the perfect thing for him to do. He always dreamt of becoming a teacher from a very young age and now he is living his dream. He finds pleasure in helping his students and always enjoys it, especially when they do well. Both Mark and John were quite grateful for the trust and confidence they are shown from the school’s administration to decide on their own terms what they teach and how they teach it and also the freedom to control their own work and working hours. Being able to choose the books they want to teach and knowing that the school administration will not be breathing down their necks. Mark does want some involvement on behalf of the school’s administration, the parents and the students on one hand but on the other hand he doesn´t want anybody else to control the way he teaches. John is not as keen on any
interference on behalf of students or parents. He has been his own boss for a long time and doesn’t feel any desire to change that. Apparently both teachers are totally in charge of how they evaluate the courses they teach. They both have a final exam in their subjects and some smaller tests during the winter. They neither use portfolio nor other alternative teaching evaluation methods other than written exams. Mark used to use oral exams, but his experience using them was not good nor did the students feel at ease with them, so he has mostly stopped using them. Nevertheless, oral tests still remain a necessity in some subjects. There is no involvement on behalf of the schools administration on that matter.

To sum up what mainly was discussed in section three; a qualitative method was used for this study and that gave a good insight into the answers that were provided by two secondary school teachers who had a long lasting experience in teaching a foreign language. The both of them received a questionnaire and underwent an interview in order to get more detailed answers. Furthermore the background and experience of both teachers was further looked at and their opinions on different matters as refresher courses, further education and teaching skills were elucidated. Their ideas on those matters were either in sync or the total opposite. Their teaching skills were elaborated and discussed, along with other teaching materials that they use in their work. To finish up the section the content of their workplace was evaluated by the two teachers.
4. Discussion and conclusion
This study was conducted to explore whether secondary teachers are using their education in order to use as many teaching methods as possible in their work for the benefit of their students. A study of teaching methods with only two subjects seemed an easy enough task. That did not take into consideration that one question usually leads to another question and the need to know more grows with every question asked. The need for more research with more subjects and more detailed questions is inevitable to get a clearer picture. In this paper, the study was introduced, the way it was conducted described and the participants were then introduced. Second, the education of the participants was explained, as well as their teaching methods and their thoughts on different matters, such as: distance teaching, further education and the changes that have occurred in their line of work, the changes in teaching, in the teaching materials, the teaching methods and in the changed environment of today’s teachers. Third, the requirements of refresher courses and further education were closer looked at. Fourth and finally, the teaching materials and the work satisfaction of the participants were discussed.

By starting off such a study with certain expectations and suspecting certain answers and realizing at the end of it to be proven wrong in every way possible is a job worthwhile doing. This crucial factor is a reminder to the newly graduated teacher to be less prejudice and more open minded to methods that have worked for ages and must therefore be worth looking at. Ingvar Sigurgeirsson (2008) mentions that, each teaching method is marked by its user. The teacher’s performance and the teaching method he uses can fit so perfectly together that the conclusion will be systematic and convincing teaching (p. 10).
Although Freeman (2000) points out in her book *Techniques and principles in language teaching* that,

In order to move from ideology to inquiry, teachers need to inquire into their practice. They need to reflect on what they do and why they do it, and need to be open to learning about the practices and research of others. They need to interact with others, and need to try new practices in order to continually search for or devise the best method they can for who they are, who their students are, and the conditions and context of their teaching (p. 187).

Perhaps the answer lies somewhere in between. It could be a solution to provide more opportunities in refresher courses for teachers that have a long teaching experience. Moreover the courses could be closer linked to certain aspects of language teaching and have a more clearly focused usage. Teaching for a long time, decades even, is not given to all. By interviewing two teachers about their teaching methods in secondary schools and by refreshing the memory on versatile teaching methods is a good way for a teacher to start a career. This study gives only a glimpse of the view that senior secondary teachers have on their work. The reason for becoming a teacher is just as valid with both of them today as when they decided to become teachers’ decades ago. The teaching methods both of these teachers use are closely linked to the teaching methods they encountered in their own studies and both of them are content with the teaching methods they use in their work. That might be the montage of today’s secondary school teacher. To be satisfied with the work they accomplish.

Looking at the teaching methods and the variety of courses that are being taught and used in the School of Education in Iceland today, it is clear that the two teachers that were interviewed are not using but a minor part of them. However, some of the
methods are perhaps not so easily conducted when introduced in class. In the research *If there is anything that they find interesting* by Hafdís Ingvarsdóttir (2004) she establishes that all the teachers in her research agreed that despite the fact that a lot of time goes into preparing for classes and without the course book this task would be impossible. Most of the teachers in her research agreed on that having a course book was very important for the students and the teachers highly regard the students’ opinion (p. 157). That was also the opinion of the two secondary school teachers who were interviewed. According to them the course books are a valuable device in creating a frame around the teaching. The changes that are occurring in the school system today, in teachers’ education, could prove that the former education was not extensive enough or the results could also come as a surprise. Will a longer education provide better teachers or will it only lengthen the education and deter students from applying in the Teachers Educational College? This question is not answerable at this time, because the changes are only just occurring. Ingvar Sigurgeirsson (2008) has a good explanation on the use of teaching methods, when he says, that it is important to understand that teaching methods could be compared with clay, which can be sculpted and shaped almost in any form (p.10). He furthermore suggests that a teacher should think of three things when he selects a teaching method. First, that the methods are in sync with the aim of the course, second, there has to be a natural variety of teaching methods and thirdly, that the teaching methods suit the personality of the teacher who uses them (p. 6). Moreover Davies and Pearse (2000) state that,

Whatever the inventors of new methods say, many teachers continue to use activities and techniques that have passed out of fashion. Sometimes this is the result of ignorance rather than informed professional judgement. But other
teachers, who are trained and well-informed, also take ideas from unfashionable methods because they seem appropriate for their own teaching-learning situation. This is known as eclecticism. Eclectic approaches, based on well-informed views of the nature of language, language learning, and language teaching, and a good analysis of the specific teaching-learning situation, are considered by many English teaching professionals to be the best (p. 187).

That is exactly what these two secondary school teachers are doing; they are tailoring their teaching methods in order to fit their personality and choosing the methods that have worked for them.

Realizing that this would not have been possible without the help and endless support of my supervisor and the two teachers that willingly gave me an opportunity to take a glimpse of the teaching experience they both preserve. I would like to thank them with all the gratitude I have in me, because without them this study would not even have been more than a mere thought and would never have seen the light of day.
5. References


Appendix

Appendix I

Spurningarlista fyrir könnun á fjölbreytni kennislaðferða í ensku við framhaldsskóla/grunnskóla í dreifbýli.

Bakgrunnur
1. Kyn: □¹ Kona □² Karl

2. Aldur: □¹ 20-29 ára □² 30-39 ára □³ 40-49 ára □⁴ 50-59 ára □⁵ 60-69 ára

3. Á hvaða skólastíg kennir þú?
   □¹ Framhaldsskóla
   □² Grunnskóla

4. Hversu lengi hefur þú kennt ensku? ____________________________

5. Hversu lengi hefur þú dvalið í landi þar sem enska er aðalsamspítamálid?
   □¹ Ár
   □² Mánúði
   □³ Á ekki við (hef aldrei dvalið í landi þar sem enska er aðalsamspítamálid)
Menntun
6. Vinsamlegast merktu við næstu menntunargráðu sem þú hefur lokið.

☐1 Kennaraháskóli Íslands (B.Ed.) með ensku sem valgrein
☐2 Kennaraháskóli Íslands (B.Ed.) með aðra grein/greinar er ensku sem valgrein
☐3 Kennaraskóli Íslands (eldra kennarapróf)
☐4 Háskólinn á Akureyri (B.Ed.)
☐5 Háskóli Íslands með ensku sem aðal- eða aukagrein til B.A. gráðu, auk uppeldis- og kennslufraði
☐6 Háskóli Íslands með aðra grein/greinar en ensku, auk uppeldis- og kennslufraði

☐7 B.A., B.S. eða samhæringleg prôf
☐8 Háskóli Íslands með M.Paed. í ensku
☐9 M.A., M.S. eða samhæringleg prôf
☐10 Annað,

hvað?_______________________________________________________

7. Hefurðu sótt námskeið, ráðstefnur eða fræðslufundi undanfarin fimm ár sem tengjast enskukennslu?

☐1 já  ☐2 nei

Ef svarið er já, um hvað var fjallað?
___________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________

Námsefni
8. Hvaða námsefni notar þú sem grunnefni í enskukennslu í kennslu þinni á þessu skólaári?
___________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________
9. Hvernig líkar þér við námsefnið sem þú notar sem grunnefni?
   □ 1 Mjög vel
   □ 2 Vel
   □ 3 Sæmilega
   □ 4 Ekki nógu vel
   □ 5 Alls ekki

10. Hvað finnst þér helst vanta í námsefnið?

11. Notar þú ítarefni í ensku kennslu?
   □ 1 Mjög oft
   □ 2 Oft
   □ 3 Stundum
   □ 4 Sjaldan
   □ 5 Aldrei

   a) Ef já, hvaða (hvers konar) efni notar þú helst? ________________________

   ________________________________________________________________

   ________________________________________________________________

   ________________________________________________________________

   ________________________________________________________________

Kennsla og kennsluhættir (námsmat)

12. Telur þú að fjöldi kennslustunda í ensku í framhaldsskóla sé:
   □ 1 of lítið?
   □ 2 hæfilegt?
   □ 3 of mikilíð?

13. Hvernig finnst þér áhugi nemenda á enskunáminu vera?
   □ 1 Mjög mikil
   □ 2 Frekar mikil
   □ 3 Lítill
   □ 4 Engin

14. Hversu mikla ensku talar þú í kennslustundum?
   □ 1 0% - 20%   □ 2 20% - 40%   □ 3 40% - 60%   □ 4 60% - 80%   □ 5 80% - 100%
15. Hvernig er enskan notuð í kennslustundum? (Gefdu dæmi)
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

16. Hvað telur þú að nemendur tali mikla ensku í kennslustundum?

☐ 1 0% - 20% ☐ 2 20% - 40% ☐ 3 40% - 60% ☐ 4 60% - 80% ☐ 5 80% - 100%

17. Hversu auðveldlega telur þú að nemendur þínir eigi með að tjá sig á ensku í tínum?

☐ 1 Auðveldlega ☐ 2 Sæmilega ☐ 3 Ekki auðveldlega ☐ 4 Alls ekki

18. Hvað telur þú að það sé helsta fyrirstaða fyrir nemendur að tjá sig á ensku?
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

19. Í hvaða tilfellum notar þú íslensku í stað ensku í kennslunni?

☐ 1 Til þess að útskýra orð/hugtök (orðafórða)
☐ 2 Til þess að útskýra máreglur tungumálsins (language rules)
☐ 3 Til að gefa fyrirmæli
☐ 4 Til þess að útskýra verkefni eða viðfangsefni
☐ 5 Til þess að tala einslega við nemanda
☐ 6 Þegar veita þarf nemendum áminningu
☐ 7 Annað, hvað? ____________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
20. Hvað leggur þú mikla áherslu á eftirfarandi kennsluaðferðir eða leiðir í kennslunni?

**Vinsamlegast krossaðu í viðeigandi reiti og bættu við í auðu reitina því sem þú telur að vanti.**

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<tr>
<td>Annað</td>
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</table>

21. Hvaða námsmatsaðferðir notar þú helst?
   - [ ] skrifleg próf
   - [ ] munleg próf eða verkefni
   - [ ] portfolio mat
   - [ ] sjálfsmat
   - [ ] símat sem samanstendur af: __________________________________________
   - [ ] Annað: _____________________________________________________________

22. Hvaða þætti leggur þú áherslu á í námsmati og hvert er vægi einstakra færniþátta?
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________

23. Myndir þú vilja breyta einhverju í þinni kennslu?  [ ] já  [ ] nei
   a) Ef þá, hverju myndir þú vilja breyta? __________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________

☐ 1. Þjálfun í ensku talmáli
☐ 2. Alhlída þjálfun í ensku máli
☐ 3. Tækifærir til að öðlast meiri þekkingu á kennsluðferðum
☐ 4. Leiðsögn í að nýta námsefnið
☐ 5. Þjálfun í að beita aðferðum samvinnunáms (t.d. hópvinnu, paravinnu, þemavinnu, leikjum)
☐ 6. Upplýsingar um ítarefni ýmiss konar
☐ 7. Tölvukunnáttu
☐ 8. Annað:
__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________

25. Ert þú félagi í Félagenskuðennara á Íslandi (FEKÍ)? ☐ 1. já ☐ 2. nei

26. Finnst þér á einhvern hátt það vera krafa foreldra eða nemenda að nota einfaldari kennsluðferðir? 
__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________

27. Hvaða kennsluðferðir finnst þér gefa bestan árangur og af hverju?
__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________
Appendix II

Viðtal fyrir kennara í ensku í framhaldsskóla

Kennarinn:

1. Af hverju varðstu ensku kennari?
2. Hvað ertu búinn að kenna lengi?
3. Hvernig viðheldur þú kunnáttu þinni í enskunni?
4. En í kennslufræðinni, t.d. sækir þú námskeið, ert í námi eða annað?

Kröfur nemenda, skólastjórnenda, samfélagssins:

5. Gerir þú könnun á kunnáttu nemenda við upphaf skólaárs?
6. Hvernig tekur þú ákvörðun um það hvernig þú byrjar?
7. Finnst þér kröfur nemenda tengjast ákveðnum kennsluaðferðum?
8. Finnst þér skólastjórnendur gera kröfur um ákveðnar kennsluaðferðir?
9. Hvað með próf eða símat, hver ákveður hvernig það ferfram?
10. Hafa foreldrar haft einhverjar kröfur um t.d. námsbækur eða kennsluaðferðir?

Kennsla:

11. Finnst þér áherslurnar í ensku kennslunni hafa breyst á undanförunum árum?
12. Ef ekki, þyrftu þær að breytast og þá hvernig?
13. Hefur þú aðalnámskráð framhaldsskölananna til hlíðsjónar við þína vinnu?
14. Ert þú hlynntur því að nota sem flestar kennsluaðferðir sem í boði eru, ef ekki hverjar þá helst?
15. Hver eru markmið þín með kennslunni (lýsing á áherslum í kennslunni)?
16. Finnst þér nægileg endurmenntun í boði í nýjum kennsluaðferðum, s.s. gsm-sínum, tölvum, netinu ofl.
17. Hvaða skoðun hefur þú á því að hafa ekki samræmd próf í grunnskólam?
18. Hvað finnst þér um fjarkennslu – ætti hún að vera aðeins fyrir sterkustu
nemendurnar og hefðir þú áhuga á að sinna þannig kennslu?

Inntak kennslu:

19. Hvaða hlutverki gegnir kennslubókin í huga þér og í kennslunni þinni?
20. Hvaða efni notar þú annað en kennslubókina, hvaða efni gætur þú hugsð að nota
þér, ef það væri aðgengilegt?
21. Hefur þú getað nýtt þér lærðóm af ensku kennslunámskeiðum eða öðru viðlíka
fyrir kennsluna?

Enskan:

22. Nýtur þú þér enskuna í umhverfi nemenda þinni í kennslunni, hvernig? Hvers
vegna ekki?
23. Gætur þú hugsð að nota meira af því, hvað þyrfti til?
24. Telur þú að nemendur séu almennt vel undirbúrir og áhugasamir fyrir nám í
framhaldsskóla?
25. Hvað veitir þér mesta ánægju í starfinu?
26. Ertu ánægður með aðbúnað og möguleika á endurmenntun ensku kennnara við
þinn skóla?