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## NARRATIVE ACCOUNT

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# Reflections on Co-Teaching Multilingual University-Level Language and Communication Courses

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In this narrative account, we reflect on our experiences of co-teaching multilingual university-level language and communication courses at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland. Finnish and Swedish are official languages in Finland, and most students also learn English at school. In our university, all three languages are currently taught within the same multilingual course. The courses are planned collaboratively and, as phenomenon-based multilingual courses, they cover areas such as academic literacy, multilingual interaction, and research communication. In practice, "...students may read academic articles in English, write a summary in Finnish, and deliver a presentation or have a group discussion in Swedish within the same module" (Jalkanen & Nikula, 2020, p. 119). We review the background to setting up these courses, and dialogically reflect on our joint involvement in planning, co-teaching, and developing multilingual academic courses.

このナラティブ・アカウントでは、フィンランドのユヴァスキュラ大学において高等教育レベルの多言語及びコミュニケーションコースを共同で教えたを振り返る。フィンランド語とスウェーデン語はどちらもフィンランドの公用語であり、また、多くの学生は学校教育の中で英語を学ぶ。現在、ユヴァスキュラ大学ではこれら3つの言語は一つの多言語コースで教えられている。このコースは、現象ベースの多言語コースとして共同で計画され、アカデミックリテラシーや多言語インターアクション、リサーチコミュニケーションといった分野を含む。実際には「学生は一つのモジュールで、学術的な論文を英語で読み、要約をフィンランド語で書き、プレゼンテーションやグループディスカッションをスウェーデン語で行うことがある」(Jalkanen & Nikula, 2020, p. 119)。本稿では、まずこれらのコースの導入に至った経緯を振り返り、コースの計画、共同授業そして多言語的なアカデミックコースの構築に携わった筆者らのを、話的なアプローチを通じてリフレクションを行う。

Tässä narratiivisessa kuvauksessa tarkastelemme kokemuksiamme yliopistotason monikielisten viestintä- ja kieliopintojen opettamisesta useamman opettajan yhteisillä opintojaksoilla Jyväskylän yliopistossa. Suomen viralliset kielet ovat suomi ja ruotsi, ja useimmat oppivat englantia ensimmäisenä vieraana kielenä koulussa. Jyväskylän yliopiston viestintä- ja kieliopinnoissa nämä kolme kieltä sisältyvät samaan monikieliseen opintojaksoon. Opintojaksot suunnitellaan yhdessä ilmiöpohjaisiksi monikielisiksi opintojaksoiksi, joita ovat esim. akateemisen lukutaidon, monikielisen vuorovaikutuksen ja tutkimusviestinnän opintojaksot. Käytännössä "...opiskelijat saattavat lukea akateemisia tekstejä englanniksi, kirjoittaa niistä tiivistelmän suomeksi ja pitää esitelmän tai keskustella ryhmissä ruotsiksi saman moduulin aikana" (Jalkanen & Nikula 2020, p. 119). Tarkastelemme näiden opintojaksojen aloittamisen taustaa ja pohdimme dialogisesti yhteistyötä monikielisten akateemisten kurssien suunnittelussa, yhdessä opettamisessa ja kehittämisessä.

### Keywords

co-teaching, university teaching, multilingual teaching, language repertoires, narrative account  
共同授業, 高等教育, 多言語教育, 言語レパートリー, ナラティブ・アカウント  
yhteisopetus, yliopisto-opetus, monikielinen opetus, kielirepertuaarit, narratiivinen kertomus

*It is my first day co-teaching in a multilingual classroom. I feel a little nervous, since I am not sure I remember very well when it is my turn to speak or how the whole situation is going to work with three teachers. The speech communication teacher starts the session in Finnish. I introduce myself briefly in English, and the course continues again in Finnish. When it's my turn, I use English again to talk about academic literacies. The students do not even look surprised when the language changes, and they present their views fluently in English. After we are done, the written communication teacher continues in Finnish. We continue the same way through the whole session. Other teachers pitch in if they have something helpful to add and I do the same for them.*

**T**his initial episode describes our feelings during our first class of teaching a restructured communication and language course, and in this narrative account we, Riitta Kelly and Jussi Jussila, will continue the story by reflecting on our experiences of this new way of planning and teaching university-level communication and language courses for the Bachelor's level students in the University of Jyväskylä, Finland. We both work in the Centre for Multilingual Academic Communication (Movi), which arranges discipline-specific communication and language courses for students of all faculties, as well as exchange students' language courses and support courses open to all students. Riitta has been working in Movi since 2002, teaching mainly discipline-specific English courses for students of all faculties, exchange students' courses, and support courses. Jussi started as a Japanese teacher in Movi in 2016, teaching basic courses in Japanese, and more recently he has also been teaching English for students from various faculties. This new way of teaching, where teachers of different languages cooperate to plan and teach the same course, occasionally co-teaching in the same class, was both exciting and challenging for both of us.

In this narrative account we focus on our reflections on what we have experienced in taking part in planning and teaching these courses, focusing on multilingualism and its role in the process. Our purpose in writing a narrative account is to gain a better understanding of the planning and teaching of these courses. In our reflection, we will share our puzzles and draw out questions raised by this novel way of arranging courses.

## The Context and the New "UVK" System

Given that the new system of restructured communication and language courses, (in Finnish "uusiutuvat viestintä- ja kieliopinnot," UVK for short) differs in many ways in comparison to the old one, in order to make our narrative account easier to understand, we will begin with a short introduction to the institutional background and present some reasons as to why the change was seen as necessary.

The University of Jyväskylä is located in Central Finland and it has six faculties and some 14,000 students (University of Jyväskylä, n.d.). Each degree at the University of Jyväskylä includes compulsory language studies following the requirements set by the faculty. Most of the time these studies include courses in speech communication and written communication in Finnish (a national language), studies in Swedish (a national language), and in one foreign language at least, which often is English. These degree-specific courses are taught by Movi.

Each faculty has its own language requirements: There are differences both in the amount of courses and the languages required. For example, students from the Jyväskylä School of Business and Economics (JSBE) study Finnish, Swedish, and two foreign languages, and students from the Faculty of Mathematics take Finnish, Swedish, and one foreign language (The Centre for Multilingual Academic Communication, 2021a; 2021b). English is the most popular first foreign language. Other options include German, French, Spanish, Russian and Japanese, among others. Depending on the student's major, there are 8–20 language-related

European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) credits included in the degree. Currently there are two different systems in force: the language-specific course system where languages are taught in separate courses, and the new system of restructured communication and language courses. In the UVK system, one course can include several languages depending on the focus of the course. Our new students follow the new system, whilst those students who are at the later stage of their studies finish their communication and language studies by taking language-specific courses.

The differences between the restructured communication and language courses (UVK) and language-specific courses are substantial. Even though we both had previous teaching experience, it took us a while to get a coherent picture of how the new UVK courses should be run. So, let us continue by explaining the basic principles of the new system.

Teaching English—as well as other languages—for academic purposes is a demanding task. It is important to take into account the general level of English that the students are likely to have (in Finland B2 in CEFR), and to consider the best ways to teach them the necessary content. Thinking about the current situation, Jalkanen and Nikula (2020) have observed that instead of learning languages separately, the emphasis has moved “to approaching language as a means of participation in disciplinary knowledge production and literacy practices” (p. 114). Thus, language and communication teaching also needs to change to reflect the changing needs of university students. Taalas and Laakso (2019) consider expertise in the light of recent research, pointing out that “expertise is seen as relational referring to the capacity to work with other practitioners in transdisciplinary contexts that are often multilingual, multicultural and multimodal. One feature common to all these contexts is that they are in constant transition.” In their view, developing the capabilities and competences that enable students to cope and work in changing contexts is of vital importance.

The guiding principle of the new system is not to offer the students a course in a foreign language but to help them to work within a “study module, in which communication and language studies are integrated with major and minor subject studies, supporting them and enhancing students’ academic skills” (The Centre for Multilingual Academic Communication, n.d.). The goal is thus to create courses, which “consist of phenomenon-based courses (academic literacy, multilingual interaction, research communication) where several languages (Finnish, English, Swedish, etc.) are used based on the objectives of the degree” (The Centre for Multilingual Academic Communication, n.d.). Symeonidis and Schwarz (2016) summarize phenomenon-based teaching as something that “invites us to break the boundaries of traditional subject teaching and move toward interdisciplinary explorations of phenomena” (p. 43). Jalkanen (2017) notes that dynamic multilingualism is a key element in the process. In practice, an English teacher will teach some part of the content through English whilst a Swedish teacher would teach another part through Swedish, and the Finnish teacher in Finnish. Occasionally the classes can be shared so that there may be for example three teachers present, and then each of them would use the language they normally use for teaching. However, the teachers can also switch between languages themselves.

In an interview (personal communication, January 29, 2021) that Riitta carried out with Peppi Taalas, the director of Movu, Taalas stated that the course renewal process was started in 2013, when it was noticed that the communication and language studies offered to students were not necessarily the best match in relation to their studies and future professions. Taalas further explained that it was difficult for students to get to the courses when they needed them, because the groups were full, and if they got into the course but missed classes, it was hard to keep up. The courses lasted 6–8 weeks so it was difficult to see the students’ progress. Also, it was also not clear to the teachers of different languages what other teachers were teaching, and thus some course contents overlapped.



In our interview, Taalas summarized the goals of the UVK system as follows:

- moving from isolated languages to multilingual repertoires
- moving away from a 6–8 week module structure into a 3-year timeline
- better alignment with subject studies
- discipline-specific needs and literacies
- development of 21st century skills, employability, global citizenship skills (collaboration, creativity, digital literacy, multiculturalism, agency...) embedded in the modes of working and made visible in the learning outcomes and assessment.

To start to achieve these goals, all the compulsory discipline-specific Bachelor's level communication and language courses were combined into a continuum where teachers of different languages worked together to plan and carry out courses that were targeted to meet the students' needs at the right time. Taalas and Laakso (2019) summarize the new way of thinking in this process: "The development work aimed at bringing together different languages, as well as combining content and language expertise in the curriculum design." Representatives of Movi (then Language Centre), subject departments, and faculties planned the courses in close cooperation, and the development work was carried out in stages so that all of the university's six faculties were included in the new system by 2020.

In the same interview Taalas (2021) observes that the pedagogical design is based on Wiggins and McTighe's (2005) backward design, where first the desired results are identified, then acceptable evidence is determined and finally learning experiences and instructions are planned. She explains that the theoretical framework behind the new courses is based on three core elements: language and literacy (e.g., Blackledge & Creese, 2014; Piller, 2016), expertise and learning (e.g., Edwards, 2011), and educational change (e.g., Fullan, 2001, 2011; Hargreaves, 2003).

To be specific, planning was undertaken a year before a particular course was intended to run, to give participants enough time to consider the content carefully. The first stage in the planning with each faculty involved members of the respective faculty, the Movi pedagogical leadership, and senior Movi teachers. Taking into account the faculty's wishes, a team of Movi teachers next planned the content of the course, including the allocation of hours per language so as best to benefit the students of the major subject in question. The decisions were based on how many credit units in total each faculty had reserved for language studies and the relation of different languages in the previous model of language studies. Eventually, collaborative decisions were made after discussions on what were the best pedagogical choices for each team.

In practice, the teachers of different languages looked at the course from a skills-based perspective and considered together which language would be best to teach a particular topic. This meant, for example, that in the first session of the course the students might meet an English teacher and a Finnish speech communication teacher, but in the second session they might meet a Swedish teacher instead. During the first session all the teachers, as well as the overall course concept, were introduced to the students. Then, throughout the course, different teachers would teach their individual parts, sometimes co-teaching when that seemed a good choice.

The first pilot courses for the new system were started in 2014, and the last were launched in the autumn of 2020. Most faculties have three courses in three consecutive years: The first-year course focuses on academic literacies, the second-year course on multilingual interaction, and the third-year course concentrates on research communication.

**Table 1. Example Music and Arts Course Schedule**

Class focus	Course task	Teachers and languages
<b>Class 1</b> Course introduction		1. Finnish written communication 2. Finnish speech communication 3. English 4. Swedish
<b>Class 2</b> Swedish introduction		1. Swedish
<b>Class 3</b> Group communication	Concept analysis instructions	1. Finnish speech communication 2. Finnish written communication
<b>Class 4</b> Reading strategies		1. English
<b>Class 5</b> References Information search (academic databases)	Finding articles for concept analysis	1. English
<b>Class 6</b> Writing as a process	Concept analysis	1. Finnish written communication
<b>Class 7</b> Using references	Concept analysis, group presentation	1. Finnish written communication
<b>Class 8</b> Peer-feedback Reading texts (Swedish texts)	Concept analysis, group presentation	1. Finnish written communication 2. Finnish speech communication
<b>Class 9</b> Field-specific vocabulary		1. English
<b>Class 10</b> Working with texts (writing as a process) Peer-feedback	Concept analysis	1. Finnish written communication
<b>Class 11</b> Working on texts (group work)	Concept analysis	1. Finnish written communication
<b>Class 12</b> Using (the Swedish) sources	Concept analysis	1. Swedish
<b>Class 13</b> Activities related to field-specific vocabulary		1. English
<b>Class 14</b> Activities related to field-specific vocabulary		1. English
<b>Class 15</b> Presentation skills Critical reflection	Group presentation	1. English
<b>Class 16</b> Teacher feedback on written task (concept analysis)	Concept analysis	1. Finnish written communication
<b>Class 17</b> Group task in English: presenting an article Peer- and teacher feedback	Group presentation	1. English
<b>Class 18</b> Group task in English: presenting an article Peer- and teacher feedback	Group presentation	1. English
<b>Class 19</b> Course wrap-up Feedback		1. Finnish written communication 2. Finnish speech communication 3. English

To give a concrete example of what our UVK teaching looks like, let us briefly introduce a course schedule for the first-year students in music and arts. This includes the general themes discussed in different sessions, but not detailed task instructions or deadlines. Rather, it gives an understanding of the overall course progression. In the last column in Table 1, it is possible to see which teachers are responsible for which sessions.

There are various ways of organizing a course schedule, and this particular course includes two 90-minute sessions per week. On the left hand side you can see which session is in question and next to it, the focus of the session. The main tasks in this course include a concept analysis written in Finnish and a group presentation in English. The concept analysis is based on several articles in English and one in Swedish. The group presentation is based on one of the articles in English, and students are asked to summarize the main points of the text and include their own critical points of view. On the right hand side of Table 1 you can see the teachers and the languages present in the class.

Now that we have described how the new UVK system works, we will position ourselves as planners and teachers of these courses in the context of narrative inquiry.

## **Teachers as Narrators in a Multilingual Context of Change**

For both of us, co-teaching in a multilingual team was a new experience. Our first UVK course was Academic Literacies for students from the Jyväskylä School of Business and Economics (JSBE) in 2018/2019. In addition, Jussi has since taken part in planning and teaching the Academic Literacies course for IT students, and Riitta has been teaching in Academic Literacies and Multilingual Interaction for Psychology students, as well as planning and teaching Academic Literacies and Multilingual Interaction for Music and IT students. Our narrative account is based on our experiences of working with these courses.

Co-teaching with teachers of different languages offers various points of view to discuss. When searching for a research topic, Pitkänen-Huhta (2019) points out that teamwork, cross-fertilization (in the sense of new ideas being born from unexpected combinations), and self-reflection are useful angles to research a topic. Teamwork and cross-fertilization are an integral part of teaching UVK courses, whilst self-reflection is important when considering the teaching process and its outcome. Pitkänen-Huhta (2019) also emphasises that, in an increasingly multilingual environment, classroom practices and multilingualism in relation to learning materials should be considered. Given that teaching university-level communication and language courses including multiple languages by teachers who are originally teachers of different languages is a relatively new concept, we wanted to consider our first impressions of this type of teaching and see how our understanding and views have developed over the first years of teaching.

Writing a narrative account offers us opportunities for self-reflection and here we want to consider questions such as how do we work as a team, why are we using a certain language in a certain context, who gets to teach what, why, and in which language, how much individual freedom each teacher has, and how to motivate students to use different languages in class. Our reflection includes only our perspectives as teachers; although we would have liked to include student voices, we do not have the permission to share student feedback here.

Narrative inquiry seemed like a suitable approach for considering our views on the new way of teaching communication and language. According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), narrative inquiry focuses on experiences in the sense that it is trying to understand and make meaning of experiences. They also mention that reflection is a central tool in maintaining “an educative sense of critique and growth” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 87) about one’s experience. As teachers, we want to benefit from reflection in order to gain a clearer



understanding of what we do and why we do it. However, Pavlenko (2007) warns us against “treating accounts as facts” (p. 168), and thus we would also like to point out that the topics discussed describe our understanding and interpretation of the teaching situations. The points we discuss reflect our views alone and cannot be used to generalize the issues further.

In our writing, we see connections to Dewey’s concepts of *situation*, *continuity*, and *interaction* that Clandinin and Connelly (2000) highlight in their discussion of a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space. For them, the term *situation* has to do with place; *continuation* includes past, present, and future; and *interaction* encompasses that which is personal and social. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) point out, any inquiry can be seen through four dimensions: *inward* and *outward*, and *backward* and *forward*. *Inward* has to do with feelings, hopes and moral disposition, whereas *outward* relates to the environment, and *backward* and *forward* have to do with the temporal constructions of past, present and future. These all play a role in our interpretation here.

Even though narratives can be written (e.g., Barcelos, 2008), oral (e.g., Cotterall, 2008), visual (e.g., Kalaja et al., 2008), or geared towards users of visual languages (Kelly, 2009), for us writing is the form of communication that comes most naturally, and that is why we chose to use writing as the medium of communication. In this text we write dialogically, taking turns to reflect on the topics that we see as meaningful in relation to our UVK teaching. Our aim in writing a narrative account is to gain a better understanding through joint reflection of how planning and teaching a multilingual course with a complicated structure works, and see what kind of puzzles we come across whilst writing. Following Barkhuizen’s (2014) categorization, our joint text can be seen as an autobiographical case study, but since there are two of us, our text includes multiple narratives. Barkhuizen (2014) furthermore points out that narrative inquiry has often brought into consideration the themes of identity, context, and affect. Given that our narratives only cover a relatively short period of time and are not introspective in the sense of identity search, our focus is mainly on the teaching environment and our way of working there—on experience and context.

## Reflections on Our Initial Teaching Experiences: What is Going on Here?

Next, we continue with a reflective dialogue about our initial experiences of teaching these new multilingual courses.

**Riitta:** My first impressions of teaching students of Jyväskylä School of Business and Economics (JSBE) were a little confused. I had no previous experience of teaching multilingual courses with teachers of four different subjects, and I was not quite sure what was going on. It felt a little bit like jumping onto a moving train, and try as they might, the other teachers did not have enough time to explain the whole concept to a newcomer. In the end this situation led to long conversations with various people responsible for the project. It was challenging getting an understanding of the big picture. The materials I was using had been prepared by another teacher, and that made the jump both easier and more difficult—easier, because I did not have to prepare my own materials but also more difficult, because I had to adjust my way of teaching to a different mindset. I had been used to having more time to get to know the students, play games, have free discussions about different topics and to be able to do all this in English. Hence, I was also surprised how little English there was included in the course—I had got used to working with a certain amount of hours in English only, and now the hours allotted to the course had to be shared between teachers of other languages as well.

**Jussi:** Similarly, it took me a while to understand the idea of the new system, but once I understood what it was about I immediately thought that it seemed efficient and useful from the student's perspective, having recently graduated from the university myself. I felt that I personally would have benefited more from this system, and I was happy to be a part of this change. To give an example, when I was a student, I postponed my compulsory Swedish course until the very last moment, and finally completing it was difficult as I had not properly studied Swedish in years. Also, when I started writing my thesis, I felt that I was still lacking in many important areas related to the research process and especially academic writing. The courses that I was now teaching in the UVK system seemed to better support the students' path through their studies, as they offered timely support in many areas at once, for example, Swedish, English, and academic reading and writing skills.

From a teacher's perspective, the courses and materials seemed thoroughly planned, having been designed by a group of teachers from different language groups. I was also happy to learn from my colleagues outside of my own language group, some of whom I had not even properly talked with before. On the other hand, having three or more teachers teaching a relatively short course meant having fewer hours together with the students for each teacher. The overall feeling for me in the beginning was thus a bit fragmented, as I felt that I was only responsible for my own small part, and I had the feeling of not knowing my students as well as on the traditional courses. However, this was partly due to my lack of experience at the time, as gaining more experience in planning and teaching the courses, and seeing the same students in not just one, but two courses, has already helped to resolve the issue a little.

## **Multilingualism in Practice**

We both have direct experiences of multilingualism in our lives and education. We continue by exploring our views on using different languages in the classroom and provide examples of our experiences.

**Riitta:** Multilingualism is something that has come naturally for me, since there have always been several languages in use in my family. My parents' shared language is Finnish sign language, but they always used Finnish with us children. My husband is English so our own family is multilingual as well. Given that I have got used to switching languages all the time in my personal life, changing languages in the classroom has not been a problem for me as such. The traditional courses have been monolingual in English, but now the situation has become more flexible, so it is accepted that students use Finnish or other languages in class. Trying to gain a holistic understanding of how the students view the multilingual teaching scheme and the quick change of languages in the class is not so simple, since we see them only for a little while and then it is the other teachers' turn to teach them. Since most of our students come from a monolingual Finnish-speaking background, it would be interesting to hear how this works in practice for them.

**Jussi:** I have also always seen multilingualism as a part of natural communication, possibly because I come from a bilingual area in Finland, where I got used to hearing and seeing Swedish and Finnish mixed daily. In class, I have never seen a student visibly surprised by teachers switching languages. The students quickly get the idea and naturally switch from Finnish to English and back when needed. However, I don't know if this happens as readily with Swedish, as I have not yet taught a class with

teachers teaching in Swedish. It seems to me that this type of teaching and studying resembles real-life situations more than forcing everyone to stick to one language in a way that seemed unnatural in earlier English-only classes. In certain situations, the students are still required to use, for example, Swedish or English to pass their course assignments, but situations like discussions, asking questions, and preparing for assignments, often tend to become more multilingual.

Riitta: I think it is interesting that you highlight the naturalness of multilingual communication, and that gives you a good starting point as a teacher to be a part of a multilingual classroom. Another point to consider is which languages we use in the class ourselves. I lecture in English, but maybe because of my multilingual background, I tend to reply to them in the same language they have used to ask me a question. If I am teaching something complicated like how to work the library system, then I will always do that in Finnish because I think it is unreasonable to expect the students to use that kind of vocabulary in English whilst navigating a complicated library system at the same time. The point is in learning a skill and not getting hampered by difficulties with the language.

When we have had more than one teacher in class, we have not actually decided on a language policy beforehand. The Finnish teachers have used Finnish and I have used English in lecturing, but both of us have used Finnish when answering questions in Finnish. When it comes to Finnish teachers I have worked with in these courses, there has been quite a lot of variation as to whether they have wanted to use Finnish only or whether they have ventured out to use other languages as well.

Jussi: That is an interesting point to mention, as I am used to something else. In a class where I act as an English teacher, I usually answer in English when I am asked a question in Finnish. I think that mostly the students are able to understand my answer even when they are not able to ask the question in English. However, I too have switched to Finnish when I have clearly felt that the individual student does not understand me, and it is in the situation more important to understand what I am saying than to practice using English. Sometimes in situations where I want to discuss an assignment with a student or a group in private, I have also used Finnish instead of English, as I have felt that the students have been able to discuss in a more relaxed atmosphere, and so get a little deeper in their reflections.

To further comment on the language policies in class, a Finnish speech communication teacher once taught an entire lesson with me in English spontaneously, only mixing Finnish in with some key words and phrases. This was without us agreeing on anything about the languages used in class. I thought that it was a great way of demonstrating to the students the way languages can be used to communicate and encouraging the students to do the same.

## Planning in Multilingual Teams

As we mentioned earlier, planning in multilingual teams is a major part of the process of developing each course. Planning together can get quite complicated in comparison to one person planning and teaching a monolingual course. Next, we will share our reflections about this aspect of our work.

- Riitta: Being part of a planning team has helped me a lot in getting an understanding of the big picture. It has also made it easier for me to see the common elements. Even though I enjoy planning by myself, I have noticed that with others it is both more fun and more challenging, especially if we do not all share the same vision about the course. However, the teachers' personal preferences may cause complications if, for example, two teachers of the same language have the same session to teach to different groups but don't agree on when the materials need to be ready.
- Jussi: For me too, it has been a useful experience to develop ideas in a team of teachers from different fields. Immediate feedback is given and the ideas are developed and refined further together. I believe that being a new teacher had a positive effect on my view of the process, as I also got the opportunity to learn from many experienced teachers, which is something that I wanted to do in the first place.
- Riitta: It has been really fruitful to talk about things together with teachers of different languages. We have been able to look at what it is that a student needs to know and figure out which language is the best to use in teaching it: the focus should be on the students and their needs, not on what the teachers want to teach. Working together with other teachers has sharpened this focus.
- Also, some of our teams are genuinely multilingual so that there are other mother tongues at play besides Finnish and Swedish, and that has given us a chance to see how we as teachers work in a multilingual meeting situation.
- Jussi: To continue thinking about the multilingual teacher teams, at some point we were also tasked to consciously decide how to use different languages in planning and working within the teams. Even before this, I thought that the teams were naturally able to use a combination of English and Finnish in the meetings to make sure that everyone was able to participate regardless of their language skills. Also, after spending meeting after meeting in multilingual teams where most teachers switch from Finnish to English and back when needed, it seems only natural that we now offer the same possibility to the students.
- The natural consequence, and at least at first, a downside, of having several teachers plan and teach the courses is that much more time and effort has to be spent on meetings, planning and scheduling, when compared to traditional teaching. Still, after seeing the benefits of having professionals from several language groups planning the courses together, to me it feels like something that we should be doing. After using a great amount of time on planning and improving the courses with other teachers and hearing their feedback and ideas, the idea of completely independent planning seems more prone to problems for me.
- Riitta: Yes, I agree that planning and scheduling has been time-consuming. If you have 3 or 4 teachers in the same course, having more groups means that you might have to add another four teachers, and trying to get scheduling done with eight people who all have their different teaching responsibilities can get quite complicated quite quickly. Trying to follow the departments' wishes for scheduling whilst keeping the amount of teachers in each teaching team reasonable can become a challenging balancing act.
- The autumn of 2020 has been particularly complicated as COVID-19 has meant that most of the planning has had to be carried out in Zoom, and that has brought extra complications to the process. Even though a lot of time has been saved because we have not needed to travel anywhere to meet, the amount of Zoom sessions per day in addition to our teaching has made it quite tiring at times.



## The Next Steps

In our continuing dialogue we evaluate our experiences until now, as well as consider what works and what needs to be developed further. We first look at the current situation, then the planning, and finally discuss future scenarios.

- Riitta: I have a better understanding of the current situation, but I am not sure this is going smoothly just yet. I now know how to run the course, but to have an in-depth understanding of why certain things are taught in a particular way takes some thinking. Teaching using another teacher's materials (such as slides) is challenging, both in terms of the time that I can spend on a certain task and also in terms of explaining the background of the task for the students. However, teaching the same module for the second time has certainly helped me to get a better idea of how long things take and what the students can get out of a particular task. We are meant to use the same core tasks in each course, but making some small changes, for example in smaller tasks, has got things to work out more smoothly. If I could start this type of teaching all over again, what I would do differently is to try to get a clear understanding of the big picture first.
- Jussi: In my experience, the courses are useful for the students, but in fact they can seem clearer for the students than for the teachers in the beginning. The students seemed to catch the ideas faster than I did when I started teaching the courses. I suppose that this was because the students had been taught by many teachers on the course, probably giving the students a clearer picture of the course as a whole. Having taught and worked on these courses more now, I too have a better idea of not only what I am doing, but also what other teachers are doing, both on the course and in general at the university. Getting to know all three courses in the UVK curriculum has also helped me in understanding the big picture of the system. To summarize, I think that for a new teacher the system might require some time to get used to, whereas for the students this is not an issue at all.
- Riitta: If I think about planning from the point of view of what works and what needs to be developed, in my view it has been afforded enough time so that we really can carry out discussions on what we are teaching and why. This is of course something that we do when we plan new curricula, but our vision needs to be sharper when planning in a team, and we need to have solid reasons why we are doing something in a certain language. Occasionally it is not quite clear whose responsibility certain tasks related to planning are, and having several new UVK courses starting at the same time means that the sheer number of meetings is high. Now the administration has clarified roles for different members of the teams, so that some teachers take on more responsibility for planning, pedagogical development, and administrative duties, and also get compensated for it. We now have one or two teachers in each course whose responsibility it is to help with the administration and keep an eye on the roles that colleagues play in different course teams, so the system is now working in a more organized manner.
- Jussi: In addition to having resources for planning, having teachers from not only the English team, but also speech communication, written communication, Swedish, Japanese, German, and so on, in the planning team has been helpful when coming up with and refining ideas and pedagogy. Being able to rely on several individuals and personalities has been, in my experience, perhaps one of the most useful tools in designing courses. I have had to question my own methods and ways of thinking often, and have been offered support and ideas that I had not thought of before.



Riitta: If I think about moving to the future, and what works and what needs to be developed in the UVK system, then I think this is a question that should also be given to the students to answer. Despite shared learning outcomes, individually planned courses can have quite a lot of different elements. Since in UKV courses the idea is to use common materials, that means that students in different groups of the same course will receive the same information. For students who study the same major subject, the courses are more standardised, but to the teachers who teach in many teams, but are not part of a planning team, it is not necessarily clear where the language coverage differences between courses come from.

I miss getting to know the students better, but I have not found a solution to that yet. Not being able to meet them constantly makes it harder to remember them individually. Grading has become easier in the sense that now all the courses are pass/fail instead of the old system, where we gave numbers on a scale of 1–5. Even though students sometimes miss numbered grades, I would keep the pass/fail system because we are trying to teach them skills which can be further honed and do not need to be mastered perfectly yet.

Jussi: The UVK courses are constantly developed based on feedback from the teachers, students, and faculties. The teams that I have been a part of have all held regular meetings before and after the courses to develop them further, which I see as positive. In my opinion, having several experts plan and teach together can support students' learning processes by offering them different perspectives on the course content. The teachers will at times, whether intentionally or not, partly overlap with each other in their teaching, which I think can also benefit the students.

Nevertheless, for me, losing certain individual freedom as a teacher to make choices has taken some time to get used to, as I have had to get used to following the same content, timetable, and using shared materials with other teachers. However, I think that the issue for me was mostly in understanding which parts of the course are fixed and which parts can still be done in an individual way.

Also, in my experience, having two to four teachers teach a course can result in some teachers feeling more distant from the students, as there is a limited amount of time to spend with them, especially compared to a regular course with only one teacher. Perhaps this issue is something that we will need to focus on more in the future.

To summarize, it has been interesting to notice during this process of discussing our teaching that on the whole, after our initial experiences with the system, we both felt similarly about how it works and what kind of things we believe could be developed further. Despite the differences in our age and teaching experience, we both shared roughly the same viewpoint when it comes to UVK teaching. We both see planning as an important part of the development work that should be given adequate time. Considering that there are fewer hours per teacher in comparison to the traditional course system, we have also noticed that we do not get to know the students as well as we have been used to. We noticed some slight differences, too. For example, for Jussi it took a little longer to get used to the idea of using similar teaching materials. He was also more likely to navigate through them in his own individual manner. When it came to planning, though, Riitta had been more used to planning on her own, whereas for Jussi planning as a part of a team was how he started teaching.

## Revisiting our Story in Terms of Narrative Inquiry

As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) have pointed out, any inquiry can be seen through four dimensions. These are *inward* and *outward*, and *backward* and *forward*: *Inward* has to do with

feelings, hopes, and moral disposition, whereas *outward* relates to the environment, and *backward* and *forward* have to do with the temporal constructions of past, present, and future. Next, we will summarize our experiences based on these four perspectives.

### ***Inward***

Riitta: Personally, I feel there is hope on the horizon. The first years have taught me a lot about this way of teaching and helped me to see what works and what does not.

Jussi: The only way is forward, and I think that the change towards a more multilingual approach to teaching and studying will take us a step forward and point us to new directions. Change will often present new kinds of problems on the way, but I believe it is a necessary part of the process.

### ***Outward***

Riitta: The environment for this type of working is supportive and inclusive, especially for those who are part of the planning team. The structures of planning and teaching are still developing, in response to changing circumstances. I like it that planning is an ongoing process, and that we discuss and change things where needed, based on the student and teacher feedback.

Jussi: The environment is more challenging as one has to continuously negotiate with other teachers about most content and pedagogy concerning the courses. On the other hand, the support from peers can also be reassuring and helpful, as there is no fear of being left alone to deal with the challenges and decisions that each course involves.

Both planning and teaching the courses seem to be becoming more multilingual, as teachers of different languages are working together more than before. To me it seems that this has, and will, probably change the attitudes and ways of using languages for both the teachers and the students towards a more flexible use of their linguistic repertoires.

### ***Backward***

Riitta: We could learn a lot about the experiences of other teaching and planning teams. Even though not everything that other teams have done can be repeated, becoming more aware of their ways of working and what has worked well for them could provide food for thought for our teams as well (and hopefully prevent us from re-inventing the wheel).

Jussi: I also believe that generally improving methods of sharing experiences, ideas, and practical matters such as assignment types between language groups and teachers more efficiently and openly will improve the quality of teaching overall in our organisation.

### ***Forward***

Riitta: Looking forward, what is helpful is that the structures are so fluid. There is room to think and rethink the teaching situations in terms of the needs of the students. The situation with COVID-19 has brought new challenges, as teachers need to be prepared for different ways of organizing teaching, including making online options available for students. This has also had an effect on shared planning, as well as on course

content. Doing some things takes more time online, and may cause some elements to be left out.

**Jussi:** The work done this far in the UVK is a great basis for improvement and further change in the future, especially as more and more teachers are now joining the courses and their planning teams. As constant development of the courses and pedagogy is encouraged and embedded in the system, I am positive that the courses will support students' needs even better in the future.

## **Representing and Exploring Our Practices in This Narrative Account**

Working on this narrative account has helped us to discuss issues and understand both ourselves and each other better as teachers. It has given us an opportunity to process different puzzles in a dialogical manner, which would not have been so easy to do in a traditional research article. Even though the teachers of the course have discussion sessions after the courses have been run, they tend to be based on factual information and what needs to be done next, and there is very little time for personal professional reflection. Writing this narrative account has forced us to stop and consider different issues from our own individual points of view. Our writing process has proved to be multilingual, too, in that we have written everything in English since the beginning, but then discussed the points together in Finnish. The four dimensions suggested by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) proved to be helpful in assessing the situation, and the new ideas from considering those dimensions could be taken into account when planning the courses further. We fully understand that these considerations reflect the views of two teachers only. We also see it as important that students' voices could be represented in order to get a more comprehensive picture of how the UVK courses work. However, looking at our first experiences of co-teaching multilingual communication and language courses, we could sum up our views as follows:

**Riitta:** On the whole, I would say that there are several opportunities included in the system, but it's up to teachers to make sure they are realized. However, instead of claiming that too many cooks spoil the broth, I would say that there is every opportunity for the situation being quite the opposite—instead of too many cooks spoiling the broth, I would say the more, the merrier!

**Jussi:** The courses take place at the right time in the students' undergraduate studies and they aim to support their academic needs, tailored to each faculty. In my opinion then, this change, however potentially time-consuming and challenging at first for teachers, will benefit both students and teachers.

The process of writing the narrative account has also provided us with new questions, issues, and puzzles to consider, some of which are:

- Should we discuss and have a joint language policy in the classroom for teachers for pedagogical reasons?
- How could we find a good compromise when it comes to arranging scheduling so that we take into account the departments' wishes but manage to keep the number of teachers in each teaching team sensible? Now most departments prefer very similar teaching times, which causes overlap, and the need for new teachers grows.
- We do not get to know the students as well as in a language-specific course, because

there are fewer sessions per teacher. In a language-specific course we might see the students once or twice a week, whereas in a UVK course we might have several weeks in between seeing the students.

- How could we better take into account those students who need extra support in class and how could we better spot them? Given that the students have less contact with an individual teacher, it is easy for the teacher to overlook those students who do not ask for help by themselves.

Even though we may not yet have answers to the previous questions, we would like to conclude our narrative account with the following reflections:

**Jussi:** Writing the narrative account has given me a chance to stop and reflect on multilingualism, and provided a theoretical framework within which to further consider various issues related to it. Writing has helped me to see the value and purpose of multilingual elements in our teaching that I have been doing for years, but have never properly looked at from a theoretical perspective before. I have also been able to describe and analyze certain issues in the current system and understand where in practice it is possible for me to improve. In the end, writing a narrative account has been a comfortable way to explore the issues for me, as I have been able to use my own voice and dialogue to reflect on the issues.

**Riitta:** For me, too, the most difficult, but at the same time also the most useful part has been that I have been forced to stop and think about what it is that I am doing and why. Especially during this study year marked by COVID-19, the focus of various meetings with other teachers has been on how to get things done. Writing this narrative account has given me a perspective to what we are doing as teachers, and it has helped me to consider various points in teaching and planning. The analysis has similarly provided me with a framework and a place to locate myself on the map. At the same time it has highlighted to me how much this type of teaching is— and very much should be—a work in progress, developing over time.

## Author Bios

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## Review Process

This paper was open-reviewed by Katherine Thornton, Simla Course, and Tim Ashwell.  
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