

**Untapped Resources  
or Deficient ‘Foreigners’**

*Students of Vietnamese Background  
in Icelandic Upper Secondary Schools*

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2015

Untapped Resources or Deficient ‘Foreigners’: Students of  
Vietnamese Background in Icelandic Upper Secondary  
Schools

A thesis for a Ph.D.-degree in Education

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ISBN (apply on <http://landsbokasafn.is> )

Printed at Prentsmiðjan Oddi

Reykjavík, Iceland, 2015

This dissertation is lovingly and respectfully dedicated to my late father, my “bố,” Cư Văn Trần. He is my muse, and a role model for my life.



## **Abstract**

As Iceland's population becomes more diverse, so does the student body in upper secondary schools. A number of studies during the past decade reported a high drop-out rate among immigrant students. The basic reasons students cited were low proficiency in the Icelandic language, low self-esteem, lack of motivation, and social isolation. Based on these findings, I ask how these phenomena can be explained by the theory and practice of multicultural education.

The study applies the critical perspective to scrutinize the discourse of policy documents, their recontextualization in the schools and the students of Vietnamese background's experiences. The philosophy of multicultural education is one of inclusion, insistence upon valuing diversity and equal opportunity regardless of gender, religion, and belief, ethnicity, race, socioeconomic status, disability or any other status (Banks, 2007b). In order to bring about equity in education that facilitates academic success for students of foreign background, multicultural education insists on the need of schools to be reformed and new pedagogy adopted (Gaine 2005; Banks 2004; Gay, 2000; Nieto, 2000).

Grounded in multicultural education theories, this study's purpose is to understand the implications of the concept of equality and how well the Icelandic educational system has established itself to make it equitable for young people of ethnic minority background.

The methodology of the study draws upon critical ethnography, which was employed as an analytical tool to scrutinize the policy documents and analyze the interviews with administrators, teachers and students.

The results reveal three basic conclusions. First, while acknowledging to some extent that Iceland is a multicultural society, the acts, regulations and curriculum that form the basis for teaching and integrating students of immigrant background, focus more on their deficit in Icelandic and assumed cultural deficiency instead of their own knowledge and culture that can enhance and facilitate their learning. Second, due to the lack of resources and knowledge about pedagogical practices informed by multicultural education philosophy, the administrators and teachers in the study resorted to doing the best they could. Third, immigrant students' experiences in the schools they attended were the direct results of the policy and the school discourses. Despite their warm feeling towards their teachers and their belief that

their teachers were trying to do their best, the students were perceived by many teachers to be deficient due to their lack of Icelandic language proficiency, and were socially isolated from their Icelandic-heritage peers.

The study proposes at the policy level that the discourse and language of policy documents be explicit about the concept of multi-culturalism and diversity, which is now the reality of Iceland's population. Inclusive pedagogy is a prerequisite for the teaching and learning for a diverse student population. Clear and specific goals need to be set and met by allocation of funding and by capacity building through training and supporting administrators and teachers. Policy changes are only effectively understood and implemented through communication, dissemination and monitoring that ensure effectiveness.

At the school level there is the need for the shifting of perceptions. Immigrant students are not deficient but embody rich academic, social and cultural resources that contribute to their learning. It is important that all members of the institution are educated and empowered to be active in helping shift policies and practices, and in taking ownership of these changes. It is equally important that school development leadership and change of management.



**Figure 1:** The meandering roadways of the Icelandic hinterland illustrate the landscape students of Vietnamese background are challenged to navigate within the nation's educational system.

## Ágrip

Um leið og lýðfræðilegar rætur Íslendinga verða fjölbreyttari breytist samsetning nemendahópsins í framhaldsskólum landsins. Ýmsar rannsóknir, sem gerðar hafa verið á síðasta áratug, hafa sýnt að brottfall innflytjenda úr íslenskum framhaldsskólunum er hátt. Nemendurnir segja sjálfir að helstu ástæður brotthvarfs úr skólum séu ófullkomin tök á íslensku máli, veik sjálfsmynd, lítil hvatning og félagsleg einangrun. Í ljósi þessara rannsókna varpa ég hér fram þeirri spurningu hvernig skýra megi ástæður þessa enn frekar með aðstoð fjölmenningsmenntunarfræðinnar.

Rannsóknin nýtir gagnrýna sjónarhornið (critical perspective) við að rýna stefnumarkandi skjöl, setja þau í nýtt samhengi skólastarfs og reynslu víetnamskra nemenda. Fjölmenningsmenntunarfræðin gengur út frá að allir séu teknir með, að gerð sé krafa um að fjölbreytileiki sé metinn að verðleikum og að allir njóti jafnra tækifæra án tillits til kyns, trúar, lífsskoðana, þjóðernis, kynþáttar, félagslegrar stöðu, fötlunar og fleiri þátta (Banks, 2007b). Með það að markmiði að greiða fyrir námsárangri nemenda af erlendum uppruna leggur fjölmenningsmenntunarfræðin áherslu á umbætur á skólastarfi og að tekin sé upp ný kennslufræði (Banks 2004; Gaine 2005; Gay, 2000; Nieto, 2000).

Tilgangur þessarar rannsóknar, sem byggir einmitt á kenningum fjölmenningsmenntunarfræðinnar, er að leita skilnings á hugtakinu jafnrétti og athuga hversu vel íslenska skólakerfinu hefur tekist að tryggja jafnan rétt ungs fólks úr þjóðernisminnihlutahópum.

Aðferðafræði rannsóknarinnar og rannsóknaráætlunin sjálf eru byggð á gagnrýninni þátttökuathugun, sem beitt er til að varpa ljósi á stefnumarkandi skjöl og greina viðtöl við stjórnendur, kennara og nemendur.

Meginniðurstöður rannsóknarinnar eru þrjár. Í fyrsta lagi eru færð rök fyrir því að þótt lög, reglugerðir og námskrá, sem mynda grunn fyrir kennslu og aðlögun nemenda úr hópi innflytjenda, geri að nokkru leyti ráð fyrir að Ísland sé orðið fjölmenningsamfélag, þá einblíni þau í of ríkum mæli á vankunnáttu þeirra í íslensku máli og vanþekkingu á íslenskri menningu í staðinn fyrir að viðurkenna þeirra eigin þekkingu og menningu og hvernig þessir þættir geta eflt þau og orðið þeim til framdráttar við námið. Í öðru lagi er sýnt fram á að þar sem auðlindir eru af skornum skammti og þekking á kennslufræðilegum æfingum mótuðum af heimspeki fjölmenningsmenntunarfræðinnar lítil, hafi

kennarar gert sitt besta með því að prófa sig áfram og læra af reynslunni. Í þriðja lagi er lýst hvernig reynsla nemenda innan úr skólunum er mótuð með beinum hætti af þeirri stefnu og skólamálaumræðu sem ríkti á þeirra skólatíma; þrátt fyrir að þeir beri hlýjar tilfinningar til kennara sinna fyrir að gera sitt besta finna nemendur fyrir veikleikum sínum vegna lítillar tungumálakunnáttu og félagslegrar einangrunar frá innfæddum samnemendum sínum.

Rannsóknin leggur til að í skjölum sem snerta mótun stefnu stjórnvalda, umræður og orðfæri þeim tengd, sé hugtakið fjölmenning notað með skýrum hætti, enda er fjölmenning orðin veruleiki sem íbúar landsins búa við. Kennslufræði þurfi að ná til allra hópa í margbreytilegu samfélagi. Skýr og nákvæm markmið þurfi að setja og uppfylla með skiptingu fjármagns og eflingu á getu starfsfólks með þjálfun og stuðningi við stjórnendur og kennara. Breytingar á stefnu og framkvæmd þeirra séu vel kynntar með beinum boðskiptum, dreifingu upplýsinga og vöktun, sem tryggi árangur af þeim.

Á vettangi skólans er þörf á breyttum skilningi. Nemendur úr hópi innflytjenda eru ekki undirmálsfólk heldur ráða þeir yfir ríkulegum auði, menntunarlegum, félagslegum og menningarlegum, sem getur orðið þeirra framlag í náminu. Mikilvægt er að allir sem eiga aðild að starfi stofnananna séu menntaðir og valdefldir til að aðstoða við að breyta stefnunni og framkvæmd hennar, og til að eigna sér hlut í breytingunum. Ekki er síður mikilvægt að í þróun skólanna felist framtíðarsýn og gildismat, og hún byggist jafnframt á skilningi á forystu og breytingastjórnun.



## Acknowledgements

I am finally writing the last page of this challenging but rewarding work. My perception of time is that it goes by very fast, and that I am always chasing after it. However, during the years in which I was constantly working on my research and dissertation, there were events in my personal life that made the years seem long indeed. When things got difficult I was thankful for being able to disappear into theories and methodologies.

For the completion of this dissertation and for my achievement of a doctoral degree, I am indebted to many people. First and foremost I would like to express my deep gratitude to my husband, Jónas Guðmundsson, for having always been the rock supporting me with encouragement, patience, and fondness, as he has supported me in all my pursuits throughout the years of our marriage.

I would like to thank Hanna Ragnarsdóttir and Chris Gaine, my supervisors, for their instructions, guidance, and encouragement. Their thorough explanations during monthly tutorial sessions were invaluable to my understanding and to building my knowledge of the multicultural field I was entering. It has been an honor to be Hanna's first doctoral student and Chris' very last one.

I am deeply thankful to my dearest friends Allyson Macdonald and Gwendolyn Whittaker, for the knowledge and expertise they have exercised in editing my work, and for having sacrificed many hours of free time and weekends. I also could not have done this immense work without the support and encouragement of other family members and friends. In particular, my two friends Gerður G. Óskarsdóttir, Sigrún Klara Hannesdóttir, Judy Tran, my sister-in-law, and Heiðrún Giao-Thi, my daughter.

Last but not least, I gratefully acknowledge the funding sources that made my Ph.D. possible. I was funded by The Doctoral Grants of The University of Iceland Research Fund, the Delta Kappa Gamma Society International Scholarship, Soroptimist International of Europe, and Hagþenkir Travel and Educational Funds.



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# **1 Introduction to the Study**

## **1.1 Background to the Study**

My interest in conducting this research stems most immediately from my years of working with Vietnamese youth in upper secondary schools in the United States and in Iceland. Throughout my professional career, I have observed and worked with the challenges facing students who immigrated during their teenage years. My choice of professional focus was deliberate: I chose to work with teenage Vietnamese immigrants because I also was of Vietnamese origin, I spoke their language, and I too had been a teenager when I arrived in the United States as a refugee.

Multicultural education adheres to the democratic principle of social justice and inclusiveness to bring excellence, equality and equity to education (Nieto, 2000). A multicultural education perspective is about an educational reform process to bring about basic education for all students as defined by Nieto as “regardless of their ethnicity, language, sexual orientation, religion, gender, race, class and other difference” (Nieto 2000, p. 311). It is pervasive because it addresses the school issues holistically, i.e. teaching by praxis, prejudice prevention, equity in pedagogy and an inclusive curriculum (Nieto, 2000; Banks, 1998). It encompasses rigorous leadership and clear vision on the part of principals, a commitment from teachers to thoroughly understand their own perceptions with the aim of understanding their students and thus being culturally responsive in their pedagogy, and the alteration of the curriculum and the school environment to benefit students of diverse backgrounds (Ryan, 2003; Gay, 2000; Riehl, 2000; Wrigley, 2000). My research adopts the perspective of multiculturalism in the Icelandic situation.

Schools in Iceland are becoming ever more diverse. In February 2014, the UNESCO organizers of an International Mother Language Day event in Reykjavík noted that there were 92 languages registered as being spoken by schoolchildren in Iceland (Tungumálaforði landsins, 2014, p. 22). At the end of 2013, the number of immigrants, defined by Statistics Iceland as “... a person born abroad with two foreign born parents and four foreign born grandparents” was 8% of the population (25,926 people). The statistics also showed 15% (3,913 people) of this population was immigrant youth from 16 to 25 years old,

and that 110 of these were Vietnamese (Statistics Iceland, 2009a, 2014b).

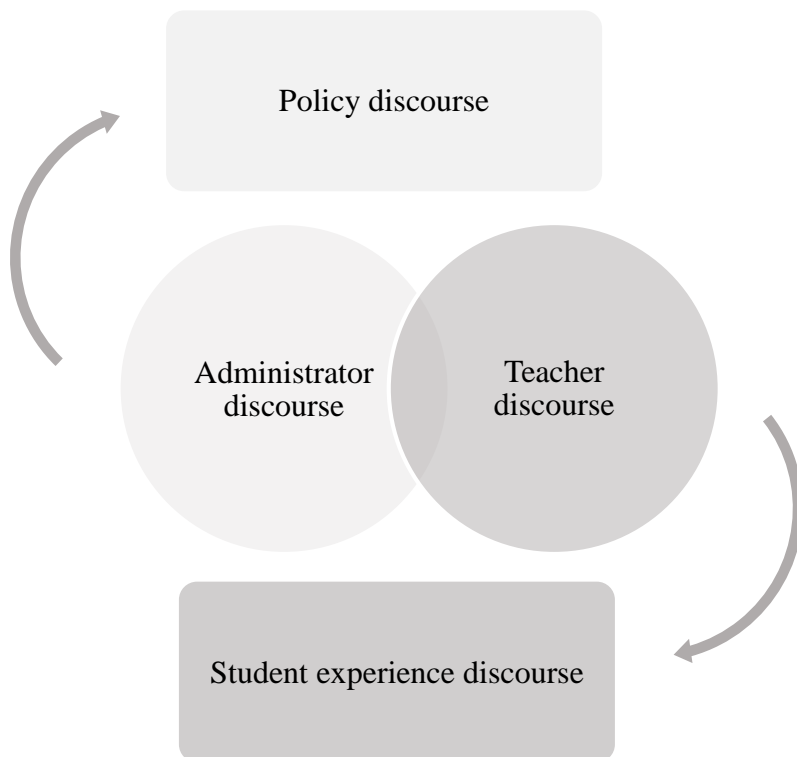
The Vietnamese come from a variety of family, socio-economic, educational, and political backgrounds. But no matter what their individual circumstances, all arrive in this new world with cultural traits that set them apart from the new cultures in which they must operate. For example, a key cultural trait that must be acknowledged when working with or researching immigrant Vietnamese teenagers is the central role that families, particularly parents, play in an individual's life. Throughout history, the family has been the cornerstone of Vietnamese culture and society. With a long history of wars and foreign domination, it has been the family that underpins Viet-Nam's social structures, and it has been the family that individuals look to for protection from the consequences of larger upheavals.

From a very young age, Vietnamese children are taught that the essential virtue is *hiếu thảo*, a term which is most commonly translated into English as "filial piety". This ethos stands in contrast to the culture that I encountered when I arrived in the US and began attending high school, and that Vietnamese teenagers today encounter in US and Icelandic secondary schools. In the West, the underlying emphasis is on personal growth and development, and many rites of passage focus on a teenager gaining independence from the family. Such contradictions between values systems can create barriers to educational success.

Multicultural education may provide a way to bridge these gaps, and to create environments where immigrant youth can draw on both the strengths of their original culture and on the opportunities of their new culture. There are many different approaches to multiculturalism, though all share a philosophy of inclusion, social justice and equity where all students should have equal opportunities for success in school. Multicultural educational theorists, such as Banks, Nieto, May, and Gay, and the social theorist Freire have developed a set of tenets that can be followed when attempting to implement a multicultural education program. These tenets are: content integration; a knowledge construction process; prejudice reduction; an equity pedagogy; an empowering school and social culture (Banks, 2004, p. 5); teachers' high expectations towards their students; dialogue between teachers and students; and the bridging of home and school culture (Nieto, 1999).

There are many issues in multicultural education research, such as race, ethnicity, gender, religion and immigrants, as well as family and

community values. Any one of these could be a doctoral thesis on its own, but these topics are not in the scope of my research. The focus of my dissertation is whether upper secondary schools in Iceland are meeting the needs of students of immigrant background and tapping into the wealth found in their cultures. In my case, I am studying immigrant education in Iceland with a particular emphasis on young adults of Vietnamese background. The research is a qualitative study of three levels of discourses of education: the policy discourse; the school discourse through the narratives of the administrators and teachers; and the student discourse.



**Figure 2: The Three Levels of Discourses of Education**

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

During the past decade, a series of studies have examined the educational progress of first generation immigrant youth in upper secondary education. In 2007, Grétarsdóttir conducted a study on educational progress among youth with native languages other than Icelandic. Her results showed that 65% of 119 respondents never attended or had dropped out of upper secondary education (Grétarsdóttir, 2007). Furthermore, *Framtíð í nýju landi*<sup>1</sup> (FÍNL), a program to assist Vietnamese immigrant youth with integration and education, which I designed and directed between 2004 and 2007, collected data that point to a similar conclusion. In 2004, there were 83 youth in Iceland who were born in Viet-Nam, who were between 16 and 25 years old, and had both parents who were of Vietnamese origins (Statistics Iceland, 2009a). Thirty-five of these youth participated in the project and returned to school to learn Icelandic and various vocations, but 24 of them dropped out again. Only 11 of them continued and were expected to finish their studies (Daníelsdóttir, 2007). In interviews, the students cited low proficiency in the Icelandic language, inadequate academic background, low self-esteem and motivation, and social isolation in school as reasons for this poor performance. Some of these findings are consistent with the results of another study that I conducted between 2002 and 2004 called *Factors Affecting Asian Students' Academic Achievement in Iceland*. Around 71% of participants of Asian origin who were in school, and 91% of those who were no longer in school, stated that the main barrier to their studies and a key reason for dropping out was difficulty with the Icelandic language. Also, 45% of those who dropped out stated that a reason for abandoning school was a lack of social connection (Tran, 2007). However, Magnúsdóttir's recent study of the difficulties that immigrant youth encountered in both elementary and upper secondary educational levels found that their interaction with students of Icelandic origin did not improve with the augmentation of their language proficiency (Magnúsdóttir, 2010). An unpublished report by Statistics Iceland looked at school attendance between 2004 and 2008 among children who were born in 1988. Of the 98 immigrant children included in the report, 75 (77%) were in school

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<sup>1</sup> Supported by the Ministry of Education, Science and Cultural, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Security, the City of Reykjavík, Efling-Trade Union, The Icelandic Children Fund, The Icelandic Red Cross, The Intercultural Centre.

and 23 (24%) were not in school. At the same time, 94% of the Icelandic children in the report were in school, and only 6% were not in school. This cohort study extended to 2008 when these children became 20 years old. At that time, 31% of the immigrants were in school and 69% not in school, while among their Icelandic counterparts 56% were in school and 44% not in school (Statistics Iceland, 2009b).

These statistics and studies have guided me to structure my research using the following assumptions:

- a. Iceland is not an ethnically homogeneous country;
- b. Immigrant youth face many difficulties and their risk of dropping out is considerably higher than that of their Icelandic peers at the upper secondary education level;
- c. The Icelandic educational system, and Iceland's wider society must face the questions "What kind of learning outcomes do all our students need in order to effectively negotiate and critically engage in this emerging 'global village' at the local, national, and global levels?" and "What are the best ways for those skills to be taught and learned?"

In this study I have interviewed 13 youth of Vietnamese origin with a heterogeneous background. The youngest one was 16 and the oldest one was 25 years old at the time of the interviews. Even though the majority of them came from a rural area of north Viet-Nam, some were from cities in the south. In Iceland, six of the 13 lived with single parents and only four had families with both parents in Iceland. The remaining three had some relatives in Iceland, but lived alone and supported themselves through work and school. All had jobs, working as housekeepers, at checkout lines, or as receptionists, to help with family incomes and in order to send money to Viet-Nam.

Most of the participants were unclear about what education their parents had received, except for two of them who said their fathers were engineers. They reported that in Viet-Nam their parents worked as farmers, fishermen and as a store salesperson (selling miscellaneous items for everyday use). In Iceland, the parents worked mainly in packing plants, hotels, and restaurants.

My close examination of one particular group (Vietnamese youth in upper secondary schools) should provide findings that allow better

understanding of the situation of youth who share similar immigrant status in Iceland's educational system. Furthermore, if the achievement of the students in my study is related to issues of equality, then my findings could be applied to an even a wider group of students beyond Iceland. My findings could also support other researchers' understanding, and spark further studies about the consequences of inequality towards immigrant children, youth and even adults. Using critical inquiry, I will be analyzing data and drawing conclusions, with the principles of a multicultural education as a framework.

### **1.3 My Motivation for the Study**

April 30<sup>th</sup>, 1975, the day the world news broadcast the end of Viet-Nam's 30 years of civil war, was also the day my family embarked on a lifelong journey. I was 16 years old. Throughout the years, my identity kept transforming from refugee, to immigrant, to citizen of the world. I described these transformations in a short article for the web site of the United Nations High Commission on Refugees: "After eight years as a stateless person, I became a citizen of the U.S. in 1983. I met my Icelandic husband in college. When we completed our studies, we decided to go 'home' to Iceland where at least one of us truly belonged. My experience of having been uprooted from my homeland and feeling rootless in the world was a strong drive behind my desire to embark on the voyage of coming to Iceland, learning a new language, adapting to a new culture, and making a new home for myself. As the years have passed and I have lived my life far from my first home, I have identified myself more as a citizen of the world influenced by different cultures and traditions. But in my heart and in my soul I am Vietnamese" (Tran, 2012).

Until the day I left Viet-Nam, I had lived in the same town all my life. I went to the same school year after year with the same close group of friends. I arrived in the U.S. with little knowledge of English. To prepare me for school and to help me learn English faster, my parents sent me to live with an American family soon after we came to the U.S. I was separated from my family by hundreds of miles.

The pages in my diary, where I recorded my emotions during this first year, are chaotic. I was like a little boat bobbing on the surface of the volatile ocean, always at the mercy of winds and waves beyond my control. The pain of losing my home and my friends and of being away



from my family was constant and at times it was unbearable. The emotions poured out onto the pages of my diary: "I miss my mother tonight. I missed her so much that I wish I could temporarily lose my mind to numb my feelings." Every night I was afraid of going to bed because the thoughts that filled my head kept me from falling asleep. I was afraid of the dreams that brought me back to my friends and to the familiar life, only to wake up in a strange environment. I was afraid of making new friends that I might lose again. I was afraid and I was afraid. As the start of the school year approached, I was apprehensive, fully aware of my limitations in English.

Not too long into the school year, I realized that even though I did not understand much English, I was able to function well in math and in chemistry classes. I was taking the highest level of both subjects, because in Viet-Nam I had already learned everything that was being taught. For this reason, I had no problem following in classes and learning the English vocabulary for math and chemistry. Nevertheless, the study of English, American history, and government, was another story. I wrote to myself: "How depressing! The vocabulary on these pages looks like some kind of unknown ancient language." The school did not have English as a second language support, so I was in classes with other students until a parent volunteered to tutor me English privately. In the following years, this tutor and her family became my second family and had a great influence on my life.

My father was an educated and progressive man. He had equally high educational goals for my sister and me, and for our brother. Completion of university education was a natural path that we never even once questioned. However, although my father had earlier spent some months in the U.S., he did not have a full understanding of the hierarchies of prestige and differences in quality among the U.S. universities and colleges. This was where my American family contributed to making me a better life. After I moved to live with them in my last year of high school, mama and papa, as I called them, spent immeasurable hours not only assisting me with my school work, but also explaining to me everything I encountered in my daily life. They had high expectations for me and taught me to strive for the best education in order to secure my future. And because of that today my life is successful and thriving today.

Professionally, I am a teacher. I have taught English as a second language and I have taught the hearing impaired. However, since my

first weeks as a 16-year-old refugee I have been drawn to working with immigrants, particularly young adults. I have long believed that the road that led to my education was not all of my own making but that part of it was due to luck, which brought me chances I could not have worked for. However, in recent years I have become convinced that even if chance played a big role in my own life, we should not rely on such luck for the new generation of immigrant youth coming to Iceland. I want luck to become the norm for immigrant students. School success should not depend on chance. It should be built into the system so that students need only to use their abilities and potential to access it. With this goal in mind, I have challenged the system, created programs and organizations that focus on empowering immigrants, enabling them to develop themselves socially and educationally in their new homelands.

One such program was Project Springboard. This was a pilot project designed to systematically and directly interact with youth of Vietnamese background to facilitate their education and integration process in Iceland. When the project ended in 2007, it left me pondering what I should do with the knowledge I had gained from the youth, the upper secondary schools, and the educational system. The stumbling blocks the youth encountered in their school process were in the areas of Icelandic proficiency, self-esteem, family support, and motivation (Tran & Ragnarsdóttir, 2013). Meanwhile, the drop-out rate among such youth at the upper secondary level was periodically reported in the media as between 80% and 90%. What explanations were behind this? Where could I find answers? What was my responsibility? These were the original questions that motivated me to embark on my doctoral studies in the field multicultural education.

The additional motive lay in my experience as an adult immigrant in Iceland. Throughout my 15 years as a teacher, I experienced the drawbacks of a general lack of multicultural understanding first-hand. Despite my advanced degree and professional experience, I often felt marginalized and invisible. I perceived that my voice was either excluded or not recognized even among those nationals who were my peers – including my colleagues, and including other women.

Issues of social justice, equity, and equality have been underlying motives for much of my professional life. These issues also are the foundation of multicultural education. As a citizen of Iceland, a country which prides itself on a long history of democracy, I also believe that

these issues are ones that we must address as we move forward into the 21st century.

## **1.4 Organization of Remaining Chapters**

This thesis has ten chapters. The first chapter is the introduction. The second chapter focuses on Iceland and Viet-Nam and their educational systems which are the background contexts of the study. It also focuses on the research literature related to immigrant students and Vietnamese students. The third chapter details the theoretical and conceptual background of the study. The fourth chapter introduces the participants and discusses the methodology and the methods that are used to collect and analyze the data. The fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth chapters include the analysis and the discussion of the data gathered from the policy documents, the interviews with the school administrators, teachers, and the students of immigrant background, respectively. The ninth chapter discusses and answers the research questions. The tenth chapter concludes with the implications for the reform agenda of policy and school practices in Iceland.

## **2 Iceland and Viet-Nam – The Two Homes**

In this chapter, I introduce Viet-Nam and Iceland, the countries where the participants in the study emigrated from or live. The background I provide is particularly intended to provide context for the educational systems in each country, and to highlight some of the differences and commonalities between each country, with the aim of providing a fuller understanding of the situation of students of Vietnamese background in the Icelandic school system

### **2.1 Viet-Nam – The Home in the Mind and in the Heart**

In the summer of 1979, Iceland, in cooperation with the Icelandic Red Cross, resettled the first group of 34 Vietnamese, including Vietnamese of Chinese origin, in Reykjavík (Harðardóttir, Jónsdóttir, & Jónsson, 2005). This event marked the beginning of the interrelationship between Viet-Nam and Iceland.

#### *2.1.1 The Land, the History, the People*

Viet-Nam is located in the southeastern part of the Indochinese Peninsula. Shaped like a long, north-south running letter S, Viet-Nam is 1,650 km in length and has a surface area of 311,688 km<sup>2</sup> (Cima, 1987). Viet-Nam has encompassed many ethnic groups during its long history.

- The majority ethnic group is the Viet people, (also known as the Kinh people) at 85.7% of the population.
- Other minority groups include the Tay, Thai, Muong, Khmer, Mong and Nung (Central Intelligence Agency [US], 2014).
- The population has expanded from approximately 48,030,000 people at the end of the civil war in 1975, to 89.71 million in 2013 (World Bank, 2014; countryeconomy.com, 2012).

The north, central, and southern regions of Viet-Nam have three distinct cultures, and each region has a major city that functions as a social, if not political, capital. While Ha-Noi has been Viet-Nam's capital city since the end of the civil war in 1976, Hue (in the center) and Saigon (in the south) were also were capitals of Viet-Nam at various points in history ("Countries and Their Cultures" n.d. To-Z.

Vietnam; Tran, 2012). Regional differences can be seen in everyday traditional dress, can be tasted in the food, and can be heard in the three dialects spoken by the local people (Truong, 2013; Hoang, 1965).

During the 1980s, following decades of civil war, Viet- Nam was among the five poorest countries in the world with 90.4% of the people living on less than \$1.25 per day in 1981 (Skaife, 2011; UN Economic and Social Affairs, 2009). More recently, it has been recognized by the World Bank as having moved up into the lower middle-income group of countries. Based on Gross Domestic Product per Capita (using PPP measure), the income per person in 2013 was 3.750 USD, ranking 53<sup>rd</sup> out of 152 countries in the world (Pasquali, 2014). Several factors have contributed to this economic development. One nationally significant source of income is from remittances, i.e, money being sent home by Vietnamese living and working abroad (Hernández-Coss, 2005). Another factor is *Đổi mới*, the 1986 shift from a highly centralized to a market economy (World Bank, 2014). Part of the Vietnamese identity is the consciousness of a long history of fighting many wars, both internal and external. The notion of Viet-Nam, as a small but fiercely independent country resonates, through many periods of history with wars against China, France, and Japan being of particular note, along with the 30-year civil war between the North and the South that ended in 1975. Two opposing ideologies, and the involvement of two world powers, fueled the 30-year war between the North (backed by the Soviet Union) and the South (backed by the United-States (Lewy, 1978). As a result of the North's victory on April 30<sup>th</sup>, 1975, more than one million South Vietnamese fled, seeking political refuge all over the world. Some 140,000 South Vietnamese were immediately evacuated after the fall of Saigon (the South's capital), primarily people in danger of persecution because of their official status in the South Vietnamese government and/or their associations with American operations. The plans for this orderly evacuation broke down during the chaos in Saigon during the final days of South Viet-Nam's existence, and people of diverse status were airlifted to boats to leave the country. My family and I shared a cargo boat with 7000 others, including a number of Catholic fishermen for whom this was the second time they had been forced to flee due to their religious beliefs. (Rudy, 2001). Their first time was in 1955 when they fled from the North to the South of Viet-Nam when the Communists of Viet-Nam came into power (Cima, 1987; Robinson, 1998). The years following the defeat of South Viet-Nam saw more people fleeing the country, giving rise to the term "Boat

People”. Thousands of people departed the country out of fear, and also because of the increasingly difficult living conditions. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that during this period over a million South-Vietnamese were dislocated from their homes and placed into new economic zones, re-education camps, and detention centers, where many of them died (UNHCR, 2000). In addition, because of increased tensions with China, ethnic Chinese who had lived many generations in Viet-Nam also fled the country. Local authorities throughout Southeast Asia were faced with the challenges of housing tens of thousands of Boat People in refugee camps, compelling the 1979 Geneva Conference to find solutions. Countries around the world then pledged to offer new homes to the refugees.

The continuous flow of refugees in the 1980s and the surge in 1987-1988 called for further solutions. The 1989 Geneva Conference in 1989 laid out the Comprehensive Plan of Action. The main objectives were to find ways to absorb the additional number people, to halt the flow of asylum seekers and illegal immigrants, and to move toward the closing of all refugee camps in Southeast Asia (UNHCR, 2000). As part of the international community effort, Iceland accepted two more groups of Vietnamese. Thirty refugees from North Viet-Nam came in 1990 and another 30 came in 1991 (Harðardóttir et al., 2005).

In the UNHCR’s 2000 report, and in many other reports, the post-war Vietnamese refugees are written about as an aggregate mass. Nevertheless, as in the case of those who arrived in Iceland, there are important distinctions among the different kinds of refugees from Viet-Nam. At least three groups arrived in Iceland: Vietnamese from the North, the South, and Vietnamese of ethnic Chinese origin, who came from several areas in Viet-Nam. Various international reports describe the reasons these people fled from their home country, but in terms that only apply to people from the South, or of Chinese ethnic background: i.e., they are all described as fleeing due to antagonism or retribution from Communist North Vietnamese government (Constitutional Rights Foundation: Educating About Immigration, 2012; UNHCR, 2000). There are no explanations, however, for the departure of the people from North Viet-Nam. My own view is that the motivations of those leaving the North lie in the Vietnamese economy, as the country was stricken by poverty during the decade after the war ended. The departure of North Vietnamese in pursuit of economic survival shares

similarities with the emigration of Icelanders to America in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century (Hálfðánarson, 2008).

While Viet-Nam has a long and complicated history of changing governments, resistance to colonization, and war, throughout all these changes Vietnamese culture has been grounded in Confucianism (Vuong, 1976).

Confucianism can be described as a worldview, an ethical system, and a code of social behavior (Truong, 2013; Vuong, 1976). The five Confucian concepts embedded in Vietnamese culture and discourse are: humaneness or benevolence (*nhân*), righteousness (*ngĩa*), propriety/rites (*lễ*), knowledge (*trí*), and integrity (*tín*). The assumption is that human nature is good, and the aim is to teach people to live unselfishly and with moral justification for their actions. A respect for the rules of social order is essential, as is continuously learning and reflecting in order to sustain righteousness and trustworthiness. An individual's actions and sense of responsibility as part of a collective community hold the key to social orders and harmony. Every individual is attached to the family, and the family's harmony is anchored in the individual's adherence to the principle of "*kính trên, nhường dưới*" (you can yield to those below and respect those above) (Thang, 2013, p. 19; Yao, 2000). Children are taught that their parents have given them life, upbringing, and education, and that in turn parents are owed duty and respect. This sense of duty and respect toward parents is inculcated into Vietnamese children from their earliest years, (Leirvik & Fekjær, 2011; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Zhou & Bankston, 1994; Vuong, 1976). Nursery rhymes and children's proverbs emphasize parents' devotion, love and sacrifices for their children, and the active involvement of family in ensuring an individual's success and happiness. One of the proverbs I learnt when I was very little is familiar to almost every Vietnamese child, no matter what their individual family circumstances:

Công cha như núi Thái Sơn<sup>2</sup>  
Nghĩa mẹ như nước trong nguồn chảy ra  
Một lòng thờ mẹ kính cha,  
Cho tròn chữ hiếu mới là đạo con<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> A mountain that is considered to be sacred and is a metaphor for the ladder to heaven (<http://www.baomoi.com/Hung-vi-nhu-nui-Thai-Son/137/11327502.epi>)

<sup>3</sup> English translation

This strong devotion to parents extends to the wider family, and includes ancestors as well. Vietnamese commonly believe that ancestral spirits watch over all family members, and that the ancestors are concerned for the well-being and prosperity of their living descendants and for the continued success of the lineage (Truong, 2013; Gunnel, 2003; Vuong, 1976).

### 2.1.2 *The Language*

Vietnamese is the country's official language and is the spoken language of 87% of the population. The first written Vietnamese dates from around 110 B.C., and the current writing system (chữ Quốc Ngữ, translated as "the National Orthography") was adopted in 1910, under the French colonial administration (Chiung, 2003; Thompson, 2000). Chữ Quốc Ngữ was developed in the 17<sup>th</sup> century by the missionary Alexandre de Rhodes. His purpose was to create a system using Roman characters to record the sounds of the script then used in Viet-Nam (Chữ Nôm, which was derived from classical Chinese characters). While this writing system uses Roman characters, these only transcribe the language: the underlying structures of Vietnamese place it firmly in the Austroasiatic family of languages spoken in Southeast Asia, and thus unrelated in grammar, syntax, and phonology to the Romance and Germanic languages of Western Europe (French, Icelandic, or English for example). Vietnamese verbs, for instance, are not conjugated, and tense and aspect are generally understood in context (Dam, 2001; Doan, 2001, p. 4). Vietnamese is a mono-syllable tonal language: Instead of having stress on syllables, it has six different accents that give each word a different tone and pitch to distinguish meanings (Hoang, 1965).

### 2.1.3 *The Educational System: A Tradition of Valuing Knowledge*

The high value that the people of Viet-Nam place on knowledge, learning, and teaching can be seen as one legacy of the country's

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Father's devotion is as great as Mount Thai-Son  
Mother's devotion is as bountiful as spring water gushing from its source  
Only genuine reverence for our mother and respect for our father  
Fulfill the code of filial piety, our duty as children

Translated by Anh-Dao Tran of traditional Vietnamese text



centuries-long history of domination and colonialism. This thread can be seen as starting with the habitus of Confucianism influenced by Chinese domination in the country's early history, and running through the 20<sup>th</sup> century educational ideologies influenced by France, the Soviet Union, and the United States and continuing today, as the Vietnamese educational system responds to the country's position as part of a global economy.

Viet-Nam's first university, Văn Miếu – Quốc Tử Giám (Temple of Literature – Imperial Academy) in Thang-Long (present Hà-Nội) was established in 1070 to educate the children of kings and nobles, followed by the public university, *Quốc học Viện* (National University), in 1253 (Truong, 2013). Both universities used Chinese literature to teach the philosophy of Confucianism.

Despite the devastation of wars, Viet-Nam is seen by scholars as resilient and ingenious in reinventing itself repeatedly, and continuing to make a place for itself in the world. Since signing the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990, Viet-Nam has worked to make primary education available to 92% of its school age children. Only 16,5% of the population of 15 years old and older is illiterate. Twice, Vietnamese students have made their name internationally for winning the International Math Olympiad, a gold medal in 2009, and again third place in 2007 (Pham & Fry, 2011).

The educational system in Viet-Nam is centralized and directed by the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET). The Article 61 of the 2013 Constitution, and Article 13 of the 2005 Educational Law of the Socialist Republic of Viet-Nam asserts that education has the priority in development, and is aimed at being competitive with the rest of the world ("Education Law. 38/2005/QH11," 14 June 2005; Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2013). Ideologically, Article 3 of the 2005 Educational Law states clearly the ideology in which its educational system grounded:

The Vietnamese education is a socialist education with popular, national, scientific, and modern characteristics, based on Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh's Thoughts ("Education Law. 38/2005/QH11," 14 June 2005).

The general goals of education are to develop well-rounded individuals, defined by a strong sense of ethics, knowledge, patriotism, and loyalty to socialist ideology. Patriotism is described in Article 2 in

terms of an individual being “loyal to the ideology of national independence and socialism; to shape and cultivate one's dignity, civil qualifications and competence, satisfying the demands of the construction and defense of the Fatherland.” The students’ moral education is explicit in the law, and promulgating this education is a duty shared between the teachers, the school leaders, and the families ("Education Law. 38/2005/QH11," 14 June 2005).

The Educational Law 38/2005/QH11 (2006) stipulates that the educational system be organized into five different levels: early childhood, primary, lower secondary, upper secondary, and higher education. Children can attend early childhood education as early as three months of age to six years old. The general education consists of three levels: primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary education.

Compulsory education, written into law in 2006, is for children between six and 14 years old. It starts with primary education and ends by the completion of lower secondary education. Students who complete their studies are awarded with a diploma that qualifies them to continue their studies either in “professional education”, or general upper secondary education.

Professional education is for practical skills and technical education, which can take anywhere from one to four years. The length of study depends on the kind of diploma the individual holds at the time of admission.

General upper secondary education lasts for three years. Upon graduation the youth are equipped with comprehensive basic skills and general knowledge in Vietnamese, foreign languages, math, social sciences, natural science and humanities, and are also prepared for taking on a career either in vocational or professional life, or for further studies. The completion of this level gives individuals the right to proceed to undergraduate studies. ("Education Law. 38/2005/QH11," 14 June 2005).

To pass a level in general education, students are graded on their academic and moral performance. The decisions on these grades are the responsibility of classroom teachers. The decisions on graduation from lower and upper secondary education are made by the Bureau of Education for Training (BoET), and MoET, respectively. The students are evaluated on the same criteria as the students at the primary level (UNESCO. Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, 2007). Even though lower secondary education is compulsory, students are

required to pay tuition for attending, as are students at the upper secondary education (Pham & Fry, 2011).

The schools of all five levels are either “people-funded” or privately funded. People-funded schools are funded by local communities. Privately funded schools are financed by organizations or individuals with non-state budget funding. Regardless of how a school is funded, government policies and curriculum apply to all of them (UNESCO. Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, 2007).

The statistics show an increase in school attendance in Viet-Nam, which is a positive improvement. However, a 2001 empirical study by Nguyen showed that educational quality remains questionable because of teacher shortages, teacher qualification issues, issues around teaching pedagogy practices, and outdated or lacking teaching tools (books, computers, facilities etc.). At that time, more than half of the country schools were not connected to the internet. Nguyen traced students’ poor performance to a lack of in-service education in pedagogical practices aimed at encouraging and stimulating learners’ independence and creativity. He found that a large number of teachers were still using traditional teaching methods, such as having students copy detailed notes from teacher dictation or blackboard writing, for rote memorization. Discussions in classes were rare, and he concluded that teacher authoritarianism resulted in student alienation. Physical punishment had been formally outlawed, but for many students it was still very much in practice (Nguyen, 2001).

Nguyen’s (2001) study showed that nationally, the school dropout rate in 2001 was between 10% and 30%, but among students in rural areas the rate was as high as 40% to 80% of class enrolment. This is a significant gap, as 71.2% (or approx. 61 million people) of the population live in rural areas (Trading Economics, 2014). In addition to the issues that plague the school system nationally, Nguyen found indications that teacher shortages seemed more acute in the rural areas. In addition, socio-economic factors required rural children to work to supplement family income. Although the youth Nguyen interviewed expressed a preference to stay in school, or regretted having left school, and wished to do homework instead of working after their school days, they had to do the opposite (Nguyen, 2001).

A 2009 United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) Factsheet cited the challenges that Viet-Nam was facing with the low number of 15 year-olds or older who had completed college and

university level education. Only 1.63% had a vocational degree and only 4.17% had university degree (UNFPA in Viet Nam, 2009).

## **2.2 Iceland – The Second Home**

### *2.2.1 The Land, the History, the People*

Iceland is an island located in the North Atlantic Ocean. It is the second largest island in Europe, with a surface area of 103,000 km<sup>2</sup>. It is a country with active volcano systems, glaciers, and vegetation that changes in color from season to season.

- As an island, it is surrounded by a blue ocean and the interior is dotted with lakes and waterfalls. Only 1,400 km<sup>2</sup> is arable land.
- The 325,671 inhabitants live mainly along the coastline, with 121,230 inhabitants of the Reykjavík capital area (Hagstofa Íslands, 2014, p. 58).
- The name Iceland, along with a location as far north as latitude 65°, connotes a very cold climate to people unfamiliar with the country. In fact, it is rather moderate in temperature thanks to the Gulf Stream that brings warm ocean water from the tropics, and geothermal activity which provides steaming hot water from the ground. The average temperature in the midsummer in July is about 13°C, and in January is about 2°C (Central Bank of Iceland, 2012; Haraldsdóttir, Ágústsdóttir, Ólafsson, & Stefánsson, 2008).

Historical sources, such as the Old Icelandic Chronicles, the Book of Settlement, and the Book of Icelanders, record that the first settlers in Iceland were of Norse origin and arrived around 870 AD. Even though popular knowledge speaks of Icelanders as of Norse descent, the majority of men were from Scandinavia, but many of the women were from Britain and Ireland. Icelanders take pride in their long history of self-governance: the general legislative and judicial assembly, the Alþingi. The form of parliament modeled after Norwegian law codes and procedures assembled the very first time in Þingvellir in 930 AD.

Since independence, Iceland has been governed by the Parliament, the Alþingi, which is legally bound by the constitution. Iceland's parliamentary system is similar to many other European parliamentary

systems. The legislative power is vested in the Alþingi and the executive power in the Government. The Government, led by the Prime Minister, must be supported by a majority in the Alþingi in order to remain in power. The 63 members of the Alþingi are elected every four years from six constituencies on the basis of proportional representation. Iceland's President is the head of state and is elected directly by the citizens of Iceland for a four year term.

Throughout a long history of rule from Norway (1262-1380) and then Denmark (1380 – 1944), Icelanders continued to view themselves as Icelanders, not as Norwegians or Danes (Central Bank of Iceland, 2012; Hálfðánarson, 2008). Until the late 9<sup>th</sup> century, Icelanders believed in the Germanic gods such as Óðin and Þór. Around the year 1000, the Catholic faith was adopted at the Alþingi as the result of pressure from Norway, and the overall ascendancy of Christianity in Western Europe. Like elsewhere in Scandinavia and North Western Europe, Catholicism was supplanted by the Protestant reformation, with Iceland following Denmark and Norway in adopting Lutheranism by the mid-sixteenth century (The Central Bank of Iceland, 1996).

Today, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Iceland is the National Church of Iceland. It is protected and supported by Article 62 of the Constitution (Constitution of the Republic of Iceland, No. 33/1944 ). The social and cultural importance of the church has roots in Iceland's struggle for independence from Denmark. During the colonialism period, clergy were the agents and advocates for their local parishes when the Danish authorities had to be dealt with. The role of the Church, both socially and politically, in bringing about independence earned the Church a special status that exists even today (Pétur Pétursson, 2011).

By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Iceland was one of the poorest countries in Europe. The 18<sup>th</sup> Century had seen a decline in population from around 50,400 at the beginning of the century, to about 40,600 at the end (Lahmeyer, 2003). This was the lowest number of inhabitants since Iceland was settled. A major cause of this depopulation was the “haze famine” caused by the volcanic eruption of Laki in 1783. The resulting acid rain, black ash, and white silicate dust killed livestock, fish, people, and vegetation (D'Arrigo, Seager, Smerdon, Legrande, & Cook, 2011).

A second depopulation of Iceland took place between 1870 and 1914 as severe climate conditions and economic hardship caused Icelanders

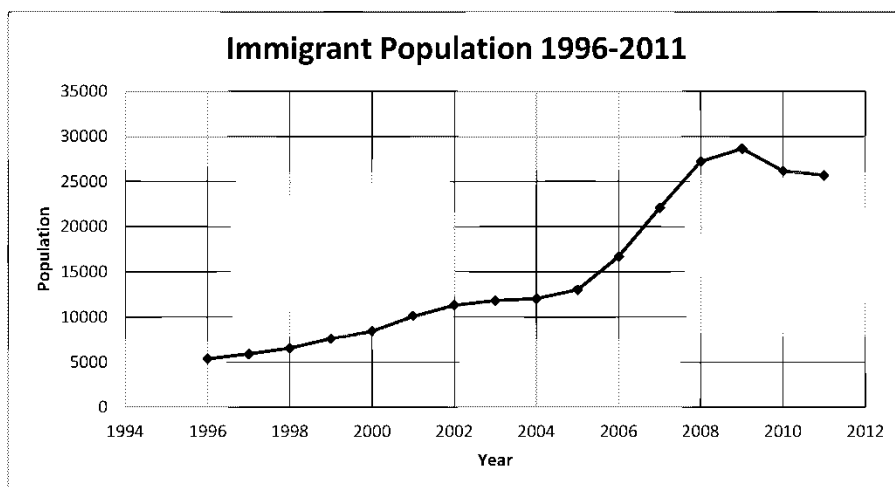
to emigrate. Of the 78.000 Icelanders, fourteen thousand emigrated to Canada and the United States, seeking a better life. The later years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw improvements in the economy, much of which is credited to the rapid mechanization of the fisheries (Hálfðánarson, 2008). Since then, the Icelandic economy has continued to develop strongly. Other natural resources that have contributed to Icelandic economy are hydroelectric and geothermal energy. In 2007, Iceland was ranked first, sharing the status with Norway on the United Nations' Human Development Index (Haraldsdóttir et al., 2008).

Throughout its history, emigration and immigration have reflected Iceland's economic conditions. During two recent periods of economic crisis, Icelanders have emigrated in significant numbers. In the late 1960's, Icelanders moved to Sweden and Australia in search of employment. In 2009, after the October 2008 collapse of the country's three largest banks caused the economy to collapse, 4.851 Icelanders emigrated, with a large percentage of them going to Norway (Bergmann, 2014; Hálfðánarson, 2008).

At the same time, since the 1950's the improved standard of living in Iceland has made Iceland an immigrant destination. The largest number of immigrants arrived during the economic bubble at the turn of the 21st century. The expanding economy required more workers and thus attracted people from all over the world. In 1996 there were only 5,357 immigrants, ten years later the number had tripled to 16,689, and by 2011 the number stood at 25,926 (Statistics Iceland, 2014b). The number of immigrants peaked in January 2009 at 28,693 persons that made up 9% of the whole population. However, due to the recession following the financial crisis in late 2008, 14.5% of all foreign nationals lost their jobs, and more than 3,000 immigrants had departed by January 2012 (Statistics Iceland, 2014c; Wojtynska, Skaptadóttir, & Ólafsdóttir, 2011). The first 34 Vietnamese refugees who arrived in Iceland in 1979 were the largest group of political refugees being resettled in Iceland in recent past, and dramatically changing its population landscape (Harðardóttir, Jónsdóttir, & Jónsson, 2005).

The international credit crisis in October 2008 hit Iceland hard. Three of its biggest banks, amounting to 85% of the country's financial system, declared bankruptcy within a single week. The banking collapse left the Icelandic Central Bank virtually insolvent. The Icelandic krona also lost almost half of its value, inflation shot up, some people lost their savings, property values dropped, and unemployment

rose to a record high. Quoting the Central Bank of Iceland (2010), Bergmann reported that national debt soared from 23% of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2007 to 78% in 2009. According to Ólafur G. Halldórsson & Zoega (2010), Iceland's population might be one of the smallest one in the world, but it ranked third in the “history of the world's greatest bankruptcies” (Bergmann, 2014).



**Figure 3: Immigrant Population 1996-2011 (Statistics Iceland, 2011).**

Unsurprisingly, public expenditures were cut sharply in the aftermath of the financial crisis. The school system was severely affected by the austerity measures. According to Ragnarsdóttir and Jóhannesson (2014), who base their numbers on Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) reports, Iceland's expenditures on education were among the highest within the OECD between 2002 – 2010. Iceland spent about 8% of its GDP compared to 6% for OECD countries overall (Ragnarsdóttir & Jóhannesson, 2014). Following the banking crisis, in 2009 and 2010, education spending was reduced by 4% and 8%, respectively, in real terms (“the index expenditure on education institutions”). Meanwhile, during the same years, education expenditures in the 14 OECD countries increased in real terms by 4% and 1%, respectively. Based on its recent research, the OECD has reported that the reduction in education outlay in Iceland has persisted during the following years (OECD, 2013).

Iceland's active participation in international economic cooperation has contributed to multiculturalism in the country. Iceland belongs to

multiple international groups and organizations. Closest to home, are groups that comprise Iceland and its “cousins” (the Nordic countries of Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Greenland, Åland Islands, and the Faeroe Islands) and fellow members of the Nordic Council.

In the broader European context, Iceland joined the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) in 1970, which led to a free trade agreement with the European Economic Community in 1972. This agreement then was followed by the establishment of a zone of free movements of goods, services, capital and persons, the European Economic Area (EEA) in 1994. The membership in EEA has resulted in the inflow of the largest groups of immigrants in Iceland.

In the wider global context beyond Europe, Iceland has been a member of the United Nations since 1946, and other memberships include the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (World Bank), and the World Trade Organization (Central Bank of Iceland, 2012).

International Monetary Fund (IMF), 1945

International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (World Bank), 1945

United Nations (UN), 1946

North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), 1949

Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 1949

Council of Europe, 1950

Nordic Council, 1952

International Finance Corporation (IFC), 1956

International Development Association (IDA), 1961

General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), 1964

European Free Trade Association (EFTA), 1970

Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), 1975

European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), 1990

Western European Union (WEU), 1992

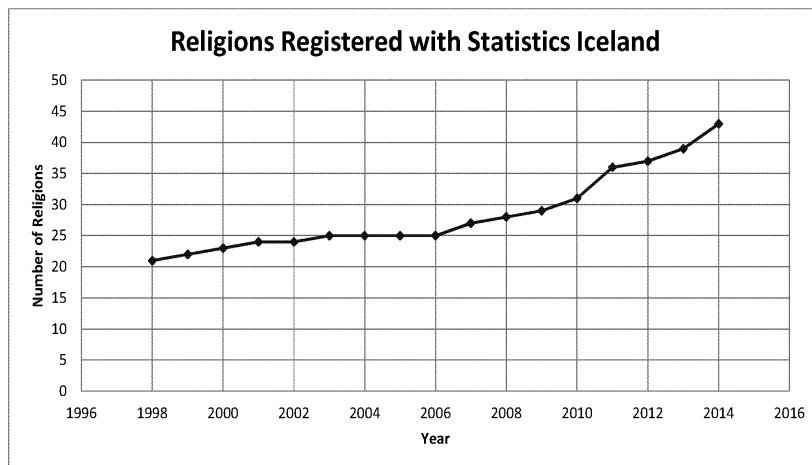
European Economic Area (EEA), 1994

World Trade Organization (WTO), 1995

By belonging to the global community, Iceland has not only become demographically diverse, but it also has made commitments to adhere to the concepts of linguistic and religious pluralism.

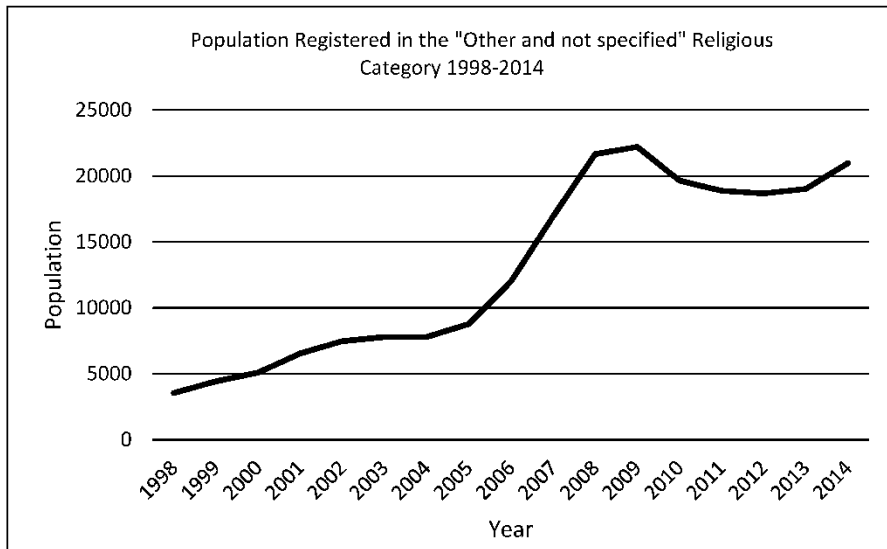


Article 63 of the Icelandic Constitution guarantees freedom of religion and the freedom for groups to practice religion. In 1981 it was recorded that, 98% of Icelanders were born in Iceland, and 96% belonged to the National Church of Iceland (Hálfðánarson, 2008). The number dropped to 90% in 1998, with 23 other religions registered. Then again in 2014, a big shift was recorded with 75% registered in the national church, and 46 religious organizations registered (Statistics Iceland, 2014d).



**Figure 4: Religions Registered with Statistics Iceland, 1996-2014 (Statistics Iceland, 2014)**

In addition, Statistics Iceland also recorded the number of people whose religious category was classified as “Other and not specified”. Statistics Iceland notes that “Persons belonging to a religious organization that has not been recognized by the Ministry [of the Interior] or whose status is unknown are classified as other or not specified.” The number of people in this category is growing. As Figure 3 below shows, in 1998, there were 2,362 people so categorized, while by 2014 the number had more than quadrupled, to 15,834. The peak during these 16 years was in 2009 when there were 18,479 persons in this category.



**Figure 5: Population Registered in the "Other and not specified" Religious Category, 1998-2014 (Statistics Iceland, 2014d)**

Even though Icelandic is clearly stated in the law to be the country's official language, Iceland is no longer a monolingual country (Ministry of Education & Science and Culture, 2008b). Since early 2014, as I have mentioned in my introduction, children enrolled in Icelandic schools speak 92 different languages (Tungumálaforði landsins, 2014).

### 2.2.2 *The Language*

The Icelandic language has its origins in Scandinavia. It was a North Germanic language that was spoken by the first settlers to the country who spoke what was then Old Norse. Because languages evolve over time, Icelandic and other Scandinavian languages have drifted apart and are no longer mutually intelligible. Some scholars consider Icelandic to be the most linguistically conservative Scandinavian language (Sapir & Zuckerman, 2008). It has changed little for centuries, and with a little training Icelanders can read literature from the 10<sup>th</sup> century (Haselow, 2009). Icelanders perceived their language to be the *ffjöregg* (egg of life) of the nation. As Leonard and Árnason explain, Icelandic defines who Icelanders are as a nation and a people, and provides them with the sense of security and cohesiveness. The relatively slow evolution of the language connects modern Icelanders with the written tradition in which their

culture is grounded. The *fföregg* metaphor also evokes the fragility of Icelandic, a language spoken by so few people: the potential risks for radical change always exist (Leonard & Árnason, 2011, p. 93). Government policies for modern Icelandic lay out the principles to be used in considering variations to the language. The basic principle is to change it as little as possible, both phonologically and grammatically, and to find new Icelandic words for new concepts instead of including foreign loan words into the language (Haselow, 2009). Hálfðánarson quotes the popular discourse in Iceland about “foreign pollution” which he further explains:

...that is Icelanders were not only to maintain their distinctive tongue, but their language was to be conserved in its pristine form, and cleansed of outside influences (Hálfðánarson, 2005, p. 58).

He also puts into perspective the sentiment about Icelandic national identity in relation to language, patriotism and nationalism: While language unites the nation’s communities, it also allows people to make clear distinctions between “us” and “them,” where “we” are the people who speak Icelandic and “they,” are the others who do not (Hálfðánarson, 2005, p. 56).

### 2.2.3 *The Educational System*

Iceland is a Nordic welfare state. Universal health care, education, and social security are provided mostly free to all citizens and persons who have legal residence in the country. In an OECD study on social justice Iceland was top among 31 member states. The four dimensions in which Iceland scored highest were social justice, access to education, labor market inclusion, and health (Schraad-Tischler & Azahaf, 2011).

Equal access to education is defined by OECD “by the presence of equal opportunities in education for all” (Schraad-Tischler & Azahaf, 2011, p. 7). Throughout all Icelandic policies, the right to education for all persons is clearly stated (Ministry of Education & Science and Culture, 2004, p. 4). The law guarantees education for all children until they are 18 years old (Ministry of Education & Science and Culture, 2008b).

The Icelandic educational system is divided into four levels: preschool, compulsory (primary and lower secondary), upper secondary, and tertiary (Appendix A). The local municipalities are

responsible for operating and implementing the laws at the preschool level and the compulsory education (Ministry of Education & Science and Cultural, 2008; Ministry of Education & Science and Culture, 2008a). The upper secondary school and universities, on the other hand, are the direct responsibility of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (Ministry of Education & Science and Culture, 2008b).

The 2008 school Acts governing the preschool and compulsory levels stipulate that the pedagogical practice of the schools must “be characterized by tolerance and affection, equality, democratic co-operation, responsibility, concern, forgiveness, respect for human values and the Christian heritage of Icelandic culture” (Constitution of the Republic of Iceland, No. 33/1944 ; Ministry of Education & Science and Cultural, 2008, p. 1; Ministry of Education & Science and Culture, 2008a). Scholars in Iceland have questioned the notion of teaching based on Christian values in a nation whose Constitution grants freedom of religion and the right to equality (Loftsdóttir, 2011; Jónsdóttir & Ragnarsdóttir, 2010a; Ragnarsdóttir, 2007a). In addition, I ask how this narrow set of philosophical values fits into the most recent curricula which are geared more toward multicultural education. By stating explicitly to which religious ideology it adheres, the Acts allow no space for other cultures and religions to contribute to the educational process and to the further development of the curriculum for more inclusive education.

The Acts also emphasize strengthening the students’ Icelandic language skills. However, the Acts do not have any provision for committing the system to enrich the heritage languages of the students for whom Icelandic is a second language. The National Curriculum Guidelines acknowledges the importance of nurturing the students’ heritage language, but lays the responsibility for doing this with the parents. The schools are encouraged to offer the students education in their own language, and to inform the parents and to assist them where they can, but without any obligation or responsibility (Ministry of Education & Science and Culture, 2008, 2008a, 2008b, 2014).

The laws also require compulsory and upper secondary schools to have reception plans for students who have Icelandic as a second language. The plan in compulsory education “should take into account the pupil’s background, language skills and competence in other fields of study,” and the parents are to be informed and advised about their children’s education (Ministry of Education & Science and Culture,

2008a). The reception plan for upper secondary education is stipulated by the *Reglugerð um rétt nemenda í framhaldsskólum til kennslu í íslensku, Nr. 654/2009* (Regulations on the Right of Students in Upper Secondary School to be Taught the Icelandic Language, number 654/2009<sup>4</sup>) that I will further analyze in the chapter about the Policy Documents and Effects of Rhetoric.

Icelandic children generally start their preschool years around the age of two. Preschool education is not mandatory, but 96% of children between two and six years old attended preschools all around the country in 2012 (Statistics Iceland, 2014a). Preschool education is governed by the *Preschool Act No. 90/2008* and guided by the *2011 National Curriculum Guide for Preschools*. The role of preschools is to provide the children a safe and healthy environment in which each child can develop naturally. The schools cooperate closely with the parents for their children's welfare (Ministry of Education & Science and Culture, 2008).

Primary education is compulsory in Iceland, thus the schools are called compulsory schools. The children start the year they reach the age of six, and in general complete their primary education by the age of 16. They progress automatically from one year to the next, from first to tenth grade. The school year is in session approximately nine and a half months per year, with about 43 periods of 40 minutes per week. The operation of the schools is stipulated by the *2008 Compulsory School Act* and guided by the *2011 National Curriculum Guide for Compulsory Schools*. It follows the same principles as the preschool level. The education is focused on individual needs for overall development.

Upper secondary education in Iceland is one comprehensive system and students have the choice of going to three different types of school: grammar, comprehensive, and vocational. Students who have completed primary education have the right to attend the upper secondary level. The majority of 16 year olds, about 90% in recent years, continue to the upper secondary level after completion of compulsory education. However, since Iceland has a rather flexible upper secondary education system, not all students in upper secondary

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<sup>4</sup> My translation of the Icelandic document titled *Reglugerð um rétt nemenda í framhaldsskólum til kennslu í íslensku, Nr. 654/2009*

schools are students who come directly from compulsory schools after their graduation. People of all ages can be students in upper secondary schools. Students who complete grammar education after three to four years are matriculated (studentspróf) and have the right to attend higher education at the university level. Students who attend comprehensive schools (fjölbrautaskóli) can choose either vocational or matriculated studies, and generally take two to four years depending on their choices. Vocational schools are for students who choose to study vocations. The length of study depends on the vocation they choose to study (Ministry of Education & Science and Culture, 2002).

At the upper secondary level, the students pay an enrolment fee, for textbooks, and (for vocational studies) part of the materials costs. They attend 32 to 40 lessons a week for periods of 40 minutes, and the school year is about nine months long. The Upper Secondary School Act No. 92/2008 is the law that guides the schools' operation (Ministry of Education & Science and Culture, 2002).

Even though Article 32 of the law states that upper secondary schools are “for everyone,” Óskarsdóttir (2012) studied the school system and was not convinced. She found the opposite to be the case and reported “Upper Secondary Schools are not as yet for everyone.”<sup>5</sup> In practice, upper secondary schools are mainly for mainstream students who match the programs that the schools offer in academics and vocations. As a result, there have been reports of high dropout rates from upper secondary education (Óskarsdóttir, 2012, p. 27). In a European Commission study (2005) of school early leavers, Iceland's dropout rate of 27.3% was one of the top four out of among 25 European countries plus the United States, Canada, Australia and Japan (European Commission DG EAG, 2005).

Even though the Icelandic population is heterogeneous, it can be considered young in experiencing immigration, with a multiethnic background only developing in recent times. Before immigrants began increasing the population at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Iceland had fewer than 280.000 people, and the wider society adhered to the Icelandic language and the Lutheran religion, which were perceived as the country's foundations.

The most recent educational reforms (the 2008 Educational Act) resulted in the rewriting of the curricula for all three school levels, and

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<sup>5</sup> Anh-Dao Tran's translation of the Icelandic from Gerður Óskarsdóttir's text.

made an attempt to be inclusive to students of all backgrounds. However, the discourse of the documents is still narrowly oriented to one language and one set of religious values: Icelandic and Christian.

### **2.3 Research on Immigrant Youth**

Immigrant youth, who have arrived in a host country within the last five years time frame, are categorized as newly arrived migrant students (NAMS) or newcomer first generation immigrant students (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2014; Public & Management Institute, 2013b). A large number of immigrant students in Icelandic schools and in upper secondary schools, in particular, are considered to be NAMS, due to the fact that Iceland is a country with a short history of immigration, as I explained in Chapter 2.2.1 (Statistic Iceland, 2014b). Research literature has found NAMS to be a vulnerable group to academic failure (Suárez-Orozco, Pimentel, & Martin, 2009). The European Commission (2013) in its Final Report about NAMS suggested that “Newly arrived migrant children is an increasing disadvantaged group in European schools” (Public & Management Institute, 2013a, p. 6).

In 2011, when I conducted this study, the student participants had been living in Iceland between two and five years. This span of time places them in this at- risk group.

In the same Final Report, the Europe Commission (2013) related what it called “three key messages” to policy makers of European countries. These key messages highlighted the importance of having in place an inclusive, cohesive and rigorous supportive system for all underachieving and immigrant students. Immigrant youth entered their host countries with many assets. They were motivated to strive for an education to access a better future, and were resilient, hardworking, and responsible towards their families (Suárez-Orozco, Pimentel, & Martin, 2009). Nevertheless, NAMS arriving to a new country, where they have to learn a new language, adapt to a new culture and a new school environment, have unique sources of distress. On the other hand, the study showed NAMS do not need to be specifically targeted, because specially designed programs, which narrowly focus on their immediate observable difficulties, risk treating their newly arrived status as temporary. The misconception could be that after they have resettled into the school environment and can communicate in the host nation’s

language, everything else will fall into place. In fact, this is only the very first stage to prepare them for integration. How well NAMS succeed in pursuing their education depends on the availability of an effective working educational system in which they can integrate and benefit from their learning. The discrepancy that the study found at the policy level in most European countries is the lack of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure the cohesiveness of implementation at the different levels in the educational system (Public & Management Institute, 2013a).

Previous studies on immigrant youth in Icelandic schools focused on compulsory schools. The small number of research projects that have looked at the upper secondary level have reached similar conclusions about first generation immigrant youth.

At the policy level, there is general agreement that the discourse of the 2004 National Curriculum Guide that is now in practice, and the 2008 Act on which the new 2011 curriculum was based, follows a conservative ideology with regard to immigrant students. Even though the principle of equality in education for all is the guideline, the underpinning philosophy is of mainstream orientation to Icelandic society. The official discourse emphasizes the upholding of Icelandic cultural heritage, Icelandic language and Christian ethics, instead of inclusive education for diversity (Gollifer & Tran, 2012; Jónsdóttir & Ragnarsdóttir, 2010b). Researchers in the field of multicultural education in the Icelandic upper secondary school environment, in particular, ascertain that despite a few success stories, there is still need for reform in order for the system to be inclusive to students of minority background (Tran & Ragnarsdóttir, 2013; Garðarsdóttir & Hauksson, 2011; Ragnarsdóttir, 2011; Tran, 2007).

In some research, students attest to their appreciation for the assistance they received for their studies and describe good experiences with their teachers. They characterize their teachers as caring and helpful to them (Guðmundsson, 2013; Karlsdóttir, 2013; Daníelsdóttir, 2009). Teachers, who taught Icelandic as a second language were very often the same individuals who taught them and provided them with support, and were particularly mentioned by the students for their inclusive teaching pedagogy and their deep concern (Guðmundsson, 2013; Daníelsdóttir, 2009). The students who were considered to have been successful in integration and who completed their upper secondary education appear to be happy with their lives and were optimistic about



the future. Their success in integration was not about being assimilated and becoming Icelandic, rather they characterized themselves as cosmopolitan. It should be noted that many of these students had attended preschool and/or compulsory schools in Iceland (Ragnarsdóttir, 2011; Daníelsdóttir, 2009). As I discuss in chapter 3.1.4 about the acquisition of the academic language of English as a second language for immigrant students, similarly most immigrant students in Iceland had also taken four, seven or even ten years of Icelandic to bring their Icelandic up to the level where they could use Icelandic as an academic language. As a result, after having acquired Icelandic proficiency, they either chose vocational education at upper secondary level, or professional study at the university level (Guðmundsson, 2013).

In contrast, the statistics from PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) for Iceland for 2006, 2009, and 2012 consistently document the lagging behind of immigrants compared to Icelandic-heritage students at the end of compulsory education (Halldórsson, Ólafsson, & Björnsson, 2012, 2007; Halldórsson, Ólafsson, Nielsson, & Björnsson, 2010). It is noteworthy that, according to the report, the number of students who were identified as first generation immigrants (the students themselves and parents were born in countries other than Iceland) and who participated in this examination has quadrupled from 2000 to 2012. In other words, the number of immigrant students had increased sharply. Iceland was also identified as having more than 50% of immigrant students as first generation. Their performance scores were significantly poorer than their Icelandic peers in all three areas that were assessed (reading, science and mathematics literacy). In reading comprehension for instance, the most recent tests for 2012 showed that Icelandic-heritage students dropped by 20 score points from the previous test in 2009, while immigrant students dropped by 47 score points. This translates into a whole school year, according to the OECD standard (Halldórsson et al., 2012). PISA posed the question, “How are school systems adapting to increasing numbers of immigrant students?” and drawing from its own statistics, showed that the performance gap between immigrant students and their Icelandic-heritage peers could be closed by government and schools’ intervention. Countries that were cited as having been successful in such efforts were Australia, Belgium, Canada, Germany, New Zealand, and Switzerland. These countries “have been able to narrow, and in some case close, this performance

gap” (PISA - Programme for International Student Assessment, 2009, p. 1).

Research in Iceland identified the deficiency model into which the schools and the teachers had fallen as the source of many of the hindrances to immigrant student performance. The first such barrier was language deficiency in Icelandic (Guðmundsson, 2013; Karlsdóttir, 2013; Tran & Ragnarsdóttir, 2013; Ragnarsdóttir, 2011). The languages in which the students were proficient were not used to assist them in learning effectively. Their underperformance in the majority language in the early years of their arrival succeeded in masking over other knowledge that they already possessed (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2014). The immigrant students’ culture, language, and previous academic knowledge were resources left untapped in the host country (Beach, Dovemark, Schwartz, & Öhrn, 2013; Ragnarsdóttir, 2012b; Daníelsdóttir, 2009; Nieto, 2002).

The second barrier was the lack of teacher education in the philosophy of inclusiveness through applying culturally responsive pedagogy to multicultural student bodies (Karlsdóttir, 2013; Tran, 2007; Aðalbjarnardóttir, Guðjónsdóttir, & Rúnarsdóttir, 2005). Óskarsdóttir’s study (2012) of the different pedagogical practices for first year students in upper secondary found that 43% of the class time was in the form of lecture. The teachers talked and the students mainly listened, watched, and followed. OECD (2012) specifically pointed out there was a comprehensive need to enrich the pedagogical practice of teachers at the upper secondary education level both at the initial and in-service teacher education (OECD - Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2012). The Promising Practices Project studied the innovative strategies and practices that were designed by four high schools in New York City and in large cities in Sweden to help NAMS. The reform they adopted was interdisciplinary, project-based, and student centered for teaching and learning. Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco cited that the teaching principles were grounded in multicultural education (Banks, 2007a, Nieto, 2000). The result of the study confirmed that different forms of pedagogical practices other than traditional teacher lectures are more effective in delivering subject content to their students (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2014).

A third barrier was the social isolation of the students. Immigrant youth enter schools at different ages and different grades with little or no connection or introduction to their national schoolmates, unlike

Icelandic youth who may live in the same neighborhoods and usually have attended the same schools since early childhood. Studies on the sense of belonging and the acculturation process for immigrant youth, affirm that they lack the cultural and social capital needed to build a sound social life in Icelandic schools. Þóroddur Bjarnason's (2006) study of immigrant adolescents concluded that they feel worse than their Icelandic peers, and his findings echo throughout many research reports and in the media. Bjarnason (2006) and Sigurjónsson's (2008) results show that the immigrant students were more depressed and had a weaker identity than their Icelandic peers, and that they were significantly more prone to being bullied, and were also significantly less likely to have the ambition of completing upper secondary education.

Tove Steen-Olsen studied the young people's sense of belonging, which she described as a sense of "emotional attachment." It is a space where individuals feel included, safe, welcome, and understood because of their shared experiences and interests. Emotional attachment is a space where they can connect to people whom they can call friends or even close friends, and where they can share their emotions, confide secrets, exchange knowledge, and support each other through the ups and downs of their daily life. Through this established social capital, the young people coming to school find their motivation, their sense of well-being, inclusion, trust and equality (Steen-Olsen, 2013; Jónsdóttir, 2007; Frønes, 2002). On the other hand, if they are socially isolated – or worse, bullied, they can feel excluded, inferior, inadequate (Steen-Olsen, 2013). Being socially connected in school for immigrant youth is of no less importance than coming to school to learn (Ragnarsdóttir, 2011; Tran, 2007). That is to say, having friends in school was of utmost importance to young people, and not the least to youth of immigrant background (Steen-Olsen, 2013; Magnúsdóttir, 2010; Schubert, 2010; Frønes, 2002). They struggle to gain friendship with their national schoolmates (Guðmundsson, 2013; Magnúsdóttir, 2010; Fangen, 2009). However, the young people expressed their disappointment about the difficulty of penetrating majority culture groups in order to befriend to them, despite their efforts (Magnúsdóttir, 2010; Tran, 2007). Guðmundsson (2013) reported in the results of his interviews with sixteen immigrant youth of 18 – 25 years old that some of his participants succeeded in befriending their peers of Icelandic origin. Nevertheless, these Icelandic friends were a little unusual: they had experience living abroad for some time. Schubert (2010) conducted a

qualitative study with a focus on the acculturation strategies of 14 immigrant students in which she argues that the school's obligation to enriching their minds did not lessen the importance of its obligation to provide the students a healthy social environment. Her findings indicated that Icelandic-heritage students showed some discomfort when associating with immigrant students, because they did not know how to relate to each other. In schools elsewhere in Europe and Iceland, the issue of fluency in national language is often put forward as an explanation for the limited interaction between individuals and groups of different origins, but the results from several studies do not support this explanation (Magnúsdóttir, 2010; Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006). The prospect of minority students having Icelandic nationals as friends did not improve after they became fluent in Icelandic (Magnúsdóttir, 2010). Schubert's (2010) explanation for this phenomenon in the Icelandic context was because the language that Icelandic-heritage students used with immigrant students "the foreigners," was English, and Icelandic was for their own countrymen. This finding she claimed was in congruent with Whelpton (2000) and Theodorsdóttir's (2006) (Schubert, 2010, p. 112). As a result, they categorized other immigrant students as friends, but the nationals as just acquaintances (Guðmundsson, 2013; Magnúsdóttir, 2010). Students of immigrant background develop and devote their friendship to each other through their shared experiences as "foreigners" in their host countries. The fact that they speak different languages and come from different cultures is not perceived by them to be barriers to bringing them closer together (Beach et al., 2013; Guðmundsson, 2013; Magnúsdóttir, 2010; Schubert, 2010; Jónsdóttir, 2007; Tran, 2007).

The question is whether these factors have contributed to the high dropout rate among immigrant students in Iceland. Garðardóttir and Haukssson (2011) analyzed the data collected by Statistics Iceland between 1996 and 2011, and provided a detailed picture of school participation among a cohort of immigrant youth born between 1985 and 1988. In the fall of 2011, of immigrant students who were 16 years old, 37% of the boys and 24% of the girls did not start upper secondary school. In contrast, the figures for boys and girls of Icelandic heritage were 10% and 6%, respectively. The same trend appears in statistics on the rate of school attendance among students between the ages of 19-22, who did not complete any kind of diploma. At the age of 19, one year before a large number students at the upper secondary schools matriculate, 42% of immigrants were still in school, compared to 68%

of Icelandic-heritage students. The findings did not include the rate of upper secondary school dropouts among immigrant students in Iceland, since there has not been any study on this topic. However, Garðardóttir and Hauksson quoted other research abroad showing that the dropout rate among students of immigrant background was significantly higher than their national peers. Looking at what are called “early school leavers” in European Union countries, the percentages of students were of 30% among immigrant and 15% among European nationals (Garðarsdóttir & Hauksson, 2011, p. 8). Therefore, the ECRI recommended that upper secondary education in Iceland facilitate the use of students’ mother tongues, find ways to curb high drop out rates among immigrants, and make training in teaching Icelandic as second language programs available for both in service and initial teacher education (ECRI - European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, 2012).

Guðmundsson’s research further disclosed that his participants all had part-time jobs during the school year. In addition, similar to Icelandic youth, they worked full-time during summer vacations, but also during longer periods of time when they took leave from school for furthering their Icelandic learning to improve their chance of school success when they return (Guðmundsson, 2013). Their work experience was described as valuable to them as it included opportunities for them to improve their Icelandic and English, as well as opportunities to make friends, learn to work cooperatively, and acquire work experience (Guðmundsson, 2013; Tran & Ragnarsdóttir, 2013).

## **2.4 Students of Vietnamese Background in Research**

Research from different countries in different parts of the world finds that the academic performance of students of Vietnamese background is generally found to be positive (Leirvik & Fekjær, 2011; Ngo & Lee, 2007; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Zhou & Bankston, 1994). Their academic performance was reported to be better than, or at least not worse than, their host nationals. These favorable outcomes have been shown to result from the students’ good study habits, self-discipline, cultural values, family support, social capital, and clear ethnic identity (Leirvik & Fekjær, 2011; Ngo & Lee, 2007; Liebkind, Jasinskaja-Lahti, & Solheim, 2004; Nieto, 2000; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Lauglo, 1999). Like other immigrant parents in Iceland, Vietnamese parents are unable to help their children with their studies due to their own

unfamiliarity with the Icelandic school system and their limitations in the language. Nevertheless, some of them still participated in their children's education, by checking their report cards, checking their completion of their homework, and giving them words of encouragement (Tran, 2007). The literature repeatedly documents the ambition the parents have for these children to succeed in school. Parental encouragement in turn sets the base for the children's high expectations for themselves (Leirvik & Fekjær, 2011; Ngo & Lee, 2007; Liebkind et al., 2004; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Lauglo, 1999). Lauglo (1999) and other scholars he cited, explained that the parents' ambitions were underpinned by their Confucian ethos. According to Weber (1951), Confucianism is a teaching that promotes patience, humility, and resiliency. It encourages the fullest participation in and adaptation to life's circumstances (Lauglo, 1999).

Although there are odds against immigrant youth as they find their way in the school system, many who are supported by family, resiliently work their way to attainment in education. Lauglo (1999) used results from a Norwegian youth survey to explore issues in education related to youth of immigrant background in Norway. He cited international research in the 1990s that empirically documented an optimistic view about immigrant families. Even though separation from their motherland posed many disadvantages, it also brought new opportunities. Being more or less alone in a new place, the families were freed from prior restraints. Their motive for leaving the old country for a new environment was the desire for a better life, including an education for their children. They also understood that it would not be a straight smooth road to start from scratch, learn a new language, become part of a new culture, and adapt to a new social political environment. Their realization, Lauglo deduced, mobilized their human energy to counter the adversity they might encounter in the host country. He concluded "...it takes initiative and drive to migrate internationally" (Lauglo, 1999).

In addition, some studies reported that favorable reception conditions in the host countries for immigrants with refugee status eased their integration process. For example, special programs by some governments enabled easier family reunifications, which helped to strengthen families and the larger communities. Vietnamese who arrived after 1975 into countries that had established Vietnamese communities found support and role models for their children to look

up to, which led to better adjustment to school (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001).

A small number of studies document university attendance rates among youth of Vietnamese heritage. The purpose of these studies was to document relationships between university attendance and employment opportunities in the United States (Fong, 2008; Zhou, 2001). These studies show a constant increase in college attainment among adults of Vietnamese heritage aged 25 and over; in 1980 12.6%, in 1980, 16.9% in 1990, and 19.4% in 2000. Nevertheless, compared to the rates for white Americans, the Vietnamese Americans showed a negative development: In 1990, 21.5% of white Americans graduated from university level, which was proportionally 8.5% more than this group of immigrants. In 2000, there was an increase in the differences to 10.6% (Fong, 2008, p. 65; Zhou, 2001, p. 193).

The same research and other studies also indicate that additional factors should be considered to more fully complete the story of youth of Vietnamese background. As an ethnic Vietnamese myself, through the lens of my own subjectivity of knowing that, for instance, there is diversity among Vietnamese, I question where ethnic Vietnamese youth are studied as an aggregated group. From which part of Viet-Nam were they and their families from - north or south, urban or rural? What were their social classes and educational backgrounds before they left Viet-Nam? What were their relationships with other generations in their families?

My own research with Vietnamese immigrant youth in Iceland found a number of hindrances they encountered that resulted in early school leaving. In addition to poor Icelandic proficiency and the social isolation that they experienced at the upper secondary schools, other causes for the discontinuation of their education included their poor educational background, lack of motivation, lack of self-esteem and lack of family support (Tran & Ragnarsdóttir, 2013; Tran, 2007). The study that I conducted in 2007 of Vietnamese immigrants and three other Asian ethnic groups (Thai, Japanese, Filipino) indicated that Vietnamese parents were less involved in schools, and had less understanding of the Icelandic school system and society than parents in the other groups. One explanation for this phenomenon was that both parents were Vietnamese, while the other Asian ethnic groups in the study had higher percentages of mixed marriage, where one spouse was a native Icelander. Another explanation was that Japanese and Filipino

parents also had English for communication and for information gathering. Vietnamese parents who had less than high school education had limited communication skills in Icelandic and less integration. Such difficulties hindered their acquisition of information about Icelandic society, and about Icelandic school system. As a result they were less directly involved in their children's education (Tran & Ragnarsdóttir, 2013; Tran, 2007; Sigurðardóttir, 2005).

Other researchers have reported other possible causes for the struggle these young people have, such as racism, family dysfunctions due to poverty (parents who work long hours do not have time to support their children), breakdowns in cultural ties among second generation youth, intergenerational conflict, and the loss of parental authority (Ngo & Lee, 2007). In addition, in cases where their cultural and social capital is perceived by the host countries as a deficiency, the young people could feel alienated. For example in Nguyen's (2012) study, some Vietnamese immigrant youth felt a sense they had been reduced to being visible only once a year. Even though some of them expressed their appreciation for opportunities to introduce Vietnamese culture through cultural awareness events, they perceived that such events were acts of tokenism. Their culture was put on display once a year for a limited time with clothes and dances that they thought did not result in deeper understanding of their culture. Their culture was invisible and non-existent the rest of the year (Nguyen, 2012). Some research reports showed that Vietnamese youth who perceived discrimination also showed lower self-esteem, stress symptoms, depressive affect, and possible weakening of ethnic identity, as Liebkind, Jasinskaja-Lahti and Solheim (2004) articulated: [perceived discrimination] "had a significant negative effect on the school adjustments of the immigrant adolescents" (Nguyen, 2012; Berry et al., 2006; Liebkind et al., 2004, p. 684; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001 ). These behaviors were found by Berry, et al. (2006) among Vietnamese immigrant youth who resided in seven host countries, in North and Central Europe and in North America for less than 12 years. Such youth are characterized as having "a diffuse profile". Researchers view this type of profile as an indication that the youth have "no clear sense of place in the new society" and are the least adaptive (Berry et al., 2006, pp. 189, 223). In the same study, the youth's social culture, determined by Berry *et al.*, relative to their school adjustment and behavior problems, worsens with their years of residence.



## 2.5 Summary

In this Chapter 2, I contextualized Vietnam and Iceland, the two homes from which the youth derived their sense of alienation and belonging.

Both Iceland and Vietnam were signatories to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which gives the priority to making education available to the children. The Icelandic and Vietnamese educational systems have the universal goals of developing well-rounded individuals. However, Viet-Nam pledged its loyalty to a socialist ideology based on Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh's thoughts which differs from Iceland which adheres to democracy ("Education Law. 38/2005/QH11," 14 June 2005; Ministry of Education & Science and Culture, 2004).

The habitus of students of Vietnamese background, which is grounded in Confucianism, affirms the importance of knowledge, family attachment and family responsibilities, have been found by research in different parts of the world to have positive influences on academic performance among students of Vietnamese background (Ngo & Lee, 2007, p. 417; Leirvik & Fekjær, 2011; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Zhou & Bankston, 1994). The favorable outcomes were explained by their good study habits, their resiliency, and their parents' encouragement and high expectations for them (Lauglo, 1999; Nieto, 2000; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Liebkind, Jasinskaja-Lahti, & Solheim, 2004; Ngo & Lee, 2007; Leirvik & Fekjær, 2011). Research in Iceland has deduced that the school system has fallen into looking through the lens of the host language and culture deficiency (Guðmundsson, 2013; Tran & Ragnarsdóttir, 2013; Ragnarsdóttir, 2011, 2012b; Danielsdóttir). For newly arrived immigrant students, NAMS (who I will discuss in Chapter 3), it takes on an average of seven years for them to learn the academic language. During this time, it was common that they were treated as being unable to think critically or logically to continue to study other subjects (Cummins, 1996). The immigrant students' resources such as their previous academic knowledge, and their social and cultural capital were untapped to contribute to their learning in the Icelandic school environment (Nieto, 2002; Danielsdóttir, 2009; Ragnarsdóttir, 2012b; Beach, Dovemark, Schwartz, & Öhrn, 2013). Professionals in Iceland are insufficient in the understanding of multi-culturalism and the pedagogical practice to facilitate their achievement (Tran, 2007; Aðalbjarnardóttir, Guðjónsdóttir, & Rúnarsdóttir, 2005; Karlsdóttir, 2013). There have also been studies in other countries

which have indicated that the youth acquired the sense of alienation and low self-esteem when their social and cultural capital was not recognized. This could have a negative effect on their school achievement (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Berry et al., 2006; Nguyen, 2012). There has been the recognition made by research that the life and behavior of the immigrants in host countries can be the result of how they are received and treated (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001). For students, in particular, their sense of belonging in schools depends on their success of establishing social capital among their school mates (Frønes, 2002; Jónsdóttir, 2007; Steen-Olsen, 2013). In Icelandic schools, students of Vietnamese background had circles of friends which primarily included youth of Vietnamese and immigrant background and a few youth of Icelandic-heritage who were described as acquaintances (Tran, 2007; Schubert, 2010; Guðmundsson, 2013). The deficiency in the Icelandic language was the explanation for their limited interaction with Icelandic-heritage peers. Nevertheless, Magnúsdóttir's (2010) research disputed this claim.

### **3 Theoretical framework: The landscape and the roadmaps**

In this chapter, I will explore the landscape of critical multicultural education as I develop the theoretical framework that will guide my research. Understanding the landscape of theories and their discourses will enable me to make sense of the data. Contextual and conceptual details and assumptions will guide my understanding of the roads taken by the Icelandic school system (policies, administrators, teachers) with regard to inclusive education. I need to understand the extent to which decisions made at the policy level and recontextualized into the classroom affect immigrant students and their school experiences in Icelandic upper secondary schools. In particular, the critical perspective is used to scrutinize the roads open to immigrant students in the Icelandic school system.

My review of the literature is presented in three sections which discuss the roadmaps of the deficiency, the critical and the Critical Multicultural Education roads. The theoretical landscape includes:

- (1) the acceptance among scholars of multiculturalism as a norm;
- (2) a definition of “culture” as a phenomenon that changes over time, and that is not limited to ethnicity or language, but encompasses such attributes as gender, socio-economic class, physical or mental disability;
- (3) the advantages of multiculturalism to the individual and to society;
- (4) the theory of multicultural education.

The critical perspective is used to scrutinize the deficient discourse that has dominated the roads available to students of immigrant background in the school systems.

### 3.1 The Critical Road

#### 3.1.1 *Multiculturalism Theory*

The concept of multiculturalism has been discussed and debated by many scholars. In his 1976 article “Multiculturalism as the Normal Human Experience”, Goodenough addresses this concept at length. He explains that multiculturalism is a learned process. As individuals, we interact daily with different people – our family members, our school mates, our colleagues. These interactions occur in different contexts. In the inner circle of relationships are our families. The circle expands outward into our schools, our neighborhoods, our communities, our societies, and our country (Goodenough, 1976). Moreover, there is the possibility of an outer circle where we are exposed to other countries as we travel for pleasure or for work. In this learning process, we develop appropriate social skills (including speech and behavior) for diverse contexts and situations (Erickson, 2007, p. 24). In addition, Parekh (2006) construes that we are “culturally embedded,” meaning that we are shaped by the cultural value system, organization and relations in which we grow up. At the same time, he says that “cultural diversity is also an important constituent and condition of human freedom” (Parekh, 2006, p. 167). In other words, through knowing and understanding other cultures we gain perspective about ourselves. Through the receptiveness for what is dissimilar, our life can be enriched and we can be more open-minded. There is more of a chance to reduce ethnocentrism, which is the root cause of discrimination, prejudice, and racism (Parekh, 1999).

For Parekh (2006) and other such thinkers, culture is conceived of as dynamic and is not limited to ethnicity and language. When culture is discussed, it cannot be isolated to ethnicity alone because it encompasses gender, sexual identity, socio-economic class, physical or mental disability, etc. (Cope & Kalantzis, 1999). As individuals, we each belong to more than one of these identity-shaping cultures, so that when we come into contact with each other we juggle with multiple discourses (Parekh, 2006; Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, & Greenfield, 2000; Cope & Kalantzis, 1999). And it must be recognized that cultures are not static, but change over time through negotiation, creation and transformation (Freire, 2009; May, 1999; Nieto, 1996). In the words of Nieto, a culture is: “the ever-changing values, traditions, social and

political relationships, and worldview created, shared, and transformed by a group of people bound together by a combination of factors that can include a common history, geographic location, language, social class, and religion” (Nieto, 1999, p. 48). Applying these definitions of culture to the Icelandic situation, it can be seen that when immigrants move from their motherlands to Iceland they need to adapt aspects of their habits and selves, in order to attain the objectives they set for themselves and their families, which drove them to emigrate in the first place (Zhou & Bankston, 1994). Leirvik & Fekjær’s (2011) study of second-generation Vietnamese in Norway indicated that there was evidence that Vietnamese parents altered their child-rearing styles due to their acculturation process. Instead of adhering to the traditional way of insisting on obedience and subordination they were more open to dialogues in the home and had a different understanding of their children.

Politically and ideologically, multiculturalism came into existence as an effort by distinct cultural groups to reject assimilation and racism (Parekh, 2006). Its history can be traced back to the 1960s, when there was a widespread struggle in many parts of the world not only for tolerance, but for recognition, affirmation, and respect for diverse languages, cultures, and identities. Particularly in the sphere of education, multiculturalism arose to counter hegemony and to modify the hierarchy of power that was perpetuated within educational systems. This oppression was recognized as the cause of the marginalization of certain groups of students, and recognized as detrimental to their achievement and self-esteem (Parekh, 2006; Sleeter & Montecinos, 1999). Myles Horton, Martin Luther King, Herbert Kohl, Angela Davis, Cesar Chavez, and Malcolm X were among many radical educators and social activists who spearheaded the movement in the United States. They “were not only committed to the ideal and practice of social justice within schools, but to the transformation of structures and conditions within society that functioned to thwart the democratic participation of all peoples” (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2009, p. 2). They laid an important part of the groundwork for critical pedagogical practices during the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Moves toward multiculturalism have expanded because we live in a time of accelerated globalization, and many social theorists have concluded that multiculturalism, driven by a global economic system, is no longer an isolated phenomenon but is now a global norm (Ragnarsdóttir, 2007b; Parekh, 2006; Gaine, 2005; Morais, 2002; Cope

& Kalantzis, 1999). As Kalantzis & Cope (1999) articulate: “Global markets, global capital, global communications and global culture play on local diversity as much as they erase it...In every country of the world, cultural and linguistic diversity is emerging as one of the great political issues for the next century” (Cope & Kalantzis, 1999, p. 247). As Ragnarsdóttir put it, Iceland was not “deprived of this development,” (Ragnarsdóttir, 2007b, p. 109). The rapid over-expansion of the Icelandic economy and the resulting deep financial crisis at the end of 2008, offered further demonstration of Iceland’s participation in this global community.

The advantages of multiculturalism are evident at both the level of the individual and the broader society. For the individual, it has been shown by some studies (Cope & Kalantzis, 1999; Hodson, 1999) that children’s meta-cognitive and meta-linguistic capacities benefit from the development of the skills necessary to communicate cross-culturally and to negotiate between two or more cultures. An end result can be better critical thinking and problem solving abilities. Individuals with multicultural skills also have an advantage in a globalized labor market, both at the local and global levels, and both as workers and employers. There is a great shortage of individuals skilled at understanding cultural differences and behaviors (Jan & Hon, 2004; Caliguiri & Cascio, 1998). Jan & Hon (2004) emphasized that “To find people with the necessary skills for foreign assignment is one of the greatest human resource challenges for international organizations” (Jan & Hon, 2004, p. 2).

In addition, Kalantzis & Cope (1999) argue that the benefits of a core multiculturalism are seen even in those youth who acquire bilingual and bicultural skills in the absence of multiculturalism – multiculturalism provides a framework in which cross-cultural communications skills and the abilities to negotiate across languages and discourses can be enhanced and flourish.

On a broader social level, multiculturalism provides a context in which cultures can cross-fertilize each other. As cultures are brought closer, concentrating in one society, they influence each other and bring about changes in each over time (Trumbull et al., 2000; Cope & Kalantzis, 1999; Parekh, 1999). Parekh (2006) says “However rich it might be, no culture embodies all that is valuable in human life and develops the full range of human possibilities. Different cultures thus correct and complement each other, expand each other’s horizon of

thought and alert each other to new forms of human fulfillment” (Parekh, 2006, p. 167).

Crossfertilization is, however, not necessarily easy or achieved without compromise and perhaps conflict. Receiving societies may disparage the elemental framework of beliefs and practices of newcomers. Zhou & Bankston (1994) research and a number of other studies show immigrants who apply their home country original cultural patterns to be at an advantage in their integration process of their host countries. Zhou & Bankston’s case study of Vietnamese youth in New Orleans found that their success in education was due to their social capital provided by the tight knit Vietnamese community in their local community in New Orleans. In their study, social capital is defined as “closed systems of social networks inherent in the structure of relations between persons and among persons within a collectivity” (p. 824). Obedience, diligence and helping others were identified as Vietnamese traditional values. These values were contrasted to American values which were independent thinking and “egoistic values” which were concerned with individual social prestige (p. 833). Vietnamese youth excelled in this very poor local neighborhood, even though some of them were having difficulty with English. On the other hand, American-heritage students were fighting a desperate war against high dropout rates, low levels of educational attainment, drug abuse, and disruptive behavioral problems.

Immigrants may well believe their ways are not only different but better. However, this is not always the case. Leirvik and Fekjær’s (2011) study recounted a phenomenon in the Vietnamese parents’ system of physical discipline that not only alienates their children from them, but in fact is illegal in many countries in the Western world, including Iceland. Children all over the world are supposed to be protected by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which Iceland was a signatory. Therefore, cultural particularities cannot all be accommodated in receiving countries.

### 3.1.2 *The Different Approaches to Multicultural Education*

In formulating a theoretical framework to analyze the data for this dissertation, I have chosen multicultural education with the lens of critical inquiry to study how the Icelandic school system addresses educational equity for ethnic Vietnamese students in upper secondary

schools. Critical inquiry is defined by Crotty (1998) as "...the type of inquiry spawned by the critical spirit, [where] researchers find themselves interrogating commonly held values and assumptions, challenging conventional social structures, and engaging in social action" (Crotty, 1998, p. 157). Critical theory refers to both a "school of thought" and a process of critique" (Giroux, 2009, p. 27)

Since the 1950s a number of different approaches to multicultural education have been put forward. These have included immigrant education, multiracial education, the education of minorities, trans-cultural education, citizenship education, intercultural education and antiracist education (Allemann-Ghionda, 2009; Banks, 2009; Gaine, 1987). Though, multicultural, intercultural, and antiracist education are quite similar, the differences among them depend largely on the emphasis taken by individual countries, and the pedagogical implementation in each country (Allemann-Ghionda, 2009; Banks, 2009). For example, antiracist educational approaches in the United Kingdom and Greece have developed discourses and pedagogies specific to those two countries.

Multicultural education aims to provide all students with the knowledge and skills necessary to function in harmony and unity in their community cultures, their national civic culture, and in the global community as they progress through life. The term "multi"-culture is understood to signal the phenomenon of diverse cultures and ethnicities living side-by-side and acknowledging and respecting cultural diversity but not necessarily interacting with each other. The term "inter"-culture signals the phenomenon of diverse cultures and ethnicities living among each other, interacting, relating, and interchanging in complex ways. (Allemann-Ghionda, 2009; Banks, 2009; Portera, 2008). In antiracist education, race is the main emphasis. The approach addresses institutional racism which is seen as disadvantaging ethnic minority students. This approach assumes that reforming racism requires a comprehensive change of attitude, structure, and policy in the society as a whole. In the words of Gaine (2000), a critical educator and writer on how race was rooted in British schools and affected the education of ethnic minority students:

Anti-racist change is by definition multidimensional... The task is to change mind, shared beliefs, schools, curricula, structures, representations and all at once, with potential implementation gaps in all directions. This is a practical,



strategic, intellectual, political and also moral task (Gaine, 2000).

Despite the differences, all three approaches share a philosophy of inclusion, where all students should have equal opportunities for success in school regardless of gender, religion, beliefs, ethnicity, race, color, socioeconomic status, national origin or any other status (Banks, 2007b). Such an education is sometimes referred to as education for pluralism, because it continually works toward an equitable education for all categories of students, whether they are minority language speakers, students of color, disabled or culturally different. This approach has the goal of eliminating the hidden power present in the curriculum, i.e, the hegemony that disadvantages, instills prejudice, and discriminates against student populations which deviate from the mainstream culture that is designated as the norm. The end goal is to bring about a genuinely equal, just, and democratic society (Banks, 2007b; Grant & Sleeter, 2007; Mor Barak, 2005; Baptiste, 1999). A multicultural school environment has the goal of bringing success to a pluralist student body by providing an equitable pedagogy in which the core concepts are grounded in critical pedagogy and in critical theory.

### 3.1.3 *Henry Giroux and Critical Theory*

Critical pedagogy is fundamentally linked to critical theory, which emerged from the Frankfurt School. Human emancipation, praxis (self-reflection and action), and historical consciousness (a continuum from the past to the future) were the key-concepts that interconnected the two traditions.

The Frankfurt School arose within the Institute of Social Research (*Institut für Sozialforschung*), which was founded in February 1923 in Frankfurt, Germany. From its inception, the school's philosophy was drawn from Marxism. Even though the Marxist philosophy of education was said to be incomplete, focusing too much on "labor process" and the "material forces of society" (Giroux, 2009, pp. 30,37), Marxism still had a long-term historical effect on the education and quality of life of many children around the world. One of the ten demands of the [*Communist Manifesto*] was free public education for all children and the abolition of child labor: "Public education of all children free of charge; Elimination of children's factory labor in its present form; Combination of education with material production; etc. etc." (Tucker,

1978, p. 490). These measures were included in Article 28 and 32 of the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child, which had been signed by 192 of 195 countries when it took effect on September 7<sup>th</sup>, 1990.

Under Max Horkheimer's directorship in the 1930's, the Institute changed its theoretical focus from "analysis of bourgeois society's socio-economic substructure" to analysis of "its cultural superstructure" (Giroux, 2009, p. 29; Jay, 1973). Horkheimer, Erich Fromm, Herbert Marcuse, and Theodor Adorno were among the first influential thinkers to reconceptualize the meanings of domination and emancipation.

The Frankfurt School's fundamental epistemology was the theory of historical consciousness. A knowledge of history was not intended to celebrate the progress of the past, but rather was intended to reflect on it to gain understanding of the human initiatives and actions that resulted in that progress. A historical consciousness informs the present and supplies pressure for continuous transformation and emancipation, leading to a more just society. Giroux used Buck-Moss' (1977) words to explain the way a "radical educator" would apply history: "...using history in order to fight against the spirit of times rather than join it, to look backward at history rather than 'forward'" (Giroux, 2009, p. 46). Instead of examining history through the concepts of time and development, teaching history with critical theory involved scrutinizing the problematic gaps in present day society with the aim of proposing actions that could form a new society.

In Giroux's overview (2009), the essence of critical theory from the Frankfurt school is the transformation of the concept of domination due to the emergence of capitalism. The Marxist critique involved radical examination of existing ideology and practices and the need for pedagogical and social transformation to free individuals from the confinement of consumer capitalism. Among the different Marxist orientations was the concept of "ruling class" which had the equivalent idea of the dominant class from which Marx and Engels (1978) wanted to rescue the "working class." In critical theory, the parallel concept was dominance: who was in the position of power and from whom critical theorists wanted to liberate the subordinated. Critical theorists such as Gramsci (1971), Horkheimer and Adorno (1972) asserted that the forces of domination no longer limited their goal of the expansion of the economy, but also aimed for ideological hegemony. Physical

force was no longer needed to exercise control in a capitalist society. The weapons of domination were now advanced technology with its power to penetrate institutions such as school, mass media, churches, etc. In such places ideological hegemony was embedded as Giroux explained: "...the power of the ruling classes was now reproduced through a form of ideological hegemony; that is, it was established primarily through the rule of consent..." (Giroux, 2009, p. 38).

Another key Frankfurt school concept was that of knowledge reproduction as perpetuated in the education system. Marx had developed this idea in his *Theses on Feuerbach*: "The materialist doctrine that humans are products of circumstances and upbringing, and that therefore changed humans are products of other circumstances and changed upbringing, forgets that it is humans who change circumstances and that it is essential to educate the educator" (Tucker, 1978, p. 144). In the same spirit, the Frankfurt School embraced the concept of self-conscious critique which, through the process of education, equipped teachers and students with the skill of reasoning as a mode of critical thinking. Marcuse believed this skill to be "...the highest potentiality of man and existence; the two belong together" (Giroux, 2009, p. 30). It is through self-conscious critique and the ability to reason that individuals are able to uncover the relationships between power and culture that appear to be objective on the surface. It is through this critical thinking process that power relationships can be altered.

The Frankfurt School's theory of culture used the relationship between culture and power as a new tool to expose the implicit role of school in perpetuating the power that exists in the wider society and within school walls. Critical theory identified culture in this context to be the material base that allows the dominant group to retain dominance through the cultural reproduction of acceptable social norms in the school curriculum. Even though, Giroux (2009) found that the Frankfurt School's analysis of culture to be underdeveloped, he thought it directed attention to the important issue of student diversity and cultural differences and how the dominance of the majority culture, in another word the mainstream culture, marginalized some students. Thus the Frankfurt School's theory is central to the idea of critical pedagogy within the field of Critical Multicultural Education.

### 3.1.4 *Critical Pedagogy*

Paulo Freire came from a childhood of poverty and hunger, but at the time of his death in 1997 he was recognized as the most influential thinker in the tradition of critical pedagogy. Born and living in Brazil almost all his life, Freire was a force of passionate criticism and struggle against the power of the oppressor. While in political exile for 15 years, he taught as a visiting professor at Harvard University. It was during this time that he published *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. The unjust social situation in Brazil, where the poor and the illiterate were oppressed and dehumanized, forms the backdrop of this book.

Paulo Freire's work explores those acts of the oppressors in the dominant culture which can be interpreted as acts of discrimination. He also describes a process which can counter the acts of the oppressors, which involves critical thinking and dialogue, which leads to a process he coins "*conscientização*" (conscientization) "The term conscientização refers to learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (Freire, 2009, p. 35).

The acts of the dominant culture are described by Freire as "exploitation, oppression and injustice" (Freire, 2009, p. 44). In the context of education, Freire sees this oppression in what he describes as the "banking" concept of teaching (ibid p. 72). In banking education, teachers, with unchallenged expertise, deposit knowledge into their students, who as passive recipients record, memorize, and repeat the information.

Freire disdains this instructional culture, where the teachers alienate their students by failing to consider their students' experiences or interests. He identifies this educational practice as oppressive because it reinforces the existing socio-economic power-structures, therefore disempowering some members of a society, essentially disadvantaging them by placing them outside that society (Freire, 2009). At the same time, he lays out new principles and methodology that mark the beginning of a new tradition in constructive education: the critical pedagogy tradition (Kincheloe, 2007).

The approach that Freire would use to transform the banking model of education is for teachers to form partnerships with their students and engage in dialogue with them. Freire believes that dialogue generates critical thinking, which in turn generates conscientização. He explains: "...the fundamental goal of dialogical teaching is to create a process of

learning and knowing that invariably involves theorizing about the experiences shared in the dialogue process” (Freire, 2009, p. 17). In dialogue, teachers and students engage each other in critical thinking reciprocally “so both are simultaneously teachers and students” (ibid p. 72). In communication, teachers and students learn from each other and constantly interact with the world in which they live and therefore transform reality together in the process (Freire, 2009). The end result of this process of dialogue and critical thinking is conscientização: “an awakening of, or increase in consciousness” (Crotty, 1998, p. 148). Conscientização also involves critical thinking, which Freire says is a way of perceiving “reality as process and transformation, rather than a static entity” (Freire, 2009, p. 92). Crotty describes Freire’s conscientização as a “joint project” among humans (Freire, 2009; Crotty, 1998, p. 153).

Critical theorists recognized school as an institution of knowledge production and is inevitably political, because it is rooted in historical and social contexts (Giroux, 2011; McLaren, 2009; Kincheloe, 2008; Nieto, 2000). School is not a neutral entity. School is where the power of the dominant is embedded at many levels, from the school culture, to policy, to administration, to the everyday activities of teaching and learning, and within the social relationships between individuals.

Antonio Gramsci’s theory of hegemony (1992) expounds how the power of domination gains ground through consent. He explains that the ruling class reproduces its beliefs, values, and perceptions by penetrating cultural institutions and instrumentally using moral leaders such as teachers. The result is that the worldview of the dominant class is widely accepted as the cultural norm; a universal ideology that socially, politically, and economically serves the interest of the privileged (Darder et al., 2009; Giroux, 2009; Kincheloe, 2008; Gordon, 2005; Gramsci, 1971).

Since power and knowledge interweave and permeate every aspect of the society, school cannot be seen as an exception; educators and learners have to be conscious and active in problem-posing as they interact with the educational system. Joe L. Kincheloe: “A critical and intellectually complex epistemology demands that we understand dominant conceptual structures and the nature of knowledge production. In such analysis, we can obtain compelling insights into the ways such structures and knowledge production support the interests of dominant power blocs” (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 39).

As a result, critical pedagogues insist that critical pedagogy be a praxis – theory and practice connect with each other and reflect each other to transform the world (Giroux, 2011; Freire, 2009, p. 51; Kincheloe, 2008). In other words, critical pedagogy is not merely a fixed method that is applied to any context or condition. Critical pedagogy cultivates an educational environment where teachers and students are empowered to be critical agents. They have the tools to question the source and kinds of knowledge that are produced. Which value system is determining the hierarchy of beliefs, values and perspectives? How are they linked to history? Who defines the “common sense” and the “correct” knowledge which is included in educational policy, in a school culture, in teaching materials? Critical consciousness is a pedagogy that unveils the hidden world of power that dictates such “hidden codes”. These codes are primary causes of unsuccessful school experiences for many non-mainstream students, because they result in inequities. Schools that fail to provide appropriate education for these students, because their cultural differences are not shared by the dominant culture, threaten the very root of any democratic society (Giroux, 2011; McLaren, 2009; Kincheloe, 2008). Thus, it can be concluded that a country that defines itself as democratic cannot have schools that discriminate against their students because of their ethnic and cultural background. This is the reason why critical theorists insist on applying critical pedagogy with the special lens of multiculturalism in educational systems around the world.

### **3.2 The Deficiency Road**

There is no lack of research demonstrating discrimination experienced by minorities as their ethnicity, religion, and/or language is “other” to the dominant group. The word “minority” can signal a system of unequal power in which the weight is on the majority side of the scale in terms of language, ethnicity and national origin. May delineates this power relation:

...the public sphere of the nation-state represents and is reflective of the *particular* cultural linguistic habitus of other dominant (ethnic) group. These habitus, in turn, are accorded with cultural and linguistic capital while other (minority) habitus specifically are not (May, 1999, p. 30).

Nevertheless, domination does not always need to be carried out by a majority population, since a system of hegemony can result in social and psychological manipulation of a majority group; a classic example is apartheid in South Africa. The apparatus of media, religion, social norms, educational institutions, popular culture and law are the mechanisms which the dominating class uses to recontextualise knowledge, which in turn shapes the way of thinking of the dominated (Bernstein, 2000). It is through this “cultural hegemony” that the subjugating group manages to gain consent of the larger society to support their ideology, although the ideology is not always in the best interest of the subjugated (Akinyela, 1995). She stated the goal of cultural hegemony:

... the main objective of cultural hegemony is to create an assimilated society under the leadership of the ruling class to ensure the smooth running of the dominant system (Akinyela, 1995, p. 35)

In the context of upper secondary schools in Iceland, the students from Viet-Nam who were participants in this study are ethnically, linguistically, and religiously located at the least advantageous position in the power hierarchy (Miller, 1986; Fairclough, 1989). Their original language, culture, and religion are of greater distance from the western world of Iceland than the distance (for example) for students from Denmark. A Danish child in an Icelandic school is less disadvantaged than a child with Vietnamese or Iraqi background, because the Danish child’s habitus is closer to the Icelandic culture. As a result, in school this child is more vulnerable in being treated as deficient because of his/her habitus, ethnicity, religion, or language.

### 3.2.1 *The Social and Cultural Capital for School Success*

Habitus is one of the basic concepts of Bourdieu’s theory. It is an individual’s experience formed in conjunction with family history, class, and cultural context. “The habitus – embodied history, internalized as second nature and so forgotten as history – is the active presence of the whole past of which it is a product” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 56). While an individual’s habitus links him or her to social contexts and groups, Bourdieu emphasizes that an individual’s habitus can only be changed over a long period of time (Guðmundsson, 2012).

School is where individuals live out what Giroux defines as their habitus of class, gender, ethnicity and culture (Giroux, 2011; Kincheloe, 2008; McLaren, 2009; Nieto, 2000), and what Bourdieu defines simply as habitus (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 56). It is important for society as a whole to understand this concept of individualized habitus, because not only must it be taken into account when teaching, but a student's habitus must be accepted without efforts to alter it. Even though it is a big challenge to take every student's habitus into consideration, if an individual's habitus is not to be a barrier to educational success, school systems must be designed so that education is accessible to all students.

Bourdieu's theory includes three different kinds of wealth, or capital, that all individuals possess. This capital combines cultural, social, and linguistic attributes woven together in complex ways to equip an individual for a lifetime of learning and maturing (Brooker, 2002; Bourdieu, 1984). Cultural capital is "what you know" (Brooker, 2002, p. 24; Bourdieu, 1997). It includes the experience of previous generations that are passed through families to new generations. But it is not simply passed on to children as wealth ready to be used. It is only a foundation for potential success. A family's literacy, language, and communications skills, for instance, can provide its children with a springboard for success in school (Brooker, 2002; Bourdieu, 1997). Children start school with different cultural capital: some start with cultural capital that facilitates their education; others start with cultural capital that prepares them poorly for school and even makes them suspicious of it. There can be discrepancies between "the local knowledge" that is valued within the home and "the official knowledge" that is valued inside the school environment (Brooker, 2002, p. 178; Bernstein, 2000).

Social capital is "who you know" (Bourdieu, 1997; Brooker, 2002, p. 24). It is the resources provided by social connections, and by being good at working these resources to one's advantage. An individual's social capital can accumulate through time from a young age, and constantly multiplies as social bonds are established. Bourdieu and Passeron believe that it "exerts a multiplier effect on the capital [one] possesses in his own right" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p. 48). Working from Bourdieu's concept of social capital, many scholars have differentiated between "bonding" social capital and "bridging" social capital. Relationships involving bonding social capital are those we have with people who share our basic moral values, and strengthen our



sense of security on a personal level. They could be our neighbors, family members, members of our religious community, or our close friends and colleagues. Relationships involving bridging social capital are more instrumental. These involve people who are not close to us personally, but who belong to the same social and professional organizations and networks. Members of such groups and networks provide each other with mutual support and resources that can serve to defend common interests and aspirations such as identity or status (Guðmundsson, 2012; Putnam, 2000; Woolcock, 2003). Depending on the social context, there are differences in the kinds and number of social ties into which an individual is able to tap, and these ties are to a certain degree gender-divided and socially stratified. Immigrant students may have, in general, very limited bridging social capital but some may have rich bonding social capital through their families. Their family values and their basic moral value system, as part of their habitus, can drive their aspirations and resiliency in educating themselves (Guðmundsson, 2012; Lauglo, 1999; Zhou & Bankston, 1994).

For Bourdieu language is both a method of communication and a mechanism of power. Thus, linguistic capital is both how you say what you know, and where your use of language places you in social hierarchies. Linguistic capital “can be understood as a form of embodied cultural capital in that it represents a means of communication and self-presentation acquired from one's surrounding culture” (Bourdieu, 1990:114). How each participant in a social interaction uses language tends to re-enforce the respective social positions of each participant. These social positions can be pinpointed by which language an individual speaks, or with which dialect or accent they speak.

Basil Bernstein (2000) further explains the phenomenon of social and cultural capital where each social group or social class possesses a frame of reference, particular values and its own special codes of behavior, language, and social interactions. “Hidden codes” are those which can require some level of sophistication for outsiders to decode: they can be complicated and are not always easily detected. Bernstein concluded from his own empirical research that school social codes are elaborate and that students who do not belong to the predominant groups are placed at great disadvantage in comparison to students from the dominant groups. Students of foreign origin, for instance, cannot participate fully in school and this affects their academic achievement (Bøje, 2008).

In order to succeed and be accepted in school, students from non-dominant cultures are expected to acquire “recognition rules” and “realization rules” (Bernstein, 2000, p. 17). “Recognition rules” include awareness of the dominant culture, skill in decoding the social rules, and skill in figuring out which rules are in effect, and how these rules govern conduct and learning. “Realization rules” include skill in understanding “framing” which Bernstein defines as “who controls what” (Bernstein, 2000, p. 12) and adjusting behavior to conform to the rules that are in effect (Morais, 2002). Students cannot learn what it means to be a student, or develop the skills necessary for acquiring an education, unless they perceive and understand the social codes, and unless they conform to the dominating values and the social rules. The irony is that even though in practice hegemony favors the dominant culture, it is generally accepted by most societies as “common sense” and “truth”.

### 3.2.2 *Ethnicity and Race as Social Constructs*

The Steering Group and Academic Team of the Programme on Intercultural Conflicts and Societal Integration (AKI) at the Social Science Research Centre Berlin (WZB) declared in its memorandum calling for political intervention:

One of the most conspicuous and at the same time most problematic social consequences of international migration is the development of ethnic stratifications: ethnic and other cultural characteristics of population groups combine systematically with disparities in education, income, access to core institutions and social recognition. Ethnic stratification exists in practically every country of immigration, although not all migrants are affected, and the ethnic groups involved may vary (Bade et al., 2006, p. 1).

An examination of how the word “ethnicity” is defined and used, becomes a demonstration of this stratification. Gaine defines ethnicity as:

...a group of people who share a history, key cultural features, such as religion and language...It may be that they are distinguished by some physical features (hair, eye or skin colour, height, facial features) but this need not be universal or excluding (Gaine, 1995, p. 25).

Particularly in the Icelandic language, there is no agreement among academics on the translation of the word “ethnicity”. In my discussions with Ragnarsdóttir; and Skaptadóttir, two authorities in the field of multicultural education and multicultural anthropology in Iceland, they said they had to use different ways of expressing this concept of “ethnicity”. Ragnarsdóttir uses the combination of culture, race, nationality, language, and religion, and Skaptadóttir used “etníska” (phonologically adopted from ethnicity) when referring to the concept in their writing. Gaine (1995) emphasizes the connotation of the concept of ethnicity as demarcated from race, which is a more value laden term reflecting only the color of skin (black, white, yellow or red), or even sometimes an imagined biological difference such as those attributed by the Nazis to Jews (Eriksen, 2010; Gaine, 1995). The distinction between ethnicity and race that Gaine derived from Modood is that “ethnicity is a mode of being” but “race is a mode of oppression” (Gaine, 1995, p. 25; 2005).

Nevertheless, in everyday conversation “ethnicity” lies in visible physical differences, and often implies some biological attribute that is possessed by minorities. The discourse has a hegemonic edge (Eriksen, 2010; Gaine, 2005, pp. 3,4).

“Race” is also used in everyday speech with generally biological connotations, in which individuals are characterized by skin tone, hair color and texture, facial features, and body size and shape (Eriksen, 2010; Fong, 2008; Gaine, 2005, p. 70). Thinkers like Hammond, Gaine and Eriksen argue that these apparently clear racial categorizations are chiefly a social construct. They point out that racial boundaries have always been blurred because the distribution of hereditary physical traits does not follow a systematic variation, and different kinds of discourse often result in inconsistent categorizations. Gaine’s research with teachers and students found that their discourses on race included not only biological appearances, but also encompass nationality, culture, religious faith, and language (Eriksen, 2010; Hammond, 2009; Gaine, 1995).

When discussed by social scientists, ethnicity and race are about distinctions between groups that are more hypothetical than real. Gaine’s definition of racism uses quotes around the term ‘racially’ to emphasize the fuzziness around definitions of race:

[Racism is] a pattern of social relations structures, and a discourse (linguistic defining and positioning) which has

specific outcomes operating against less powerful groups defined 'racially' (Gaine, 1995, p. 27).

The categorization of differences of people has no clear boundaries because it depends on how differences are signified. Historically, the differences of race signify biological differences, but in reality it is a mixture of determinants that make it impossible to set absolutely perfect scientific definitions (Gaine, 2005). Similarly, Ragnarsdóttir argues that Gunaratnam's (2003) theory on the vagueness of race is applicable to the Icelandic context where racial categories are vague. Gunaratman questions the notion of homogeneity and legitimizes diversity. Ragnarsdóttir notes that this theory is important because it undermines the homogenizing, essentializing processes of racialization that denies diversity (Ragnarsdóttir, 2007a, p. 55).

In her study of nine immigrant students (two from Europe and seven from different parts of Asia), Ragnarsdóttir (2011) shows that the young people did not define themselves using the narrow terms of race or ethnicity. Rather they perceived themselves to have a hybrid identity, feeling that they belonged to both Iceland and their country of origin.

There are three ways in which these categorizations of race and ethnicity are important in schooling and by implication in my study. The first is the notion that some groups constitute 'model minorities' - a term coined to describe a stereotype of Asian American youth as high achievers in school due to their possession of superior cultural values (Fong, 2008, p. 87; Lee, 2009; Steinberg, 1981; Sue & Sumie Okazaki, 1990). The second is the deficiency model, which suggests that some immigrant students are the very opposite of model minorities in that they are perceived to need cultural and linguistic compensation for their deficiencies (Convertino, Levinson, & González, 2010; Gay, 2000; Gaine, 1987). The third model is the long-running debate about genetic superiority and inferiority in relation to intelligence, most typically ranking whites and blacks (Fong, 2008). All three of these categorizations are underpinned by racism, a violating act by the group in the hegemonic position.

### 3.2.3 *The Religious Deficiency*

Religion is the last, but not least, factor that contributes to social stratification, and thus to discrimination against immigrants.

Currently in much of Western Europe, Islam is the central concern in politics, in the media, and in academia. The explanations in the literature include first the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, which resulted in negative attention towards immigrants who were categorized as Arabs, Asians or South Asians in general, and Muslims in particular (Modood, 2011; Meer & Modood, 2009; Foner & Alba, 2008). Second, explanations seem to lie in demographic changes. The large increase in the Muslim immigrant population in Europe makes Islam “one of the fastest growing religions in the region at the present time” (Buijs & Rath, 2006, p. 1). One result of this trend is “possibly a few thousand publications or more,” in the last three decades including books, reports and papers written about this immigrant population (Foner & Alba, 2008; Buijs & Rath, 2006, p. 361). The public discourses and publications related to Islam encompass topics on terrorism, oppression of women, female circumcision, honor killings, polygamy, rigid and primitive behavior, etc. (Foner & Alba, 2008; Buijs & Rath, 2006; Parekh, 2006; Gaine, 2005). Buijs and Rath’s (2006) review of the vast quantity of research literature concludes that Muslim culture is in general portrayed as backward.

Muslims are often associated with pre-modern attitudes and practices and this has, to some extent, influenced the research agenda. A lot of attention is dedicated to such themes as gender relations (including headscarves), freedom of speech (including the Rushdie affair, Muslim radicalism, and so forth), and the compatibility of Islam and modernity (Buijs & Rath, 2006, p. 28).

Islam is perceived as a barrier to integration of immigrants to western societies. This essentializing of the differences of the Muslim minority is interpreted by liberal social scientist Modood as an attack on multiculturalism and as an attempt to reemphasize assimilation to the dominant nation-state cultures (Modood, 2011; Meer & Modood, 2009).

In this dissertation, however, the religion factor will not be discussed since only one student participant mentioned briefly his family religion. The 1999 Vietnamese census reported that 80,8% of the Vietnamese population had no religion, while 9,3% of the population were reported to be Buddhist, with the remainder reported as Catholic, Tay, Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, Protestant, or Muslim (Central Intelligence Agency [US], 2014).

### 3.2.4 *The Linguistic Deficiency*

The language of the host country is another factor that reinforces the deficiency perception and contributes to social stratification within pluralist western societies. Research has repeatedly shown that bilingualism is an effective pedagogical route to success for immigrant students (Filhon, 2013; OECD, 2010; UNESCO, 2003; Gogolin, 2002; Gay, 2000; Nieto, 2000, 2002). Enriching the home language of immigrant children is the most effective method to help them learn the new language of the host country. Despite this body of research, it is nevertheless often the practice to emphasize the teaching of the host country's language, the argument being that acquiring this language is the key to immigrants' successful integration in school and in daily life (Filhon, 2013; OECD, 2010; Nieto, 2000).

An immigrant student's command of the host country language is often used to determine their readiness for education, and to predict their success in school. Cummins, a researcher in language and literacy development among students whose English is a second language, says such uses demonstrate "misconceptions about the nature of language proficiency" (Cummins, 1996, p. 51) He defines language proficiency as:

...the extent to which an individual has access to and command of the oral and written academic registers of schooling" [In linguistics, a register is a variety of a language used for a particular purpose or in a particular social setting]. (Cummins, 2000, p. 67).

He says one misconception is in the assumption that if a student's conversational language proficiency is limited, then they must not yet be able to undertake studies that require logical and critical thinking. The other misconception, he says, is if a student is considered to be fluent and can speak eloquently, then they are considered ready to tackle all academic subjects equally with their native speaking classmates. Cummins delineates:

Two major misconceptions regarding the nature of language proficiency...a confusion between the surface or conversational aspects of children's language and deeper aspects of proficiency that are more closely related to conceptual and academic development (Cummins, 1996, p. 51)

Many of the researchers I refer to, i.e. Ladson-Billings, (1995), Gay (2000), Nieto (2002), Banks (2007a) align with Cummin's (1996) conclusion, in that all of them are critical that immigrant students' academic abilities are measured chiefly on the basis of their proficiency in the dominant language

In addition, Cummins' Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP) model shows there is "significant transfer of conceptual knowledge" between the heritage language and the host language (Cummins, 1996). This work serves to underscore the fallacy of assuming that students are deficient in their logical and critical thinking due to their oral limitations in the majority language, when these young immigrants have their native language in which they are more developed and fluent.

It takes on average from four to five years (seven years for non-English speaking background) for immigrant students who arrived in North America around the age of 12 to attain grade norms in academic English skills (Cummins, 1991, 1996). Collier and Thomas' (1989) findings, in their analysis of studies of English learners with diverse home languages and countries of origin, showed it could take five to seven years for students who had had two to three years of school in their home country, and seven to ten years or more for the ones who had had no schooling when they arrived. Although, researchers suggest that immigrant youth only need around three years or even less than two years to achieve reasonable fluency in conversational English (González, 1986; Cummins, 1981; Snow and Hoefnagel-Höhle, 1978). Academic language needs a greater amount of time to acquire because cognitively it requires the continual development of a more complicated set of skills, including analysis, synthesis, integration, reasoning, and transferring (Roessingh & Kover, 2003; Collier, 1995). Collier and Thomas describes this process vividly:

For non-native speakers, the goal of proficiency equal to native speaker is a moving target (Collier, 1995, p. 5)

Needless to say, since immigrants are not a homogeneous population as second language learners, they also are not monolithic in character. Their success in learning the academic language in a host country depends on different variables among individuals, such as motivation, level of proficiency in their first language, the amount and the quality of education they had in their home country, and the quality of the language programs and the amount the time the students receive

structured language support in the host country (Roessingh & Kover, 2003; Cummins, 1996; Collier, 1995).

Roessingh and Kover's (2003) research findings place immigrant students who arrived between the ages of 12 and 15 in the "high-risk" group for failing in Canadian English schools. Their explanation for the high risk factor is that at this age students have not yet learned the cognitive language in their native language, and they have less time in compulsory school in the host country to receive the instruction they need to build up their academic language for more formal education. Their findings show that students, who come between the ages of 15 – 16 and who are considered to have acquired the cognitive academic language in their home country, have a better chance of academic success than the previous group (Roessingh & Kover, 2003). In some subject areas, particularly mathematics and science, it takes a considerably shorter time for these older students to catch up with their English-speaking peers and some have even proved to be more advanced. Their findings agree with Collier's earlier findings, when she discovered from her data that the most significant data variable from her participants is the number of years of formal education they had had in their home country before their arrival (Collier, 1995).

According to Esser at the Programme on Intercultural Conflicts and Societal Integration (AKI), Social Science Research Center Berlin, there is a close relationship between the ease with which immigrants learn the host country language, and the linguistic and cultural distance from the language and culture of the immigrants (Esser, 2006). Results from studies on the acquisition of European languages by immigrants in Europe follow the pattern of having more difficulties as those immigrants from more "distant" languages and cultures. These results fit more or less into Bourdieu's ideas on the relative "legitimacy" of languages. Bourdieu's theory on "language and symbolic power" maintains that language is not merely a communication tool but is also a hierarchical system of power determined by the language people possess; the accent, the manner, the style of communication determine a speaker's status (Bourdieu, 1991). Fairclough uses sociolinguistics to further explain this hierarchy of language, finding a direct link between formal linguistic matters such as grammar and social status. He defines language as socially determined discourse (Fairclough, 1989, pp. 20, 22). In contrast to the classical linguistic approach laid out by Saussure, in which language is seen as "unitary and homogeneous", Fairclough sees language as a platform established by the ruling class to legitimize



their power. In his view, language is discourse defined “by diversity, and by power struggle” (Fairclough, 1989, p.22).

In addition, languages that are closest to the dominant language and to each other in terms of writing, grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation systems occupy the top rankings in the pyramid of power. In other words, the languages that share prestige in the western world are languages such as English, German, French, and Danish. As stated by the authors of *The Other Languages of England*:

...bilingualism tends to be accorded prestige only when the languages in questions are vehicles of an elite European culture... The status of a minority language is based not on any inherent characteristics of the language but rather on the status of those who use it (Miller, 1986, p. 283).

### **3.3 Critical Multicultural Education: Tapping into Resources**

Critical multicultural education is based on a philosophy of inclusiveness, where all students have equal opportunity for school success regardless of gender, religion, ethnicity, race, color, socioeconomic status, origin or any other status (Banks, 2007b). In addition, multicultural education scholars share a vision of transforming educational systems (policies and pedagogies) with the goal of bringing about social justice and equality (Hanley, 2010; Banks, 2004; Nieto, 2000; Shor, 1992). Furthermore, they argue that critical multiculturalism cannot be limited to the educational system, but that the wider society must also be scrutinized and changed in order to eliminate the inequality of marginalized and vulnerable groups (Ragnarsdóttir, 2007; Gay, 2000). Unsurprisingly, these scholars emphasize that effectively changing the educational system involves not only changes in the curriculum, but also requires a more comprehensive approach, where all levels of the education system are critically examined. Nieto said of multicultural education:

It is a philosophy. It needs to be infused into the pedagogies – we need to look at tracking, staffing, reading materials, bulletin boards, foods in the cafeteria, offerings in the athletic programs, letters sent home to parents and the language they’re written in. Multicultural education needs

to be pervasive... It's an issue of equity, not just changing the curriculum. It means using students' experiences as part of the curriculum (Nieto, 2000, p. 9).

Dewey's pragmatism is criticized by theorists, such as Mumford and Bourne, as being uncritical and lacking in vision (Crotty, 1998). However, many concepts of multicultural discourse rest on Dewey's concepts of democracy and education that emphasize students' achievement. Dewey believes that the teacher's job is not instructing or assigning what students are to learn, but rather is to provide them with a learning environment, socially and academically, where students can take initiative, and where students are encouraged to constantly look to expanding their knowledge (Dewey, 2000). Each individual should have the freedom to form his or her own opinion, and should be able to pursue a life characterized by respect, concern, freedom from prejudice, and belief in equality and the importance of everyone, since everyone has the knowledge and ability to benefit society (Dewey, 1998). He asserts that democracy in education encourages all students to be active learners and contribute to their own education, instead of being passive receivers of knowledge. Students who have opportunities to directly influence their own education have a greater interest in learning and ultimately gain a better education (Dewey, 2000).

Like Dewey, multicultural theorists emphasize the importance of each individual's experience. Education should be built on the experiences which students bring with them into the classroom, such as their knowledge of their home languages and cultures. The connection between formal education and student experiences adds meaning to the educational experience – it leads to deeper understanding and contributes to the students' expansion of knowledge, and development of their emotion, social and political skills (Dewey, 2000; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1992, 1995).

### 3.3.1 *Policy and Curriculum*

Policies are perceived not as documents that are static, but as changing as the social environment evolves. The legalizing of educational Acts and regulations is aimed at ensuring the realization of the necessary modifications in the system, as Gaine (2001) articulated:

Policies are about change, they are not about static situations. Their production and formal adoption are critical

stages in sharing and developing understanding and commitment, and the whole point of adopting them is to legitimise and formalise the school's engagement with something which needs changing, or at least constant scrutiny (Gaine, 2001, pp. 177-178).

Critical multicultural education theorists have argued for and established the validity of theories in multicultural education for equity and school success for all. However, scholars like Gay (1992) and Sheets (2003) found that administrator and teacher education, and curriculum and policy development in practice, lag behind the development of theory in multicultural education (Banks, 2004; Sheets, 2003; Gay, 1992).

As the effects of globalization echo through all aspects of our lives today, a question is how much has globalization impacted educational policy. International leaders for global education include United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Education Information Network in Europe (Eurydice Network), Global Education Network Europe (GENE) and European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI).

The Maastricht Global Education Declaration impacts European strategy framework for improving and increasing global education in Europe to the year 2015 (agreed upon at the Europe-wide Global Education Congress, November 15<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> 2002). It outlines the commitment of member states of the Council of Europe to be a force behind: “International, regional and national commitments to increase and improve support for Global Education, as education that supports peoples’ search for knowledge about the realities of their world, and engages them in critical global democratic citizenship towards greater justice, sustainability, equity and human rights for all” (Maastricht Global Education Declaration: European strategy framework for improving and increasing global education in Europe to the year 2015, 2002). The concepts the declaration reflects are those of critical multicultural education. They call for access to an education free from bias and favoritism for the world’s diverse populations.

OECD, a forum of 30 democratic countries, has the mission of disseminating best practices to its member states to effectively address issues such as “economic, social and environmental challenges of globalization” (OECD, 2010). In 2010, after policy reviews of migrant

education in six European countries and studies on the education experience of a number of its member states, the OECD published *Closing the Gap for Immigrant Students: Policy, practice and performance*, a reference guide for policy makers. The guide identifies imbalances in language proficiency and social status as causes of the gaps between immigrant and host country students, and proposes that priority be given to improving education for immigrant students, and that policies at all levels (national, regional and local) be “well-co-ordinated” (OECD, 2010, p. 8). The organization proposed eight “tools” for more effective policy making:

[S]etting explicit policy goals; setting regulations and legislation; designing effective funding strategies; establishing standards, qualifications and qualifications frameworks; establishing curricula, guidelines and pedagogy; building capacity (especially training and teacher support); raising awareness, communication and dissemination; monitoring, research, evaluation and feedback (OECD, 2010, p. 8).

Two years later, in 2012, the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education produced another document *Teacher Education for Inclusion: Profile of Inclusive Teachers* (TE4I). This document was the result of a three-year project that involved fifty-five experts from twenty-five European countries, including Iceland. The document lays out guidelines for a framework for inclusive education programs for teacher educators, teacher education, and ongoing professional development for teachers, policy makers, and school leaders. The four core values of this framework are concepts of multicultural education: “valuing learners’ diversity, supporting all learners, working with others and continuing personal professional development” (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2012, p. 11).

Policies are, in general, written documents projecting the authority of a government enacting an educational agenda. Policy makers can be individuals with differing ideologies or political agendas, and representing institutions with a diversity of interests that can be local, regional, national, or global. These influences are dynamic and context specific because they are modified by the historical, cultural, and political landscape of the individual nation state (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). While the policy texts set goals and lay out guidelines for implementation, it might not be possible for a policy to dictate an

implementation process that suits all educational settings and diverse practitioners. Policies are designed to provide a general overview, leaving a great deal of room for interpretation...a policy is designed to steer understanding and action without ever being sure of the practices it might produce” (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 5).

Critical theorists also warn against educational transformation that claims to address problems of inequality and inequity. They suggest that what is identified as problems needs to be scrutinized. Questions should be asked such as: whose problem it is; who benefits from the solving of the problem; what is the historical context of the problem; how does the present economic and social situation relate to the problem; and last but not least, whether the change ameliorates the inequity situation of marginalized groups within educational institutions, or is it another adjustment where the hidden agenda continues to serve the interest of the dominant culture or class. In other words, “we need to observe policy in action, tracing how economic and social forces, institutions, people, interests, events and chance interact. Issues of power and interests need to be investigated” (Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012, p. 2; Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard, & Henry, 1997).

Curriculum, as an enactment of policy guidelines, strategies and pedagogy reflects the ideology of the policy makers. Therefore, the discourse of this policy document, instead of serving the dominant culture needs, to be explicitly inclusive of, responsive to, and effective for heterogeneous and culturally diverse student bodies. A curriculum content that makes relevant the background wealth of this group of pupils – their mother tongue, their home culture, and their previous academic knowledge – would validate the value of their knowledge and encourage them to exercise their agency. The recognition of their knowledge, equal access to quality teachers, and a nurturing environment provides them the springboard for their continual resiliency and development to educationally accelerate them, for a positive outcome (Banks, 2007a; Gay, 2000; Nieto, 2000). Gay defined the importance of the curriculum: “Curriculum content should be seen as a tool to help students assert and accentuate their present and future powers, capabilities, attitudes, and experiences (Gay, 2000, p. 111). A challenging curriculum incorporates concepts of dissimilar subject school matters and student knowledge in the classroom. Students problematize, ask questions, find answers, read, dialogue and write as venues of learning (Darling-Hammond, 2004).

Gay defines the purpose of critical multicultural education as "...to reform schooling so that its positive benefits and effects are more accessible, equitable, and effective for a wider variety of student populations. Among the innovations there are intergroup education, progressive education, humanistic education, child-centered education, citizenship education, and the more recent development in critical pedagogy" (Gay, 1995, p. 155).

Effective education of principals and teachers, implementation guidelines, strategies and pedagogy in school curricula and a clear plan of following up are to be in place. The end result of this process is that all students are provided with educational equality and equity. This means that ethnic minority students have access to the same resources and opportunities as majority students. Their skills, talents and experiences are valued, and to achieve fair outcomes, unequal funding and unfair standardized testing and tracking are eliminated. Only if all students, majority and minority, have this educational equity and equality, they will all have an equal chance to participate in a democratic society. (Ragnarsdóttir, 2007b; Nieto, 2000).

### 3.3.2 *Teaching as an Act of "Love"*

Multicultural education theorists developed the concepts of bridging cultures and of culturally responsive teaching, which include respect for the students, their culture, and background, as means to successful school outcomes (Gay, 2000; May, 1999; Nieto, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Banks, 1994) Freire's concept of "love" manifests also in Nieto's "love", and Gay's "caring" which urges all teachers to be conscious of minority students' dignity and intellectual capabilities (Gay, 2000; Nieto, 1999; Freire, 1998). This "love" and "care" is not about making the traditions of the different students exotic and salient only at annual celebrations of ethnic heroes and holidays, tasting their food and admiring their colorful traditional clothes and dances. The deep "love" or "care" that these three educators conceptualize also does not mean teachers' helpfulness, niceness, or friendliness towards students of minority background. As Nieto says, "Being nice is not enough" even though both she and Gay recognize that children coming to school need to feel welcome (Gay, 2000; Nieto, 1999, p. 85). Their writings assert that teachers who care about these students are culturally responsive in their teaching, have high expectations for their students, and do not blame their students for failure. Education is the development of a

whole individual far beyond the aspect of academic achievement, and includes “intellectual, academic, ethical and political dimensions, all of which are developed in concert with one another” (Gay, 2000, pp. 43-44).

### 3.3.3 *Culture of Inclusiveness of a Learning Community*

#### *Inclusive leadership*

During her lifetime of work Nieto was as much as a teacher as a researcher. She spoke about the dedication of the majority of teachers who ask for little in return: “Given the arduous demands and few material rewards of teaching, it is clear that those who enter the profession do so with a profound belief in children and in their ability to learn” (Nieto, 1999, p. xx). However, despite their devotedness teachers cannot work alone in building an equitable educational environment for minority students, since teachers are influenced and bounded by policies, curricula, social stratifications, and power hierarchy. Thus at the school level, teachers cannot be made chiefly responsible for the students’ education, which ideally is the outcome of cooperative projects that include all members of a learning community: administrators, other staff members, parents, and community organizations.

Research has repeatedly shown that even though principals are officially designated as decision-makers, shared leadership is the most effective way to attain an inclusive and equitable educational system for every member of the student body. Leadership derived from critical pedagogy is underpinned by such research (Ryan, 2003, 2006). This type of leadership adheres to “collaborative, reciprocal, and horizontal relationships” as working principles for dialoguing and relating to each other in the diverse educational community which the schools serve (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; Ryan, 2006, p. 58; Riehl, 2000; Wrigley, 2000). Riehl explained:

One of the core factors identified as contributing to school effectiveness was strong instructional leadership, enacted through administrators’ high expectations for student achievement, high visibility of the key players in the process of school reform in critical multicultural education,

and frequent visits to classes, high support for staff, and strong goal and task orientations (Riehl, 2000, p. 63).

It is emancipatory because it is not hierarchical, and is not limited to the few individuals who are characterized as possessing certain leadership qualities, but is open to all members who are team players, sharing vision and commitment. Decisions are made inclusively when the empowerment of the teachers, students, other staff members, parents, and community organizations positively influence the progress of the students. Ryan says:

...I see inclusive positions or individuals who perform certain tasks but as a collective process in which everyone is included or fairly represented...a collective process of social influence that is aimed at a particular end (Ryan, 2006, p. 16).

For inclusive leadership to effectively evolve, a safe space for communication has to be created, where members of the educational community are listened to with mutual respect, value, and are equally open to take as much as to give criticism. It is necessary for everyone to agree on the same goal, which is to provide the most equitable learning environment for all students to the best of their ability. It is necessary for all members to have ownership of this goal in order for them to be committed to it.

The inclusiveness of the parents of foreign background, in particular, requires a vigorous effort to make them feel that their presence is welcome, to ensure that they understand what the schools are about, and to ensure that they are understood by the schools. Parents need to have the schools' structures and curricula explained to them and staff members must take the initiative and provide opportunities to welcome them in environments and on occasions where the parents feel secure and confident, such as in their homes and at community events. With the help of the staff's openness and intercultural skills, parents will not feel estranged from the school but will instead come to trust the school, through taking on a role in the shared leadership.

The situation in Icelandic upper secondary schools stands in contrast to the partnered leadership model proposed by these theories. A hierarchical stratification of power is used to organize the upper secondary education system. The highest authority is the Ministry of Education. The second in command is the school board, followed by



the school council, with the head teacher (the principal) serving as the “director of the board,” and the “chair to the council.” The head teacher is given the relatively highest power to fulfill his/her multifaceted responsibilities with regards to the functioning of the school, its personnel, finances, and students (Ministry of Education & Science and Culture, 2008b, pp. 2, 3).

### *School culture of inclusiveness*

The majority students of a nation state possess social capital, one of the three most significant capitals, along with economic and cultural capital. Bourdieu theorizes that social capital is a membership card that grants these youth access to the mainstream social network in an institution such as a school (Bourdieu, 1997). The inclusion of others in an exclusive network is only extended through the perpetuation of recognition and initiation by group members. The addition of a new member into a group is usually resisted because of the fear that the group dynamic will be changed. The group wants to protect its own interests because relations between members are conceived of as an investment. These relations are bound by the internalization of kinship, solidarity, obligation, and loyalty. Through connections within the group, members benefit from each other’s service and prestige. In Bourdieu’s (1997) terms, service and prestige provide material and symbolic profits respectively. Bourdieu defined social capital as “the aggregate of actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition...” (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 51). An individual’s agency is strengthened by the size of his social capital. Immigrant students in Iceland arrive at their new schools already lacking much social capital in comparison to their Icelandic heritage peers, and thus also have a relative lack of agency.

Bernstein’s (2000) analysis acknowledged, how schools, as formal public institutions, systematically discriminate against different groups of students from both majority and minority groups, based on their social class, sex, race or religion, without the students’ awareness (Bøje, 2008). Such discrimination in the school system, according to Bernstein, reinforces differences among students and discrimination in the wider society. When bias is embedded in what is taught and in who benefits the most from education, the school system perpetuates the discrimination found in the broader society. Talented students, whose

cultures are different from the mainstream culture, are underutilized and unable to achieve optimally. Bernstein considers this situation to be dangerous to the culture of democracy. For schools to be able to contribute to strengthening and preserving a democratic society, students and their parents have to have real reasons to believe that they are relevant and important to the institution.

Bernstein describes three “democratic pedagogic rights” that belong to all students: a) “Enhancement”, which operates at the individual level. It is the right “to the means of critical understanding and to new possibilities”. b) “Inclusion”, which operates at the social level. It is the right “to be included socially, intellectually, culturally and personally” as an individual and a member of a group; c) “Participation” which operates at the political level. It is the right “to participate in the construction, maintenance and transformation of order” (Bernstein, 2000, pp. xx-xxi). Unless students are able to exercise these rights, they will not have the confidence to act.

“Inclusion” is a key concept underpinning democratic societies and values, and as such has been encompassed in international policies since the 1990s including the 1990 World Declaration on Education of All, the 1994 Salamanca Statement, and the 2001 United Nations: Convention on the Rights of the Child - Article 29 (1) The Aims of Education.

An inclusive school culture assumes that the majority culture should not be automatically privileged over others, and integrates into the curriculum and practices the cultural knowledge brought to the school by students of diverse backgrounds. All students must be able to value as well as question and problematize their own cultures, and at the same time be able to learn about, welcome, and appreciate the cultures of others. Such inter-cultural understanding does not require the different groups to abandon their own cultures in order to be part of the wider society. May emphasizes that: “... a critical multiculturalism must foster, above all, students who can engage critically with all ethnic and cultural backgrounds, including their own” (May, 1999, p. 33). Similarly, Bernstein posits that if schools are committed to building communication and relationships between diverse individuals they can contribute to students’ “motivation, aspiration and commitment” (Bernstein, 2000, p. xxiv). The failure of educational institutions to form unity among students of different background can lessen the pupils’ school success, or even result in early dropouts through the

discouragement caused by feelings of isolation, exclusion, inferiority, inadequacy, and marginalization (Nieto, 1999).

Banks' dimension on "empowering school culture and *social structure*" addresses the cultivation of a school culture that involves everybody who contributes to the academic success of a school's students, including students of different racial, ethnic, or cultural groups. The agents in bringing this about include teachers, principals, parents, and other school professionals, and all aspects of the school must be involved in this empowering process (Banks, 2004).

By developing Bernstein's three pedagogic rights (enhancement, inclusion and participation), a democratic nation state strengthens its democracy and culture through the productive utilization of all its youth by empowering them, giving them partnership in their education, and allowing them to optimally achieve their potential.

Critical educators see this partnership in the form of reciprocal learning between teachers and students. Teachers are also learners when they reflect on their own worldview and learn about their students. Dialogue between teachers and students is the central tenet of Nieto's critical pedagogy in that dialogues must be opened between students, schools, and teachers. As a result of these dialogues, teachers will adapt their instruction to meet the needs of a diverse set of students, and in turn this "equity pedagogy" will enable the students to successfully acquire essential knowledge and skills in all school subject areas (Nieto, 1996; 2000, p. 10). Furthermore, her approach to school reform is anti-racist and anti-bias, and reflects an understanding that all students have talents and strengths that can enhance their education. Her approach is also based on the notion that those most intimately connected with students need to be meaningfully involved in their education, and is based on high expectations and rigorous standards for all learners. Through a pedagogy that is student-centered, she focuses on the wealth of knowledge and background the students bring with them, as she explained in her own words about critical pedagogy: "Critical pedagogy begins where students are at; it is based on using students' present reality as a foundation for further learning..." (Nieto, 1999, p. 104). Empowerment and justice are the goals in her approach. In critical pedagogy, the role of classroom teaching, as discussed by Nieto (1996, 1999, 2000), is to engage with the realities students bring to the classroom, aiming to develop student consciousness about their agency, needs, and social justice.

Learners who acquire knowledge through the guidance of teachers, whose pedagogical practices are informed by critical epistemology often have opportunities to engage in discussions and debates. Through this process, both teachers and learners have the opportunity to challenge views and thoughts that are rooted in the personal cultural background of each other, therefore exercising their critical thinking (Kincheloe, 2008). Such teaching treats students as partners, goes beyond the subjects covered by disciplines such as math, literature, and geography, and connects students with the larger society and the world (Gay, 2000; Nieto, 2000). Such teaching treats students as co-writers of the curricula in practice in their classrooms, instead of treating them as powerless consumers (Gay, 2000). Nieto (2000) notes that teachers who comprehend the realities of the students' world outside the classroom (the languages they speak, their cultures, their lives) are able to make education relevant and interesting to the students, and this motivates the students to learn. An education built on the realities that students bring with them into the classroom, where there are connections between formal education and student experience, leads to deeper understanding and contributes to the expansion of students' knowledge (Gay, 2000; Dewey, 1998; Freire, 1998; Nieto, 1996, 2000). In the words of Freire (1998), such implementation of critical pedagogy teaches the students reading "of the world and of the word" (Freire, 1998, p. 22).

Freire and other theorists in multicultural education, such as Gay (2000) and Nieto (2000), criticize instructional cultures where the teachers alienate diverse students or cause the breakdown of communication with such students by seeing them through the lens of their (the teachers') own worldview. An educator's worldview is influenced by their personal social background which includes the language they speak and how they express themselves, their social class, culture, religion, and ethnicity with which they identify themselves (Gay, 2000; Nieto, 1999; Freire, 1998; Pai, 1990). Therefore, Nieto's recommendation for teachers, especially the ones who are of the ethnic majority background, is: "In order to develop meaningful relationship with their students, teachers first need to transform their own attitudes and beliefs about the value and worthiness of non-majority-group students" (Nieto, 1999, p. 97). Teachers who fail to care about and to have respect for their students' experiences or interests can be an obstruction to their pupils' progress (Freire, 1998; Gay, 2000; Nieto, 1996, 1999).

However, it needs to be emphasized that this joint project, between teachers and students, does not make caring teachers ineffective or

unprofessional. Rather, the project is carried out rigorously but with love and passion. The love and passion motivates the teachers to approach the practice through praxis and to connect theory with pedagogical strategies. They continuously reflect on realities in order to humanize and temporalize them, to intellectually recreate, reinvent, and develop their practice (Freire, 2009; Gay, 2000; Kincheloe, 2008; Nieto, 1999). Freire's job description for teachers is clear: "The teaching task is above all a professional task that requires constant rigor and the stimulation of epistemological curiosity, of the capacity to love, of creativity, of scientific competence and the rejection of scientific reductionism" (Freire, 1998, p. 4).

### *The culture bridges*

The multicultural schools depicted in many studies have social and academic gaps between groups of students and even groups of teachers (Pham & Saltmarsh, 2013; Nguyen, 2012; Magnúsdóttir, 2010; Nieto, 2000; Olsen, 1997). The question posed by multicultural educational thinkers is not about learning the majority language, and they do not expect schools to adopt all the diverse cultures which the students represent. Rather the question they pose is whether students of minority background must conform to the majority school culture, in other words to be assimilated, in order to have school success and to be socially accepted. Research has shown that assimilation is not necessary for school and social success. It has been shown that schools can achieve more positive academic and social integration outcomes when they dedicate themselves to encouraging students by recognizing and fostering their languages and home cultures (Kincheloe, 2008; Nieto, 1999; Freire, 1998; Gay, 1992, 2000). Teachers who are pedagogical strategists in mediating this process are referred to as 'bridges'. Multicultural bridges, metaphorically, allow people of different backgrounds to come and go, crossing over to communicate and interact. No one is coerced into burning his or her bridge, but remains free to cross back and forth.

May's principle is that in order to bridge the gaps between students' home cultures and school cultures, schools must adopt pedagogies which accommodate cultural and linguistic differences – and society as a whole must go beyond limiting these pedagogies to schools, and incorporate the principles into the mainstream culture, so as to fully

span the gaps between home and school cultures for all students (May, 1999, p. 33).

Teachers as effective bridges need to constantly reflect on their actions and avoid falling into the trap of unconsciously playing the role of oppressor. Freire (2010) believes that teachers carry out the oppressors' discriminatory goals, which are to force students (who the oppressors regard as "outsiders") into conformity and "integrate" them into what the oppressors regard as a cohesive, healthy society (Freire, 2009, p. 74). In fact, it is not an act of "integration" but it is an act of surrendering and "adaptation" on the learners' part (Freire, 2010, p. 4). Freire makes a distinction between "integration" and "adaptation."

Applying Freire's general theory to immigrants, one sees that an immigrant who "integrates" into a target country not only adapts herself to new realities, but more importantly, she is able to reflect and use her critical perception and thinking to make choices which incorporate the different dimensions of her own self, which originate in the different cultures she embodies. She also needs to have the capacity to transform these realities to discover her new balance between cultures in a new space and time. Freire defines this process as "humaniz[ing] reality."

As men relate to the world by responding to the challenges of the environment, they begin to dynamize, to master, and to humanize reality. They add to it something of their own making, by giving temporal meaning to geographic space, by creating culture (Freire, 2010, p. 4).

On the other hand, when the immigrant "adapts" to a new home, she most likely encounters oppression. Freire calls adaptation "a weak form of self-defense" in which out of helplessness towards changes, the immigrant tries to mold herself according to outside expectations in order to be able to "integrate" (Freire, 2010, p. 4).

Parallel to Freire's two concepts of "adaptation" and "integration" are Nieto's (2000) concepts of "subtractive" and "additive" multiculturalism in a school environment. In "subtractive" multicultural surroundings, a student has to choose between academic success and his or her own culture and language. In an "additive" multicultural milieu, a student is encouraged and empowered to use his or her own language and cultural background as a springboard to advance academically, intellectually, and socially (Nieto, 2000, pp. 335-336). Gay (2000) believes teachers have the tendency to treat all their pupils

the same, using the “banking” method of instruction. Furthermore, that out of insecurity towards their students’ backgrounds, teachers view school as an academic setting that is culturally neutral and despite each student’s ability, there is the misconception that everyone needs to acquire the same knowledge and to be molded for mainstream society (Gay, 2000, p. 21).

Teachers learn to be aware of how their own perceptions reflect their own habits and culture, and how these can be barriers to success for their students from different cultures than their own. In Freire’s literature, a teacher who doesn’t acknowledge the abilities and knowledge students bring with them into the classrooms are labeled oppressors. According to Banks et al. (2005), in order for teachers to understand students’ diversity they first need to see themselves as heterogeneous, as they are “greatly influenced by their life experiences and aspects of their cultural, gender, race, ethnicity, and social-class background” (Giroux, 2011, p. 253). Banks believes it is important for a teacher’s education to include situating themselves in culturally diverse communities, and learning a different language. Doing this allows them to ethnographically experience being the “other” and to experience acquiring a new language. This learned reality helps them to reflect on their prior worldview and on being sensitive to their future minority students, as Banks et al. (2005) explained: “Community experiences in and of themselves are not necessarily educative, however, what makes them so, are opportunities for students to reflect on and challenge initial assumptions they carry with them into the field. Undoing prior assumptions is an important part of this process of learning how to teach children who are not one’s own” (Banks et al., 2005, p. 265).

Politically, Nieto considered that teachers as bridge builders need to serve as an institutional agent in support of their culturally diverse students. It is necessary for them to challenge the establishment to recognize more of their pupils’ cultural and academic knowledge that they bring with them into the classrooms. It is also necessary for culturally responsive teaching to be in effect in the school environment, in order to bring more equity in education for students whose culture is not of mainstream culture (Gay, 2000; Nieto, 1999).

### *Culturally responsive teaching*

Culturally responsive teaching was conceptualized as a result of common research findings relating the failure of students' performance in school to the pattern of communication between the students and teachers in cases, where the students' culture and language differed from teachers' mainstream language and culture (Ladson-Billings, 1995). In this dissertation, I use Gay's definition of "culturally responsive teaching": "...using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frame of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them. It teaches to and through the strengths of these students" (Gay, 2000, p. 29). However, the concept has also been expressed by theorist Ladson-Billing (1995) as "culturally relevant pedagogy," or by Irvine (1991) as "cultural synchronization," or by Nieto (2000) as "culture-specific teaching."

In the literature about culturally responsive teaching, Gay and other leading researchers in multicultural education affirm that this pedagogical practice is "validating, comprehensive, multidimensional, transformative, emancipatory, and empowering" (Gay, 2000, pp. 29-42). Culturally responsive teaching encompasses all these characteristics, because the theory that underpins it recognizes and accesses the students' wealth of prior knowledge and experiences, and uses it to create the scaffolding on which they can further develop their social interactions and cognitive knowledge. Culturally responsive teaching bridges the cultures between home and school, flexibly employs multiple teaching methods, and incorporates teaching materials that reflect the reality the learners are living in across all subject areas in their curriculum. It lays the foundation for students to understand themselves and others, thereby bringing about respect and appreciation for each others' ethnicity, heritage, and religion. It values every student and believes in each and every one's ability to learn. It is student-centered, focusing on the development of a whole individual – mentally, physically, socially, and academically (Nieto, 2000; Gay, 2000; Banks, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Children learn and internalize their home languages, the methods of receiving and processing information, and communicating them through the social cultural medium of their ethnic environment. Thus, they come to school with a culturally bounded set of tools and strategies for problem-solving and critical thinking. In addition, youth who have



already spent a number of years in school in their home country also bring to their new host country schools certain defined study habits and learning styles (De Vita, 2001; Gay, 2000; Nieto, 2000). Culturally literate teachers who use students' existing knowledge as a basic principle for teaching would incorporate the students' diverse learning methods into their pedagogical strategies. The congruity between the teaching and learning will then make students more effective and successful learners. On the other hand, teachers who lack understanding about the students' cultures can cause misunderstandings and discrepancies between the students and teachers by not recognizing different learning styles, expectations, or values. Teachers in the power position who fail to recognize the ethnic minority students' ability and proficiency can compromise their self-esteem, disempower them, and render them feeling "alienated, unwelcome and out of place" (Gay, 2000; Nieto, 2000, p. 146).

Establishing congruity between teachers' instruction strategies and students' learning customs, bridging cultures, and affirming dialogue between students and teachers are all pedagogical practices that promote equity in education for all students and immigrant students in particular. An equitable education includes the teacher's high expectations for learning outcomes, and the teacher's assumption that each and every student is equipped to learn. The adoption of these conventions in teaching is not to be understood as accommodating or supplementing student deficiencies when the majority language and culture are not theirs. As a matter of fact, students' multilingualism and multiculturalism are assets and gains, and not disadvantages and deficits (Gay, 2000; Nieto, 2000).

Ethnic minority teachers are in a similar situation to immigrant students in that their wealth of knowledge is untapped. Researchers in the field of multicultural education have recognized that to have culturally responsive teaching with a diverse student body, it is necessary to have a diverse teaching force. The challenge for many schools is that teachers are not as ethnically, religiously, and linguistically diverse as the students. Therefore, they have limited capacity to understand and thus a limited capacity to enhance the learning of learners of minority immigrant backgrounds (OECD, 2010; Ragnarsdóttir, 2010, 2012a; Santoro, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 2001). Immigrant teachers, besides sharing the students' background, language, and/or religion, may also share their experiences, which can be very meaningful to the students. As Nieto elaborates:

Minority teachers [who] are bicultural and at least bilingual, if not multilingual, share the same barriers and experiences of alienation for being “the others” as minority students. Thus, they can reflect upon them to acknowledge this group of students’ strength and challenges to provide them with effective encouragement and support in their pedagogical practice (Nieto, 1999, p. 32).

In addition, researchers have found that the presence of multicultural teachers in schools was necessary, not only because they are a resource for students, but also function as culture bridges for other staff members (Pearce, 2005; Santoro, 2007).

[There is] the need to recruit and retain greater numbers of teachers of difference in schools, the need to acknowledge their potential to make valuable contributions to the education of minority students as well as their potential to act as cross-cultural mentors for their ‘mainstream’ colleagues (Santoro, 2007, p. 81).

It can be concluded that an inclusive and just education system needs to cherish, respect, and empower teachers of minority background. At the same time, the educational system must put thought into what kind of teacher profile is appropriate for teachers in societies that function within a global community.

**Table 1: Nine Principles of Multicultural Education & Critical Pedagogy**

Theorists	Banks	Nieto	May	Freire	Gay
Content integration	X	X	X	X	X
Knowledge construction	X	X	X	X	X
Prejudice reduction	X	X	X	X	X
Empowering school & social culture	X	X	X	X	X
Equity pedagogy	X	X	X	X	X
Dialogue betw. teachers & students	x	X	x	X	X
High expectations	x	X	x	x	x
Bridging home & school	x	X	X	x	x
Benefitting all students	X	X	X	X	X

Table 1 shows nine principles common to multicultural education theories – the large X’s indicate the tenets each theorist regards as especially essential to implementing a successful multicultural educational program. The small x’s indicate the theorists did not go into depth concerning these tenets.

### 3.4 Research Questions

In Chapters 2 and Chapter 3, I have discussed the theoretical, conceptual, and literature background of my dissertation. The critical perspective which reveals the discourse of deficiency allows me to scrutinize the ideological hegemony existing in our school system. These tools enable me first to understand how ethnic minority students might be disadvantaged in the present school system, by allowing me to examine their interpretation of their own experiences. Second, the application of these two traditions allows me to situate the participants in the power structure in society and within the school system. Therefore, I may be able to suggest applicable reform models that might bring more equality and equity to students of immigrant background, in general, and in upper secondary education in particular.

The purpose of this literature was to situate my dissertation within the academic literature, and to structure a methodological framework to guide my research to answer my research questions. The three key questions which are the foundation of this dissertation explore three different levels of discourse: policy discourse, administrator and teacher discourse, and student experience discourse. They are:

- a. What do equality statements presented in legal acts, policy and national curriculum say about educating diverse student bodies at the upper secondary level?
- b. How are equality statements implemented in the two upper secondary schools chosen for this study? How are they related to multiculturalism and thus the immigrant population in regard to pedagogy (teaching approaches and methods) and the learning and social environment?
- c. What are the social and academic experiences of students of Vietnamese background in the two upper secondary schools in the study and how do they reflect policy intention and implementation?

In the following chapter, I discuss the methodology of this study and the research design.

## **4 Methodology – The Analytical Tool**

This chapter discusses the methodology and the methods which I used to collect and analyze the data.

This research is a qualitative study of the discourses of policy documents and of the understanding of those documents by school leadership and the teachers. It is also a qualitative study of the understanding that school leadership and teachers had of their immigrant students, and the school practices that resulted from this understanding. Finally, it is a qualitative study of the experiences the immigrant students had within the upper secondary school system.

Epistemologically, the study is grounded in a social constructivist perspective which seeks to explain how we learn through our own life experiences by continuously interpreting and making sense of the reality of our world, and thus construct our own worldviews (Lichtman, 2006; Bae, 2004; Crotty, 1998;). As I present in chapter 3, the paradigm of this study is underpinned by critical theory with the emphasis on multicultural education, which is the focus of my study. Critical ethnography, on the other hand, is the methodology I use, and is located within the constructivist tradition. The critical stand where I chose to anchor myself as a researcher is compelled by an ethical sense of responsibility and duty. As a critical ethnographer, I seek to uncover the power positionings within the school system that may be the cause for educational inequality between groups. Creswell (2007) identified the work of critical ethnographers as studying “marginalized groups from different classes, races, and genders, with an aim of advocating for the needs of these participants” (Creswell, 2007, p. 241; Madison, 2005; Thomas, 1993). Underpinning critical ethnography with my critical multicultural education perspective, I wish to contribute to a transformative upper secondary educational system that brings about equity, freedom, and well-being across ethnic groups (S. J. Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Equity, freedom, and universal well-being are the basic ingredients of a democratic society.

The ethnography concept itself has the literal meaning of describing (foreign) culture. It is an approach that is more inductive (moving from the specific to the general) than deductive, a method of investigation that involves observation of the participants (Hanley, 2010; Lichtman, 2006; Gretar Marinósson, 1998; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). The line of inquiry that is also commonly known as “interpretive qualitative

enquiry” (i.e. “entering research participants’ world,”) is used as guidance for conducting the study (Charmaz, 2006, p. 19; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Lichtman, 2006). For my study, I intended to gain an insider perspective on the reality that students of Vietnamese background have constructed through their experiences in upper secondary school. Instead of conducting a research merely to understand and at the same time accept the status quo, critical inquiry questions conventional assumptions, practices and values, and exposes the hidden hegemonic discourses in the educational system. I will employ critical ethnography to analyze the data on equity in upper secondary education in Iceland, in the context of ethnic Vietnamese students. The methods I have chosen for an exhaustive investigation of the discourses that are in effect are in-depth interviews, participant observations, and document analysis.

#### **4.1 Methods and Data Generation**

My “triangulation” of the data sources was to provide a deeper and clearer understanding of the participants and their environment as part of their everyday encounter. Triangulation is defined as “the combination of methods or resources of data in a single study” (Taylor & Bogdan, p. 80). The first was triangulation of participants where I conducted in-depth interviews with students, teachers, and principals. In addition I also used three data-gathering methods: In-depth interviews; observations (in classrooms and common areas); and document analysis. The primary methods were interviews and document analysis, while observation method was for the contextual data. This “triangulation” among data sources allowed me to draw a detailed picture of the situation, with each method filling in details that could not be captured by the other methods. This triangulation also allowed me to be confident in my analysis, because I gathered data on the same phenomena in several different ways (Lichtman, 2006; Gretar Marinósson, 1998; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998; Eisner, 1991).

To pursue answers to my three research questions about equity and inclusiveness for students of Vietnamese origin, I used the critical perspectives (the critical road, Section 3.1) and the lenses within the deficiency discourse (the deficiency road, Section 3.2) to investigate conditions at three levels in the educational system: national (Iceland’s

legal and educational policies, and curricula choices); local (the particular schools), and individual students.

At the national level, I reviewed documents such as equality statements presented in legal acts, policy, and curricula to identify where the national discourse was relevant to students of foreign origins, in general and students of Vietnamese origin, in particular. At the school, level I examined how equity that was conceptualized at the national level was interpreted and implemented in practice: in the organization in pedagogy, in principals' leadership, and in teachers' experiences. At the student level, in-depth interviews enabled me to understand how students themselves conceptualized their school experiences and informed my analysis of the system's effectiveness in regard to these students. I analyzed the links between these three levels (national policies, school practices, and student experiences) to determine whether the practices in the schools gave concrete meaning to the concept of "equality" which was promised to the students in the national documents.

## **4.2 Data Collection**

I chose the two upper secondary schools in Iceland where the majority of youth of Vietnamese background in Iceland attended to conduct my fieldwork (Statistics Iceland, 2010). I gave them the pseudonyms of Sjónarhóll Comprehensive School and Mosahraun Comprehensive School. The choices provided for maximum variation purposive sampling that identified the differences and the common characteristics of the programs serving immigrant students. The student participants were youth of Vietnamese origin (both parents are Vietnamese born) between the ages of 16 to 25 years old who had lived in Iceland no more than ten years at the time of the interviews.

### **4.2.1 Interviews**

My primary methods for data gathering were in-depth interviews and observations. However, the predominant data were from the interviews which were supported by the data of participant observations. In the traditions of qualitative inquiry, these two methods are considered to be the most valuable tools for acquiring information: both methods have long been used in the social sciences and are known to be the

“yardstick” for measuring data collected. As Taylor and Bogdan (1998) explain “no other [methods] can provide the depth of understanding that comes from directly observing people and listening to what they have to say at the scene” (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 90). I employed a face-to-face, semi-structured, in-depth interviewing method; hence the participants had the freedom to tell their stories naturally. I prepared an interview guideline for each of the three groups of participants that I used as a reminder of issues I wished to discuss with them (Appendix B) I developed rapport and gained trust with my participants, with the aim of eliciting more details and richer data about their experiences and perspectives (Lichtman, 2006; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 90; McCracken, 1988). Developing rapport with participants was also a way of respecting their human dignity (Charmaz, 2006, p. 19). These interviews gave me the opportunity to witness their own journeys as administrators, teachers, and students in a school system where diversity was no longer a new phenomenon but was now a norm. Using my previous experience working in this environment, I had a set interview guide, outlining key topics in my research, so that even though each interview was free-form and followed an individual’s experience, I was able to shape follow-up questions during the conversation in order to acquire clarifying details, follow up on leads, and obtain further data (Tuckman, 1999; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998).

With the permission of the participants, I used a voice recorder for the interviews. The device was rather small but highly sensitive. It was inconspicuous and housed inside a telephone case to help minimize the participants’ consciousness of its presence. This voice recorder allowed me to capture details in interviews without having to rely on memory, which could have proved difficult in an hour session of pure conversation. In addition, I also used it for recording contextual details about each interview, and my observations of the surroundings and the environment where it took place. I recorded these context-setting notes immediately after I left the participant. Icelandic is my fourth language, and even though I am fluent in speaking and reading the language, I am rather slow in writing. Thus, I made the decision to hire a reliable transcriber for the interview recordings when the interview was in Icelandic. The transcriptions were done very soon after each interview took place. The transcription registered verbatim speech with all key features of the interview (pause, hesitation, intonation, intakes of breath, etc.). Before giving each recorded interview to the transcriber, I listened to it and made notes to capture the spirit and the contextual



details beyond the recorded conversation, while these details were still vivid in my mind (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998; Deutscher, Pestello, & Pestello, 1993). This work with the field notes data also gave me an opportunity to return to the participants for further information or clarification if necessary. After each interview was transcribed, I coded it, made analytical notes, and wrote memos interpreting the data and noting any emerging themes.

### *Administrator Interviews*

I conducted 206 minutes of in-depth interviews with administrators. They were two principals and two part-time coordinators for special programs for students of foreign background. Administrators in schools with students from diverse backgrounds, play a critical role in promoting and providing education that is culturally sensitive to difference, and in maintaining educational equity (Riehl, 2000). Interviews with administrators informed me about their conceptualizations of their role in shaping policy, the worldviews among the staff towards the populations they serve, their implementation plans, and the vision that they had for immigrant youth integration and school success, and the challenges the principals face in their schools.

### *Teacher Interviews*

I recorded 452 minutes of interviews with eight teachers from my two target schools. The teachers were recommended to me by the schools, because they had students of foreign background in their classrooms and had experience teaching them. Their subjects included Icelandic as a Second Language, Life Skills, Foreign Languages, Computer Science. My goal in the in-depth interviews with teachers was to gain a more thorough understanding of their implicit assumptions and their worldviews, in particular how they viewed their ethnic Vietnamese students. I also sought to relate the extent that these notions influence their pedagogy and their expectations for their Vietnamese students. I also acquired information about their experiences and professional qualifications for teaching students from diverse backgrounds, their opinions about the strengths and weaknesses of the Icelandic educational system in this area, and any recommendations they wished to make.

### *Student Interviews*

A total of thirteen students of Vietnamese background, five girls and eight boys, were interviewed. They all arrived in Iceland during their teens. The length of time the participants had been in Iceland at the time of the interviews was two to five years. The schools helped me select students for this study, following the criteria I provided. Originally, I wanted to interview students who had finished no less than three semesters in upper secondary Icelandic schools. However, because the number of students who fit this criterion was too few, I modified my criteria to include students who were completing their second semester. The primary interviews took place during the spring semester of the school year of 2010 – 2011, and the follow-up interviews while I was working on the analysis of the data in 2011 – 2012. During this time, I had several phone conversations with three of the students to clarify some of the information. In addition, I was able to establish rapport with four of the students, whom I met in several informal meetings where they talked more in-depth about their schooling and life in Iceland. The data I had from these participants was very detail rich, but because they were so few Vietnamese students in the Icelandic educational system, the sensitive information they provided me would lead to directly to them. This is my reason for only revealing the necessary information that is most related to my study.

On April 2014, I contacted the schools again for an update on my 13 participants' educational status. It was reported that six had graduated and that seven had not completed their study programs. I was also able to contact five of the seven students, who dropped out, to ask about their current status. A biographical overview of the participants is provided in Table 2.

The in-depth interviews were conducted in Vietnamese, since it allowed the participants to tell, in their own words, in their own language, the story of their journeys between countries, cultures, educational systems, and their day to day school life experiences (Lichtman, 2006). The 710 minutes of data collection with participants, I organized into two categories. The first category includes the students' biographies, information about their parents' support for and level of involvement in their education, the students' social and educational backgrounds, and their short term objectives and their long term goals. The second category includes their social and educational experiences in their current school, and whether their short term objectives had been

met, and would help them successfully complete their upper secondary education.

#### 4.2.2 *Observations*

While conducting observations during my fieldwork, I tried to absorb as much first-hand data as possible about how the ethnic Vietnamese students managed their day-to-day-school lives, without relying on reporting directly to me. Wolcott describes this type of observation this way: “Experiencing includes, of course, information that comes directly through all the senses...observational research plays out almost entirely in what we *see* and what we *hear*” (Wolcott, 1999, p. 46). Therefore, as a neophyte researcher, I followed Wolcott’s advice and did my best to record descriptive field notes from the classrooms and other common spaces inside the school premises.

With the permission of the teachers and the principals, I spent 475 minutes as a nonparticipant ethnographic observer in classrooms and in other areas of the school buildings during different times of the school day, such as class time, activities for special school events, breaks, and free time. While such observation sessions were not extensive in my research, they did provide me with general impressions about the school life environment and context for the interviews for probing my participants.

The classes I chose to observe included students of Vietnamese background and usually had a diverse student body beyond the Vietnamese students. The classes included subjects such as Business and Marketing, Icelandic as Second Language, English, and math. As requested by the teachers, I introduced myself at the beginning of the class and briefly explained my presence to the students. I situated myself where I was not too conspicuous but had a good view of all participants. During non-class time, I stationed myself in the cafeteria, the hallways and other common areas. I often moved between places to have an overview of the kind of spaces students of Vietnamese background occupied. To avoid drawing attention to myself, handwritten notes were my primary method of recording the observations, especially in classrooms. I recorded details about what was going on in these settings: such activities, discussions, conversations, body language, or tones of voice. I also had a voice recorder on hand to record

my thoughts immediately after class, and also during my observations of common spaces in the school.

My purpose in gathering data through observation was to visualise individual stories by being able to place them in the context of the school environment. I wanted to witness the behaviors of the ethnic Vietnamese youth, and their interactions with other students, teachers, and principals. It was my aim to follow my individual interview participants during these sessions, both in classes covering different subject areas and during non-class times on school premises (i.e., the common area, the cafeteria, the hallway). I recorded particulars about the students with whom they communicated and associated, the areas where they gathered, the areas which they occupied in the classrooms, and the activities in which they participated.

Also, I wanted to have a personal cognizance of the formal teacher-student dialogue during instruction and informal interaction in other settings. I recorded the contexts, the topics, the manners, the initiations, and the frequencies of these dialogues. While my plan was to observe and record as much information as possible, I avoided being overwhelmed by the myriad of activities that simultaneously occurred in the observed settings by using a checklist of key events in which I was particularly interested (Appendix B)

These observations helped me piece together a more complete image of each of my participants, built on the information that I gathered from the verbal discourse (interviews) and visual discourse (observations). In other words, these observation sessions gave me opportunities to support the information I received from the interviews. They also allowed me to observe events that I could ask about later in the interviews.

#### *4.2.3 Reviewing Policy Documents*

As an approach to reviewing documents to gain insight into how equality statements were presented in legal acts, policy, and national curriculum and how diversity or multicultural issues were addressed, I drew on the principle of critical discourse analysis (McGregor, 2003; Fairclough, 1989). I also examined eight school-based policy and mission on school websites. The purpose of the document analysis was to uncover the mainstream ideology on equity, as presented in the

relevant texts of the official documents, and to determine whether they were inclusive in regard to youth of diverse backgrounds.

#### 4.2.4 *Keeping a Journal*

I kept a journal that accompanied me at all times where I recorded my reflections on readings, interviews, and fieldwork observations as they come to mind. I bracketed my thoughts and ideas about my personal experience as a teenage refugee in the United States and as a young adult immigrant to Iceland, both of which form a key part of my motivation to do this research. I explicitly identified these reflections on my own experience in order to avoid projecting my conceptualizations about my own experience onto those of the ethnic Vietnamese youths with whom I was in close contact. Finally, in this diary I expressed my personal thoughts and feelings during my journey as a doctoral student.

#### 4.2.5 *Strengths and Weaknesses of Methods of Gathering Data*

The main limitation of this study is using the method of interviews predominantly within the qualitative framework. Participant observation was used as a method for collecting data, but it was limited because of the scope of the study. Although to some extent I was able to use some of the data I collected through participant observation to support the data in from interviews, there was important data I did not use to avoid revealing the schools' identity. On the other hand, follow-up interviews yielded richer data (Creswell, 2007). Taking notes during participant observation sessions, instead of using electronic devices, e.g., picture taking or video taping, was also a non-invasive method. The down side of this method, however, was I could not review recorded data to capture information I could have missed during the observation (Lichtman, 2006).

The student participants in this study were originally from Vietnam. However, most of the time the conversations about immigrant students, in general, were in the interviews with the principals and the teachers. Thus, the limitation was there is not a clear picture of their perception about the study's demarcated group. On the other hand, this limitation was also a strength of the study, since it gave possible

evidence that in the mind of the professionals small groups of immigrants were all in one large group – immigrants.

### **4.3 Data Analysis**

My data analysis is organized according to the three issues raised by my research questions. These are: questions about equality statements in the context of students from diverse backgrounds; policies of inclusiveness; and how these statements and policies translate into the design of effective educational programs.

The first area of analysis involves documents, such as articles of the constitution and the laws, regulations and curriculum. The second area involves analysis of the principals' and the teachers' perceptions of their jobs as administrators and teachers in schools attended by a population of Vietnamese and students of many other ethnicities, and the challenges the teachers and administrators face. The third, and most important, area is the analysis of the participant students' worldview, and their integration into the classrooms and in school premises. This third area includes the analysis of my observations in the school environment where the participants carry out their day to day activities of teaching, administering, learning and integrating.

These analyses will show how policies and curriculum at the national level are interpreted and implemented by the school administrators and teachers at the local level.

Before I began my analysis, I familiarized myself with the field data. The very first step was to gather and organize all the data together in one complete set: the official documents such as the equality statements; the national and school curricula; the transcripts of the interviews; and the notes from non-participant observation sessions. I then, for the first time, read this "complete corpus" (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. 142). All the while I kept notes of my thoughts and ideas, of patterns that I recognized, as I took in the text and reflected on my time in the field encountering my participants, talking to them, observing them as they went about their activities, and my thoughts as I read through the documents about equality in education. I then read and reread this "complete corpus" until I was comfortable with many of the details that were the foundation of the story that I was about to tell about Upper Secondary Education in Iceland's Multicultural Society (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998; Emerson, et al., 1995).

After the overall reading was done, I divided the data into three parts for analysis: the documents, the interviews, and the observation notes.

#### 4.3.1 *Policy Documents Research Method of Analysis*

I drew on the principle of critical discourse analysis (CDA), although I cannot claim to have conducted CDA of policy documents. My analysis has drawn on key principles of this method. The analysis of the policy documents incorporated two steps. First, I reviewed a body of documents to choose policies that were most related to my research questions and most relevant to specific issues concerned with the immigrant students. Second, I applied discourse analysis using the critical road (Section 3.1) and the deficiency road (Section 3.2) that I defined as my roadmaps.

I used critical discourse analysis (CDA) as an approach to deconstruct the policy documents. My choice of this methodology was based on the assumption of the existence of systematic asymmetries of power between Icelandic-heritage policy makers and the ethnic minority immigrants in my study. I examined how the text was framed to present the majority perspective, and how vocabulary and grammar were used to influence readers' values and thinking. I read the raw data word by word, phrase by phrase, and sentence by sentence to diagnose the way language was manipulated so that I could extract the hidden messages and make them explicit. I then applied qualitative research method to inductively develop themes from this rich but complex raw data.

CDA is an approach for studying power relations in social practices that are embedded implicitly in the language used in written and spoken texts. People do not generally perceive power structures consciously but rather understand them as "common-sense" and take them for granted (Fairclough, 1989, p. 2). This method of discourse analysis has the aim of exposing the messages of power and inequality hidden within word choices, the construction of sentences, and the manipulation of language (McGregor, 2003; Fairclough, 1989). McGregor (2003) explains: "Discourse and language can be used to make unbalanced power relations and portrayals of social groups appear to be commonsense, normal, and natural when in fact the reality is prejudice, injustice, and inequities" (Fairclough, 1989; McGregor, 2003, p. 3). The words that we use to express ourselves orally or in written text in

each context are always biased by how we see ourselves and our own social, political and historical background (McGregor, 2003). Language conveys different discourses and purposes depending on whether the goal is to exercise power, set guidelines or regulations, expand knowledge or negotiate relationships. Discourse is constructed to fit context. McGregor described this method of analysis as “concerned with studying and analyzing written texts and spoken words to reveal the discursive sources of power, dominance, inequality, and bias...” (McGregor, 2003, p. 2; van Dijk, 1988). As Haberman (2000) says, “...language is not an innocent reflection of how we think. The terms we use control our perceptions, shape our understanding...” (p. 203). Discourse analysis was my analytic tool for discovering the intentions of the governing body at the time the official documents were written, and for determining how they were relevant to the immigrant student population.

#### 4.3.2 *Qualitative Research Method of Analysis*

A qualitative research approach is defined as “a way of knowing that assumes that the researcher gathers, organizes, and interprets information (usually in words or in pictures) with his or her own eyes and ears as filters” (Litchman, 2006, p. 22). Qualitative research, as well as being my method of unfolding the implicit language of empowerment embedded in the documents, was also my tool for analyzing the data I collected from participants’ in-depth interviews and observations.

I read the raw data line by line, labeling with codes each of the thoughts and ideas that were expressed by the participants. However, because the text of fieldwork observations was in my own words, I analyzed the data incident to incident rather than word by word. I wrote the codes in the margins of the body of the text. Predefined codes were used and reused in all the data gathered by different methods: i.e, the codes used in a transcript of an interview with a student were also used for other transcripts or written documents. These codes were then grouped together into categories and themes (Appendix C).

During the process of coding, I wrote memos to myself to elaborate on ideas and insights, comparing and contrasting, and explaining how different codes related to each other. I kept track of ideas and issues that



came to mind as I proceeded. I recorded how my data evoked and could be explained by critical multicultural education theories.

Through the process of coding and memo writing, themes were developed. I used MindManager to relate the codes and the categories with each other for development into themes (Appendix C). The next step was choosing core themes. These emerged by assessing which themes were generated by the largest and strongest amount of data, and also which were said by the participants themselves to be important, and finally by which were directly applicable to my research questions (Appendix B).

My intention in this dissertation is to tell a story about educational equality and social justice as expressed in laws, policies and curriculum, and in practice as explained by school staff and students of Vietnamese origin. Even though I am the interpreter of my participants' experiences and knowledge, which evoked theories of my own life experience, it is my participants' own realities which drive the plot of this story. Only when I had documented their realities, was I able to confirm or reject or adjust my assumptions and form a cohesive story.

#### **4.4 Ethical Issues**

Being ethical in one's research, according to Tracy (2010), is where sincerity plays an important role. She explains: "Sincerity means that the research is marked by honesty and transparency about the researcher's bias, goals, and foibles as well as about how these played a role in the methods, joys, and mistakes of the research" (Tracy, 2010, p. 3). To be honest in qualitative research includes the practice of self-reflexivity, which means self-awareness of how biases stemming from the researcher's own experience and worldviews influence her way of understanding and interpreting that thus shape the study (Lichtman, 2006). Personally, I understand that transparency is also an important element of honesty in the process of doing research. In addition to these two elements that Tracy (2010) listed as crucial for honest research, there are also other elements that are required in qualitative research: informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity, privacy and confidentiality, and credibility/ trustworthiness.

### *Self-reflexivity*

I believe that self-reflexivity is particularly important in my study because, as I explained in the introductory chapter of this dissertation, this research stems from my professional and personal life. Through my social and political lenses, I shaped my research interest and developed my research questions on which I based my theoretical framework, research designs, and methodology. This is why I had to be critical in reflecting on the kind of knowledge I constructed and produced, as well as how it was generated. Banks explained that: “the biographical journeys of researchers greatly influence their values, their research questions, and the knowledge they construct” (Banks, 1998b).

I entered the fieldwork with a set of values from multiple identities. I am a middle aged female researcher, I am an immigrant of Vietnamese origin, and for more than two thirds of my life I have lived in the western world and for most of that time I have been a teacher in Iceland. As a researcher and an educator of Vietnamese origin, I have conducted this study with participants who were teachers, administrators and students. I had the same origin as the students, giving me some access both as an insider and an outsider. The participants, who identified me as an insider, seemed to express themselves openly about their experiences and feelings, perhaps because they trusted me and felt that I understood their lived social realities. In this way, I benefitted from being able to collect rich and thick data (Couture, Zaidi, & Maticka-Tyndale, 2012). Hamnett et al. (1985) maintained that an insider “can provide insights, inner meanings, and subjectivity dimensions that are likely to be overlooked by outsiders” (as cited in Couture et al., 2012, p. 90; Hamdan, 2009). There are dangers though in being an insider in that I could have over-interpreted the data because of the assumption of having shared the similarity with the participants and therefore understanding it without further analysis or clarification. Another danger is that the insider can be too subjective to be critical, a notion that Hirshman (1998) asserted: “It is often difficult to gain critical purchase on a context from within the context itself; one must be often outside it at the same time that one is ‘inside’ it” (p. 362). As a result, being a researcher who was considered to be an insider, I needed to be actively conscious and disciplined about being self-reflexive during the process of conducting the research and particularly while collecting and analyzing the data. Being perceived as an insider, on the other hand, did not exclude me from also being perceived as an outsider. For many of

the participant, I was an outsider because I was a researcher. I was an outsider to the students because I was a teacher, and I was an outsider to the teachers and administrators of Icelandic heritage because I was an immigrant.

The discussion about the insider-outsider binary has another dimension. During the communication process, Mullings (1999) argued there was no such clear binary division. When the interviews took place, any shift in identities depended on how I was being perceived by the participants. In other words, the way in which the participants interacted with me, or were open or not with me, was contingent on what role they assigned to me and how they identified me (Couture et al., 2012). My identities were constantly renegotiated in different situations within the many dialogues we shared with each other. Mullings (1999) observed:

The insider/outsider binary in reality is a boundary that is not only highly unstable but also one that ignores the dynamism of positionalities in time and through space. No individual can consistently remain an insider and few ever remain complete outsiders (p. 340)

As a result, my interaction with the participants influences every stage of this research. As a researcher I had to vigilantly practice reflexivity and be constantly alert about the different biases that could affect the quality and validity of the ongoing inquiry. According to Harding's (1991), an exhaustive self-reflexive practice requires:

...the objects of inquiry be conceptualized as gazing back in all their cultural particularity and that the researcher, through theory and methods, stands behind them, gazing back at his own socially situated research project in all its cultural particularity and its relationships to other projects of his culture (p. 163).

### *Transparency*

Transparency refers to clear detailed explanations of how the qualitative research is conducted. I documented and explained every step in the study. My journal was my method of keeping track of the research decisions that I made, field notes and interview notes that I wrote, interviews and field-observation that I conducted, and how the study transformed through the different stages of the research or because of

unexpected incidents. All the resources that contributed to the existence of my research were acknowledged and honored (Tracy, 2010).

### *Informed Consent and Avoiding Deception*

The very first step I took to formalize my research was to notify the Data Protection Authority of my research. I did not need to acquire permission because I would not be collecting any official personal data (i.e., medical records) about the participants.

To get access to the schools, I met with the school principals and discussed my research. I then followed up with a letter formally explaining the purpose of my research and asking for formal permission for access to their schools for the purposes of my research. My letters explained the aims of my research, identified the participants, outlined my research methods, and gave the time frame within which I would conduct my research.

I used the same approach with the teachers and the students when asking for interviews. I first met with them informally and talked to them about the aims of my research and what their role was, and informally received their consent before presenting them with a letter seeking their formal consent.

At the interviews, as was required by the Data Protection Authority, I informed the participants that their involvement with the research was voluntary and they had the full right to terminate it at any time, before I presented them with the consent form to be signed (Appendix D). Special permission from the parents was acquired before students under 18 were interviewed. The consent form for students of Vietnamese background and their parents was in Vietnamese (Appendix D).

My purpose in meeting informally with the participants before the study started was to build a rapport with them in advance. This rapport was especially important with the Vietnamese students, as I believed that this kind of participation in research was very unfamiliar to them. I also wished to give them the chance to call and talk to me to put them at ease before the actual work started.

During the interviews with individual staff members of the School of Education I informed them of my research and my conversations with them would be part of my data collection.

### *Privacy and Confidentiality*

I considered the task of maintaining confidentiality and privacy to be very difficult, because Iceland is a very small society and my participants and the schools that I used for the study had to fit particular criteria. I had to seriously weigh the importance and necessity of each piece of information about my participants (such as ages, origins, subjects they studied or taught) and the schools before using it in this dissertation, so as to avoid revealing their identities. There were pieces of data about the schools and the participants that I decided not to include, even though they were valuable to my findings because using them would have been too revealing. Pseudonyms were assigned to all the participants. In the greater Reykjavík area, there are only 11 upper secondary schools and each of them has special features by which it can be easily identified (Þorkelsson, 2011). For this reason, I tried not to give any specific descriptions of the two schools in my study. I also did not connect the administrators and the teachers, particularly teachers of immigrant background, with the schools with which they were affiliated since the identification with the schools would make them vulnerable to identification. To protect the student participants, I carefully avoided including details about them and their family members. For instance, I did not indicate which school an individual attended, I did not make their ages and the years they arrived in Iceland explicit, nor did I indicate in which part of Viet-Nam they lived before they emigrated to Iceland. The participants and I discussed mainly their general courses, i.e., Icelandic, math and English, and we did not discuss courses that were related to the students' specializations which again could pinpoint their identity.

### *Credibility*

Credibility is about the trustworthiness of the research findings. In qualitative research, it is accomplished by providing readers with thick description and triangulation of the data. To supply the readers with thick description means to provide them with the details they can expand on and draw their own conclusions from (Tracy, 2010). As Gonzalez (2000) expresses about doing qualitative research “things get bigger, not smaller and tighter, as we understand them” (p. 629). In this study, I have been able to extract meanings from the interviews at the explicit level of the conversation and the implicit level since I am fluent in both languages, Icelandic and Vietnamese, and have knowledge of

both cultures. Although English was the primary language I used for analyzing the policy documents, I always referred back to the Icelandic texts when the English text appeared to be vague or unclear.

For triangulating the data, I interviewed the administrators, the teachers, and the students, and also conducted observations. Furthermore, I contacted the participants for clarification after the interviews had been transcribed and the field notes were written. Last but not least, my research issues of understanding how equality was conceptualized and played out in upper secondary education were explored, understood, and broadened in scope with multiple methods of analysis and theoretical frames (Tracy, 2010).

### *Limitations*

This study is one of the very few that have been conducted in upper secondary schools in Iceland. One limitation of this study is the small number of schools attended by ethnic Vietnamese students. How the concept of equality in education is transferred into inclusive curriculum, teaching materials, pedagogy, etc., has not yet been studied. In addition, the question of how multiculturalism is understood in upper secondary education in relation to the multicultural education discipline needs to be examined.

## **4.5 Overview of the Study**

My three research questions are framed to scrutinize the concept of equality using the lens of multiculturalism in legal acts, policy and national curriculum, as well as their re-contextualization in the two schools I studied, and their effects on the education of diverse student bodies. I hope my study will contribute to the knowledge about students of immigrant background and their educational experiences at the upper secondary education, and therefore further reform the educational system. The findings from the data collected could influence changes in policy, curricula, pedagogy practice, and better understanding of immigrant youth's position, wealth, background, and abilities. While equal access to education is important, without equity, equal access is of little avail. The goal should be that graduation from upper secondary schools is the norm for all for students of foreign background, not only for students perceived to be the cream of the crop.

In the next three chapters I will map out my findings on the three levels of discourses: the policy discourse, the administrative and teacher discourse, and the student of ethnic minority background discourse.

## 5 Rhetoric of Equality

At the policy discourse level, the findings are four-fold. First, is the elimination process to identify the documents that were relevant to the education of students of foreign origin. Second, is the discussion and the analysis of the Act, the Regulations, and the curriculum for upper secondary schools. Third, is the outcomes of the study of the implementation of the policy at eight upper secondary schools. Fourth, is the influences of the policy documents on the teacher education programs that are relevant to teaching immigrant students.

In the policy documents, the concept of multicultural education, explained in Section, 3.3 is absent. The rhetoric gives priority to the teaching of the Icelandic language which is perceived to be the deficiency of immigrant students. The deficiency discourse stands in contrast with the objective stated in Article 2 of the 2008 Act (Ministry of Education & Science and Culture, 2008b, p. 1).

### 5.1 Policy Documents and Effects of Rhetoric

#### 5.1.1 *Policy Documents Relevant to Immigrant Students*

The Republic of Iceland is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which affirms the right to education for all children, and to equal access to education:

Education is one of the major cornerstones of democracy, culture and general prosperity. All persons have the right to education, as stated in the Constitution of the Republic of Iceland and the United Nations Human Rights Convention, to which Iceland is party (Ministry of Education & Science and Culture, 2004, p. 5).

These basic rights are reiterated throughout Iceland's own educational acts and curricula.

The educational acts and curricula adopted in Iceland have been influenced by global trends and by internal changes in demographics, politics, and economics. Therefore it is necessary to scrutinize what these rights encompass in the Icelandic context. In addition, issues of equity in education arise in a society where the student body is diverse.



Given the demographic realities I discussed in my introductory chapter, Iceland can now be characterized as having a multicultural student population. A concrete example in education is the increase of the number of 16 year old students whose both parents are of foreign origins, who participated in PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) in 2012. They were 19 in 2000, and 12 years later they were 86, with 131 different languages spoken at home (Almar M. Halldórsson et al., 2012). Thus, the rights to education and to access to education must be analyzed in relation to the relative success of students from all backgrounds as they proceed through the system. An equitable school system demands that schools reorganize pedagogically, socially, and philosophically to meet the challenges in educating all students.

The Ministry of Education is responsible for the national curriculum, policy and individual school curricula, in compliance with the *Upper Secondary School Act, No.80/1996 and No.92/2008*. Article 3 of the Act states:

The Minister of Education, Science and Culture governs the affairs covered by this Act, and is ultimately responsible for the following:

- a. General policy making regarding upper secondary school matters
- b. National Curriculum Guide and validation of school curriculum guide and study programme descriptions (Ministry of Education & Science and Culture, 2008b, p. 1)

The Icelandic National Curriculum Guide – National Section, 2004 guaranteed this basic right for all students:

Schools should take care to ensure that students are awarded equal study opportunities and should offer suitable study programmes and methods of teaching (Ministry of Education & Science and Culture, 2004, p. 6) .

In 1996 the Icelandic government first addressed issues related to the rapid increase in the number of students with foreign mother tongues. From the beginning, with the passage of the *Upper Secondary School Act 80/1996*<sup>6</sup>, the government's primary solution was to stipulate the

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<sup>6</sup> My translation of the Iceland document title *Lög um framhaldsskóla nr. 80/1996*

teaching of Icelandic as a second language (íslenska sem annað tungumál, ÍSA)

Since 1996, there has been an increasing number of efforts to address student diversity through the development of laws and guidelines. However, while these laws and guidelines made some attempts to take into consideration the wealth these students brought with them into the classrooms, overall these laws and regulations were framed within the context of teaching Icelandic. Despite changes in the government's political ideologies since 1996 to the present (from center-right to left wing and back again), the end goal of the policies relating to non-native Icelandic speaking students remains assimilative: i.e, the expectation is that minority students will be molded into the existing educational system. Article 20 of the *Upper Secondary School Act 80/1996* declared that students who had a mother tongue other than Icelandic, hearing impaired students, and students of Icelandic background who did not have a good command of Icelandic had the right to the "specific teaching of Icelandic" (Mennta- og menningarmálaráðuneytið, 1996). This Act was followed by the *Regulation for Specific Icelandic in Upper Secondary Schools 329/1997*<sup>7</sup>.

The Act 80/1996 resulted in the publishing of a new *National Curriculum Guide for Upper Secondary Education* in 1999. The guide, which took effect in June 1999, included a *General Section* that laid the foundation for the implementation of the curriculum, the six core study programs and series of subjects taught at the upper secondary level. The publication defined its role thus:

The National Curriculum Guide introduces the main objectives of upper secondary schools and the specific objectives of individual study programs, subjects, course units and graduation (Ministry of Education & Science and Culture, 2004, p. 5)

The Icelandic language was one of the listed subjects in which the curriculum content included a series of courses of ÍSA. The goal of this curriculum was to enrich young people's knowledge of the Icelandic language in order to give them an equal chance to pursue their studies (Mennta- og menningarmálaráðuneytið, 1999). In 2004, the general section of this guide was amended for the clarification of some of the

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<sup>7</sup> My translation of the Icelandic document title *Reglugerð um sértaka íslensku í framhaldsskólum 329/1997*

text (criteria for evaluation and organization of subject areas) but without any shift in policy (Ministry of Education & Science and Culture, 2004). Thus, the curriculum concerning the teaching of ÍSA remained unchanged.

In January 2007, the first *Government Policy on the Integration of Immigrants* was published to address the changes in the composition of the Icelandic population. The document expressed the need for a comprehensive policy that included health, welfare, and education:

...it is not enough to value immigrant contributions to society in the labour market alone. Immigrants generally bring their families with them to Iceland with the intention of settling here for longer or shorter periods.

Society as a whole needs to be able to react to new and altered circumstances in the labour market and in the school system (Ministry of Social Affairs, 2007, p. 2).

As part of this new comprehensive policy a new curriculum for teaching ÍSA at upper secondary level was stated as one of the means:

Issue: in 2007, the main curriculum for secondary schools  
– Icelandic as a second language (Ministry of Social Affairs, 2007, p. 13).

The plan for the new curriculum was preceded by the *Upper Secondary Schools Act 92/2008*, which replaced the *Act 80/1996* in August 2008. This law reiterates that all pupils 16 years and older are to have the opportunity to receive an upper secondary education and that the schools are to take into account each individual's ability. Article 2 states:

The objective of the upper secondary school is to encourage the overall development of all pupils and encourage their active participation in democratic society by offering studies suitable to the needs of each pupil (Ministry of Education & Science and Culture, 2008b, p. 1).

In addition, this Act requires that the schools make plans to receive these students, resulting in the *Regulations on the Right of Students in Upper Secondary School to be Taught the Icelandic Language*, number

654/2009<sup>8</sup>. Even though the primary goal of the regulations stayed the same (ie, proficiency in Icelandic so as to enable study at the upper secondary level and to foster active citizenship), these regulations also function as a roadmap for integrating immigrant students in upper secondary schools. Along with reemphasizing some general concepts, the 2004 curriculum also takes a more holistic approach to integration. The regulations direct the schools to extend their cooperation with minority communities, schools, and parents, and to assist the youth in forming social connections with their Icelandic-heritage-speaking peers. A new *National Curriculum Guide for Upper Secondary Education – General Section* was published in 2011 but will not be in effect until 2015 (Katrín Jakobsdóttir, 2011). As a result, the *National Curriculum Guide for Upper Secondary Education – General Section, 2004*, and the *National Curriculum Guide for Upper Secondary Education – Icelandic, 1999*<sup>9</sup> are still in effect.

Therefore, the five policy documents listed below are the laws and regulations that form the basis for teaching and integrating students of immigrant background in upper secondary schools. These are the documents that I will scrutinize in order to have a thorough understanding of their philosophy, goals, and strategies.

*National Curriculum Guide for Upper Secondary Education – Icelandic, 1999* (in Icelandic)

*National Curriculum Guide for Upper Secondary Education – General Section, 2004* (in Icelandic and official English translation)

*The Government Policy on the Integration of Immigrants, 2007* (in Icelandic and official English translation)

*Upper Secondary Schools Act 92/2008* (in Icelandic and official English translation)

*Regulations on the Right of Students in Upper Secondary School to be Taught the Icelandic Language, number 654/2009* (in Icelandic)

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<sup>8</sup> My translation of the Icelandic document *Reglugerð um rétt nemenda í framhaldsskólum til kennslu í íslensku, 654/2009*

<sup>9</sup> My translation of the Icelandic document title *Aðalnámskrá Framhaldsskóla – Íslenska, 1999*

### 5.1.2 *Clarifying the Goal of Icelandic Language Teaching*

The above laws and curricula have five defined general goals for all students: to use a holistic approach in developing the students' abilities to be active citizens in a democratic society, to respect others, to apply critical thinking, to continue their education, and to participate in the job market. These goals were best stated in the National Curriculum Guide for Upper Secondary Education – General Section, 2004:

...the role of upper secondary schools is to:

Encourage the overall development of students in order to prepare them as well as possible for active participation in a democratic society.

Prepare students for employment and further study.

(Ministry of Education & Science and Culture, 2004, p. 6)

Particularly for students of immigrant background, the policy documents adamantly specify their right to receive instruction in Icelandic as a second language. Underlying the focus on this right is the belief that Icelandic is the key to equal access to and equity in upper secondary education, as well as the key to active participation in Icelandic society (Mennta- og menningarmálaráðuneytið, 1999, 2009), a “multicultural society” (Ministry of Social Affairs, 2007, p. 4). *Regulations on Right of Students in Upper Secondary School to be Taught the Icelandic Language*, the *Government Policy on the Integration of Immigrants*, 2007 and the *Upper Secondary School Act 92/2008* also suggest that the schools could provide students with opportunities to enrich their mother tongue. While a school was not responsible for providing such enrichment, it could facilitate the process by being a liaison:

An upper secondary school can offer such study [mother tongue courses] on-site or by distance learning or by giving credit for study elsewhere. The upper secondary school would need to approve such study if credits were requested. An upper secondary school is not responsible to provide such instruction but it can be a contact, i.e., data collection, libraries, social organizations, or others which provide instruction in the students' own mother tongue (Mennta- og menningarmálaráðuneytið, 2009, p. 2).

Reference to Iceland as a “multicultural society” appears in these documents only in the *Government Policy on the Integration of Immigrants* (Ministry of Social Affairs, 2007, p. 4). The use of the term by the Ministry of Social Affairs indicates official recognition that the country is no longer a mono-cultural society. Accordingly, all pupils are to be educated to function effectively in such a society. However, after an examination of the discourse in these documents, I question the ideology that is embedded behind the pedagogic practices. The curriculum for teaching students of foreign background Icelandic as a second language promotes something that is not “multicultural” as stated in *The Government Policy on the Integration of Immigrants*, 2007.

First, the eight-course program of Icelandic as a second language (ÍSA) starts with the students learning vocabulary, grammar, and culture in order to express themselves orally, in reading, and in writing (ÍSA 104 and ÍSA 212 courses for advanced level, ÍSA 102 and ÍSA 202 for lower level) (Mennta- og menningarmálaráðuneytið, 1999, pp. 59-63). Then, to deepen their understanding of the country’s literature and cultural history, the students read Nordic mythology and Icelandic literature of the 20th century in ÍSA 403 and ÍSA 503 courses (ibid pp. 68 – 70). In addition to the basic goal of teaching students of immigrant background the Icelandic language, the goal is to give them linguistic and cultural perspectives, ÍSA 403:

The objective of the course is to give students who have different mother tongues [other than Icelandic] a linguistic and cultural framework for understanding the cultural establishment and national identity that are often present in learning materials and pedagogical practices. (Mennta- og menningarmálaráðuneytið, 1999, p. 68)

The stated goals of the ÍSA program suggest that in addition to learning the language and its history, the aim is to allow such students to access an existing pedagogy and teaching materials that are rooted in the Icelandic worldview. In other words, the monocultural assumptions underlying this policy rhetoric assume that “successful outcomes” for immigrant students lie in adapting themselves to the “the cultural establishment and national identity”. I wish to argue that such assumptions contradict the goal of enabling all students to function in a “multicultural society”, and that such assumptions have negative effects on all students. Therefore, the possibility is an upper secondary

education carried out in this environment cannot fulfill its goal to “*Encourage the overall development of students*” (Ministry of Education & Science and Culture, 2004, p. 6). Second, Article 35 states:

The language of instruction in upper secondary schools shall be Icelandic (Ministry of Education & Science and Culture, 2008b, p. 13)

This is a special article specifically addressing the situation of students for whom Icelandic is a second language. If by law Icelandic is the instructional language, then a question is whether this law frees disengaged principals from having to actively help students of foreign background achieve successful academic outcomes. Rather than ensuring student comprehension of subjects, the law was concerned about Icelandic is used for the instructional purpose. While immigrant pupils enter upper secondary schools with a wealth of knowledge that could be drawn on to equip them for their overall education, the policy discourse assumes that the route to achieving positive outcomes in the school system is to instill these youth with everything that starts with the adjective “Icelandic”. The “Role, objectives and working methods of upper secondary schools” of the 2004 curriculum articulates this:

Schools should make an effort to meet the needs of students of foreign origin through the active teaching of Icelandic, by educating them about Icelandic society and culture, and by providing other types of assistance, insofar as possible (Ministry of Education & Science and Culture, 2004, p. 7)

While they should be taught about Icelandic culture, society and language, there is no mention of how their existing cultural, religious and educational backgrounds can be integrated to work to their advantage. Even where the law explicitly states the right of these students to learn Icelandic as a second language, the concomitant need to enriching their mother tongue, their first language, is not a priority (Grant & Sleeter, 2007). It is an “optional subject” (Ministry of Education & Science and Culture, 2008b, p. 13) and “[an] upper secondary school is not responsible for providing such instruction” (Mennta- og menningarmálaráðuneytið, 2009, p. 2). The discourse of the law implies that the initiative and responsibility for advancing in their mother tongues lies with the students and not with the educational system or the schools:

Pupils who do not have Icelandic as their native language have the right for instruction in Icelandic as second language...The objective is to provide pupils, whose native language is not Icelandic, with the opportunity to maintain their native language as an optional subject, through distance learning or otherwise (Ministry of Education & Science and Culture, 2008b, p. 13)

On the other hand, *the Government Policy on the Integration of Immigrants, 2007* explicitly has the goal of equipping pupils of immigrant background to function in a “multicultural society.”

School curricula shall be based on preparing students for active participation in a multicultural society (Ministry of Social Affairs, 2007, p. 4).

This is the one and only time that this term “multicultural society” is used in all five documents. Tellingly, it is used in the context of education for immigrants. Even though, such preparation for all students could be said to be implicit in the Objective of Article 2, Upper Secondary School:

It shall strive to strengthen its pupils’ skills in the Icelandic language, both spoken and written, develop moral values, sense of responsibility, broadmindedness, initiative, self-confidence and tolerance in its pupils, train them to apply disciplined, autonomous working methods and critical thought, teach them to appreciate cultural values and encourage them to seek further knowledge (Ministry of Education & Science and Culture, 2008b, p. 1).

Multiculturalism is explicitly mentioned in the context of immigrant students, but not mentioned within the context of all students. Multiculturalism, in other words, is understood as being for the others, the foreigners, the minorities who have backgrounds different from the Icelandic-heritage majority. As I explained earlier in chapter 2.2.2, Icelandic does not yet have a word equivalent to the English word “ethnicity”, which can be used to refer to ethnic background without indicating whether or not someone is an immigrant or native-born. In Icelandic, the word “útlendingur” (foreigner) is used in everyday speech to refer both to individuals who are not Icelanders as well as to Icelanders of immigrant background. The use of the word “útlendingur”



is a powerful signifier for exclusion in Iceland, which is seen as having remained homogeneous long into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (Koay, 2004).

There is a lack of explicitly inclusive language in the policy discourse pertaining to a student body diverse in socio-economic status, gender, race, language, religion, disability, and ethnicity. In the *National Curriculum Guide for Upper Secondary Education – General Section, 2004*, Section 4.1 of the curriculum, the criteria for the “Structure of Academic Programmes - Programmes of Study”, which addresses the need to take into consideration the differences among students in terms of their readiness for their studies, is limited in scope listing only “maturity, interest, and learning capacity” as differentiating factors:

Students who are starting upper secondary education differ in readiness, maturity, interests, and learning capacity. Course planning in upper secondary schools takes these different needs into account and therefore an effort should be made to help all students find a suitable programme of study in which they can control their progression of learning as much as possible (Ministry of Education & Science and Culture, 2004, p. 8)

While it is important to acknowledge the heterogeneity of students in terms of “readiness, maturity, interests, and learning capacity,” it is also necessary to explicitly acknowledge the multicultural characteristics that students bring with them.

Neither the *Upper Secondary School Act 92/2008* nor the *National Curriculum Guide for Upper Secondary Education – General Section, 2004* has any overall guidelines on how assessment for all subjects are to be conducted, but instead these are stipulated in the guidelines for each subject in the curriculum. Teachers are responsible for assessing the students according to the subjects they cover, under the principals’ supervision (Ministry of Education & Science and Culture, 2008b). The guidelines for the evaluation of the students are very broad, and encourage the use of various assessment techniques and instruments. It is suggested that multiple strategies be used with the general goal of assembling a more complete picture of a student’s performance in individual subjects, i.e., oral and written quizzes, presentations, tests, projects, self-evaluation, etc.

The assessment must apply to different aspects of the study...It has to be built on the student's work of the whole semester, ongoing evaluation, [and a] final test where it applies (Mennta- og menningarmálaráðuneytið, 1999, p. 17).

Grades are to be given for pupil performance. However, written evaluations by the teachers are also promoted as a way to give students a better understanding of areas in which they can be proud of their accomplishments, and of areas in which they need to improve.

The subject assessment guidelines include a variety of venues in which a diverse student body can have opportunities to demonstrate their achievements, each student using the styles of learning and expression in which they are individually confident. The diverse assessment approaches that many researchers recommend are those which are used effectively in different times and environments: both during instruction time, and during informal and formal testing time (Shepard et al., 2005). Nevertheless, it is important to note that these two policy documents do not include procedures for administering standardized tests to students who have Icelandic as a second language. For example, when testing to assess students' proficiency in certain fields of study, it is necessary to safeguard that Icelandic is not a barrier (Freire).

Furthermore, in Section 7.6 "Evaluation of education from other schools, informal education and work experience" (Ministry of Education & Science and Culture, 2004, p. 25) the "other" refers to upper secondary schools in Iceland. The outline details what and how courses are to be accredited; how students' status is to be treated; and how informal and formal education are defined and should be evaluated. However, it lays down no guidelines for assessing students transferring from other parts of the world. That measurement is left, instead, in the hands of individual principals

Principals or upper secondary schools are responsible for evaluating students' previous studies, whether they are formal or informal (Ministry of Education & Science and Culture, 2004, p. 25)

My concern is that without some kind of guidelines, students may be penalized when transferring from educational systems unfamiliar to Icelandic principals and teachers. Although this same section of the

curriculum explicitly ensures the right of students to challenge evaluations, Gollifer and Tran found it to be discriminatory.

If doubts arise as to how evaluation should be conducted, students should be given the benefit of the doubt or given a competence test to allow them to prove their competence in the relevant subject or field (Ministry of Education & Science and Culture, 2004, p. 25)

Gollifer and Tran (2012) explain that this regulation, rather than recognizing the limitations in the system that might be due to a lack of multicultural positioning, instead puts the responsibility on the students to prove themselves.

The discourse in all five documents clearly suggests that instilling the Icelandic language is the primary focus. The argument for this policy is that mastery of the language and understanding its history and its “basic values” are the essential means for immigrant young people to integrate and to succeed (Mennta- og menningarmálaráðuneytið, 1999; Ministry of Social Affairs, 2007, p. 9).

Icelandic educational policies must also be looked at in the context of a world in which languages spoken by small populations are constantly vanishing: one language disappears every two weeks (Rymer, 2012), and it is estimated that by the end of the 21<sup>st</sup> century dominant languages will replace 90% of the world’s minority languages (UNESCO Ad hoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages, 2003). A language embodies a culture, an environment, a political and social system. It is a people’s identity and inheritance that they want to pass on to future generations. Christine Johnson, Elder of the American Indian Tohono O’odham nation, explained:

I speak my favourite language  
because that’s who I am.

We teach our children our favourite language,  
because we want them to know who they are<sup>10</sup>

(UNESCO Ad hoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages,  
2003, p. 1)

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<sup>10</sup> Christine Johnson, Tohono O’odham Elder, American Indian Language Development Institute, June 2002

As Icelandic is a language spoken only by about 300,000 people, it is understandable that Icelandic policies would aim to protect it. In the *Government Policy on the Integration of Immigrants*, the language itself is presented as one of five “core values of Icelandic society,” along with “democracy, human rights, joint responsibility, and personal freedom.” It is declared explicitly that education for immigrants in the Icelandic language is not merely to facilitate their educational progress, but to make them participants in its preservation.

It is the policy of the Icelandic government – approved by the entire nation – to protect the Icelandic language. It is the shared property of the Icelandic nation and contains its history, culture and self-awareness. It is also a tool for social interaction and a key to participation in the nation’s life. Powerful support of Icelandic language education for immigrants serves the dual purpose of speeding up their integration into society and strengthening the position of the Icelandic language”(Ministry of Social Affairs, 2007, p. 6)

In general policy documents, unless some laws are quoted, there are no references to track declarations such as the text “It is the policy of the Icelandic government – approved by the entire nation – to protect the Icelandic language.” The use of the phrase “entire nation” is an unsubstantiated claim. By stating that the Icelandic language “is the shared property of the Icelandic nation” the statement identifies having the knowledge of Icelandic is the prerequisite for a person to be in the Icelandic nation. The rhetoric of this policy expresses an imbalance of power between the dominants, the Icelandic-heritage population who possess the knowledge of Icelandic, and the immigrants, the subordinated who are deficient in such language (Bourdieu, 1990). It therefore appears to be a political rhetoric to garner authority for a political policy that does not seem to include differences. With an unsubstantiated claim such as this, the government risks portraying itself as ethnocentric. The anthropologist Durrenberger (1995) explains ethnocentrism thus:

Not everyone in the world thinks and feels the same way you do...The main danger of ethnocentrism is substituting tacit, unstated assumptions from one’s own culture in place of things one does not know about other culture (Durrenberger, 1995, p. 133)

It might be asked if the “entire nation” referred to by the government is meant to include immigrants, who are now in a new country (Iceland) but still want to preserve their own native language and pass it on to their children, as a central part of their own identity.

On the other hand, based on *the National Curriculum Guide for Upper Secondary Education – Icelandic, 1999*, the *Regulation on the Right of Students in Upper Secondary School* to be taught the Icelandic language, number 654/2009 was elaborated and published. The latter is stipulated in *The Upper Secondary School Act, No. 92/2008* which requires upper secondary schools to design a specific plan to receive this group of students. The plan is a guideline for cultivating the students’ well being both in academic and social interactions, and is derived from the *National Curriculum Guide for Upper Secondary Education – Icelandic, 1999*. Academically, the schools are to collect information about students such as “pupil’s background, language skills, and skills in other fields of study” (Mennta- og menningarmálaráðuneytið, 2009; Ministry of Education & Science and Culture, 2008, p. 13) in order to design an individual educational plan suitable for each student. Social integration is to be mutual by facilitating the relationship between youth of immigrant and Icelandic backgrounds. The educational institutions are to secure the students’ access to services by ensuring that the staff and specialists within their walls work cohesively together. To help foster strong ties between the parents and the schools, the schools are to maintain effective information flows about the students and available services – i.e., social and recreational activities and sports, as well as education. (Mennta- og menningarmálaráðuneytið, 2009).

*The National Curriculum Guide for Upper Secondary Education – Icelandic, 2004* and the *Regulation 654/2009* identifies some important elements that were attributes of multicultural education. However, the question remains as to how the discourse of these two documents was relocated and interpreted for implementation in school curricula and in the educating of the teachers.

### 5.1.3 *The 2011 Icelandic National Curriculum Guide for Upper Secondary Schools*

Since my research began, the new curriculum was published (*The Icelandic National Curriculum Guide for Upper Secondary Schools –*

General Section 2011) that is intended to replace the 2004 curriculum in order to comply with *The Upper Secondary School Act No.92/2008*. According to a curriculum specialist and the Department Head at the Ministry of Education, the transformation of the curriculum was influenced both by global and political internal change in Iceland, promoting education for the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Gollifer & Tran, 2012). The new curriculum is not relevant to the context of my dissertation since it will not start to be implemented until 2015. However, I am including it the analysis because of the future implications it might have for my research.

The *Upper Secondary School Act No.92/2008* was written during the time the central-right was in power. As a result, the policy discourse reflects the party ideology and a conservative approach to multicultural education (Gollifer & Tran, 2012). In contrast, The Icelandic National Curriculum Guide for Upper Secondary Schools – General Section 2011 was written while the central-left party was in power between 2009 – 2013, the Education Minister was herself from the left party, marking a shift in educational ideology (Gollifer & Tran, 2012). The general education is based on six fundamental pillars and key competence in: literacy, sustainability, democracy and human rights, equality, health and welfare, and creativity. These pillars are implicitly more aligned with the characteristics of multicultural education. The concepts that are used to describe each pillar evoke the notion of inclusiveness and the value of diverse groups of students and “of Iceland as a multicultural society” (Ministry of Education & Science and Cultural, 2011, p. 20). The curriculum text in some particular contexts recognizes diversity, ethnicity, and multiculturalism as strengths, and these dimensions of human kind are to be valued and respected with the goal being an equal and sustainable world:

In order to obtain equality, democratic methods have to be employed, the diversity of mankind respected and multiculturalism ensured. Diversity is a source of strength that can eradicate poverty, contribute to peace and secure living conditions and quality of life for all, wherever they live in the world. Sustainability is a prerequisite to understand the importance of one’s own welfare and that of others (Ministry of Education & Science and Cultural, 2011, p. 18).

Furthermore, the new curriculum gives more emphasis to the role of teachers and their responsibility to adapt to the social changes that are now a part of the global community. They are expected to revamp their pedagogical practices to be effective instructors and facilitators for their diverse student body:

At the beginning of the 21st century, extensive changes have taken place in Icelandic society and these have both direct and indirect influence on the educational system, the pupils' studies and the work of teachers...These changes increase the demands on teachers, both in analysing social changes and adopting school activities to the present status in a responsible manner (Ministry of Education & Science and Cultural, 2011, p. 12)

Despite this comprehensive revision of the curriculum that may positively influence the learning experience of immigrant students, many of the concerns I identified (earlier in this chapter) relating to Article 15 of *2004 National Curriculum* remain unchanged under Section 16 of the 2011 National Curriculum in relation to students of foreign origin. The calls to meet the needs of students whose native language is not Icelandic, under section 16 of the curriculum, are optional. The use of the auxiliary verbs should, would, and may, gives the schools the choice to be noncommittal when it comes to providing an equitable education to this student population (Ministry of Education & Science and Cultural, 2011, p. 83). Despite the recognition of the strengths of diversity, the 2011 National Curriculum remains locked in the perspective of Icelandic language deficiency. The curriculum designates Icelandic to be one of the three core subjects, besides math and English, but Icelandic as a second language is not included. The criteria for measuring student competency in Icelandic are defined on three levels. Level three (the highest level for Icelandic in upper secondary schools) allows the students to participate in matriculation examinations and paves the way for them to further their studies at university levels. Students for whom Icelandic is not their first language are only required to complete Icelandic Level 2, instead of having to complete a well designed program to enable them to reach the same level of Icelandic competency and achieve the same goals as their Icelandic-heritage peers. Even though the curriculum provides students for whom Icelandic is not their native language with the option of substituting mathematics or English for the Icelandic requirement this

does not serve to equip them with the level of Icelandic they need to pursue higher levels of education. The discussion about educational equity and practice should be about optimizing the learning opportunities and resources so that every student can acquire the knowledge they need. It should not be about lowering expectations or redirecting requirements. Without Level 3 Icelandic, there is the question of students of immigrant background running the risk of not being successful in their higher education if they choose to further their studies.

Students of immigrant background need to achieve a proficiency in Icelandic equitable with that of their Icelandic peers. What differs is that different pedagogical practices may be needed for them to achieve this. Reduction in expectations is not equity, and a lower standard for one group of students suggests a lower expectation for that group's opportunities, including the pursuit of higher education.

For these reasons I have come to similar conclusions as those in Gollifer and Tran (2012): Even though *The Icelandic National Curriculum Guide for Upper Secondary Schools – General Section 2011* text includes more concepts that are more oriented towards multicultural education, it still does not explicitly ground its philosophical foundation in the theories of multicultural education (Gollifer & Tran, 2012).

## **5.2 The School Curricula and Iceland as a Multicultural Society**

To examine how policies are re-contextualized from national acts to curricula at the upper secondary school level, I reviewed the rhetoric of eight school curricula and focused on inclusiveness with regard to students of immigrant background.

After critical readings of the eight schools' policies and goals I found that they reflect the direction given by the *National Curriculum Guide – General Section 2004* (Ministry of Education & Science and Culture, 2004, p. 6) and required by *The Upper Secondary School Act, No. 92/2008* (Ministry of Education & Science and Culture, 2008b, p. 1). Among the many educational objectives that these schools have, the ones that can implicitly be considered to relate to multicultural education are overall student development, students' understanding of



their rights and responsibilities to actively participate in a democratic society, respect, critical thinking and open-mindedness. One school has an explicit multicultural policy with clearly defined goals for providing education to a diverse student body. The policy states that prejudice and discrimination will not be tolerated, that differing viewpoints will be respected, that all students should benefit to the fullest according to their abilities, and that students from diverse background and ethnicities have the opportunity to learn from each other.

All pupils in FÁ should have the same opportunity to education, independently of his/her background and ethnicity. No kind of prejudice or discrimination is tolerated. The student population in FÁ is very diverse. The school policy is to encourage positive attitudes towards multiculturalism, among students as well as teachers, so that each and every student can develop in his/her own way. The students in the school should be able to enjoy their diversity and the opportunity to obtain education, which is a part of social interaction and communication with people of different background and ethnicity.

The Comprehensive Secondary School at Ármúli runs a robust tutoring program for students of foreign background<sup>11</sup> (Fjölbrautaskólinn við Ármúla, 2012).

Of these eight schools, four of them have Icelandic as a second language programs. Three of these four schools have reception plans for immigrant students, as stipulated in the *Regulations on the Right of Students in Upper Secondary School to be Taught the Icelandic Language*, number 654/2009:

Upper secondary schools shall draw up a reception plan for students who have a mother tongue other than Icelandic. The plan will be designed with reference to their background, their linguistic abilities, their competencies in other

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<sup>11</sup> My translation based on the Icelandic school curriculum of the Comprehensive School at Ármúli

academic fields, and the teaching and support available<sup>12</sup>  
(Mennta- og menningarmálaráðuneytið, 2009).

Despite this stipulation, four of the eight schools lack such a plan. It is also worth mentioning that some of the schools I include in this sample, offer immigrant students special services, such as tutoring and counseling, while others offer no such special services. From this it may be understood that these schools only enroll immigrant students who can perform without such services.

These facts demonstrate the truth of the response that Minister of Education, Katrín Jakóbsdóttir, gave in answer to a question I posed at the October 2012 meeting of Gamma Chapter of Delta Kappa Gamma in Iceland. I asked her how the Ministry follows up on Regulation 654/2009 to make sure that all schools are equipped with a reception plan to welcome students of immigrant background. She admitted the problematic nature of the system:

*Schools choose students. Students don't get to choose the schools. I admit that we could do better in providing services to this group of students (Katrín Jakóbsdóttir).*

This answer can be interpreted as acknowledging that some upper secondary schools have the autonomy to decide not to enroll students of minority background, and that therefore it is not necessary for them to include a reception plan in their curricula. As a result, I question the authenticity of the schools' commitment to equal access for minority students. I also believe that this shortcoming casts a shadow on the values of the schools' goals of developing their pupils into well-rounded individuals who embody the qualities of respect, tolerance, open-mindedness, and critical thinking that will enable them to actively exercise their citizenship in Iceland's democratic society. Furthermore, I ask whether this variation in school practices in the enrolment of minority pupils is rooted in the otherness of this group of students, who are, in the rhetoric of the laws and the national curriculum, seen as having deficits in Icelandic language, values and culture, rather than as possessing valuable intellectual, social, and other capital that could be used to their own and to other students' advantage.

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<sup>12</sup> My translation based on the Icelandic document *Reglugerð um rétt nemenda í framhaldsskólum til kennslu í íslensku 654/2009*

### 5.3 Icelandic as a Second Language and Teacher Education Programs

The law and regulations have developed so that immigrant pupils are entitled to have their social, cultural, and knowledge backgrounds considered, their individual educational and social needs met, and to learn Icelandic as a second language (Mennta- og menningarmálaráðuneytið, 2009; Ministry of Education & Science and Culture, 2008b). Thus my goal in scrutinizing the teacher education programs is to understand how student teachers are educated to enable them to meet the rights of the minority students. I will study the policies, roles, and visions that are included in the curricula of the two faculties of education in Iceland – the Faculty of Education at the University of Akureyri (UA), and the School of Education at the University of Iceland (UI).

As with the *National Curriculum Guide for Upper Secondary Education – General Section, 2004*, the rhetoric of the aims of the two programs include some universal concepts that can be construed as applying to students of diverse backgrounds, since these concepts are aimed at educating student teachers so that they can support their pupils’ “overall development” (Ministry of Education & Science and Culture, 2004, p. 1). The future educators are to be instructed in theories and in practice in order to develop their skills in critical thinking, cooperation and research, and their creativity. This education is aimed to equip “teachers with the knowledge, skills, and values to meet the needs of different individuals and nurture their general education” (University of Akureyri) and to “educate and contribute to the maturity of dissimilar students with diverse needs”<sup>13</sup> (University of Iceland, 2010). My question is how these policies are implemented through coursework at both universities.

The Master of Education degree program is two years, after which in-service and pre-service teachers are awarded with a teaching certificate for the upper secondary level. I analyzed, the courses that are included in the program at each university. My analysis shows that mandatory courses in educational psychology and philosophy, teaching and assessment methods, school development, and curriculum all have implicit discourse that can be conceived as embracing student diversity.

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<sup>13</sup> My translation based on the Icelandic document *Kennaradeild Mennta-vísindasvið Háskóla Íslands – Hlutverk of stefna 2010 - 2015*

The differences between the two universities lie in the courses that explicitly address the concepts of multicultural education and inclusiveness.

The program at the University of Akureyri incorporates two compulsory courses that emphasize theories of multicultural education, and one elective course. The content of the courses introduces the student teachers to multiple teaching and assessment methods so that they will be able to design instruction appropriate to the students in their classrooms. They are also encouraged to reflect on their own worldview and how they bring it into their classrooms, and the kinds of effects this has on their students. In addition, student teachers who want to expand their understanding of multicultural education can attend two more courses at the School of Humanities and Social Sciences. These two courses focus on theories and research about student diversity and inclusiveness in schools in Iceland.

Within the School of Education at the University of Iceland, student teachers choose from six specializations, of which *Inclusion and multicultural education* is one. Of the degree program's 12 compulsory courses, students can choose to take up to four in their specialization. The focus of the courses in this particular specialty is both to build the student teachers' theoretical and research knowledge, and to develop pedagogical practices aimed at meeting the needs of diverse student bodies, individuals, or groups. Special emphasis is placed on expanding these teachers' leadership skills and comprehension of the relationship between religions and cultures, and how they shape school children and adolescent identities, and family lives (Kincheloe, 2007). The four courses, therefore, can lay a basic foundation enabling teachers to enter their classrooms with more critical and sensitive understandings of their students and of themselves and their instruction. However, only one course is mandatory, and the other three are elective.

My concern here is not about the content of the courses but is about grounding multicultural education theory within a comprehensive teacher education program, rather than limiting it to a specialization. If the teaching philosophy includes a commitment to school success for all students, then it is necessary for all classroom teachers to acquire a solid foundation and embrace these ideas, instead of depending on the interest of individual teachers. To clarify my concerns, I interviewed Marín, a staff member at the School of Education. We discussed this inclusive education perspective and the teacher education program at

the University of Iceland<sup>14</sup>. Her view was that very few student teachers major in multicultural education, because the majority of them concentrate on their subject of expertise:

*It can be chosen [specialization] and it will always be the minority. It will always be very few [students who chose multicultural education as their specialization], because you need to take a large, large, large part [i.e, a large number of courses in the specialization], and the majority take them within their subject [the major of their B.A. or B.S.] (Marín).*

As it is, multicultural education, as an ideology grounded in all courses offered, is not on the agenda of the School of Education:

*There is no talk about everyone [student teachers] taking courses in multiculturalism, or anything like that. No, I don't think there is anything of the sort. It will just be a part of another specialization like special education, inclusive school, [and] school diversity as it is being discussed at the moment (Marín).*

Underlying Marín's observations about the field being limited to a specialization, is her sense that the concept of Iceland as a multicultural society is not a reality that everyone and every school around the country encounters daily, and that even though her perception is that Iceland wants to be multicultural, individual daily reality does not reflect this. Thus, student diversity in relation to teacher education is not a priority. As Marín explained:

*The schools live only in the society where we are located. And the projects people want to work on are on what they face every day*

*It is not like every single class has students of foreign background. Plenty of schools don't have a single student of foreign background. There is plenty of this kind of schools in the country.*

*In schools that have no students of foreign background, or even parents, then there is no thinking about it. While it is like that one thinks that educating teachers about it*

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<sup>14</sup> The whole interview was in Icelandic, and I translated the quotes into English

*[multicultural education] does not have priority. But, Iceland wants to be a multicultural society, Iceland as a whole* (Marín).

Similar to my analysis of the discourse of the national laws, my interview with Marín points to a connotation of multiculturalism as pertaining to others, to the exceptional minority of pupils of foreign background, instead of being seen as a concept that includes the entire student body within which there are differences of socio-economic status, gender, race, language, religion, physical and intellectual abilities, and ethnicity. Thus, a question is whether multicultural education as a specialization is perceived only as a way of teaching the others who do not share the Icelandic majority culture.

For the reason that the law stipulates that pupils whose mother tongue is other than Icelandic have the right to be taught Icelandic as a second language (Mennta- og menningarmálaráðuneytið, 2009), I thought it was also important to assess the curricula for teacher education in the field of teaching Icelandic as second language.

Researching the website of the University of Akureyri did not show any evidence of any program related to the field of teaching Icelandic as a second language, so I contacted four different staff members, two by telephone and two by e-mail. The two staff members to whom I posed the question on the telephone and the one e-mail I received back all confirmed that the University does not have such a program.

The University of Iceland does not offer a bachelors degree in the field of Icelandic as second language, but at the master's level the School of Education has both a Master of Education (M.Ed.) and Master of Arts (M.A.) with special emphasis in ÍSA. The program was developed during the last ten years. It originated in the School of Humanities, where it was called the Master of Pedagogy (M.Paed). In 2010 it merged with another program offered by the School of Education (Giroux, 2009). This was a M.Ed. program that was embedded in *Multicultural Studies* within the Faculty of Education Studies in 2008. Currently, ÍSA as a focus of study is taught within the program *Education studies with an emphasis on democracy, equality and multiculturalism*. The courses provide students with theories and methodologies for teaching ÍSA. The coursework includes multiculturalism, pedagogy practice, Icelandic acquisition, curriculum design, and evaluation methods that highlight and encourage the literacy success of bilingual students. In addition for their electives

degree, candidates can take more courses in multiculturalism, and bilingualism offered both at the Faculty of Education Studies and at the Faculty of Icelandic and Comparative Cultural Studies. These courses offer opportunities to expand their knowledge about cognitive development, and the social, linguistic and psychological factors that influence bilingual students' academic performance in multicultural societies.

One question I have is how much interest do both in-service and pre-service student teachers have in specializing in teaching ÍSA in upper secondary schools. According to the discussions I had with the staff, there are two basic explanations for the scarcity of teachers in this area. The first is that ÍSA is not available as a subject at the bachelor degree level. By law, to be certified for teaching at the upper secondary level, a teacher must acquire a Bachelor of 180 ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System) in certain subjects in addition to 60 ECTS at the Master's level and 60 ECTS in Pedagogy (Nieto, 2009). Marín detailed the process:

*It is a bit difficult in upper secondary schools because the students take a big part, actually most of their education, in another faculty, not teacher education. They take their major subject, and ÍSA actually does not exist as a subject. Teacher education for upper secondary teachers at the School of Education is only one year for these credits which are about pedagogy. But you can continue and take all credits for a master degree at the School of Education. You can take it as specialization, and mainly at the Faculty of Education Studies. There has always been very few who are learning this [learning to teach ÍSA] (Marín).*

The second explanation emerged in my conversation with Már and Hlynur, two other staff members. They felt that there is a false belief among teachers that they are qualified to instruct ÍSA simply because they are Icelandic speakers or teachers. Hlynur voiced his frustration:

*Lots of teachers think they can do it, because they are Icelandic speakers. There are Icelandic teachers who think they can do it. [They think] They have the skills to teach ÍSA. That's one of our biggest problem. There is no intercultural understanding or anything (Hlynur).*

Már further explained:

*There is a lack of teacher education because it is thought that since Icelanders can learn so can the immigrants. It is not realized that it is a science. It [ÍSA] needs to be a field of study (Már).*

My conclusion from my research into teacher education in relation to multicultural education and teaching Icelandic as a second language is that there is a limited number of teachers who acquire such knowledge in these two areas. Multicultural education is a body of knowledge that is acquired by only a few, because it is not a philosophy embedded in all areas of teacher education. Rather, it is a specialized subject chosen by individual teachers. In addition to this, proficiency in teaching Icelandic as a second language is achieved only by limited numbers of teachers either because of the organizational discrepancies for educating teachers in this area, or because of the belief that the only real requirement is to be an Icelandic speaker.

## **5.4 Summary and Issues**

Since *The Upper Secondary School Act* of 2008 took effect, there has been a series of regulations to enact and also amend this law. These regulations have aimed to enhance equal access and to integrate better immigrant students so as to improve their chances to complete their studies at upper secondary schools. My analysis of the goals of the five policy documents, and my assessment of the eight school curricula, together with the two teacher education programs showed that they are consistent with each other in aiming to provide an education that is inclusive of all young people. Their rhetoric indicates their commitment to provide the youth with an education that nurtures individual needs for overall social and educational development and enables them to be active citizens in a democratic country. Such goals are also shared by multicultural education philosophy (Hanley, 2010; Banks 2004; Nieto, 2000; Shor, 1992). However, scrutinizing the implementation of these goals by examining the school curricula and the teacher education programs, I found gaps in both areas.

As I show above, even though the 2008 Act acknowledges that Iceland is a multicultural society, the concept of Multicultural Education, discussed in Section 3.3, is explicitly absent in the Act leading to several gaps.



A result of one gap is that multiculturalism is treated as something that is for the minorities only, for those who have backgrounds different from the Icelandic-heritage majority. This was manifested in my interviews and the policy documents. This perception can be interpreted as the cause of multicultural education not being a foundation subject in teacher education and not being understood to benefit a heterogeneous student body, but only understood as a specialization for teaching “the others.” The notion that multiculturalism is for ethnic minorities and multicultural education is for the others, is explained by scholars as being flawed (Parekh, 2006). Others depict multiculturalism as a learned process which is not only limited to ethnicity and language but also includes the spectrum of variables such as ethnicity, gender, sexual identity, socio-economic class, and physical or mental disability (Cope & Kalantzis, 1999). Banks (2007b) construes multicultural education as inclusive and equitable to the diverse student population, reflecting all members of the society of all makings.

The second gap is about the foreign origin of the students signifying their deficiency. The analysis of the policy documents showed that the overwhelming emphasis when it comes to educating immigrant students is on the deficiency in the Icelandic language. This emphasis on Icelandic proficiency, which begins at the policy level and extends into the classrooms, overshadows all other factors when it comes to the kind of education the students in my study receive. The students’ cultural and social capital, which were identified by Bourdieu (1997) as their wealth of background knowledge or habitus was excluded as parts of the tool kit for them to learn the new language. Regulation 654/2009, the one regulation that called for drawing on this background knowledge was only implemented by less than half of the eight schools I studied included reception plans to receive immigrant students in their school policy. Thus, it appeared that a language deficient road was mapped out to define their competence before they were allowed to participate in any other studies that required any higher level of logical and critical thinking. This second gap is identified by Cummins (1996) and is also in line with views of scholars i.e. Ladson-Billings (1995), Gay (2000), Nieto (2002), and Banks (2007a).

And since this emphasis on language deficiency is coupled with a lack of mechanisms for evaluating a student’s prior educational achievement in other subject areas, the school system naturally views the transfer of knowledge as a one-way street. The acquisition of knowledge by Vietnamese students about the Icelandic school system,

about the Icelandic language, customs, habits and culture is not reciprocated in the school curriculum. Immigrant students' habitus is perceived as deficient in terms of culture, ethnicity, and capital (Giroux, 2011; McLaren, 2009; Kincheloe, 2008; Nieto, 2000; Boudieu, 1984). The Icelandic school is to function as a mold designed to shape immigrant students into established institutions – first Icelandic school and then Icelandic society. It is understood that the policy assigned the schools the role of teaching immigrant students to decode the hidden codes of Icelandic social rules and conduct themselves accordingly (Morais, 2002; Bernstein, 2000). But if Iceland is a multicultural and democratic society, how is it that some members of that society are effectively invisible when it comes to the first years in Iceland of their educational and social development? Critical theorists would identify this process of imposing the majority culture and treating it as the common culture on a diverse population in Icelandic society as marginalization of culture differences of minority groups. The Icelandic system paves ways for the perpetuating of the cultural hegemony (Giroux, 2009). According to critical pedagogic principles, it could be argued that Iceland's policy on emphasizing the instilling of its language and culture threatens the value of democracy.

The third gap is about the implementation of the Act. Academically, the acquisition of Icelandic is of great importance for the academic success of Vietnamese students (Roessingh & Kover, 2003; Cummins, 1996; Collier, 1995). At the school curricula level, the laws declare that pupils whose mother tongue is other than Icelandic have the right to instruction in Icelandic as a second language. The policy documents maintain that mastering the Icelandic language is the key to integration into Icelandic society. Fostering the effective development of the language acquisition during the first years the students immigrate to a host country is an important part of integration (Public & Management Institute, 2013a). However, teaching Icelandic as a second language is not a field in which teachers can specialize. In other words, students at upper secondary level do not receive qualified instruction because teachers are not given professional training in teaching the subject. In the view of critical multicultural education scholars, the lack of qualified teachers is part of the inequitable education for ethnic minority students (Banks, 2007, 2009; Gay, 2000; Nieto, 2000). This gap between the implementation level and the policy level of regulation to make the system cohesive and vigorous to benefit NAMS has been

found to be a discrepancy that many European countries shared with Iceland (Public & Management Institute, 2013a).

Empirical research has shown that the enrichment of the home language is an effective way of helping the students to learn the host language (Filhon, 2013; OECD, 2010; UNESCO, 2003; Gogolin, 2002; Gay, 2000; Nieto, 2000, 2002;). However, as I have demonstrated earlier, Iceland chooses to teach Icelandic and does not address the learning of the home language in the school setting. As a result of the noncommittal stance of the policy discourse, in which coursework in an immigrant student's mother tongue is an "optional subject," and in which minimal responsibility is placed on the institution, none of the eight school curricula I examined even mentioned the concept of mother tongue.

The issue of the power of the majority being imposed on the immigrant population is also at play, when Icelandic was declared in a regulation to be the language of the nation and the identity of the people of Iceland. At the same time, it is also designated to be the "powerful" tool for integrating immigrants into the nation state without considering their language as their own identities. This is a clear example of unequal power relation between majority and minority that multicultural and critical theorists delineate (May, 1999; Giroux, 2009).

After critically analyzing the discourse of the national policy documents and examining how the rhetoric was recontextualized at the levels of school curricula and the teacher education, I detect there are emphasis on the adaptation of the deficiency road as the approach for the learning process of immigrant students.

## 6 Administrators' Narratives

This chapter recounts the administrators' narratives of their experiences in implementing the laws and the curriculum. First, is to be able to reveal the kinds of effects the laws have on their practices. Second, is to be able to grasp the administrators' understanding and their perceptions of their students of foreign background, and also to try to deduce the context and the environment which benefit or disadvantage these students.

How rules and regulations are implemented at the school level depends on the interpretations of school administrators, particularly principals, who *The Upper Secondary School 2008 Act* refers to as the "head teacher[s]." According to Article 6 of the Act, the principal of a school bears full responsibility for the school he or she directs:

The head teacher is the director of the school. The head teacher manages daily administration and school activities and ensures that school operations comply with all Acts, Regulations, the National Curriculum Guide and other provisions currently in force (Ministry of Education & Science and Culture, 2008b, p. 1).

Administrators have the responsibility to implement the laws and the national curriculum, but at the same time they can interpret them according to their beliefs in how the student body should be educated. The administrators in the two upper secondary schools adhere to the deficiency road which the policies pursue. The given reasons are the shortage of funding and the shortcomings of the system that disadvantage students of immigrant background.

### 6.1 Supporting the Goals of the Act

The principals in my interviews strongly supported the Act's goal of educating students as individuals and preparing them to function effectively in society (Ministry of Education & Science and Culture, 2008b, p. 1). This particular goal is relevant to student diversity, which one principal (Ari) defined on his own as "Icelanders are of all backgrounds," after he carefully explained that all who live in "this land" are "Icelanders."

[The Upper Secondary School 2008 Act] *emphasizes educating each student where he is* [student is masculine in Icelandic]. *Meet him where he is located* [in terms of maturity, intellectual ability, social skills, etc.]. *And, of course, the main objective is to prepare him to live and to work in our society. Naturally, the school policy is to receive diverse groups of people. We consider that to be with Icelanders of all backgrounds is the best way of training people to live and work in this kind of society that has all kind of people...To have this community [school] which is similar to the society itself* (Ari).

Particularly in relation to students of foreign background, the Act's goal provides administrators a guideline for shaping school policy:

*What is so important is that it [the Act] assumes that teaching will be according to individual needs...for each individual student. For example, it gives room for the background of the students to be considered. [The Act] determines the kind of study that should be offered for them* (Eiður).

## **6.2 Through the Narrow Lens of Language Deficiency**

The discourses of the staff (administrators, principals, and Icelandic as second language coordinators) made it clear that they viewed acquisition of Icelandic as the necessary foundation for their immigrant students' education. This view is in line with Article 35 of the 2008 Act, which is the only text that addresses students of foreign background in the Act. This law was integrated into the school curriculum and interpreted to mean that providing Icelandic as a second language for immigrant students, and the provision of this instruction is in and of itself an "individualized curriculum":

*So it [the Act] makes provision for foreign students who need Icelandic teaching to receive it. This is what we call individualized curriculum* (Fjóra).

The Article also made Icelandic proficiency the primary prerequisite for enrolling in other subjects. Previous academic proficiency, especially in the case of students of Vietnamese origin, was discounted on the ground they had no common language (such as English).

Ethnic minority students primarily learn Icelandic in separate classes from the nationals. In addition, until the budget cut due to the financial crisis at the end of 2008, a number of core classes such as English, computer skills, mathematics, social studies, life skills, and Icelandic literature were among courses where special sections were created specifically for students for whom Icelandic was a second language. The administrators explained that that these classes were developed to meet the students' needs:

*We saw the needs so we tried to position ourselves, [we] read the National Curriculum [and] then adjusted for our students' and our needs (Fjóla).*

### **6.3 Supportive Methods**

The administrators reported that students with sufficient Icelandic were welcome to enroll in classes and subjects of their choice. For these students the schools had a combination of support methods. Group support was usually in the form of a class that had one or two teachers present:

*There are groups, little groups together of individuals who are assisted. More than one teacher walks among the students to help them with math, science or something else that they are learning (Ari).*

Teachers of certain subjects were also used for tutoring their own students but only when a student proved to be exceptionally diligent:

*We have got the teacher who teaches the subject to take a student for additional teaching, in cases where the student is interested in the subject and tries to continue despite the language difficulty. Also, if the student has, without doubt, attended well to their studies, and the only thing is missing is understanding (Eiður).*

Peer tutoring was another method the schools used for academic support:

*Sometimes we try to get another student to help, if that works. If we are lucky we can find two students in the same class together. The one who is more able or has been studying longer can help the other one (Fjóla).*

The use of an interpreter was also mentioned, but only for individual students in cases of necessity, and never in class. The most common use for interpreters is for assessment.

Ari talked about a recent report comparing the services offered to immigrant youth services among the Nordic countries. He said that Iceland provided only a fraction of the services offered by the other countries in the report. Basic support not available in Iceland included interpreters, and subject area books in their mother tongues aimed at allowing them to progress while they are in the process of learning Icelandic.

## **6.4 Little Change in 40 Years**

One of the administrators observed that there has been little change in the school system over the last 40 years. She felt that it is rigid and outdated, and that the result is a lack of understanding, and inequality in education at the upper secondary level. She was frustrated on behalf of the students who are locked into an inflexible system. The core courses now required for graduating from upper secondary school are designed for students of Icelandic background with high proficiency in Icelandic. This makes it much harder not only for students of foreign background to graduate, but also for any students who are not academically strong. These courses do not necessarily reflect the interests and abilities of such students.

## **6.5 Professional Development for Administrators**

Multicultural Education is a holistic teaching philosophy: it is meant to permeate all academic and school-related social activities, and it requires the participation of everyone who works with the students. The administrators I interviewed demonstrated a limited understanding of Multicultural Education. One perception was that it is a subject area that is taught by a specialized teacher and consists of teaching about different customs and cultures, from which students of Icelandic background can also benefit. Another perception is that Multicultural Education is intended for minorities – such as the disabled, or immigrants – who need individual educational attention in order to better integrate into Icelandic society. For pupils of foreign origin, for

example, Multicultural Education is seen as a way to help them achieve Icelandic proficiency and therefore help them further their studies or function in the job market and daily life.

*It has always been a big part of the educator discussions when they meet, whether they are administrators or teachers. Icelandic society has changed so much since the beginning of the last decade. The number of immigrants from all over the world has grown so much that they have undoubtedly also surfaced in schools. Schools, thus, have needed to change their emphasis. Maybe there aren't very many schools that offer Icelandic for foreigners, so the educators discussed among each other about how to resolve certain problems which have come up (Eiður 15).*

The participants were certain that there has not been a lot of continuing education in the field of Multicultural Education for administrators. However, though these administrators talked about how the school environment should change with society, which they believe is now multicultural, they did not express the need for a deeper understanding of Multiculturalism and Multicultural Education. While expressing mild support for the ideas, they did not express strong interest in pursuing the ideas:

*That would naturally be preferable, to have such like [continuing education], to have an introduction about it. I meant a course. That wouldn't hurt (Ari).*

## **6.6 Professional Development for Teachers**

The administrators also revealed that there have not been many continuing education courses for teachers about Multicultural Education. If there had been any seminars, workshops, or courses offered, they were organized by teacher associations in certain subject areas. The administrators believed that Multicultural Education constitutes a very large part of basic teacher education at the School of Education at the University of Iceland. In contrast, my research into teacher education documents shows that Multicultural Education is not central to the curriculum at the School of Education.

The administrators diplomatically pointed out that it would be natural for some teachers to resist change because of an understandable



self-interest. In addition, administrators said they did not have the right to ask their staff to do more than the job required, especially when administrators could not afford to pay teachers for extra work. On the other hand, administrators described their staffs as broadminded and sympathetic to the idea that schools need to be flexible in order to serve a diverse student body. After all, the administrators observed, the teachers who were involved in teaching immigrant students were the ones who had great interest in teaching them.

## **6.7 Social Integration in Schools**

These administrators admitted that social life was not flourishing at their schools generally, and that students of foreign and Icelandic background did not associate very much with each other. Nevertheless, they thought it was important that students blend into a tight community and communicate with each other in order to mutually learn from each other's cultures. The administrators said they encouraged immigrant youth to use the common spaces inside the schools such as the dining rooms and libraries, and to join the different school clubs and field trips. Like many others, their schools have only a few days each year when different activities are organized instead of regular classes. This is the time when some immigrant student groups make themselves visible through their performing arts, food, and distinctive national dress.

At the same time, the administrators thought it was natural for pupils of different ethnic backgrounds to be in separate groups. They argued that it was logical for students of the same background to hang out together and speak the same mother tongue with each other. To these administrators, students staying together in homogeneous groups was not an indicator of any problems with communication, or discrimination, or negative behavior.

## **6.8 Financial Challenges and Roadblocks**

Unsurprisingly, the Icelandic financial crisis, the ensuing budget constraints, and current funding structures all have had an impact on administrators' ability to meet the needs of their student populations. Because of budget cuts, some courses targeting students of foreign origin, aside from Icelandic as a second language, have been cancelled.

While some schools had tried peer mentoring or peer tutoring in the past, a lack of funding now makes this difficult to carry out. At one of the schools, for instance, pairing Icelandic-speakers and non-Icelandic speakers was briefly tried, but the organizer soon felt that without a formal system to screen the peer mentors, and without funding to pay staff to maintain oversight and follow-up, the potential risks were too great.

And while the interviewees described several methods for integrating immigrant youth into classes with nationals, in reality most of these were in non-existent in classrooms, and budget constraints were prime factor.

*The goal is to meet a student where he is and try to make it possible for him to learn the teaching materials as much as possible. Another goal is maybe to integrate the students to our regular system, maybe for matriculation, if that is their intention. But all this counseling and support are work and they cost [money] (Ástríður).*

If a student wanted to take classes where they would need some assistance, then the answer would most likely be:

*...we have to say we are sorry but we can't help you. We could possibly consider doing something only if there were more than one student who got into similar trouble who was taking the same class. In that case, we might add in a very few hours to help them. We need to save a lot so we have little to work with as it is today (Eiður).*

Funding reductions also limit teacher development. Schools have little financial room to further train teachers, or to develop new classes that give students of foreign origin more opportunity to graduate from upper secondary education at the same rates as their classmates.

One administrator described the current funding structure as a “negative revenue” system, meaning that there is less money allocated per student, and that it costs schools more to provide students with services. Those affected include immigrant students and students with learning disabilities, such as dyslexia, depression, anxiety, attention-deficit disorder, etc. Schools are paid additional per student amounts only for students who are severely disabled and are enrolled in particular programs. The present system pays schools according to the number of credits each student completes. Students who face no

challenges in their studies, take a regular load of classes and pass their exams bring regular income to their schools. However, students who have difficulties with their studies are more likely to take fewer courses, need more support, and thus cost the school more, both because of the cost of extra services and the loss of potential payments for credits completed. In cases of immigrant youth who are under 16, or by request, schools must also provide interpreters for parents who do not speak Icelandic for parent-teacher conferences, which is also an additional cost. In other words, schools that welcome students whose mother tongue is not Icelandic are penalized for having a diverse student body. As one of the administrators said, “Only crazy people could have designed such a system.”

Along with expressing their frustration with the existing funding structure, the administrators from time to time diplomatically interjected that ministers, including the Minister of Education, had expressed willingness to provide services to immigrant students. But all the same there was no additional money for schools to increase accessibility to upper secondary education for these students. An administrator said bluntly that the government budget policy for upper secondary schools in particular is at cross-purposes to the 2008 Act, and to the law, which emphasized the holistic development of individual students.

The services required by the 2008 Act (such as having an education plan to meet each student’s requirements) required more funding for teacher pay and school reorganization. Facing deep funding cuts in the school system, the government postponed the full implementation of the 2011 curriculum until 2015, which the administrators viewed as a setback for immigrant students. They felt that the new curriculum would have made the system more flexible and therefore would have been more suitable for students with Icelandic as a second language, and made completing their upper secondary education more possible them:

*We can see that it [2011 curriculum] makes allowances for student background. The schools are in charge of what kind of courses, or how the courses are offered...Many more choices. The students can learn different things which are much more familiar to them; issues that might better connect their studies with their language or culture. Those courses then can be included for matriculation. This*

*is what the new curriculum is about. This is why it is such a sorrow that it had been postponed for four years (Ari).*

## **6.9 Looking to the Future**

Members of the administration expressed optimism for better days when Iceland can move beyond the financial crisis. They hope that once there is more money in the country there will be money for education. The National Curriculum for Upper Secondary Education, which will be in effect in 2015, will then be honored in compliance with the present Act of providing students with “studies suitable to the needs of each pupil” (Ministry of Education & Science and Culture, 2008b, p. 1).

## **6.10 Summary and Issues**

The administrators are operating in a policy system that is already inequitable before they themselves do their part. In the interviews, the administrators presented themselves as progressive and welcoming to a diverse student body in their schools, and they were receptive to the needs of immigrants for academic success. However, their philosophy of integration reflected the discourse present in the policy documents and they also see NAMS through the Icelandic language deficiency lens. By making Icelandic the primary prerequisite for the immigrant students’ enrolment in other subject areas, they too made the false assumption of using verbal language as the yard stick to measure the students’ ability for undertaking studies that require logical and critical thinking (Cummins, 2000).

The interview with the administrators revealed their school leadership framework to be more of a hierarchy limited to a designated few. Inclusive leadership, where the voices of students, parents, and community organizations positively influence the progress of the students, was not a part of their schools’ practice (Banks 2004; Wrigley, 2000). The administrators’ knowledge about immigrant students and their communities was rather modest. Once a year, schools called attention to diversity by giving minority groups a chance to display their cultures through national dress, arts, and food. Beyond these one-off events, non-Icelandic cultures are not part of the school culture. The kind of cultural awareness that the youth of Vietnamese background in

Nguyen's (2012) study experienced was alienating because they perceived it as an act of tokenism. The invisibility of an ethnic minority culture in the schools can also be understood as an indicator that there was little cooperation between the schools and the communities.

The social environments in the schools provide a case in point: If a social snapshot were taken of these schools, it would have shown students of different ethnicities in isolated groups. The administrators' view of this picture was that in the context of school social life everything was available to all students. All that students of foreign background needed to do was to join in of their own will. However, the reality was that these students continued being foreigners in their own schools. Critical theorists would deplore where Icelandic culture, the mainstream culture, marginalizes immigrant students by the administrators not taking into consideration the reality of the isolation of these students. The marginalization can be based on their cultural differences. Ethnic minority students, especially NAMS, do not possess the recognition and realization rules which they are expected to have in Icelandic social situations in schools and classrooms (Public & Management Institute, 2013a; Morais, 2002; Bernstein, 2000). Immigrant youth stood outside looking in because they were invited, but there was no introduction. There was no one who took the lead to make the first knot to tie all students together. There was no catalyst to start the process of interweaving the social relationships between groups, no shared goal of creating a more cohesive student body out of the diverse population of the school. The question I ask is: how do students of foreign background and Icelandic-heritage students cross paths and get to know each other culturally and intellectually if the school does not play an active role in integrating the student body as a whole? How can there be a wholly integrated student body if there is limited social integration coupled with separate teaching for students of foreign background? Studies from several researchers suggest that young people's sense of emotional attachment to their school is of utmost importance, and that this can be especially important for immigrant youth. These researchers point out that the school itself needs to play an active role in integrating all students in order to foster this emotional attachment by creating a school environment of security, inclusion, trust, and equality. (Public & Management Institute, 2013a; Steen-Olsen, 2013; Jónsdóttir, 2007; Frønes, 2002). Likewise, the multicultural education theories of Banks (2004) and Nieto (1999) emphasize the need for a formation of unity among a diverse student

body, and the need for an active pursuit by all staff members of an inclusive school and social culture.

While expressing their welcome of ethnic minority students, school administrators see themselves as relatively powerless to make changes. They are constrained by three factors. The first is limited budgets and resources. They could not implement different measures to assist ethnic minority students because of the lack of funding. As one of the administrators explained, government funding for schools currently depends on the number of students who pass examinations and the number who graduate. Students who need more support for their studies for more positive outcomes, such as immigrants, both cost the schools extra and result in the schools receiving less funding. It could be said that the schools were punished for enrolling students whose mother tongue was not Icelandic. OECD's reference guide, *Closing the Gap for Immigrant Students: Policies, practice and performance* in education indicated appropriate funding to be one of the eight tools (OECD, 2010). In addition, after the financial crisis the cut of funding to schools, like other public institutions, further put constraint on services to this particular group (OECD, 2013). Ironically, the administrators and teachers reported that the biggest effect these constraints had on the instruction of immigrant students was the elimination of classes such as English, mathematics and computer classes that had been created to teach them in isolation. These students then joined their Icelandic-heritage peers in classes, which is more in accordance to the principle of inclusiveness. The issue thus returns to providing teachers with more support in acquiring more effective teaching culture and methods (Banks 2007b; Gay, 2000; Nieto 2000; May, 1999). The fact that the schools which welcome immigrant student populations incur additional expenses, led me to further reflect on the number of schools that indirectly exclude such students by not having Icelandic as a second language on their curriculum or by not having a reception plan. These deficits on the part of the schools result in limiting the choices immigrant students can make about which schools to attend.

A second indication of this conservative approach among administrators was their lack of a multicultural framework through which to analyze their schools, set clear goals and directions for their school, thus supporting their staff, and validating the potential of all their students (Riehl, 2000). Their strategy of segregating ethnic minority students from their majority peers in order to supplement deficiencies (as defined by the majority worldview) stood in contrast with what

research has indicated to be effective and the philosophy of inclusiveness in multicultural education theories (Gaine, 1987, Gay 2000).

The third indication was the administrators' assumption that the school culture was something that they themselves did not have the agency to alter. In this they stand in opposition to how Riehl (2000) defines effective leaders in school reform. Riehl (2000), among other multicultural education theorists, regarded administrators as responsible leaders who provided clear instructional and inclusive leadership, who could share visions and empower key players (teachers, students, staff, parents, community members) to bring them on board so that all could cooperate in achieving effective changes for the benefit of every member of their community of learners (Ryan, 2006; Banks, 2004; Wrigley, 2000).

The administrators, instead of being active agents in cultivating a school culture where all students can engage critically with all ethnic cultural backgrounds within their schools, seemed to feel that they themselves did not have the agency needed to make their schools more integrative for these students (Banks, 2004; May, 1999). There was a lot of recognition among the administrators of the various resources students of foreign background needed to reach their potential, but in the administrators' discourses there was little indication that they took the stand of being instrumental in bringing about changes that could assist these students. They instead expressed helplessness about the lack of funding and the rigidity of the system, and they relied on what they called "natural" social behaviours among their student bodies rather than attempting to shape those behaviours. The principals' choice of staying passive under the circumstances can infringe on the immigrants' democratic pedagogical rights: enhancement, inclusion and participation rights (Bernstein, 2000). The empowerment of the students and their rights in schools through Multicultural Education would encourage the minority students to act to change the landscape of the schools (Banks, 2004; Nieto, 2000; Gay, 1999; May, 1999).

While the systematic shortcomings of the Ministry of Education and Iceland's financial crisis are real challenges that administrators must work with, I would like to maintain that if school administrators had a deeper understanding of and interest in Multicultural Education, they could have implemented changes within their schools. Broad minded administrators could use policy, such as Article 2 of the 2008 Act to create dynamic school communities. They could have used policy to

frame schools' activities, and curriculum to tap or untap the students' social and cultural capital. They could have found the means to build the kind of schools that they said they wanted that would reflect Iceland's multicultural, democratic society and better prepare for the whole development of all students for a future in that society.



## 7 Teachers' Narratives

This chapter describes the perceptions and the practices of the teachers who taught students of immigrant background in general and students of Vietnamese background in particular. It also includes description of the experiences of teachers who were themselves immigrants.

Despite the kindness and helpfulness towards immigrant students, the Icelandic-heritage teachers did not take into account the cultural and educational background of the students. Nor did they use practices commonly found in multicultural education. Immigrant teachers on the other hand, had more sense of understanding of students who were immigrants like them.

### 7.1 Dedicated Teachers Open Doors

For a few ÍSA teachers, instruction hours were not limited to classes, but their office doors were often open to welcome students who sought additional support for their studies:

*I see myself as protector of their [immigrant students'] interest. They can approach me if anyone has some kind of problem. I told them my door is open...I always have this door [her office] open when I am working here so they can come if they want to. Sometimes they came to study. Sometimes a student would ask: "May I sit here with you?" I have also tutored a student when she started her vocational study and was so stressed out (Birta).*

Long after her pupils completed Karen's courses, they would send her presentations from other classes and ask her to correct them, a request which she never refused:

*...They often sent me their slides which they were to present in Social Studies, History, something else...They sent them to my computer and I fixed them up for them and sent them back to them. They wanted to have their presentations correct and good (Karen).*

Occasionally, these ÍSA instructors even extended their assistance to helping with matters beyond the school walls:

*They looked to us teachers for different reasons. We were a little bit like their liaison. They came for help with their school projects, job applications. They brought letters from the tax office to ask us to read and explain to them, because they don't understand. We were asked to call banks, social services, wrote recommendations or other things that they needed. There was a considerable amount of such things. Things that naturally no one had taught us to deal with, but we could not say: "No, this is not my job you need to talk to someone else." So, yes, break time tended to go to these kinds of things when someone came to knock on the door (Fríða).*

## **7.2 Limited Icelandic to Limited Academic Opportunity**

The critical factor of Icelandic proficiency resonated throughout all the interviews with the teachers. Teachers used students' proficiency levels as a gauge for determining when immigrant students should be allowed to enroll in classes that required demanding Icelandic, such as Social Studies and Natural Science. A big concern was to help students avoid failing such classes. (Gyða, Karen, Birta, Heiða). Birta explained that she had learned the hard way and sincerely blamed herself for a student's failing, because she was not careful enough in advising him:

*[Subject] Teachers sometimes wondered about why a certain student did not understand enough Icelandic. Then maybe it was the failing was mine to let him [a student, because student is masculine noun in Icelandic] start too early learning Social Studies. Let him start too early for instance History or another such subject. Now, I always make sure that they have finished, preferably, two years [of Icelandic] before they start learning Social Studies (Birta).*

I asked these teachers about the subject teachers in Social Studies and Natural Science: What is their role and responsibility in making sure that all students learn what is taught in their classes? Karen and Gyða answered in the negative:

*He does nothing. He talks to the homeroom teacher and says to her/him: "I am very afraid that this student will*

*not pass the exam because he/she didn't understand"*  
(Karen).

Karen thought that such teachers do not do anything because they were overwhelmed with "the problem" that was so vast. They did not know where to start with students who lacked vocabulary in the subject being taught:

*Many teachers considered it difficult to have them in class. They don't have the vocabulary that is needed to read Social Studies and Natural Science. This immense amount of vocabulary you need so you can understand concepts and everything else. I think it all gets stranded in some way...Teachers can't cope with this. This is such a problem* (Karen).

Gyða, on the other hand, had another explanation for the "problem." She thought it was because of the lack of multicultural policy and the lack of understanding of multiculturalism in the realm of education. The responsibility too often fell to the homeroom teachers only, usually the same ones who taught students of foreign origins Icelandic as a second language:

*Ay, he [an immigrant student] doesn't understand. 'We [the subject teachers] don't want to have them in the group. You [homeroom teachers] do it. You find the ways.' This can't be multicultural policy. Multicultural policy has to be that, the student is here, he is in the group then you [the teacher] have to help him so he understands like everyone else* (Gyða).

According to Karen and Birta, there have been one or two teachers who undertook to rewrite materials to cater better to immigrant students. However, the work was very demanding and they did not get any additional pay for the time they devoted to rewriting. Some of the teachers thought the lack of pay made the work even harder to accept:

*I have not adjusted my teaching for the foreigners. No, I don't think so. I can't imagine myself to do so. There was a teacher who needed to rearrange his teaching in a new way from how he used to teach. Always a shorter version than the one I was teaching. But then he saw it was so much work. We don't get pay for such work. No, no, no.*

*He gave up. The students had to just go to the regular class [with Icelandic speakers] (Karen)*

Although Karen only discussed Social Studies and Natural Science teachers, there were teachers of other subjects (Icelandic, English, Life Skills and Computer Science) who also felt it was difficult to teach students who lack Icelandic proficiency (Birta, Karen, Gyða):

*All the courses that are now available especially for these students are because [the “regular” courses] have not gone well for them. We have tried to send them into regular classes with the ones of Icelandic origin (Karen).*

The reason that students of foreign background could not take the same classes as students of Icelandic origin was that the teachers did not manage to get their explanations across to them. Gyða related the difficulty that teachers of English encountered:

*Not all teachers want to teach foreigners English. They don't want to because it is difficult. They don't understand Icelandic when they [the teachers] explain the grammar (Gyða).*

Birta taught Icelandic to students whose mother tongues were different than Icelandic, and she found it a challenge but from a different angle than many of her colleagues. Instead of seeing the problem through the lens of immigrant youth's deficiency, she recognized the shortcoming was hers, because she did not have the correct education to tackle the task:

*I had a degree in Icelandic...[but] Because I didn't know how to teach Icelandic as a second language I found teaching it very difficult as well as demanding (Birta).*

Ívar agreed with Birta that there was a general lack of preparation for teachers in his school, which welcomed immigrant students in its classrooms.

*All of a sudden I got a lot of students from other countries. I don't get notified of this [and thus was not prepared to teach such students]... I think more should be done in this case. The teachers should be called upon to explain whether the school has some kind of teaching plan or method of teaching. I would have liked to know more how*

*I should teach. Consider the fact myself as an immigrant, I have so far learnt quite a few things (Ívar).*

Apart from Ívar and Birta, the majority of teachers I interviewed and informally talked with during observation sessions shared the solution to the “problem” of the students’ as being limited Icelandic: Such students need to be taught in classes separately from Icelandic-heritage speakers. This way the teaching materials can include more pictures, different explanations, approaches with simpler language (Karen, Birta, Fríða, Herdís):

*In fact, it is important for the teachers to set up the materials in such a way the foreigners can understand, more pictures and completely different ways of explaining (Karen).*

Among the courses were Icelandic, English, math, Life Skills, and Computer Science. However, the two subjects that had priority were English and Icelandic because the teachers believed that many of the immigrants were far behind in these subjects compared to the youth who have been taught and exposed to them for many years:

*Naturally, there is a difference because, the ones of Icelandic background are used to English in television, know more than the others who arrived [into Icelandic schools] with no English knowledge, or very little (Birta).*

Even though the teachers recognized that not all immigrant nationalities understood English (i.e. some Eastern Europeans, Asians, South Americans), it was still a pedagogic practice on which some of the teachers relied, as I noted during my observations in classes. Birta and Karen pondered the different teaching approaches that facilitated the learning experiences of non-native Icelandic speakers in relation to Icelandic-heritage speakers. They did not deny such pedagogical practice could also benefit some students of Icelandic background (Birta, Karen, Fríða).

*As it is, when students of Icelandic background fail a course they have to retake it (Birta).*

*How one explains something, maybe simpler, something more, is naturally good... This could be less overwhelming for many Icelanders, the way I would do it [conduct her*

*teaching], for those who needed this kind of instruction. They, for sure, would feel better (Karen).*

### **7.3 The Teachers' View of Vietnamese Students**

The majority of the teachers described Vietnamese immigrant pupils as diligent and studious:

*I think in general there is a positive feeling for Vietnamese students in this school. They settle in well and generally diligent, courteous, well behaved, and do their best. Very few of them were the exception (Birta).*

Karen:

*I would say they are studious. They studied more at home and turned in the work that was required. They were diligent, they handed in homework that some other students don't even do or care about [i.e., was not required] (Karen).*

The teachers recognized that students of Vietnamese background viewed their relationships with teachers differently than Icelandic students did:

*I think they don't look upon teachers as their friends. Maybe they are not used to. A teacher is a teacher, he is there and I am here. There is a distinction (Karen).*

Karen was confident in the resiliency she observed in these students:

*Yes, they naturally are not different than others, not in such ways, but still they are harder working. I have to say they will go far especially the ones that attend school regularly... and continue so. And, of course, there was also occasionally one who dropped out...(Karen).*

Some of these students have succeeded, one even graduating as valedictorian of his class (Gyða, Birta). However, as Karen said, there were a few who failed or dropped out. The two explanations the teachers had for the unsuccessful results were first because the studies required a level of Icelandic that was too difficult (Gyða, Heiða):

*...when the new students came [in the Fall semester] they sometimes chose Natural Science classes after Christmas [Spring semester]. But, they usually gave up because it was simply too difficult, except in the case that their Icelandic was already that good (Heiða).*

The second reason was that these students needed to work to feed themselves and help their families (Birta, Karen):

*...[they] needed to work too much! They needed to work for themselves and their parents. They have turned 18 and are just at work (Birta).*

The teachers characterized their ethnic Vietnamese students as introverted, quiet, independent, and “geniuses” in math (Jenný, Karen, Heiða, Birta, Gyða):

*[In tutoring class] They were incredibly self-reliant. There was maybe an occasional word that one needs to help them with. They always had a computer and used Google Translate to translate. Only if there was some kind of text that one needs to help them through... Then maybe in History that one needs to read through with them the whole chapter. It is terribly difficult for them first to study this subject. But they are very diligent with translating (Heiða).*

The teachers observed that immigrant students of Asian background have difficulty learning Icelandic, with the biggest challenges being aspects of Icelandic grammar (declensions, personal pronouns, singular, plural, etc.) that are not components of the Vietnamese language. (Karen, Fríða, Birta).

*Asian teenagers often have much more difficulty in learning Icelandic than the ones that speak languages that are somewhat similar or related [to Icelandic], that way they understand first, second, third person, singular, plural. This is difficult for both for me and for them because often I see in their faces that they don't understand where I am heading. I think it is the grammar. They don't have any problem in learning new words or the vocabulary (Fríða).*

Fríða:

*...there is so much struggle with the grammar...it would have been such a difference, I find, for example another similar language can be used to link so I could say such as: this is the past tense like in English...It is difficult, if only I could link it [Icelandic grammar] to something else [another similar language] (Fríða).*

Along with grammar, pronunciation of Icelandic also appeared to at least for one teacher to be difficult for Vietnamese students. Karen described her strategies for understanding many Vietnamese students in her classroom:

*It applies to almost all of them. They spoke so unclearly [because of their strong accent] that each time someone asks about something in the classroom and I stand at my desk I am not completely sure what they are talking or asking about. Then I often need to walk to them or follow the text in a book, or read. Maybe certain sounds but I have not thought about which one they were that they have difficulty with (Karen).*

On the positive side, the instructors observed that the students' Icelandic improved with the length of time they lived in Iceland and as they became more comfortable speaking or asking questions in class (Jenný, Birta, Karen).

## **7.4 Immigrant Background vs. Icelandic Background**

The teachers observed that immigrant youth tended to socialize primarily with each other, being in ethnically homogenous groups or in groups with other immigrants more often than in groups with their ethnic Icelandic schoolmates. One teacher had a project that asked about this phenomenon among his students. He found that very few of them had friends among Icelandic nationals:

*Some of them, indeed, have Icelandic friends. But, I think very few. I actually asked them in a project they worked on (Heiða).*

Teachers felt the explanation for this phenomenon was that the foreign students were more in courses together. Only immigrant youth who



were further ahead in their studies enrolled in classes with students of Icelandic origin (this usually occurs during their last year in upper secondary school). The teachers say that immigrants befriend more nationals when they are more proficient in Icelandic:

*It seems that they are together a lot as the same nationality. Sometimes, they mixed, as we have talked about before: Filipino, Nepali, Vietnamese, but not many Icelanders. They don't start this [talking to ethnic Icelanders] until their graduation year. Not until then that I saw them first talking to others. [Then] There are the Icelanders. I saw them talking together in the hallways (Karen).*

Groups of different nationalities gathered separately in different parts of school during breaks and lunches. Birta personally believed it was healthy for them to rest their minds after endless listening to Icelandic in classes. At the same time, the teachers admitted that there has been little done to try to integrate immigrants better in the schools. There were suggestions from the teachers about getting the student social affairs organization to involve youth of foreign background to participate and organize with it. So far, their visibility is once a year when certain schools hold special events days, as described in the Administrator Findings above. Prejudice was one of the topics I introduced in my interviews, but teachers did not see that such behavior was displayed in their school environment, except for Heiðar, who recounted incidences when youth of foreign background had prejudice against students of Icelandic origins. She believed the negative feeling carried over from the students' bad experience with ethnic Icelanders in compulsory school:

*I have found myself that they [immigrant students] were full of prejudice against Icelandic kids. Maybe, they have already been put in the corner in compulsory school. I don't know. But somehow [the immigrants attitude toward Icelandic kids is] "Ah, they are all some kind of lunatic" (Heiða).*

## 7.5 Multicultural Schools?

The teachers believed that their schools were multicultural because they welcomed students of multicultural background. Through the literature in their Icelandic language classes, they transferred their knowledge about Icelandic habits, culture, and traditions to their “foreign” students with a sincere belief that this instruction is in the best interest of these students who need to function in an Icelandic society:

*...education about how the Icelandic society was established, what was our heritage. Because if I moved to another country then I would have liked to learn more about something of the kind (Fríða).*

These objectives were in compliance with the law and the National Curriculum Guide (Ministry of Education & Science and Culture, 2004, 2008b). The literature courses included only Icelandic literature:

*The literature is by Icelandic writers. This way they [the students] get to know Icelandic society through the stories and naturally maybe that is the key point (Fríða).*

Another teacher shared with me that there had been a discussion in his school about limiting the number of students of foreign background who should be welcomed every year. The staff was afraid that accepting a large percentage of immigrant students might make it a school only for “foreigners.” It was perceived as “dangerous” to make a school only for “foreigners”, because immigrants need to be with Icelandic-heritage schoolmates. In 2011 when the interview took place, the percentage of immigrant students in this school was about 10%. According to the teacher, there was an implicit consensus in the school that 10% was a fine number and should not be exceeded.

## 7.6 Professional Development for Teachers?

Of the eight teacher participants, only two had had any teacher education related to Multicultural Education. Throughout the interviews, the teachers attested that there was no systematic professional development in this field. Teachers who were conscientious and wanted to have understanding of Multicultural Education philosophies and pedagogical practices needed to take the initiative themselves to find courses or workshops.

*There have only been seminars which one decides [to take] oneself [voluntarily]. Then the teachers receive invitation letters to attend (Birta).*

Organizations in Iceland that were named by the teachers were ÍSBRÚ (The Association of Foreign Language Teachers in Iceland), Mímir Símenntun, Námsflokkar Reykjavíkur and Framtíð í nýju landi (Project Springboard), which have primarily offered workshops only on teaching Icelandic as a second language. The rare lectures on Multicultural Education attended by a few of the teachers apparently had little influence on them, since they did not recollect the content:

*It was a workshop like half of a day. I have forgotten how it was. We worked in groups or something. If you want, I can send you what we [the attendants] were doing. It is for sure we got an agenda and the description of it (Karen).*

Even Fríða, who found the ideas presented in the workshops exciting, did not follow up by implementing these ideas in her classrooms:

*It was very exciting. There were all kinds of projects, unconventional projects, with all kinds of games, different ways of approach. But, I probably am not very diligent in adopting them. One or some idea might sink in and I might be able to use it (Fríða).*

Gyða observed that little altered in her school after teachers came back from such courses:

*One would think after a course of this kind [Multicultural Education] there would be a feeling like “Wah, this is what we need.” But, no, nothing happened. It was just difficult. They [teachers] are stuck in their everyday routine. The same and the same (Gyða).*

There were teachers like Heiða and Ívar who had not had Multicultural Education pedagogical practice and philosophy introduced to them but thought they would have been helpful.

In none of my interviews did teachers mention the name of any theorist or particular teaching philosophy by which they were influenced. They described programs that were developed for students with Icelandic as a second language as “learning by doing” and as being driven by practical necessity... A program would usually start with one or two

courses and then expand by one course at a time, depending on the enrollment of students of foreign background:

*In teaching the ideas are born. It is feeling what is needed.  
Like it has always been said, from grassroots (Birta).*

In other words, the instructors' pedagogical practices developed from their personal teaching and learning experiences:

*Throughout the years I have developed certain methods for myself, which I use. I can't necessarily sit down and write them. Naturally they are from my experiences and all kinds of this and that. Then there are all the methods that are blended together (Birta).*

## **7.7 Immigrant Teachers: Welcome, but not without Prejudice**

Three of the eight teacher participants were themselves of foreign background, and during my interviews shared some thoughts about their own professional and social experiences as immigrants to Iceland.

Ívar held the view that his fluency in Icelandic allowed cross-cultural understanding on his part, and thus he believed that fluency in Icelandic is the key to diffusing prejudices that host nationals might have towards immigrants:

*...Racism begins with language because people don't understand each other well enough. As soon as you learn the language then there is much more than the language that is learnt: the way the culture is, the way people perceive things, the way people think... Thus, even though I am not Icelandic, because I have lived here so long, I am well acquainted with the Icelandic way of thinking, culture, and the way the people behave themselves. Thus, I have integrated a bit. As a result I have always been well received (Ívar).*

Ívar further justified the importance for immigrants of mastering Icelandic by noting that his own lack of proficiency in Icelandic likely led colleagues to discount his ideas:

*As a foreigner I know what it means to not have thorough command of Icelandic. People then take me as a fool because I speak very simple language so I must be simple-minded (Ívar).*

Ívar expresses the well-documented phenomenon of language acquisition leading to broader cultural understanding. Ívar's experience also raises a question: Was he "well received" solely because of his efforts to learn the language and to understand the Icelandic culture, or was there also an effort from host nationals to understand and accept him? Ívar's quote above pertains mainly to his own adaptation to Icelandic society, which is more like the definition of assimilation. As a matter of fact, Ívar admitted that he would rather conform than to constantly be "in competition" or "at war":

*Nevertheless, there have been times that were kind of difficult, when one needs to do things like the others [Icelanders], even it is not the best way, but it is the way it is done here. It is kind of play along, go with the flow. Because I live here I need in some ways to adjust. But one is to adapt but more to say to be Icelandic. I don't think I am Icelandic. I need in some ways to acculturate. Otherwise, I am always in some kind of competition. Always in some kind of war. Always trying to change someone else. That doesn't work. (Ívar).*

In addition to talking about being "well received" by the host society and by colleagues, Ívar and the other immigrant teachers also described having negative experiences. They found a lack of "compassion or solidarity" (Gyða) in their Icelandic colleagues: they were teased, their greetings ignored, inappropriate questions were asked, and they were treated as outsiders (Gyða, Ívar, Malla). Ívar was repeatedly teased because of his name. In the end, he called himself by a nickname to avoid the teasing, which had become more like harassment:

*The first time it was funny, the second time was OK, one hundred times then it is no longer funny (Ívar).*

Teachers of foreign background received implicit signals from their colleagues about their "foreign" status (Gyða, Malla, Ívar). In particular, these teachers described instances when discussions about ideas and opinions were involved. Their perception was that their

Icelandic counterparts found their ideas to be foreign to the Icelandic teachers' way of thinking, that the ideas of the "foreign teachers" were not relevant. Gyða was frustrated by the thought that her ideas or opinions were discounted because she was perceived as a foreigner:

*What I find difficult is when I see things differently, you know, because I am a foreigner, I am always a foreigner. I have different outlook. Thus, when I am involved in a discussion about topics such as politics or complicated issues as such, I have sometimes the feeling they think to themselves: "you are a foreigner, you don't understand" (Gyða).*

Ívar explained that his ideas were disregarded because he did not know the Icelandic way to deliver and follow up on them:

*When new ideas were brought forward people said, "interesting, interesting, we will think about it." You know what that means? It means, "Nothing will happen." Thus with time I just stop proposing anything anymore... Maybe it was my fault. Maybe, because I don't present them with a traditional manner of doing things here. Presumably, if I were Icelandic then I would have got my suggestion through (Ívar).*

With time, the feeling of ineffectiveness resulted in withdrawal and inaction among these teachers:

*When I first came here, I somehow had a lot of ideas for changes, for improvements. Then when I saw nothing happened. No one had any interest so I thought, "OK, I just do my best in my own subject instead" (Gyða).*

In their private lives, these immigrant teachers primarily had friends of foreign origin, and in the school environment they looked to their fellow immigrant teachers for mutual support and socializing. These immigrant teachers did not perceive Iceland as a multicultural society. Rather, they saw it as a place where different groups share a space but do not intertwine. They shared a general perception that their colleagues of Icelandic origins are uncomfortable with immigrants:

*Icelanders have difficulty. They are so introverted towards foreigners because they don't have experience. This is a nation of Icelanders with foreigners. It has not become a*

*multicultural country like many other countries in Europe that have had many years of experience. Not everybody is white, black or yellow, but everybody blends in together. But, here there are still many more Icelanders than there are foreigners. Foreigners group a bit together. Thus, this idea about multiculturalism is just a new phenomenon as it is. It takes many years (Ívar).*

The report of the immigrant teachers' experiences of such passive-aggressive behavior from their Icelandic-heritage colleagues made me pose the question whether this was symptomatic of underlying attitudes. How would such attitudes play out in behavior of these teachers towards immigrant students?

## **7.8 Immigrant Teachers: Making a Difference**

Their own experiences as “foreigners” in Iceland seem to give these teachers an extra level of pride in the accomplishments of their immigrant students. In third language courses, Malla and Gyða observed that non-Icelandic speakers were confident in the coursework, because they perceived that students of Icelandic background had no advantage over them. With a proud smile, Malla shared a cherished anecdote:

*I asked them [immigrant students] why they took my class and one student told me it's because they can start from scratch along with Icelandic students. In English or Danish classes, Icelandic students are ahead of them. But in classes like French, German or other languages, they all start at the same stage. Icelanders don't know more than them. It only depends on their attitude, how diligent they are with their studies (Malla).*

Malla also expressed understanding her non-Icelandic speakers' intimidation when sitting in classes where they feel inferior, and noted that her class is an exception. In her class, these students can hold their heads high and prove themselves:

*Yes, foreign students always feel Icelandic students are better than them. So they feel a little bit like they don't have the confidence to compete against them. But in my class, they are all the same (Malla).*

Gyða believes that the presence of teachers of foreign background in the schools expands the ideas of all students, majority and minority, about what sorts of education levels and jobs immigrants can attain. Gyða also pointed out that teachers with non-Icelandic backgrounds can provide important insights about the needs of immigrant students, insights that can be useful to all of the staff. Similarly, Ívar talked about the importance of all teachers having an awareness that immigrant students might have ways of learning different from those the teachers are familiar with:

*What I have thought was if I were an Icelandic I would have liked to know there are more than one ways to do things. Maybe the differences in how the children have learnt to do math. Even though math is a bit scientific, there are sometimes various ways to calculate (Ívar).*

My interviews showed that the immigrant teachers' classroom styles and pedagogical techniques markedly varied from their Icelandic-heritage colleagues. Classroom discipline was one area where my interviews revealed such a variance. None of the teachers of Icelandic background spoke about discipline as an issue. Nevertheless, Gyða talked about it at length, characterizing it as a problem the school is not acting to solve. Gyða reported that although it was recognized as a problem among teachers and they thought her idea of posting common classroom rules was a good solution, this idea has not been carried out.

Gyða's criticism agreed with my observations of classes during my fieldwork, I saw immigrant (rarely Vietnamese) students behaving irresponsibly and disrespectfully – trash and bottles scattered around the classrooms, phones ringing in the classrooms, constantly fiddling with the phones in their classes, chattering, drawing on tables, and being disrespectful to teachers. Classroom teachers did not intervene or comment on such activities.

Another area of divergence was homework: My student participants observed that while they had little homework from other teachers, they found that the immigrant teachers emphasized home study.

The immigrant teachers often made use of pedagogical techniques not widely used by Icelandic-heritage teachers. One reason for this is that the immigrant teachers often taught subjects which were in their mother tongues, where no standard classroom materials exist. Thus they



created their own teaching materials, tailored to their students in Icelandic schools.

These teachers also made extensive use of the school's computer technology, integrating it into their materials as an aid to teaching and to studying: The students had the option of logging onto their student domain to study on their own, and the teachers uploaded listening materials and answers to writing and reading exercises. The teachers wanted the students to listen to the recordings that they had recorded themselves of conversations and texts for listening comprehension and to practice speaking and writing. They provided their pupils with the opportunity to independently supplement their studies and advance at their own pace.

## **7.9 Looking to the Future**

As some of the teachers looked into the future and talked about changes they would like to see to improve the teaching of students of immigrant background, three components stood out. First, they would like to continue to write their teaching materials. For teachers who taught Icelandic, writing their teaching materials was a fact of life because there was little has been published. While their dedication to their students is a strong motivation, they also thought that they could be more effective teachers if they had some sort of periodic paid leave during which they could develop their teaching materials. Currently, this kind of stipend is very rare. Second, they wish more Icelandic language courses could be offered. Third, they would like the possibility of having assistant teachers work in a variety of classes where pupils without strong Icelandic proficiency need language help. The students then would have the choice of continuing their studies from where they left off in their homeland without having to go through a special program.

At the time of my interviews, Gyða had already offered suggestions in her school that were still under discussion: She thought that the physical location of courses that only included non-Icelandic speakers should be avoided, because it would further isolate the immigrant students from the rest of the school. And there should not be schedule conflicts between ÍSA and tutoring sessions, so students could make maximum use of tutoring.

## 7.10 Summary and issues

“Teachers are enthusiastic about us students” was a typical response from students of Vietnamese origin as they described their teachers in Icelandic upper secondary schools. After analyzing the interviews with the teachers, I would also like to add that some teachers were particularly dedicated to immigrant students. They reached out to their students and assisted them in many ways to make their process of integration easier in school and even, at times, in their daily lives. In their interviews and in the classes that I observed, the teachers who chose to teach immigrant students conveyed a deep sense of caring for and seeking to do their best for these students. Some created new teaching materials and adjusted their teaching methods to better fit these different groups of students. The dialogues that these teachers established with their immigrant students not only helped the students feel welcomed and motivated them to learn, but the teachers themselves understood the students’ realities outside the classroom wall (Nieto, 2000). As a result, they could have designed their pedagogical practice to connect the formal education to the world of the students’ experience to facilitate their learning and at the same time contribute to their knowledge expansion in line with the recommendations of scholars in this field (Gay, 2000; Dewey, 1998; Freire, 1998; Nieto, 1996, 2000). These teachers could have approached their practices through praxis of connecting theories and practice with creativity, rigor, and scientific competence (Freire, 1998). Instead, Icelandic-heritage teachers working with immigrant students did not acknowledge their previous education achievements therefore they did not tap into the rich resource brought by the immigrants.

On the other hand, many teachers who simply saw immigrant students as deficient in Icelandic, had the tendency of disadvantaging this group of students. They treated all students the same and kept on doggedly teaching the way they had always done. These teachers’ discourse reflected the banking model (Gay 2000; Freire, 2009). They seemed to lack sufficient understanding about the distresses the youth encountered coming into a new country, a new school system, and learning a new language that were recognized by studies such as the Public & Management Institute (2013a). Ethnic minority students failed courses in Social Studies and Natural Science because the teachers’ judged their logical and critical thinking through the narrow lens of their Icelandic proficiency (Cummins, 1996). These teachers did not indicate

that they engaged in dialogues with the students to establish some kind of mutual understanding which could lead to the kind of love and caring pedagogical practices used by some of their colleagues did (Gay, 2000; Nieto, 1999; Freire, 1998). Through their shortcoming in not applying critical thinking to provide themselves a self-conscious critique (Giroux, 2009), they have contributed to this group of NAMS' vulnerability in academic failure (Suárez-Orozco, Pimentel, & Martin, 2009).

The Icelandic deficiency assumptions also led to the isolation of the classrooms for "foreigners." The schools separated immigrant students from the school landscape, instead of creating bridges to include them. The teachers observed that immigrant students tended to socialize primarily with each other, within their own ethnic groups or in groups with other foreign students, but rarely with Icelandic-heritage schoolmates. It has been pointed out that teachers who are bridge builders are pedagogical strategists allowing people of diverse cultural background to come and go, crossing over to communicate and interact (Nieto, 1999). Nieto's bridge builders don't succumb to the status quo but challenge it so that their students of immigrant background have the opportunity to use their cultural background and previous academic knowledge to their advantage.

The lens of Icelandic deficiency through which Icelandic-heritage teachers see immigrants can be also interpreted as contributing to a discourse of otherness towards immigrant teachers and students who noted that their ideas were rarely accepted. My interviews showed that this lack of integration in the schools included immigrant teachers, who described feeling socially and professionally isolated from their Icelandic-heritage colleagues. Immigrant teachers' experiences within these school walls validated critical theorists and critical pedagogues' recognition of schools as not being a neutral entity but where the power of the dominant is embedded (Giroux, 2009, 2011; McLaren, 2009; Kincheloe, 2008; Tucker, 1978). Similar to immigrant students, the teachers were treated as deficient because perhaps they did not play by the rules that were in effect and were prone to be the victims of power of the people who spoke Icelandic (Bernstein, 2000; Bourdieu, 1991; Fairclough, 1989).

The ethnic minority teachers' brought important expertise and point of views to the school landscape. They noted that the teachers who were advisors to the "foreigners" and assisted them to better integrate were

the ones who were primarily responsible for them and who knew most about them, rather than these students being the responsibility of all teachers in the school. These teachers conveyed an understanding that immigrant students had learning styles and habits that differed from those of their Icelandic-heritage peers. They believed that this understanding, combined with teachers' adapting to their students, could result in more successful learning for the students. Their knowledge was recognized by multicultural education scholars to be a valuable resource that was untapped. They were not only resources for the ethnic minority students but they also could have operated as bridges for other staff members (Santoro, 2007; Pearce, 2005; Nieto, 1999)

I could only detect a limited sense of self-reflection in the discourse of Icelandic-heritage teachers about their own worldviews and how these could inform or damage their pedagogical practices. The teachers were not particularly aware of their own worldviews so they would not avoid projecting them on to their students. Teachers as humans, according to Banks et al. (2005), Giroux (2009, 2011), and Tucker (1978), are influenced by their own experiences of their life and who they are. Therefore, it is necessary for teachers to realize that their perceptions reflect Icelandic habits and culture which could hinder positive academic and social integration outcomes among immigrant students. The instructors' discourse in this study did not give any intimations of learning from their ethnically diverse students, or of taking into account the students' learning styles or their background knowledge when trying to facilitate their further education, practices recommended by experts in the field (Freire, 2009; De Vita, 2001; Gay, 2000; Nieto, 1999, 2000). The teachers did not engage in the pedagogical practice of teaching by praxis, in which Freire (2009) firmly believed. By reflecting on their work and acting to improve their practices, they could have worked towards the creation of a productive learning environment for their students. I was struck by a lack of curiosity, or in the language of Freire, *conscientização*, the consciousness about different philosophical approaches or pedagogical practices that might link the school in which they taught more to the wider multicultural society in which they lived (Freire, 2009).

Like the policy documents whose rhetoric forms the foundation of their work, the teachers focused on the molding of students of foreign background into the norms of established institutions. Inclusion and social justice were not problematic concepts for the teachers. There

were no indications in the interviews that they felt the need to acquire more knowledge in order to contribute to the initiation of the process of transforming their pedagogic environment characterized by inclusion and social justice.

## **8 Students' Narratives**

This chapter is about students' discourse which describes their experiences as students of ethnic minority in the two Icelandic upper secondary schools. The students' perceptions are detailed in order to have a deeper understanding of the reality of their learning process in school and to bring these experiences back to life.

The majority of the students felt they were vulnerable with regards to Icelandic. The schools underestimated their previous academic knowledge, and the students experienced a sense of alienation from the general student body.

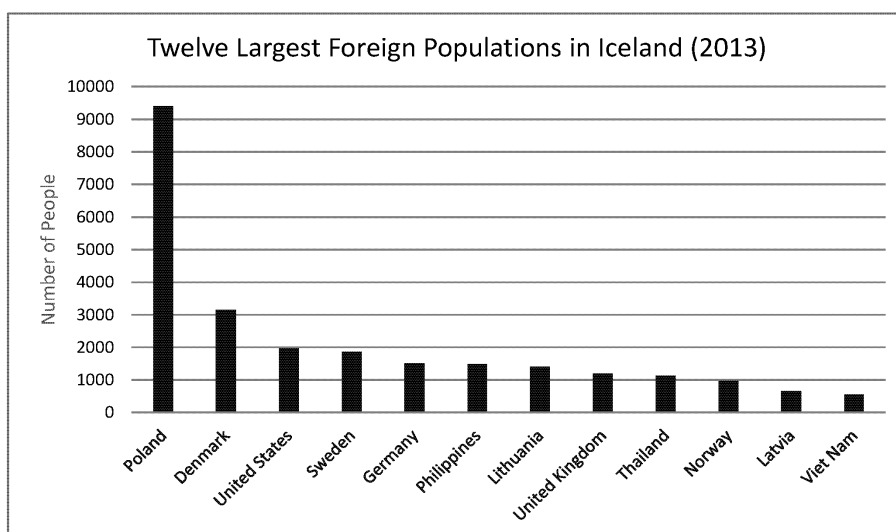
To begin with, however I will give some statistical ideas of the progress of students of Vietnamese background have in upper secondary schools comparing to Icelandic-heritage students. Table 2 below gives an overview of the students' number of years in Iceland, with whom they are living, their educational and employment status.

**Table 2: Students' Biographies**

<b>Student name</b>	<b>Years in Iceland in 2014</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Parent/parents in Iceland</b>	<b>Years in compulsory school</b>	<b>Terms in upper second. school 2014</b>	<b>Type of employment</b>	<b>School/ employment status in 2014</b>
<b>HanTrung</b>	5	M	Single parent	0	5/ dropout	housekeeping	Food industry
<b>TruongTrinh</b>	5	M	Both parents	1	2 (2011)	department store worker	No information
<b>ThanhNga</b>	5	F	Single parent	0	6/ in school	housekeeping	Housekeeping
<b>ThanhLang</b>	6	M	Single parent	0	4/ dropout	housekeeping	No information
<b>HoangOanh</b>	6	F	Single parent	0	3/ dropout	dishwasher	Food industry
<b>ThanhLiem</b>	6	M	Single parent	2	4/ dropout	dishwasher	Food industry
<b>MyThanh</b>	7	M	Alone	0	8/ matriculation	receptionist	University studies
<b>VietThuc</b>	7	M	Both parents	3	8/ matriculation	department store worker	University studies
<b>VinhHau</b>	8	M	Both parents	3	8/ matriculation	department store worker	University studies
<b>NhuTam</b>	8	F	Alone	0	6/ dropout	food industry	Housekeeping
<b>MyLinh</b>	8	F	Alone	0	6/ dropout	cafeteria worker	Food industry
<b>NgocBao</b>	8	M	Single parent	2	7/matriculation	check out line	University studies
<b>LanHuong</b>	8	F	Both parents	3	8/matriculation	check out line	University studies

## 8.1 Statistics on Youth Enrollment in Upper Secondary School

After the arrival of 94 Vietnamese refugees in three separate groups, in 1979, 1990 and 1991, they have steadily applied for their family members and friends to join them (Harðardóttir et al., 2005, p. 7). By 2013, it was one of the top twelve largest ethnic groups in Iceland with 555 persons in the country (Statistics Iceland, 2013). As the group grows larger the statistics youth enrollment in upper secondary school grows.



**Figure 6: Twelve Largest Foreign Populations in Iceland, 2013 (Statistics Iceland, 2013)**

Using numbers prepared by Statistics Iceland especially for this project, I compared the enrollment and graduation rates in 1999, 2005, and 2011 for upper secondary age students of Icelandic heritage and immigrants from Viet-Nam. The absolute numbers of people of Vietnamese background, between 15 to 25 years old, grew considerably during the period between 1999 and 2011.

There was a big change among students of Vietnamese background; their enrollment was 26 in 2005, which was 6 times more the number in 1999. In 2011 the number was 45, which was almost a doubling from 2005.



In 2005, the graduation rate for students of Vietnamese background was half that of Icelandic-heritage students, but the gap had narrowed; 8.2% of immigrant students and 7.3% students of Vietnamese background graduated, but 15.6% of Icelandic-heritage students. In 2011, the graduation rate among youth of Vietnamese immigrant background was more encouraging. It increased to 13.3%, an improvement which approaches the rate for students of Icelandic-heritage.

**Table 3: Rates of Enrollment and Graduation in Icelandic Upper Secondary Schools**

		Icelandic-heritage students		Vietnamese background students	
1999	<b>General population</b>	42,560		39	
	<b>Enrollment rate (%)</b>	16,073	(37.8%)	4	(10%)
	<b>Graduation rate (%)</b>	2,525	(15.7%)	2	(50%)
2005	<b>General population</b>	41,718		95	
	<b>Enrollment rate (%)</b>	17,145	(41.1%)	26	(27.4%)
	<b>Graduation rate (%)</b>	2,670	(15.6%)	2	(7.3%)
2011	<b>General population</b>	42,021		118	
	<b>Enrollment rate (%)</b>	18,874	(44.9%)	45	(38.1%)
	<b>Graduation rate (%)</b>	3,322	(17.6%)	6	(13.3%)

## 8.2 Academic Life in Vietnamese and Icelandic Schools

### 8.2.1 Upper secondary education in Viet-Nam

The student participants and I traveled their educational road together starting with their narratives about their school experiences in their hometowns in Viet-Nam. The participants were in their teens when they

came to Iceland. Thus, they all had school classroom experience in Viet-Nam.

Many of them were quick to say that school in Iceland was easy compared to Viet-Nam. They described their Vietnamese school days as long, intense, severely disciplined, and constrained.

They started school between 7:00 am and 8:00 am in the morning and finished between 9:00 pm and 10:00 pm in the evening. A normal day included regular schooling, extra schooling and tutoring, and finally homework at home. ThanhNga and Vinh Hau explained:

*I studied over there truly a lot. In short, there was no time to rest... We studied in the morning – I remember 7:00 a.m. until around noon. We had a two-hour break, and then we started again until 5:00 p.m. But in Viet-Nam the study programs were heavy. Besides being taught, we needed to do a lot of extra learning. After 5:00 p.m., if we continued to study more in school, we had a one or two hours break, then we started again for another two or three hours (ThanhNga).*

*There were seven days a week; I studied almost all seven days. Saturdays and Sundays I didn't come to school, but I studied at the teacher's home. However, on the weekends I got to stop early (Vinh Hau).*

Like many schools in Viet-Nam where there was a shortage of school buildings and teachers, the ones they attended operated with double shifts of students; morning and afternoon. All subjects areas that are included the curriculum were scheduled during classes that were approximately four hours long per day, five days a week. The schools also offered three to four hours of extra teaching in subjects that the system emphasized, such as physics, chemistry, mathematics and English. Students had to pay an extra tuition fee to attend the classes in which they thought they needed extra teaching to improve. Morning students would attend extra classes in the afternoon and vice-versa. Even though these classes were optional, the students felt that they were necessary in order for them to do well in school and in examinations. Spending an immense amount of time within school walls was for them the key to scholastic success – to be able to reach university level. HoangOanh, when I asked her why they had to spend so many hours in school:

*It was like in Viet-Nam there was something pressuring, something pushing really hard for one to study a lot—study a lot. Because studying a lot is the only way to keep up [with the teaching] (HoangOanh).*

Some of them explained that the number of hours allocated for teaching was not enough for the teachers to cover all the material required by the curriculum. Therefore either the teachers taught very fast, which made it difficult for students to keep up, or the teaching was limited to basic concepts. For further knowledge understanding, the students had to seek additional classes. ThanhNga:

*...in classes, for instance, teachers were required to teach according to the curriculum. But there was an immense amount of knowledge [and] we could not learn everything we needed during class. Thus teachers covered the materials at such speed that the students in the classroom had difficulty in following. This was the reason we had to attend extra teaching: to extend our knowledge. When we took exams, only a small part was about the materials in the course book, but a large part asked about broader knowledge (ThanhNga).*

In general, the participants' descriptions of the pedagogy practices in Viet-Nam indicated a "banking model." In most subject areas, the students sat at their desks and listened to the teachers lecture and learned the material by heart so that they could repeat it back in classes, or in examinations. ThanhNga and HoangOanh:

*In Viet-Nam, every lesson was very long with lots of materials to cover, therefore there was little time. There was never any discussion or debate in class (ThanhNga).*

*In Viet-Nam, whatever subject we studied, in the beginning of each class the teachers took fifteen minutes for calling some student's name randomly to stand up and answer questions about what we had learned the day before. We learned by heart at home to answer questions orally in class (HoangOanh).*

The youth experienced their studies as intense for at least three different reasons. The first reason lay in ThanhNga's explanation

above. The extra teaching was not only for broadening their knowledge but more importantly it covered the gaps in the class teaching.

Homework was the second reason: Every day after school, they worked on their homework. In their homework, students were expected to both master the day's material, and to prepare the following day's material:

*... I thought studying here was much more leisurely, much more leisurely. Because going to school in Viet-Nam, almost every day I had to worry about homework. After coming home from school. I needed to think about the homework of the day. Then after finishing it, I needed to prepare for the following school day (VinhHau).*

The third factor fueling the students' feeling that the overall experience of school in Viet-Nam was intense was the continuous need to succeed in exams. There were entrance exams for public upper secondary schools, which have lower tuition fees than private ones, and final exams at the end of the twelfth grade for the graduation certificate necessary for taking further entrance exams to universities. Similar to the Icelandic school system, after the last grade of compulsory education (10th grade), or low secondary school in Viet-Nam (9th grade), the students compete to get accepted into top rated upper secondary schools, which NgocBao called the "chosen schools." This form of tracking would facilitate entrance to university:

*There were exams at all levels. Students with high grades attend chosen school. Students with low grades go to low achiever school. Coming from such school it is difficult to apply for university (NgocBao).*

In addition to the exam pressure at all levels, at the secondary school level there was an additional pressure to complete the curriculum early so as to have the time to prepare for university entrance exams. [In 2008, the gross enrollment ratio for tertiary education in Viet-Nam was 19% (Mor Barak, 2005), with the net enrollment rate of only 13% (McLaren, 2009). Despite the low hope of getting to further their education these students's motivation, similar to their peers in the country, drew from the general perception that education would be "a stepping stone to a better future" (Nguyen, 2001)

*...teachers in upper secondary school determined right at the beginning [of upper secondary education] that it was*

*necessary to start the program early and going speedily over it in order to have time to prepare for universities (TruongTrinh).*

A further source of pressure was the students' awareness that their passing grades on the university entrance exams would determine which faculty they would be qualified to enter, despite whatever personal preferences they might have.

Thus, the process of building knowledge in the Vietnamese school system was structured around the standardized tests. As these students understood it, their homework was not only to review work and prepare them to tackle the work for the next day, but was to prepare them to pass exams. Their work in upper secondary education was not just to expand their knowledge but was also to prepare them to pass exams and go on to further study. As a result, the youth focused their achievement goals around examinations.

MyThanh expressed frustration about what he found to be an incomprehensible system:

*Yes, I don't understand the teaching. The subjects were taught in school but we went to extra classes to prepare for university. The preparation had to be similar to the "inntökupróf" (entrance exam). We had to take a university entrance exam; therefore the course materials were not the same as in the morning school. I don't understand why (MyThanh).*

MyThanh was also very critical of the after school study system. In his opinion, it was not effective and was simply a way for the system to make money.

*Studied for the school! (He sarcastically laughed). The truth is there was no quality in the Vietnamese way of teaching. It was very strange. Following the curriculum only don't quite seem to be enough, but trying to teach more than the curriculum intended don't solve the problem either. It lacked quality. This was the reason why the education was not good. The truth was the extra teaching arrangement was mainly for the institution to make more money. I didn't acquire any more new knowledge than the primary teaching time...It was not very "practical" (MyThanh's word).*

The students' descriptions of the intensity and pressure inside classrooms were not limited to teaching and learning but also included disciplinary actions that they perceived as designed "to make us learn" (HanTrung 10). Seven out of thirteen of the narrators mentioned perceiving disdain from their Vietnamese teachers. The youth regarded the teachers as very strict in class. Teachers expected students to be quiet and pay attention. NhuTam:

*In Viet-Nam we were not allowed to eat, drink, or snack.  
We had to be serious, not talking a lot, and attentively  
listening to the teachers' teaching (NhuTam).*

Students could face different consequences for lacking discipline, not doing their homework, or neglecting to memorize the knowledge transferred from their teachers. In his soft voice, ThanhLiem:

*Teachers in Viet-Nam were a little bit hot tempered,  
rough, they knew only to teach... For instance, if the  
students don't do their work they would be either verbally  
or corporally punished... I was kind of scared  
(ThanhLiem).*

ThanhLiem and HanTrung were intimidated, but this did not help them learn because it discouraged them from participating in classes:

*There was a math teacher whose class I was more active. I  
often raised my hand to volunteer to come to the  
blackboard. But when I studied with teachers who applied  
corporal punishment, like when I was in 6th grade, I was  
afraid to raise the hand to volunteer (ThanhLiem).*

Even though ThanhLiem was speaking about his corporal punishment in 6th grade above, it was not limited to the lower grades according to other participants.

Other forms of discipline included dismissing students from classes, or inviting parents to a special meeting for formal complaints. The youth were generally afraid of involving their parents, because they had no doubt that the consequences from their parents would be no less severe than the teachers' (ThanhLang, HanTrung).

*In Viet-Nam if we [students] don't do our homework, or  
something of the kind, we were afraid parents would be  
invited then we would be scolded or spanked  
(ThanhLang).*

An important constraint felt by some of the participants stemmed from an inequality in the design of the educational system: not all students could afford the extra schooling which they considered essential for their future. Of the 13 participants, 10 attended the extra classes or tutoring regularly. The other three took only some of the extra classes during their final year of upper secondary education. They were too poor to pay the tuition, and they needed to work during after school hours in order to help their families:

*I took the examination at the end of the year... I went for tutoring classes in math in the afternoon for two or three hours... two times a week. I was free on the weekend from study since one had to be able to afford these extra classes. I needed to have the money to pay for tuition... Because my family was in financial difficulty, in the free time from school I had to work... (NhuTam).*

When I asked these three students to rate themselves they thought they were satisfactory students. But according to LanHuong, these students were the ones who were at the highest risk of failing classes.

*We needed to study a lot more in Viet-Nam, besides having to pay a lot for tuition. The ones who didn't join these extra classes would never reach the good student status. Teachers only failed satisfactory and below average students (LanHuong).*

Moreover, since the teachers who taught the extra classes were the same ones who taught the students in the primary teaching hours, some of the students felt that if they did not take the extra classes then the teachers would form negative opinions of them. MyThanh:

*Of course, there were effects. Let's say if there were five students in class and I was the one who didn't attend the tutoring class. Then the teachers would have a different attitude towards me. They would look at me differently. I could receive less attention or have a more difficult time in class. I could receive lower grades for my work (MyThanh).*

### 8.2.2 *Values and knowledge from Viet-Nam to Iceland*

Although the majority of the youth described the pressure they felt in school in Viet-Nam, they also admitted that they came away with good study habits and an extensive knowledge in certain subjects such as math and science. These were advantages they brought with them to Icelandic schools:

*Our methods of study in Viet-Nam were much more austere than in this country. Thus I know how to work when I came here (ThanhLang).*

The participants described how the emphasis on math and science in the Vietnamese system helped put them in an advantageous position in the Icelandic system. The majority found that they were far ahead in math in Iceland. Even though the methods of teaching math differed between the two countries and between schools in Iceland, it can be said that students who had completed 12th grade math in Viet-Nam would not learn anything new in Icelandic upper secondary school math until level 600. MyThanh explained his experience in math during his four years at Mosahraun Comprehensive School:

*Math is the subject that helps us the most because it is awfully easy. I had almost finished grade 12 math [when he first came to Iceland?] therefore we could actually go directly into math level 503 here. However, we have to start with math 203, 303, 403, 503 for earning credits. Starting at 603 are concepts that we had not yet learned (MyThanh).*

In Viet-Nam, the participants had also studied natural sciences (physics and chemistry) and writing techniques (punctuation, paragraph construction, essay writing) which they could transfer into Icelandic classrooms (MyThanh, VinhHau, LanHuong, ThanhNga).

math, science, and writing skills were not the only valuable assets these students brought with them into the Icelandic classrooms. They were also armed with the Vietnamese traditions of working hard, valuing education, and having strong family ties. In making the decision to move to Iceland, their families had sacrificed the tight everyday communication and support systems of their close extended families. For some, even their nuclear families were now separated. However, the displacement was not only to seek better education for their children and better living conditions for themselves, but also to be financially



stronger and thus improve life for their family members who were still in Viet-Nam. Six of these thirteen youth live with single parents, and three of them are alone in Iceland. Thus they struggle not only with a new language and culture, but they also struggle to manage their isolation from the emotional and moral support provided by their missing parents and siblings. MyThanh, whose only relative in Iceland is a cousin, works a full time job at night and is a full time student during the day. He is determined to push forward for a better future. He described his presence in Iceland as an opportunity of which he needs to take full advantage:

*...coming here [to Iceland] I was lucky I to get to go to school. Getting to go to school, provides me with an opportunity to learn the language and to develop myself. In the beginning, I was only thinking about finishing upper secondary education. But then I found out there was no future after this much education. This is the reason I need to try to learn more. I need to learn a profession that I am passionate about (MyThanh).*

In a new educational system and culture, these connections to family and traditional social relationships fuel their resiliency, motivation, and determination to get a good education. The education is not only for themselves, but is part of their duty to return the sacrifices their parents have made for them. ThanhNga:

*My mother is very concerned. Every day she told me that coming into this country we don't know the language. Without the language there is nothing we can do. My mother said her hope and expectation is on me... (ThanhNga).*

Vietnamese parents and relatives, like ThanhNga's mother, may not speak Icelandic enough to help their children with their studies or with navigating the system, but they gave them a lot of encouragement. MyThanh's parents encouraged him every time they had the opportunity to speak to him from across the ocean:

*In the beginning, they [the parents] were worried about I could not make it in Icelandic school because maybe I don't have the knowledge. But once they saw that I could handle my studies, they became very enthusiastic and encouraged me a lot more (MyThanh).*

Their parents remind their children to do their homework, monitor their grades, and come to meet with teachers when they are invited (LanHuong, ThanhLiem, TruongTrinh, ThanhLang)

*My parents told me to put my effort into my studies then I can choose to study whatever I am interested in...They make sure I do my homework every night and carefully read my report card every time (LanHuong).*

ThanhLiem grandparents' words of guidance connect his education to the development of his well-being. Their words echo the printed words in the Icelandic curriculum:

*Make every effort in your education to become a fully rounded person (ThanhLiem).*

### 8.2.3 Contrasts between Education in Viet-Nam and in Iceland

In contrast to the adjectives the students used for the Vietnamese school system, they described upper secondary schooling in Iceland as “*dễ, thoải mái, nhàn*” (ie, easy, relaxed, leisurely). These were students who were attending the first to the fourth year of upper secondary education, in different programs such as Icelandic as Second Language, Natural Science, Business, and Economics. VinhHau:

*I find the schooling here much more leisurely, much more leisurely. For instance, the homework from Monday to Friday, there are assignments but there isn't much (VinhHau).*

These youth felt that in Iceland they had greater autonomy in their learning than they had in Viet-Nam, where their learning was controlled by the adults:

*The quality of learning is different. If we want to learn more [in Iceland], then we just register for more courses. There is no-one to make us (MyThanh).*

*I think it is an effective way of teaching. Here we need to study ourselves a lot more. In Viet-Nam we also had to be responsible but there was a lot more pressure. We need to be more self-motivated and responsible for ourselves here (HoangOanh).*

Most of all, the youth valued the trust that was given to them to choose studies in which they were interested. ThanhNga excitedly talked about this concept of “freedom” that seemed to be unfamiliar to her. She needed to ponder in the middle of the sentence and searched for the word:

*We study what we are passionate about. We study the subjects we are interested in. They are up to us to choose...that is...what is the word, that I want to use, I have forgotten it... it is like... respecting our freedom*  
(ThanhNga).

They appreciated having the responsibility for learning in their own hands:

*Here I find that for the ones who want to learn, they learn. The ones who don't want to learn, they don't. It's their responsibility. They learn for themselves. In Viet-Nam we were pressured to learn. We were made to learn*  
(HanTrung).

While in their experience Vietnamese teachers had been distant and impersonal, the attention they received from Icelandic teachers proved to be very important to these students. They perceived their teachers to be enthusiastic, friendly, and helpful to students who approached them for explanations. NhuTam:

*Enthusiastic. Teachers are enthusiastic about us students. They don't scold and are not violent towards us. They assist us when we don't understand and can't do our work, and explain for us when we don't understand the meanings so we can understand better* (NhuTam).

When asked to compare teaching methods between Viet-Nam and Iceland, what seemed to be uppermost in their minds was the kind of atmosphere created in the classroom and the approachability of the teachers. Their response was that in Iceland “the teachers were enthusiastic about students” whether or not the teachers were effective in their instructional techniques. Their explanation for this characteristic was that they were free to ask questions and their teachers readily and willingly tried their best to answer them in class. HoangOanh:

*Enthusiastic, because if I found that I didn't understand something, I was free to ask and the teachers would*

*answer. But in Viet-Nam we could only ask during a designated time. (HoangOanh).*

#### 8.2.4 Pedagogy in Iceland

VinhHau and other students, such as HoangOanh and MyThanh, thought the pedagogy of practice in Iceland provides more direct practical experience. VinhHau cited his physics course, which seemed to excite him the most, because he got to conduct experiments and write reports about them, instead of learning only the theories from books as in Viet-Nam. Nevertheless, he believed both methods were equally important:

*There is more practical studying here. I mean there aren't so many theories like at home...For instance, in Physics classes either the teachers do experiments or we do them ourselves then write reports...In Viet-Nam we learned the "formulas" [VinhHau's word] then used the formulas to work on problems; tried to understand more about them. That's all. There is no practice...That's why I find school both in Iceland and in Viet-Nam each has its own good way (VinhHau).*

HoangOanh thought language teaching was more effective in Iceland, because the students could discuss issues before giving answers to assignments in class and had the chance to practice talking to each other on topics that were useful in daily life. She felt the atmosphere was more relaxed:

*There is more freedom in our learning here. The teachers can give us guidance, but we get to speak more in our learning. Yes, we talk to each other about practical issues. For instance, we talked about jobs, things we do everyday, entertainment, things like that (HoangOanh).*

MyThanh found that Icelandic upper secondary programs prepare the students well for their future tertiary education:

*...At home [in Viet-Nam] I was almost finished. I was in 12<sup>th</sup> grade [the last grade in upper secondary education]. I only had a tiny bit left before I graduated. But, with the level of education here, I got to acquire new knowledge in subjects, in the "braut" (study program) that I didn't get*

*to learn before. For example subjects like economics or business I didn't know what they were all about when I was studying in Viet-Nam. The subjects are very practical. What I mean by practical is, the subjects have learned at this level I will continue at the university. This is excellent (MyThanh).*

Some classes allowed the students to apply a critical lens to some of the ways society functions. MyThanh appreciated his social science classes, even though they were mainly about the evolution of Iceland as a country and a society over the centuries: he had learnt about the development of human beings in general through learning about Iceland. He thought one of the classes had influenced his way of scrutinizing his surroundings and extracting information available in his daily life:

*For instance, last year, we [MyThanh and his Icelandic classmates in that class] were discussing prejudice towards foreigners... Students, old people, teachers, friends, other foreigners all see foreigners differently. The media usually reported on bad people [meaning foreigners who had caused trouble in Iceland]. But we were taught to look at issues with different viewpoints. I changed because I recognized that there were always the bad and the good sides of people or any issues. I, of course, favored the good side more than the bad one (MyThanh).*

Several participants were critical about the lack of homework in the school they attended, noting that their experiences in Viet-Nam had taught them to believe that daily homework was an effective way to review and prepare:

*No homework [in Iceland], but I think there should be homework so the students had to learn to prepare to come to classes the next day... There was a lot of homework in Viet-Nam but in my opinion, I benefitted from it (ThanhNga).*

However, MyThanh said that in Iceland he did not have to study at home, and he credited his Icelandic teachers for this: homework was not needed because he already understood everything in class:

*I rarely ever need to study at home because in school the method of teaching is good enough [to understand]. If there is time to study at home then it is better, but I almost never read the books unless something is difficult or for reviewing for tests. The rest of the time is for work (MyThanh).*

Likewise, NgocBao just laughed when the subject about homework in Iceland was discussed:

*I can work and study at the same time. I don't need to study at home. I only do quick review for tests (NgocBao).*

According to the students, the most commonly applied method in teaching Icelandic was going online to find explanations or definitions of words in Vietnamese. (ThanhLiem, MyLinh). Using English was also a popular avenue for many teachers. (MyLinh, NgocBao, MyThanh). I witnessed both these methods being employed in classrooms during the time of observation in the schools.

Unfortunately, English was a subject in which students of Vietnamese background were equally as vulnerable as in Icelandic. HoangOanh and ThanhNga:

*Using English was good for students who know English. But because I don't know a lot of English, it was difficult to understand (HoangOanh).*

*...the group of foreign students—not the Vietnamese group—Americans or some people like that—they were already proficient in English; in class the teacher also used English. This was the reason they understood a lot, i.e., we [Vietnamese students] understood 50%, but the others [students with English] must understand up to 80-90% (ThanhNga).*

MyLinh shared her rather unpleasant experience, which she encountered with some other immigrant classmates.

*...when we started school, we didn't have any English, although we agreed that when we learned Icelandic the teacher should use Icelandic. He should not use English with us. What happened was that we asked, but he didn't answer us. He only answered the ones who knew English.*

*The ones who didn't have English could only sit and wait (MyLinh).*

ThanhNga's experienced another conflict in pedagogical practice that possibly affected her progress due to her Icelandic teacher's unfamiliarity with her learning style. She told me that once in one of her Icelandic language classes, she was asked to describe the activities of her day. She wrote the essay the way she had learnt in Viet-Nam, beginning by describing the overall atmosphere of a rainy day, with herself walking in it before she described what she did on that day. She turned in the paper and when she got it back, the part where she described the environment was crossed out because the teacher considered it irrelevant to the assignment. ThanhNga's interpretation of the teacher's comment was that Icelanders write directly to the point without describing their surroundings, unlike the way the Vietnamese usually do. From a Multicultural Education perspective, this incident would be seen as a missed learning opportunity for both the teacher and ThanhNga. The teacher could have acknowledged ThanhNga's existing writing habits while at the same time explaining more fully Icelandic expectations, thus boosting ThanhNga's confidence for future assignments, instead of leaving her feeling discouraged.

#### 8.2.5 *Language barriers*

The students I interviewed identified their lack of Icelandic proficiency as a major barrier to their educational progress. ThanhLang:

*I found it is more difficult to study here because of the difference in the language. There are many words I don't understand. But in Viet-Nam, after consideration, I had already understood everything (ThanhLang).*

In NgocBao's opinion, immigrant students who have only been in Iceland two or three years would have difficulty in their learning, because they would not have enough Icelandic or English to understand or to express themselves, both in speaking and in writing. Unless they know some English, there is little the teachers can do to help them, and thus they will fail their classes.

*If they don't know [the language] because they had only been here two or three years and they came to school, then they couldn't speak, couldn't write, don't know what to do.*

*The teachers don't mind them, but if they don't understand anything then they just failed the class. The teachers don't want to help at all. It just meant that they had not the proficiency in Icelandic to take such a class... If they knew English, then the teachers could help them (NgocBao).*

Vietnamese and Icelandic have little in common beyond the Roman alphabet. Vietnamese is a tonal language and Icelandic is an inflectional language, so unsurprisingly there are major differences between them in pronunciation and grammar. Some students of Vietnamese background considered these differences insurmountable.

Listening to these participants, I could hear that many of them faced the same difficulties that Vietnamese speakers generally encounter when learning Icelandic. They have difficulty in pronouncing the “s” that is positioned in the middle of a word, and the “l, r, n and þ.” Pronunciation issues seem to have eroded the students’ self-confidence in their ability to learn Icelandic. HoangOanh and ThanhNga perceived themselves as “kém” (weak) in learning language, because they “*didn't not know how to pronounce [Icelandic]*.” HoangOanh explained:

*...My pronunciation is bad, thus I am lazy to speak. That's right, every time I pronounce a word wrong I become kind of scared and reluctant to speak a lot more (HoangOanh).*

ThanhNga expressed desperation about wanting to speak Icelandic better, but she did not know where to go or how to find a solution:

*... I can understand the teacher, but I can't speak, I don't know why I am bad in pronunciation, in learning the language... I am trying to get someone to help me with this problem, to enhance my ability. But, I don't know. I have not gotten a solution for improving my pronunciation (ThanhNga).*

In the first interview with the participants, only two mentioned that Icelandic grammar was difficult (NhuTam, HoangOanh). I pondered how to interpret their silence on this issue. I thought there could be two reasons for their not bringing this subject into our discussions. The first reason could be that their focus, as beginners, was on learning enough vocabulary and correct pronunciation. This is the reason these students talked about learning Icelandic as “*understanding the words*” (NhuTam, ThanhLang), or “*pronouncing the words*” (HoangOanh, ThanhNga). The second reason could be because they did not have a



clear understanding of how the different components of the Icelandic grammar system—the inflections and syntax—functioned, and how semantically these components could affect the language.

In subsequent interviews, I got to travel the Icelandic grammar learning roads with my participants. Many of the experiences they shared with me about their journey supported the earlier interpretations. The youth observed the roads as both steep and winding, but they found inflections, the way Icelandic words transform and vary, to be steeper and more winding than others. With no hesitation they classified inflections as “*khó*” (difficult). HanTrung fell silent for a very long time then admitted:

*Lots of times I don't understand the explanation of how the grammar worked...So, I don't remember things about grammar (HanTrung).*

However, even though HanTrung could not explain Icelandic grammar, he was not that intimidated and silenced by it. HanTrung was a practical individual. He put what he had internalized through learning and listening into practice without consciously thinking about the mechanical aspects of the language:

*I just speak, I don't think about grammar... I don't apply grammar rules a lot either when I write. When I speak, whether I use grammar or not—I don't know—I just speak so people can understand me (HanTrung).*

Like HanTrung, ThanhLiem did not let the feeling of speaking incorrectly stop him from communicating but he was more conscious about his lack of knowledge:

*Grammar is a little hard because it declines a lot. I don't understand very much. I don't understand things about sentences, feminine, neuter something of that sort... In conversation I use grammar with some simple words. For instance, the singular and plural in verbs. But other than that I just speak (ThanhLiem).*

A long uphill road for these young Vietnamese was the four cases—nominative, accusative, dative and genitive – that did not exist in their previous language learning experience. With no comparable structure in their experiences, it was difficult for them to understand the concept of cases and how to apply them. ThanhNga explained:

*I found these cases translated in your dictionary<sup>15</sup> but I didn't know what they meant (ThanhNga).*

When ThanhNga talked about the cases, she used Icelandic words for the cases she knew, and for the ones she did not know, she replaced them with “*cái phần, phần đấy, cái đấy*” (the part, that part, that). Needless to say, without a good understanding of the cases, it becomes an insurmountable challenge for a speaker to juggle the four different cases correctly with the singular and the plural in the separate forms for each of the three genders.

*I know how to decline feminine, masculine—that I have understood a little. But later when we went higher, learned about “þolfall” (accusative), those four. That part, I don't have much comprehension. I usually get mixed up in that part. I don't understand when I use that and when I don't need to use that (ThanhNga).*

MyThanh and NgocBao were among the students who have succeeded and are now studying at the university level. In one of my upper secondary school observation sessions, I watched NgocBao working with his classmate in a small group. He was confident and very much at ease in communicating and relating to his peers. He listened attentively, actively participated in discussion, and smiled and joked with members of the group. When I asked him about studying in Icelandic he proudly said to me:

*Just keep studying, then one would succeed. Icelandic was very difficult in the beginning but it became easy at the end (NgocBao).*

Similar to NgocBao, MyThanh did not find learning Icelandic very difficult. His strategy included using his social venues:

*The truth was I spent a lot of time listening. At work people taught me more. They taught me more colloquial language. I wrote words down then when I came home I looked them up in the dictionary. I also learnt from the television subtitles. I listened to FM radio to study pronunciation. Then after a period of time, around three*

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<sup>15</sup> Anh-Dao Tran (2010) Orðabók Vietnömsk-Íslensk/ Íslensk-Vietnömsk (Vietnamese-Icelandic/Icelandic-Vietnamese Dictionary)

*months I started to speak a little. After six months I was able to incorporate grammar to speak more properly. After that my vocabulary continued to expand. For me learning Icelandic was not difficult (MyThanh).*

#### 8.2.6 *Helping themselves*

The students, especially the highly motivated ones, adopted several strategies to overcome stumbling blocks in their studies. The Internet was their first resource. They looked up vocabulary and found more information in Vietnamese about the topics that they did not fully understand in class (LanHuong, MyLinh, TruongTrinh, VietThuc, MyThanh). However, the process of translating words or text from Icelandic to Vietnamese was not always simple, as they often had to first find them in English before turning to Vietnamese. In Iceland only one dictionary exists in book form and one online for Icelandic-Vietnamese and Vietnamese-Icelandic, and these mainly list only most commonly used words. For Vietnamese students, limited proficiency in English can be a key barrier, particularly when they study subjects such as economics, geography, marketing, biology, and other natural and social sciences. This is why LanHuong reported that the classes these young people failed the most were in history and natural science. MyLinh voiced her frustration:

*...for instance, I am studying economics. I like economics a lot, so I have thought about it and studied at home. I went online to look up words and concepts. Then when I came to class I asked the teacher. Naturally, I didn't understand his answers. I didn't understand the language. I could not understand the words used, the particular language that is used for the subject... I translated them into Vietnamese, but they were not right (MyLinh).*

Getting assistance from friends or exchanging information and knowledge with classmates was another very important resource. Often when TruongTrinh did not have the opportunity to ask the teachers in class about issues that he did not understand, he consulted with his classmates. Meanwhile, MyThanh usually had his friends of Icelandic background proofread his papers before he handed them in:

*I only asked for my friends' help and not teachers here (MyThanh).*

He was sure that the teachers eased the requirements for him in his assignments when it came to Icelandic (they usually marked words that were misspelled for him to correct). LanHuong shared her strengths with a friend:

*This year I failed the English test and a friend of mine failed math. Since she passed English and I passed math we will teach each other (LanHuong).*

A few of the participants also signed up for homework assistance time in subjects other than Icelandic. They found these sessions helpful in completing their work, as the attending teachers could clarify many problems arising from language barriers. However, there were times the instructors were unable to provide answers to questions about specific subject matter. TruongTrinh:

*[During these sessions] we just worked on our own, if there were parts that we don't understand then we asked the teachers for help. But the teachers at these sessions could only assist us partly, because they didn't know about particular subjects. Then we just searched the Internet (TruongTrinh).*

For the few youth who could be considered to have learnt Icelandic enough to comfortably associate with Icelanders, their strategy would seem to lie in establishing ties with Icelandic born individuals, in minimizing speaking Vietnamese, and in learning English simultaneously with Icelandic. NgocBao shared with me the advice he would offer to young Vietnamese:

*Don't speak Vietnamese. Learn English first. Speak only English. You can then use English to learn more Icelandic on television. You need to choose programs that speak English so you can read the Icelandic subtitles and learn from them. Work with Icelanders to give yourself opportunities to speak English and Icelandic. If you keep speaking Vietnamese, you can't progress (NgocBao).*

MyThanh's process of learning Icelandic was similar to NgocBao's. In addition he took extra English courses in a private institution. He also believed that it was very important to have a "local" person as a friend with an interest in helping:

*In my opinion, the first thing we [Vietnamese] need to do is look for a foreign friend, a local friend, for instance an Icelander, to make him/her a good, close friend. But the person has to whole-heartedly, truly, want to help. We need to find people like that to talk to everyday (MyThanh).*

MyLinh and NhuTam strongly agreed with MyThanh and NgocBao, but also had suggestions for how teachers and schools could create opportunities for immigrant and Icelandic students to work together. MyLinh wished to have an Icelandic peer mentor to help her with classes where she has difficulties:

*I need to have someone to help me. Not the teacher, it is more difficult to involve the teacher. A student is easier. It is good if the classroom teacher can assign a student who is doing well in her class to help an immigrant student like me. It can just be in class time only. We can sit next to each other so that I can ask if there is something I don't follow (MyLinh).*

NhuTam, likewise, wanted to implement in Iceland the cooperative learning practices that she learnt in Viet-Nam:

*...[In Viet-Nam] we studied in groups and we did our homework together. If this one don't know then the other one helped. It is good to study in groups, but you have to know how to organize and run it. The idea is not to get together to chat about nonsense. That doesn't work. Studying in a group you are not allowed to discriminate. Someone who is good in his/her studies needs to be humble and help others to progress, to do their work well. Good students are not to behave proudly and make others feel inferior. As friends everyone needs to be in harmony and helping each other (NhuTam).*

### 8.2.7 Dreams for the Future

Like any other youth, the student participants allow themselves to dream about their futures. Some of their dreams were as simple as completion of their upper secondary education. Some others hoped to learn a trade (such as hairdressing, sewing, or massage), and then hoped

to work and save money to go back to Viet-Nam to invest in some kind of business. Some set academic goals for themselves and hoped to earn university degrees in business administration or in dentistry.

In May 2013, I contacted the youth to survey their present status and learned that four of them had graduated from their upper secondary schools. One more participant was due to graduate by May 2014. Seven have dropped out of school. Of these six, two of them completed the Icelandic courses, but skipped other courses required for completion of the two year program. One participant was no longer in the school, and I could not find any further information about him.

### 8.2.8 *The One To Be Blamed*

In Vietnamese culture it is a virtue to be grateful and to respect teachers. An old proverb is:

Con ơi ghi nhớ lời này  
Công cha, nghĩa mẹ, công thầy chớ quên<sup>16</sup>

The values of this proverb are reflected in the opinions of NhuTam and other interviewees:

*Students in Iceland are not like students in Viet-Nam.  
There is little respect for the teachers [in Iceland].  
Students argue, scold teachers. They don't obey teachers.  
It is not fair. Students have to respect teachers. If there  
were something that the teachers were not correct, the  
students could remind them, but they were not to  
disrespect them (NhuTam).*

These students do not put blame for their lack of success on their teachers, but find causes for it elsewhere. For example, the Icelandic curriculum:

*The teacher was very enthusiastic with her teaching but it  
was the same all the time. Yes, repetition, back and forth,  
everything was from the book. But I think it was because*

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<sup>16</sup> My child, remember these words. Never to forget your father, mother and teachers' devotion to you (my translation)

*of the curriculum that she could not change anything (HoangOanh).*

Even the Icelandic teacher's intelligence was a valid excuse:

*The teacher, he talked a lot but it was incomprehensible what he explained. He was very quick, you see, because he was so intelligent (MyLinh).*

Or they put the blame onto themselves:

*I think, as Icelanders the only ways they can explain [besides using Icelandic] are to use English orally and gestures. But, there are concepts that can't be conveyed by gestures. These are the issues. Thus the shortcoming is mine, I can't blame them. They have done their best (ThanhNga).*

The possibility that the teachers lacked the ability to teach them effectively was never in their repertoire. One after the other the students used the idiom *bất đồng ngôn ngữ* (not sharing the same language) to express their difficulty:

*I can learn but a lot of times, because we [Vietnamese students] don't share the same language [as Icelanders], I can't grasp the deeper meaning. I look at words, I can say that I understand, but I don't comprehend their whole meanings. This is why it is hard (NhuTam).*

One way to interpret NhuTam's dilemma is to look at it from a linguistic perspective. She could not comprehend the whole meaning of words because they were within contexts that are influenced first by the mechanical aspect of Icelandic, i.e., inflection, syntax, and second, the cultural aspect of it, i.e., background knowledge of issues, and the nuances of the language.

### **8.3 Experiencing Life in Iceland**

Youth of Vietnamese background carried an active life of working and learning in Iceland similar to the many immigrant youth in Iceland in Guðmundsson's study (2013). The coming into contact with the society shapes the youth's identity. Although they articulated themselves as

Vietnamese, at the same time they perceived themselves as cosmopolitan. The detachment of the policy discourse about multiculturalism was recontextualized into schools. As the result, the students' social and cultural capital was overlooked by the school system.

### 8.3.1 *Emotional Beginnings in a New Home*

When I think about the participants I think, of their resiliency and their immense drive to integrate and to educate themselves. They had travelled across worlds and cultures, and there were moments during some of the interviews when the narrators and I, the listener, choked with emotion.

At the time of the interviews, the youth were between the ages of 16 and 25. The youngest arrived in Iceland when she was 13 years old, and the oldest one was 22. Of the thirteen who shared with me their experiences of leaving Viet-Nam and settling in Iceland, three lived in Iceland alone and six lived with a single parent.

For their first six months or so in Iceland, the young people were bombarded with different emotions: homesickness, nervousness about coping with a new life in addition to taking on a job, and learning a new language and shouldering new responsibilities. But they were also excited. HanTrung told me with a smile:

*When I first came I didn't know what to expect. I liked it very much. Of course getting to be abroad is such an excitement (HanTrung).*

TruongTrinh thought it was "fun" to move to Iceland, a completely different environment than Viet-Nam, and a new school, new friends and a new life. However, he could not deny the fact that he missed many of his good friends back in Viet-Nam. Reality also quickly set in for HanTrung, as he found himself spending more of his time indoors and alone:

*But, after coming here, I was always at home. I didn't get to go around the neighborhood to play like when I was in Viet-Nam, so I was sad. Besides, I didn't have many friends. Here there were only westerners [the generic term Vietnamese use to refer to people of Icelandic origin]... It was not agreeable to me so I wanted to go home (HanTrung).*



All the participants shared HanTrung's feeling of isolation and homesickness:

*The truth is in the beginning I was very sad because I don't know anyone. I don't know the language. I don't go anywhere (MyThanh).*

HoangOanh spoke with deep emotion about her feelings after arriving in the midst of the dark of the winter months:

*I felt in the beginning that I was not familiar with the way of life here. I arrived during the winter months. The days were dark, melancholic and depressing. I was irritable because I felt I had left a vibrant life in Viet-Nam for a more restricted life here. This was the reason why it was difficult. Life was sad and boring (HoangOanh).*

Some of them wanted to return to the familiar environment where they could find the people they knew and with whom they had grown up. ThanhLang and ThanhLiem, for instance, missed their grandparents. ThanhLiem said sadly:

*The first few months I wanted to go home... I missed my grandparents, my cousins, and my friends. Thus I often telephoned home (ThanhLiem).*

TruongTrinh even light-heartedly mentioned particular foods that he missed:

*I missed the snacks that we don't have here in Iceland (TruongTrinh).*

Unsurprisingly, they all felt the absence of their soul mates, their confidants, and this feeling did not necessarily diminish with time. For MyLinh and NhuTam, who both lived in Iceland with relatives, but not their close kin, their sense of loneliness and isolation lingered on after almost a half a decade after immigrating:

*...if there were someone who was not nice to me, but I could not speak my mind, at least if I had a [close] family member nearby then I could share my thoughts with my people. It is not that [such a] person can avenge me or do anything. But mainly it is so that I can speak my mind...[so that I have] someone I can talk heart to heart to...(MyLinh).*

NhuTam found it especially difficult to be alone during the holidays. She interrupted my question, just when I came to the word lonely, as though I touched a raw nerve. With a teary voice, her words poured out:

*Yes, lonesome, sad for myself. I cried alone. A lot of time I thought of my family [NhuTam sighed]. I missed them even more during the holidays. I was lonely and heavyhearted. I missed my family, missed my parents at home. During these days when I was at home, the family was complete, joyfully together (NhuTam).*

To ease their emotions these young adults rely on modern technology to connect to the people who are closest to their hearts. In addition to using the telephone they also make use of less expensive or free services such as chat lines, Skype and Facebook.

### 8.3.2 *Family Social Status in Viet-Nam and in Iceland*

The majority of these young people described the status of their families in Viet-Nam as “bình thường,” or “đủ sống” which means normal, or enough to live on. However, three of them sincerely characterized their families as “không có khá, khó khăn, nghèo” which indicates a more modest or poor status. In Viet-Nam, these three had to work to help their families or to support themselves. MyLinh moved to a cousin’s to help take care of her cousin’s children in exchange for room, board, and tuition during her upper secondary school years. NhuTam collected seashells to sell in the market, and ThanhLang helped with fish once the boats came to dock. The occupations of the participants’ parents included shopkeeper, chemical engineer, merchant, farmer, and fisherman. These youth immigrated to Iceland because their families wished for them to first help themselves by getting a better education, so that they in turn could help provide a better future for their families:

*My uncle and aunt, who lived in Iceland, observed the difficult [financial] situation of my family. Thus, they told my parents that since I have completed my studies [high school in Viet-Nam], they wanted me to go abroad to broaden my knowledge (NhuTam).*

In addition, MyLinh felt she needed to make the journey in order to ameliorate her family’s status, so that they would not be looked down upon:

*I thought I needed to help my family. I mean I needed to help my family lift themselves up into a better place [social status] so that people didn't look down on them. Thus I decided I needed to work to make money...The fact is I had to go abroad. If I didn't get to go, I could not help my family (MyLinh).*

Whether the families were average, modest, or poor, they all had to borrow money for their children to travel to Iceland. The debt was then paid by these youth after they arrived in Iceland:

*My family had financial difficulties. When I needed to travel my parents didn't have enough, didn't have enough money for me to buy the tickets, thus they had to borrow (NhuTam).*

MyLinh explained the process of borrowing and repaying in her case:

*After arriving here, I worked to pay for the debt...I borrowed from my aunt the money to buy the plane tickets...I started working after I was in the country about two or three months. I was very lucky. At the time the credit crunch had not settled in. What I got in salary, I used for paying off what I borrowed. I didn't have to worry much about that. The money I got from an additional job, I sent to my family to build a place for them to live in (MyLinh).*

As result, since the day these youth arrived in Iceland, they have all held jobs. They have worked day and night shifts, as receptionists in hotels, housekeepers in hotels and corporate office buildings, as register clerks in shops, supermarkets, and bakeries, and as waitresses, and dishwashers in restaurants, distributing newspapers, and as multi-purpose personnel at department stores. Of the rest of their families, all who were old enough and could get a job, worked at a similar variety of jobs. In addition to paying their debts, their earnings are also used to support themselves, and to contribute to the family income in Viet-Nam or in Iceland. NgocBao proudly declared the amount he voluntarily contributes to his mother:

*Normally, I pay mother 50.000 every month because she just bought an apartment. She also has atvinnuleysibætur*

*(unemployment benefits) but she needs to save the money to pay other things. So, I pay her 50.000 every month for housing, food and this and that. I have already done this for three years. Every month 50.000 kronur (NgocBao).*

MyThanh, in particular, has ambitions for further studies at the university, so also wants to save his money for this purpose:

*... I am finishing up [upper secondary education] in April, after the exams. The truth is I am studying very little; I am only taking four courses this term. Before, I studied very hard [took many courses], so I have little left. Now, is the time to work to save up for studying at the university (MyThanh).*

With the 2008 devaluation of the Icelandic currency, the kronur, the biggest effect for some of these youth is the amount of money they could afford to send back to Viet-Nam. When sending money to Viet-Nam, they exchange kronur for (US) dollars, and the kronur to dollar exchange rate has essentially doubled since the crash, effectively decreasing the amounts they can send:

*...the money to send home is less...I don't send it but my father does. He sends it to my grandparents for expenses (HoangOanh).*

On the other hand, even though the cost of living in Iceland has risen, these youth did not find that this has had a big impact on them, because of their relatively low social and economic status. A sense of acceptance and resignation permeated ThanhNga's words:

*In this developed country, the level of my family income is for sure below the standard of living. Thus, there is not much effect on us. If there is any effect then it is very little, only related to the increase of things like electricity, hot water, merchandise, something of that sort (ThanhNga).*

### 8.3.3 Working and Learning

Despite their resiliency and motivations to prepare for a better future, the amount of concentration each of these youth could apply to their education also depended on the amount of responsibility they had for their families, including relatives in Viet-Nam as well as in Iceland.

NhuTam had a seriously ill family member in Viet-Nam, who depended on the money she sent for hospitalization and medication. She emotionally explained:

*I don't have a lot of time to study in school. I want to study but I don't have enough time, studying and working at the same time. I study but I can't concentrate...I would like to learn a vocation, but the condition I am in, just has not allowed me to realize it (NhuTam).*

After five years of struggling MyLinh admitted:

*...I worry about so many things. In addition I am weary for many reasons. I like studying very much, I like it very much, but my brain can't absorb what I learn (MyLinh).*

HoangOanh's employment also limited her studying opportunities because she could only take courses in the morning. In the afternoon she had a job:

*...because I need to make a living, hold a job. I have to ask the teacher to schedule my classes so that I am finished by noon (HoangOanh).*

#### 8.3.4 “I Am Vietnamese,” but also a bit “Western”

These young people identified themselves positively as Vietnamese. VinhHau and VietThuc came to Iceland at the ages of 13 and 12, and were around 17 when they were interviewed. Without any hesitation they declared, in words similar to those used by other participants, that they were proud to be Vietnamese because Viet-Nam was their native land. However, some of them thought that being submissive or obedient to adults was not so agreeable. MyThanh eloquently commented on the aspects of Vietnamese culture that he views as conservative and causing communication gaps between generations:

*Asian culture and tradition lean too heavily on virtue...We Vietnamese, particularly Vietnamese [children] don't have the right to speak to adults... the polite manners, the respect [that is demanded from the young] create a gap between people. You know some people are wrong, but you don't say anything because they are older than you are. It is said to be respectful, but the truth is you are*

*being dishonest, stupid for not explaining their errors for them to rethink (MyThanh).*

MyThanh also thought that traditional Vietnamese values could result in oppressive upbringings that inhibit children's mental development and make it more difficult to have an independent frame of mind:

*The adults mold young children's thinking. They grow up influenced, pressured into doing this and learning that. They don't recognize that they are coerced or compelled. As adults they fall into the same track blindly without any changes or new discoveries in their thinking (MyThanh).*

MyThanh was determined to steer himself out of the "track" and be honest with himself. Risking some tensions with adults, he found subtle ways to address issues when he does not quite agree with them:

*In the beginning it was a little rough, not quite conflict, but more like a little tension and I needed to be cautious. I wasn't trying to teach the adults, but more like communicating with them (MyThanh).*

The nature of their situations as breadwinners, contributing to their family incomes, participating in the job market, has resulted in them becoming more mature and independent. They cleverly analyzed their environment in order to navigate between the two cultures in their daily lives. VinhHau thoughtfully delineated where he stands:

*I am Vietnamese. There isn't any change in me. Coming to a different country, naturally because of financial reason for living, I need to change. But, my inner personality stays the same (VinhHau).*

Even with this new independence, these youths did not describe allowing themselves to become disobedient or intolerant towards the older generation. None of them spoke of being confrontational with their parents because of disagreements. NgocBao, even though he expressed a bit of wariness about his mother scolding him for behavior that she felt was disobedient, did not try to contradict her:

*Vietnamese children always have to obey their parents. If they don't the parents reprimand them. I usually say nothing in return, but I still go out if I want to go (NgocBao laughed).*

LanHuong, who was the youngest participant, arrived in Iceland when she was 13 years old and had already been in Iceland for seven years at the time of the interview. Unlike NgocBao, she does say something to her parents when she disagrees with them but she does not disobey them:

*I am Vietnamese, so I continue to follow Vietnamese culture. I have been influenced a little bit by the Icelandic culture...If I don't agree with what my parents said then I would have to respond (LanHuong).*

However, if her parents stand their ground then she will obey:

*I go out to entertain myself a bit more now. Before, when didn't have friends, I didn't go out much. But now that I have friends I go out considerably more. But if my parents say no, then I won't go (LanHuong).*

VinhHau believed his parents thought he had fully matured, and thus they no longer tried to influence him in any way:

*Now, my parents consider that I have acquired some knowledge, have my own way of thinking. They don't suggest I adopt one culture and abandon the other (VinhHau).*

Though he sees himself as following the same religious beliefs as his parents, he describes this as part of his independent thinking:

*My parents believe more in Buddhism. I have been exposed to Christianity when I was in compulsory education [in Iceland], but I am not much of a believer in it. I would say I am more with my parents in religion (VinhHau).*

NhuTam found that when she visited her parents in Viet-Nam after four years of living independently in Iceland, she had to readjust herself:

*I was just the same as before [coming to Iceland]. I follow the way of life here when I am here. When I go back to Viet-Nam then I have to change, correct myself to behave certain ways. I don't allow myself to be disrespectful or anything like that (NhuTam).*

Despite the fact NgocBao, LanHuong, or MyThanh behaved a little less traditionally than Vietnamese children, who NgocBao described “obedient” towards their parents, these participants were not unruly or disrespectful. A central ideal of Vietnamese culture is the virtue of filial piety (deep respect for parents and other elders). In declaring, “I am Vietnamese” these youth are explaining the cultural context in which their behavior toward adults may seem tame in comparison to Icelandic-heritage youth. It should be understood that “filial piety” does not simply mean unthinking obedience but also includes strong affection and gratefulness to one’s parents, even when one is gaining independence from them. As ThanhNga said:

*...I am afraid of hurting my mother’s feeling (ThanhNga).*

### 8.3.5 *Iceland, a Western Country, Means “Freedom”*

In general, when Vietnamese use the term, “western society” the connotation is one of valuing freedom above all, and of having little respect for age, social hierarchy, collective thinking, and strong human relationships. The perspective of the participants in this study is that their Icelandic peers have a lot of freedom. As ThanhNga discussed (above, in academic findings) this includes the freedom to choose studies and subjects based on their own passions, as well as freedom in the conduct of their daily lives. The participants interpret this freedom as having both positive and negative connotations. “Freedom” can mean healthy independence in thinking and behavior, or it can imply a lack of discipline resulting from parental leniency (NgocBao, LanHuong, HoangOanh, ThanhLang).

These young men and women thought that the individualistic and sometimes unruly nature of Icelandic society stems from a lack of parental discipline. To these Vietnamese youth, leniency equates with not caring for the moral education of one’s children. NhuTam, NgocBao and MyLinh were particularly critical of this kind of freedom. MyLinh, who had admittedly had little exposure to people of other than those she met in school and at work, was particularly judgmental about Icelandic child rearing, and relations with the elderly:

*In general, I observe Icelanders don’t value their parents.  
In return, the adults don’t value their children either.  
When I observe their way of life, I wonder why they don’t  
teach their children when they take care of them. They nod*



*their heads to everything. They never shake their heads. They don't communicate very much with their elderly. The relationship is not a comfortable one. Our parents gave birth to us so we have to help them and everything else. This is only my own way of thinking. The Asian way of thinking (MyLinh).*

Surprisingly, NgocBao, who did not present himself as being deeply influenced by any traditional Vietnamese upbringing and was not quite obedient to his mother when she tried to stop him from going out from time to time, agreed with MyLinh. On the one hand, he wanted to be free in making his own decisions, but on the other hand, he actually appreciated his mother's involvement and intervention in his life:

*Vietnamese parents often scold [their children]. Icelandic parents pamper their children. They don't care about saying anything to them [i.e., they do not speak to their children about their behavior] (NgocBao).*

NhuTam contrasted the Icelandic freedom in everyday social behaviors with the expectations in Viet-Nam about how such interactions should be handled:

*In Viet-Nam, there are certain expectations of behaviors that we must follow - we need to be disciplined and practice the way we eat, the way we greet people, politeness. But here, there is no such a thing, too much freedom. Everybody goes his/her own way. There is nothing mutual...No one can say anything to anyone [i.e., no-one can criticize another's behavior] (NhuTam).*

For these ethnic Vietnamese youth, freedom also connotes partying, playing hard, and staying out late at night. ThanhLiem thought Icelandic-heritage youngsters are "mellow", but "real party-goers." Some of them considered that going out regularly for late entertainment was one of the influences they got from living in Iceland (HoangOanh, ThanhLang, LanHuong). They saw this as an act of negative independence, because such behavior contradicts one's identity as Vietnamese, as ThanhLang explained:

*For many people their characteristics are no longer like Vietnamese, but more like Icelandic because they have lived here too long. They have assimilated. They stay out*

*late at night, to the morning. But for Vietnamese, we need to be home no later than one or two in the morning. If we don't get home on time, we are locked out (ThanhLang).*

According to HoangOanh the reason that youth in Viet-Nam are more restricted by their parents is that the adults believe that Vietnamese society has become more complicated, chaotic, and confusing for young people.

*Yes, I have got more freedom here. There was more parental supervision in Viet-Nam because life in Viet-Nam is now no longer innocent but a little corrupt, a mixture of the good and the bad (HoangOanh).*

HoangOanh believes her parents lifted the restraints on socializing outside the home because of the loneliness and unhappiness she experienced when she first arrived in Iceland. She believes her family wanted to let her have more opportunities to socialize and be happier. As a result, HoangOanh admitted that she is now free to go out whenever she wishes to without her father's interference.

Freedom for some of the participants also signifies individualism, or weaker social bonding. ThanhLang explained that some of his Vietnamese friends have adapted to the Icelandic practice of paying separately when they are together as a group of friends. He finds this hard to get used to, and he prefers to follow a Vietnamese practice in which when one member of the group has money, then he pays. Another member of the group who has money will pay the bill next time. In this context, individualism for ThanhLang suggests estrangement instead of good friendship:

*We, Vietnamese, sometimes, if we are close friends we go out together we invite one another. But here, in Iceland, whoever eats pays for it...That is no close friendship (ThanhLang).*

Freedom in the sense of independence has another angle for ThanhNga. She called it "gender freedom" (tự do giới tính). ThanhNga explained that by "gender freedom" she does not mean what these words connote in a Western context, but she means the specific milestone a woman has reached when she is free to choose either to move or to continue to share her parents' home. Despite admitting there could be an advantage in being on one's own, she concluded it was better for her to stay under her parents' protection:

*Of course, I am not influenced by the aspect that is called gender freedom. What this means is that if one's family were disagreeable to live with, then one would move out when one is grown up. I think it is better to continue to live with my parents than to live alone or be independent. Being independent can be good, but it can be that entering society too early is not ideal (ThanhNga).*

In contrast to the youth who were critical of Icelandic freedoms, MyThanh, who presented himself earlier as a critical and progressive thinker, emphasized his dislike of the Vietnamese social system, with its hierarchical relationship between children and adults. To MyThanh, this system engendered negative restraint and a lack of individual freedom of expression. He thought that his views enabled him to more quickly integrate into Icelandic society:

*My own thinking has never appreciated the Vietnamese social system. I have never done so. The truth was that because I lived there I had to accept it. There are many things that I thought I needed to change in myself. But when I came here, I encountered the western freedom, and I felt I could quickly bridge myself over (MyThanh).*

He appreciated the aspects of Icelandic culture, which gives space to independent thoughts and to the freedom of expression regardless of age or status:

*In this country, everybody has their own independent ways of thinking. Everyone has their own thoughts which can be expressed whenever. We have the right to speak our mind. Even children when they talk, the adults listen. But children in Viet-Nam, it can be said, they don't have the right to speak to the adults. This is wrong (MyThanh).*

The “westerner's” direct communication styles are easier for MyThanh to comprehend:

*In the west people speak directly to the issue. We just need to listen to what is said. It is easy to understand. I am now used to this and prefer this direct way. It is not the kind of talking around the issue, like we do in Viet-Nam. That is very frustrating. A lot of times I don't manage to*

*understand what was being said [in Viet-Nam]  
(MyThanh).*

When he left Viet-Nam to come to Iceland alone, MyThanh's parents were fearful that he would be influenced by a corrupt way of life. They thought he would become a partygoer, and lose his sense of discipline and respect. MyThanh understands his parents' anxiety:

*In the beginning, they were afraid I would be corrupted.  
Sometimes when first living abroad, Vietnamese had a  
moral break down. Many people, not everybody, for  
instance, changed their way of conducting themselves, the  
way they talked (MyThanh).*

Despite such fears, the testimonies of these young men and women demonstrate that instead of corrupting them, the new culture gave them the freedom to make independent and mature choices to adhere to Vietnamese values. Their experiences living in Iceland allowed them to critically assess the positives and the negatives of both cultures. They had a "double view" of Icelandic society, being both participants in daily Icelandic school and work life, and being immigrant "outsiders" as well. They had observed much, and were able to make general judgments about the behavior of "westerners" and had much to say about the concept of "freedom" in Icelandic society. While they were often critical of these freedoms, they felt that they used freedom to choose the best from each culture to guide their practices.

### 8.3.6 *Extracurricular Activities*

From the observation in the schools which the participants attended, they did not stand out in the way they dressed or conducted themselves. They blended in with their jeans, trainers, and the hooded sweatshirts that were in fashion at the time. Some had braces and some boys wore an earring in one ear. NgocBao, a self-confident and eloquent young man who had had an Icelandic-heritage girlfriend, shared with me his views on integration into Icelandic society:

*We come here, we have to accommodate with people's  
ways here. We can't keep everything Vietnamese...the way  
we speak, dress and wear our hair (NgocBao).*

In other words, he suggested that immigrant young people should blend in with Icelandic social norms and avoid standing out. NgocBao's point

of view very much reflected the Vietnamese tradition that is expressed through the proverb "nhập gia tùy tục, đáo giang tùy khúc" ("When visiting a family, observe its customs. When sailing along a river, follow its meandering")<sup>17</sup>. Even though he seemed a bit reluctant to be blunt, he expressed the opinion that youth of Vietnamese origin who had difficulty in integrating had themselves to blame:

*They can't integrate because of the way they dress, or because they don't study, they can't speak the language, and then they can't integrate (NgocBao).*

MyThanh felt that Asians, in particular, are known for being distinctive in their etiquette, which makes others hesitant to communicate with them. Thus, he believes immigrants should take the initiative to reach out:

*Young [Icelandic] people are always more reserved towards foreigners, since they don't know us. Knowing that a great number of Asians are restrained, behave totally different from Europeans, they become more cautious. For this reason, we always have to be the ones who start. People don't come to us without welcoming signs from us. It is very rare (MyThanh).*

As foreigners, the Asians have to make the first move, to alter the preconceived view of the "westerners" about them.

*The majority [of Asians] are self-contained. Westerners notice if we come forward. Therefore, we need to show we are approachable. We need to participate in school events. The way we present ourselves, the way we talk to them [should] give them a different outlook about us (MyThanh).*

Few of the other participants followed MyThanh's prescription. Even though some of them participated in extracurricular activities in Viet-Nam, they rarely joined such activities here in Iceland. The activities in which these young people participated in their homeland included organizing talent shows, charitable work with children, and

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Translated proverb by Very Viet-Nam at <http://veryvietnam.com/2011-03-15/why-do-overseas-vietnamese-adopt-western-names/>

sports. HoangOanh, for instance giggled with joy when she told me about the fun she had in taking part in organizing some of them:

*We collected class dues, which we used to buy things our class needed, and gifts for classmates who got sick, and extracurriculars, etc. Ah, the 20<sup>th</sup> November, on the annual teacher day, we bought gifts for teachers. I also managed my class activities. We participated in talent competition within the school. I did lots of things* (HoangOanh).

ThanhLiem was proud of his extracurricular accomplishments in Viet-Nam:

*I ran the marathon in my school and was number four* (ThanhLiem).

ThanhNga, who thought of herself as untalented in singing and dancing, used to be involved in assisting poor children in her hometown. She wanted to stay socially active when she came to Iceland but gave up because she found she was too alone. Like many of the participants (ThanhLang, LanHuong, ThanhLiem, HoangOanh), she observed that students with Vietnamese heritage rarely ever participated in extracurricular activities in Iceland:

*The school registered students to participate for two days of activities. We were to be in teams to compete in bowling or ice-skating, something of the kind. I wanted to go but there was no one to go with [whom she knew], so I stopped. I was kind of scared since I am a bit shy* (ThanhNga).

HoangOanh and LanHuong agreed with ThanhNga about the deterrent effects of having to go alone. The girls elaborated:

*It is rather dreary in school here. The Vietnamese participate little in school events. Basically, if one doesn't go then the other one doesn't go either. It is kind of disheartening to go alone* (HoangOanh).

*I don't go when I am alone* (LanHuong).

It could be said that it is natural for them to wish to have the support of someone else in order for the activities to be more enjoyable, especially when they were insecure about their language:

*Here in Iceland, I have once gone to a picnic and played games outside. It was organized by some group that gathered outside of the restaurant the Pearl. A friend of mine [of Vietnamese origin who came to Iceland when she was little] took me with her. I liked it a lot, but the communication with others was limited because I could only speak a little [because of language proficiency] (ThanhNga).*

In general, schools only have one or two days a year that are designated for special events that include talent show, games, food. All students usually are required to attend (LanHuong, MyThanh, NgocBao, ThanhLang). NgocBao believed that there should be more social activities organized at school:

*Social activities are rather limited. In my school, there is only what is called 'the graduating class.' The students who are about to graduate go out together and drink or something of the sort. This replaces social activities because then students get to know each other more. It is a little late. There is also something like movie night, but it is after eight or ten o'clock at night, I am too lazy to come out again after I am already home (NgocBao).*

MyThanh also confirmed the "laziness" of his countrymen in social gatherings. However, I cannot help but pose the question: are there implicit reasons for youth of Vietnamese origin to be discouraged from involvement in the activities the school organized? Are these students just shy, lazy, or insecure like MyThanh, NgocBao, HoangOanh and ThanhNga seemed to think? Some light can be shed on this question by further examining the young people's social lives. Who are their friends or acquaintances, and what do they do together?

### 8.3.7 *Friends, Families, Acquaintances, and Social Life*

Students of Vietnamese background resemble any other pupils in that they come to school wishing to make friends, both for social companionship and to have companions with whom to learn. Cooperative support among friends in the learning process was one of MyThanh, LanHuong, and ThanhLang's strategies. In contrast, HoangOanh and ThanhNga felt isolated because there was no Vietnamese speaker in the classes which they ended up dropping. Mosahraun Comprehensive

School has a high concentration of students of foreign background, but HoangOanh was the only ethnic Vietnamese in her classes. Lacking any friend with whom she could communicate was not only lonely, but also hindered her learning, as she had no-one for discussion and mutual support:

*Before I was alone in class where there was no other Vietnamese student. I came to class and I didn't understand very much because of a lot of grammar; I got discouraged so I stopped going... Now that I have more friends I am more diligent (HoangOanh).*

Likewise, ThanhNga had a lot of interest in continuing in math but was demoralized by her friendlessness in class. Her depiction of her classroom was of herself alone in a world that she dreaded:

*The previous semester I studied math but because no one [no ethnic Vietnamese student] studied with me, I was kind of scared (ThanhNga).*

ThanhLang's choice of Mosahraun Comprehensive School was based on the composition of the student body, thus emphasizing the importance of this wish for companionship. He made the distinction between two types of schools – one with more concentrations of immigrant students and the other dominated by Icelandic-heritage students, which he called an “Icelandic” school:

*This school has many more classes for foreign students. I find a school attended by many foreign pupils is more compatible for me than an Icelandic one...Foreigners with foreigners are easier to associate with. We are more attuned with one another (ThanhLang).*

ThanhLang's ease with minority pupils is a feeling shared with most of the participants. Their lists of immigrant friends besides Vietnamese included Poles, South Americans, Slovaks, Lithuanians, Thais, Filipinos, and Chinese. Similar to ThanhLang, the participants believed that as immigrants they shared experiences and thus they understood each other, even though they do not speak the same language. The language the immigrant youth spoke with each other was a combination of Icelandic and English, whichever language that best suited the situation. ThanhLang code switched when he recounted:



*“Pínulítið” (a little bit of) Icelandic, then a little bit of English (ThanhLang).*

NhuTam recounted the way that the gaps in language understanding were nonetheless overcome because of rapport and friendship:

*We spoke Icelandic and English from time to time.  
Sometimes we didn’t understand each other completely  
but we conversed a lot. As friends talking together, we  
understood one another (NhuTam).*

In addition to sharing the general immigrant experience, these youth shared a specific notion of being foreigners living in Iceland. LanHuong, NgocBao, and MyLinh in particular, befriended Asians whom they categorized as close friends, because they were more familiar with each other’s cultures:

*I don’t have an Icelandic friend but I have an Asian friend.  
She was born here. She speaks Icelandic like an Icelandic.  
Her culture is similar to Vietnamese (LanHuong).*

When fellow immigrants socialized together, they went to the movies, restaurants, and coffeehouses, or bowling, or swimming, or played football, or visited each other at their homes and sat around and chatted:

*We sometimes go swimming or playing football together...  
(ThanhLiem)*

*We played football or went out to eat together...  
(ThanhLang)*

*We went bowling... (LanHuong)*

*We went out, we visited someone at home, or went to the  
movies... (VinhHau)*

Going to the movies, usually a common entertainment, proved to be rather tricky for many of them who were not strong in English and Icelandic. HoangOanh giggled to hide her embarrassment because of her dependence on others for such a simple activity:

*The spoken language in movies usually is English and the  
subtitles are in Icelandic. Well, I don’t understand some  
but understand the simplest sentences. But, the truth is I*

*really need to have an interpreter, someone to explain for me (HoangOanh).*

Nevertheless, for HoangOanh and many others, the movie or other entertainment, itself, was not the primary purpose of socializing. The activity they valued the most was the time they could spend together talking and sharing feelings with each other:

*We usually go to the movies. Now and then we went out for ice cream to talk. The main purpose was to talk (HoangOanh).*

ThanhLang reflected especially on how much he missed the school break times in Viet-Nam when he and his friends usually gathered around and just talked:

*...I don't have many friends here. Not much fun here, during breaks I don't get to ask friends, two together, to sit and talk. In Viet-Nam, during breaks, friends who enjoyed each other's company, we sat together and talked (ThanhLang).*

Because of the importance of speaking their minds and having heart-to-heart talks, and the need to manipulate language to precisely express the nuances of their abstract sentiments, language became a crucial social determinant for these young people. When the notion of friends was discussed, two categories of acquaintances and confidants are clearly defined by ThanhLang:

*Close friends are only Vietnamese. Foreign friends are only for socializing (ThanhLang).*

The Vietnamese immigrant youths' experiences of friendship with their Icelandic counterparts ranged from completely out of the question to superficial acquaintance, with the exception of MyThanh who had good Icelandic friends. MyThanh had found that some aspects of Icelandic culture more suited him, as I explained earlier. In addition, he also found that ethnic Icelanders were a resource he could use to learn the language and the culture even faster:

*I have western friends and I can discuss with them what I have learned during the day and ask them for help with what I had difficulty with. We can discuss social issues, things that relate to my life and my future (MyThanh).*

In contrast, MyLinh, after five years of working, studying, and living in Iceland still found herself marginalized and isolated from the Icelandic society despite her effort to integrate. Her explanation for the hindrance was due to the reserved nature of the Icelandic character:

*I go to school to understand this society better but I don't think I can. The reason is because they are private people. I feel as though they don't like associating with me. Thus, I keep away from them. Day by day the estrangement between people becomes more compelling. I want to understand. I want to understand Icelandic people. I want to understand how they live. I want to be able to integrate, but I don't know what is expected of me (MyLinh).*

NhuTam observed that Icelandic students were indifferent and do not care for mingling with immigrants:

*It seems that, they, the students in this country, are not yet very friendly to foreigners. Not quite keen. They continue to only associate among themselves (NhuTam).*

NhuTam and MyLinh's views were supported by MyThanh's observations on his school's social environment. His verbal mapping of groups showed a picture of Icelandic students (the ethnic majority) occupying a central space, the main hall, while minorities were scattered in groups in hallways and different wings or floors or even in a separate building. I also drew a similar diagram during observation on the fieldwork.

*It is easy to see Filipino speak to Filipino, Thai speak with Thai, Vietnamese speak with Vietnamese, Poles speak with Poles. They rarely gather in the main hall [Icelandic students are in the main hall] but they usually in different groups sit in the hallway on the other side of the school (MyThanh).*

Some of the participants admitted they rarely go to the cafeteria for lunch:

*We boys, [Vietnamese] rarely ever go to the dining hall. Five or six of us usually gather in the corridor upstairs to have lunch and talk among ourselves (VinhHau).*

None of these immigrant students described encountering any negative attitude towards them within the school walls of the upper

secondary schools they were attending. Even so, eight out of the thirteen youth maintained they had seen, heard, and encountered prejudice, discrimination, or racism in stores, entertainment venues, work places, and compulsory schools. The young people were very careful when they described these issues. They joked about them, tried to defuse, them, or excused the perpetrators. NgocBao, one of the ones who considered himself to have quite comfortably integrated in Iceland, reported that there were a lot of instances he had come upon, but then confidently laughed and joked about them:

*Plenty, but I know who I am. I know how I am. If they provoked then I knew they were jealous of me, because they couldn't be like me. I just laughed at them. If I were to be angry then they had achieved their goal. It is better not letting them succeed, then they won't any more*  
(NgocBao).

MyThanh detected the prejudice in the looks and in some instances in the way the people behaved:

*There was a little tiny bit [of prejudice] but they didn't say anything. It was in the look. In the way they behave*  
(MyThanh).

ThanhLang more explicitly described this implicit prejudice:

*In stores or in entertainment places for example, there were many westerners who showed their dislike towards foreigners. When we asked about something, we sometimes had to wait for a long time. They were not enthusiastic, were rough in their ways of communication, or scowled. The ones who welcome foreigners talked nicely, smiled, joked with us and were easy going towards us* (ThanhLang).

In addition, ThanhNga underwent what she categorized as discrimination based on ethnicity and class. ThanhNga was especially conscious about class because she recognized that her mother, coming to Iceland and working as a housekeeper, was not placed high in society. Although she was critical, ThanhNga made sure to distance herself from the experience of discrimination and minimized the impact of it.

*Um, if I said no then it wasn't right, but yes then it wasn't accurate. There were only a few people. These people were in another company but shared the same building with the one I worked for. I was told that office workers there were not very friendly. They never responded when the [foreign] workers greeted them. People on this side of the company where I worked for told me directly that the others often discriminated against people based on ethnicity and class. They treated the ones who don't have college education with contempt, as inferior. I think those people were only a part of a small entity. It was not worth discussing about (ThanhNga).*

Icelandic language proficiency was another excuse for disregarding immigrants. MyLinh was very decisive when narrating her experiences as though they had been suppressed but awaiting an occasion to escape:

*Yes, I have encountered. I have experienced it. First, the way they look at me. They looked at me with a different look knowing that I don't speak Icelandic. Every little thing was an occasion for someone to say: "She doesn't speak Icelandic. She can't speak. She can't understand." Well, in such instances, even I don't understand their words, I understood their attitude (MyLinh).*

NgocBao was laughed at when he spoke Icelandic incorrectly or for differing from the majority in his elementary school in the ways he dressed or acted:

*When I first came, I didn't speak correctly and they laughed at me, also from the way I acted, the way I dressed differently, or something of the sort (NgocBao).*

NgocBao was not the only one who had to endure such bullying. LanHuong and ThanhLiem were also victims. They were animated in retelling their own and their immigrant schoolmates' experiences.

LanHuong was one of those who had no Icelandic friends, and I wonder whether this was a result of her negative experience when she first started school in Iceland. Her account was of being pushed, hit, and having her school things taken from her. She thought they "detested" her and were "racist" towards her:

*Here in Iceland and in this school people are likable. But, when I first came, when I was attending compulsory school, some girls who were racist, or it was like they detested me. They threw things at me. They hit me and disturbed me by pushing or elbowing me. One time they took my calculator then after they finished using it they threw it away. My Vietnamese friend, who came before me also had to go through this period when she first came (LanHuong).*

ThanhLiem went through the same ordeal at another school and got into fights. However, ThanhLiem, like other immigrants of ethnic Vietnamese background, played down the seriousness of the phenomenon:

*My friends were the foreigners in my class. We had fun together, but the Icelanders liked to bully us or tease us. In class, they constantly called our names. They pushed us around during gym time. We ended up pushing them back and we fought. It was only teasing, no big deal (ThanhLiem tutted his tongue).*

Considering the challenges these immigrants have endured, it is understandable if some of them chose to have no association with the majority. However, ThanhLang's depiction is of a situation in which not having this group as acquaintances is more a stage that may change in future, rather than as a permanent choice:

*If we talk about friends then there is no westerner. I have not gotten to have them as friends (ThanhLang).*

Some of these youth did describe having ethnic Icelandic friends, though these relationships were not described as deep friendships. They mainly chatted or greeted each other when they saw each other in school. They never met outside of school to socialize.

*Icelandic students in this school, we only chat together. We don't go out or do something of the kind (NgocBao).*

In contrast to their fellow countrymen who had limited, or no relations with Icelandic-heritage youth, LanHuong, NgocBao and MyThanh do not have Vietnamese speakers as friends. The two young men, in particular, held similar opinions. To some extent, the two perceived Vietnamese friends as hindrances to their progress in learning

Icelandic, even though they admitted it was pleasant and easier to speak their mother tongue.

*Going out with westerners I can learn. But there is always the good and the bad side of an issue. For instance, going out with Vietnamese I got to speak Vietnamese, my mother tongue, I could understand much more... (MyThanh)*

However, MyThanh did not appreciate the issues they discussed. He thought they gossiped.

*Many Vietnamese live here like to gossip. Often they don't have much to talk about, so they talk about other people's private matters. I dislike this kind of talk, because there is nothing good about it. It has nothing to do with me (MyThanh).*

NgocBao had the same views as MyThanh. He did not like the gossips in the Vietnamese community, because gossip had caused him unnecessary trouble:

*Not one [friend] is Vietnamese...They are gossipers. Children told parents then parents told my mother. They commented this and that...Before, when I had an Icelandic girlfriend they saw us together in Kringlan, they went and told my mother. They talked about how I was naïve towards girls. It ended by my mother turning around and nagging at me. She said she didn't want to listen to the criticism (NgocBao).*

The two young men also shared the opinion that many Vietnamese youth have focused solely on working to earn wages since they came to Iceland, and have invested little time in continuing their education. As a result, these two participants believe that they themselves have a different mindset from other Vietnamese immigrant youth. MyThanh believes the others are limited by their language proficiency, that this is a barrier to their integration into Icelandic society. He sees these others as trapped in Vietnamese thinking, and as confining themselves in the small Vietnamese community in Iceland, gossiping about each other. Aside from his relatives, this is now a community that he has difficulty relating to.

*Very few of them went to school. They worked, and thus they were no different than Vietnamese who live in Viet-*

*Nam. The language they used, the way they acted. In general, their way of life here is very different than mine. They were not quite for me (MyThanh).*

Even though LanHuong did not analyze her reasons for not having ethnic Vietnamese as friends, after the interview when I drove her to work, she offered me some additional information about Vietnamese youth who were in the same school with her. With no sympathy in her voice, she told me that there used to be many more of them but that quite a few were “thrown out” of school because of bad attendance, because maybe they worked too much.

### 8.3.8 *The Negotiation between Vietnamese and Icelandic*

Despite their sense that there are some strange Icelandic habits that some of them cannot quite adapt to, they were all hopeful and satisfied with their choice of building their life in Iceland. They have developed the skills to balance gains and losses, and to bring into harmony within themselves the two cultures. Even though there were a lot of worries about their process of integration, most of them looked towards the future with hopeful eyes. In two meaningful words, MyThanh gave me his perception of his future with a cheerful laugh: “Pretty bright!”

### 8.3.9 *Social Inclusion and Exclusion*

“I am Vietnamese” the young people declared. Being Vietnamese is an identity that is natural for them, because Viet-Nam is where they were born and they share their parents’ cultural values. However, through years of living in Iceland, they have been influenced by Icelandic culture, even though some of them were critical of what they described as excess “freedom”. They found they no longer absolutely obeyed or submitted to adults. It was more natural for them to answer or contradict the older ones when they disagreed, although they continued to describe themselves as respectful.

All of them at some point in their daily lives had encountered discrimination, both in schools in their early years in Iceland, and in their social environment. Each of these young people synthesized their new identity individually, and some of them have been more successful than others in finding their way.



Similarly, their journeys toward Icelandic language proficiency also had varied success. Most of them emphasized that a lack of fluency in Icelandic was a barrier to socializing with nationals, and their discourse about preferring immigrants as friends revealed a sense of alienation in regard to their Icelandic-heritage classmates. There was an implication about otherness with “us” as guests, who have more mutual understanding among “ourselves,” and “them” as the hosts, though the few who had made friends with national peers were satisfied with their relationships.

The topic of social inclusion and exclusion among students of immigrant background and Icelandic-heritage in upper secondary schools is an area in need of further research to further explore the relationships between the various factors that might be in play. To what degree might different factors be at fault, in addition to lack of a shared language, such as school structure, differing cultural norms, and social insecurities from both groups?

#### 8.3.10 *Language Difficulties*

The teachers’ observations that immigrant students of Asian background have difficulty learning Icelandic paralleled the perceptions of the majority of the youth participants about themselves. Both teachers and students say the challenges lie in aspects of Icelandic grammar (declensions, personal pronouns, singular, plural etc.) that are not components of the Vietnamese language. (Karen, Fríða, Birta).

A teacher’s difficulty in understanding the youth’s Icelandic spoken language was also mirrored in the youth’s insecurity with their pronunciation (HoangOanh, ThanhNga).

#### 8.3.11 *Born at Leifstöð Iceland International Airport*

As the findings have shown, the policies and schools are not using a multicultural model. The model they are following is a “deficiency model”: ie, the primary goal of the system is to address some deficiency in the students. In the case of these immigrant students, the deficiency is in the Icelandic language, and thus their lack of proficiency becomes the sole lens through which the school system evaluates them, and it becomes a barrier to accessing further education.

It is important to note the teachers' comments about the student participants being "incredibly strong in math" (Heiða, Jenný, Karen, Heiða, Birta, Gyða) while also noting that the school system lacked any method of accrediting this previous learning. In an informal conversation with a staff member in one school, I was told in that in order for students to receive credits they had to have their school records to prove what they studied in their home country. The school had no way of assessing their knowledge if they could not take a test in either Icelandic or in English.

Their skill in mathematics was the one area that the youth were confident of and proud to mention during the interviews. Similar to MyThanh's view (above), VinhHau said that his previous math curriculum in upper secondary education was further ahead than Iceland. Without hesitation, VinhHau gave his opinion on math teaching in present upper secondary school:

*If we consider the standard of teaching math here [Iceland] with Viet-Nam then it is not comparable. For instance, when I came here I was studying 6th grade math there. At the moment I am taking Math403. If I had completed 7th grade [in Viet-Nam] there could have been a possibility that I could complete all math courses in this school (VinhHau).*

NhuTam, who needed to work long hours to support herself and a seriously ill sibling in Viet-Nam, could not afford the time to start from scratch and thus decided not to take math, even though it was required for graduation.

*I had registered for math classes earlier, but then I dropped out again because I had already learned everything in Viet-Nam. I had completed math through 12<sup>th</sup> grade level in Viet-Nam. However, when the teachers asked whether I had taken any math [in Iceland] and I told them I had not, since I had finished it in Viet-Nam, I was then only allowed to start at the beginning, level 100. That's right. The teacher registered me to study math, but it was all the same [as I had already learned] (NhuTam).*

The fact that the teacher registered NhuTam for level Math100 without even asking her how much she had previously learned suggests that the decision was based only on her knowledge of Icelandic without

taking into account her knowledge of math. This one-sided decision required her to start from the beginning. The choice could have been made largely by the teachers' assumption, or it could have also been due to a school system's constraining qualification. MyLinh's account challenged the teacher's position.

*Of course, what I have learnt in Viet-Nam helped my study here. For instance, in the beginning I don't have Icelandic. I don't understand the teachers. But when I studied math, the teacher only needed to introduce the problem and I already knew what the following steps were because I was familiar with the method. I could just continue (MyLinh).*

NhuTam's disappointment reflected that of many other students of Vietnamese background who came during their mid-teenage years. The focus was not on the level of scholarship they had already achieved, but rather on where they were deficient, which was in the Icelandic language. Language was the lens through which the Icelandic upper secondary school system saw these youth. Without the language they were seen as a blank page, as though their lives began when they arrived in Iceland.

I use math as an example because it is an especially striking one, but the fact is they had already been experienced students before they arrived in Iceland. Not only did they have different kinds of academic knowledge from which they could draw, but in addition pragmatic knowledge, such as knowledge gained from daily living and participation in different cultures. NhuTam articulated this very obvious connection.

*Things that are similar in Vietnamese and in Icelandic — I could have full understanding about them (NhuTam).*

The question is what does "giving room for the background of the students to be considered" mean. The discourses of the staff (administrators, principals, and Icelandic as second language coordinators) all exhibited deficits in their understanding of the "background" concept in the context of immigrant pupils. By viewing the students primarily through the narrow lens of language proficiency, the administrators overlooked the wealth of languages and home cultures that the students brought with them into the classrooms, and these assets were rarely being drawn on to advance the learning process.

### 8.3.12 *The Effect of the Deficiency Road*

The effect of this attitude towards the youth was reflected in the way they expressed a lack of self-confidence throughout many of my interviews with them. Even though she had completed three and a half years of compulsory education in Iceland before she entered Upper Secondary Education, LanHuong was already resigned when she talked about the process of applying for schools:

*...because at the time I had newly started in school, also because I didn't yet know a lot of Icelandic, my teacher advised me to apply to Mosahraun because this school is more suitable for foreign students...I also applied to two other schools, but naturally, I didn't get in (LanHuong).*

LanHuong took her teacher's recommendation and applied to the school where there was more support for students of foreign background, but like other Icelandic teenagers she also wanted to go to another school that might have been more suitable for her for other reasons. When she did not get accepted by the other two schools she applied to, she was disappointed but also thought it was “*natural*,” as though she already knew these schools were out of her reach.

ThanhNga who arrived 2 years ago in Iceland had been about to complete 12<sup>th</sup> grade in Viet-Nam, was preparing for her university entrance exam, considered herself to be “*hoc sinh khá*” (good student), and had a very clear plan for herself. She had majored in math and natural science to prepare for studying business administration. At the time of the study, she had completed her two year Icelandic program but is no longer sure which direction she is heading because she thinks of herself as a failure at learning Icelandic:

*Now, especially to study at the university level, the language has to be ours. In Viet-Nam the language is already mine, because I am Vietnamese, so I comprehend everything. But here, because of the language I can't grasp 100%—not even 90%—I find the dream is a little difficult to realize (ThanhNga).*

Students going to upper secondary school can take placement tests for their heritage language, for which they can get up to 12 credits, which can be used for elective courses. The tests are offered by the Ministry of Education and Culture annually in the fall at Hamrahlíð College. The tests are offered for several languages, including

Vietnamese. When MyLinh started studying at Sjónarhóll she had taken the exam, thinking that she would ultimately be graduating. However, after two years in school she was convinced that she would not be able to graduate because she could not take written tests in the subjects she learned in Icelandic. Thus, she did not want to put in the effort to make use of the credits:

*Yes, I took that exam [in Vietnamese], but I forgot about it because I will not graduate from here. The reason is I can't take the written tests [on the different subjects] in Icelandic. There is no way I can write long Icelandic text (MyLinh).*

## **8.4 Summary and Issues**

Most students of Vietnamese background participating in this study entered Icelandic upper secondary schools without full command of Icelandic. They were equipped, however, with a habitus, social and cultural capital that are applicable and favorable for the continuation of their education in Icelandic upper secondary schools.

In the schools in Viet-Nam the youth enjoyed the comfort of studying in their mother tongue, and in a school environment connected to their own culture. Nevertheless, they recounted the oppression they felt by the pressures and rigidity of the system. They had the perception of having no choices in what they learned and felt trapped in long school days, myriad exams, and relentless homework. Many of them felt disdain from some of their teachers, and many described violent tempered teachers who used harsh words or even corporal punishment. They had experienced a school system of which Freire (2009) disapproved because of teachers' expertise was unchallenged and their students' experiences and interests were disregarded. The students received an education which they had no opportunity to scrutinize but only to act as passive recipients of knowledge (Freire, 2009).

Students of Vietnamese background appreciated Icelandic schools for the freedom they had to make their own decisions, to control the pace of their studies, to select the courses, and the attention the teachers gave them. They described the Icelandic school system as being more in the spirit of Dewey (1998, 2000). They perceived the pedagogical approaches in Icelandic schools as more positive than in Viet-Nam

because it is more practical, more comfortable, more relaxed, and more to their preference. They appreciated having the chance to speak English, to do experiments in science classes, and to study subjects that would be useful for study at the university level. And last but not least, they appreciated looking at issues from different angles, finding this way of learning to be more practical and more enjoyable than their experience of the purely banking teaching model in Vietnamese schools, which they had found rather overwhelming (Freire 2009; Dewey, 1998, 2000). In other words, the youth recognized that, to some extent, schools in Iceland taught them the skill of reasoning as a mode of critical thinking. A skill that Marcus a critical theorist believe of utmost important for human potential and existence (Giroux, 2009).

At the same time, these students faced different kinds of oppression in the Icelandic school system that worked as a barrier to their educational success. The Icelandic language deficiency frame of mind infiltrated all areas of their study. In addition to language and cultural differences they also faced an inflexible educational system that failed to recognize their strengths and the wealth of knowledge they brought with them into the classrooms. The students' description of their school process at Icelandic upper secondary school, in Nieto's (1999, p. 104) words, instead of empowering and just by using only their present reality as a foundation for further learning was unjust and dis-empowering. A concrete example was the teachers' comments about the student participants being "incredibly strong in Math" while also noting that the school system lacked any method of accrediting this previous learning. In an informal conversation with a staff member in one school, I was told in that in order for students to receive credits they had to have their school records to prove what they studied in their home country. The school had no way of assessing their knowledge if they could not take a test in either Icelandic or in English. The students' learning styles, learning habits, experiences were not taken into consideration (De Vita, 2001; Gay, 2000; Nieto; 2000). It was open to interpretation that there were not dialogues with this ethnic minority students group to establish some kind of understanding and reciprocity for learning to take place (Freire, 2009). Teachers in these classrooms seemed to have not applied culturally responsive pedagogical practices and treated all students as the same, majority and minority, using the banking method of instruction (Gay, 2000).

The students themselves had reached the same conclusion as the administrators and the teachers that due to their Icelandic deficiency it

was difficult for them to socially and academically integrate. Most of them emphasized that a lack of fluency in Icelandic was a barrier to socializing with nationals, and their discourse about preferring immigrants as friends revealed a sense of alienation in regard to their Icelandic-heritage classmates. There was an implication about otherness with “us” as guests, who have more mutual understanding among “ourselves,” and “them” as the hosts, though the few who had made friends with national peers were satisfied with their relationships. The youth feeling of alienation reflected Bjarnason’s (2006) study. However, the view that immigrants’ fluency in Icelandic, or the host language, would provide them with access to friendship with the national heritage youth was challenged by Berry et al. (2006) and Magnúsdóttir’s (2010) to be rather groundless.

Most of the youth felt vulnerable in their Icelandic language skills, which corresponds with other research about conflict with a host language (Gaine, 1987; Nieto, 1999, 2000, 2002; Gay, 2000; Banks, 2010; Ragnarsdóttir 2013). For many youth of Vietnamese background journeys toward Icelandic language proficiency had varied success. The teachers’ observations that immigrant students of Asian background have difficulty learning Icelandic paralleled the perceptions of the majority of the youth participants about themselves. Both teachers and students say the challenges lie in aspects of Icelandic grammar (declensions, personal pronouns, singular, plural etc.) that are not components of the Vietnamese language. The teacher, Karen’s difficulty in understanding the youth’s Icelandic spoken language was also mirrored in the young people’s insecurity with their pronunciation. Needless to say, students of Vietnamese background’s language and culture are as far apart as possible from Iceland both in physical distance and as regards language and culture. Studies conducted, such as Esser’s 2006, explained the difficulties immigrants encountered in learning the host language depended on the host country language and the linguistic and cultural distance from the language and culture of the immigrants.

The Vietnamese tradition in which these students began their schooling placed the responsibility for teaching on the teachers and for learning on the students. These students believe it is their own responsibility to figure out how to absorb the teaching that is delivered, and to redeliver it satisfactorily in oral quizzes, test and exams (Freire, 2009). Their move from Vietnamese to Icelandic schools did not shift their perception of being responsible for their own learning, and these

students did not question the pedagogical practices of the teachers they found in Iceland. Instead, they regarded their failure to learn Icelandic as their own failure. Re-enforcing this sense that the responsibility for their educational progress is all their own is the fact that in Iceland most of them are now entirely responsible for their own lives. They worked to feed and house themselves, and to send money back to Viet-Nam for helping their families. Being responsible or having integrity, living unselfishly, and being knowledgeable are three of the five virtues, the cultural capital that the people of Viet-Nam lived by (Vuong, 1976; Truong, 2013). This is the cultural capital that these young people draw on as strength for their resiliency (Brooker, 2002; Bourdieu, 1984). However, although, the students took the responsibility for their failure Nieto (1999) and Gay (2000) argued that teachers who care about their students are culturally responsive in their teaching, and don't blame their students for failure.

The student narratives portrayed the policies and schools as not using a multicultural model. The model they are following is a "deficiency model": i.e., the primary goal of the system is to address some deficiency in the students. In the case of these immigrant students, their deficiency is in the Icelandic language, and thus their apparent lack of general proficiency becomes the sole lens through which the school system evaluates them, and it becomes a barrier to accessing further education.

The effect of this attitude towards the youth was reflected in the way they expressed a lack of self-confidence throughout the interviews with them. Even though LanHuong had completed three and a half years of compulsory education in Iceland before she entered Upper Secondary Education, LanHuong was already resigned when she talked about the process of applying for schools. LanHuong took her teacher's recommendation and applied to the school where there was more support for students of foreign background, but like other Icelandic teenagers she also wanted to go to another school that might have been more suitable for her for other reasons. When she did not get accepted by the other two schools to which she applied, she was disappointed but also thought it was "*natural*," as though she already knew these schools were out of her reach.

ThanhNga who arrived two years ago in Iceland and had been about to complete 12<sup>th</sup> grade in Viet-Nam, was preparing for her university entrance exam. She considered herself to be "*hoc sinh khá*" (good



student), and had a very clear plan for herself. She had majored in math and natural science to prepare for studying business administration. At the time of the study, she had completed her two year Icelandic program but is no longer sure which direction she is heading because she thinks of herself as a failure in learning Icelandic.

Students going to upper secondary school can take placement tests for their heritage language, for which they can get up to 12 credits, which can be used for elective courses. The tests are offered by the Ministry of Education and Culture annually in the fall at Hamrahlíð College. The tests are offered for several languages, including Vietnamese. When MyLinh started studying at Sjónarhóll she had taken the exam, thinking that she would ultimately be graduating. However, after two years in school she was convinced that she would not be able to graduate because she could not take written tests in the subjects which she learned in Icelandic. Thus, she did not want to put in the effort to make use of the credits.

These are examples of students who were beaten down by the system because of they were perceived to be deficient in Icelandic language and culture. The focus was not on the level of scholarship they had already achieved, but rather on where they were deficient. Icelandic was the lens through which the Icelandic upper secondary school system saw these youth. Without the language they were seen as a blank page, as though their lives began when they arrived in Iceland. Multicultural Education scholars and critical pedagogues would have been critical of the Icelandic school system for not designing a school system that is conscious of minority students' dignity and intellectual capabilities (Gay, 2000; May, 1999; Nieto, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Banks, 1994).

The warmth, friendliness, and willingness to assist students of Vietnamese background found in their teachers in Icelandic upper secondary school are characteristics that are highly valued by thinkers such as Gay, 2000; Nieto, 1999; Freire, 1998. However, they also insisted that teachers' professionalism is through praxis. Teachers' rigorous practice connects theory with pedagogical strategies. Through the students' discourse it appears that these students struggled in the classrooms because the teachers did not have the appropriate professional development and specific skills to be effective in their pedagogical communication with students whose language and culture were diverse. Therefore, according to Freire, Nieto and Gay, it would

be necessary for teachers in Iceland to continuously reflect on realities of their students to intellectually recreate, reinvent and develop their practice for them to provide their students an equitable education (Freire, 2009; Kincheloe, 2008; Gay, 2000; Nieto, 1999).

“I am Vietnamese” the young people declared. Being Vietnamese is an identity that is natural for them, because Viet-Nam is where they were born and they share their parents’ cultural values. However, through years of living in Iceland, they have been influenced by Icelandic culture, even though some of them were critical of what they described as excess “freedom”. They found they no longer absolutely obeyed or submitted to adults. It was more natural for them to answer or contradict the older ones when they disagreed, although they continued to describe themselves as respectful. The youth of Vietnamese background, similar to other immigrant youth living in Iceland, have a hybrid identity (Ragnarsdóttir, 2011). Multiculturalists discerned that as individuals we each belong to more than one culture because culture is conceived of as dynamic.

## 9 Lessons Learned: Answering the Research Questions

In this chapter I will discuss the research findings and how they could be used as a road map to transform education to be equitable for students of immigrant background and at the same time benefit Icelandic-heritage students.

*Untapped Resources or Deficient “Foreigners”*: *Students of Vietnamese Background in Icelandic Upper Secondary Education* was motivated by the need for thorough research on issues of equality in relation to students of ethnic minority background at the different levels of discourses in the Icelandic upper secondary education system. The very few previous studies about this new population of students have shown that immigrant youth in upper secondary education faced many difficulties and were at higher risk of dropping out than their Icelandic-heritage peers. Although the findings of this study indicated that students of Vietnamese background encountered many hindrances in their studies, most of them were hopeful and doing reasonably well.

To understand the implications of the concept of equality and how well the Icelandic educational system has made itself equitable to young people of ethnic minority backgrounds, I aimed to explore these concepts in the upper secondary schools. Grounded in the lenses of deficiency, and critical theories, the study scrutinized the concept of equality in curricula and laws, and compared these findings with the practices and experiences of administrators, teachers, and immigrant students in schools. Critical ethnography was the methodology and research design that I employed as an analytical tool to answer the three research questions that focus on the three different dimensions of education in the study: the policy dimension, the school dimension through the interpretations and experiences of the principals and teachers, and the school experiences of students of Vietnamese background.

There were four important common themes which emerged from the data which I applied to answer the three research questions. The themes were present in all three levels of discourses – the policy, the schools (administrators and teachers), and the students. The four themes included:

- the students of immigrant background were perceived as deficient, reflecting the Icelandic majority worldview

- the lack of awareness and understanding of multiculturalism
- the policy's deficiencies in explicit and effective stipulation of steps for implementation of multicultural education
- the students of immigrant background's linguistic, cultural and previous academic background were untapped.

## 9.1 The Policy Dimension

My first research question asks about equality statements presented in legal acts, policy, and national curriculum and what they say about educating diverse student bodies at the upper secondary level. In Chapter 5, "The Rhetoric of Equality," the analysis of the five policy documents for upper secondary education shows that equality is more about access than equity. The three basic concepts to which the rhetoric of the law adheres are equality, inclusiveness, and nurturing individual needs for the overall development of all pupils (Ministry of Education & Science and Culture, 2004, 2008b).

While acknowledging to some extent that Iceland is a multicultural society, the acts, regulations, and curriculum that form the basis for teaching and integrating students of immigrant background focus more on the deficiency of the Icelandic language and culture. The deficiency road is challenged by many critical pedagogues and multicultural educators (Filion, 2013; OECD, 2010; Giroux, 2009; Romaine, 2009; Nieto, 2000). The discourse of instilling Icelandic language and culture is explicit and adamant while the content of concept of multiculturalism is absent. Multiculturalism is understood as being for the others whose language and culture are apart from the Icelandic-heritage majority. This is flawed which is clearly explained by scholars (Cope & Kalantzis, 1999; Parekh, 2006). Icelandic curriculum and policies development is a concrete example of this reality. The policy development lags behind the development of theory even when the policies are about equity and school success for all, as is emphasized by scholars such as Sheets (2003), Banks (2004), and Gay (1992).

First, the study shows the gap between policy rhetoric and practice. Throughout the documents I studied, Icelandic is designated as the key tool that is believed necessary to effectively integrate students of foreign background into Icelandic society. Nevertheless, the system fails to recruit and appropriately educate teachers for teaching Icelandic

as a second language. Icelandic as a second language is not a field of study in teacher education.

Second, at the school level, the requirement of Regulation 654/2009 is that all upper secondary schools have a reception plan (*Mennta- og menningarmálaráðuneytið*, 2009), where the students' background and knowledge can be a resource for their study in Icelandic schools. Tapping into the students' resources is strongly emphasized by critical pedagogues and multicultural education scholars (Kincheloe, 2008; Nieto, 1999, 2000; Freire, 1998; Gay, 1992, 2000). In addition, the Regulation stipulates that students have a right to instruction in Icelandic as a second language. Despite these requirements, less than half of the schools I surveyed had such plans or had Icelandic as a second language in their curriculum.

Third, since the curriculum content failed to recognize and tap into the immigrant youths' home cultures, their heritage languages, and their previous academic knowledge it could be interpreted as regarding these things as irrelevant. Banks (2007, 2009), Gay (2000), and Nieto (2000) were among theorists who justified the recognition of such background knowledge among ethnic minority students. Along with equal access to qualified teachers and a nurturing environment, the recognition of background knowledge encourages the students' agency and therefore fuels their resiliency and their drive for school success.

The documents reflect the agenda of a conservative approach to multicultural education on the part of the authorities (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). At the national level the conservative ideology behind the policies result in failing to provide young people of immigrant background an equitable education (Gollifer & Tran, 2012).

In other words, the answer to the first research question is that there are some indications in development in becoming more integrative in the discourse of the curricula 2004 and 2011 and the Upper Secondary Educational School Act No. 92/2008. Nevertheless, at the practical level, there are still gaps to be filled. Upper secondary schools still need qualified teachers and the educational system provides students of immigrant background a marginally equitable education.

## 9.2 The School Dimension

My second research question asks about how equality statements are implemented in the two upper secondary schools chosen for this study. How they are related to multiculturalism and thus the immigrant population in regard to pedagogy (teaching approaches and methods) and the learning and social environment? In the analysis of the administrator and teacher interviews in Chapters 6 and 7, I found clear indications that a conservative approach to multicultural education permeates the system (Gollifer & Tran, 2012; Jónsdóttir & Ragnarsdóttir, 2010b;). Administrators and teachers adhered to the policy rhetoric, which on the one hand, calls for providing students with education according to their needs but, on the other hand embraces the deficiency road in educating students of immigrant background.

Administrators and teachers' discourses gave evidence to their lack of development in awareness of multiculturalism both in theory and as a lens through which to evaluate their own worldviews and pedagogical methods. The administrators and the majority of the teacher participants believed in segregating the students of foreign background from the Icelandic-heritage students because of language limitations. Their view that the minority students' Icelandic deficiency was the major cause of their academic limitations and social isolation from their national peers is challenged by a number of prominent researchers (Filhon, 2013; OECD, 2010; Romaine, 2009; Nieto, 2000; Cummins, 1996). Administrators and teachers informed by the multicultural education pedagogy of practice would have had a different interpretation, as my findings suggested. Instead of placing the blame on the students, they would have scrutinized the system and sought to figure out how it inherently disadvantaged students of diverse background. They would have questioned the curriculum of and their own practice in educating these students (Gay, 2000; Nieto 1999).

The findings of this research and from other studies show that the students were grateful to their teachers for providing such a supportive environment where they felt respected and had control over what they learnt, and the students were grateful for their teachers' enthusiasm and helpfulness (Guðmundsson, 2013; Karlsdóttir, 2013; Daníelsdóttir, 2009). The students enjoyed the practical learning experiences, as when they got to practice speaking English and to carry out experiments in their science classes. On the other hand, the data also revealed that the teachers' pedagogic practice was first and foremost about transferring

Icelandic culture and skill in the Icelandic language. Undoubtedly, skill in Icelandic language would benefit these students (Cummins, 1996). But, the teachers failed to understand that without providing these students opportunities to benefit from their previous academic and cultural knowledge and their learning styles they had already acquired, they infringed on the students' equity of education. The teachers helped to perpetuate the dominant culture beliefs, values and perceptions by compelling students into adapting principles that the teachers were convinced to be the cultural norm (Parekh, 2006; Freire, 2009, 2010; Kincheloe, 2008; May, 1999; Sleeter & Montecino, 1999). Some of the students' accounts of negative experiences with their teachers show the detrimental effects a teacher's lack of knowledge can have. This is why Nieto declares that "being nice is not enough": the caring must be underpinned by rigorous epistemological knowledge within the profession (Nieto, 2000, p. 85).

Freire conceptualized the demands of knowledge and the passion teachers need to have in order to be "cultural workers" and declared that only "those who dare teach." He clearly defined their multiple skills and roles:

...the task of the teacher, who is also a learner, is both joyful and rigorous...those who committed themselves to teaching develop certain love not only for others but also of the very process implied in teaching...The teaching task is above all a professional task that requires constant intellectual rigor and the stimulation of epistemological curiosity, of the capacity to love, of creativity, of scientific competence and the rejection of scientific reductionism (Freire, 1998: 3-4).

The teachers in the study who had an interest in teaching immigrant students, developed their methods of teaching and learned about the different kinds of assistance these youth required, through their years of giving them attention and teaching them. They were sympathetic, understanding, and were helpful to them. They called their developmental method of teaching "grassroots". However, Nieto, who like Freire, was a teacher as well as a researcher, offered this heartfelt advice for her colleagues:

Educators frequently rely on their own experiences and common sense when they teach. However, educational

research...generally provides a better source for educational practice. Rather than relying on convention or tradition or what seems to work, it is more effective to look to research for ways to improve teaching (Nieto, 2000: 6)

Finally, it is important to reflect on the immigrant teachers' own experiences in the schools. All three of the immigrant teachers expressed understanding for their immigrant students. They understood the importance of these students having the opportunities to feel equal with their Icelandic-heritage peers. They acknowledged the different learning styles that the students might have, and they empathized with their feelings of being "a foreigner, always a foreigner." They recounted their own experiences with some of their Icelandic-heritage colleagues, who they perceived as lacking compassion toward them, as disregarding them, as treating them as invisible. This personal experience of marginalization allowed the immigrant teachers to relate to their immigrant students (Nieto, 1999, p. 32; Montero-Sieburth & Pérez, 1987). While immigrant teachers directly experienced alienation, there was evidence that immigrant students were indirectly being alienated. The phenomenon can be explained by teachers who reported about their colleagues who did not want to have immigrant students in their classes, or who pushed all the responsibilities for such students onto the home-room teachers.

In a learning community where the practice is guided by multicultural education philosophy, staff, teachers and students learn, investigate, and construct knowledge about cultural diversity together to empower and reduce prejudice (Banks, 2007b). The school culture should be inclusive and academically friendly to all members of its community and to ethnic minority members in particular. The OECD emphasizes particularly a comprehensive need for enrichment of pedagogy practice among teachers of upper secondary education (OECD, 2012).

The answer to the second research question is Sjónarhóll Comprehensive School and Mosahraun Comprehensive School follow the deficiency road by default. By mandating only the teaching of Icelandic as a second language implicitly emphasizing immigrant students' deficiency, by failing to have a system in place for monitoring school educational practices (academic and social practices) that make immigrant students more visible, by failing to emphasize the importance of making school an inclusive space for all students, the



policy discourse resulted in services for immigrant students becoming optional. For example, according to the administrators, there was no budget earmarked for the extra services that were needed for academic and social integration of these students into the schools. Appropriate funding was among the eight effective tools recommended by OECD (2010), besides opportunities for professional development, raising awareness, setting explicit policy goals, to name a few, that were all relevant to the Icelandic education policy context. Due to the lack of knowledge about pedagogical practices informed by multicultural education philosophy, the administrators and teachers resorted to do their best as well as they knew how, in learning by doing (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2012; Nieto, 2000). They lack a tool for praxis, for reflecting and acting to improve, and thus for ensuring productive learning environment for their students (Freire, 2009). Therefore, students of immigrant background faced rather inequitable teaching methods and attended a more or less segregated school social environment. This is the kind of educational environment that could be described as deterring rather than paving the way for students of immigrant background to complete their education at the upper secondary level, and thus hindering the way to further study as well (Freire, 2009, 2010; Kincheloe, 2008; Parekh, 2006; May, 1999; Sleeter & Montecino, 1999).

### **9.3 The Student Experiences Dimension**

My third research question asks about the students of Vietnamese background's social and academic experiences. The goal of this third question was to find the recontextualization of the official discourse in the school practice that had direct effect on the immigrant students themselves. The narratives of the students in Chapter 8, told the stories of the young immigrants' journey in upper secondary education in Vietnam and in Iceland.

On the one hand, the students' description of their learning experiences in Vietnam followed Freire's banking model which they found difficult and in many ways disempowering (Giroux, 2011; Freire, 2009; McLaren, 2009; Kincheloe, 2008). On the other hand, they had developed study skills, perseverance, and they excelled in subjects such as math and science that put them in an advantageous position in the Icelandic schools. Lauglo's (1999) research yielded similar data. They

all described beginning their lives in Iceland with homesickness and isolation. Some of them longed for their old homes, but as they settled in Iceland and got to know other youth of Vietnamese and foreign origins in school, they found they were at home after all.

### 9.3.1 *Deficient Students and Deficient Educational System*

The Icelandic educational policy clearly stipulated that Icelandic language proficiency was the only bridge to education and integration for youth of ethnic minority background at the upper secondary education (Ministry of Education & Science and Culture, 2008b). Even if we accepted the premise that Icelandic proficiency is the only bridge, we can see that the administrators and teachers who were supposed to build the bridge were given a poorly supplied toolbox. They were mostly untrained in teaching Icelandic as a second language, and they lacked the understanding of what it took to educate students with different backgrounds.

In addition, by making Icelandic the chief vehicle for crossing the bridge to positive outcomes and integration, the schools disrupted the students' perceptions of their own abilities. They were convinced by their classroom experience, both at the compulsory school and at their upper secondary school that their language deficiency was the cause of their limitation (Brooker, 2002; Bernstein, 2000; Bourdieu, 1990). Instead, they could have been empowered by their capacity, their proficiency, and their resiliency as they continued to progress as hybrid individuals, as they portrayed themselves and which has been documented by other studies (Filion, 2013; Guðmundsson, 2013; Tran & Ragnarsdóttir, 2013; Banks, 2010; Gogolin, 2002; Gay, 2000; Nieto, 1999, 2000, 2002; Gaine, 1987).

The students also convinced themselves that Icelandic was the bridge they needed to cross in order to enter their Icelandic-heritage peers' space. Multicultural education and critical pedagogy theorists, Freire in particular, explained the reason the students molded themselves according to outside expectations in order to be able to "integrate" out of helplessness (Freire, 2009, 2010; Kincheloe, 2008; Parekh, 2006; May, 1999; Nieto, 1999; Sleeter & Montecino, 1999). However, when the students' choices of educational institution they wished to attend was limited to which school provided ÍSA, when Icelandic proficiency was the prerequisite for courses, the students'

confidence was damaged. The policy and practice needed to be scrutinized. If the language was the barrier to the equity and the equality of the students' educational process, then there is the question of whether the policy and the practice needed to be reviewed and altered (Ragnarsdóttir 2013; Banks, 2010; Gaine, 2001; Gay, 2000; Nieto, 2000). Of the student participants in this study who saw themselves as potentially not completing schools, half were undone by their Icelandic proficiency. But was Icelandic the only barrier?

The administrative and teacher participants observed that it was normal that groups of students with different languages were segregated from each other because they preferred to speak their mother tongue. They also observed that students of foreign and Icelandic background befriended each other more as time went by and the former group could speak more Icelandic. However, the reality did not prove the adults to be correct. First, research both in Iceland and abroad documents that immigrant students want to befriend nationals. The home country students were just not receptive to their efforts (Steen-Olsen, 2013; Magnúsdóttir, 2010; Tran, 2007; Frønes, 2002). In addition, the student participants' experiences of having Icelandic-heritage peers as friends helped them to improve their Icelandic learning through their communication and their cooperation in their studies (Bernstein, 2000). Second, students of Vietnamese background were friends with other immigrant students from different parts of the world. They made use of Icelandic, English, and their body language to communicate with each other. Through their shared status as immigrants, they could understand each other and this brought them together (Steen-Olsen, 2013; Bernstein, 2000). Language was not an issue. Besides, Magnúsdóttir (2010) and other researchers in other countries have shown the inadequacy of the claim that having a common language, such as Icelandic, would bring nationals and immigrants closer together (Beach et al., 2013; Magnúsdóttir, 2010; Schubert, 2010; Tran, 2007). Friends in school are of utmost importance for all children and youth in general. Having friends in certain schools was one of the most important factors for the student participants when choosing which school to attend. Without being able to build a sound social life in Icelandic schools, immigrant young people were more prone to be bullied and were significantly less likely to complete their education at upper secondary schools (Sigurjónsson, 2008; Bjarnason, 2006).

Language is only one component within the multi dimensions of a multicultural education curriculum (Banks, 2004). I would argue that

administrators in Icelandic upper secondary schools whose leadership was informed by multicultural pedagogy would have been visionaries of more equitable, inclusive school curriculum and environment (Ryan, 2003, 2006; Riehl, 2000). They would have understood that a multicultural school did not consist simply of having students from different parts of the world, or once a year having one multicultural day when diversity was visible, and that offering Icelandic as a second language class was not enough. They would have engaged in a more determined effort so that services are in place so that immigrant students' education could continue to progress from what they left off in their home countries, instead of stagnating because of bureaucracy. They would have been applying more pluralistic approaches to steer and develop their staff to make their schools more accessible to students of diverse background (Ryan, 2003, 2006; Banks, 2004; Riehl, 2000).

I believe that teachers who might have applied multicultural education philosophy as their pedagogical approach would have reflected more on their own worldview and been more vigilant in their teaching methods so that their methods did not privilege students of Icelandic background with whom the teachers shared a culture and language (Freire, 2009, 2010; Gay, 2000). They would have seen themselves as heterogeneous in order to understand students' diversity. They would have made the life histories of the students in their classroom more relevant and explicit in their teaching methods and materials. They would have made their teaching more equitable and welcoming to a student body of diverse background. (Nieto, 2002, 1999; Gay, 2000; May, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Recognizing students of immigrant background cultures, knowledge and languages in the everyday life of their school would have empowered such students and helped them to acquire a sense of belonging in their own school (Steen-Olsen, 2013; Jónsdóttir, 2007; Frønes, 2002). The interpretation was that schools that adapted multicultural education as their teaching culture would have more teachers welcoming students of diverse background and in many ways could avoid inequitable learning experiences like NhuTam, MyLinh, ThanhNga recounted. NhuTam gave up on her math classes, MyLinh sat through classes where English (another language she did not understand) was used for explanations. ThanhNga had part of her Icelandic essay crossed out because, as she understood it, she had not written her essay the way Icelanders wrote an essay. They narrated their experiences with feelings of frustration and resignation. They felt they had been treated unfairly, but they

excused their teachers because they realized that the teachers did not know any better.

### 9.3.2 *Blank Slates?*

All three levels of discourses (policy, administrator, and teacher) had the tendency of embracing the deficiency model for immigrant students. They were viewed as blank slates whose accomplishments prior to their arrival in the Icelandic school system were not evaluated or acknowledged. This model of the immigrant student as a blank slate, in combination with the emphasis on Icelandic proficiency alone as the gatekeeper to further education, created a system in which many students felt locked out of successful outcomes due solely to language acquisition difficulties (Banks, 2007; Nieto, 2002; Bernstein, 2000; Gay, 2000; Gaine, 1987). Their existing educational capital, even in areas where their achievements prior to coming to Iceland were ambitious, was disregarded. As it was indicated in the data from student participants, to some extent studies of subjects other than Icelandic did not challenge these students. They found studying in Iceland was more “leisurely”, because there was little homework, they had already learned some of the materials in Viet-Nam, and they had strong study skills.

These examples underline that Vietnamese immigrant youth are not blank slates: they entered Icelandic upper secondary schools with educational, cultural, and social capital (Guðmundsson, 2012; Lauglo, 1999; Zhou & Bankston, 1994). They were also fueled with personal resiliency that they acquired from moving across the globe, working to provide for themselves and helping their families to build a new home, living and negotiating between Icelandic and Vietnamese cultures in their everyday lives (Leirvik & Fekjær, 2011; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Ngo & Lee, 2007; Liebkind, Jasinskaja-Lahti, & Solheim, 2004; Nieto, 2000; Cope & Kalantzis, 1999; Hodson, 1999; Lauglo, 1999). Coming from a culture which strongly respects education and reveres teachers and parents, the students tend to blame themselves when they were not successful in school, even as they offer insights into how the system is not working for them. They were resourceful in finding ways to help themselves in their studies. The student participants studied together, exchanged knowledge among each other, and mapped out their own strategies to tackle learning Icelandic and school subjects in order to produce positive outcomes for themselves.

Like Iceland's policy makers, administrators, and teachers, these students lacked formal training in multicultural educational theories, but their lived experiences have taught them that in order to succeed, they must learn to view the world from multiple points of view. They have learned these lessons: the question is whether the adults responsible for shaping the policies, schools, and classrooms can learn these lessons as well.

### 9.3.3 *Cultural Diversity as Human Freedom*

These youth of Vietnamese background clearly identified their habitus as Vietnamese. They felt that they embodied the land they shared with their ancestors and their parents, the culture by which they were influenced from the day they were born, and the language they have spoken all their life (Bourdieu, 1990; Parekh, 2006). However, they were also enriched by their years of working and striving to build a life in Icelandic society, even though their habits were not changed. The influences of the Icelandic culture on these youths contributed to the different perspectives they understood about themselves which were evident in the data. Although they described themselves as not disrespecting the older generation, by adhering to the Vietnamese culture, they still did not blindly obey or quietly accept criticism. On one hand, they scrutinized the excessive freedom of the Icelandic culture but, on the other hand, they enjoyed the freedom they have learnt and the attention and some level of respect they were given from their teachers. Seeing them in the schools, I could see little difference between their overall appearance and the other youth around them, in their clothes, their school bags, and their hair styles.

Living and constantly negotiating between cultures deepened the youths' understanding of themselves and at the same time made them more accepting of others' similarities and dissimilarities from them. The youths' characteristics were construed by Parekh (1999) as a condition of human freedom in multiculturalism. Thus, I would argue that the non-intervention attitudes the schools had about trying to integrate Icelandic-heritage and immigrant students was a missed opportunity to educate the majority youth to live in the global community. Parekh's (1999) theory was people could become more open-minded through the multi cultures they get to know. Such opportunities provide possibilities to transform ethnocentrism and reduce discrimination, prejudice, and racism.

#### 9.3.4 *Deficient Foreigners?*

The history of people of Vietnamese-heritage in Iceland began in 1979, almost 36 years ago. However, according to the statistics the number of students from this ethnic group in upper secondary was not on the increase until around 2005. The growth in numbers was an impressive one. By 2011 the rate, percentage wise, was approaching the Icelandic-heritage population. I could not help pondering the reasons for this growth, and why it has taken more than twenty years for the people of Vietnamese-heritage to be able to realize the ambition of upper secondary education for their children. The explanation I got from the former students had to do with the young history of Vietnamese immigration to Iceland. The very first such immigrants needed to work to build not only their new life but also to create the foundation for the community as a whole. This effort required the efforts of all, including that of the youth. People who came later enjoyed the fruits of this earlier labor. Now youth can go to school and benefit from the support of an established community (Guðmundsson, 2012; Woolcock, 2003; Putnam, 2000).

In addition, in line with many theorists, parents' encouragement was also big factor (Banks, 2004; Bernstein, 2000; Ryan, 2006; Wrigley, 2000). In particular, the ambitions for their children in parents of Vietnamese background are well documented. (Leirvik & Fekjær, 2011; Ngo & Lee, 2007; Tran, 2007; Liebkind et al., 2004; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Lauglo, 1999). Knowledge (*trí*) was one of the five Confucian concepts that formed the foundation of the moral system to which the people of Vietnam adhered. The findings of the research indicate that the youth who are now living in Iceland enjoy similar support. This is regardless whether the parents are in Iceland or in Vietnam. The youth whose parents are half the globe away, may be physically distant but technology has bound them together. The parents can still communicate their encouragement, give them advice, and share their words of wisdom. ThanhLiem came to Iceland bringing his grandparents' invaluable wisdom with him. Their words can serve as a reminder to all of us about the potential and resources these youth carry with them:

*Make every effort in your education to become a fully rounded person (ThanhLiem).*

The answer to the third research question is that the adversities which the students faced which started at the policy level, the very foundation of the national educational system, possibly caused more than half of the youth of Vietnamese background in the study to dropout of upper secondary schools. Nevertheless, they found themselves comfortable living in Iceland. The students, who successfully navigated the deficiency model of the Icelandic school system, got some help from some dedicated teachers, figured out strategies, and exercised their social capital which they actively built in this second home country and used their habitus. These students managed to overcome the inhibitory school system. They succeeded in finishing school at the upper secondary level and kept on building up their dreams for which their parents had sacrificed so much to send them in Iceland.

#### **9.4 Untapped Students' Resources**

The stories of the students of Vietnamese background about their road to success in the two Icelandic schools indicated that the road was both rocky and steep. For some of them, the end of the upper secondary education was a road up to the top of a hill, but for others the end was a steep road up to the top of a mountain. They were considered new in the Icelandic landscape, and they had a lot to learn in the new climate. But they brought with them their backpacks equipped with tools, experiences, knowledge, and motivation, ready to make the journey on their road of education. Unfortunately, the administrators and teachers who organized, instructed, and facilitated the students' way along the road to the top did not have the understanding of the usefulness of the students' sophisticated backpacks. Therefore the values and the capabilities with which the students were equipped were treated as exotic and untapped in different ways. The shortcomings of the administrators and teachers were traced to their own lack of tools and knowledge about their young culturally different students. They were told by the National policy that their new students were deficient in Icelandic and as administrators and teachers they were to concentrate on making sure that these new immigrant students learned it and everything else in relation to this landscape before continuing on their road to their education.

The policy instructed the schools to make a plan to receive the groups of students who were culturally different. However, the policy



did not set explicit goals, implement regulations and legislation for guidance and accountability, or allocate appropriate funding, so to build capacity for administrators to be inclusive in organizing their schools, and to train teachers to be inclusive and culturally responsive to their student body in their teaching. Therefore, it could be concluded that the absence of a multicultural education philosophy at the policy level resulted in practices at the school level that were not informed by an awareness of multicultural education philosophies or practices, and this in turn resulted in students of immigrant background being treated as deficient by school administrators and teachers in the upper secondary schools.

## **10 Next Steps: Implications for Reform**

In answering the three research questions, I found overwhelming evidence of the marginalization of students of Vietnamese immigrant background in upper secondary education in Iceland. These findings are in tune with other European studies, which have shown NAMS to be a disadvantaged group in pursuing their education (Public & Management Institute, 2013a, OECD, 2010). Bourdieu (1990) defined *habitus* as an individual's experience formed in conjunction with family history, class and cultural context, and is therefore difficult to change. But changes can occur through time when life conditions change (Guðmundsson, 2012). I would suggest that Vietnamese youth in this study are an example of this shift of *habitus*. They might have clearly identified themselves as Vietnamese, but they live in Iceland, attend Icelandic schools and will continue to do so, since it is their home. They have adopted hybrid identities which help them to navigate the different cultural and social contexts they encountered. Therefore, their *habitus* has been altered.

Icelandic upper secondary schools' social and academic environment could have been more inclusive, so that all concerned parties could pursue a unified goal of engendering a sense of belonging for such students, and allow them to be at home in their hybrid identities. Instead, the system seems motivated by nationalistic sentiments fearing a dilution of the Icelandic language and culture. Such sentiment was expressed in the policy of the Ministry of Social Affairs (2007, p. 6).

The policy statement implicitly claimed that they were acting in the interest of the Icelandic nation. By using “the entire nation” as the authority, they practiced hegemony favoring the dominant culture which is believed to be accepted as “common sense” and the “truth.” Gramsci’s theory of hegemony (1992) expounded that schools were a setting for the main culture’s power domination to gain ground through consent. It is based on Gramsci’s theory of hegemony through which I interpreted how Icelandic language deficiency was accepted as the starting point of educating immigrant students in upper secondary schools. Applying the Frankfurt School’s theory, it can be said, the Icelandic school system allows the dominant group to retain dominance and perpetuates the privilege of the majority while disadvantaging the ethnic minorities (Giroux, 2009).

NAMS’ exposure to academic failure has a negative influence not only on themselves but also on the society. Therefore, instead of disadvantaging them, the society should invest in them. Iceland should strengthen its educational system to provide youth of immigrant background with the instruction they need and the assistance they require for them to attain the maximum of their potential as is stated in the Icelandic Upper Secondary School Act (Ministry of Education & Science and Culture, 2000b). As well-rounded developed individuals with good education and secure jobs, integrate into the society this additional group of citizens of Iceland will strengthen and continue to preserve the Icelandic language. It is also important to keep in mind that they are the foundation of many more generations to come. Their success will pave the way for the future generations to follow. Thus, there is an urgent need to reform education in order to change the mind-set of perceiving NAMS at face value but to perceive them as active, effective participating citizens in developing and sustaining the Icelandic language and society. The value of my findings is that the policy makers and educators will have both theoretical and practical relevance for the reforms I will propose.

Theoretically, the findings suggest that qualitative research methods are essential for close analysis of the policy discourses, as well as a close analysis of the administrators’ and teachers’ understanding of the policies, and their practices which follow from this understanding, which have affected the immigrant students’ school experiences.

In addition, through the lenses of critical theory and multicultural education, personal narratives shed light on each participant’s

experience, on how they were influenced and affected by the shortcomings of policy and leadership and by the environment in which they worked, lived, and learned. Personal narratives also brought to life the uniqueness of each individual's cultural background. This background shapes their professional practice (in the case of administrators and teachers), and their learning strategies and habits (in the case of students). While students of Vietnamese background had many experiences in common, including their status as immigrants and their ethnic background, they were far from being a homogeneous group. In the Vietnamese context, they all had different social statuses, different regional origins, and different school and childhood experiences. In Iceland, they each had a different family situation, different responsibilities, different learning experiences and approaches. Only by dissecting each of the individual's narratives and the observational information I collected in the field, I was able to put together all the pieces of the puzzle of each individual student's life in Iceland.

Once the puzzle pieces for each individual came together, the pattern that emerged was one in which these students' work and learning lives were marginalized in Iceland, where they have been labelled as foreigners. Marginalization is the opposite of equality and inclusion, two principles to which democratic societies adhere. In order to live up to its basic principles as a social welfare, democratic country, Iceland needs to reform. While many different areas of society could be reformed in order for immigrants in Iceland to be properly integrated, my research project and the implications I will discuss below will be limited to the academic and social environment of upper secondary education.

Finally, multicultural education as a teaching philosophy is an inclusive pedagogical practice. Therefore it benefits students of all backgrounds, majority and minority. It emphasizes the equality of the learning process for all students regardless of their gender, social class, ethnicity, race or cultural characteristics (Banks, 2004). Multicultural education, like May (1999) and Nieto (2000) delineate, provides all students a critical thinking tool with which they not only value their own cultures, but also question and problematize them, and open-mindedly welcome, learn, and appreciate other cultures. Multicultural education embraces critical pedagogy of practice by insisting that teachers engage in dialogue with their students (Freire, 2009; Nieto, 2000). Through dialogue, critical thinking is generated and reciprocal learning between teachers and students takes place (Freire, 2009). The

teachers learn about the students' reality, their students' resources, their best characteristics and styles of learning, their cultural and system of values that can be tapped into to provide an equitable and productive learning environment for all of their students.

Banks' five dimensions take the students through a process of learning with knowledge construction, equity pedagogy, content integration, prejudice reduction, and an empowering school culture, all of which can equip students with multicultural competency, enabling them to navigate the culturally diverse global community to which Iceland belongs (Banks, 2004).

The dialogue for building an equitable and productive learning environment for all of students needs to take place in the different levels of the school system. The inclusive dialogue for establishing and maintaining interaction, cooperation, and partnership needs to take place between teachers and students, between teachers and administrators, between schools and parents, between administrators and educators and policy makers, and more (Ryan, 2006; Riehl, 2000; Wrigley, 2000).

## **10.1 Policy Reform**

In my chapter on policy document analysis, *Findings, Rhetoric and Experiences*, I show that the policy documents are committed to the concept of equality. I found a particular paradox in the rhetoric. On one hand, the discourse of the text was committed to equal rights for education for all students. On the other hand the discourse was adamant about the need to instill Icelandic heritage culture and language with no consideration for students' background. However, an important step for reform was taken when the concept of multiculturalism was included in the 2011 *Icelandic Nation Curriculum Guide for Upper Secondary Education* (Ministry of Education & Science and Culture, 2011). This was the first time the concept had been included in the national curriculum guidelines. The rhetoric of the 2011 document is still conservative in ideology, using an assimilative model for teaching Icelandic culture and language in its pedagogical approach. Informed by my research, I would propose shifting to a multicultural educational model as a more holistic and inclusive pedagogy. The aim would be for more equitable upper secondary schools to serve a diverse student body that reflects the society as the law, regulation, and curriculum lay out as

the goal. It should be recognized that since the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century research and development projects have been initiated by reform driven individuals. This paved the way for more informed discussions on immigrant issues at all school levels, but it was limited in scope regarding upper secondary education.

Effective positive reform does not happen in a vacuum. As my study showed, educational policy enactment had direct effects on school practices, which was one of the causes of the marginalization of students of immigrant background. Thus, it is necessary for the changes to start first with a different agenda at the policy level. The discourse and language of policy documents need to display the intention of realizing social justice, equity, and inclusion in the Icelandic educational system. They need to be explicit about the concept of multiculturalism, which is now the reality of Iceland's population.

Inclusive pedagogy for a population that is diverse is another important concept that needs to be theorized and applied in order to achieve the overall development of all students. Clear and specific goals need to be set and met by allocation of funding and by capacity building through training and supporting administrators and teachers.

It is also necessary that policy changes are understood and implemented. A plan for communication, dissemination and monitoring will help ensure effectiveness.

Such a policy of social justice, equity, and inclusion has been adapted by the OECD (2010) in the publication *Closing the Gap for Immigrant Students: Policy, practice and performance*, and the document *Maastricht Global Education Declaration: European strategy framework for improving and increasing global education in Europe to the year 2015* (2002), where initiatives calling for changes in European countries were proposed (discussed in chapter 3.3.1).

## **10.2 School Reform**

My research establishes three basic misunderstandings about students of foreign background that need to be corrected in order for schools to effectively develop well-rounded individuals, equipped to live in the global community. These three misunderstandings all stem from an assumption that students of foreign background are deficient.

The first misunderstanding is the perception that youth of immigrant background arrive in schools as blank slates. The second misunderstanding is the belief that segregation of groups within the school because of their lack of a common language is acceptable. The third misunderstanding is that instilling Icelandic cultural and language heritage is seen as an effective method of integrating immigrants into society.

In order for such mistakes to be corrected and in order for the schools to effectively develop well-rounded students equipped to live in the global community, it is important that educators acquire the relevant professional development. It is important for them to be empowered to be active in helping shift policies and practices and in taking ownership of these changes. Last but not least, it is equally important that school development includes visions and values as well as building on an understanding of leadership and change of management.

### *Leadership Education and Development*

Knowledge about multicultural education fosters the development of inclusive leadership. This kind of leadership emphasizes sharing power among the various members of the school community – staff, teachers, and parents– who have equal responsibility for educating each student. Inclusive leaders treat fellow members of this community with mutual respect and create spaces for them to exercise their agency, to dialogue, and to participate in building a school that reflects their community's cultural background (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; Riehl, 2000; Ryan, 2003, 2006; Wrigley, 2000).

School leaders need to be equipped with knowledge about the philosophy that lies behind multicultural education and need to seek professional development and teacher education for their teachers, in order to provide their students of diverse backgrounds with equity pedagogy for positive outcomes. School leaders should also seek to create a rounded school culture that is both socially and academically inclusive for their multicultural student body. They are instrumental to their staff and their community by having an empowering school and social culture (Banks, 1998).

### *Teacher Education and Development*

My theoretical framework was based on Freire's and the multicultural education dimensions and principles of Banks, Nieto, Gay, and May. Teacher education and development that followed this framework would provide students with an equitable education. With this framework, teachers learn to teach by praxis. They constantly reflect and act on their own practice so that they do not penalize their students for their different language, background, knowledge, style of learning the students bring with them into the classrooms. Teachers value their students' home cultures and bring them into the classroom, validating them as strengths on which the students can build and progress. Using content integration and knowledge construction as part of their pedagogical approach, the teachers situate issues of race, ethnicity, and language in the curriculum. Critically, they instruct the students to scrutinize the power relations in the majority discourse.

Teachers informed by multicultural pedagogy, value multilingual and multicultural students and teachers as resources and expertise, instead of viewing them as foreigners and deficiencies. The balance of power between majority and minority can be realized only when dialogues between students and teachers, students and students, and teachers and teachers are possible.

These are reasons multicultural education benefits all students who live in today's global community. These are also the reasons for teachers to develop professionally and be educated in this pedagogical philosophy in order to love and care – as Freire, Nieto and Gay put it – for their students.

In short, my recommendations for the reform of the upper secondary educational system are: policy reform, and education and development for administrators and teachers for equality, inclusiveness, and nurturing pedagogy for students of multicultural background.

### *Curriculum Reform*

Upper secondary schools must conform to the 92, 2008 Act and the national curriculum that was published in 2011. Article 22 on the School Curriculum Guide requires teachers to develop their own guidelines for courses and study programs. There are opportunities for teachers to influence the aims and objectives of the schools' curriculum and its implementation which could enrich the educational experience

of all students, and immigrant students especially. In particular, through the formation of “key priorities and strategic direction” school leaders can have a strong effect on how the school operates.

### **10.3 Community Understanding and Contribution**

Schools are the entities of the communities which they serve. Therefore, when reform of the educational system is discussed, I find it is also necessary to include the responsibility of the communities. Given my Vietnamese background, I am connected to the Vietnamese population in Iceland. I plan to work to facilitate the mutual understanding between the schools and the Vietnamese community. I would like to find venues to inform the parents of the importance of the teachers’ understanding of their language, their habits, their traditions, and their culture in order to help with the education of their children. I wish to encourage the parents to be active in cooperating with the schools.

### **10.4 Strengths and Weaknesses and Further Research**

The strength of my study lies in the qualitative research methods and the use of multicultural education as a powerful, relevant, theoretical framework to analyze the data I collected. It also lies in the rapport I formed with the participants during interviews, particularly with the students of Vietnamese background. The fact that we were able to speak Vietnamese and could understand each other through all the nuances of the language, and the fact that they perceived me as their country-woman, enabled me to gather rich data. At the same time, I felt this dimension also limited my study. The perceptions of the participants were demarcated by the particularities of Vietnamese cultural values. I, as a researcher with a similar background, might have been confined in the same perceptions.

An additional limitation was due to the small number of student participants who attended classes in subject areas other than Icelandic language at the time of my study. As a result, many of the teachers I interviewed were teaching Icelandic, and the classes I observed were Icelandic language classes. As I think back, I could also have interviewed the teachers who had experiences in teaching students of Vietnamese background in other subject areas in previous years. There



was the possibility that this could have yielded richer data from teacher perspectives.

Finally, in 2011, when I did my field research, students of Vietnamese background were concentrated in two upper secondary schools. Thus, the scope of my study was also limited by the number of schools. Despite this limitation, my research does show that at least this particular immigrant population is marginalized within the system. For future research in the field of multicultural education in Iceland, I already have many questions pertaining to youth of Vietnamese heritage. I have the privilege of conducting Vietnamese placement examinations every year for upper secondary schools. Through this, I get to meet many of the youth attending upper secondary schools. Some of these students arrived in Iceland at a very young age, some of them were born in Iceland, and a few of them arrived in Iceland in the last few years. Almost all of these students read and write Vietnamese well. My first question is: where and how did they learn Vietnamese? My second question is: how well are they connected to their Vietnamese cultural heritage?

With regard to research in relation to the general population of immigrants, in 2015 the implementation of the 2011 Icelandic National Curriculum Guide for Upper Secondary Education will begin. My questions are: what kind of impact will this curriculum have on the pedagogical practice in schools five years from now, in 2020? And as Iceland progresses toward a larger number of people of foreign background living and studying in the country, how widely will the doors of all upper secondary schools in Iceland be opened for students with Icelandic as a second language? Through which lens will these students be perceived: will they be seen as richly endowed with resources on which to build, or will they still be seen as deficient?

My own belief, as a person with hybrid identity, is that the road to integration is not a one-way but a two-way street. Everybody needs to travel in order to meet, to get acquainted, and to understand each other to unite and to live in harmony. The strongest element with which people have built this island, called Iceland, where fire, ice and water meet, is education inside and outside of the school walls. Education binds together all the fundamental elements of a pluralistic society and strengthens unity.

There is limited comprehensive research at the doctoral level of study about the immigrant students' experience in upper secondary schools in

Iceland, and for immigrant students of Vietnamese background, in particular, which my study is the first to address. Research on a particular group has its limitation. However, immigrant students of Vietnamese background, who have traveled almost as far as possible in our world, both in physical distance and in terms of language and culture, were most vulnerable to be disadvantaged in practice because of their ethnic, cultural, and linguistic differences. Therefore, my contribution to the understanding of their strengths and challenges could possibly lead to pedagogical practices that would have value for them and might also have value for some other immigrant student populations.

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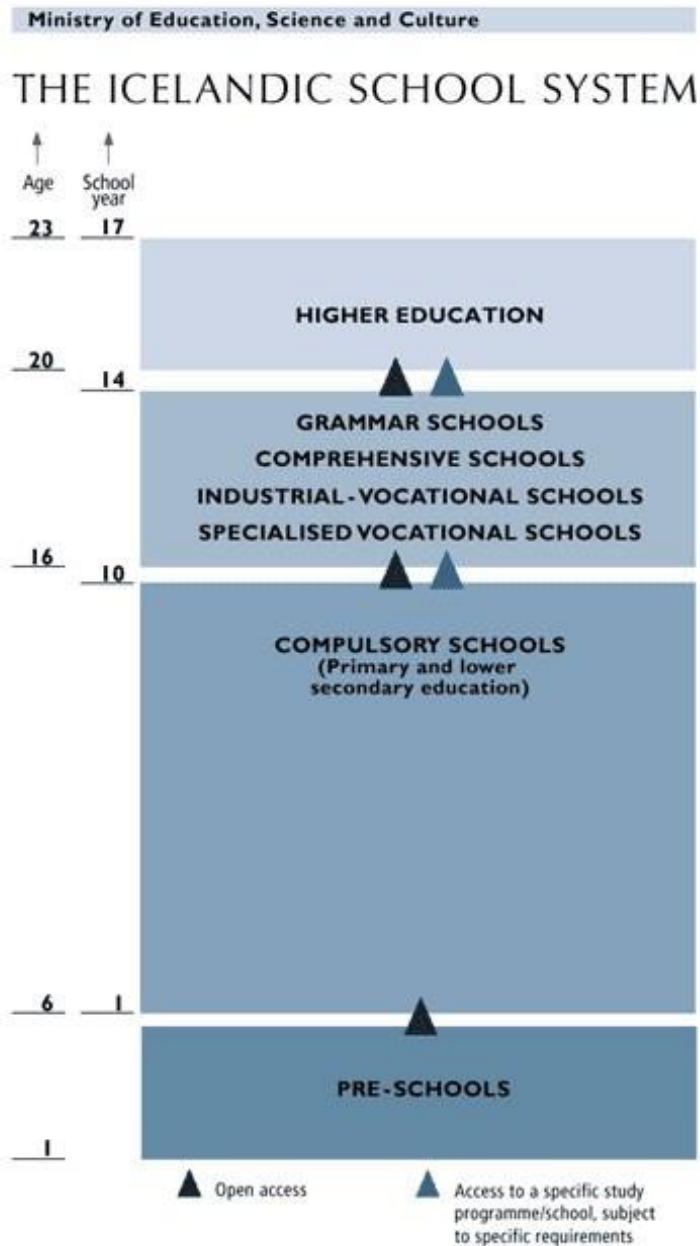
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## Appendix A: The Icelandic School System





## **Appendix B: Protocols for Research**

### ***Interview Protocol for Administrators***

#### **A. Students**

- a. Total number of students in school
- b. Ages
- c. Graduation rate among Icelandic students
- d. Dropout rate among Icelandic students

#### **Immigrant students**

- e. Total number of immigrant students
- f. Countries they are from
- g. Amount of time they have been in Iceland
- h. Ages
- i. Part time / full time students
- j. Areas of studies
- k. Graduation rate
- l. Dropout rate

#### **Vietnamese students**

- m. Total number of Vietnamese students
- n. Ages
- o. Amount of time they are in Iceland
- p. Part time / full time students
- q. Areas of studies
- r. Graduation rate
- s. Dropout rate

#### **B. Policy at state level:**

- a. The change of law for upper secondary education in the Spring of 2009.
- b. The changes from the old law

- c. The effects of the new law for students of foreign background
  - d. Is there any law that is categorized as multicultural education?
- C. School policy on education that reflects Iceland multicultural society
  - a. Immigrant students integration in the school
  - b. Icelandic students benefit from being a part of other students' diversity
  - c. Interaction between social groups
  - d. Social activities
- D. Immigrant students' education in upper secondary school
  - a. A particular program (model, method)
  - b. The development of the teaching
  - c. Pedagogy
  - d. Icelandic teaching
  - e. Tutoring
  - f. Integration
  - g. After school activities
- E. Teachers :
  - a. Teachers' view about MC
  - b. Professional development on multicultural education organised by the Department of Education (pedagogy, expectations of students)
  - c. The principal's view on professional development
  - d. Teachers' method of developing themselves
- F. Principal:
  - a. Your knowledge about multicultural education?
  - b. Professional development on multicultural education organized by the Department of Education
  - c. Principal' ways of developing himself/herself
  - d. The principal's view on professional development

G. Áhrif krepuna á daglega starf með nemenda uppruna, úrræða, og þróun á þessu sviði) (*The effects of the financial crisis on the day to day operation that effects the youth of foreign background and the continuation of development*)

H. School material relating to multicultural education

- a. School Websites
- b. Documents
- c. How did programs for immigrant students come about?

## ***Interview Protocol for Teachers***

- A. Your story as a teacher of immigrant youthYour education
  - a. Your inters
  - b. Your experience teaching youth of foreign background
  - c. Your role as a teacher for youth of foreign background
  - d. Your involvement in the life of youth of foreign background
  - e. Professional development on multicultural education organized by the Department of Education (pedagogy, expectations of students)
  - f. Your method of teaching youth of foreign background
  - g. Your method of developing yourselves for your teaching
  - h. Your knowledge about multicultural education
- B. Immigrant students education in upper secondary school
  - a. Description of the whole program (each of them)  
*Lýsing*
  - b. A particular program (model, method) *fyrirmynd, aðferð*
  - c. The development of the teaching (*þróunarkennsla*)
    - Pedagogy (*kennsluaðferð*)
    - Materials (*kennsluefni*)
    - Icelandic teaching
    - Tutoring
    - Books in the library
  - d. Integration
    - After school activities
    - Who are their friends?
- B. Who do they go to for assistance?
  - a. Amount of time they are in Iceland
  - b. Part time / full time students
  - c. Areas of studies
  - d. Graduation rate

- e. Reasons for dropout?
- D. School policy on education that reflects Iceland multicultural society
  - a. Immigrant students integration in the school
  - b. Icelandic students benefit from being a part of other students' diversity (*fjölbreytileg*)
  - c. Interaction between social groups (*félagshópar*)
  - d. Social activities
- E. School and youth of foreign background
  - a. Staff's view, attitude towards school diversity
  - b. Icelandic students benefit from the presence of youth of foreign background (how? what? Why?)
- F. Áhrif krepuna á daglega starf með nemenda uppruna, úrræða, og þróun á þessu sviði (*The effects of the financial crisis on the day to day operation that effects the youth of foreign background and the continuation of development*)
- G. What is your definition of multicultural education?
- H. What is your vision for the future in this program?
- I. Would you like to add something else?

## ***Interview Protocol for Students***

Research – nghiên cứu (học hỏi, tìm hiểu) về vấn đề học vấn của thanh thiên niên nhập cư đến Băng Đảo.

To help the students to succeed, we will need to understand the students' educational history. Therefore, there will be questions about your background (Để hiểu biết thêm về sự liên hệ về vấn đề học vấn):

- A. Your life and education in Vietnam and (Đời sống ở VN và tin tức gia đình)
  - a. family background
    - place
    - parents
    - siblings
    - social status
  - b. Education (Việc học ở VN)
    - Grade completion
    - Describe elementary school
    - Describe secondary school
- B. Iceland. (chuyển sang Băng Đảo)
  - a. When did you arrive to Iceland?
  - b. With whom?
  - c. How do you think of yourself?
  - d. What does Vietnamese culture mean to you?
  - e. What does it mean by being in Iceland to you?
  - f. Job (hours work, kind of job, reason for working)
  - g. Learning Icelandic before coming to present school  
(where, when, how long)
- C. Your education in this school (Your opinion about the education system in Iceland)
  - a. How are things going?
  - b. What are you studying?
  - c. What do you thing of school here?
  - d. Why did you choose this school?
  - e. Can you benefit from what you learn in Vietnam here?

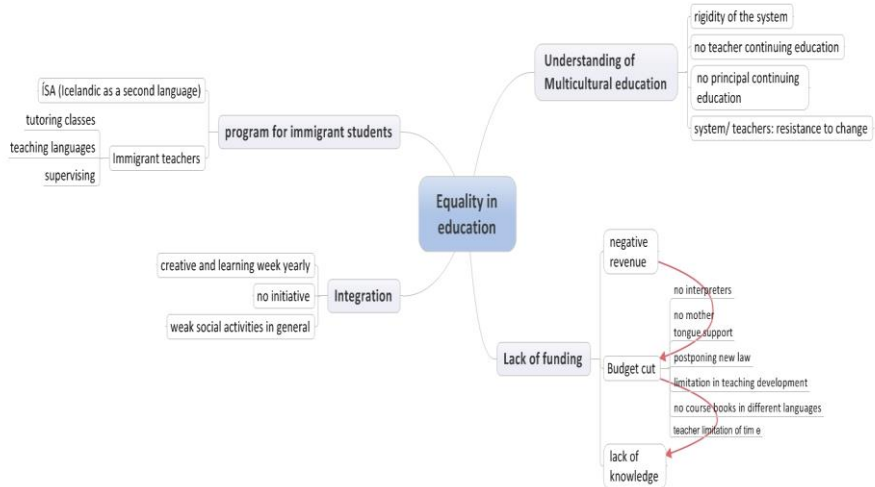
- f. Does your Vietnamese background help you in your functioning here?
  - g. How is the school pedagogy (cách thức dạy)?
  - h. How is the curriculum (chương trình giảng dạy)?
  - i. Can you share with me about how the teachers are here (attitude, pedagogy)?
  - j. How is the education related to your life outside of the classroom?
  - k. Where do you do your homework?
- D. Do you involved in social life in this school? (Giao tiếp ở trường)
- a. Activities participate in school (tham gia các tổ chức vui chơi trong trường, sau giờ học, các chuyến tham quan, kịch nghệ)
  - b. Who are your **friends** inside and outside of school?
  - c. What is your relationship with students of Icelandic origin? (học sinh BD đối xử như thế nào)
  - d. Prejudice (thành kiến)
  - e. Relationship with students of foreign origins?
  - f. Do you feel there are conflicts between your cultural values (giá trị văn hóa) and the cultural values in the school system here? What kinds of problems to you have?
  - g. Do you feel there is some kinds of prejudice against you? By whom?
- E. How does the Icelandic financial crisis affect your life?
- a. Your life before the crisis
  - b. Your life at the moment
  - c. Your future plan
- F. Future plan
- a. What is your plan for the future?
  - b. How does education relate to your future plan

## ***Observation Protocol***

- A. Description of the observed place (classroom, common area)
- B. Time
- C. Student participants
  - a. Activities
  - b. Sitting place/area (where, with whom, alone, in group)
  - c. Hanging out area (where, with whom, alone, in group)
  - d. Behavior (tentative, aloof, interested, detached, puzzled, comfortable, in control, confident)
  - e. Participation
  - f. Dressing
- D. Other students in relation to the participant/s
- E. Teacher
  - a. Dialogue with students
  - b. Positioning (walking around the classroom, sitting at the desk, standing by blackboard)
  - c. Teaching techniques (using blackboard, technology, drawing, gesture, animation...)
  - d. Group work, individual work
  - e. Lecturing
  - f. Cultural responsiveness



## Appendix C: Emerging Themes from Administrators' Data



## **Appendix D**

### **Introductory Letters**

#### **Letters for Administrator and Teachers**

Reykjavík 11. mars 2011

#### **Framhaldsskólamenntun í íslensku fjölmenningsmenningarsamfélagi**

Doktorsverkefnið í menntunarfræði innan þess skóla myndi fela í sér:

- a. Safna upplýsingum frá nemendum
- b. Safna saman upplýsingum frá stjórnendum
- c. Safna upplýsingum frá kennurum til þess að fá innsýn inn í kennslu ungra innflytjenda, með sérstakri áherslu á stöðu ungmenna frá Víetnam, og þær tillögur sem kennararnir kunna að hafa í því sambandi.

Helsta markmið rannsóknarinnar er að afla nýrrar þekkingar um framfarir ungra innflytjenda af víetnömskum uppruna í íslenskum framhaldsskólum. Markmiðinu verður í fyrsta lagi náð með því að skoða reynsluna af ólíkum námsbrautum sem einstakir skólar hafa tekið upp til að kenna þessum nemendum sínum, í öðru lagi með því að undirbúa frekari rannsókn á hvort innleiða ætti fjölmenningsmenntunaraðferðir þannig að allir nemendur skólans njóti góðs af. Rannsóknin snýst í grunninn um leiðir skóla til að ná betri árangri við kennslu nemenda af erlendum uppruna, efla skólasókn þeirra og takmarka brottfall þeirra úr framhaldsskólum. Menntun yrði um leið mikilvægari leið til aðlögunar og virkrar þátttöku allra nemenda í samfélaginu.

Mér er ljóst að upplýsingarnar sem safnað verður eru í eðli sínu persónulegar og viðkvæmar. Því verða dulnefni notuð við rannsóknina. Vegna eðlis rannsóknarinnar þarf ég samt sem áður að fara yfir kyn þátttakenda, aldur, félagslega og menntunarlega stöðu þátttakenda. Ég mun fara með þær upplýsingar af ýrustu varfærni til þess að vernda einkahagi þátttakenda á meðan að unnið er úr upplýsingunum sem safnað verður.

Upplýsts samþykkis allra þátttakenda þarf að afla og þeir munu geta dregið sig út úr rannsókninni á hvaða stigi hennar sem er.

Niðurstöður rannsóknarinnar verða kynntar í fræðilegum greinum, ritgerðum og fyrirlestrum eftir að rannsókninni lýkur..

Ég hef þegar aflað samþykkis Persónuverndar fyrir rannsókninni.

Með undirskrift minni samþykki ég að taka þátt í ofangreindri rannsókn.

## Thơ giới thiệu cho học sinh tham gia

Reykjavík 26. tháng 1 năm 2011

### *Văn hóa và giáo dục cấp ba trong xã hội đa văn hóa của Băng-Đảo*

Sự nghiên cứu này là để hiểu biết thêm về vấn đề học vấn của học sinh Việt-Nam nhập cư đến Băng-Đảo.

Mục đích:

1. Tìm hiểu về kinh nghiệm các trường dạy các học sinh này.
2. Học hỏi thêm về sự hiệu nghiệm của phương pháp dạy đa văn hóa trong môi trường giáo dục của Băng-Đảo để có thể có lợi cho tất cả mọi học sinh.

Mục đích chính là để giúp cho học sinh nhập cư đến Băng-Đảo tiến bộ dễ dàng hơn trong vấn đề học vấn để giảm số học sinh bỏ ngang việc học trên cấp ba. Giáo dục và văn hóa được xem như là cách giúp cho thanh thiếu niên hòa nhập và trở thành công dân hữu ích cho cá nhân và xã hội.

Sự cộng tác của anh/chị trong luận án này hoàn toàn là do sự tình nguyện cho vấn đề cải tiến giáo dục và văn hóa. Học sinh tham gia vào dự án có thể chấm dứt bất cứ lúc nào theo ý muốn của chính mình. Tất cả các chi tiết trong phỏng vấn đều được giữ bí mật, ngoài nhân viên làm việc cho luận án sẽ không một ai khác được quyền nghe, đọc những chi tiết.

Chữ ký dưới đây chứng nhận sự đồng ý của tôi cộng tác với dự án trên.

Chữ ký học sinh tham gia,

Anh-Đào Trần  
Học sinh lớp tiến sĩ  
Menntavísindasvið - Háskóli Íslands  
Sími: 821 2523  
Địa chỉ mạng: [adk3@hi.is](mailto:adk3@hi.is)

## Thơ giới thiệu cho phụ huynh

Reykjavík 26. tháng 1 năm 2011

### *Văn hóa và giáo dục cấp ba trong xã hội đa văn hóa của Băng Đảo*

Sự nghiên cứu này là để hiểu biết thêm về vấn đề học vấn của học sinh Việt-Nam nhập cư đến Băng-Đảo.

Mục đích:

1. Tìm hiểu về kinh nghiệm các trường dạy các học sinh này.
2. Học hỏi thêm về sự hiệu nghiệm của phương pháp dạy đa văn hóa trong môi trường giáo dục của Băng-Đảo để có thể có lợi cho tất cả mọi học sinh.

Mục đích chính là để giúp cho học sinh nhập cư đến Băng-Đảo tiến bộ dễ dàng hơn trong vấn đề học vấn để giảm số học sinh bỏ ngang việc học trên cấp ba.

Giáo dục và văn hóa được xem như là cách giúp cho thanh thiếu niên hòa nhập và trở thành công dân hữu ích cho cá nhân và xã hội.

Sự cho phép của phụ huynh cho con em cộng tác trong luận án này hoàn toàn là do sự tình nguyện cho vấn đề cải tiến giáo dục và văn hóa. Học sinh tham gia vào dự án có thể chấm dứt bất cứ lúc nào theo ý muốn của của phụ huynh và con em. Tất cả các chi tiết trong phòng vấn đều được giữ bí mật, ngoài nhân viên làm việc cho luận án sẽ không một ai khác được quyền nghe, đọc những chi tiết.

Chữ ký dưới đây chứng nhận sự đồng ý của tôi cho con tôi cộng tác với dự án trên

Chữ ký của phụ huynh,

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## Glossary

**Comprehensive school** (Fjölbrautaskóli). Students who attend comprehensive schools can choose either vocational or matriculated studies and generally take two to four years depending on their choices.

**Compulsory school** (Grunnskóli). The schools are run by the municipalities. Children from six to sixteen years old are required by law to attend. First grade is the lowest, and tenth grade is the highest.

**Grammar schools** (Menntaskóli). Students who complete grammar education after three to four years are matriculated (studentspróf) and have the right to attend higher education at the university level.

**Icelandic school system.** The four school levels in Iceland are pre-schools, compulsory schools, upper secondary schools, and higher education.

**Pre-schools** (Leikskóli). The schools are run by the municipalities. Children from one to six years old are not required but are qualified to attend pre-schools.

**Upper secondary school** (Framhaldsskóli). The majority of the schools are run by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, but some of the schools are independent private schools. People of all ages can be students in upper secondary schools. The qualification for attending this level is the completion of compulsory education. There are three different types of schools at this level. These are vocational schools, comprehensive schools, and grammar schools.

**Vocational schools.** The schools are for students who choose to study vocations. The length of study depends on which vocation they choose to study.