



HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

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WE WANT TO CONTRIBUTE TOO

The narrative experience of immigrants with career qualifications and their acceptance into the Icelandic labor market

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to shed light on the experiences of professionally educated individuals who have immigrated to Iceland and their subsequent accounts of obtaining recognition and validation for their educational degrees and career experience. Qualitative methods were used to acquire an understanding of the typical obstacles that immigrants holding professional degrees have encountered and the effects that these obstacles have had on their adjustment to living in Iceland. Data was acquired through personal interviews with seven individuals from ages 32-53. The results show that the career paths of professionals attempting to use their qualifications in Iceland can be rough and stony. On the other hand, the results of this research also showed that flexibility can lead to other career paths that are equally fortuitous and that it is impossible to emphasize enough, the importance of being open-minded when searching for career opportunities. Lastly the research affirms the value of career and educational counseling for newly arrived immigrants to Iceland. Counseling can aid in understanding the struggle and frustration of culture shock. It also emphasizes the usefulness of language learning. It underscores the importance in helping to guide immigrants through the process of validation of credentials and aid in a job search that will assist the individual either to continue his present career or start a new and valuable path. Whatever option is chosen, the availability of validation of education and experience in addition to the realization of choices, can benefit both the immigrant and Iceland.

ÚTDRÁTTUR

Tilgangur þessarar rannsóknar er að varpa ljósi á reynslur faglærðra innflytjenda á Íslandi við að fá námsgráður og starfsreynslur sínar metnar og viðurkenndar. Sjö þátttakendur voru valdir til að öðlast skilning á hindrunum sem innflytjendur hafa staðið frammi fyrir. Gögnum var safnað í gegnum einkaviðtöl við einstaklinga á aldrinum 32-53 ára. Niðurstöður rannsóknarinnar sýna að tilraunir faglærðra innflytjenda við að öðlast fótfestu í íslensku atvinnulífi með framvísun fagréttinga sinna falla oft í grýttan farveg. Á hinn bóginn sýna niðurstöðurnar fram á að sveigjanlegt hugarfar getur leitt til að starfsferill tekur óvænta stefnu, sem oft reynast jafn heppilegir og að ógerlegt sé að leggja næga áherslu á mikilvægi þess að hafa opinn huga þegar atvinnutækifæri eru skoðuð. Að lokum staðfestir rannsóknin mikilvægi starfs- og námsráðgjafar til handa innflytjendum á Íslandi. Ráðgjöf af þessu tagi getur hjálpað innflytjendum við að skilja betur baráttuna og ergelsið sem fylgir menningarlegu áfalli og einnig getur hún lagt áherslu á þýðingu þess að læra tungumálið í nýja heimalandinu. Rannsóknin sýnir mikilvægi þess að hjálpa innflytjendum í gegnum ferlið við að staðfesta réttindi sín og liðsinna þeim við atvinnuleit. Einstaklingurinn mun þar af leiðandi annað hvort halda áfram á þeirri starfsbraut sem hann hefur unnið á áður eða finna nýja og gagnlega starfsframabraut. Sama hvor leiðin er farin, þá mun það, að geta fengið viðurkenningu á menntun sinni og starfsreynslu í viðbót við það að hafa skilning á valmöguleikum þeim sem í boði eru, geta haft í för með sér hagnað fyrir bæði innflytjandann og íslenskt samfélag.

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The research is conducted under the supervision of Dr. Sif Einarisdóttir, Dosent at the University of Iceland, with the assistance of a second supervisor, Dr. Hallfríður Þórarinsdóttir, doctor in anthropology and the chair of the Centre for Immigration Research at the Reykjavik Academy. I want to thank them both for their instruction and support during this prolonged journey of research and writing.

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And lastly I posthumously dedicate this paper and milestone in my life and career to my loving spouse, Runólfur Gíslason, who truly was the “wind beneath my wings” throughout the many good years we had together.

*“Did you ever know that you're my hero,
and everything I would like to be?
I can fly higher than an eagle,
'cause you are the wind beneath my
wings.”*

-Jeff Silbar and Larry Henley

Note:**A Journey of Landscapes from 2006 through 2009**

When I first started this research in 2006 Iceland's economic landscape, along with the rest of the world's, was radically different as compared to today's. The three main Icelandic banks of Glitnir, Kaupþing and Landsbanki had shown market value increases of an unbelievable 1400% between the short time period of only 2 years preceding 2006. Obviously, this bubble expansion of the economy was too good to be true and these banks were the proverbial "canary in the coal mine" for the rest of the world when they had to declare bankruptcy in October of 2008.

Along with the financial landscape, the employment sector has also drastically changed in Iceland since then. Much of the foreign workforce at that time was employed in the construction field. Without the building growth, and the opportunity to make higher wages than they could in their own countries, many of these employees have returned to their homelands. Yet that does not negate the qualitative research done within these pages about migration, validation, social adjustment, and employment among the professionals that have made Iceland their home or others who will come here in the future.

Migration will continue to be a form of trying to enhance one's living conditions, exploring new opportunities, and hopefully using the education and experience that one has accumulated in the past. The necessity to get validation will remain and the conclusions of this research will persist.

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Introduction

It is 3am and the alarm clock rings. Miriam crawls out of bed to get dressed and ready for the next shift in the fish processing plant in the small Icelandic fishing village where she and her family live. The capelin has finally arrived to the fishing grounds close enough to the town and the season has begun with the boats sailing into harbor and round-the-clock shifts to process the catch. This job in the fish factory is very unlike her summer job back home in Serbia, where she works as a trained dentist in the office that her father and brother own. No, in this job she utilizes nothing of her long education, years of training, and years of experience working as a dentist. This job consists of sorting fish, cleaning fish and packing fish. She makes a sliver of income compared to what she would be making as a dentist in Iceland, but try as she might, she has not succeeded in getting her dentistry credentials recognized in this country. This is not a unique story among the many foreign professionals who come to Iceland.

Immigration is a relatively new phenomenon in Iceland and therefore research and study about the subject is needed. In this research paper, *We Want to Contribute Too, the narrative experience of immigrants with career qualifications and their acceptance into the Icelandic labor market*, the answer will be sought to the question asked of seven participants: What effect does the recognition and validation of an immigrant's professional education have on his well-being and his contribution to Icelandic society? The observations contained within these pages pertain to utilizing the resources that immigrants bring with them in terms of education, career experience, and entrepreneurship. The results have practical and applicable value for anyone who works with, or on behalf of, immigrants coming to this country, i.e., policy makers, career and educational counselors, social workers, employers and also those who work in procuring educational validation for foreign job seekers.

Currently, the mobility of people from one country to another along with the high levels of education among many immigrants leads to the probability that Iceland will be admitting an increasing number of professionals with various degrees and career experience. According to the Ministry of Social Affairs in Iceland, from the middle of the 20th century and until 1997 foreign residents were within only 2% of the total population and at that time started to increase in numbers (Statistics Iceland, January 20, 2009). In the middle of the 1970s, immigrants from outside Scandinavia and others who needed work permits started to immigrate to Iceland mostly to work in the fish factories. At the end of the 1980s this began to change when companies in other employment sectors, other industries, health care, and technical work began to seek foreign workers. At the same time, compared to Iceland, the percentage of foreign residents were still double in all the other Scandinavian countries with the exception of Finland. In 1994 Iceland joined the EEC (European Economic Community) and Iceland was required to adhere to the same laws governing the free flow of immigrants within the EEC and the EU (European Union). As a result, there was an increase of immigrants from the EEC into Iceland. At the end of the last century, immigration started to increase much more quickly and the percentage of foreign residents had risen to 3.5% in 2004 (Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Security, 2007). On January 1st, 2009 the number of foreign residents in Iceland had jumped to 24,379 or 7.6% of the population, having quadrupled between the years of 1997 and 2009 (Iceland Statistics, January 20, 2009).

Employment plays a tremendously important part in one's life (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2007) and job satisfaction infiltrates and reflects upon all other areas of an individual's development. Research has shown that one's personal growth is often directly related to the effort of reaching educational and career goals. Employment has personal, financial, and social values for people and makes up a very large part of their contribution towards a society (The World Health Organization [WHO], 2005; Blustein, 2006). How does

it make newly arrived immigrants feel not to be able to use what they have often been studying or working at for years? The elements of self-esteem, productivity, financial security, and general health are all affected (Blustein, 2006). What are the possible losses for Iceland when immigrants are not able to fulfill their potential in the arena of employment and what are the gains when they are able to contribute their expertise, education and knowledge in a particular field?

Background

Living in Vestmannaeyjar and being an immigrant myself, it is frequently apparent that the human resources pertaining to knowledge and education of immigrants are often vastly ignored or not rightly utilized. There is much to consider in relation to the emotional and social adjustments that individuals have to make when they immigrate to a new country. Just as Icelanders expect to be able to use their education when they move abroad, the hopes and dreams of those who come to Iceland are the same. In respecting that which the immigrant has to offer we are not only contributing to a better self concept of each individual, but also better productivity, and the happiness and well-being of everyone in the community.

Migration

Factors influencing migration

In looking at the process of migration from a broad perspective, it is clear that even when migration is a choice made willingly, it often contains its share of heartbreak and culture shock. “Migration can be a wrenching, disruptive experience. It tears people from their often beloved homelands, breaks up their families, and forces them into a prolonged sometimes lifelong period of adjustment to a strange and alienating environment” (Light & Bonacich, 1988, p.430). For this reason it was difficult to separate the chapter that follows this one which deals with employment and self-esteem, because for an immigrant, their education and job skills are sometimes the only “belongings” they arrive with when they land on foreign

shores and self-esteem can be very wrapped up in those personal assets. The subject of employment and self-esteem will be addressed in the next chapter but the reader should nevertheless have these issues in mind while reading this current chapter.

Since the end of World War II, international migration has emerged as a major demographic force throughout the world. Contemporary international migration began about 1950 and is clearly differently defined than the immigration that preceded that time period. Instead of being dominated by flows between Europe and a handful of former colonies, immigration became a truly global phenomenon, as the number and variety of both sending and receiving nations increased. Whereas 85 percent of international migrants before 1925 originated in Europe, since 1950 Europeans have become an increasingly minor part of the flow. Meanwhile, the number of immigrants from Latin America, Africa and Asia has steadily grown. (Massey, 1996)

While long-standing migratory paths remain, they are developing new patterns in response to economic and political change. According to Castles and Miller (2003) there are distinct identifiable issues that play major roles in today's migration patterns including globalization, the acceleration of migration, and the differentiation of migration. Refugees, legally those people who have fled their homelands and are unable to return, tripled between 1980 and 1990 to about 17 million (Loescher, 2000).

No matter where one is emigrating from, the phenomenon of migration is controlled by forced and/or voluntary factors. According to Demuth (2000) the voluntary vs. involuntary analytic tool of migration is based on whether or not the factors involved leave a choice to migrate or not. The involuntary factor is a need to leave a country in order to survive. This could include variants of economic survival, exodus from a natural disaster, freedom from political persecution or religious persecution, which if severe enough could include avoidance of conflict, genocide, or war where people fear for their lives. Immigration becomes necessary for survival (Akhtar, 1999).

The voluntary factor consists of the attraction to a new way of life. This could include a gentler form of the above, perhaps not under physical or dangerous threat from political or

religious persecution, but yet a longing to be able to freely make choices in these matters.

Other voluntary factors could also include family reunification in joining other family members who have already migrated. Better education and career in addition to a better life with more income, might also be the dream of those who are under the influence of a voluntary factor (Demuth, 2000). Salman Akhtar (1999) makes the distinction between “immigrants and exiles” in labeling those who leave a country willingly as immigrants, as opposed to exiles who are pushed from their homeland.

It is also a misconception that economic issues are the prominent reason for migration. According to Massey (1996) higher income is not always the main incentive force in migration and decisions about leaving family and home in developing countries are typically made by the whole family, not individuals. People migrate not only to maximize earning but also to minimize risks. Massey continues to explain that sending different family members to geographically distant labor markets represents a strategy to diversify and reduce risks to household income.

Immigration and identity – adapting to a foreign society

The psychological outcome of immigration is well-described by Akhtar (1999) when he addresses the magnitude of cultural differences that an immigrant faces. He comments that though immigration can be an exciting and happily anticipated undertaking, there are issues that can involve a wide range of difference between the adopted and the home country. There is the matter of food, language, wit, and humor, the separation from friends and family, the adjustment to suddenly being a minority, often a loss of social status, often a power shift within the family, and frequently the letdown of unmet expectations. Akhtar also refers to the cultural differences that can be more subtle including conscious or unconscious racism, misunderstandings due to the language, varying customs of courtesy, attitude towards

authority, relations among certain age groups or gender rules, and other social customs specific to a certain society or culture.

No matter what the determining factors are that lead to migration either voluntary or involuntary, there still exists the struggle of leaving something familiar and embarking on a new chapter in one's life. Issues of identity, self-esteem and adaptation play major roles in how an individual settles into their new home. This identity and self-esteem are quite often dependent on one's career (Blustein, 2006). According to Akhtar (1999) the extent to which one's original psychosocial role can be resumed upon immigration plays a large role in how well an immigrant can adjust. These issues are pivotal in determining not only their quality of life in the new country but also what an individual can contribute to the new society where they are now living.

Kalvero Oberg coined the term "culture shock" in 1958 and it is defined as the loss of emotional equilibrium that a person suffers when he moves from a familiar environment where he can easily function into a new environment where he can not. Symptoms are the same regardless of nationality (Guanipa, 1998). Oberg divided the phenomenon of culture shock into five stages. Each stage can be long standing or appear only under certain conditions depending on the individual and his circumstances. He considered culture shock a normal condition which affects individuals differently just as grief or other pressures in life do.

According to Oberg the first stage is often called the honeymoon stage and is characterized by tension and expectations. During this stage people enjoy the excitement of being in a new place where everything is interesting and exciting. The second stage is the actual shock and the most important one for a counselor or the immigrant themselves to recognize. It is characterized with a loss of courage and self-esteem and people develop a general discomfort. It can range from mild uneasiness and homesickness to, in extreme cases,

psychological panic. Most often the victim does not know what the problem is and can be plagued by depression, anxiety, bouts of crying, and lack of confidence. There can also be strong feelings of dissatisfaction. It can be a difficult period of adjustment because the immigrant is often comparing the environment and circumstances to what it was like “at home” and problems with language, employment, housing, and just buying and cooking food can seem like huge obstacles. Because people in the new country do not understand the process of what is taking place, they seem to appear aggressive or non-caring.

Oberg has described the third stage of culture shock as characterized by slowly but surely gaining an understanding of the new culture. Key aspects in a new culture are being learned and a feeling of pleasure and a sense of humor can be experienced. Language is also developing during this stage. With this all going on it becomes easier to initiate a more objective evaluation of the differences between the two countries. In the fourth stage, the person realizes that the new culture has good and bad things to offer. They develop a more solid feeling of belonging and start to define themselves and establish goals for living. People stop thinking of “them” and “us”. They have integrated with life in the new country, regarding both emotions and general activities, and life is similar to what it was before immigrating. The fifth stage of culture shock is the stage that is often called the “re-entry” shock or the “wound of re-entry” (Akhtar, 1999). This occurs when one returns “home” to find that the homeland is not as comfortable as remembered.

It is vitally important on both sides, for the immigrant and also for members of the receiving community, to recognize culture shock for what it is and what influence it has on the relationships that individuals build and what role it plays to the adjustment of an immigrant. In the beginning people are well received and the newcomer often sees things through rose-colored glasses, but when time passes and the novelty disappears, a feeling of indifference or irritation replaces the euphoria (Guanipa, 1998).

If more career and educational counselors who work with immigrants were trained in multicultural counseling, it would be easier for counselors to help individuals through the adjustment period. In order to utilize what the immigrant has to offer, i.e., education, experience, and expertise, it is important that instead of trying to fit the client into a mold, that a counselor rather address the unique needs of the client (Corey, 2001). Corey goes on to emphasize the requirement for counselors to possess knowledge of differing cultures and have skills to assist diverse clients in meeting their needs within the realities of their own culture and also their new cultural environment. Multicultural counseling has become a more important issue and more research has been done in the last fifteen years. Topics such as counselor ethnicity, minority clients, culture responsive counseling, and the psychological costs of racism, stress, coping, and assessment have come to the attention of the counseling field (Brown & Lent, 2000).

How many times has a foreigner heard, “Well if you don’t like it here, why don’t you leave?” That attitude is often prevalent but unfair. Often because of long years and the custom of doing things in a different way, a newcomer, thinking outside the box, might even see things from a clearer perspective. It is important to see this as possibly being a positive element rather than negative. Corey (2001), who writes extensively about the multicultural aspects of counseling, reflects this in his comments about Adlerian therapy from a multicultural perspective when he states that “the Adlerian emphasis on the subjective fashion in which people view and interpret their world leads to a respect for clients’ unique values and perceptions” (p.133).

It is also interesting to note that views of assimilation vs. integration have changed over the past years. The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance [ECRI] (2006) notes that integration is widely discussed in most member states today. It underlines in this respect that the success of any integration strategy depends on the importance the strategy

accords to the issue of combating discrimination. Successful integration is a two-way process, a process of mutual recognition, which has nothing to do with assimilation. ECRI prefers to refer to an “integrated society”, which is equally inclusive of majority and minority groups and gives more respect to the individual uniqueness contained within a multicultural community rather than trying to make everyone assimilate to a sameness which has less tolerance for varying customs and ideas.

An integral aspect of immigration and employment is the assessment of one’s credentials. Pre-existing expectations about what kind of employment an immigrant is going to find is often a driving force in their quest for an improved lifestyle and thus immigration. It can be a very difficult obstacle if one is unable to validate hard-earned credentials from the homeland. Akhtar (1999) says it so well, “To feel efficacious is to live, and to feel vocationally impotent is to psychically wither away” (p. 25). It is important to recognize that though higher educational programs might differ in other countries, there are still without doubt, various skills and knowledge that one has acquired through a professional degree program that can and should be assessed. For example, in the United States, the Commission on Graduates of Foreign Nursing Schools in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, recognizes that foreign trained nurses are a substantial part of the US nursing workforce.

The important role of these foreign-trained nurses is fully recognized and they are aggressively recruited. Foreign-trained nurses are more likely than their US counterparts to have a bachelor’s degree, comparable work experience, and higher income. Yet it is important to undergo a vigorous screening program that verifies that their nursing licenses are valid and unencumbered, that they have proficiency in written and spoken English, and that they have passed a test of nursing knowledge with the CGFNS Qualifying Examination or the US licensure examination (Nichols, 2007)

Similar regulations are enforced by the Ministry of Health in Iceland through the Icelandic Nurses’ Association. Nurses have often been needed on the Icelandic work force so the provisions to certify have been made and there are various regulations that one has to

comply with, including being able to speak the Icelandic language, before becoming certified (The Icelandic Nurse's Association, 2009). The Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture handles certification of teaching degrees, for teachers of pre-school, compulsory, and upper secondary classes. This ministry also handles certification for librarians (The Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, 2009). Other Icelandic government ministries administer to the recognition of credentials that pertain to their various jurisdictions.

In addition there are various institutions and organizations in Iceland that are creating and using assessment tools in order to validate education and experience, especially in technical jobs. For example in 2001 The Icelandic Confederation of Labour [ASÍ] and The Confederation of Icelandic Employers [SA], set up an institution called The Education and Training Service Centre [FRÆ] (The Education and Training Service Centre, 2009). This organization has been a forerunner in initiating and implementing work assessment programs at least for technical jobs.

As a good role model, Canada has also recognized this as a valid and pertinent need and just recently allocated \$50-million over the next two years to make the process of assessing and recognizing foreign credentials more efficiently.

The House of Commons immigration committee released a report [...] calling on the federal government to step up efforts to improve recognition of newcomers' education, skills and training as a way of alleviating the poverty, unemployment and underemployment that, it said, too many are forced to endure. (Greenaway, 2009)

The Canadian immigration committee is going to include architects, engineers, financial auditors, accountants, medical laboratory technologists, occupational therapists, pharmacists and physiotherapists. Not long thereafter, physicians, dentists, engineering technicians, licensed practical nurses, medical radiation technologists and teachers for kindergarten through Grade 12 should also be able to receive quick and fair assessment of credentials. Iceland is beginning the process (Government Policy, 2007, The Education and Training,

2009), but, just as Canada has seen the need, Iceland must work more in assessing at professional levels and doing it more quickly.

Work, career, and therein self-esteem

It is extremely important to recognize work or career as a central issue in the well-being of an immigrant and his family as the case may be. It is an element of existence that enhances life and promotes emotional growth. Relations within the family, community, and his view of himself are all affected (Blustein, 2006). As Blustein says in addition, work is central to the human condition and facilitates development of social bonds insuring identification with the adult role. It functions to provide people with a way to establish an identity and a sense of coherence in their social interactions.

The oft asked question given to children, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” emphasizes how we elevate work to be so central to our conception of adulthood. It provides a context for assessing our significance in the world. Without work a person may feel alienated from society, lack a firm identity, and have little basis for the self-esteem needed to function healthily in a society.

The right to employment is seen as one of the basic social rights of a member of a group or community, alongside the right to education and training, the right to housing, the right to health care, the right to social security and the right to culture. (Dell’Olio, 2005)

Dell’Olio also goes on to say that it is at the workplace and through membership in unions that immigrants have enjoyed a stronger legal status and more equal rights of representation.

The roles of work and career

For an immigrant, who as mentioned before, might arrive to the new country with little else than his name, education and work experience or career, the role of work and career are likely to be even more meaningful than usual.

Work can meet many different psychosocial needs, as well as economic needs. For the average adult, work activities occupy more time than any other form of activity, including sleep. Work behavior

extends beyond a person's given job title to many areas of that person's life: upkeep of a household, paying bills, cutting the grass, and raising children. (Sperry, 1993)

Blustein (2006) explains his view that work serves three core functions: firstly, a means for power and survival, secondly as a social connection and thirdly as a means of self-determination. Relatively affluent and well-educated people who have attained professional degrees and applied themselves to a particular career usually have more input into how they engage in their working lives. According to Neff (1985) who has also done extensive research on the role of work, the core functions of work are material needs, activity, respect of others, and the need for creativity. Again, the question arises: what are the consequences when an immigrant is denied being able to utilize his education and training?

In the career-counseling textbook that Sharf (2002) has written, he devotes a whole chapter to adult career crises and transitions. Not much is mentioned specifically about the transitions or crises attributed to immigrants but he refers to career crises affecting culturally diverse populations and the difficulties that can be encountered when discrimination is part of the picture. Unfortunately, discrimination can certainly be identified in some of the obstacles that professionals have to deal with who are coming to work in Iceland. Sharf also refers to the element of an individual's self-esteem, stating that particularly when one is in the establishment or maintenance phase of one's career and work is important to one's self-esteem, discrimination can be quite damaging. Because a very large number of the professional immigrants coming to Iceland to find jobs are young people who are exactly in that stage of their careers, career is probably even more tied into their self-identity and self-esteem. As Axelrod (1999) who writes about psychoanalysis and work says of the young worker just starting out in his career:

Oscillations in self-esteem are characteristic of this period as the pleasure of beginning to make one's way in the world alternates with the real limitations of being a novice. Fluctuations between feelings of omnipotence and morbid self-doubt are not uncommon as the young person is deeply involved in

sorting out fantasies about his work identity. The status of beginner at work may be especially difficult for some, with resentment dominating their day-to-day experience of work.

For many, the emotional ups and downs of culture shock along with language and cultural obstacles can be intrinsically draining even leading to depression (Culture Shock, 2009).

Akhtar (1999) for instance mentions the ability “to tolerate the moments of loneliness that are inevitably associated with immigration” (p.16). For some immigrants, the challenge that immigration presents might make it seem easier to simply “give up” and return to their homelands.

Levine (1997) adds another dimension of one’s identity and place in a new country when he talks about the capacity for work and one’s identity as a worker in that it “define[s] adulthood and masculinity – i.e., who one is as a man” (p. 147). He says that the extent of identity could be culture bound but today in Western society an individual is closely associated with the work one does, how one does it, how that work is valued, and how it is remunerated. Work plays a very vital role in relation to self-definition and the maintenance of self-esteem. Levine claims that the psychological effects of prolonged unemployment are often felt to be so devastating due to this strong sense of ego identity associated with a person’s work. How then for a young immigrant who has newly found their identity and coming to Iceland finds that they are no longer able to identify with the role that they had worked so hard in their country to achieve? Would it not be somewhat similar to the psychological effects of unemployment having a detrimental effect on one’s identity and self-esteem?

If the psychological effects of prolonged unemployment can be “so devastating” so too can the downward spiral of work and social status when an immigrant must settle for a job that is far below his education or experience. Sharf (2002) also mentions this when referring to various types of transition, and states that:

One type of transition may cause greater stress as individuals make changes to a new employer, encountering new styles of work, tasks, and coworkers. A more dramatic change occurs when one leaves one profession for another; for example, an engineer becomes an entrepreneur, a lawyer, or a farmer. (p.254)

For an immigrant, the scenario of new employment or career could easily include all of the above: new coworkers, work style, new tasks, a totally new job and a socially downward spiral of status.

The topics of culture and language, of feeling good about living in Iceland, of making use of opportunities often comes down to what kind of employment one can get here, what employment means to an individual and what aspects he values the most. In Iceland employment most often plays a strong role in the socioeconomic status of a family and a major role in the identity of that family within the community.

How does socioeconomic status contribute to self-definition? [...] It affects an individual's hope for the future and his or her sense of the possibilities that life offers. It affects a person's "choice" of work or career. Indeed it determines whether the person thinks about choosing a career or gratefully takes the best-paying job available. Socioeconomic status also affects ideas about marriage and family – when and whom to marry, when to have children, and also how much economic independence a person should achieve before marriage, during marriage, or outside marriage. Finally, socioeconomic status affects one's ability to see him or herself as an individual. (Okun, 1998)

Iceland

The subject of immigration to Iceland has been a topic of much discussion in recent years, not surprisingly considering, as mentioned earlier, the number of immigrants in Iceland has quadrupled between the years of 1997 and 2009 (Statistics Iceland, January 20, 2009). This tremendous surge in immigration to Iceland was due to the economic bubble that touched almost every sector of business. Wages in Iceland were high and with long hours, a substantially higher wage could be earned than in the home countries, especially Poland,

where most of the labor force was arriving from (Þórarinsdóttir, Georgsdóttir, & Hafsteinsdóttir, 2009).

It is relevant in this research to acquaint the reader with the setting that the immigrant is entering when arriving to Iceland. All of the participants interviewed in this research were accustomed to highly populated metropolises. The majority of them were also living in areas surrounded by countryside of lush terrain with tall trees and forested hills. Comments of Iceland's rugged landscapes and open vistas were a shared experience for all of them and they mentioned how even the environment was foreign. Just as Iceland's natural phenomenon can be alien to a newcomer, so can the Icelandic work market, the benefits and obligations that exist there within, the Icelandic language, and even the partisanship that exists in the small villages where often everyone either grew up together or is otherwise a close or a distant family member.

The population of Iceland as of October 1, 2009 was only 318,906 and the land area is 103,000 km². The greater metropolitan area of Reykjavik has a population of just over 200,000 people (Statistics Iceland, 2009) which means that the rest of the population is spread out in the tiny communities that lie mostly along the coastline of Iceland. Some of these communities are quite small and isolated and family and longtime school ties are strong. An immigrant has to make this a consideration when moving into such a homogenous community. It is all part of the very distinct culture that the Icelanders feel very proud to be a part.

Obstacles

The need to learn a new language for any immigrant moving to any country in the world can be one of the most difficult obstacles to overcome and for the newcomer to Iceland, the Icelandic language is definitely a challenge. Not only is language, and how well one has a grasp on it, an obvious form of communication and coping with one's environment, but

according to Akhtar (1999), the act of not being able to use one's own native language threatens the immigrant's identity which is linked to his mother tongue. Akhtar claims it is his deepest and most trustworthy link to the culture that nourished him. Yet being able to speak Icelandic is the best way to become a part of the community. In the booklet, *Your First Steps in Iceland*, (Immigration Council et al., 2007) the authors regard language learning as the basis for learning one's basic rights and obligations, meeting new people and getting involved in the community. As in all of the Scandinavian countries, Iceland also has requirements that a residence permit will only be issued if the applicant has taken a specified number of hours in language lessons at an accredited institution. This law went into effect as of May 15, 2009 (Icelandic Directorate of Immigration, 2009). Therefore it is quite important to genuinely make an effort to learn the language.

Icelandic belongs to the northern branch of Germanic languages and has remained very close to that which was spoken one thousand years ago. Like the old Indo-European languages, Icelandic has a complicated grammar: nouns, most pronouns, adjectives, and the definite article are inflected in four cases, and in two numbers, while each noun is intrinsically masculine, feminine, or neuter. Most adjectives and some adverbs have three degrees of comparison and most adjectives have two types of inflection, called strong and weak, in the positive and superlative. And of course the verbs are no more simple, being inflected in three persons, two numbers, two simple tenses, three moods and two voices also entering into several constructions to represent various tenses (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2001).

There is a general assumption in Iceland that Icelandic is more difficult to learn than other languages. Information about Icelandic always includes that the language has changed little in the last 1000 years. In fact resistance to change is one of the characteristics of the Icelandic language, which explains the fact that a 12th-century text is still easy to read for a

modern Icelandic. Another characteristic of the language is its uniformity, i.e., absence of dialects (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2009). This deliberate reluctance to change and the remoteness of the population on this small North Atlantic island has influenced both the homogeneity of the population and the isolation of the language. The question arises, that with the lack of experience which Icelanders have in hearing their language spoken with a foreign tongue and not even being acquainted with dialects, could it be that it makes it more difficult for them to understand their language if it is not spoken perfectly correctly? There would seem to be a slight intolerance or at least impatience at hearing the language muddled and spoken less than flawlessly by the newcomer. Along with this hidden intolerance, with today's younger population being so fluent in English it becomes difficult for the foreigner to "practice" his Icelandic.

After analyzing the situation in Iceland, the Council of Europe in *The Third Report on Iceland, European Commission against Racism and Intolerance* (ECRI, 2007) emphasizes the importance of language learning for immigrants stating in its executive summary:

Immigrants still often find themselves in a situation of excessive dependence on their employers, which, coupled with limited knowledge of the Icelandic language and awareness of their rights, exposes them to a higher risk of exploitation and discrimination.

Therefore they recommend that the Icelandic authorities take further action, and among other things, they state the need for foreigners to learn the language, have interpretation services when necessary, and also the need to review the policy of granting work permits to employers rather than the employee. The major thrust remains the language and they emphasize the need for Icelandic language courses to be of good quality, inexpensive and tailored as much as possible to the individual. It was noted that language courses are available but often only at considerable cost to the immigrant, often at a long distance, and only in few cases were immigrants

allowed to attend classes during work hours. In addition the quality was reportedly lacking in areas outside of Reykjavik (Council of Europe, 2008).

The experience gained in the other Scandinavian countries show that the key to adjustment to a new society is to possess the ability to speak the language; without this, integration is nearly impossible. As mentioned earlier, all of the Scandinavian countries, Iceland included, have conditions stating that a temporary residence permit will only be issued if the applicant has taken a specified number of hours in language lessons. Many of the Scandinavian countries offer language lessons at no cost to the immigrant (Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Security, 2006). ECRI notes that research seems to indicate that only a very limited number of immigrants feel that they are able to express themselves fully in Icelandic, although the vast majority of them declare a keen interest in improving their knowledge of Icelandic (Council of Europe, 2008). The needs for good teaching materials, courses for teachers in teaching Icelandic as another language, as well as cost to the students were all addressed in a report that the Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture put together in 2008 (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2008). Unfortunately, though the need is recognized, and legislation passed in May of 2008 (Parliament, 2008), there have now been considerable cutbacks on funding for teaching Icelandic to foreigners. The amount allocated between the years of 2008 and 2009 was cut by approximately 50% (Ministry of Finance, 2009). Further work must be done, but with cutbacks, it is not seen as urgent as it was two years ago.

It is interesting to note that according to information from the Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD] of June 8th 2006, countries that demand that immigrants learn the language draw a more qualified and higher educated group of newcomers. Immigrants who are not ready to do the work involved in adjusting, i.e., learning

the language, ignore the countries that require language lessons and go to places not requiring the study and skill that it would take to learn a new language.

A second obstacle an immigrant will encounter is the very strong sense of nationalism among the Icelanders. Iceland is a country that has been known for its encompassing homogeneity after hundreds of years of being a rather isolated island in the north Atlantic. They share the same cultural heritage, the same language, in a small clearly defined area (ERCI, 1996). The family bloodlines running back to the first Viking settlers are not much diminished and tracing one's ancestry back to the first habitants is a popular pastime. As mentioned earlier, immigration to Iceland is fairly new. As Gylfi Th. Gíslason (1990), a prominent academic and political figure of postwar Iceland, states in his book:

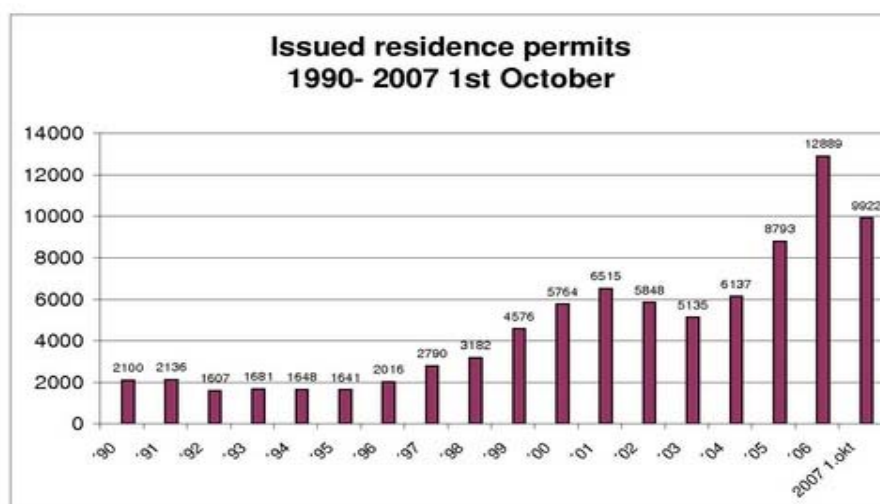
...the history of Iceland, Icelandic culture has not only given the people the happiness of knowing that they are a distinct nation, but it has also been of inestimable importance in the struggle for independence and played a significant part in Iceland's advance to prosperity in the present century. [. . .] The value of an independent culture for this small nation calling itself Icelandic is thus quite clear. If it is a distinction to be an Icelander, it derives from being a participant in the amazing adventure that Icelandic history is. (p.107)

As Gíslason, who served as both minister of culture and education from 1956-71 and as minister of trade for most of the same period, emphasizes throughout his book, Icelanders take pride that, despite their smallness, they have been able to maintain their sovereignty, their own language and customs, and their national characteristics.

Human rights and government policy

Despite the strong sense of nationalism, Iceland still welcomes foreigners as seen by the number of applicants for residence permits in the past 17 years. Though immigration to Iceland began later than immigration to neighboring countries, there has been a dramatic increase of foreigners coming to Iceland to work or live here during these past 17 years. The groups of immigrants coming to Iceland have come from all over the world having birthplaces

in well over 170 countries though mostly from Europe or 85% (Þórarinsdóttir, Georgsdóttir & Hafsteinsdóttir, 2009). The chart below shows that the residence permits in 2006 had increased 6 times from that of 1990, though the numbers slightly decreased in 2007.



(Icelandic Directorate of Immigration, 2009).

As far as civil rights are concerned, everyone is legally equal under the law in Iceland and is entitled to basic human rights, regardless of sex, religion, opinions, national or social origin, race, color, economic status, ancestry or other status. By law, women and men in Iceland are also equal (Immigration Council, 2007).

When the law applies to immigrants and foreigners in Iceland, there has been an effort to insure that both the rights of the immigrants are protected and the obligations that coincide with those rights are clearly defined with Parliamentary legislation (Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Security, 2009).

Residence Permits

A foreign citizen intending to stay longer than three months in Iceland must have a residence permit.

An EEA- national may stay for three months without any permit but if he is looking for employment he

is allowed to stay in Iceland for up to six months without one. If the individual resides longer in Iceland, he shall register his right to residency with the National Registry. Citizens of countries outside the EEA who are family members of an EEA citizen shall apply for a residence card at the Directorate of Immigration within three months from their arrival in Iceland. Generally Nordic citizens do not need a residence permit to reside in Iceland and the rule for issuing permits varies between citizens of the EEA and non-EEA citizens. (Icelandic Directorate of Immigration, 2009)

Residence permits are classified according to purpose of stay depending on if one is coming to work, to unite with family, to study, etc.

Recognition of work and qualifications

Many professionals who have immigrated to Iceland have found it very difficult to move into the careers for which they have credentials in their homelands (ECRI, 2007). ECRI has been encouraging the Icelandic authorities to take steps to ensure that immigrants gain access to professions reflecting their level of educational attainment and professional experience. To this end, it encourages the authorities in particular to take steps to improve recognition of foreign diplomas and qualifications and to raise awareness among employers of racial discrimination and how to avoid it (ibid: 2007).

There is no comparable framework legislation on academic recognition in Iceland. Professional recognition is regulated by the Recognition of Educational Qualifications Act, No. 83/1993. However, under Article 24 of the Universities Act, No. 136/1997, universities are to set rules on mutual recognition of parts of study programs. Rules on recognition of education can usually be found in the regulations of each university/institution. The following is an excerpt from the Regulations for the University of Iceland, No. 458/2000:

According to the EEA treaty, higher degrees, which took at least three years to earn, and vocational studies with a secondary school education, will be recognized by the other EEA countries. One should always find out before going to Iceland if their degree is comparable with an Icelandic one. That information is found out by contacting the Ministry of Education and Culture which can inform a

prospective immigrant of the comparability qualifications with the equivalent in Iceland both at academic as well as at vocational level. There is also a direct link to the national reference point for assessment and recognition of vocational qualification at <http://menntagatt.is/default.aspx?pageid=281> (The Educational Gateway, 2009)

Though Iceland is usually a generally welcoming country for immigrants, it can, in many ways, also be quite difficult. It is certainly best to check up on what papers and certification are needed before arrival. It will definitely make the adjustment and integration much easier if it is well thought out ahead of time.

Despite the recent world banking crisis or perhaps due to it, immigration will not cease and there will continue to be a large number of highly educated individuals coming to Iceland who will be able to validly share their competence with the community and contribute to the work market and society. People like Miriam, the dentist mentioned in the first paragraph of this research, should not only be allowed, but they should be encouraged, to seek ways to validate their hard-earned credentials. The path to assessment, validation, and if necessary, additional training should be open to all.

Method

Seven people who have immigrated to Iceland who already had degrees and career qualifications from their home countries were chosen to participate in this study. The focus was to acquire an understanding of the typical obstacles that immigrants holding professional degrees have encountered, and to shed light on the effects that these obstacles have had on their adjustment to living in Iceland, their well-being and their contribution to Icelandic society. By using qualitative research, the subjective experiences recorded here within are able to reflect both the client needs of the immigrants and the community needs of Iceland. The research investigates the obstacles and facilitators which the participants have encountered in their desire to use their education and career experience after immigration. It looks at what kind of professions or jobs that they are working at now, and also seeks to answer the question of whether or not Iceland is utilizing this available resource of foreign produced professionals.

Because of the social content and the inevitable subjective results to the questions posed in this research paper, it was decided that qualitative research methods would be the preferred method. Qualitative research methods demonstrate the variety of perspectives on the research question and start from the subjective and social meanings related to it (Flick, 2006). Qualitative evaluation methods have often been seen as best used to study client or community needs. Evaluation of a qualitative study is reflected when the subjective experiences of participants are seen as essential data in answering the research questions (Anastas, 2004). There are various types of qualitative research which examine life experiences in an effort to understand and give them meaning. The goal was to systematically collect and analyze narrative materials using methods that ensure credibility of both the data and the results. The desire was also to research this study as close to the source as possible and interview the participants who were selected from the immigrant community in Iceland.

Participants

There were seven participants ranging in ages from 32-44 living in three different communities in Iceland. These individuals were asked if they would like to participate based on a selection process where they were chosen with a view to information that was already known in advance to the data collection. *A priori* means that individuals, groups, etc. are selected according to their expected level of new insights for the developing theory in relation to the state of theory elaboration (Flick, 2006). For example it had already been established that all of the participants were university educated and with professional degrees except for one who had a vocational degree and many years experience behind him as a chef. The participants were also chosen considering the criteria that define a good informant i.e., that they should have the necessary knowledge and experience of the issue that is being researched, they should have the capability to speculate and express themselves, they should also have time to be interviewed, and of course they should be ready and willing to participate in the study” (ibid: 2006).

It is important to mention that of the seven participants interviewed, there were three couples. The seventh interviewee was also married to an immigrant who had already been living in Iceland for 15 years when she came to marry him. The reason for finding couples as participants in this research is because without the aid of an Icelandic spouse, they were compelled to truly deal with integrating into the Icelandic culture on an independent level, learning the language on their own, and finding their way through the Icelandic bureaucracy. Participants were preferred who had unequivocally left all their friends and family behind when they immigrated to Iceland, not someone who had a “ready-made” Icelandic family waiting for them when they arrived in Iceland with all the connections and often nepotism that goes hand-in-hand in such a small and tightly-knit community. These participants really had

to stand on their own feet. To keep the participants anonymous, names have been changed in the narratives.

Miriam and Davor are a married couple and emigrated from Serbia to Iceland in 1997. They live here with their two children. They both come from a middle class background in Serbia and are currently renting a home in Iceland. Davor is 44 years old and graduated from the university in Serbia with a degree in athletic pedagogy. He initially came to Iceland in 1991 when he was drafted to play football with an Icelandic team in Reykjavik. He has trained young children in football here in Iceland but has not worked as an athletic teacher here within the school system. While he remained a strong player, his primary career was that of football player, with other lesser paid menial labor jobs on the side. Since he retired from the football scene, he has been working in a fish factory.

Miriam is also 44 years old and came to Iceland bringing along their children so that the family would be together. She has a degree in dentistry. Her father is also a dentist along with her brother and together they run a dental office in Serbia where Miriam works for at least three months every summer while she is visiting there. She feels that in this way she is maintaining her dentistry training and skills while at the same time also keeping up with the newest techniques. Presently she is working in a fish factory in Iceland, something that she has been doing since she started on the job market here, except for a cleaning job that she had when the couple was first here for a short stay in 1991. In 1997 Miriam and Davor started spending the majority of the year in Iceland, returning to Serbia to spend only the summers there.

Anna and Karlo are from Poland and have been living in Iceland for seven years and have three children. They come from the academic class in Poland where the class system is based more on one's educational and academic status. They own their own home here in Iceland. Karlo is 42 years old, a specialty doctor and was recruited to Iceland to work in one

of the smaller hospitals outside the Reykjavik metropolitan area. Finding specialists to work in the smaller towns of Iceland is often difficult and Polish doctors are often sought out to fill various vacancies. The hospital where he obtained a position had had several Polish medical specialists before so the road was easily paved ahead for him, with residence and work permits.

Karlo's wife, Anna, 41 years old, followed with the children after Karlo had worked in Iceland for a year and she had visited a couple of times. Anna has a degree in chemistry with a postgraduate degree in teaching. She also has had a good amount of experience working in the banking system in Poland where she quickly rose in the ranks there because of her fluency in English. She is now teaching music at the local music school in the same community where Karlo is working as a doctor.

Dhanja and Hari are from southern India and came to Iceland in 2001. They have one son, are expecting their second child, and own their own home. Hari who is 33 years old is a licensed chef. He was offered a job in Iceland by a restaurant owner who met him while he was working at a restaurant in an exclusive hotel in India. Before accepting a position in Iceland, he first went to England to work in London for a couple of years so that he had quite a lot of experience already behind him when he arrived in Iceland. He is now the main chef for a small restaurant that is on the verge of expanding. After expansion he will be running the kitchen with several cooks from India, who he helped recruit for the positions with the intention of making the restaurant and cooking as authentically Indian as possible.

His wife, Dhanja, is 32 years old and has a university degree with a major in physics and minors in both chemistry and math. When she was in school in India, her intent was to simply acquire a university degree but she was never really happy with her grades in the sciences and really wanted to do something more creative. After graduating from the university, she applied to a hotel-management school on a whim and finished a degree there

enjoying the creativity in the courses on flower arrangements, cooking and food production, interior decorating, and also enjoyed working with people. At present she is working full time at a nursery school.

Rania comes from Jordan and was living in the Sultanate of Oman before immigrating to Iceland. She is 36 years old. She has an undergraduate degree with a major in Arabic and a minor in English. She also has a master's in Arabic literature. She is presently working on her PhD in art history. She came to Iceland less than a year ago to marry her husband who is from Iran and who has been living here for fifteen years. She has experience in teaching Arabic in London and also taught English for four years in Oman, though she does not have a professional teaching degree. Rania is presently teaching a few hours a week at the University of Iceland and then in addition, working part-time at a nursery school.

Tang (2002) maintains that cultural backgrounds of participants can influence the atmosphere of the interviews by influencing the passiveness or activeness that individuals show in answering questions or sharing information. Yet, on the whole, though the interviewees all came from different cultures, i.e. India, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe, the vitality was apparent, and their input and answers always generous. There was a clear willingness to share their stories, both the positive and the negative, and that is one of the reasons that they were chosen as participants in this research.

Procedure

The interviews with the seven participants were done in the narrative form of interviewing where the participants were asked to tell their stories. This type of data collection worked very well with this research because each individual was able to relate his unique situation, experiences, circumstances, and views.

The interviews were semi-structured in the sense that, though an outline of questions (see appendix) was developed and used as reference when needed, allowance was made for

flexibility within the interviews so that the participants could express themselves as freely as possible and the emphasis was then their own in an open interview situation (Flick, 2006). In a semi-structured interview, the interviewer develops a loose guide with open-ended, general questions, to open up a conversation about a topic and then proceeds with follow-up questions or probes prepared in advance that are used to elicit certain types of information from the participants (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2008, *Interviewing in Qualitative Research* 2009).

To insure verbatim data, the interviews were all audio-recorded and then transcribed before interpretation. With today's technology of digital recorders it was easy to get as close as possible to the naturalness of a friendly conversation. The thought of doing audio visual recordings did come to mind but I felt it would have been too contrived and not as relaxed as I wanted it to be. Field notes were taken in all cases but only to account for body language or other physical reactions to the narrative that could only be observed first hand and not through the audio recorder.

The type of interview used was semi-structured somewhat using the problem-centered interview (Flick, 2006) where data is collected in regard to a certain problem and also the ethnographic interview where the interview is seen as more of a series of friendly conversations into which the researcher introduces new elements to assist the informant to respond as informants (Flick). The place of the interview can influence the power dynamics between the interviewer and interviewee (Tang, 2002) and so I made it a point to interview the clients in their own homes on their own ground where they would feel most comfortable and hopefully be able to talk more openly about the emotional processes that they had experienced in dealing with immigration and career change.

One interview was taken with each of the key participants and they were all taken in April and May 2008. Each interview lasted between 60 and 85 minutes.

Documentation and analysis

When each audio interview was completed, it was transcribed along with the comments that were written in the field notes. Once the interviews and notes were transcribed it was easier to read through the materials and utilize the grounded theory approach of analysis (Flick, 2006) which worked well with the narratives of the participants. The interviews were then coded in order to identify anchors to allow key points to be gathered. At that stage in the analysis the codes were grouped into five main themes of similar content discerning the similarities and the differences, the obstacles and the facilitators, for each individual. With the comparative method of the grounded theory approach it was possible to compare the narratives of immigration of each participant in relation to the various themes.

Ethical concerns

The fact that I am an immigrant myself and am interviewing immigrants can be likened to the study of Ning Tang (2002) where she illuminates the relationships between women as the interviewer and interviewee and describes their status as a minority group. According to what Tang says, the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee and therefore the relevancy of her being an immigrant does not so much reflect on the quality of the interview but the dynamics between them. She goes on to say that sharing the same critical life experiences minimizes social distance and helps the research.

It should also be noted that ethical standards concerning the risk of inferred identification had to be observed but Iceland is a very small community and the foreign community even smaller. When it comes to professionals within the foreign community, especially those who have lived here for several years and established themselves, it is almost impossible to maintain anonymity. Participants were clearly made aware that identities could be traced despite the fact that their names and locations were disguised. In a sense this could limit the respondents to those who felt that they could speak freely of their situation, but of

the participants that were interviewed for this research, all of them who participated said that they felt alright with the possibility that they would be recognized.

Results

To achieve the goals of this research, several main themes were addressed, which in turn, were the major threads through the narratives of the participants. These main themes were: the importance of flexibility and adaptation to a new situation; what role language learning in Iceland has played; how immigration to Iceland and the ensuing search for employment has affected the interviewees' sense of self-esteem and feeling of self-efficacy; the recognition and validation of education or training in terms of what was assessed, how it was assessed, and how easy or difficult the process was; and lastly, pre-existing expectations, the hopes of the individual and prospects they assumed before they arrived in Iceland. All of these issues were instrumental in the outcome for each subject and had an influence on how they are employed today.

In this chapter the results of the research will be presented. As explained earlier in this paper, the use of a narrative approach was utilized in this qualitative research, the participants giving verbal testimonies of their experiences as immigrants in Iceland, the challenges and the benefits. The purpose of using this method was to increase the understanding of how each individual described this important life event. Therefore in context of each of the aforementioned themes, the experiences of the participants will be accounted for and their narratives brought to light in a clear process of examination.

Flexibility and adaptation

For the participants in this study, their personal flexibility and ability to adapt to new roles, new careers and new a community was an important factor in their experience of immigration. Miriam is perhaps the best example of the flexibility it sometimes takes to accept a new career role and remain satisfied despite the educational and social status gaps between the two jobs. Though having a degree in dentistry, she is working as a laborer in the fishing industry. She is not resentful of the fact that she works a menial job. She even goes so

far as to accept her status as very low on the pecking ladder within the hierarchy of the fish factory job because she feels that as a foreigner and living in such a small place, she will get the jobs that no one else wants. She says,

In the fish factory I was the last one to get a job or something but I felt that was normal. I was the foreigner. The women that worked there the longest would get the jobs. And then the kids whose parents or other relatives were working there would get the jobs. But I knew this all. I expected it. I am the one that came looking for a job. They did not come looking for me.

Despite the menial labor and the low position within the hierarchy both Miriam and her husband, Davor, appreciate the fact that even as unskilled laborers, they can make a substantially better wage in Iceland than in Serbia, by working long hours in various seasonal work. This they see as the positive side to an essentially negative situation. It is obvious throughout the interview that there has been a large amount of discussion between Davor and Miriam on what the pros and cons of their situation are, i.e. what are the benefits for the children, the children's relationships with family and friends, what is best for them as parents, what does it involve being homeowners in Serbia, and what is best for them in terms of time spent with family back home in Serbia. They have adapted themselves to what they feel is most beneficial for everyone in the long run, though they assuredly had other goals and plans earlier in their lives when Miriam studied dentistry and Davor studied athletic pedagogy.

Anna is also an excellent example of the type of flexibility that is often needed to adjust to new circumstances, and where planned happenstance can play a large role in discovering about what she is really passionate. She was open to looking at options outside chemistry research, banking, or teaching English; all of which she had worked at or had a degree. This has led her to find herself in a music career and she says that she is much happier at this career than at any other she has previously worked at. She started this semester in a Master's course in music theory through a music academy in Poland and travels there

monthly to attend workshops and classes. With a step in this direction, Anna has started on a new and exciting career path.

The reader must also have in mind that all of the participants except one, have young families with children. Anna and Miriam both took into account the family obligations and concern for the welfare of the children when searching for work in Iceland. Anna is married to a doctor who is sometimes working long hours and not always available at home, so she felt she had to get a job to fit into his schedule. Davor, Miriam's husband, feels that just living in the small town atmosphere of an Icelandic fishing village is in favor of the children:

The advantage here is having much more of a family life. Everything is good, for kids, for school. Kids are good in school, teachers good. It is safer for the children.

It is one of the reasons that Miriam and Davor give for still living in Iceland.

This element of family responsibility and career choice is also apparent in Dhanja's narrative which has an interesting and unexpected twist and also with a sense of planned happenstance. Having the ability to envision herself in new roles has afforded her the opportunity to work at something she had not before imagined for herself. As mentioned earlier, Dhanja and Hari had been told before arriving in Iceland that jobs within their fields of education and expertise would be available to them. Once their son entered nursery school Dhanja diligently applied for work in various hotels and restaurants in the Reykjavík area without success. Then one day Dhanja unexpectedly got a phone call from her son's nursery school saying that they needed someone to work there and asked if she would like the job. Though she had never applied to work at her son's nursery, after some short consideration, she accepted the offer. She realized that the hours would certainly be more conducive to family life especially with her husband also working in the restaurant business as a chef. She said that she saw

it as very good for the family that I have the same work hours as the nursery school was open during the week: no evenings, no weekends, no irregular shift work.

So, by being open to other career possibilities, Dhanja feels very satisfied in her nursery school job. She is of the opinion that the education that she received in hotel management will eventually be quite valuable to her if she and her husband someday start their own restaurant business as they hope to do. “My degree in hotel management is not being utilized at the moment,” as she words it, “but is just perhaps temporarily dormant.” This aspect also makes it easier for her to accept the fact that she is not working in her acquired profession at the present time.

On the other hand, there are those individuals who find it very difficult to be flexible and feel that the demands of adaptation are too extreme. Rania says, “I don’t have to adjust. I have other options. I can leave. I don’t have to waste my time here if I am not fitting.” She goes on to say that she feels that she is, “wasting my time and my life and my energy and education.” The frustration and bitterness are typical symptoms of culture shock and Rania is apparently having a difficult time at this particular point when the interview is taken. She has also been in Iceland less than a year – much shorter than the other participants.

Though most of the participants are Rania’s age, some even older, Rania is the only one who mentioned age in relation to the question of flexibility:

When you come [to a foreign country] when you are young, you are much more flexible than at 35. [I am] very much limited here and I am at a point in my life where I don’t want to spend it here fighting the people, struggling with the nature, the language. I lecture 26 students at the university, correct their papers, advise them, then I leave to go change diapers. One minute I am at the top of the mountain, the next minute it’s a dive into the lowest position on the totem pole. They don’t get it. I am there on my own will. I am there to learn the language of my own free will. I felt it would be easier to learn it from children.

Rania is still having a difficult time adapting to her new roles in Iceland.

By reviewing the experiences of these research participants it is apparent that those who were more open to new ideas, or more flexible in accepting a new position or role, are more happy at what they are doing and achieving today. Responsibility towards the welfare of

the whole family also tends to play a large part in facing and dealing with certain obstacles. The struggle is worth it, if seen as valuable for the whole family.

Language learning

The interviews all reflected how much of a problem the Icelandic language has been for the participants. The majority of them feel that it is the main obstacle for adapting and Rania is by far the most vocal about this encumbrance. Rania admits that she had been forewarned that Icelandic was difficult and it might present a problem and she had actually studied on her own for six months before coming to Iceland. Maybe it is because Rania is newer to the country than the other interviewees and seems to still be in the second stage of culture shock which is the most difficult period of adjustment and includes loss of courage and strong feelings of dissatisfaction. Perhaps it is just because her personality type is less flexible, but she is by far the most upset and angry about this obstacle. She says,

Sometimes I feel that I don't want to learn the language. It is only spoken by 300,000 people. Accept me for who I am first. Then I will learn your language. I don't need to be accepted by an Icelandic who is so prejudiced about the language.

She is so angry and frustrated that during the interview, her husband reminds her that she took the kindergarten job in order to help learn Icelandic. Yet she says that she feels so handicapped and feels like she is being persecuted there:

During the coffee breaks they want you to speak Icelandic. They force you to speak. Sometimes I am so tired of trying to speak Icelandic. It's not a break for me. It's torture.

An unsettling aspect of the language obstacle that emerged in this research was the lack of quality language instruction. In order to apply for residency in Iceland, the law states that an immigrant must finish 150 hours of Icelandic language study before application. Though both Davor and Miriam have taken the required 150 hours of courses to obtain the residency permit, living as the family has, outside the Reykjavík area has limited them in the quality of Icelandic instruction that they have received. They have never had a teacher who

has had any training in teaching Icelandic as a foreign language. In fact in order to make up the required 150 hours, they actually had to take one course level twice because there were not enough students at their level to make up the required class number and thus a teacher was not found to teach the needed curriculum. The lessons have helped somewhat, but not enough. Neither Miriam nor her husband feel that they are fluent “enough” in Icelandic, but with the long hours that they work and the lack of better courses in their town of residence, they have little opportunity to augment their language study at this time.

Davor states language difficulties as the main reason that he has not applied for a position as an athletic teacher. He says,

“I know a teacher from Russia the last few years. He say it is very, very difficult when you not know the language.”

Davor coached soccer for one summer:

It was difficult coaching kids here. I couldn't explain my point. I needed the Icelandic. It turned into joking and lack of respect. They try to show off for each other.

He feels that the job opportunity for teaching is available but does not trust his language skills to be able to handle young students. He would very much like to be able to use the degree he studied for, but without the language capabilities, he finds the challenge too severe and stays in the fish factory job.

Like Miriam though, Davor has adapted to the negative side of not using his degree in order to reap what he considers the positive outcomes of their immigration, much of it having to do with the children's welfare, i.e., Icelandic passports, a closer knit community to raise the children, etc. He feels that he and his family are doing alright.

Very contrary to Rania who felt quite uncomfortable having to speak Icelandic on her breaks, Dhanja is decidedly grateful to her colleagues at the nursery school for the effort and patience that they have shown in helping her with her Icelandic language skills.

They made me learn. They only spoke Icelandic to me and would not speak English. I have their persistence to thank. I was very poor in the language when I started to work there.

Dhanja was fortunate that she was working with other teachers who have the teaching capability, patience, and interest to instruct others. Her colleagues were also professionally educated and if there were questions, they knew more about language rules and grammar, than perhaps someone working in the fish factory who had not studied language forms or teaching.

On the other hand her husband, Hari, worked with and is still working with Indians so he was speaking his mother tongue and finds it simply impossible to practice Icelandic with others who do not know how to speak the language. Hari relates that he wasn't even thinking about the language when he decided to take the job in Iceland.

The woman who hired me was speaking English and I knew that I would be working at an Indian restaurant. I didn't even think of the language. I just wanted to get the job. I saw that the alphabet was the same as in English, more or less, so I went to the library in London to get a book to learn Icelandic. It was very difficult.

Learning Icelandic is definitely a thread that runs through each narrative and plays a very large role in the adjustment process for the participants. Only Dhanja seems to exude the self-confidence and pride in having learned the language as well as she has. For Miriam and Davor, it has clearly prevented them from furthering themselves in their learned professions while living here in Iceland. For newcomers to Iceland, feeling fluent in the language affects not only their qualifications for professional jobs, but also a sense within themselves that they are active members in their new communities

Self-esteem and feeling of self-efficacy

Despite the amount of education and career experience someone obtains before immigration, there is a measure of dysfunction when one suddenly arrives into a new culture with new customs, foods, language and environment. The sense of self-esteem and self-

efficacy can be quickly diminished. As mentioned above, after coming to Iceland, the lack of language abilities played a large role in the self-esteem and self-efficacy of the participants.

While Dhanja feels confident about how well she has learned the language and it has boosted her assurance to be as fluent as she is, Hari who works within his trained profession as a chef, says that his inability to speak the language is what most influences his self-esteem or lack thereof:

It is very embarrassing when people ask how long I have been here and I tell them 6 years and then people say, “What, six years and you don’t know the language?”

Davor also acknowledges a lack of self-efficacy. Though he is not disgruntled working in the fish factory, he admits that he often feels that he has more to offer. Though Davor never formally applied for a teaching position, his children often tried to encourage him to do so. Again as mentioned above, Davor considers it the lack of language skills that prevents him from working within his career field of athletic pedagogy.

Anna’s new career as music instructor is supplying her with new-found confidence and self-esteem in an area that she had not before considered as a career, in fact so much so that as mentioned earlier she is now involved in taking her masters thesis in music. Though she had taken piano lessons for many years, she had never taught it before and she had doubts about starting out such a career in a foreign language. At first she was unsure of herself because of the language but as she tells it:

Teaching the piano is not as difficult as I think at first. I learn piano for many years but I never teach it before so I did not know how I would teach it. And then in another language – Icelandic!

When determining whether or not the participants’ self-esteem has been affected by the course of career events since coming to Iceland, it can certainly be said that Anna’s sense of self-esteem has been considerably heightened by what has developed into her career.

Actually, self-esteem for Dhanja, who has a BS in chemistry and math and another unrelated degree in hotel management, presently has little relationship to whether or not she is

using her educational credentials. Though not working in any of the fields that she has studied, it is the Icelandic culture and customs that has boosted her self-esteem. She relates that she has become:

much more confident here in Iceland. In India the system is different. Parents are always living in the home taking positions, not really controlling but there are certain rules to follow, about going out at night, chaperoned, you must have brother or husband or group. I do not have a driver's license in India and I never am alone when shopping. Women and girls are very protected.

Dhanja feels that here in Iceland she is much more independent and has more responsibility and more self confidence.

I went to Denmark with the other teachers. In India I would not have gone abroad or even outside the state where I lived. My life has completely changed here.

Dhanja obviously feels that it is a change for the better.

As seen from the other themes that are covered in this research Rania feels far from fulfilled or confident about what she is doing with her life at this time. She says that she does not want to blame anyone personally but she is very angry and when asked what her limits are she replies:

I am limited with everything! I am working in a kindergarten. I should be working at the university. I am changing diapers. They will not accept my certificate here. Their attitude towards all foreigners is that they are not good enough, not brilliant enough to get a job. [...] that they should all work at low paying jobs. Can you imagine working from 8am until 4pm everyday with young children who don't talk? I don't want to be wasting my time here.

Perhaps having gone from her Arabic country, moving to England where she was able to speak fluent English and where her skills were appreciated, she fails to see the vital necessity of knowing the language here in Iceland before one can get certain jobs. The reader must note that at the time the interview is taken, Rania does in fact feel that she is on the verge of a breakdown and that she is feeling acutely frustrated and admits that fact.

I only live this life once and I am on the edge of breaking down. I shouldn't have to live with these problems. I just want to live a normal life. The kindergarten work is killing me, consuming my energy, my power, my brain, just everything.

It is interesting to follow the path of Dhanja's growth of self-confidence, witness her feeling of independence and to hear her comment about her degree not being wasted but only on the back burner and then see how for Rania, the very fact that she is not using her education and training is such a huge disappointment and frustration. She is strongly feeling the spiral of downward mobility on the job market and it is intensely affecting her state of well-being. Ironically, to a certain degree, it is Rania's sense of self-confidence and self-worth that makes it difficult for her. She simply maintains that she is wasting her time here and her sense of self-efficacy is extremely low. She clearly states:

I can so do much more other places. I am a fighter and a hard working person, [but there is] no point in doing this while I can be doing better things. Okay, then this country is only for Icelanders and I am not fitting.

Perhaps most revealing and the voice that divulged the most and communicated the best where self-esteem and self-efficacy is concerned was the voice of Hari. Despite his difficulties with the language mentioned earlier, as a chef Hari likes to be good at what he does, and admits to striving to be better than others. He has a competitive, outgoing spirit and takes pride in what he has accomplished and in what he does. When attempting to have his credentials validated, his first reaction was anger when he was told in the beginning that he might have to take the courses and the following examination which new students were put through who wanted to become chefs.

When I was told this, I actually felt insulted. I was going to have to take the same courses as 17 or 18 year old students when I was already a recognized chef in England and had 12 years of experience behind me.

Obviously he felt that he could have taught the courses. That leads us to another meaningful comment from him:

As much as I want to learn new things about cooking and food preparation, I know that I have things that others can also learn from me. As much as I want to be able to work in my field, and learn new things, **I want to contribute too.**

Hari feels that it is his contribution to the community that gives him the most self-esteem.

As an immigrant coming to a foreign country, not having family, not knowing the language, not being able to untangle the bureaucracy, and needing help everywhere, it is important to be able to do something better than the next person. It gives a boost of self-esteem and recognition of one's own strengths and qualities after being at the mercy of others and their patience, their help. Being able to contribute, especially on a professional and respected level is the boost that is necessary in order to gracefully accept the needed help in all the other areas of one's life.

Thus it can be concluded that there are multiple areas that an immigrant can gain a sense of self-esteem and self-efficacy. Language is very important but equally important were Anna's new career, Dhanja's new sense of independence, or Hari's sense of contribution. Self-esteem and self-efficacy, another very important part of the immigration process, can obviously be sought and found in many places.

Recognition and validation of education or training

By now Miriam's story has been told and the reader knows that she is a dentist working in a fish factory. The question is why has she not been able to work at her career as a dentist? At first she and her husband were only going to be in Iceland a short time. At first she also wanted to stay at home with the children when they were young. But the longer she remained in Iceland, and then after she had started to work long hours at the fish factory, the more she looked at acquiring a job in her own professional field. Almost five years after coming to Iceland Miriam decided that she wanted to see if she could get her dentistry degree accepted here. She has been from one institution to another, from the Dental Association, the Ministry of Education, and the Icelandic School of Dentistry. She was realistic about the fact

that her degree would perhaps not be accepted as completely viable but then wanted to know what the requirements were to make up the difference and how she should go about it. She seemed to get few results along the way, but after three years of seeking answers, she was given the opportunity to take a very difficult three-part placement exam that would test her on materials in all the areas of discipline that one covers in the early years of dental study. The third part is in Icelandic, though all the books that she has been studying and all the books used at the dental school in Iceland are in English.

I was going back every summer to Serbia to help out my father and my brother in their dental office, so I was keeping up my skills. I waited almost five years before I thought of applying in Iceland though and then I saw how much I had to study. I can not study so much while I am working all the time, everyday until 5pm and also on the weekends. I had to read all my old books again. I knew all the things, but you have to know exactly when you take a test.

She speculates that the study to retake the tests would be like starting all over again from the beginning of her university years and realizes that she would have to quit the job she has at the fish factory in order to study and thus it would involve a large financial loss for taking an exam that she has doubts about passing.

This is a far cry from Karlo's story. Karlo was hired by a hospital in one of the smaller communities in Iceland where there had been three Polish doctors before him and he was referred by his predecessor. Because his skills were needed at the local hospital and they had already employed Polish doctors with the same degree as Karlo, and also because no Icelandic specialist applied for the opening, it was easy to get Karlo's credentials cleared with the Ministry of Health in Iceland. Whereas there are enough Icelandic dentists and therefore Miriam is not a needed professional and she was helped very little in her quest for validation, Karlo was needed and his path to credential validation was open and clear.

Though Dhanja applied to many places, giving credentials of her hotel management education, she had very little luck. And though she is not using the content of her degrees in

chemistry and mathematics while working at the nursery school, the head of the school helped Dhanja in applying to the Ministry of Education to have her university degree in chemistry and mathematics accredited so that she is more highly paid than someone without a university degree. In that sense her qualifications are certainly being recognized.

In a sense, Hari's experience is a good example of half of Karlo's and half of Miriam's. Hari's training as a chef was immediately recognized by his first employer though it was an uphill battle to get paid the equivalent of what Icelandic chefs of his experience were getting paid. Examples like this seem to be a subtle reflection of the old guestworker system. When he eventually tired of being shortchanged and decided to look for a new job and employer, it took a lot of time to find the right authorities to talk to about having his Indian credentials and the years of experience in England validated. If looked at with a view to the *guestworker attitude*, Hari was needed for a particular niche, i.e. cooking Indian food at an Indian restaurant, just as Karlo was needed at the hospital. When he no longer wanted to put up with unfair employer conduct, he had the choice to go home. That seems to be the attitude that is reflected when someone like Hari is hired for a specific job and then after that job ceases he can not untangle the bureaucracy to get his credentials validated for other comparative work. A cumbersome obstacle in this area is Iceland's policy that employers apply for the immigrant's work permit and in order to maintain residency status, an immigrant must find another job and another employer to sponsor him. Fortunately, with the help of a counselor, Hari eventually found the right channels to go through in order to get the adequate validation to work as a licensed chef, but it still involved months of being directed from one place to the next. The first organization that he approached was the Food Service and Restaurant Union of Matvís. As mentioned earlier Matvís wanted Hari to take courses and the exam for licensing that is required for graduation as a chef from the cooking school in Kópavogur. Finally after several months of showing verification of his training, experience,

and letters of recommendation, Hari was approved without being required to take the courses at the technical school which Matvís first wanted him to do. The Icelandic Ministry of Education granted him certification as a chef.

Though Rania mentions several times that she does not hold anyone “personally” responsible for her problems and feelings of downward mobility on the job market, she relates a story from the kindergarten where she is working and where she felt very debased. The other members of the staff were receiving training that involved a full day of study and round-table discussions from 9am until 3pm. Rania relates:

They were studying materials that I had the qualifications to teach. Instead, because I don't know Icelandic so well, I was given a doll house to paint from 9am until 3pm and was not even recognized as part of the group.

She clearly felt very left out and offended by this, angrily adding that though she might not have been able to contribute as much as the others, she could have at least sat there with them and listened.

At the university where she is teaching Arabic part-time for several hours a week, she feels validated and feels that she is working according to her educational status.

I am a teacher and I speak English with my students. The nationality of the students makes no difference. I am strong there. I am giving something that they need. The Arabic language and culture is so foreign to them. I can be creative in my teaching techniques. Outside the walls of the university, things are different. [. . .] You get into this frame of mind where you think that you are handicapped, disabled, unable to do things. You start to believe you are useless.

When Rania was asked if she had been able to use her education, or previous job experience, the only place that she feels that she has been able to do this was at the temporary university job teaching Arabic, but this is only for a few hours each week. Some of Rania's qualifications and experience have been accepted and validated, but for example in order to teach English at the college level she, just as every other qualified teacher in Iceland, needs a teaching degree on top of her BA even though she has a Master's in Art. This has been

explained to her but she still feels very repressed. Again, she says does not want to blame anyone personally but she is very angry and when asked what her limits are she replies:

I am limited with everything! I am working in a kindergarten. I should be working at the university. I am changing diapers. They will not accept my certificate here. Their attitude towards all foreigners is that they are not good enough, not brilliant enough to get a job. [...] that they should all work at low paying jobs. Can you imagine working from 8am until 4pm everyday with young children who don't talk? I don't want to be wasting my time here.

Pre-existing expectations

When approaching the momentous event of immigration, all of the participants had various preconceived ideas about how they would adjust, what kind of job they would get, if they would be able or not to use what they had studied, etc. For those of the participants who had been here before, the adjustment seemed less harsh. They knew more about what to expect. They had experienced what kind of language obstacles they would encounter, they knew what kind of schools their children would be attending, they had experienced a bit of Iceland's environment and unpredictable weather, they had felt the absence of close friends and family.

Having been to Iceland often during the previous years to visit her husband while he was playing football, Miriam from Serbia knew about some of the aspects before immigration i.e. cost of living, schooling for the children, housing, etc., so there were no unrealistic preconceived ideas or expectations. At the beginning there were plans to be in Iceland only a short time. For that reason, expectations of being able to work in her career field of dentistry was not a priority during the first couple of years.

Like Miriam, Anna from Poland, had also been in Iceland several times to visit her husband before deciding to move here with the children, so she knew what to expect. Despite her degrees in chemistry and teaching in addition to her experience in banking, she had few expectations about getting a job in any of those fields, knowing that there were no nearby

chemistry laboratories where she was moving, that the banking system in Iceland would be different than that in Poland, and she also realized that not knowing the language would be an obstacle in teaching. Actually, she was hoping to get a job at the local grocery store or in the hospital kitchen if only to learn Icelandic and integrate into the community.

Dhanja, from southern India, had high expectations and was confident that both she and her husband would get good jobs in their professional fields when they arrived in Iceland, but in their cases, their expectations were not met. The circumstances of Hari and Dhanja are an example of being promised more in advance than what the true situation is upon arrival. Along with Hari, Dhanja was promised work and she said that they were told:

No problem, that both of us could work, and for a very good salary. We were told that we could easily get a nanny for our little boy. But we found out differently. We were offered more than what we got.

Rania did not have a job in Iceland before immigrating but she had enough self-confidence in her skills and education, that she thought getting a job would not be a big obstacle. Unfortunately acquiring a satisfactory job was much more difficult than she had expected. Her expectations in fact were quite high, and thus she has probably had the hardest fall among the various participants in this research. She was unprepared for the fact that customers in Iceland want a customer service representative who speaks fluent Icelandic and so she felt that the telephone company where she applied was discriminating against her.

If there is an unqualified Icelandic and a qualified foreigner then the Icelandic is chosen. I worked for six years as a supervisor. Why won't they hire me with my experience with the internet, computers and all? The customer should have options as to what language they want to speak. The service should not only be in Icelandic. This is customer service, not Icelandic service.

Her husband who is sitting with us during the interview reminds her that there is only a tiny minority of foreigners who require the customer service and it is not certain that they can all speak English. Rania is very frustrated, the anger is apparent and the logic of her husband's comment is not heard.

DISCUSSION

The goal of this research is to answer the question of how the recognition and validation of an immigrant's professional education affects their well-being and their contribution to Icelandic society. Through qualitative and narrative research of seven participants and within five collective themes, i.e., flexibility, language, validation of education, self-esteem and self-efficacy, and pre-existing expectations, the narratives unraveled to cover the phenomenon of immigration to Iceland for these individuals. Some of the results were expected and predictable, yet there were also unanticipated findings. That which stood out and was of little surprise was firstly, the obvious guest worker attitude of Iceland when it came to validation of education and credentials. Secondly, and also not surprisingly, was the obstacle of language learning for the immigrants who want to make Iceland their home. That which was unanticipated and also remarkable was the flexibility and compliance of those who were not working in their fields of education, the lack of bitterness, and their ability to find new and interesting career paths. Questions that arose were about the quantitative figures pertaining to the number of immigrants with professional degrees and of what kind, also how to improve the efficacy of language courses, and lastly the characteristics of an immigrant. This research also emphasizes the need for more specialized training in counseling immigrants.

Guestworker attitude

The first issue relates to the guest worker system that, though is not a formal policy in Iceland, and more or less ended in Europe in the 1970s, still exists, in a sense, in the form of limited work permits, work permits in the hands of the employers, rather than the employees, and various restrictions against foreigners, for example the inability to apply for citizenship if one has ever received unemployment or social welfare benefits (Þórarinsdóttir, Georgsdóttir, & Hafsteinsdóttir, 2009, Immigration Council, 2007). A guestworker system, as used at one

time in many European countries and the United States, provided workers when there were temporary labor shortages. It allowed for the importation of foreign laborers, usually legally but they only had temporary work permits and were often not guaranteed the same labor rights as the indigenous group of workers. This was first seen in the late 19th century in Germany, as a compromise between political and economic interests when Polish workers were allowed into the country to work in seasonal agricultural work (Castles and Miller, 2003). These guestworker systems were set up in many countries, and abided by the attitude that if an aspiring immigrant had desirable skills, they were allowed into the country for a limited period of time, but when they were not needed or they were nearing immigration status, they should leave. On discussing the matter in the USA, there was an editorial in the New York Times where the writer claimed that in that country guest worker programs are actually just “massive indentured servitude — colonial times all over again, but without any hope of citizenship for those taking our most difficult and despised jobs” (Made a Bad Bill, May 29, 2007).

Based on this research, it would seem that those who are accepted most readily and those who have their credentials recognized most easily are those who will not be competing for jobs with the native Icelanders. It is the supply and demand of the work market that seems to define the rules. If there are not enough health care specialists or fish factory workers or music teachers available within the Icelandic population, then somehow it seems magically easy to find accreditation for their credentials just as the path has been paved to provide assessment and accreditation for the nurses needed in Iceland (The Icelandic Nurse’s Association, 2009). If English teachers, hotel managers, or cooks are not needed on the work market then the path becomes strewn with obstacles. The process then becomes one of tying things up with red tape, forcing a person to chase to one organization and then back to the other, and then having to comply with impossible methods of assessment. This can especially

be seen in Karlo's story as compared to Miriam's and unfortunately shows a resemblance to a guestworker attitude on behalf of the Icelandic work market.

The importance of non-biased relations, especially in the employment sector is represented in the *Third Report on Iceland*, by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance Council of Europe, 2007. There it is reported that statistics indicate that unemployment is generally not a problem for the immigrant population of Iceland today and that immigrants are actually proportionally less than Icelandic citizens amongst the unemployed population. However, the problem is that non-EEA immigrants are widely reported to be employed in positions that do not reflect their educational attainment or professional experience (ECRI, 2009). Despite many of them having much higher qualifications or education, most of those from outside the European Economic Area (EEA) are employed in low-skilled and menial labor jobs in fish factories, construction work, restaurants, cleaning, working at nursing homes or as sales personnel in stores. In order to raise awareness among employers of this type of racial discrimination the ECRI encourages the Icelandic authorities to ensure that "immigrants gain access to professions reflecting their level of education and professional experience, especially by recognizing foreign diplomas and qualifications" (ECRI: *ibid*).

Statistics about the educational qualifications of immigrants in Iceland are very limited and it is unknown how many professionals are working at menial jobs. This study lays the foundation for quantitative research in this area. As stated in the research recently done by The Center for Immigration Research Academy (CIRRA) about the immigration population in Iceland pertaining to how the recession has affected their situation, "It is apparent that the background statistics of so many differing immigrant groups in Iceland, whether it applies to education, values, or opinion of various cultural aspects of the society is insufficient and needs more quantitative research" (Þórarinsdóttir, Georgsdóttir, & Hafsteinsdóttir p.24).

Language learning

For many positions on the Icelandic work market, employability is knit very closely together with the second expected result of this research. The partly-personalized, partly-institutionalized obstacle, the language, was considered by far the biggest obstacle in integration by all seven of the participants. By personalized is meant that at the bottom line, it is up to the immigrant to learn the language. By institutionalized is meant that without the proper means and assistance i.e., courses taught with qualified teachers and materials, and at a low cost, preferably during work hours where the individual would, in that sense, get paid for learning.

As the research here showed, learning the language ties in extensively with self-esteem, employment, and upward social and employment mobility. Davor is the most affected by his inability to speak Icelandic. He stated several times throughout his interview that he would have liked to apply for a teaching job if his Icelandic would have been “good enough.” Rania is obviously very upset and bitter about the language but as implied earlier, it would seem that a considerable amount of her angst is due to culture shock. Even Hari, who is doing quite well as a chef, would like to branch out more with his entrepreneurial ideas of book writing, classes or television shows, but he feels that his lack of fluency in Icelandic is a handicap.

Demanding work schedules, limited resources and other responsibilities often make it difficult and expensive to attend language classes outside of work hours. The ECRI (2007) suggests that Icelandic language lessons be made available during work hours and the cost to the student must be minimal. This would be unequivocally beneficial. Furthermore, in view of the fact that some of the Icelandic courses being taught in the smaller villages of Iceland are shown not to be at all adequate, the results of this research hopefully emphasize the grave need for more teachers in Iceland who are trained to teach Icelandic as a secondary language.

“Without proper language skills, there is a greater likelihood of immigrants working in jobs at the bottom of the economy and never really become assimilated to the Icelandic community.”(Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Security, 2009)

Goals set by the government within the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, 2008) recognize the need for more language teaching, better materials, and less expensive for the student, but as mentioned before, funding has been cut by 50% during the last two years (Ministry of Finance, 2009). If learning Icelandic is the cornerstone of integration, then teaching it has to be approached very professionally and earnestly. It is important that the newly arrived immigrant to Iceland is counseled of the importance of learning the language, explained the social advantages and the career advantages of speaking Icelandic fluently. It not only helps the immigrant in his daily life in Iceland, but will add that extra boost of confidence and self-assurance that is so valuable in any life endeavor including immigration. Of the seven interviewed participants, the better command of the language, the better their sense of self and sense of integration into the community.

Adaptability

That which was most surprising in the results of this research was the lack of frustration and anger that the researcher had anticipated in the participants. Though five out of the seven individuals have not been using their degrees, all of them, except one, seemed to accept that fact and were not at all bitter or angry. In fact the participants have accepted their circumstances with an amazing amount of flexibility and adaptability. As can be seen in a couple of the narratives, most discernibly in the examples of Anna and Dhanja, there is a definite role that flexibility and planned happenstance has in acquiring employment and pursuing a career. The contrast between their experiences and Rania are definite examples of how flexibility can be

an invaluable coping mechanism when entering a foreign job market and the importance of keeping an open mind despite the strong desire to use one's professional and pre-existing qualifications. The concepts of flexibility, planned happenstance, seeing new opportunities, looking for doors to open, all have very important roles to play in finding an acceptable career after immigration. It would seem that the most important aspect is to simply be open to new ideas while working at trying to find a career opportunity, be it in one's own professional field or not.

Planned happenstance is a term coined by Kathleen Mitchell that emphasizes the view of unplanned events as both inevitable and desirable, claiming that unplanned or chance events can become opportunities for learning, getting lucky breaks, or leading down a new unexpected career path (Mitchell, Levin, & Krumboltz, 1999). This theory of happenstance was most clearly represented in this research in the case of Anna from Poland who has now found herself finishing her Masters in music theory and loving her present career as music teacher more than any of the other various careers, i.e. chemist research or banking that she has worked at before. It is vitally important for a career counselor to remain open minded and encourage his client to do the same. This is not at all meant to diminish the importance of recognizing credentials, as seen in the case of Miriam who would like to obtain her license to practice dentistry here. But contained within this research is the obvious benefit of remaining open minded, recognizing competence in connected or even new fields, and letting serendipity and planned happenstance help in career choices.

This research also lays the foundation to study the various character traits that might exist in those individuals who "successfully" immigrate. It is apparent that some people develop the ability to adapt, to settle with things or even go beyond that

and rather than settle with things, are adept at paving new roads for themselves. At least many immigrants seem to have this certain characteristic of resiliency, and also have the aptitude to see the good instead of the negative. If this is the actuality of the situation, what a wonderful addition to the work market and Icelandic society: a valuable resource of sound work ethics, the ability to compromise, the drive for entrepreneurship, and the longing to contribute. Is it a manifestation that those who can not adapt have simply left? There were limitations in this research regarding this frame of reference. Examining personality types of immigrants would make fascinating research material and might possibly help in counseling newly arrived immigrants.

Counseling

Besides government policy and language teaching, this research has shown that multicultural counseling is an issue that has to be addressed. Multicultural counseling is becoming a popular field in counseling psychology. In fact a number of researchers have evaluated the efficacy of existing theories across racial and ethnic minority clients and proposed theories specifically for multicultural groups (Brown & Lent, Eds., 2000). They also claim that multiculturalism has the potential to become the “fourth force” in psychology. Richard S. Sharf's textbook, *Applying Career Development Theory to Counseling* (2002) is an excellent example of this. Every chapter gives special attention to culturally diverse populations in relation to specific counseling theories. Yet it is essential that career and educational counselors, social workers, psychologists (especially dealing within employment fields), also get specific instruction during their education about “immigration” and what that especially entails particularly because immigration is such a major life decision. It is also such a relatively new phenomenon in Iceland. What are the major

problems that arise for immigrants? How should a counselor approach issues that might be culturally sensitive and how does a counselor know what might differ from one culture to the next? What about culture shock, language problems, simple misunderstandings because of differing value systems, or customs? It was interesting to note that in the draft of the 2010-2011 curriculum for educational and career counselors at HÍ that both the need for more *multicultural counseling* and the need for *advocacy* counseling which immigrants often require, are two areas that are recognized in the new curriculum as wanting more emphasis (Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Iceland, 2009). Where it concerns on-the-job training for counselors the curriculum draft includes visits to various employment centers, life long learning institutes and schools at various levels. The Intercultural Centre at Ísafjörður and the Intercultural Centre in Reykjavík would also make excellent training fields.

The curriculum draft recognizes the need “To incorporate multicultural counseling in a more goal-orientated manner in all of the appropriate courses within the counseling curriculum.” In light of the findings in this research, immigration and multicultural studies would be an excellent program to install within the educational and career counseling curriculum just as there are multicultural courses in teaching. It is apparent that immigrants are indeed an adaptable group of individuals ready to make the most out of their situation. Yet, having a degree in career and educational counseling myself, I could always see within their stories, how a good career counselor could have been the needed advocate to help with the adjustment it took to find their niche in the Icelandic community.

This research consisted of interviewing seven individuals who had obtained various educational training and credentials in their home countries before

immigrating to Iceland. Their backgrounds varied, two couples were from Eastern Europe, one couple from India, and the last individual was from the Middle East. All had different backgrounds and different educations. When I started this research, my opinion was that by not recognizing and utilizing foreign professional degrees, Iceland was wasting a very valuable resource of long education and training. This, in a sense remains true, yet I misjudged and perhaps underestimated the characters of the immigrants. All except one of the participants, Rania, whom I now believe was experiencing a strong case of culture shock, had again taken destiny into their own hands and seemed to be making the most out of the situation, whether or not they were using their professional degrees. Globalization is making the world smaller and transportation and communication makes migrations of populations simpler today than it has ever been before. Iceland is quickly becoming multicultural on a level that it has never seen in the past. If Iceland works harder at assessment and validation of credentials for professional immigrants everyone will benefit. These people are ready for adventure, hard work, ready to adapt to a new society, learn a new language, and adjust to new customs. They are not afraid to think outside the box. They bring new life to the community. They expect obstacles, but as Hari commented in his interview, he also expects to *be able to contribute too*. It is so important that Iceland take advantage of this.

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Appendix

Suggested Interview Questions

1. Background

- a) Where are you from?
- b) Age?
- c) Social class?
- d) Pre-immigration character? Now?
- e) Family members living together?
- f) Living accommodations?
 - i. owned home
 - ii. rented
- g) Education? Your academic career?
 - i. Explain the system in your home country
 - ii. Formal degrees?
 - iii. Length of education.
- h) Work experience?

2. Coming to Iceland Reasons for Migration

- a. What brought you to Iceland?
 - i. Where you looking for a job?
 - ii. Were you sought out?
 - iii. New place to live?
 - iv. Invite by friends or relatives?
- b. Did you know someone before you came?
- c. What were your first impressions?
- d. Stereotypes?
- e. Are those ideas changed or the same at this time?

3. Employment

- a. Were you promised a job contract?
 - i. Was the employment in your field of expertise?
 - ii. For a specific time?
- b. Were you promised a job for your spouse?
 - i. What type of job?
 - ii. Was it explained?
- c. What were your expectations?
- d. Were there things that did not meet your expectations?
 - i. Living conditions
 - ii. Job contract
 - iii. Family resettlement
- e. If you did not have employment here or have changed employment what was the main difficulty in finding a suitable job here?
 - i. For yourself
 - ii. For your spouse
- f. Experiences of efficacy in Iceland?
 - i. Do you feel that you have been able to use your previous education?
 - ii. Did you try to get credit for previous educational degrees?
 - iii. If you succeeded was it difficult?
 - iv. If you did not succeed, what were the obstacles?
 - v. If you did not succeed, explain how you felt.
 - vi. What does this mean about your decision to remain in Iceland?

4. **What is your purpose of employment here?**
- a. Needed income
 - b. Stepping stone
 - c. Participating in the community/social interaction
 - d. Learning the language
 - e. Saving for something
5. **Describe yourself as a worker.**
- a. Independent
 - b. Quick to learn
 - c. Work with others or alone
 - d. Initiative
 - e. Punctuality
 - f. Flexibility
6. **Describe the job that you work at today.**
- a. Stress
 - b. Responsibility
 - c. Are instructions explained clearly
 - d. Physical, technical, or mental.
 - e. Is the work more or less difficult than you thought?
 - f. Are you shown any bias?
7. **If disagreements occur, how are they handled?**
- a. Ignored
 - b. Handled alone
 - c. With a co-worker's help
 - d. Union representative
 - e. What language is spoken?
8. **Any behaviours or attitudes that you find culturally different concerning employment?**
- a. Appropriate or unacceptable?
 - b. Respect for authority (company managers or owners?)
 - c. Discipline?
 - d. Responsibility?
 - e. Flexibility?
 - f. Punctuality?
 - e. Hours?
 - f. Sexual difference?
 - g. Sick days?
 - h. Vacations?
 - i. Unions?
 - j. Work values?
9. **What's important to you in a job?**
- a. Income
 - b. Respect
 - c. Flexibility
 - d. Security
 - e. Social interaction
 - f. Responsibility
 - e. Physically safe

- f. To be creative
- g. To work independently
- h. To feel needed or important
- i. To use my training and abilities
- j. To work to my full capacity

10. Living as foreigners

- a. What language is spoken at home?
- b. Do you keep your own customs? Holidays? Celebrations? (political, seasonal, religious?)
- c. Cultural values that you feel are important?
- d. Do you feel that you fit in at work?
- e. Do you feel a part of the community?
- f. Social interaction?
- g. Community participation?
- h. Icelandic festivals, holidays, i.e. 17th of June.
- i. Contact with other foreign groups?
- j. Are there any Icelandic customs that you have adopted?

11. The Icelandic language.

- a. Did you take formal lessons?
- b. Did you feel that they were necessary?
- c. Did they help?
- d. How fluent do you feel today?
- e. Do you think it is important to learn the language?
- f. Necessary for the job you have?

12. Expectations of your children

- a. Education
- b. Employment
- c. Where will they live in the future
- d. Marriage

13. Contact with the “home” country.

- a. Where do you consider “home”?
- b. Do you visit often?

14. Resources and counseling since coming to Iceland.

- a. What resources have you used to get or try to get your credentials validated?
- b. Have you received any counseling pertaining to your education or employment while you have been in Iceland?