



# **The teacher in an inclusive school**

Exploring teachers' construction of their meaning and knowledge relating to their concepts and understanding of inclusive education

Hermína Gunnþórsdóttir

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of a Ph.D.-degree



**UNIVERSITY OF ICELAND**  
**SCHOOL OF EDUCATION**



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## **The teacher in an inclusive school**

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## Ágrip

Doktorsritgerð þessi greinir frá rannsókn á hugmyndum grunnskólakennara um hugmyndafræðina að baki skóla án aðgreiningar og hvernig þær endurspeglast í faglegum starfsvenjum þeirra og sýn á menntun. Megintilgangur rannsóknarinnar var að varpa ljósi á hvernig menning og opinber menntastefna orkar á og mótar hugmyndir og skilning kennara á kennarahlutverkinu í skólum sem ætlað er að starfa í anda skóla án aðgreiningar. Rannsóknarspurning verksins í heild lýtur að því hvernig kennarar móta skilning sinn og þekkingu í tengslum við hugmyndir sínar um skóla án aðgreiningar. Gögnin eru eigindleg viðtöl, kennsluskráning (teaching logs), opinber skjöl, svo sem lög, reglugerðir og námskrár, og fjölmiðlaefni (blaðagreinar). Félagslegum mótunarkenningum og sjónarhorni póstrúktúralisma var beitt við greiningu gagnanna. Niðurstöðurnar eru kynntar í einum bókarkafli og tveimur tímaritsgreinum, sem hver um sig visar til afmarkaðs þema og viðeigandi rannsóknarspurninga. Fyrsta þemað fjallar um hvernig íslenskir og hollenskir kennarar móta þekkingu, skilning og hugmyndir um kennarann í skóla sem stefnir að því að verða án aðgreiningar. Þema tvö fjallar um orðræðu íslenskra kennara um skóla án aðgreiningar - möguleika, takmarkanir og tengsl við hina opinberu orðræðu. Í þema þrjú er áhersla á faglega starfshætti kennara og sjónarmið í tengslum við hugmyndir þeirra um skóla án aðgreiningar. Rannsóknin er fræðilegt og hagnýtt framlag til áframhaldandi umræðu um skóla án aðgreiningar, eðli slíks skóla og umfang. Vonast er til að þessi rannsókn varpi ljósi á möguleika og mótsagnir skólastarfs án aðgreiningar og verði þannig til hagsbóta fyrir kennara, foreldra, fræðafólk og stefnumótendur.

## **Abstract**

### **The teacher in an inclusive school**

This PhD research comprises a doctoral study focusing on primary school teachers' ideas on the ideology of inclusive education and how these are reflected in their professional work habits and notions of education. The general purpose of the study was to explore the interplay between national education policy and teachers' perceptions of their role in the inclusive school. The main research question for the overall project is how teachers construct their meaning and knowledge relating to their concepts and understanding of inclusive education. The study is framed within an interpretive paradigm, informed by the theoretical perspectives of social constructionism and post-structuralism. Data were collected through qualitative interviews, teaching logs, document and media article analysis. The findings are introduced in one book chapter and two research journal articles, each representing one particular theme with reference to the research questions. The first theme deals with the social construction of the teacher in the inclusive school – the cases of Iceland and the Netherlands. Theme two focuses on Icelandic teachers' discourse on inclusive education – its possibilities, limits, and relationship with the official dialogue. In theme three the researcher explores Icelandic teachers' professional practices and perspectives in relation to their ideas about inclusive education. The study makes a theoretical and practical contribution to the continuing debate about inclusive education, its nature and extent, for the benefit of teachers, parents, researchers and policy-makers.

## Acknowledgements

A long journey has come to an end. I have finished my doctoral dissertation. This is my piece of work but created with various and valuable support from other people. My supervisors, Dóra S. Bjarnason and Ingólfur Ásgeir Jóhannesson, have brought the largest share to the table; their professional knowledge and experience which I have delved into and will continue to do in my work as a university teacher and researcher. I was privileged to have Len Barton and Julie Allan as external examiners at my interim evaluation, and Julie also joined my doctoral dissertation committee during the final year of the study. Their valuable critique, guidance and encouragement convinced me that I could and should finish this process.

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I owe the most to the participants of this study who offered their perspectives on a complicated and controversial educational issue. Because of their contribution, I am able to contribute additional and valuable knowledge to the educational field.

I am convinced that I would not have been able to complete this journey except for the support from Arnar, my husband and best friend. He has created the space I needed for this work. Most importantly he has helped me maintain my mental health and stay balanced. My children, who are now young people and adults, have been my role models. Their ability to adapt and cope with new situations and challenges has been the image I have looked to when I have faced difficulties and vulnerability. I am infinitely grateful for my family.



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# 1 Introduction of the research

This chapter explains the research background and the environment in which it is rooted. It provides an overview of the aim of the research and the research questions, and the research topic is placed in a local and international context. Finally, the structure of the thesis is explained.

This is a qualitative study of primary school teachers' perceptions of the ideology of inclusive education and how these are reflected in their professional work habits and concepts of education. The overall aim of the study was to explore the interplay between the national education policy and teachers' ideas of their role in the inclusive school.

The study is located within an interpretive framework and the data comprise interviews with teachers and head teachers in five compulsory schools, three in Iceland and two in the Netherlands; teaching logs from classroom lessons; documents (Acts of Parliament and curricula) and media articles. Iceland is the main case in the study; however, the aim of gathering data in Dutch schools as well was to obtain a deeper and richer perspective and understanding of the Icelandic issues.

## 1.1 Research questions

The main research question for the overall project is how teachers construct their meaning and knowledge relating to their concepts and understanding of inclusive education.

In accordance with the research aim, the subject matter was further defined by three themes, each with the following sub-questions:

Theme I – The social construction of teachers' knowledge, roles and responsibilities in the inclusive school – the cases of Iceland and the Netherlands

- How do teachers construct their ideas about the teacher in the inclusive school?

Theme II – Icelandic teachers' discourse on inclusive education – its possibilities, limits, and relationship with the official dialogue

- What characterises and legitimises teachers' discourse on inclusive education?

- What are the contradictions in teachers' discourse on inclusive education as well as those occurring in official dialogue?
- How have teachers involved themselves in the discourse?

Theme III – Icelandic teachers' professional practices and perspectives about inclusive education

- What characterises teachers' ideas of their professional practice in a school that is expected to aim for inclusive education?
- In what ways do teachers' perspectives on their students' learning and learning potential coincide with ideas about inclusive education?

Each theme refers to one book chapter or article where the subject matter is analysed. There is a great deal of literature available about inclusive and special education and schools, but less regarding how teachers construct their meaning and knowledge about their ideas and understanding and how this appears in their teaching practices. That will be explored in this research.

## **1.2 Why this study?**

Why am I interested in issues on inclusive education? There is a story about that with a beginning in my Master's research which was about the adaptation of two Icelandic children (two of my three children) to a Dutch primary school. I moved with my family to the Netherlands in the year 2000. The year before I had worked in a primary school in Iceland with a group of refugee people (parents and children) from Kosovo. I became interested in the adaptation process they went through during their first year in a new country, mainly regarding education and schooling.

I decided to do my Master's research on my children's adaptation to a Dutch primary school. My interest and focus was on five factors: Social connections and relations, learning a new language, learning in a new language, cooperation between home and school and the role of parents in learning adaptations. I started to collect data when the family moved to the Netherlands and soon I realised that I needed to add the sixth factor to the research focus: The education of children with disabilities. My son who was a subject in the research was born with spina bifida and hydrocephalus and suddenly – in this new country and culture – that was an issue in his schooling.

We lived for four years in the Netherlands and all the time I and his father had to be on the alert with regard to the school authorities to ensure

that he could remain in his neighbourhood school. Even after three years in the school the school management requested that he should go to a special school because of his immobility.

My first reaction was anger and astonishment. My son has excellent walking ability, he has developed normally and has never had any learning hindrances. During his three years in the school he had adapted particularly well to the classroom, he was fluent and confident in the Dutch language and had several friends – boys and girls – who he interacted with inside and outside the school. He received good and positive comments from his teachers, both regarding his education and socially. I was, therefore, puzzled by this decision as there had never been any discussion on behalf of the school about his future presence there. Then realised that the school's reactions originated in a lack of experience in having children with disability in regular schools and the teachers and the school feared the consequences of taking any steps in this direction.

I decided to offer my support – my knowledge and attitude – to the school and try to convince them that my son belonged there. To make a long story short I managed to convince them and my son spent his fourth and last year in the school without significant complications. But there is another story with the same beginning but a different ending. There was another boy – a Dutch boy – in the classroom that the school also wanted to send to a special school – and he lived literally opposite the school door. His parents were devastated because of the school's decision but were not capable of challenging it and he left his classmates and went to a special school in another district.

Since I had this personal and professional experience on institutional exclusion, I have been committed to issues on inclusive education and ideas presented in social models of disability. This experience was also a milestone in deepening and broadening my understanding on inclusive education in two ways. Firstly, I realised that access alone is a fake if it is not accompanied by a responsible attitude, a commitment to the students and a willingness to seek solutions within the school. Secondly, I realised – although much later when reading scholars as Julie Allan, Roger Slee, Len Barton and Deborah Youdell on, for example, social and educational exclusion, inequality, social capital and disability – how forces like power, status and social capital affected the educational future of the two boys mentioned above. I became concerned about students whose parents are not capable of challenging exclusionary decisions and procedures within the

school systems and how important it is for students that teachers are able to recognise and understand forces that create educational inequalities.

Thus, the origin of the study is partly based on my personal experience gained by living abroad with my family. During those seven years we lived in the Netherlands and Germany I learned about the Dutch and German school systems and the educational practices in the schools where we lived and was able to compare them to what I knew from Iceland, my home country. I learned that despite international and public policies and conventions concerning inclusive education, the reality in schools is sometimes far removed from policy decisions. I became interested in European school systems in general and how different countries interpret and implement policies and statements on inclusive education. As a foreigner I was able to use different lenses to 'read' the culture in Germany and the Netherlands, and as time passed I looked more critically at the Icelandic system. As a mother of three children I got to know many teachers, especially my son's teachers. It became quite clear from my point of view that too many children with disabilities or additional needs were dependent upon teachers' goodwill and endorsement regarding their attendance in regular schools. These concerns are further identified in my Master's degree research (Gunnþórsdóttir, 2003) which I conducted in the Netherlands. The above mentioned issues relate to policy, as well as the teacher, and are the main motives for the rationale of this research.

The study has undergone some modifications since its beginning. Two main changes have occurred. Initially my intention was to compare the perspectives of Icelandic and Dutch teachers regarding issues on inclusive education. As time passed I found it more interesting to place the Icelandic data at the forefront and use the Dutch data as a prism to see further and deeper into the Icelandic issues. Thus, the use of data gathered for this research has changed, and in a few instances additional material has been collected. The research issue of inclusive education, however, has remained the same. Secondly, the format of the thesis has altered, in accordance with the changes mentioned above, from being a monograph to becoming an article based study where the research findings are introduced in one book chapter and two research journal articles (see further in chapter 1.5 – The structure of the thesis and presentation of findings).

The term "inclusive education" is discussed in further detail in chapter 2. The discussion is complex as the concept can refer to various aspects within the school as an organisation, as well as to policy. Basically, the concept requires changes in the whole school environment, including how we think

about education in general, as well as teacher education. In recent years, moreover, research indicates considerable failures in the implementation of policy and there are doubts in some quarters about the fundamental principles of policy-making.

The guiding light in my own definition is based on the philosophical vision that quality education should be the standard for all students where democracy and social justice is a prerequisite for practice. This is based on the vision that inclusion is an active process, involving values applicable to all learners. School inclusion is for me a task where the aim is to overcome barriers which have led to all forms of marginalisation, exclusion and underachievement.

### **1.3 The Icelandic and Dutch education context**

#### **1.3.1 Iceland**

Unlike its Dutch counterpart, the Icelandic education system is an example of a homogenous system (Eurydice, 2006b, 2008) with an emphasis on equal opportunities and an appropriate education for all children, no matter what their physical or mental capabilities may be, their social emotional situation or linguistic development (Lög um grunnskóla nr. 66/1995). The compulsory school is obliged to attempt to educate all children in a successful way. By the Compulsory School Act from 1974 the tone for future development was set. The law prescribed ten years of compulsory schooling and an emphasis on equal opportunities to education (Lög um grunnskóla nr. 63/1974). In the 1980s and '90s special education within regular schools increased rapidly, among other things because of the primary school Act from 1974 (Jónasson, 2008). An important change occurred in 1996 when the municipalities took over the management of the compulsory schools from the state. This transformation has given the compulsory schools more freedom to develop in different directions, e.g. concerning ideology and pedagogy, and has reduced schools' homogeneity (Jónasson, 2008; Sigþórsson & Eggertsdóttir, 2008). By the turn of this century some special schools were closed down, but special units within some of the regular schools have since been established. New legislation on education for all school levels was enacted in 2008. In the Primary School Act (Lög um grunnskóla nr. 91/2008) the word "inclusive school" is used for the first time to describe the Icelandic compulsory school (Article 17).

It can be argued that during the past few years the development has been towards inclusion, taking into account the policy changes in the

system (see e.g. Eurydice, 2008; Fræðslumiðstöð Reykjavíkur, 2002). There is, however, evidence which shows that teachers are not satisfied with current arrangements and many of them think they have reached the end of their tether in handling the diversity of students in Icelandic primary schools (Bjarnason & Persson 2007; Björnsdóttir & Jónsdóttir, 2010; Marinósson, 2007; Morthens & Marinósson, 2002).

### **1.3.2 The Netherlands**

The main characteristic of the Dutch school system is division (Eurydice, 2006a). There is a long history of special schools for children with various kinds of disabilities, social- and educational difficulties, as well as wide range of schools based on religious- or ideological specialities. The number of special schools increased tremendously in the 20th century as in most countries in Europe, but during the past few years, the Dutch authorities have tried to reduce the segregation within the school system. A turning point in this direction was a new law on primary schools, passed 1998 under the slogan “Weer Samen Naar School” (Together to school) which emphasises that it is desirable that children from the same neighbourhood attend the same school (Eurydice, 2008/9; Eurydice, 2009; Leeuwen, van Schram & Cordang, 2008; Leeuwen, Thijs, & Zandbergen, 2009; Ministerie van Onderwijs, Culture en Wetenschap, 2007). However, these types of schools – regular and special – continued alongside each other, although all the expertise, special knowledge and service was based in the special schools and their staff. Hence there was slow progress in developing expert services within the regular schools and to counteract this a new law was passed in 2003, called the ‘backpack’ (het rugzak) (Ministerie van Onderwijs, Culture en Wetenschap, 2006a, 2006b). This law stipulated that the parents of children with special educational needs could apply for a special budget (personal budget) for the extra support they needed for their education. Their parents or custodians could then choose to what kind of school the child went with the budget; to a special or regular school. The basic idea was that the budget would travel with the child but would not be restricted to a certain type of school (Eurydice, 2009; Fletcher-Campbell, Pijl, Meijer, Dyson, & Parrish, 2003). ‘The backpack system’ was originally meant to minimise segregation; however, research shows that it has worked in the opposite direction and induced increased segregation and tremendous expansion in the psychological and medical diagnosis of students (Pijl & Veneman, 2005; Spies, 2007).

The newest policy introduced in 2005-2006, called *passend onderwijs* (e. appropriate education) will take place in steps starting in 2011. It specifies that each child should be found an appropriate place in the school system (Passend onderwijs, 2009). School boards will have the responsibility of finding each student an appropriate place at school. The offer does not need to be at the local school, but the idea is to avoid students being referred to special schools by offering appropriate education as soon as possible (Eurydice, 2008/9). A critique of this approach argues that the idea of *passend onderwijs* is not based upon fully inclusive thinking where the child's needs are central. Moreover, it does not presuppose that the regular schools are the most effective means for all children (Schuman, 2007).

#### **1.4 Significance of the study**

In this research I intend to shed light on teachers' ideas about inclusive education in order to gain a better understanding of the term, the most important aspect being how it is possible to make use of teachers' views in order to develop and promote inclusive practices?

I have chosen as data sources two countries with different educational systems, culture and history. This helps identify similar, as well as different, factors in teachers' ideas and practices in relation to inclusive education. Thus, I hope to identify issues that will help to understand the nature of the hindrances as well as the potential for making schools and education more inclusive.

#### **1.5 The structure of the thesis and presentation of findings**

The thesis is divided into following chapters. Chapter 1 is a general introduction of the research, its aim and questions and my motive for embarking on it. In chapter 2, I explain the theoretical background and the main concepts and theories in order to create an understanding of the term "inclusive education". Chapter 3 outlines the theoretical perspectives used in the research and here the research methods are explained. The findings of this doctoral thesis are introduced by the publication of one book chapter and two research journal articles. An overview of the findings is provided in chapter 4 as well as summary of the general findings and conclusion, followed by the book chapter and the articles in APPENDIX A.



## **2 Theoretical background: Concepts and theories**

This chapter explains the theoretical framework behind the research and the main concepts and issues of the research. The chapter constitutes a summary intended to explain the principal elements that compose the notion of inclusive education, as it appears to me as a researcher. The summary is partly historical in order to sharpen the background and highlight how the term inclusive education and its meaning have developed through time.

### **2.1 Historical background and the development of the term inclusive education**

During the past decades much has been written about school inclusion and different definitions have been put forward (Armstrong, Armstrong & Spandagou, 2010, 2011; Artiles, Kozleski & Waitoller, 2011; Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Ferguson, 2008; Marinósson, Ohna & Tetler, 2007). Recent publications discuss and analyse the problems and confusion involved when the term is put to use (Allan, 2008; Benjamin, 2002). Inclusive education is a term, which has developed from different disciplines, such as the special educational needs sector, the vision of human rights and democracy, sociology and psychology. The confusion is, therefore, partly linked to the fact that the term can refer to different things depending on the context and definition applied. Thus, inclusive education covers a wide array of political and human rights issues (value dimension), as well as how to serve children with additional needs in regular settings (resource dimension). What follows is an attempt to explore the various concepts attached to the discussion and understanding of inclusive education.

#### **2.1.1 Perspectives on disability**

At the outset of this chapter I consider it important to introduce two main perspectives that are explanatory as to how the following concepts and ideas are understood in a social and cultural context. These are perspectives of the way disability is understood in societies and how different understandings and standpoints create different approaches to reactions and practices.

The former is a biomedical perspective where disability is medicalised (usually referred to as the “medical model of disability”). A biomedical understanding of, and approach to, disability sees it as a feature of the person caused by a health condition; hence the individualistic view that the ‘problem’ lies within the person but not in environmental factors and social barriers (Rizvi & Lingard, 1996; Shakespeare, 2004). By viewing disability through this medical lens “disabled people are treated as objects rather than as authors of their own lives” (Goodley, 2011, p. 8).

The latter perspective – a social perspective on disability – draws attention to what the medical model lacks, that is to take account of the environment to understand disability (Goodley, 2011; Tøssebro, 2004). A social approach to disability focuses on the dynamic interaction between a person and the environment and seeks to look at shared experiences, identity and the cultures of disabled people instead of focusing on the impairment as is the case in a medical understanding of disability. A clear distinction is made between the *impairment* as the functional limitations within the individual caused by the physical, mental or sensory impairment and the *disability* as the loss or limitation of opportunities to take part in the normal life of the community on an equal level with others due to physical and social barriers (Disabled People's International, 2013; Goodley, 2011). The social approach advocates the responsibility of each society to offer disabled people, as well as other members of society, meaningful and respectful living standards (Barnes, Mercer & Shakespeare, 1999; Traustadóttir, 2006).

These two perspectives create different approaches in education regarding implications for policy and practice. While the pure medical perspective creates policy where the aim is prevention or treatment for the individual, the social perspective aims to change the environment and remove barriers to enable the individual to be an active participant in society.

### **2.1.2 Segregation and schooling**

Schools are traditional and complicated organisations. The systems and the schools take their forms from various parts of society and are kind of a mirror of the societies that create them. Therefore, we see differences between the school systems of different countries. Each system takes shape from the environment and the needs of its society and these needs can vary between countries. Schools, as we know them today, are a product of a society, which created schools for its elite children; for children who were

able to learn and behave in a certain manner and within certain structures. The history of education shows us that from the very beginning there was a selection. Only 'certain' children were allowed to seek education, i.e. boys from wealthy families, girls were excluded as well as children from poor families (Guttormsson, 2008). Children with disabilities were not considered 'educable'. As time went by, certain 'groups', previously excluded, gained access to the public school system, although black and disabled children still have to face not gaining access to public schools. The official 'language' in our modern world is that all children have equal rights to education, but nevertheless we see a selective school system, which restricts access, and equal opportunities. It seems that this selection is deeply integrated within the system.

The ideology of the inclusive school has, among other things, developed from various types of provision for children with special needs and disabilities. It is mainly driven by the fact that despite every effort to offer this group of children an education built on equal opportunities and social justice as prescribed for the majority of pupils, it seems that the system in itself, provides for these children way out of the mainstream (Jóhannesson, 2006; Marinósson, 2007, 2011).

Segregation has always been part of every education system. The creation of the modern school and mass education for the public at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Europe and America, involved a selection based upon gender, religion, colour, class and disability. A historical example from the United States shows how public schools have over time incorporated various groups of children previously excluded because of race, religion, colour, social status or disability. The last group – disabled people – became though the last group to be included and had the longest way to go for the right to seek their education on equal terms with others (Libsky & Gartner, 1996, p. 146).

The form of special segregated educational provision has, therefore, a history as long as or longer than compulsory education. Advocates both for and against segregated settings argue in the best interests of children, although from a different viewpoint. Barton (2004) has listed the ideological assumptions which justify and criticise this form of schooling.

Justification of special schools:

- Such schooling is essential in order to provide the type of education and curriculum these children need.
- Disabled children and young people need protection from the harsh and cruel realities of the world, including those to be found in

mainstream schools; their size, the attitudes of staff and pupils, and verbal and physical abuse.

- Normal pupils need to be protected from the damaging influences that disabled pupils will have on their development, especially their academic achievements.
- Special schools are staffed by teachers who have those special qualities of patience, dedication, and love. Such schools provide good interpersonal relationships with staff and the small and necessary staff-pupil ratios.
- Special schools are necessary on administrative efficiency grounds. Thus, special teachers, equipment, and support services are most effectively deployed.

Criticism of special schools:

- Special schools are part of the disabling barriers within society and therefore need to be removed. This is a human rights issue.
- Segregated provision tends to encourage negative labels, suspicion, stereotypes, fear, and ignorance of a reciprocal nature.
- Pupils within such schools receive an education that is inferior to that of their non-disabled peers and the low expectation of teachers is a significant factor in this outcome. The rhetoric of 'caring' and 'supporting' often obscures this fact.
- Such provision legitimates the notion of 'professional' as 'expert' and encourages passive dependency on the part of pupils (Based on Barton, 2004, p. 68–69).

Educational authorities in many countries have decided not to restrict their policy to one of these two strands by running both segregated and integrated systems (see e.g. Eurydice, 2003) and leaving it to parents to choose what they think is the best setting for their child. This is in line with the neoliberal and marketing ideologies, with the notion of parental choice currently dominating western educational systems (Slee, 2011; Tomlinson, 2005).

### **2.1.3 Categorising and classification**

Categorisation of some kind has always been part of human life. In any aspect of society we see categorisation, e.g. race, gender, religion, occupation and socio-economic class. In fact this is an important tool in our human society:

Categories and classification are relative to human practices, they are embedded in various discourses, and they *re-present* the world in manners that are relevant for a certain activity. They enable shared understandings among people operating in social practices, who can communicate efficiently by identifying objects and events in standard terms. (Hjörne & Säljö, 2004, p. 3–4)

For institutions, categories are among the main factors, which clarify their work as structural units. Schools are social institutions and their work is heavily based on categories, such as age, abilities, academic subjects, etc. In the past twenty years, the use of categories in schools has increased tremendously, especially in terms of special needs and disability, in order to manage enhanced heterogeneity within the regular compulsory school (Christensen, 1996; Hjörne & Säljö, 2004). Increased emphasis on marketing principles in governing the educational system has encouraged the use of categories in order to control, e.g. special education. In the analysis of the Icelandic educational system regarding special education, Jóhannesson (2006) focuses on the construction of school students as “diagnosable subjects”. His discussion is in line with what other researchers have pointed out, namely:

The reason for this construction is that the discourse and practices about special educational needs has been highly medicalized by using clinical methods to define and determine the particular special educational needs of children. ... The construction of a student as a diagnosable subject also means that the student becomes a consumer of service so that his or her special educational needs are met. (p. 112)

Categories are integral to society, both at personal and organisational levels. What has been criticised is how schools use categories as a tool to resolve educational problems, which, too often, results in biomedical diagnosis. Hjörne & Säljö (2004) found in their longitudinal study on ADHD in Swedish schools<sup>1</sup> that school staff and professionals use, in this case, a neuropsychiatric category of ADHD/DAMP as a tool to resolve an educational problem, “This category seems to close the gap between the

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<sup>1</sup> Data were gathered by documenting Pupil Welfare Team meetings during 1 year in order to report on how schools use categories like ADHD in practice.

descriptions of children's behaviors and the probable causes in a satisfactory manner for the team members" (p. 18). In general there was a lack of argumentation, critical analysis and professional pedagogical discussion as well as discussion on the social background and family conditions of the children in question.

#### **2.1.4 Special Education**

The effort to assist children who need additional support in school (normally referred to as special education) developed parallel with increased public education in the Enlightenment period and grouping of students (Björnsdóttir, 2009; Goodley, 2011; Marinósson, 2011; Richardson & Powell, 2011; Rizvi & Lingard, 1996; Tideman, 2005). It was not until the first half of the twentieth century, however, that special education gradually came to be considered as a distinctive field of study. According to Rizvi & Lingard (1996), "the basic tenets of special education have been the search for a better knowledge base and an implicit moral commitment to the welfare of students with disabilities" (p.9). Critics have, on the other hand, pointed out that too little attention has been paid to moral premises within this field and this is attributed to the fact that special education developed as a technical field within the positivist framework (Rizvi & Lingard, 1996) where the medical-model dominated the ideology and influenced segregated services such as special schools and sheltered workshops (Tideman, 2005; Traustadóttir, 2006).

Through the twentieth century special education expanded in steps with the multiplication of special schools. Throughout Europe different types of special schools were established to educate children who 'did not fit' in with the regular, public school system. This development was notable after the end of World War II when educational systems in most Western countries were reconstructed on the basis of faith in the systematic categorisation of pupils for educational intervention and treatment (Marinósson, 2011).

Goodley (2011) highlights the fact that mass public education was never designed with disabled learners in mind and all attempts to include those students who historically were not meant to fit in to regular schools are marked by this inherent technical paradigm. Special education, either practised in special schools or regular schools, therefore views the "special child" through the lens of functionalism; it is a learner that has failed to fit in and learn. Despite international agreements and a right-based legislation emphasising social and relational ideas on disability and society, the

practices of special education have continued to focus on the individual impairment and the failure of the student (Richardson & Powell, 2011). The reason for this is that if a child is defined as having special needs it gives the school a licence to exclude the child from regular education “if resources deemed necessary are, for a number of reasons, not in place” (Vlachou, 1997). The term special needs – as a feature of the school environment – is then transferred from the school into the child.

### **2.1.5 Normalization and integration**

In the period after the mid-twentieth century in the wake of demands for more civil rights, (e.g. for black people in the US) people started to question the current system of special schools which resulted in segregation and the labelling of children attending segregated educational settings. The term normalization – originated in Scandinavia between 1950–1960 (Brodin & Lindstrand, 2007) – became part of the discussion. The Dane Bank-Mikkelsen first introduced this concept in relation to human rights issues, society and disability in the years between 1970 and 1980. He looked at normalization simply as the idea that all persons should be entitled to as normal a life as possible and that all citizens should have the right to enjoy a normal living standard (Bjarnason, 1991, 2007). The concept was then developed further by Bank-Mikkelsen himself, the Swede Nirje and by Wolfensberger in the US (see e.g. Wolfensberger, 1980). Very close to normalization is the notion of integration, which is based on the idea that joint participation of disabled and non-disabled persons in society is a fundamental right of all human beings. Therefore, society should promote public service, which meets the needs of *all* people. In terms of education integration was about the right of the disabled children to be educated in their local schools (Goodley, 2011). Theories on educational integration emphasise a system which unifies rather than segregates (Bjarnason, 1991, 2007; Margeisdóttir, 2001; Meekosha & Jakubowicz, 1996). However, new practices and categories that emerged from the idea of integration, such as special educational needs (SEN) and the conception of special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs) in UK was meant to identify and work with students who required extra support in regular schools – but did not manage to unite diverse groups within the school culture. “Too often SENCOs were the sole agitators in schools and they, like their SEN children, were marginalised by the wider school culture” (Goodle, 2011, p.140).

In terms of schooling, the idea of educational integration involves more than the idea that disabled children should receive their education in

regular schools where their special needs would be met. Furthermore, they should take part in social activities as far as possible. The rationale for the integration policy was based on both educational and moral premises, rooted in social justice and equal opportunities. Rizvi & Lingard (1996) have, however, pointed out that:

the nature of the relationship between this political commitment to social justice and the dilemmas of educational practice was seldom examined. As a result, practices on integration varied a great deal from school to school, and segregation and integration continued to exist alongside each other (p.10).

Current critiques and concerns about the inclusive ideology introduced at the outset focuses on this relationship between a political commitments and practices in schools. Although integration was meant to equip regular schools with tools to reach students that were not seen to fit into the regular school, integration practices focused too much on resources and technical issues controlled and organised by special personnel inside and outside schools.

### **2.1.6 The inclusive ideology: Removing barriers to learning**

It can be argued that changes in schools linked to ideas on integration offered many children new opportunities to education, but the criticism was directed at schools and their practices. Many countries have developed their educational policy towards integration, but the practices have too often been simply providing access for disabled students to regular schools without making a sufficient effort to change the dominant culture within the schools whereby disabled students will experience recognition and respect (Rizvi & Lingard, 1996). This criticism reflects the contrasting perspectives which appear, respectively, in the medical and social approaches to disability discussed above. It has been noted that it seems to be a 'resistance' inherent in the school system – and built into the practices of special education, with too much focus on 'the special' and 'the problem' within the child. Jóhannesson (2001) has clarified this in the following manner:

Children are categorised by using modern, clinical methods and then there is a 'solution' or treatment to remove or at least minimise as much as possible individual 'otherness', since it

will be expensive if legal provision is to be followed on that everyone should receive an education and upbringing proper to its uniqueness (p.13, Hermína's translation).<sup>2</sup>

With such practices, the educational system promotes a dualism towards students, i.e. the majority who are healthy/whole and those who are not, who are imperfect. Thus, the school considers the education of those who are 'able' as normal but the education of those who are disabled as 'something else' which needs to be treated differently (Christensen, 1996). Such responses indicate failure in the school system and researchers, scholars and parents have pointed out that the current system is not working properly and, moreover, it is not serving the children it should be serving. Libsky and Gartner (1996) summarize some USA findings which show a negative picture of education for children with special educational needs (SEN) and disabilities:

- High dropout rates.
- Low graduation rates – only 45 per cent of the students with disabilities leave school with a diploma.
- Limited success in post-secondary education. Special education graduates go on to post-secondary education at less than half the rate of general education graduates.
- High rates of unemployment; persons with disabilities have the highest unemployment rate of any population subgroup.
- Lack of success in community living, with too many parents reporting their children continuing to live at home (p.148).

These negative facts in the education of children with SEN and disabilities have much to say in the shift from the ideology of integration (where children were expected to adjust to unchanged school) to inclusion (which requires school to adjust to its pupils, irrespective of their different needs) and calls for a changed school culture and a reformation of the whole education structure. The following chapters are meant to give an insight to the discussion around this shift in ideology. I will also explore concepts and ideas I consider crucial to build an understanding of the inclusive school and education.

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<sup>2</sup> Börn eru dregin í dilka með nútímalegum aðferðum klínískrar greiningar og síðan fundin "úrlausn" eða meðferð til að útrýma eða a.m.k. draga eins og kostur er úr "öðruvísileika" einstaklinga, enda kostnaðarsamt ef á að uppfylla lagaákvæði um að hver og einn skuli fá kennslu og uppeldi við hæfi á forsendum sérstöðu sinnar.

### 2.1.6.1 *International conventions and statements on inclusive education*

International policy documents like UNESCO statements have for the past two decades placed an emphasis on equal rights to education for all children and promoted increased quality in all fields of education. A starting point in this process was the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) based on a World Conference on Special Needs Education in Salamanca, Spain 1994, that represented the provision and recommendations of 92 governments and 25 international organizations. The Salamanca Statement is a declaration signed by countries committed to work towards *Education for All*. The fundamental vision of the Salamanca Statement is listed in article 2 and states the fundamental right of every child to education and who must be given the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning. Education systems, schools and educational programmes should be designed in such a way that they take into account the wide diversity of unique characteristics, strengths and needs of every child. In addition, the statement emphasises that a child-centred pedagogy and regular schools are considered to be the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an effective education for all children and improving the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system (UNESCO, 1994). Other UNESCO campaigns, such as *Education for All (EFA)* (UNESCO, 2001), *the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (United Nations, 2006), *the Right to Education for Persons with Disabilities: Towards Inclusion* (UNESCO, 2004), *The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (United Nations, 1989) and *the United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities* (United Nations, 1994) create the international landscape which is supposed to guide the world's nations towards adopting more inclusive school systems. Many countries have chosen to use the Salamanca statement as well as other guidelines mentioned above in reconstructing their educational systems. The aim of the statement, however, does not only refer to the inclusion of all children; it also calls for reforming the nations' school systems so that inclusion can take place. This, in turn, requires a major policy and resources shift in most countries of the world, the setting of national targets, and a partnership between all the national and international agencies involved (UNESCO, 1994).

Depending on each education system and culture, these changes vary and within Europe we see different strategies at work, e.g. Italy with radical

integration, the Netherlands and Denmark running parallel segregated and integrated systems, and Norway and Iceland defined as having highly inclusive systems with very few special schools (Eurydice, 2003). In spite of various steps having been taken towards more inclusive systems, it seems that the implementation at local level – action in schools – is encountering resistance in many countries, including Iceland and the Netherlands (Bartolo & Lous 2005; Bjarnason & Persson, 2007; Marinósson, 2011).

### *2.1.6.2 Diversity*

The notion of diversity as a social, cultural and educational fact in modern society has been widely used within the field of inclusive education to indicate the role of the regular school in welcoming all children, also those who are 'different', (see e.g. Benjamin, 2002; Youdell, 2006). The Index for Inclusion (Booth & Ainscow, 2002) which provides resource material to support inclusive developments in schools, emphasises the importance of diversity to promote inclusion, e.g. by valuing all students and staff equally, "by restructuring the cultures, policies and practices in schools so that they respond to the diversity of students in the locality" and by "viewing the difference between students as resources to support learning, rather than problems to be overcome" (p.3). In this view disability is therefore not seen as an indicator for special education but there could however be cultural reasons for hindrances to education. In general, the idea of diversity in education has been used to describe the ideal school which celebrates human differences of all kinds and at the same time rejects categorisation which results in a pejorative and negative image for certain groups of students. In a nutshell, the notion of diversity "suggests that everyone is different, everyone is unique, and everyone is valuable for who they are" (Benjamin, 2002, p. 309). In her article, 'Valuing diversity': a cliché for the 21st century?, Benjamin (2002) doubts the real function of valuing diversity, although its meaning is clear. She argues that 'valuing diversity' has become an empty term and refers to e.g. "the dangers associated with the use of valuing diversity as a legitimating and explanatory narrative". She continues: "The contradictory nature of these twin aims – of improving the school's overall score in terms of examination results whilst seeking to become more 'inclusive' ..." (p.311). Her overall conclusion is that the problem with valuing diversity is a systemic one, linked to socio/political values and practices and the fact that diversity, in educational discourse, is situated within identified groups or individuals. Conversely, we have the standard agenda demands which require homogeneity and academic success (ibid, p. 320).

As stated above, diversity is a complicated term with reference to social and personal factors and as an educational concept it has a strong relation with the concept of social justice in education. Youdell has written extensively on educational inequalities and how to understand them in order to deal with educational exclusion and discrimination. As discussed in this research the discourse on inclusive education has for the past few years revolved around how we think about and understand diversity, how schools acknowledge and deal with diversity in the student population. Youdell (2006), in her analysis, uses the work of the US philosopher Judith Butler which is framed by Foucault's concepts of productive power and subjectivation and her aim is to explain how and why social and educational inequalities endure despite political agreements, legislation on equal opportunities and "apparent public goodwill" (p.36). In so doing, she makes use of Butler's definition of 'discursive performatives' and how they appear through spoken and written language, e.g. as marked subjects. The complexity with discursive performatives is that they are not always as obvious as biographical categories like, girl, boy, student, teacher, they can also be translated through bodily gestures, acts and, what is perhaps most difficult to observe, through silence; what is unspoken and what is not done (ibid). Youdell suggests that we pay more attention to discursive performatives and how students come to be performatively constituted in the minutiae of school life. Only by doing so we can learn to understand and act upon educational exclusion and inequalities, as it has been shown that inclusive policy alone doesn't seem to work in establishing and maintaining diversity (Youdell, 2006). In their analysis of the Swedish school system, Göransson, Nilholm & Magnússon (2012) argue that because of increased demands of eligibility for upper secondary education, the number of students eligible for special support will probably increase in the nearest future. As a consequence, they argue that labels will continue to be important and therefore it could be even harder to celebrate differences. Another related factor that might work against more diversity is increased demand for school choice "which might have the consequences that children in need of special support will tend to end up in the same schools" (Göransson, Nilholm & Magnússon, 2012, p.170). Jónsson (2011) has pointed out, in his discussion of values and rationality and the difficulties in assimilating those to reality that official documents such as national curricula do not allow for diversity – as the focus in such documents is on the normal student.

### *2.1.6.3 Ideas about participation*

Some of the main differences between ideas of integration and inclusion come together in the term participation. Integration is about access to regular schools, the right to go to the local school alongside with other children from the same neighbourhood. Such an idea does not expect the schools to change their structures, rather, a child is supposed to adapt to his or her school. Conversely, inclusion is an active term, insisting upon active participation from both sides the school and the student. But what does active participation mean?

As an example we can make use of ideas derived from disability studies and the priority of people with disabilities, which centres on the right to live an ordinary life as the majority of people (Bjarnason, 2004, 2006; Van Hove, 2003; Rizvi & Lingard, 1996). For a long time, people with disabilities have been portrayed as passive receivers of care, dependent upon other people's goodwill. This view is the dominant one in the so-called medical-model of disability, (as discussed in chapter 2.1.1) which fosters ideas that consider impairment and disability to be the same thing where the 'problem' lies within the individual himself and his or her limitations. A different perspective, which has gradually gained more attention, is to look at the impairment and disability as two different things; impairment as part of human diversity but disability as a social phenomenon. The main point is that although individuals may have a certain inherent or acquired biological deviation, this should not be used to legitimise prejudice, inequality or any kind of exclusion (Bjarnason, 2007). This social approach assumes that people with disabilities act and take control over their own lives as members in a democratic society (Barton, 2001). According to Dewey (1961) the salient goal of democracy is:

more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjunct communicated experience. The extension in space of the number of individuals who participate in an interest so that each has to refer his own action to that of others, and to consider the action of others to give point and direction to his own, is equivalent to the breaking down of those barriers of class, race, and national territory which kept men from perceiving the full import of their activity. (p.87)

To be an active citizen in a democratic society involves, therefore, interaction between people that can create a sense of belonging, which is

one of the core ideas of inclusive education. According to Todd (2007) one way to achieve this aim is through collaborative work of children and young people in schools and services, partnership of parents with schools and with practitioners who work in services external to schools and cooperation between professionals and agencies.

Todd's key assumption is that inclusive education requires ways to hear the voices of children, young people, parents and professionals for action to be taken. Education, therefore, cannot respond to diversity unless the system is able to hear unfamiliar voices. One way of increasing children's participation in schools is to involve them in decision making where they experience collaboration. According to Todd, there is still a long way to go:

There have been major moves to consult with children and young people and to involve them more in schools and services. However, the child's voice is often absent from educational decisions that concern them. It is rarely heard in the deliberations of teachers, other professionals and policy-makers when trying to fashion education in a more inclusive guise. (p.5)

According to Jónsson (2011) the idea of democracy as cooperation and togetherness includes considering how people live together and especially what opportunities individuals have to conduct their own lives.

#### *2.1.6.4 Exclusion and othering*

A crucial feature in building an understanding of the term inclusive education lies in its opposite term exclusion (Barton, 2012). Slee (2011) argues that we need to seek that understanding "from the perspectives of those who are devalued and rendered marginal or surplus by the dominant culture of the regular school" (p. 107). Exclusion can take various forms, both intended and unintended. It is for example probably not an initial intention to exclude children who receive special education in regular schools, but if the necessary resources are not in place the child could experience exclusion (Vlachou, 1997).

It lies in the very nature of the traditional school as an organization and its original purpose to have social control over children who need to fit into a certain prescribed structure of the education delivered by the school (Garðarsdóttir, 2008; Marinósson, 2011). This idea in itself creates a distance between those who can cope within such a system and those who cannot. In this distance or gap the space for exclusion appears and the

group others comes into existence. The concept othering refers to a social process that includes individuals or groups which endeavour to secure their own image and position by identifying, excluding and oppressing other individuals or groups (Bjarnason & Marinósson, 2007). This behaviour or attitude was defined earlier by Goffman (1963) in the term stigma which refers to similar social construction and leads to marginalisation and dehumanisation of the stigmatised person. Disability and special needs are an example of a characteristics used to categorise individuals that creates stigmatized groups. According to Goffman (1963) a stigma is a discrediting attribute assigned to those who differ in some manner from society's expectations, customs and mores. It results from a social categorisation process that allows for the quick identification of those who are similar and those who are different and can therefore be considered as 'others'. It is not simply the act of categorization that results in stigmatisation of certain groups, but, rather the coupling of negative value judgments with particular characteristics that results in an adverse reaction to difference. Since Goffman's definition the concept has been applied to various circumstances and research fields though mainly within sociology and psychology.

Recently, Link and Phelan (2001) developed a conceptual framework for stigma that addresses the role of power in discrimination. They apply the term when "elements of labelling, stereotyping, separation, status loss and discrimination co-occur in a power situation that allows the components of stigma to unfold" (p.367). In their framework, stigma is conceptualised as a five stage process: 1) people distinguish and label human differences; 2) the dominant cultural beliefs link differences to negative stereotypes; 3) labelled persons are placed in distinct categories, separate from the dominant culture; the creation of 'us' and 'them'; 4) labelled persons experience status loss and discrimination leading to unequal status; 5) discrimination becomes possible when a power differential exists between the labeller and the labelled (pp. 367–375). At stage three the distinction between 'us' and 'them' is confirmed when the labelled is thought to 'be' the thing he is labelled by. For example, by referring to people as being disabled, being special education students, being slow learners etc. rather than having physical impairments or additional learning needs. Thus the focus is on the person not the impairment or disability. The fact that people are categorized in two groups 'us' and 'them' calls for the ethical question whether or not some people are more valid than others. In terms of education, Allan (2008) offers some insight into this in comments from parents who have experienced humiliation from the school faculty because of their children's special needs or disability. Most of the comments refer to

the idea that the children concerned are not valued the same as 'other' children. Comments from teachers in a study on the impact of reform on students with disabilities express this view as well:

Teachers don't want them. If my job depends on their test scores and they are reading at a first- or second-grade level and I am teaching fourth grade ... I don't want those kids. I do because I am a teacher and went into teaching to help kids. But if my job depends on it ... my care payments depend on it ... my apartment payment depends on it ... I don't want those kids. (p.17)

Jónsson (2011) explores the reason for such attitude; why does the teacher not want to have children with special needs or disability in his classroom? He offers two answers; the former is practical and is about inadequate circumstances in schools that make it impossible for teachers to respond to all students. The second is theoretical and lies within teachers' perspectives on the teacher's roles in regular schools; a vision that does not suppose that teachers should teach all students. This perspective accounts for segregation; general schools are for normal students, those who are not normal for some reasons do not fit in and should be educated elsewhere.

The consequences of any form of exclusion and othering attitudes are mostly noticeable in terms of social attitude and actions. Less focused on, but even more significant, is how this affects what kind of education 'the others' or those who are excluded receive from the school system. Jónsson (2011) discusses this in relation to educational organisations that fail to instil democratic attitudes among their students. Such an organisation could hardly be considered a proper educational organisation. In this regard, Jónsson (2011) suggests the distinction between training and education. As a consequence, the question can be asked whether the education of the others is seen as training, but as for those considered to be normal, they receive an education.

#### *2.1.6.5 Different interpretation – different strategies*

The concept (of) inclusive education has different meanings in different contexts. This can cause complexity and confusion, making it more difficult to decide upon how it is implemented. In cross-cultural dimensions the complexity appears in how countries deal with inclusion in different ways, depending on the legislation, history and culture in each country. Another dimension of the complexity is the different terminology used in various

countries. In the Icelandic language, for example, three words are used for the English term, that is, skóli án aðgreiningar. A direct translation would be a school without segregation. In the Netherlands the English term has been used as *inclusief onderwijs*, but in 2005–2006 another term, *passend onderwijs*, was introduced by the Dutch government. This term, which can translate as appropriate education, means that an appropriate place for each child should be found in the school system (Passend onderwijs, 2009).

Ainscow (2005) has pointed out how in England there is considerable confusion as to what inclusion means. His work with supporting English LEAs (Local Educational Authorities) developing a definition of inclusion has demonstrated that each LEA's definition of the term varies, because of the need to take into account local circumstances, culture and history (Ainscow, 2005). Thus different definitions of inclusive education emerge both internationally and at local levels. The UNESCO definition of the term inclusive education is for example policy-related as it defines a desirable aim for nations of the world to work towards by creating educational systems that seek to reduce or eliminate social exclusion and secure basic human rights through education. It is, however, up to each educational authority to interpret and implement these international agreements. Clark, Dyson and Millward (1995) have pointed out that inclusive education can be discussed within the following six dimensions:

- Policy dimension: national and local policy, relationship between policy and practice at school and classroom level.
- Organizational dimension: the characteristics of schools that enable them to respond to diversity.
- Teacher development dimension: the characteristics of teachers who can respond positively to diversity in the classroom
- Resource dimension: how educational resources (material and human) can be so managed as to promote inclusion.
- Pedagogical and curricular dimension: to do with what is taught and by what means.
- Values dimension: a philosophical stance regarding human rights, discrimination and the interplay of language with these issues.

These dimensions refer to the main layers of education and schooling and the complexity of creating a unified definition which implies each dimension relates to how each sector operates and connects to students and their learning.

### *2.1.6.6 Policy and practice*

The education system is a particular unit of the structure of every national system. It is indeed one of the most expensive systems in modern societies. In the past few decades there have been educational changes among industrialised countries that move along similar lines. These changes influenced by globalisation and neo-liberalism are rooted in the concepts of market ideologies, cost effectiveness, efficiency, standards, measurable outputs and competition (Barton, 2004; Evans & Lunt 2002; Jóhannesson, Geirsdóttir & Finnbogason, 2002; Lunt, 1999; Tomlinson, 2005).

Globalisation can be explained by how the individual nation-state is influenced by the international world order. This can happen in various spectrums but mainly at economic, cultural and political levels which all are then shaped by technological and communication-related processes. The consequences of these developments have reduced the potential of individual nation states to maintain their national and local characteristics with regard to the main governance factors. Markets, governments and independent political groups within specific nation states have therefore become 'more sensitively adjusted' to each other (Olssen, Codd & O'Neill, 2004, p. 4, cited by Held, 199, p.145). These developments have influenced educational legislation and policy in many Western countries, for example by replacing principles of equity, social progress and altruism (Evans & Lunt 2002, p. 2). Evans and Lunt (ibid) report on consequences which manifest themselves in tension between two opposing points of educational view. There is tension between striving for effectiveness, on the one hand, and pressure for inclusiveness, on the other (p.2). International research shows that this appears to be what most school systems in the Western world are dealing with today (Tomlinson, 2005).

### *2.1.6.7 Teachers' dimension of inclusive education*

In the international literature on inclusive education there is a growing concern about the role of teachers in moving inclusive practices forward (see Allan 2008; Bartolo & Lous 2005; Elhoweris & Alsheikh 2006; Ferguson, 2008; Lawson, Parker & Sikes, 2006; Marinósson, 2011; Tetler, 2005).

As discussed above, the implementation of inclusive education has proved to be problematic and controversial in many countries. The discourse has been directed towards how inclusive education is understood by policy makers, teachers, parents and the public, and what and where the barriers are to its implementation (see Bartolo & Lous, 2005; Bunch, Lupart & Brown, 1997; Gartner & Libsky 1987; Marinósson, 2011). It has become

apparent that teachers are the ones who have the power to bring inclusion forward (Avramidis, Bayliss & Burden, 2000). But at the same time there is a growing heterogeneity of the student body and diversity within regular classrooms and consequent professional demands upon teachers are increasing. These demands call for practical answers to questions such as how can teachers be expected to teach *all* students, including those with diagnosed special educational needs? Although student teachers may go through the same or similar training programmes, their way of interpreting and assimilating learning theories and teaching methods is highly personal. This process is partly shaped by teachers' personal backgrounds and cultures and these, in turn, shape their attitudes to school policy as well as their practices. International as well as Icelandic research indicates that teachers claim to lack the knowledge and resources to deal with the changing role of the teaching profession in the postmodern world (Aðalbjarnardóttir, 2007; Bartolo & Lous, 2005; Jóhannesson, 2006).

A host of research shows that teachers' beliefs are far from being homogeneous towards inclusive education - on the contrary they appear to be multiple and complex (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). There are two main categories that have been identified and can be used to explain and interpret teachers' beliefs: The former is linked with traditionalism in the sense that it expresses a set of educational beliefs which focus on ultimate truths and principles, the intellectual aspects and standards of education, subject matter, spiritual and moral values, tradition, discipline and the authority of the teacher, as well as education as preparation for further education and for life. The latter is a progressive perspective and includes a set of educational beliefs characterised by emphasis on the needs and interests of the child, the freedom of the child and the teacher, permissiveness, life experiences as being educative, the qualities of teacher and student, democratic citizenship, and physical, emotional, and social development; in brief, the education of the whole child (Bunch, Lupart & Brown, 1997).

Research focusing on the attitudes of regular and special needs teachers (Elhoweris & Alsheikh, 2006) found some differences between those two groups of teachers. Their attitudes were influenced by three factors. Firstly, *legalism*, where the importance is placed on the fairness of inclusion as a legal issue and it is viewed as beneficial for everybody; Inclusion is a civil rights issue. The second factor is related to *environmentalism*, as teachers believe that the environment of the general education classroom could meet the needs of all students. The third one is *conservatism*. Teachers who adhere to this factor have some concerns about inclusion and it is viewed as

an inappropriate approach for academic, as well as social success, for all students. It seems that teachers' attitudes and beliefs become more complex when they are concerned with the term inclusion. Avramidis and Norwich (2002) have, to a large extent, reviewed research on attitudes to integration/inclusion (see discussion on the terms in chapters 2.1.5 and 2.1.6) in the years 1980-2000. Their findings show that a positive attitude towards integration is combined with the nature of the disability or educational problem; thus teachers' show willingness to include students with disabilities in line with the degree of the impairment. Teachers are more positive towards students with mild and physical disabilities than towards those who have complex needs (p. 142). With regard to the term inclusion, research shows more complex outcomes linked to several interrelated factors influencing teachers' beliefs. These are variables related to *the child, the teacher* and *the educational environment*. On the basis of these various sources of international research, Avramidis and Norwich (ibid) emphasise the fact that no variable alone can be used to explain teachers' attitudes and it should be noted, furthermore, that the outcomes vary according to national level and educational settings. Their findings show, however, that teachers hold a more positive attitude when inclusion is carefully prepared and planned and teachers have been provided with adequate resources and support. This is actually a crucial factor when it comes to the question of what confirms and what changes teachers' attitudes and beliefs and, even more importantly; how this is linked to practices? An important teacher-variable in this context is *the experience of contact* (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002) and *personal experience* (Lawson, Parker & Sikes, 2006) of children with special needs or disabilities. Lawson, Parker & Sikes (2006) report that in cases where inclusive practices were inherent in teachers' work it was because "[p]eople's experiences of inclusive practices in the schools where they worked had become part of their biographies and informed their views" (p.64) This research is concerned with the teachers' dimension of inclusive education in a policy context and seeks to address how teachers construct their ideas on inclusive education and what role the national education policy may exercise in that respect.

#### *2.1.6.8 The current state of inclusive education*

It can be argued that the ideology of integration and inclusion has changed the way we think about education and its meaning for all children. It has, for example, opened doors for many children who otherwise would not have had the chance to receive any education. It has, moreover, made

education meaningful to many minority children and marginalised children. As discussed earlier, inclusion, in terms of education and schooling can refer to different aspects of school and society and even have different meanings from country to country. While UNESCO emphasizes the importance of access to education in the developing countries, many Western countries maintain the debate about separate or integrated provision, pull-out programmes and extra resources for children with special needs and disabilities.

Countries that have moved towards inclusive school systems and educational policy for the past three to four decades, such as Norway and Iceland, are facing new challenges. This springs from how to manage the diversity within the 'school for all' which has been used as a synonym for the inclusive school. In Norway, which is considered to have a highly inclusive education system, with no state special schools (except for the deaf) since 1999, children receive special education in their local schools. Stromstad (2004) has, on the other hand, reported that teaching based on individual solutions in Norwegian schools has grown from expected 1.5% to 6% and "... 10% of pupils receive special education, and the school allocates 25-30% of the total time resources for special education" (Stromstad, 2004, p. 121). These arrangements are an example of developments within the local schools as a provision for minority and special needs students, since the regular school took over the task of special schools. An example from the current state in Norway is offered by Kari Nes (2004):

The organizational arrangement for teaching "special education" students varies from a few support lessons in or out of class, individually or in groups, to an almost complete separate and parallel system within the school. There are even examples of small separate units for the "special" pupils in or outside the school area that have developed (or continued as previously established), all in a country where special schools do not "officially" exist. The extent of this kind of "internal segregation" is difficult to assess since it is decided and administered locally and since there is little agreement on what to count. (p.128)

The Norwegian case is far from being an exception and the findings of this research show a similar trend. It seems that there is a growing tendency to create a parallel system within the local school to cater for "special" children who are not seem to fit in with the mainstream – which

means that factors such as segregation and exclusion are still at work but now under different preconditions.

There has not been much research in Iceland focusing on inclusive education. However, available evidence, mainly in Master's theses, indicates lack of clear procedures aimed at inclusive education (e.g., Árnadóttir 2010; K. Axelsdóttir 2012; R. Axelsdóttir 2010; Bjarnadóttir 2011; Finnbogadóttir 2011; Gunnbjörnsdóttir 2006). Research relating to students with developmental disabilities also indicates that the implementation of inclusive teaching depends to a large extent on teachers' confidence rather than school-wide decisions. It has been suggested that the main reasons here are the conservatism of the schools, the traditional paradigm of the 'normal' and the tendency to treat all variations as a problem needing to be fixed (Marínósson 2007, 85). In Iceland, as well as in many other countries (see above), the term inclusive education has come to signify different things and it is uncertain what teachers think and feel about inclusive education, although there are indications suggesting mixed opinions (Capacent Gallup, 2007; Karlsdóttir & Guðjónsdóttir, 2010; Marínósson 2011). Recent comprehensive research on teaching and learning in Icelandic compulsory schools has shown evidence of teachers' concerns that current classroom organisation may not suit students with a foreign background or behaviour difficulties. The initial published results of this study indicate that the ideology of the inclusive school is not well-established in the minds of most of the teachers. Further, 83% of participants in the research (825 teachers, including special education needs (SEN) teachers, head teachers and other staff of 20 schools) agree that teachers do not have the preparation needed to support and care for all children (Björnsdóttir & Jónsdóttir, 2010).

#### *2.1.6.9 From narrow to broad understanding on inclusive education*

As the summary above indicates, the development of the term "inclusive education" embodies a reference to varied social and educational ideas and concepts. Through this process, waves of definitions of inclusive education have appeared, with both a narrow and broad focus on the term, depending on the time and focus of the discussion. Armstrong, Armstrong & Spandagou (2010) have for example pointed out that different understandings of inclusion means that we will get different answers to the questions, "for whom is inclusion and what is the purpose?" Armstrong and colleagues offer the following definitions that invite different answers to those two questions:

- Inclusion is about all students with disabilities participating in all aspects of the school life within the regular school to provide them with access to the same educational experiences as other students and full citizenship in an inclusive society.
- Inclusion refers to students with disabilities and special education needs and their increased participation within the education system, with the aim of providing an education that responds to their individual needs and preparing them for life after school.
- Inclusion refers to all students actively participating in schools that are organised in such ways that all students are valued and which constantly problematize notions of inclusion and exclusion and of different ways of being (Armstrong, Armstrong & Spandagou, 2010, p. 31).

According to Armstrong and colleagues (2010), these three approaches lead to three different pathways towards inclusive education. The first, although presenting a narrow definition regarding the groups referred to, involves the idea that a fundamental change has to take place in the education system regarding e.g. values, attitudes, the organisational structure, curriculum and criteria for achievement. According to the first definition, it is likely that schools that are committed to these ideas would respond to the needs of disabled students as well as the needs of other students who experience exclusion, emphasising general education reforms for the benefit of all students. The second definition is also narrow, focusing on specific groups of students, but does not involve radical changes in existing educational policy and practice. This definition is in harmony with many policy documents on education, but has been criticised for being too close to ideas about integration suggesting individualised teaching and learning. (Armstrong, Armstrong & Spandagou, 2010). The third definition is broader than the other two and refers to all students. Inclusion is defined as an open-ended project where individual differences are the normal criteria. The explanation is rejected that exclusion and inclusion are fixed once and for all, but rather seen as a process of continuous interaction between these ideas (Armstrong, Armstrong & Spandagou, 2010, pp. 31–32).

The narrow view presents inclusive education as being about disability and accommodation, e.g. in ideas about integration (Slee, 2011). The broader view introduced by, for instance, Artiles, Kozleski & Waitoller (2011) considers inclusive education to be a global movement comprising a broad range of groups vulnerable to marginalisation for various reasons.

They conceptualise inclusive education as “a means to provide students with educational access and opportunities to participate in society” (p.9). In this study I apply the broader understanding of inclusive education (see chapter 1.2 The context of the study) and see it as the task of all educational stakeholders to overcome barriers to learning and to provide all students with quality education.

## **2.2 The development of my own understanding of the term “inclusive education”**

When I look back and try to put a finger on how I first understood inclusive education when I started to read about the concept around the year 2000, I think the words equality and equity can best describe my understanding. My ideas were grounded in a human rights view to the effect that no person is more valuable than another and that schools should provide students with high-quality education, regardless of their background, circumstances or ability. I am not certain, however, that I was aware of the multilateral and complex references these words and ideas have in relation to inclusive education – that understanding came much later when I explored the issues for this doctoral research and is related to what is noted in the UNESCO document *Educational Equity and Public Policy: Comparing Results from 16 Countries* (2007) namely that the term equity is subject to variety of interpretations and “opinions diverge about what aspects of education should be distributed “equitably” to whom and about what levels of disparity are “equitable” or “inequitable”” (p.15). At first, my ideas were concerned with access to education (equality of access) – and although I have explored inclusive education from other viewpoints – education access is still an important component in my understanding of inclusive education. The same is iterated in the above mentioned UNESCO document: “education access is the most basic equity concern because learning, regardless of the quality, cannot occur without access” (p.23) as well as in the Policy Guidelines on Inclusion in Education (UNESCO, 2009). Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948) defines the right to education as one of the fundamental rights of all humans. It is then the obligation of governments and educational authorities to enable their citizens to have access to education. Access – in its literal meaning – is not enough, however, since there are more layers involved in the idea of access that I gradually understood to be fundamental factors in how I understood educational inclusion. One dimension is participation and quality – everyone has to be able to fully

participate in education to equally benefit from inclusion. There can be hindrances – structural or ideological – that prevent students from using various existing educational facilities and opportunities. In a new UNESCO Handbook on Education Policy Analysis and Programming (2013) it is highlighted that equity is an important aspect of education policy and the level of equity in the provision of education affects access to education and participation in education (p.27). This is particularly important with regard to the question whether education services are provided equally to all groups of students, paying special attention to the actual access and participation by sub-groups. Earlier in this chapter (2.1.2 Segregation and Schooling) it is mentioned how certain groups of students, previously excluded, gained access to the public school system. This development has continued and public schools in many Western countries now include a spectrum of students with various and multiple needs which schools are by law required to cater for. When access to education is increased, this calls for more and different resources of various kinds. This has become most evident through the process of meeting students in regular schools whom the schools have identified as being in need of special education. When access is expanded it has to be ensured that the level of participation and the quality of education do not fall short of basic quality standards. Equity in education therefore includes the exploration of “whether education services are provided equally to all groups, and involves paying particular attention to the actual access and participation by sub-groups” (ibid, p.27).

The summary in the chapters above describes how concepts on inclusion have developed from various ideas that include issues along the axis of both inclusion and exclusion. They therefore appear in various forms. This has not occurred in a linear way, as all these ideas can be active in one culture at the same time. Kozleski, Artiles and Waitoller, (2011) talk about waves of inclusive education based on “country’s historical commitment to inclusive education and its attendant historical legacies about difference” (p.7). When I started to read and think about inclusive education, my ideas and attitudes towards difference and diversity were already shaped by my upbringing, education and culture. I grew up in a small village in the countryside and in my school and classroom there were children with developmental and physical impairments. They also took part in the “summer work camp” (vinnuskólinn/unglingavinnan) organised by the municipality for teenagers during the summer. Furthermore, there were in my village people who for various reasons were seen to be different, but nevertheless belonged to the community. As for “waves” and the development of ideas about inclusive education and my background, I saw

it as normal from a very young age that people with a disability or “this and that” belonged to the community – school and society – but were not kept apart.

Some ideas have a greater impact on us than others and in my case I guess it was when I first read about the perspectives of the social and medical models of disability (see discussion about the perspectives in chapter 2.1.1 Perspectives on Disability). I was in no doubt in which channel my ideas should run, the social perspectives were consistent with my view of life at that time.

My understanding has, therefore, developed according to what is described in the chapter above; that is, from a narrow to broad understanding of inclusive education. Part of this process is the continuing struggle with words, concepts, ideas and theories. This is a positive struggle in the sense that without it we take things for granted and would hardly move forward in our search for a better education for everyone.

The toughest challenge is to be critical of our own position, how words are used and how we interpret ideas. Without constant and critical reflection, we risk becoming so accustomed to our own ideas that we do not hear or see anything else. Allan and Slee (2008) offer a discussion among researchers in inclusive education on the role of ideology in their researches and quote a colleague who said: “Ideology is like sweat: you can’t smell your own” (p.54). The same applies to how we use words and our awareness of this. When I went through the interim review of this doctoral project, one of the external examiners commented on my use of terms, for example the difference between “children with SEN” (which I used in my text) and “children diagnosed as having SEN” and he asked: Is the use of SEN language counter-productive to the realisation of inclusive thinking and practice? This discussion has reference to how we determine and locate “difficulties” that students are considered *to have*. Historically, evidence indicates that students’ difficulties are their problems – their inner characteristics – that need to be responded to, for example by categorisation and then, for example, special education. This approach includes a medical approach towards students which sees the student – the child – as the problem and implies the use of clinical methods to define student’s special needs and thus “seeing students as diagnosable subjects assumes that they are in “need” of something – they are regarded as “defective”. (Jóhannesson, 2006, p.113). An opposite view – which I adhere to – is to look at education through an inclusive lens which “implies a shift from seeing the child as the problem to seeing the education system as the

problem” UNESCO, 2009, p. 14). It is the responsibility of the system/the school to identify barriers and difficulties that students face and respond to them by non-discriminating means with a focus on quality. This approach requires that we simultaneously explore exclusion as well. Exclusion is another example of a concept that moved and developed my ideas about inclusive education and broadened my understanding. I totally agree with Allan and Slee (2008) when they say: “Reducing educational exclusion and moving towards more inclusive futures for students disadvantaged by the complex interactions of poverty, disability, race, language, geographic location, sexuality and gender with pedagogy, curriculum and the organisation of schooling is at the centre of our educational project” (p.11). Exclusion is much more than the visible action of excluding someone from certain place or area. It has – as inclusion – references to all layers of the education system and moreover “in different societies different individuals and groups become more vulnerable and susceptible to exclusion” (Slee, 2011, p.35). An inclusive approach to education requires that we constantly and critically explore the dominant culture of the school from the perspective of those who are somehow marginalised by the system.



## **3 The research**

This chapter provides an overview of the research process in two main sub-chapters. First the theoretical perspectives are introduced and explained. Then the research methodology, design and approach is outlined followed by a description of the purpose and the main questions of the study, the research site and participants introduced and how the data was generated and analysed. Finally I address ethical concerns and explain changes that occurred during the research process

### **3.1 Theoretical perspectives used in the research**

In this chapter I will introduce the theoretical framework underpinning the methods used in this qualitative research. The approach is located within the interpretivist tradition and informed by social constructionism and post-structuralism.

#### **3.1.1 Interpretivist approach**

The research is qualitative in character which means that its primary aim is to understand the meaning of human action (Schwandt, 2007). The ontological assumption is characterised by the vision that reality is subjective and multiple as seen by the participants in the study. The researcher therefore seeks to embrace the idea of multiple realities (Creswell, 2007). The research is framed within an interpretive paradigm (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Bogdan & Biklen, 1992) that has its origin in the hermeneutic tradition with its roots in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century philosophy and hermeneutics of Droysen and Dilthey (cited in Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, p. 227; Schwandt, 2000) who were concerned with the interpretative understanding of human sciences which have been described as *Verstehen* (a German term for understanding). The *Verstehen* sociology developed as a critique of the 19th century dominant philosophy of positivism. The *Verstehen* approach claimed that human sciences were a different paradigm from natural sciences, aiming to understand human actions instead of offering causal explanations of certain phenomena as practised under positivism. According to the *Verstehen* a lived experience is considered to be essential and inherently meaningful (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, p. 227).

A researcher who follows and works according to an interpretivist paradigm – where the aim is to understand a particular social action – thus endeavours to acquire an understanding and the meaning of what constitutes the action. Schwandt (2000) has explained how different philosophical strands within interpretivism can offer disparate approaches to the process of interpreting or understanding; that is achieving *Verstehen*. Firstly, the researcher needs to grasp the subjective consciousness or intent of the actor from the inside in order to understand the meaning of human actions – empathic identification. Secondly, the researcher makes use of phenomenological sociology, which is concerned with understanding how the everyday, intersubjective world (the lifeworld) is constituted. The third approach to interpretive understanding is borrowed from the idea of analysing language games (how we play with language), which draws attention to how complex our use of language actually is. Furthermore, these language games constitute a different meaning in different cultures, as each of these games has its own rules and criteria that make the game meaningful to its participants (p.191–193).

The interpretivist approach, explained above, is used in this research to analyse and understand how teachers construct their ideas on inclusive education and what role national education policy may exercise in that respect. I make use of two broad theoretical perspectives, which I consider useful to explore and interpret the data and the overall approach to the research. These perspectives serve as tools to unravel the complex social, historical and cultural environment that shapes teachers' ideas, their roles and work. These are *social constructionism* and *post-structuralism*. These perspectives embrace aspects of the understanding of human actions, but from a different viewpoint, which I will now explain.

### **3.1.2 Social constructionism**

Social constructionism is an epistemological strand, which focuses on the making of meaning and power where the aim is to understand how phenomena are socially constructed. The focus is on how meaning is constructed in social contexts, and the world we live in is considered to be the product of social and cultural processes, intersubjectivity and interaction (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). With our diversity, distinct experience and background, we construct the social world around us on the basis of a world already constructed in particular way. This is a process that occurs through steps of externalisation – objectivation – and internalisation. In this view, meaning is considered to be activated as

individuals transform various impressions, which they convert into new knowledge (Schwandt, 2000, 2007).

An important feature inherent in this process is the importance of culture and context in order to understand what occurs in society and how we understand the world; that is, the categories and the concepts we use (Bjarnason, 2006; Gergen, 1994). In terms of the main concept in this research – inclusive education – social constructionism offers tools to look at how social phenomena around inclusive education are externalised, objectified, internalised or institutionalised; accepted or rejected. It helps to ask and seek answers to what constitutes our ideas on inclusive education and how new ideas around inclusive school and education are constructed. It gives scope to explore if and how we need to reconstruct our ideas on education and learning parallel to the construction of ideas on the inclusive school?

### **3.1.3 Post-structuralism**

Post-structuralism involves theories and ideas, which have their origins in the disciplines of philosophy and sociology. It does not have a strict definition and is often confused with postmodernism as some of the basic tenets would be the same. Indeed post-structuralism is probably best described as a ‘movement’ of ideas or a set of theoretical positions, which developed as responses to structuralism. The central criticism of structuralism was its notion of defining an inner, universal structure, such as how society develops, the structure of language, how children learn a language, etc. structuralism does not account for historical or cultural circumstances; in contrast post-structuralism considers for instance that our human nature develops through our relationship with others. People are social beings because we have relations with other people. Those relations are historical and social in nature, but not based on universal structures (Jóhannesson, 2010b; Peters & Wain, 2003, pp. 60-61). The essence of post-structural thinking can be explained by the words of Bredo (2006): “If there is no fixed or neutral place, no center or basic foundation from which to gain a full perspective on other perspectives, then diverse perspectives and/or epistemologies gain coequal status” (p. 19). This understanding derives from the idea that reality is fragmented and diverse.

A constructed practice of education and learning is, for example, how education has most of the time been organised in a traditional way with a group of students, each sitting quietly at a table in a classroom and listening to the teacher, who without any doubt controls the lesson; learning and

communication. In this situation education means pure academic knowledge obtained from schoolbooks and the teacher. From the mid twentieth century this view on education has been challenged by educational scholars and today we have multiple definitions of education and learning (Slee, 2011; Tomlinson, 2005). For those who adhere to post-structuralism it is, contrary to the traditional view, considered normal that there are multiple truths about things, the world is not two-sided – black or white – as reality is far more complex. Ideas from post-structuralism are, therefore, useful for critically examining how knowledge is produced around educational issues, which rest on divergent foundations. According to Lee (1992, p.7) post-structuralism is valuable for educational research for the following reasons:

- because it takes social complexity seriously and attempts to work with it rather than reduce and marginalise it; that is, it addresses practice;
- because it refuses the opposition between the individual and the social and has ways of investigating the relation between them;
- because it theorizes power and allows an explicitly politically informed research practice.

Post-structuralism is more than a way of thinking as it also offers tools used by post-structuralist researchers. From this toolbox I make use of – when analyzing the data – a technique developed by the twentieth century philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) who introduced the concept of deconstruction. The concept is used as a tool to analyse a particular text where the main aim is to challenge the foundations of the text and draw attention to contradictions. The practice of this approach may include creating new links and conjunctives, using elements of the original text. These procedures involve the exploration of symbols and discourse, the form of the narrative, which could be characterised by a certain ideology or view (Allan, 2008; Sigurðardóttir, 2009). Derrida's philosophy of deconstruction is, therefore, a way to rethink the system, which surrounds us and shapes all our thinking. Language or discourse is seen as the fundamental factor which shapes the system, because all intellectual and significant interpretations happen within language and discourse. By criticising and rethinking the pluralism which lies behind the discourse it is possible to unwind the system of power, which is built into the discourse (Sigurðardóttir, 2009). The main purpose of using such discourse procedures is to analyse power, mainly normalised power, i.e. the hidden power, which is there without being noticed because it is not applied. The

hidden impact of a text on our way of thinking makes us actively complicit in becoming the same as the others (Jóhannesson, 2010a). In terms of inclusive education, these post-structural ideas are used to understand how power is exercised upon teachers and how they are controlled and constrained to behave in particular ways (Allan, 2008).

### **3.2 Research methodology, design and approach**

Interpretive research has been defined as the study of the immediate and local meanings of social actions for the actors involved (Creswell, 2007, 2012) as explained at the beginning of the chapter. The subject matter of such research is – people – who have ideas about their world and attach meaning to what is going on around them. This research takes shape of Creswell’s (2007) approach to qualitative research which involves the following key characteristics, seen as fundamental to the whole research process: The researcher collects data in natural settings – in the field where the participants experience the research issue. The researcher is the key instrument, which means that he is the one who gathers the information. There are multiple forms of data, including interviews, observations and documents. The data analysis is inductive, that is, the researcher builds the patterns, categories and themes from bottom-up. “This inductive process involves researchers working back and forth between the themes and the database until they establish a comprehensive set of themes” (p. 38–39). The interpretive focus is at the forefront in all the process and emphasis is placed on the participants’ meaning by understanding and learning the meaning that the participants hold about the issue. The research process is not fixed, it is an emergent design and the initial plan – actually all phases of the process – may change or shift, including the questions and the forms of data collection. A qualitative researcher may use a theoretical lens to view his study, such as certain concepts from various perspectives. The researcher endeavours to develop a complex picture of the research issue by reporting multiple perspectives and interactions of related factors (p. 38–39). Drawn together, the focus in qualitative research is on studying things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Qualitative research can adopt various approaches, that is, it can take different forms, such as narrative research and phenomenology. Whatever its form may be, the emphasis is on the process of research as “flowing from philosophical assumptions, to worldviews and through a theoretical

lens, and onto the procedures involved in studying social or human problems.” (Creswell, 2007, p. 37). The framework used in this research is a combination of a case study and ethnographic approach. A case study is a common method of conducting a qualitative inquiry. It is a strategy preferred:

when the inquirer seeks answers to how or why questions, when the object of study is a contemporary phenomenon in a real-life context, when boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clear, .... (Schwandt, 2007, p.28)

A case study is either seen as a methodology or a research strategy (Creswell, 2007). In this instance it is used as a design or framework for a qualitative research project.

As the research focus and questions refer to the individual within society and culture, I have chosen an ethnographic approach to focus upon the socio-cultural context, time and space. Ethnographical research methods have their origins in the field of anthropology and involve an intensive study of the features of a culture and the patterns in those features (Gall, Borg & Gall, 1996, p. 607). One of the main characteristics of this type of research is the focus on a group that shares a culture and by looking at each individual in more depth information on the larger culture can be obtained (Gall, Borg & Gall, 1996; Robson, 2002; Tedlock, 2000). Another characteristic of ethnographic research is the emphasis on the perspective of the members of the culture (emic) that is the participants’ viewpoint and how they define their own reality and experiences (Gall, Borg & Gall, 1996). This focus is useful as my aim is to look at individual teachers in their own cultural context and try to understand how the existing culture and education policy shapes teachers’ ideas of inclusive education.

### **3.2.1 The purpose and questions of the study**

As mentioned in chapter 2.1.6.7, Teachers’ dimension of inclusive education, there is a growing concern about the teacher’s role in moving inclusive practices forward. In this research, as stated in chapter 1– Introduction of the research – the overall aim of the study was to explore the interplay between national education policy and teachers’ perceptions of their role in the inclusive school. Thus my research subject is dependent on a range of complex and interrelated, social and cultural factors – for example, education acts and curriculum, teachers’ work habits and culture,

teachers' attitudes as well as general attitudes to education – which cannot be seen as separate influencing factors.

The research questions are introduced in chapter 1.1. Research questions, but repeated here for convenience:

The main research question for the overall project is how teachers construct their meaning and knowledge relating to their concepts and understanding of inclusive education.

The following themes and sub-questions emerged from the data:

Theme I – The social construction of teachers' knowledge, roles and responsibilities in the inclusive school – the cases of Iceland and the Netherlands

- How do teachers construct their ideas about the teacher in the inclusive school?

Theme II – Icelandic teachers' discourse on inclusive education – its possibilities, limits, and relationship with the official dialogue

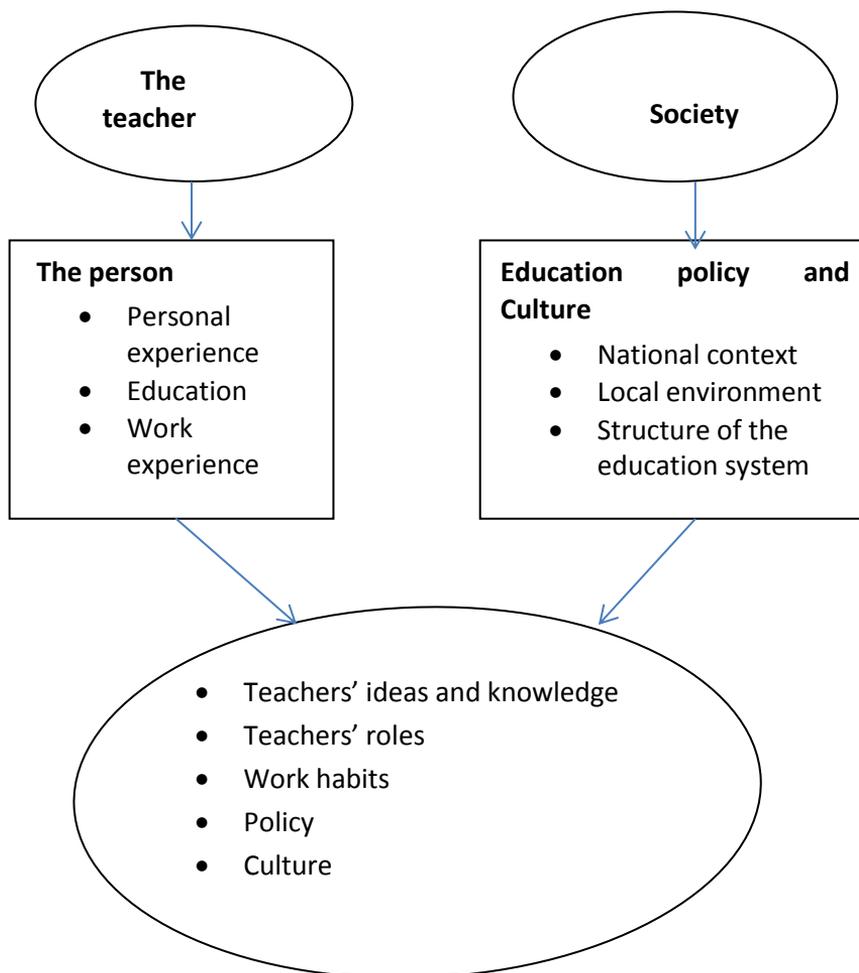
- What characterises and legitimises teachers' discourse on inclusive education?
- What are the contradictions in teachers' discourse on inclusive education as well as those occurring in official dialogue?
- How have teachers involved themselves in the discourse?

Theme III – Icelandic teachers' professional practices and perspectives about inclusive education

- What characterises teachers' ideas of their professional practice in a school that is expected to aim for inclusive education?
- In what ways do teachers' perspectives on their students' learning and learning potential coincide with ideas about inclusive education?

My interest in the research topics is reflected in the above themes and questions; thereby the issues have a reference to teachers and how existing culture, society and education policy affect the way teachers construct their concepts and knowledge relating to inclusive education. In theme I, my aim was to understand how teachers construct their ideas about the teacher in the inclusive school. Does it, for example, relate to their education, the leadership of the head teachers or the school culture? How and why do they have certain ideas? In theme II, I wanted to approach the teachers themselves by exploring teachers' discourse on inclusive education in order

to understand – at least to obtain a picture of – the complexity of teachers’ personal and professional expressions on inclusive education with regard to the official dialogue. Theme III, then, refers to teachers’ professional practices and perspectives in relation to their ideas about inclusive education; here I was interested to learn whether issues on inclusive education were somehow included in teachers’ ideas about their own professional work. Figure I below shows how I approached the research aim and questions by analysing separate components – as explained above – relating to “the teacher” and “society” in order to obtain a holistic picture of the research issues.



**Figure 1** The dimension/focus of the research aim

### 3.2.2 Participants, environment and access

The research project was built around five regular primary schools. Three schools are located in Iceland (Schools A-IS, B-IS, C-IS) and two in the Netherlands (D-NL, E-NL). The research participants are fourteen regular teachers, four in the Dutch schools and ten in the Icelandic schools, and four head teachers, two in each of the Dutch schools and two in two Icelandic schools (B-IS, C-IS). The head teacher in school A was not interviewed. The teachers in the Dutch schools and two of the Icelandic schools (B-IS, C-IS) were all responsible for teaching 11-12 years old children when data collection took place. This age cohort was chosen because by this age, teachers claim that things start to become 'difficult' in terms of social and educational inclusion/exclusion according to a pilot interview (see 3.2.3.) taken with one teacher at an Icelandic primary school, prior to the main interviews. The six teachers in school A-IS taught children from 6-16 years old. All the research participants had the experience of having in their classroom (the school year 2006/2007 or 2007/2008) at least two students identified with special education needs or disability, according to the criteria in the country concerned.

The three Icelandic schools are located in one school district in Iceland. The total student population in the district is approximately 2700 in ten compulsory schools. The age range is 6–16 (grades 1–10). Within the three schools there are special units, one for children diagnosed with autism, one for children diagnosed with hearing impairments and one for children with Icelandic as second language. One special school belongs to the district. It is a school with approximately 25 students, and intended for students identified with significant, behavioural difficulties as well as diagnosed with social- and emotional difficulties. The placement in the school is a temporary resort when the regular schools have done all they think they can.

The two Dutch schools are located in the province of North Holland. They are run by a foundation which in total runs 23 schools (21 regular and two special schools for children identified with learning difficulties and behavioural difficulties). These schools have a total of 7000 students. The schools belong to a school type which in Dutch is called "bijzondere scholen" (different/special but not in the meaning of SEN) which means that schools emphasise a certain ideology, religion or particular educational philosophy. The two schools in this research are both Christian schools, school D-NL has 275 students which is close to the average in most Dutch schools and school E-NL has around 300 students in the age range 4–12

(grades 1–8). Although the Icelandic and Dutch schools in this research are different in nature they are similar in that sense that they are rooted in Christianity and inclusive ideology is a part of the education policy.

Different approaches were used to access the schools. In Iceland, the local education authority was approached and asked to name three schools, which would be likely to fit in with the research according to the description of the project. The schools were contacted and the head teachers asked if they would like to take part in the research. They were all positive and gave their permission to conduct the research in their schools, provided that individual teachers were willing to take part. A letter explaining the research, its procedures and what was expected of the research participants was sent to the schools and the teachers.

Contact with the Dutch schools was established at a conference on inclusive education in the Netherlands. At the conference, several schools were introduced, their vision and curriculum. At one such introduction I found a Dutch school where teachers explained the inclusive procedures in the school. Contact with another one was arranged by the head teacher of the first school. The same procedures were used to introduce and explain the research as for the Icelandic schools. In school A-IS (six teachers) I asked for teachers who were teaching students in all grades 1–10 (age 6–16) as I wanted to reach teachers with various levels of experience in terms of students' age. I asked if the head teacher could provide me with two teachers from each level (youngest - grades 1–4, middle – grades 5–7 and oldest – grades 8–10). He contacted his teachers and asked who would be willing and able (with respect to the time schedule of the interview) to take part. The other eight teachers were self- chosen as there were only two teachers in each school teaching 11–12 year old students.

### **3.2.3 Data collection**

The research aims at providing an in-depth understanding of the area covered by the research questions and the focus is on the meaning of particular phenomena – inclusive education – to the research participants. Data sources are fourfold:

Firstly, pilot interviews were conducted with six Icelandic students aged 6–16. The purpose of these interviews was to collect information about students' ideas relating to issues on inclusive education and exclusion. At the beginning of the project my intention was to include students' perspectives on inclusive education as well as those of the teachers. After the pilot interviews with students I decided to focus only on teachers but

used the student interviews to develop the final questions. For the same reason, a pilot interview was taken with one Icelandic regular teacher. With reference to these interviews, themes were generated and a question grid designed, (see appendix B) based on the themes, and intended as a blueprint for the main interviews.

Secondly, data collection by interviews with fourteen teachers and teaching logs from eight of the fourteen teachers took place from February to September 2007. Six Icelandic regular teachers (school A-IS) were interviewed once for about 30–60 minutes. These teachers taught students from 6–16 years of age. Eight teachers both Icelandic and Dutch (two in B-IS, two in C-IS, two in D-NL and two in E-NL) were interviewed twice, first according to the questions grid mentioned above (about one hour for each interview) and then after they had filled out a teaching log for five days regarding one or two students identified in their classrooms with special needs or disabilities. The latter interview took about 30 minutes and centred on the teaching log and the former interview. The purpose of asking teachers to fill out the teaching logs in their classrooms (see Appendix D) was to obtain a detailed picture of what the labelled students did in each lesson and why.

Four head teachers, (one in each of the schools B-IS, C-IS, D-NL, E-NL) were interviewed once for about thirty minutes according to the same questions grid as for the teachers. The purpose of interviewing the head teachers was to learn about their ideas regarding their own and the teachers' roles in the inclusionary process. All the interviews were semi-structured, but further progress was then strongly dependent upon the interviewers' responses. Prompts and probes (see appendix C) were used when necessary (Drever, 1995; Robson, 2002). Table 3 (see appendix E) gives an overview of the interviews. The language of the interviews in Iceland was Icelandic. In the Netherlands, teachers could choose to speak either in Dutch or English. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and each teacher was assigned a capital letter for a pseudonym. Table 1 gives an overview of the data collection by interviews and teaching logs.

**Table 1 Data collection by interviews and teaching logs**

<b>Icelandic Schools</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Interview 1</b>	<b>Teaching logs</b>	<b>Interview 2</b>
School A-IS	6 teachers	x		
School B-IS	2 teachers 1 head teacher	X X	X	X
School C-IS	2 teachers 1 head teacher	X X	X	X

<b>Dutch Schools</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Interview 1</b>	<b>Teaching logs</b>	<b>Interview 2</b>
School D-NL	2 teachers 1 head teacher	X X	X	X
School E-NL	2 teachers 1 head teacher	X X	X	X

My third source of data was written documents, including policy documents both national and local, such as information about the Icelandic and Dutch

school systems; documents from local educational authorities; curricula and legislative acts on equality as well as local documents from each of the schools. By analysing policy documents I focused on the national and local educational environment and looked for continuities/discontinuities between documents, policy and teachers' ideas. These data were collected parallel with other data and later on as well (see. article 2).

The fourth type of data used in this research (see further in article 2) are Icelandic media articles (newspapers and radio and television transcripts) on education which were collected to cover the period of 16 months prior to and concurrent with the research interviews, from the beginning of January 2006 to the end of April 2007, in order to identify public views on education and to locate teachers' discourse within the social, cultural and public context. These data was added to the data at later stages in the research process in order to be better able to answer the research questions on theme II.

The media articles are available from a database offered by the company Fjölmiðlavaktin/CreditInfo (n.d.). When searching the database, the following key words were used (the Icelandic search words in parentheses): inclusive school (skóli án aðgreiningar), school for all (skóli fyrir alla), special needs (sérþarfir), school (skóli), education (menntun), special education (sérkennsla). The search resulted in a total of 352 articles on education out of which 196 were analysed for the purpose of this research. The distinctive feature of these 196 articles was the focus of the subject matter, which related to inclusive education and special needs, rather than, for example, the issue of the length of the secondary school. Special attention was given to pieces written by teachers but 30 of the 196 articles turned out to have been written by authors who identified themselves as teachers.

As can be read in the introductory chapter (1.3 The Icelandic and Dutch education context), there is considerable difference between the Dutch and Icelandic school systems and consequently the schools differ. My aim was to try to find Dutch schools that would not be too different from the Icelandic ones in terms of vision and ideology. The main criterion was that all the schools must be described as working towards inclusion. In order to learn more about the Dutch and Icelandic education policy and practice in a broader context I attended conferences on (inclusive) education in Iceland and the Netherlands as well as in other countries.

By gathering data of these four types I acquired a comprehensive database that gave an insight into diverse aspects of teachers work. The interviews offered the teachers' personal and professional ideas, and by

referring to the teaching log parallel with the interviews helped me to look at teachers' practices together as an integral process. The media articles then relate teachers and their work to the society and culture, and the current official discourse about teaching and education. I also wanted the teachers and schools to be part of my project, if they preferred, thereby the research data gathered could be useful for them as well as for my work. The schools and the teachers could, for example, keep the teaching logs and the interviews for further use. One of the Icelandic schools, for example, planned for the following year, after the interviews and the teaching logs, a co-teaching programme in one of the participants' classrooms. The schools aim was to develop a co-teaching programme by integrate the special teacher in the classroom together with the regular teacher.

### *3.2.3.1 Data collection – challenges*

The research issue – inclusive education – is a complex matter and can have various implications in different countries as chapter 2 indicates. It was, therefore, a challenge to collect data in two countries, using three languages. This called for awareness as to the use of words, concepts and terms when designing the question grids and the form for the teaching log, as well as regarding my general use of language in the interviews and communication with the schools. It is important to highlight the role of language in the research process as it can increase the level of complexity – the messiness of the research – According to Nind et al (2005) “A way forward for researching inclusive school cultures must [...] address not only the shared language that helps to identify the culture but also the different levels of culture” (p.196). An example of this is the use of the words integration and inclusion and what they mean to people; for some they have the same meaning, for others not. Another example of how levels of culture can reflect a certain understanding is that to some people inclusion has a strong reference to disability and dealing with students with disability in regular schools. For others inclusion does not refer to certain groups of students (as discussed in chapter 2 – Theoretical background: Concepts and theories).

### **3.2.4 Data analysis**

The texts were analysed in order to understand the background of the teachers' ideas and practices. I see my task as a researcher in the analysis process is to understand the multiple social constructions of meaning and knowledge that appear in the various data with an emphasis on the

interviews with teachers; thus to hear and understand the teachers' voices and their interpretations of their own realities (Silverman, 2000).

I used discourse analysis, (mainly in article 2) a technique often used by researchers who apply a poststructuralist approach to analyse the data. Discourse analysis has in recent years been used in various fields such as within social- and educational sciences. It has its roots in the humanities such as philosophy, literature and history but has been developed as a tool in research methodology, where the aim is to create knowledge which better reflects human society and behaviour. This methodology seeks to increase the understanding of human society rather than discovering facts (Björnsdóttir, 2003).

The term discourse is actually interplay between talk and text, a public and private experience, a silence, words and functions. By adopting this post-structural thinking the researcher endeavours to deconstruct important issues related to the subject in order to understand it from a new perspective. In order to let that happen the researcher needs to look for hidden impacts, an obscure power which can be concealed – at least is not obvious – behind the text and therefore remains abstruse to the reader. This is one of the definitions of the term discourse where the correlation between the hidden power and the obvious power and how we become familiar with this exercise is in the forefront (Jóhannesson, 2010b; Peters & Wain, 2003; Todd, 2007).

Researchers who adopt discourse analysis to scrutinise their data see language as the main key in analysing peoples' social reality and understanding. The idea that participants' account of an event reflects mainly their inner experience is denied as we are part of particular culture and tradition, which shapes us as persons and our understanding at each time. This reality places constraints on how we think and, therefore, which understanding is possible at each time. This pragmatic approach accounts for language as communication formed by a complex interplay of power which results in a specific mode of expression. By focusing on this typical mode of expression the researcher can identify prevailing attitudes and values. Thus, the discourse is seen as a creative process where phenomena are constructed but not as a static phase (Jóhannesson, 2010a).

Interviews in Icelandic and English were transcribed by myself and the Dutch interviews by a native Dutch speaker. The transcripts of the interviews were analysed in several ways. First, all interviews both the Dutch and Icelandic were analysed according to the themes discussed in the interviews (see appendix B) to obtain a picture of each teacher. Then each

data set was analysed as an independent unit. The data analysis is further explained in the method sections of the relevant book chapter or articles.

In this research, the Dutch data is used as a prism for exploring the Icelandic issues which means that I am deeply embedded in cultural similarities and differences impacting schools, socialisation and society. This does not suggest, however, that I am equally competent at interpreting nuances of meaning in my data as the Icelandic language and culture is more likely to predominate my way of seeing and listening.

### **3.3 Ethical issues and challenges**

It is the character of qualitative research to involve the individual and the interpretation of his environment. Research in the educational sector is especially sensitive in this regard as education is something everyone seems to have strong opinions about. Teachers may have their professional views on certain subjects, but they are also individuals with different backgrounds, feelings and beliefs. Thus it is essential to respect people's private views and values, a point of particular importance when investigating foreign school systems and their local cultures.

One of the challenges I faced was teachers' different attitudes and beliefs about schooling and education in the two countries explored in the research. Sometimes it was challenging for me to listen to teachers expressing opinions totally opposite to my own, such as that they did not want to have students with disabilities in their classroom. An important technique in such situations was going back to the research aim and questions as well as the theoretical tools and lenses applied to the research and ask questions as to what these views actually meant for my understanding of inclusive education. These opposite views supported the understanding that inclusive education is an active process that includes discourses and practices which legitimate ideas based on segregation and discrimination. This applies to the special needs discourse as well as inclusive education. Thus, those opposite views influenced my understanding of what inclusive education might entail in a given context and contributed to the process of building an awareness of inclusive education as a multiple and complex issue where meanings and definitions are not fixed, but varied and fluid (see for example Allan, 2012; Barton, 2004, 2012; Slee, 2003).

Another challenge was the different use of language and concepts among the teachers in the two countries, for example on integration and

inclusive education. My task was to try to understand what these terms meant to teachers within their own local and professional field.

When the research process changed from doing a monograph to an article based dissertation (see further in chapter 1.2 Why this study?) a new challenge followed when I decided to write two of the articles with my supervisors. The collaboration with supervisors is in general based on a classical learner–mentor relationship but to write a joint article in a peer reviewed journal added some new dimensions to that relationship. This meant that our target was the same; to write an article that would be accepted for publication. The subjects of the articles were based on themes I, II and III (as first introduced in chapter 1.1 Research questions). After the decision on the subjects which was taken by all three of us, each step in the writing process had to be discussed and accepted from both sides. The collaboration was essentially successful and we encountered no serious conflicts or tensions. This was much rather an enormous learning curve for me in many ways. Firstly, it was useful for the future to learn and go through the technical approach from finding a journal and having an article accepted by means of a peer review process. Secondly, it necessitated discussing and explaining the research issue from different viewpoints than mine which helped to evolve the meaning of the project.

Some ethical issues relate to the fact that I was the one who collected the data and to involve my co-authors in the research issue, I had to ask them to trust my data analysis, as well as having to give them an insider perspective on my data without breaking the anonymity of my interviewees. To be engaged in such collaboration opened an avenue for more extensive and deeper dialogue on the complex and contentious field of inclusive education than if I had been the sole author of the articles, as mentioned above. The co-authors had to understand my thinking and writing – which they sometimes did not – and then I had to come up with better explanations for them and for myself. Such a dialogue helped to sharpen the focus and create a shared meaning of the research issue.

Finally, I would like to mention an ethical matter that arose alongside the creation of the findings; this was a kind of a struggle between my personal self as an Icelandic person and a teacher, and the self as a researcher. My findings are perhaps not very positive and even uncomfortable or upsetting for the Icelandic school community in terms of the inclusive image of the Icelandic school system. My findings indicate that there is a reason to seriously question the inclusiveness of the Icelandic school system since it appears to fall short of the ideal presented in official

documents. When dealing with these ethical issues it was, therefore, a benefit to me as a novice researcher to have the opportunity to co-write with experienced researchers – my supervisors – and question my own findings; this is what I found, how do I know?

Informed consent is essential in all research and insists that all research participants must have been properly informed about the aims and purposes of the research and that their participation is fully voluntary (BERA, 2004). Another code of ethics has to do with privacy and confidentiality with respect to the people who participate in research. This means that the researcher agrees to protect personal data against misuse and the access of extraneous parties. Unlike Dutch society, the population of Iceland is small and interconnected and therefore it is difficult to hide the Icelandic schools. I therefore made a point of not explaining too much about the Icelandic schools. Nevertheless, it is possible that someone might find out about the geographical location of the schools, but I have gone to lengths to hide the research participants' identities by referring to them in the articles by using capital letters or pseudonyms in the articles and the book chapter published, and giving them all female pronouns although some of them are male. For the same reason, I refer to students by female pronouns. I am deeply grateful to those who participated in the study, gave their time and shared their perspectives, beliefs, hopes and frustrations with me.

### **3.4 The research process – changes**

Conducting PhD research is a journey where the researcher has certain notions about where to go, but the route is somehow blurred. The process is not predictable, nor should it be, as directions shift on the way and as does the research focus and relevant questions. My research journey – which actually was on hold for a time – is characterised by a number of alterations and reconstruction phases which had a particular impact on the final outcome.

There are some milestones on the route which marked a watershed where the research project changed and moved forward in larger steps than were normally taken throughout the process.

The first milestone worthy of mention was that I started out with the intention of writing a monograph where I would compare the perspectives of Icelandic and Dutch teachers regarding issues on inclusive education. This first step was taken at the Institute of Education, University of London where I commenced my doctoral study in January 2006. When I began to

analyse the data, however, I found it more interesting to turn the focus on the Icelandic issues and allow those more space than I had originally planned. This decision caused some complications which followed me through the whole process, because I had gathered the data with a comparison in mind. This is addressed in more detail in chapter 1.2 Why this study?

The second milestone occurred when I decided to change from a monograph to an article based dissertation. This decision was taken after I had transferred my studies to the University of Iceland, in January 2011, and was allocated two new supervisors. This development partly solved the problem mentioned above, regarding the Icelandic and Dutch data, as I decided to write articles where I presented one specific theme in each article. Theme I – presented in the book chapter – thus reflects my original idea of comparing the Icelandic and Dutch data.

The third milestone was reached close to the end of the process, followed by the interim evaluation of this doctoral project. I received highly useful comments from the external examiners, although one observation was particularly unexpected. They suggested that I should leave out the fourth and last theme on gender and inclusive education. My intention was to explore the role mothers play, as seen by teachers in inclusive schools. The examiners, however, concluded that the theme was not well enough related to the overall thesis and too comprehensive a theme, in addition to the other three, which called for exploring different concepts and theories than I had done with respect to the other three themes. Acting on my supervisors' recommendation I agreed to remove this fourth theme from the thesis – but keep it for later times. This last main change differed from others on this journey in that it speeded up the project instead of delaying it as I was used to when major changes occurred. Most importantly, it provided space for a more holistic and integral focus on the central research issue.

### **3.5 Summary**

In this chapter I have described the elements of the research process. The rationale for using theoretical perspectives based on an interpretivist approach, social constructionism and post-structuralism is explained, as well as the research methodology, design and approach. In the chapter on participants, environment and access, I report on the background and the environment of the research site and explain how schools and participants were chosen and why. The approach and methodology of data collection

and analysis is then clarified. Finally I have addressed ethical issues and challenges connected with the research and the chapter concludes by a summary on changes that occurred during the research process.

## 4 Research findings

In this chapter, the research findings from this doctoral study are summarised and its significance discussed. The findings are presented in three articles (one book chapter and two journal articles, referred to as article I, II and III) that have been published or submitted internationally. Each publication refers to one theme explored in this research, as first introduced in chapter 1.1 Research questions. The data used for this research are for the most part from 2007. In articles II and III there is a note on this, explaining how the economic collapse of autumn 2008 in Iceland had unexpected consequences for the researcher's educational and financial plans and caused delays in the study. The researcher and the co-authors of the articles have taken advantage of this fact, and in the findings (the articles) it is noted that the interval is seen to have sharpened and highlighted some of the conclusions and enabled us to look more critically at the current situation. It should be noted, furthermore, in this regard, that in the meantime no significant changes have occurred in the Icelandic school system.

The structure of this chapter is as follows: First, there is an overview of the findings with an explanation of how they relate to the overall research in terms of themes, authors and publication. This is shown in table 2 below. Then there is a brief summary on the content of the articles printed in their original version in APPENDIX A. In the last chapter –conclusion– the main themes and common threads of the overall findings are drawn together, along with a discussion on the contribution of this work to policy and practice of inclusive education.

## 4.1 Overview of the findings

**Table 2 Overview of the findings**

	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Title/proposed title of article</b>	<b>Publication/proposed avenue for submission</b>	<b>Status</b>
Article I Single-authored.	Theme I – The social construction of teachers' knowledge, roles and responsibilities in the inclusive school – the cases of Iceland and the Netherlands.	The Teacher in an Inclusive School: Influences on the ideas of Icelandic and Dutch compulsory school teachers.	Gunnthorsdottir, H. (forthcoming). The teacher in an inclusive school: Influences on the ideas of Icelandic and Dutch compulsory school teachers. In B. Boufoy-Bastick (Ed.), <i>International Cultures of Educational Inclusion</i> (pp.... ). Strasbourg: Analytrics.	Accepted 09 May 2012 for publication.  The book is planned to be published in 2014.
Article II Written with Ingólfur Ásgeir Jóhannesson co-supervisor.	Theme II – Icelandic teachers' discourse on inclusive education – its possibilities, limits, and relationship with the official dialogue.	Additional workload or part of the job? Icelandic teachers' discourse on inclusive education.	International Journal of Inclusive Education.	Published online 03 June 2013.
Article III Written with Dóra S. Bjarnason supervisor.	Theme III – Icelandic teachers' professional practices and perspectives about inclusive education.	Conflicts in teachers' professional practices and perspectives about inclusion in Icelandic compulsory schools.	European Journal of Special needs Education.	Submitted for a review on 07 February 2014 and after changes on 24 April 2014.  Accepted for publication on 8 may 2014.

## 4.2 Summary of the articles

### Article I

Gunnthorsdottir, H. (forthcoming). The teacher in an inclusive school: Influences on the ideas of Icelandic and Dutch compulsory school teachers. In B. Boufoy-Bastick (Ed.), *International Cultures of Educational Inclusion* (pp.... ). Strasbourg: Analytrics.

The purpose of this chapter is to address how teachers construct their ideas on inclusive education in terms of their national education policy. For this I have chosen two countries, Iceland and the Netherlands – both of which I know personally. I was born and raised in Iceland and lived in both of them with my school-aged children. Through my examination of this I identify how national education policy shapes teachers' ideas about inclusive education.

The chapter reports findings from a qualitative study conducted in four regular compulsory schools, two in Iceland and two in the Netherlands. The aim of the overall study was to address how teachers construct their ideas on inclusive education and what role national education policy may exercise in that respect. The differences and similarities between the teachers in the two countries are highlighted. The findings show that there are considerable differences between teachers' ideas in those two countries, which can be explained by differing educational structures and policies. Further, the findings show that teachers' ideas of inclusive education and the implementation of inclusive practices are sometimes characterised by contradictions in terms of their ideas on education in general, on the one hand, and ideas on inclusive education on the other. This, in turn, means that school staff find it difficult to distinguish between procedures that lead to discrimination and exclusion of students, and those that do not.

### Article II

Hermína Gunnþórsdóttir & Ingólfur Ásgeir Jóhannesson. (2013). Additional workload or part of the job? Icelandic teachers' discourse on inclusive education. *International Journal of Inclusive education*, 17(10), 1–21. DOI:10.1080/13603116.2013.802027

The aim of this article is to examine the discourse of Icelandic compulsory school teachers on inclusive education. From 1974 and onwards education policy in Iceland has been towards inclusion and Iceland is considered to be an example of a highly inclusive education system with few segregated resources for students with special educational needs. In

particular, the article focuses on what characterises and legitimises teachers' discourse on inclusive education, the contradictions in the discourse and how teachers have involved themselves in the process. We use the approach of historical discourse analysis to analyse the discourse as it appears in interviews with teachers and in media articles on education, as well as in key documents issued by Parliament. The article provides an insight into the complexities of this topic and draws attention to underlying issues relevant to inclusive education.

#### Article III

Hermína Gunnþórsdóttir & Dóra S. Bjarnason. (in print). Conflicts in teachers' professional practices and perspectives about inclusion in Icelandic compulsory schools. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*.

Inclusive education policy, now the norm in many parts of the world including Iceland, is highly dependent on teachers for its successful implementation. Research on inclusion often attempts to identify teachers' attitudes of inclusion (against/for). This article takes a different approach. It focuses on teachers' perspectives of their professional practices; that is, how teachers understand what it means to be and practise as a teacher. We interviewed 10 Icelandic compulsory school teachers and also examined teaching logs and associated documents. The findings suggest that the teachers participating in this study have conflicting expectations towards their professional practice. They have unclear ideas about the inclusive ideology, and external factors influence teachers' perception of their professional practice more than reflective practices. We suggest that these findings may well be applicable beyond the Icelandic context, and that they have implications for the overall inservice and preservice education offered to teachers.

### **4.3 Summary and conclusions – Mind the gap!**

This piece of work is about inclusive education. The main research question for the overall project is: How do teachers construct their meaning and knowledge about their concepts and understanding on inclusive education? The findings were introduced by three themes, each of which was given an "independent life" in a relevant book chapter and journal article. I shall not repeat the findings in this chapter, instead I would like to focus on a common thread that was detected in the overall findings – in all themes – that is, the notion of exclusion.

As this work reveals, inclusion is a multiple, complex and multi-layered concept. The same principles apply to the concept of exclusion which is an indispensable adjunct when exploring inclusion. This summary will emphasise how the concept of exclusion appears in the data used in the research and is presented in the findings in more detail than in the articles. It will be discussed by four headings indicating the context. When referring to the findings, those will be categorised according to articles I, II and III.

#### **4.3.1 A space for exclusive thinking and practices**

The findings from all the themes indicate how both the structure of a school system and teachers' attitudes create a space/scope for exclusionary thinking and practices which then affect and hinder students' opportunities to education. Some examples are presented below.

Theme I refers to a comparison where differences and similarities between teachers in two countries are highlighted. As noted in article I, the two school systems involved – Iceland and the Netherlands – are quite different in character and have taken divergent standpoints towards inclusive education; the Icelandic system presents Acts of Parliament and a curriculum emphasising equity and equal opportunities and an appropriate education for all children, whereas the Dutch system has a long history of a segregated school system and special schools. In the findings from theme I it is noted how the divided Dutch system made it easier for the teachers to keep a certain distance between the normal child and one not considered normal. The Dutch teachers say they were trained as teachers of a normal child but not of children who need some extra contribution above and beyond those who are considered to be normal. Thus, the long history of the existence of special schools, as well as the division in teachers' education (special and regular), enables teachers to distance themselves from the “not normal” students. Although the Icelandic school system does not comprise a similar division as the Dutch one in terms of special versus regular schools, the data show, nevertheless, how teachers' belief in the existence of the normal student creates a space/scope for exclusionary thinking and practices.

In the journal article on theme III, teachers' “mind map” of their students is introduced as a dichotomy of normal and not-normal students. In the article it is argued that in attempting to respond to individual needs according to the ethos of individualised learning, teachers constructed almost mutually exclusive student groups both within and outside their classrooms. Such segregated thinking can happen when teachers focus

more on their students' weak sides than their strong sides and, as a solution, students receive additional support provided in segregated groups.

#### **4.3.2 Internal exclusion**

The findings from this research which pertain to exclusion indicate how the schools, as an institutional setting, manage the diversity of their students by maintaining approaches of categorisation and exclusionary thinking adopted in the 20th century, when new groups of previously excluded students entered the school (Slee, 2011). It can be argued that instead of former external exclusion, internal exclusion has taken place and is becoming inherent in the system. Hjörne and Säljö (2004) iterate that „categorization in the school context should be studied as a practice; it is something that people *do* to manage their daily chores“ (p.6).

In this research, the findings (see article II and III) indicate a similar trend; that segregation is seen as an appropriate option in an inclusive system, for example special units for students with certain impairments; taking students out of their classroom to receive special education; special needs are in a pecking order; the othering discourse according to which students described as having additional needs are defined as “an addition” to the regular class. These findings actually reflect Hjörne and Säljö’s claim that „The problem of how to handle diversity is a prominent feature of modern schooling“ (2004, p. 1).

In her analysis of diversity and inequality, Youdell (2006) has highlighted the importance of understanding and identifying “ways of interrupting, abiding educational exclusions and inequalities” (p.33) as well as making sense of “the process through which students come to be particular sorts of subjects of schooling” (p.33). The findings from this study indicate that there is too much emphasis on students as subjects of failure, and exclusive discourses and practices have come to be regarded as common sense which appears to be taken for granted by its users (Slee, 2011). The danger is that if means such as segregation and categorisation are used uncritically, simply to solve institutional dilemmas in handling student diversity, the consequences for students will be damaging. This creates a process where students are marked as subjects, certain types of learners, and some are marked as impossible learners (Youdell, 2006) and this is taken for granted.

### 4.3.3 Who defines and decides?

Complacent attitudes and practices can limit and dilute our understanding of what inclusive education and the inclusive school stands for. It would be interesting, for example, to explore further why exclusion in its various forms is such a prominent feature in the findings of this research, given the fact the Icelandic schools involved are described and defined as representative of inclusion. Is it acceptable that such schools practise and present exclusion in some form or another? Who defines what is inclusive and what is not? Nind, Benjamin, Sheehy and Hall (2005) bring up similar questions in terms of methodological challenges in researching inclusive school culture, as there are no universal and standardised criteria available to identify what inclusive education really is. Thus, it could be a challenge, when collecting and analysing data, to determine how we look for inclusive cultures and practices and how we recognise them (ibid, p. 195).

The latter title of this chapter is “mind the gap”. This is a phrase that reminds me of the phrase “mind your step” that people hear when coming towards the end of an escalator at Schiphol airport in Amsterdam (which I often went through when I lived in the Netherlands). It is played out at every single escalator so you cannot possibly miss the information that there is a gap coming up ahead and you should mind your step. When I was writing the chapter on exclusion, this metaphor of „mind the gap“ came to me and I saw it as illustrating how educational segregation appeared to me in Iceland and the Netherlands. In the Netherlands the segregation is quite obvious in terms of the divided system – it is spoken aloud as in the airport. Iceland is the opposite; it is educationally a homogenous system and the segregation is not obvious. The results of this research show, however, that segregation and exclusion are at work in the Icelandic schools studied in the research. It is therefore important – and in fact necessary – that we should learn to mind the gap which is not spoken aloud in public; in other words, that we learn to identify where segregation and exclusion take place and how it is produced and structured. We have to learn to see differently. I therefore agree with Youdell (2006, p. 42), that we need to learn to:

see new possibilities for dislodging the familiar links between class, race, gender, sexuality, ability and disability and educational inclusions and exclusions, experiences and outcomes. [...] Such changes do not take place through legislation and policy development (although such reforms for equity remain welcome), rather they occur through practising

differently in the everyday, from moment to moment, across school spaces.

To be able to see differently is a process of learned and practised behaviour acquired through critical reflection and examination of people's own ideals, values and ideas on difference in terms of education and schooling. Such critical reflection is, according to Carrington (1999), a prerequisite for creating an inclusive school culture where definitions and decisions are based on ideas informed by inclusive principles.

#### **4.3.4 Access alone is a fake**

The heading of this chapter refers to my personal experience of educational exclusion as mentioned in chapter 1.2. Why this study? What I experienced is in harmony with what many scholars have pointed out regarding integration and inclusion, that is, physical access to a school or education needs to include an attitude of the school community which is characterised by a moral and educational willingness to offer all students quality education.

In article III teachers' understanding on inclusive education is discussed and it is argued that this is most often confined to what Söder (1991) called situational integration; that is, the idea that all students should be together in the same location, irrespective of their needs or impairment. An understanding which is limited to such a definition creates the danger that students' learning is not seen as a continuum. However, if the principles of inclusive education are to be an integral part of teachers' thinking and actions, the structure of the curriculum has to accommodate the notion of a wide variety of learners and emphasise that diversity is a welcome and normal element in the classroom.

In article I where I explore the social construction of teachers' knowledge, roles and responsibilities in the inclusive school, the Icelandic data reveal how the head teachers assumed that their teachers knew and practised inclusive education. The findings however show the opposite, and in some cases teachers express very low ambitions towards students who are considered by their teachers' academically slow learners. Access needs to be discussed to its logical conclusion; it has to be clear how the school and the teachers will respond to students' learning in order to fulfil their learning needs. Effective leadership is thus essential for the success of students as well as teachers and schools (Day, 1995).

When I argue that access alone is a fake I am referring to how students are deprived of their right to a meaningful education if their educational needs are not met. In my view this is one form of exclusion, originating in the assumption that some students are valued more than others as a result of a dominating attitude and understanding that sees difference as a social deviance. The result of continued emphasis on difference as deviance places the focus of the teachers on students' inadequacies rather than their strengths and abilities.

#### **4.3.5 The contribution of this work**

This study was intended to provide an understanding of how teachers construct their meaning and knowledge about their concepts and understanding on inclusive education. It supports the findings of many other research projects, where issues on inclusive education are explored, i.e. that inclusive education is a complex and contested concept (Artiles, Kozleski & Waitoller, 2011; Slee, 2011; UNESCO, 2013). It refers to various aspects of schools and their activities and there is no general agreement on what inclusive education is. The study also supports findings that highlight the importance of a commitment of the whole school community to a successful implementation and to the entrenchment of inclusive practices (Bourke, 2010; Eggertsdóttir & Marinósson, 2005; Marinósson, 2011). Key promoters in that process are strong leaders; school managers and teachers (UNESCO, 2004, 2013).

The findings of this study show, however, that within an education system which, according to law and curriculum, presents inclusion as its main value and ideology, internal exclusion exists in various forms as articles I, II and III illustrate. These varying manifestations of internal exclusion appear both because of contradictions in policy (see article II and discussion below) and as a result of teachers' practices (see article I and III). A solution of this problem is not suggested here, although the findings reveal certain possibilities. Further research is needed at all levels, from policy to practice.

I would like to finish by highlighting some implications for policy and practice emanating from this work. As chapter 2.1 Historical background and the development of the term inclusive education shows, it is difficult, and perhaps impossible, to pinpoint a certain starting point for inclusive education as clusters of influence have contributed to the field (Armstrong, Armstrong & Spandagou, 2010; Slee, 2011). In view of this, I argue that a

definition of inclusive education needs to be characterised by flexibility instead of a fixed categorisation of certain students and their situation.

I believe the most powerful way to understand and articulate issues about inclusive education is to focus on and explore how and why exclusion appears as a factor in students' education. Our task is to recognise and remove hindrances – whatever they may be – to students' education. In order to address exclusive issues faced by students it is crucial that the focus be not solely on students; parents' and teachers' views and experiences need to be addressed to obtain a wholistic picture.

The policy – both at national and local level – must not issue misleading messages regarding students' rights to education. It is not acceptable that in one document their right to education is stated (Lög um grunnskóla nr. 91/2008; The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012), but restricted in the next document (Reglugerð um nemendur með sérþarfir í grunnskóla nr. 585/2010). There ought to be agreement on the fundamental values laid down in the policy and clear messages to schools about their responsibility to find solutions and ways for all students to achieve from their education. The policy must be followed by providing guidelines and direction for school districts, schools, head teachers and teachers regarding the implementation of inclusive ideology and practices. A strong leadership characterised by the mission of inclusion is the first step in creating an inclusive environment and practices. The leadership is not limited to head teachers, however; it must also be clearly visible at national and district levels, indicating inclusive priorities and directions in policy and curriculum. Teachers – as the key promoters – must be equipped with and ensured appropriate and effective means to understand and create inclusive school practices.

Important role of policy makers and school managers is to provide ways for teachers to examine and understand assumptions about difference and inclusive education parallel with concepts about the purposes and goals of education and schooling. One way of achieving inclusion is to understand the elements of exclusion in policy and practice. It can be argued – and perhaps it is unavoidable – that policy involves contradictions as it must refer to various groups and stakeholders that have different priorities. The findings from this research show, however, that such contradictions cause problems to teachers because they are not discussing those conflicts and the consequences for students' learning.

Inclusive practices require teachers to reflect critically upon their current practices and analyse them in terms of the concepts of inclusion and

exclusion (Allan, 2008; Allan & Slee, 2008; Slee, 2011). In order to do that, time and situation has to be arranged within teachers' working day to explore fundamental issues on inclusive education, as well as personal beliefs about teaching and learning, difference and disability. The findings from this research show that teaching is directed at the so-called normal student and students who fall at either end of the academic continuum seem to be a challenge for many classroom teachers. As a result, those students are not receiving the support they need to maximise their learning.

The sum of the argument is this; in spite of a highly ambitious policy, supporting school districts and enthusiastic school managers, it is *the teachers* who have the power to make changes and let inclusive education become reality in the classroom. In article III, I report on findings showing that the teachers' professional portrayals of themselves do not indicate principles of inclusive education. I argue that in order to become inclusive teachers, principles of inclusive education need to be part of how teachers see themselves as professionals. There has to be congruence between what teachers say they believe and intend to do, based on their ideals and beliefs, and their actual behaviour and actions in classrooms.

Having explored Icelandic teachers' ideas about inclusive education, it seems to me that there is still a long way to go before the Icelandic education system is capable of creating inclusive schools. The PISA results for 2012 (The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2013) show that the attainment of Icelandic students has been falling in the past decade. An interesting result in terms of the findings of this research is that from 2009–2012 an increased number of students are categorised in the PISA results as the weakest students and a decrease occurs among those categorised as the very best students. This is in line with what seems to be the case in the findings of this research and mentioned above; that students at either end of the academic continuum are not receiving relevant support to learn to their benefit. Inclusive education is a powerful tool to improve students' learning and achievement. The positive thing is that we know from evidence-based research that some approaches are more useful than others in creating an inclusive learning environment and culture (see for example Bartolo, et al., 2007; Eggertsdóttir and Marinósson, 2005). The starting questions are: Where do we want to be – and how do we get there?



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## **APPENDICES**

APPENDIX A – Article I, II and III

APPENDIX B – Question grids used in interviews with teachers and head teachers

APPENDIX C – Researcher prompts in interviews with teachers and head teachers

APPENDIX D – Teaching log used by teachers

APPENDIX E – Interviews in Iceland and the Netherlands – an overview



## APPENDIX A – Article I, II and III

Article I – manuscript in book editor's preparation.

Gunnthorsdottir, H. (forthcoming). The teacher in an inclusive school: Influences on the ideas of Icelandic and Dutch compulsory school teachers. In B. Boufoy-Bastick (Ed.), *International Cultures of Educational Inclusion* (pp.... ). Strasbourg: Analytrics.

Article II – Printed as published:

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# **THE TEACHER IN AN INCLUSIVE SCHOOL: INFLUENCES ON THE IDEAS OF ICELANDIC AND DUTCH COMPULSORY SCHOOL TEACHERS<sup>3</sup>**

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## **Abstract**

The chapter reports findings from a qualitative study conducted in four regular compulsory schools, two in Iceland and two in the Netherlands. The aim of the overall study was to address how teachers construct their ideas on inclusive education and what role the national education policy may exercise in that respect. The differences and similarities between the teachers in the two countries will be highlighted. The findings show that there are considerable differences between teachers' ideas in those two countries which can be explained by differing educational structures and policies. Further, the findings show that teachers' ideas of inclusive education and the implementation of inclusive practices are sometimes characterized by contradictions in terms of their ideas on education in general, on the one hand, and ideas on inclusive education on the other. This, in turn, means that school staff find it difficult to distinguish between procedures that lead to discrimination and exclusion of students, and those that do not.

## **Keywords**

- Inclusive education, Educational policy, Influences on teachers

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## Introduction

During the past twenty years the educational policy prescribing *inclusive education* has been widely documented and debated within the academic field. Basically, the policy requires that the whole school environment, practices and structures, how we think about education in general as well as teacher training, should aim at making education inclusive (Ainscow, Booth & Dyson, 2006; Allan, 2008; Slee, 2011). However, research indicates that there has been considerable failure in the implementation of the policy and there are doubts in some quarters about its fundamental elements, such as to what extent the regular compulsory school can indeed accommodate all children (Allan, 2008; Benjamin, 2002; Ferguson, 2008; Jónasson, 2008; Slee, 2011; Tetler, 2005).

The purpose of this chapter is to address how teachers construct their ideas on inclusive education in terms of their national education policy. For this I have chosen two countries, Iceland and the Netherlands – both of which I know personally. I was born and raised in Iceland and lived in both of them with my school-aged children. Through my examination of this I hope to identify evidence on how national education policy shape teachers' ideas about inclusive education.

The main context of this study focuses on Icelandic and Dutch data, which is used as a tool to look beyond the familiar. This enables the researcher to ask questions such as: What is similar? What is different? How can this information be used to create themes? This approach is considered to be useful for shedding light on the hidden characteristics of a local culture, which do not appear except by focusing on unlike but similar data (Barton & Armstrong, 2000; Robson, 2002).

The chapter is categorized into five sections. First, as background material, some structural issues characterizing the educational systems in Iceland and the Netherlands are addressed and the context of the research will be explored by a literature review in the field of inclusive education. Second, the research method will be explained, and in the

third section the findings are introduced. Finally, discussion and conclusion are presented.

## **1. Background**

In this section the aim is to give an insight into the main characteristics of the Icelandic and Dutch compulsory educational systems with emphasis on changes towards inclusive education.

### *1.1. The Icelandic and Dutch education context*

The Icelandic school system consists of four school levels: pre-school education (children 1–5 years old), compulsory (children 6–15 years old), upper secondary (16–20 year olds), and tertiary education. Compulsory education can be traced to legislation in 1908, but in 1946 the first comprehensive legislation about schools was passed.

New educational acts were established for all school levels in 2008. In the Compulsory School Act (Lög um grunnskóla nr. 91/2008) it is stated for the first time that the compulsory school is an inclusive school (article 17). The main characteristic of Icelandic primary schools is that they have, since the first legislation in 1946, been relatively homogeneous in terms of ideology and structure. According to educational laws the primary school is supposed to emphasize equity, equal opportunities and an appropriate education for all children, irrespective of their physical, mental or sensory capacities, their socio-economic, situation, national/ethnic origin or linguistic competences. Schools are obliged by law to educate all children in a successful way and prepare them for participation in a democratic society (Lög um grunnskóla nr. 91/2008). The Compulsory School Act from 1974 (Lög um grunnskóla nr. 63/1974 set the tone for future legislation and policy; compulsory schooling should be ten years and emphasis should be on equity and equal opportunities to education. In the 1980s and 90s the provision of special education within regular schools increased, among other things due to the Compulsory School Act from 1974 (Eurydice 2006; Jónasson, 2008; Lög um

grunnskóla nr. 63/1974; Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture 2002).

Until 1996 the compulsory school system was centralized under the state. An important change occurred in 1996, when the municipalities took over the management of the compulsory schools from the state. That transfer has given the compulsory schools more freedom to develop in different directions e.g. concerning ideology and pedagogy and has reduced the homogeneity (Jónasson, 2008; Sigþórsson & Eggertsdóttir, 2008). By the turn of this century special schools for deaf and blind children were closed down but special-needs departments within some regular schools were established. There are three segregated special schools in Iceland; one for children with multiple disabilities and the others for children with behavioral or psychological difficulties. These schools, like all other compulsory schools, are run by the municipalities. Currently (2012), there are no segregated special schools at pre- and secondary level.

Special teaching is organized by each school, which decides, together with parents or guardians, how teaching should be arranged. The total number pupils of compulsory school age (*including those with SEN*) was 42,845 and pupils with SEN in segregated special schools were 143 (0.3%) in the school year 2008/2009 (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2011). There is no formal unit of inspection but standardized national tests in Icelandic compulsory schools in grades 4, 7 and 10 have long been used as benchmarks for academic performance.

The development both in policy and practice has, in the last years, been towards ideas on inclusive education, taking into account the changes in policy documents by the state and municipalities (Fræðslumiðstöð Reykjavíkur, 2002; Lög um grunnskóla nr. 91/2008; Mennta- og menningarmálaráðuneytið, 2011; Skóladeild Akureyrarbæjar, 2006).

There is, however, evidence which shows that teachers are not satisfied with the current arrangements in compulsory schools, and many of them think that they have reached the limit in handling the diversity of students in Icelandic

compulsory schools (Bjarnason & Persson 2007; Marinósson, 2007; Morthens & Marinósson 2003).

The Dutch school system is organized in three levels: early childhood: (2-4 years old) – there is, however, no formal pre-primary educational provision, but instead various childcare facilities – compulsory education (primary and secondary) (4/5-18 years old) and tertiary education.

The main characteristic of the Dutch school system is segregation. There is a long history of special schools for children with various kinds of disabilities, social and educational difficulties, as well as a wide range of schools based on religious or ideological beliefs. Throughout the 20th century the number of special schools increased as in most countries in Europe, but since the turn of the millennium, the Dutch authorities have tried to reduce segregation within the school system. A turning point in this direction was a new law on primary schools, passed in 1998 under the policy “Weer Samen Naar School” (Together to School) which emphasizes that it is desirable that children from the same neighborhood attend the same school (Eurydice, 2008/9; Eurydice, 2009; Leeuwen, Thijs, & Zandbergen, 2009; Ministerie van Onderwijs, Culture en Wetenschap, 2006a). Regular and special schools are, however, still operating alongside each other with most of the expertise, special knowledge and service limited to the special schools and their staff. Because of this there was slow progress in developing expert services within the regular schools and to counteract the problem a new law was passed in 2003, called the *backpack (het rugzak)*. This law prescribed that children with special educational needs could apply for a special budget (*personal budget*) for the extra support they need for their education. Their parents could then choose where the child went with the budget, to a special or regular school. The basic idea was that the budget should travel with the child, but is not limited to a certain type of school/place (Eurydice, 2009; Fletcher-Campell, Pijl, et al., 2003). *The backpack system* was originally meant to minimize segregation but new research shows that it has actually worked in the opposite direction and induced increased segregation and tremendous expansion in psychological and medical diagnosis of students (Pijl & Veneman, 2005; Spies,

2007). In the school year 2009/2010 the total number of pupils of compulsory school age (including those with SEN) was 2,411,194 and pupils with SEN in segregated special schools were 64,425 (2.7%) (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2011).

The newest policy arrangement introduced in 2005–2006 and entitled *passend onderwijs* (e. appropriate education) is to be implemented in phases, commencing in 2011. It declares that each child should be found an appropriate place in the school system (Passend onderwijs, 2009). School boards will be responsible for finding an appropriate place for each student at school but that place does not need to be at the local school (Eurydice, 2007). A critique of this approach argues that the idea of *passend onderwijs* is not based upon fully inclusive thinking where the child's needs are central. Moreover, it does not presuppose that the regular schools are the most effective means for all children (Schuman, 2007).

The Inspectorate of Education is an executive agency, which falls under the Ministry of Education and monitors the quality of education in all levels.

As the summary above indicates, these two educational systems are different in many aspects. This gives a unique opportunity to identify issues which would be difficult to identify except because of some comparison between dissimilar features.

### *1.2. Background and previous research*

The policy on inclusive education appears in such international declarations as the *Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education* (UNESCO, 1994) as well as in other *United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization* (UNESCO) policy documents on education where there is an emphasis on improving teacher education, the organization of schools, education and teaching (see e.g. UNESCO, 2000, 2001, 2004, 2005, 2006). The policy stems from ideas on equality, quality education for all students, democracy and social justice in schools. The ideology of inclusion is based on the

vision that an inclusive school is one that is flexible and adaptable and education is seen as a process (Ainscow, 2005; Ferguson, 2008; Meijer, 2003). It involves the inculcation of certain values applicable to all students in order to combat all forms of barriers to education. This education policy is widely stated, for example in the *UN Millennium Development Goals*, (United Nations, 2011) in documents by the *European Commission on Education and training* (European Commission, 2012) and by numerous nations and states and international organization (Ainscow, Booth & Dyson, 2006; Allan, 2008; Allan, Ozga & Smyth, 2009; Rannsóknarstofa um skóla án aðgreiningar, 2008; United Nations, 2006; WHO, 2011). Both Iceland and the Netherlands have signed international agreements on more inclusive school systems, such as the *Salamanca Statement*. The process and changes implemented in the school system have, however, been different in these countries, as the summary above shows.

Both in Iceland and the Netherlands, there have been changes leading to increases in psychological and medical diagnosis of students. This has led to the growth of the special education sector as an answer to the education of those students who, for various reasons do not manage to follow the educational path intended for the majority of students (Marinósson, 2002; Schuman, 2007). Increased diagnosis and segregated special education arrangements have a direct link with a *medical model* on disability, which, in an educational sense appears to focus too strongly on what is 'wrong' with a student. This in turn leads to procedures in schools which very often are characterized by following description, offered by Jóhannesson (2001):

Children are categorized with modern, clinical methods and then there is a solution or treatment to remove or minimize as much as possible individual 'otherness', since it will be expensive if legal provision is to be followed on the premise that everyone should get an education and upbringing appropriate to his or her uniqueness (p.13, my transl.).

Such procedures promote a dualism in looking at students, i.e. the majority that is 'healthy'/whole and a minority that is seen as imperfect. In this manner the education of those who are 'able' is seen to be 'normal' but the education of those who are disabled is considered to be 'something else' which needs to be treated differently (Christensen, 1996). These responses indicate failure in the school system and researchers, scholars and parents have pointed out that the current system is not working properly; that it is not serving the children it should be serving (Gabel, 2005; Marinósson, 2007; Rizvi & Lingard, 1996; Tomlinson, 2005).

From the point of view of the *social model* with its roots in disability studies, the picture looks different (Bjarnason, 2010a; Bjarnason & Persson, 2007; Gabel, 2005; Traustadóttir, 2006). Disability is seen to be a social and situational construct created by the interaction between the individual and the environment. It is therefore not realistic to focus on what is 'wrong' with the person or what is missing. Rather, the focus should be on the obstacles created by the environment. Those obstacles can be of many different kinds and have various origins, e.g. social obstacles such as negative attitudes and prejudices (Bjarnason, 2004; Slee, 2011; Traustadóttir, 2003). The degree of personal disability depends, therefore, on barriers created by the society at each time and space (Bjarnason, 2010b; Traustadóttir, 2006; Tøssebro, 2002, 2004). This viewpoint is derived from a constructivist thought known as social constructionism, which emphasizes the actors' definition of the situation. A constructivist position endeavors to explain how human beings interpret or construct assumptions, such as disability, learning difficulties or special education needs, in a social and historical context. The production and organization of differences is at the core of this view (Bjarnason, 2010b; Schwandt, 2007). In terms of education, diversity is seen to be the mainstream paradigm, and each individual is therefore considered to be unique and should be treated as such. One of the main goals of education in line with the social model is to overcome barriers to education so each individual can receive quality education (Allan, 2008; Ferguson, 2008; UNESCO, 2004, 2005)

In the international literature on inclusive education there has been a growing concern about the teacher's role in moving inclusive practices forward (Avramidis, Bayliss & Burden, 2000; Bartolo & Lous, 2005; Bjarnason, 2005; Bunch, Lupart & Brown, 1997; Elhoweris & Alsheikh, 2006; Gartner & Libsky, 1987; Marinósson, 2002; Marinósson, Ohne & Tetler, 2007; Schauwer, 2011). Miller & Hodges (2005), who have done research on the position of blind and visually impaired students in the British school system, pointed out that too little attention has been paid to pedagogy and learning in the context of inclusive education. Failure at this level can cause insecurity among teachers and minimize the quality of teaching (Clark, Dyson & Millward, 1995; Ferguson, 2008). Besides, it has formative effects on teachers' attitudes to current education policy (Avramidis, Bayliss & Burden, 2000; Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Jóhannesson, 2006; Marinósson, 2002; Todd, 2007) as well as their attitude to students' diverse needs and how to tackle them (Abbot, 2006; Ainscow, 2005; Florian & Linklater, 2010).

The role of head teachers in promoting inclusive practices is crucial, as it is they who lead professional practices in schools (Ryan, 2003). The external environment of schools has, however, changed considerably during the past years and affected the role of primary school head teachers. Recent research in Iceland found that head teachers put increasing emphasis on staff-related issues (Hansen, Jóhannsson & Lárusdóttir, 2008). Research on school effectiveness has shown that head teachers, with their vision and leadership, have much to say about the extent to which changes in schools become a reality (Fullan, 2007; Ryan, 2003; Sergiovanni, 2006). Head teachers' leadership styles also influence their success in initiating and sustaining change. A transformational leadership is, for example, the type of leadership characterized by collective decision-making, the sharing of power and influence with staff. Head teachers who adopt this type of leadership are considered likely to have a direct impact on teachers' commitment to reform those educational practices (Sigurðardóttir, 2006).

As mentioned in the introduction chapter, teachers have doubts about the viability of the policy in practice. These concerns gives reasons to explore further the 'teachers' dimension' of inclusive education. The aim of this research is therefore to address how teachers construct their ideas on inclusive education in terms of their national education policy. The research questions for the part of the study presented here were:

- How do teachers construct their ideas about the teacher in the inclusive school?
- What is the interplay between the national education policy and teachers' ideas of their role in the inclusive school

## **2. The Research method and analysis**

The theoretical focus of this research is framed within ideas on social constructionism and poststructuralism, with emphasis on the relationship between meaning and power and on understanding how phenomena are socially constructed in their social and cultural context (Flick, 2004; Schwandt, 2000). The research is, therefore, based on a qualitative approach which includes methods where the aim is to interpret phenomena in their natural environment (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Robson, 2002; Schwandt, 2007; Silverman, 2000).

### *2.1. Participants, environment and access*

The research project is based on four regular compulsory schools in urban areas, two located in Iceland and two in the Netherlands. The Dutch schools are Christian schools, the Icelandic schools are public schools but in Iceland the church comes under the state and the majority of the population follows the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Iceland. The participants are eight classroom teachers – two from each school in each country – and four head teachers. All the teachers are female except one Dutch male teacher and the head teachers were male and female in both countries. The

personal pronoun *she* is used when I refer to teachers and head teachers in this study. The teachers were all responsible for teaching 11-12 year old children in the school year 2006-2007, and at least two students, identified with special needs and disabilities, according to the criteria in each country, were in their classrooms. In Iceland, the local education authorities were contacted and asked to name schools, which would fit in with the research aim, but in the Netherlands contacts with the schools were established during a conference on education in the Netherlands.

## 2.2. Data collection

Data collection was as follows:

*Initial semi structured interviews* were taken with teachers and head teachers (max. one hour). Teachers then filled out over five days a standard form, or *Teaching Log* (a description of a curriculum task students were asked to do) regarding two students with special needs or disabilities (Icelandic teachers in Icelandic and Dutch teachers in Dutch). The intention was to gain insight into their teaching methods and arrangements concerning students with special needs and disabilities. Then there were *post-interview* sessions (around 30 minutes each) where the researcher and the teachers discussed the teaching log and the former interview. The aim of interviewing the head teachers was to gain information about their school's professional emphases regarding inclusive education and how head teachers saw their own leadership roles in terms of inclusive education.

The interviews took place in February 2007 in Iceland, and in September 2007 in the Netherlands. They were all recorded and typed ad verbatim. The interviews were conducted in Icelandic in Iceland and Dutch or English in the Netherlands and were transcribed by myself except the Dutch interviews which were conducted by a native Dutch speaker.

Further, national and local documents were collected in order to look for continuities or contradictions between documents, policy and teachers' perspectives on inclusive issues.

Although the sample is small – four schools, eight classroom teachers and four head teachers – it is a good sample to cast light on the depth of the issue in this research. Moreover, it gives scope to identify what is specific among the teachers from each country and how the knowledge acquired can be used to better understand each school system as well as other school systems.

### *2.3. Data analysis*

The transcripts and the teaching logs were analyzed in order to understand the background and reasons behind teachers' ideas and interpretations of inclusive education by coding in order to develop themes. Moreover, as Silverman (2000) explains the theoretical orientation through analyzing texts: "[the researchers] are more concerned with the processes through which texts depict 'reality' than with whether such texts contain true or false statements" (p.128). The themes were created through a process of asking questions such as what is similar and what is different and why? This approach is considered to be useful for shedding light on the hidden characteristics of a local culture, which do not appear except by focusing on unlike but similar data (Barton & Armstrong, 2000; Robson, 2002).

### 3. Findings

The findings reported under following themes are: *Towards the Inclusive School?*; previous experience of diversity; the role of national educational policy, and the role of head teachers in promoting inclusive education.

#### 3.1. *Towards the inclusive school?*

Despite the fact that teachers expressed very different perspectives on education, at least two common threads were identified from the data. One demonstrating that in both countries schools have clearly opened their doors to diverse students, and teachers expressed views characterized by a willingness to meet students' diversity and additional needs. They attempt to find study material, teaching methods and other support which can best serve their students. The other common thread comes across as a contradiction in teachers' fundamental views on education; namely, their belief in the existence of the *normal student*. According to all the teachers, the normal student can follow the aims of the National Curriculum without additional support and is not considered to have to deal with any *problems*. This is in direct opposition to their view that the school should reflect and embrace human diversity.

As indicated earlier, the development towards the inclusive school has followed different paths in the two countries. This is evident from the research data. The picture that teachers give of their daily work, by interviews and a teaching log, demonstrates at what stage they are in this process. The Dutch teachers are, for example, not convinced how appropriate the inclusive school actually is, because they do not see that necessary pre-conditions for developing an inclusive school will be implemented in the near future, such as providing more specialized staff in the classroom and making the school more flexible. They give as an example, the way in which the structure of additional support for students is organized; for example, where support is arranged by parties outside the school that do not take into account the circumstances inside the classroom. One teacher had to deal with four different assistants who came to assist four students in his classroom at various times during the week. This was occasioned by four students

who had different diagnoses and belonged to four different departments at the diagnosis center which organized and delivered the support. This made it extremely difficult for the teacher to change her plans or do something unexpected as each of the four assistants had a fixed timetable. Moreover, it prevented her from thinking of her students as one integral group:

[...] well I only need like a class assistance or something [...] it costs me a lot of energy to explain to these four persons who come into my classroom about the children [...] I know the child best and I like to have, I like to connect better with the child as well in a small group you know more about the child in the whole class [...] the persons from the outside they come at certain day at a certain time and maybe it is not needed at that time and day and you have to plan it ahead and if there is something coming up I have to cancel them and most times they cannot change the date or day because they have other such schedules as well so that is quite stressful for teacher as well and if I could do it all by myself, I could see it better and I know the child better and yeah it is my group and I have to deal with the child the most so [...] I would like to do the instruction and the class assistance can do the around or helping out in the group [...](Initial interview – Teacher 3-NL).

This is seen by the Dutch teachers as a barrier to inclusive practices. The above description is not what the Icelandic teachers have to deal with as in the Icelandic case the support is organized by each school with an inside staff. The Icelandic teachers offered a different view that shows how the development of the communal responsibility is tied in with the education policy. The Icelandic teachers were well aware that the rights of their students with disabilities and special learning needs were equal to other students' rights – such as the right to attend regular school in their neighborhood and be together with their peers. Some of the Icelandic teachers interviewed argued that external resources such as special schools were exclusionary and involved a breach of the human rights of students' labeled

with SEN, as it hindered their participation in regular school life and society; "They should not be plucked out of society and deposited in a special school, that is like putting them in prison – it makes them inactive only on the receiving end and unable to participate or give anything of themselves" (Initial interview-Teacher 2-IC).

The Dutch teachers did not share this view. Their ideas reflected an educational organization that is characterized by separated resources for different student groups or individuals. They expressed the opinion that schools providing regular education were not appropriate for all children, and did not take it for granted that all children could receive education in their neighborhood school. In the words of one of them: "If a child's difference is such that it does not fit with the regular school, then that child should go to a special school" (Initial interview-Teacher 4-NL).

### *3.2. Previous experience with diversity*

It is evident from research participants in both countries that previous experience of any form of diversity results in a more positive attitude. This theme was the only one which did not involve some contrasts between the countries. Teachers in both countries said that they were given little or no experience of working with students with SENs in their teacher training. Their experience of people with disability or SENs was gained outside school and in circumstances that were not linked to formal education. These grew out of activities that the teachers took part in during their free time, in families where there were people with disabilities or from their upbringing or informal influences from friends and colleagues: "It is all in my upbringing, I grew up with it ... when someone with a disability visited our house I learned that they were due the same respect as any other person" (Initial interview-Teacher 1-IC), "I have worked as a volunteer in an orphanage in Romania for children with special needs, were their parents left them because of their disability" (Initial interview-Teacher 4-NL). Another form of experience, which resulted in a positive attitude to diversity, is the experience teachers gained from teaching students with diverse needs. This applies to teachers in both

countries. They reported on real progress by their students academically, but they talked more often of social progress. The Dutch teachers believed that their students would hardly have benefited to the same extent if they had been in a special school, because there they would get less stimulation, and one teacher mentioned that she was afraid that her student would regress if he had to go to a special secondary school which he will very likely have to do:

“and you see simply that he can learn, he can learn a lot and that is the benefit from this [...] if he, and we are now busy with the secondary school and if he goes to a classroom with only autistic children, then we are afraid that he will go back to his former habits” (Initial interview-Teacher 4-NL).

They mentioned that the second year when the student with special needs was in their classroom was easier for them as teachers than the first year, and how important it was to get the chance to work with students for more than one year. Thereby, they could learn from their experiences and develop further successful methods. Teachers (both Icelandic and Dutch) stated honestly that it was somewhat difficult and challenging to have students with diverse needs in a regular classroom but they believe that the experience makes them better teachers for all children. An example from a Dutch teacher indicates, moreover, a changed attitude by students who have studied in a diverse classroom from a young age; what used to be seen as different or odd became normal by the time:

“I think it goes better now, it is more normal for children to associate with children with disability. I have also seen that. I have had children with Down Syndrome in my classroom and you see that clearly that it becomes more normal for other children, not like: *what is he strange!* No, that is more normal” (Initial interview-Teacher 2-NL).

The Dutch teachers mentioned how the attitudes of parents of regular education students changed and became more positive the longer students with special needs or disabilities were in their children’s classrooms. According to the teachers, the parents expressed less worries that the students in need of additional support were obtaining such

support at the expense of other students' education. This issue was not raised by the Icelandic teachers.

### *3.3. The role of national policy*

The role of national policy can be identified in teachers' talk. It shows a picture of a different focus on educational issues and is the only theme that has very different references and a few clear common aspects. The Dutch teachers mentioned more often and more decisively than the Icelandic teachers that they chose and were trained as teachers of 'normal children', not as teachers of disabled children or children with special educational needs. Therefore, they said that it was unreasonable to expect them to be able to teach students with diverse needs. The Icelandic teachers did not mention this factor directly although the discourse on the normal students was identified in their talk. They believed that they were able to teach 'all types of children', the problem was not that the children would have *this* or *that* label but how external factors, for example the planning and support, was organized.

An example from a Dutch teacher indicates how the divided system made it easier for the teacher to keep a certain distance between the *normal child* and one not considered normal. A girl with Down's syndrome was placed in the teacher's classroom. The teacher was not positive when she first arrived in her classroom because, as she said: "My professional choice was to educate the normal child" (Initial interview-Teacher 1-NL). Indeed, that teacher was not responsible for the girl's learning because the special teacher arranged and organized all her lessons. "I just said: What is your plan today" (Initial interview-Teacher 1-NL) and she started to work according to her plan". Another Dutch teacher complained about this arrangement and called for more partnership with special teachers and specialists and joint responsibility.

The Icelandic data express the teachers' view on the multiple aims of schooling. A boy diagnosed with ADHD had had the same teacher for two years. The teacher talked with pride about the progress this student had made, e.g. learning to follow rules, behaving in a positive manner, and

becoming more independent. Generally the Icelandic teachers talked less about the importance of academic learning and placed more emphasis on the importance of practical and social learning. Some of the teachers expressed the opinion that many of their students would never be able to reach the standards laid down by the National Curriculum. They claimed that there was nothing unusual about that, as "children are in school to learn different things."

The Dutch teachers were more concerned with academic standards, and to show parents objective evidence about their children's achievement compared to that of the group. If a student's grades were below the average grade in the classroom, the teacher was likely to put all his or her efforts into pulling the student's grades closer to the average. "We have to keep up the standard as the inspection can come at any time", the Dutch teachers claim. The Icelandic teachers were more relaxed about their students' academic learning. They were used to having a broad heterogeneous group of students in their classrooms and thus they took it for granted that a few students' academic achievements fell below the benchmark. The Icelandic teachers do not have to undergo an inspection comparable to that of their Dutch counterparts.

#### *3.4. The role of the head teacher in promoting inclusive education*

Both the Icelandic and Dutch head teachers talked about inclusive education as a good thing for the school but with a substantial difference in emphasis. The Icelandic head teachers referred more often than the Dutch head teachers to the official education policy, both nationally and locally, as the predominant policy and therefore it was simply a matter of course that students with, for example, intellectual impairments attended the school.

The Dutch head teachers were personally more committed to the inclusive policy as such than the Icelandic head teachers and talked about how important it was to discuss inclusion with their teaching staff. They saw it as a fundamental requirement for developing professionalism

among teachers. In one of the Dutch schools, a project group was established where the aim was to promote discussion among teachers about inclusive education and values in education. Shortly before the interviews took place, the Dutch schools (together with the management of other Dutch schools) organized a conference on inclusive education for all teachers of the schools. This could be a reason why the Dutch teachers felt they were generally well informed about ideas on inclusive education and how these relate to perspectives on human rights, irrespective of whether or not they agreed with these concepts in educational settings. The Dutch head teachers considered this arrangement a necessary step for teachers' further work which was confirmed in teachers' talk as they referred to these actions as an important tool to help them realize their own attitudes and expectations, but also mentioned how complicated and complex these ideas were.

The Icelandic head teachers said that they did not especially promote ideas on inclusive education among their teachers. This was also confirmed by the teachers who argued that issues on inclusive education were hardly discussed within their schools. "There is no discussion about this and never has been; there has been absolutely nothing....it just depends very much on the teachers how they want to go about this" (Initial interview-Teacher 3-IC). One Icelandic teacher was unfamiliar with the basic principles of inclusive education and another became acquainted with the term and its implications from a colleague who was studying for a master's in special education.

#### **4. Discussion**

The purpose of this chapter was to address how teachers construct their ideas on inclusive education in terms of their national situation. The research questions were: How do teachers construct their ideas about the 'teacher' in the inclusive school? And what is the interplay between the national education policy and teachers' ideas of their role in the inclusive school? The findings—the four themes—introduced above play a crucial role in how teachers

construct their ideas. I will now discuss the impacts the themes have in creating those ideas.

#### *4.1. Towards the inclusive school?*

It is evident from this research that ideas based on a process from exclusion to inclusion can be recognized. The question mark in the title above indicates that this is a two-sided process and steps have been taken forward as well as backward over time (Slee, 2011; Tomlinson, 2005). It can be argued that the adjustment relates to language rather than the system and practices in schools, as is evident in more changes in the use of words and terms in policy documents than in practice (Slee, 2011). A predominant factor in this process appears to spring from a dualism as to how we look at students: Teachers talk about the right of each child to get an education which builds on the child's abilities and claim that their job is to ensure this will happen. On the other hand, their teaching styles and attitudes are under the influence of a traditional view on education, namely standardized norms and ideas about the normal student (Tetler, 2005). This reinforces the view that actual changes in schools have not taken place and an inclusive school culture is not rooted within the institution. Research has shown that if inclusion is to work, teachers need adequate preparation and information to gain the confidence that they can deal with the changes inclusion requires (Meijer, 2003; Schauwer, 2011). This may not be enough, because if we continue to think about students along the lines of dualism as *normal* and *not normal* the procedures in schools will still be characterized by exclusionary methods which hinder students' education.

An inclusive school culture requires changes in thinking about education in such a way that we can endeavor to understand why some students are excluded by the culture of the school. In long-term ethnographic research of one compulsory school in Iceland the purpose was to seek answers to how the school responded to the diverse learning needs of its students and why it responded as it did (Marinósson, 2002). One of the findings has to do with the multiple roles of schools, which then can be summarized at two main levels, on the one hand there is a work with individuals and groups, based on values, and, on

the other, there is a structure, which places the work and values of the school into a certain framework

Teachers in both countries mention lack of collaboration with other teachers and support persons. In the Netherlands, this could be explained by the work approach where the special teacher is based outside the school. In Iceland, lack of collaboration might sound odd because special teachers and support staff are usually hired directly by the school and are always based within the school. Nevertheless Icelandic classroom teachers still claim that there is insufficient cooperation between them and the special teacher.

Inclusion has been explained by the concepts "process" and "journey" (Ainscow, 2005; Allan, 2008; Ferguson, 2008). By adopting this understanding, change becomes an important factor in this context. As in the example above, structure is one of schools' main elements in inclusive practices and it is well known that changes in schools usually take a long time. Teaching in compulsory schools has traditionally been organized for a group of students by one teacher. Although this has gradually changed there is still a long way to go for collaborative practices to become inherent and inevitable procedures in most schools (Todd, 2007).

The changes in both countries are linked with the policy demands of welcoming *all*—at least *most*—children into the regular school. In both countries we have learned that it seems the same thing has happened when the regular school became obliged by law to open its doors to children with special educational needs and disability, namely an expansion in the psychological and medical diagnosis of students. What is interesting and links this with global phenomena is that in spite of a substantial difference in time, structure and policy both countries implemented a similar approach to inclusive education with considerably more emphasis on the medical model than upon social approaches, as the increase in diagnoses indicates. It seems that we have two examples of a similar failure in challenging the dominant culture in schools and the main concern has become how to control the increased number of students who are considered to be abnormal in unchanged schools.

With such work procedures the dualism when looking at students, discussed earlier, will be strengthened instead of adopting a multiple and flexible perspective.

#### *4.2. Teachers' former experiences of diversity*

*Teachers' former experiences of diversity* appear in various ways, both personally and professionally. Teachers claim that having students with disabilities and special needs in their classrooms requires more of them but, at the same time, gives them back an experience which they believe will make them better teachers for all children. This view, however, is highly personal and incidental as shown in the findings. Moreover, initial teacher education does not seem to offer teachers adequate preparation for inclusive education. This is remarkable regarding Iceland, having in mind the changes in policy towards inclusive education explained at the beginning of the chapter. What is evident from this research is that teachers, both Dutch and Icelandic, talk as if they lack professional capacity to deal with requirements attached to inclusive practices, or they say that the external environment does not support them enough. My findings suggest that the problem is more their attitude. What is missing from the picture could be what Ainscow (2005) has pointed out, i.e. that teachers need to adopt an attitude "about learning how to live with difference and, learning how to learn from difference" (p9). New research and projects focus likewise on the shift from knowing what kind of knowledge and skills teachers need to have, to knowing how they can make the best use of what they already know to meet diverse learners (Florian & Linklater, 2010). This shift means that teachers need to adopt a positive view of difference and they have to be confident that they can teach all children (Abbott, 2006). A range of research shows that teachers' attitudes to inclusive education vary from positive to negative and their experience with different groups of learners is an influencing factor (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). The issue of the 'experience of contact' is evident in this research regarding teachers who express a positive view towards students with special needs or disability in their regular classrooms.

### 4.3. *The role of national policy*

The role of national policy in formalizing concepts and teachers' ideas of inclusive education is evident in both the Icelandic and Dutch data. The Icelandic teachers express a multiple understanding regarding the aims of education and schooling, that coincide with official education policy (Lög um grunnskóla nr. 91/2008; Menntamálaráðuneytið, 2006; Mennta- og menningarmálaráðuneytið, 2011). This is remarkable, because teacher education in Iceland has not focused systematically on issues regarding inclusive education. Teachers' views might, therefore, be influenced by phrases in the official education policy. They are, on the other hand, not satisfied with the mismatch between demands for diverse teaching procedures to meet students' different needs and the organization and implementation of standardized national exams where there seemed to be little regard for pupils' diverse needs. Teachers claimed that this was an attack on their professionalism. This discussion has been going on in Iceland for many years. The Dutch teachers seem to look at the standardized tests as an integral part of their work, although they claim the standardized tests act as a barrier to becoming more inclusive as their teaching is increasingly required to meet standards.

The Icelandic teachers did not express as strong an opinion about the existence of the *normal student* as the Dutch teachers did, although the subject is evident in their talk. As mentioned in the findings, Icelandic teachers are used to dealing with diversity in their classrooms. They did not complain about that – but they did complain about lacking additional support to implement inclusive approaches.

The Dutch example of the girl with Down's syndrome indicates habits and culture which encourage the social and educational separation of students instead of inclusion. In this case, there was lack of cooperation between the classroom teacher and the special teacher who was not permanent in the classroom. The work of the special teacher became, in this case, the premise for the girl's presence in the classroom. Inclusion does not happen in a vacuum; it

requires a holistic approach where all aspects of the school system are under consideration (Clark, Dyson & Millward, 1995; Ferguson, 2008). Access to school alone is not adequate and can actually do more harm than good.

#### *4.4. The role of head teachers in promoting inclusive education.*

An interesting difference can be identified between Icelandic and Dutch head teachers in how they promote ideas on inclusive education to their teachers. The Dutch ones see their role more as professional leaders in implementing ideas and values. As mentioned above, both the Dutch schools are Christian schools and this could be a reason for the schools choosing to dedicate themselves to certain values above others. The Icelandic head teachers claim not to spend much time discussing values and assume that new teachers realize by themselves how things are when they start working at the school. They also refer to the role of a middle manager who is to be in closer contact with teachers on a daily basis than themselves. This could be in line with findings in an Icelandic research project on how changes in the past 5-15 years have affected the role of head teachers in compulsory schools by the creation of a new profession - middle managers - in schools. Head teachers claim to spend most of their time on management and administration, i.e. components related to school operation, office management, finance and paperwork (Hansen, Jóhannsson & Lárusdóttir, 2008). I use the word 'an interesting difference' when I refer to head teachers' views, as this is the opposite of what might be expected, keeping in mind that Icelandic education policy is more explicit than the Dutch one on inclusive education.

Howsoever head teachers carry out their job, their leadership practices have to involve the vision of inclusive beliefs and values if inclusion is to happen, because inclusive practices need to be introduced and monitored (Ryan, 2003). Coincidence will determine whether teachers are dedicated to inclusive education if the Icelandic example is going to dominate; that is, if the head teacher is passive and assumes that teachers sense "how we work here".

Leadership is considered to be the key to successful inclusion. Moreover, the most important support comes through dialogue on a whole-school basis promoted by head teachers (Ryan, 2003). If their leadership styles do not include evidence of transformational leadership (Fullan, 2007; Sergiovanni, 2006; Sigurðardóttir, 2006), such as influencing staff, teachers cannot not be expected to adopt inclusive views.

## **5. Conclusion**

In this chapter I have discussed the differences and similarities between teachers in two countries in order to gain more knowledge as to how national policy and local situation shape their ideas in relation to inclusive education. In order to do this, it was necessary to analyze certain aspects of the education system and policy in both countries. My main drive in comparing has been to learn from the comparison to gain a clearer picture of the situation in each country, which then provides the opportunity to explore further what could be considered as strong or weak factors within both systems. By identifying what is country-specific, it becomes possible to define the potential and limitations of each system. Having gone through this process it is possible to set the scene in an international context and consider what one country could learn or adopt from another.

I should like to highlight interesting findings, which have to do with the relationship between official policy, teacher education and the head teacher's role. Icelandic education policy is in favor of inclusive education, but the head teachers do not see it as their function to promote inclusion to their teachers. The Dutch finding presents an opposite example. In both countries emphasis on inclusion has not been in the foreground in teacher education; however, Icelandic teachers express a multiple and diverse view on school education, which is in harmony with the official policy. The Dutch head teachers' emphasis on inclusive issues enabled the Dutch teachers to reflect upon inclusive education in relation to their teaching and perspectives.

The concerns raised at the beginning of this chapter about failing to implement the policy and doubts about its fundamental elements, such as to what extent the regular compulsory school can accommodate all children, echo in the findings of this research. What we have learned from the research and might be of use for policy makers and practitioners can be summarized in three issues:

**Firstly**, countries have to reflect on their own system in terms of exclusion/inclusion. Does intentional exclusion exist and if so, what are the assumptions for doing so? Exclusion can be hidden and therefore difficult to detect. In both cases, a critical analysis is needed to explore ideas and practices in schools.

**Secondly**, countries have to review and rebuild teacher education with issues on inclusion as an inherent part of their study programs. If teachers are to gain a positive attitude towards inclusion and a willingness to explore these ideas, training in inclusive education has to be integrated into initial teacher education in more systematic way. This research shows that initial teacher education needs to be better adapted to what happens in schools. Issues around diversity and inclusion should not be taught apart from other subjects, but should instead be an integral part of the whole curriculum. Only by so doing will teachers and students learn to understand and value diversity as a norm.

**Thirdly**, to make better use of teachers' professionalism and minimize uncertainty and insecurity, teachers have to have the chance to cooperate with other teachers and professionals as well as parents. A joint responsibility will also enable them to deal with divergent groups of students.

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### Additional workload or a part of the job? Icelandic teachers' discourse on inclusive education

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## **Additional workload or a part of the job? Icelandic teachers' discourse on inclusive education**

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The aim of this article is to examine the discourse of Icelandic compulsory school teachers on inclusive education. From 1974 and onwards, the education policy in Iceland has been towards inclusion, and Iceland is considered to be an example of a highly inclusive education system with few segregated resources for students with special educational needs. In particular, the article focuses on what characterises and legitimises teachers' discourse on inclusive education, the contradictions in the discourse and how teachers have involved themselves in the process. We use the approach of historical discourse analysis to analyse the discourse as it appears in interviews with teachers and media articles on education as well as in key documents issued by the Parliament. The article provides an insight into the complexities of this topic and draws attention to underlying issues relevant to inclusive education.

**Keywords:** inclusive education; discourse; teachers' discourse; historical discourse analysis; educational policy and practice

### **Introduction**

Inclusive education is an issue which has attracted relatively strong attention during the past 20 years, both regarding policy and practice, especially after the release of the United Nations' so-called *Salamanca Statement* (UNESCO 1994). While the premise of inclusive education relates to human rights, this issue is, nevertheless, also a matter of controversy among researchers and teachers alike (Allan 2008; Jóhannesson 2006b; Slee 2011). It seems to us, however, that the actual debates on the vision of inclusive education have mainly taken place within the academic field (Ainscow et al. 2006; Allan 2008; Benjamin 2002; Slee 2011; Tetler 2005). Iceland is no exception to this (see, e.g. Bjarnason 2010; Bjarnason and Persson 2007; Jóhannesson 2006a; Jóhannesson, Geirsdóttir, and Finnbogason 2002; Marinósson 2011). This article examines the discourse of Icelandic compulsory school teachers on inclusive education in Iceland.

### **Background**

While comparable to most Western educational systems, the Icelandic system is a small unit, with a total of 42,539 students at the compulsory school level, which in Iceland

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covers the ages from 6 to 16 years (Hagstofa Íslands 2012a). The total population of Iceland was 321.857 at the beginning of year 2013 (Hagstofa Íslands 2013). Iceland is an interesting case in terms of inclusion policy. The development in Iceland from 1974, when new compulsory school legislation was passed about the school level as a comprehensive school from the age of 7–16, with the *Salamanca Statement* (UNESCO 1994), published in Icelandic in 1995, as a milestone, until now has been towards inclusion.

In international comparison, Iceland can be considered as an example of a highly inclusive education system with a very low percentage of segregated resources for students with special educational needs. Indeed, in autumn 2011, there were only three special schools at the compulsory level with 138 students (approximately 0.3%) (Hagstofa Íslands 2012b). This information in its raw form does not, however, demonstrate that the Icelandic system is inclusive. For example, special units are attached to many compulsory schools, mainly in Reykjavík and the larger municipalities. In total, in autumn 2011, 476 compulsory school students (approximately 1.1%) in the country were placed in special units. Examples of special units include, for example, five in Reykjavík, four for autistic children and one specialising in language and speech therapy and sign language (Reykjavíkurborg 2012). In the town, where data for this research were collected, there are three special units, one for autistic children, one for children with severe developmental impairments and one for children with hearing impairments (source not revealed for anonymity purposes). In general, regular classrooms support children with various disabilities, developmental as well as physical, and many types of learning problems, such as reading difficulties or attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder.

Although some of the policy stipulations in Iceland have been quite clear regarding emphasis on inclusive issues, we maintain that no structured, official attempt has been made to implement the official policy, based on the inclusive ideology, into the classrooms. Successful examples, even the work of visionaries, are however, well known in some parts of the country (see, e.g. Eggertsdóttir and Marinósson 2005; Norðlingaskóli 2009). Importantly, through this process, the term inclusive education – in Icelandic, *skóli án aðgreiningar*, literally *school without segregation* – has, therefore, come to signify different things and it is uncertain what teachers think and feel about inclusive education; indeed there are indications suggesting mixed opinions (Capacent Gallup 2007; Karlsdóttir and Guðjónsdóttir 2010; Marinósson 2011).

There has not been much research in Iceland focusing on inclusive education. However, available evidence, mainly in Master's theses, indicates lack of well defined procedures aimed at inclusive education (K. Axelsdóttir 2012; R. Axelsdóttir 2010; Arnadóttir 2010; Bjarnadóttir 2011; Finnbogadóttir 2011; Gunnbjörnsdóttir 2006). Research relating to students with developmental disabilities also indicates that the implementation of inclusive teaching depends to a large extent on teachers' confidence rather than school-wide decisions. It has been suggested that the main reasons here are the conservatism of the schools, the traditional paradigm of the 'normal' and the tendency to treat all variations as a problem needing to be fixed (Marinósson 2007, 85). This view of seeing students as needing specific 'treatment' was also noted by Jóhannesson (2006b) who analysed policy documents on inclusion and special needs education. Recent comprehensive research on teaching and learning in Icelandic compulsory schools has shown evidence of teachers' concerns that classroom organisation does not suit students with a foreign background and behaviour difficulties. The initial published results of this study indicate that the ideology of the

inclusive school is not well-established in the minds of most teachers. Further, 83% of participants in the research (825 teachers, including special education needs (SENs) teachers, head teachers and other staff of 20 schools) agree that teachers do not have the preparation needed to support and care for all children (Björnsdóttir and Jónsdóttir 2010).

In the international literature, there is likewise a growing concern about the complexity around inclusive education and how the discussion has been lacking a shared epistemological base (Armstrong, Armstrong, and Spandagou 2011; Booth 2005; Dunne 2009; Kozleski, Artiles, and Waitoller 2011; Slee 2001). Lloyd (2008) comments on the failure in the UK policy to recognise the complex and controversial nature of inclusion, stating that there have been no attempts to address the 'exclusiveness of the curriculum, assessment procedures, and practices of mainstream provision and that the strategy is founded on notions of normalization, compensation and deficit approaches to SEN' (221). Dunne (2009, 43) has pointed out that the policy on inclusive education as it appears in the UK is both 'nebulous and vague' causing needless complexity for those attached to the field when attempting to build a shared understanding and focus. Riddell and Weedon (2010) who have analysed the negotiations between different actors on the formation of the SEN legislation framework in Scotland have reported a similar tendency; that is, how the tension between competing policies and various social actors results in legislation that reflects an attempt to balance the preferences of different interest groups. This perspective supports the idea 'that inclusion policies are not intrinsic elements of the wider educational political economy' (Vlachou 2004, 7–8) and one of the main difficulties associated with inclusive education is that other education policies impinge on the development of inclusive schools. Vlachou (2004) comes to the conclusion that 'inclusion policies have been considered as additional "extra" policies that have to fit in the already existing educational policies' (8). In her analysis of the UK education policy for inclusion since 1997, Lloyd (2008) concludes that the policy has done little to increase genuine access to the mainstream for students with SEN and it may have increased exclusionary practices therein.

### **Research questions**

We are interested in exploring whether teachers' discourse in Iceland might give some insights into the concerns raised. We use interviews with compulsory school teachers and media articles written by them. Furthermore, we investigate how the teachers' discourse relates to the policy as expressed in official documents. We seek to answer the following three questions.

What characterises and legitimises teachers' discourse on inclusive education?

What are the contradictions in teachers' discourse on inclusive education as well as those occurring in official dialogue?

How have teachers involved themselves in the discourse?

### **Method**

The research perspective of this article is historical discourse analysis. This kind of analysis aims at shedding light on how things have evolved in a historical and political context, which has been created out of the conjuncture of various discourses in education and the way the participants have involved themselves in the discourse. We endeavour to understand how phenomena are created in the discourse, what becomes

appropriate to think and say and how some ideas gain more legitimacy than others. The analysing process is, therefore, characterised by viewing the discourse in the light of prevailing traditions and customs and with regard to the historical, cultural and social reality in which it has been created. By using historical discourse analysis, the aim is, therefore, not to describe participants' personal understanding of a certain matter, but rather to gain insight into how individuals, in this case teachers, shape and are shaped by the discourse they are part of within a certain social and cultural context (Armstrong, Armstrong, and Spandagou 2010; Foucault 1979; Jóhannesson 2010; Lee 2000; Slee 2011).

The main concepts that guide our analysing process are discursive themes, legitimating principles and historical conjuncture. When analysing the text – whether official documents, media articles or interview transcripts – the researcher looks for words, ideas or practices that characterise the text more than others and are repeated to such an extent that they can be seen as discursive themes creating patterns in the text. These patterns are created and recreated through social, political and historical discourse and by the participants in the discourse. This process produces the legitimating principles of the discourse, which, for example, constitute what is appropriate to say in certain circumstances at each time and, no less importantly, what one should keep quiet about. Using the concept of historical conjuncture then helps to explain the interplay between ideas, practices and historical and political conditions and shed light on why some ideas and practices achieve more legitimacy than others (Foucault 1979; Jóhannesson 2010).

### *A six-step approach*

We have adopted an approach for the analysis, introduced by Sharp and Richardson (2001) and adapted by Jóhannesson (2006b, 2010), which involves the process of six steps when followed in detail. We follow the process for the most part.

The first step – to select an issue or a topic to study – was in this case chosen beforehand, that is, the issue of inclusion. The second step involves the selection of data, the third step involves analysing the data to find the discursive themes, and the fourth step is to identify the legitimating principles and contradictions. In the fifth step, the historical conjuncture of the research matter is examined. The final step comprises writing a report, which was drafted in Icelandic (by the first author) to serve as a working paper for the article.

### *Data selection*

We use three main sets of data. First, key documents, issued by the Parliament (Alþingi) and the Icelandic Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, were analysed. These documents were *The Compulsory School Act* and the *National Curriculum Guide for Compulsory School* in force when data collection took place (The Compulsory School Act No. 66/1995; The Menntamálaráðuneytið [Ministry of Education, Science and Culture] 2006). These documents were chosen as being the ones which teachers are supposed to build on when structuring their teaching (hereafter we refer to them as the Act and the Curriculum).

Second, we use research interviews with 10 compulsory school teachers, conducted by the first author in the period from February to May 2007. Those teachers – nine women and one man – taught at the time in three compulsory schools in an Icelandic

town which has been considered to be at the forefront of inclusive education. The teachers were all classroom teachers, ranging in age from their lower 30s to their lower 50s at the time of the interviews, teaching in grades 1–10, with between 5 and 25 years of teaching experience. At least two students in each teacher's classroom had been identified with special educational needs. Within this data set, there are also teaching logs from four teachers, kept over five days (one particular week) about one or two students with special educational needs. The log data are primarily used as a complementary source to analyse the teachers' discourse, rather than as an independent data set. Yet they also provide a window through which one may obtain a grasp of actual classroom practice. All interviews were semi-structured. They were transcribed verbatim by the first author, and each teacher assigned a capital letter for a pseudonym. Six teachers (A–F) were interviewed once, and those who kept the logs (G–J) were interviewed twice, the second time immediately after they had completed their logs.

Third, Icelandic media articles (newspapers, and radio and television transcripts) on education were collected to cover the period of 16 months prior to and concurrent with the first parts of the research interviews, from the beginning of January 2006 to the end of April 2007, in order to identify public views on education and to locate teachers' discourse within the social, cultural and public context. The media articles are available from a database offered by the company Fjölmíðlavaktin/CreditInfo (n.d.). When searching the database, the following key words were used (the Icelandic search words in parentheses): inclusive school (skóli án aðgreiningar), school for all (skóli fyrir alla), special needs (sérþarfir), school (skóli), education (menntun) and special education (sérkennsla). The search resulted in a total of 352 articles on education out of which 196 were analysed for the purpose of this research. The distinctive feature of these 196 articles was the focus of the subject matter, which related to inclusive education and special needs, rather than, for example, the length of the secondary school. We thought it important to focus on the pieces written by teachers. In total, 30 of the 196 articles turned out to have been written by authors who identified themselves as teachers. Rather than referring to the articles by authors' names, the articles were assigned numbers between 1 and 352.

### **Data analysis**

At the beginning, the three data sets were analysed separately for the purpose of identifying discursive themes representative of each set. In addition to the actual research questions, we created key questions for each data set in order to identify its distinctive features.

*Official documents:* We were interested to know what would characterise the notion of inclusion in these key documents. Therefore, the following questions guided the analysis: *How are ideas on inclusive education presented in the documents, if at all? To what kind of ideas does the discourse on inclusive education refer? Does it rely on the ideology of human rights issues? Does it use the language of individualism? How do the documents refer to teachers, if at all?* The findings are used both for comparison and as a background to the teachers' discourse.

*Interviews and teaching logs:* The purpose of taking interviews with teachers was to explore what kind of discourse appears in the interviews and the teaching logs. We created several key questions, each with a specific reference to certain factors: *Do teachers refer to the system (policy and governance)? Do teachers quote acts of law and curriculum documents? Do they discuss the school system, types of schools, etc.? How*

*do teachers talk about students? Do teachers talk about teachers' work in general terms? Are there signs of resistance to inclusive education? If so, on what kind of ideas is the resistance based?*

*Media articles:* When the media articles were read, the following questions guided the analysis: *What is so important to teachers that they decide to write newspaper articles? What kind of pressure on schools and teachers appears in the media discussion?* In contrast, we are not aiming at the mapping of public views in any way; rather, this material is used as a background to help us identify the contradictions in the teachers' discourse.

All these questions helped to identify the discursive themes in each set of data. Furthermore, spotting discursive themes in one set drew attention to new themes to search for in the other two data sets. Thus, drawn together, these three data sets provide a picture of teachers' discourse on inclusive education and how it relates to the official discourse, as well as the contradictions within and surrounding it. After themes had been identified, they were first grouped into 17 types that we report in Table 1.

### ***Reliability and ethical issues***

We believe that the Act and the Curriculum are documents almost chosen by default when official discourse is being studied. The interview data serve as the main vehicle for studying the discourse of teachers. The selected group of teachers were experienced teachers from a certain town who, because of the town's history of inclusive education (see above), are likely to give a more positive picture of inclusive education than if randomly chosen across the country. If, and with an emphasis on *if*, this is the case, some of the contradictions in the discourse might be even more obvious and damaging to the vision of inclusion than we suggest here. Later, it was decided to add the media data to, first and foremost to help identify contradictions between official debate and teachers' discourse.

The interviewees all agreed to be interviewed by the researcher, knowing that excerpts from their interviews might be published without their input as to how this was done. They only knew and agreed that the issue of inclusion is important enough to be further researched. When we refer to our interviewees, we have gone to lengths to hide their identity by only referring to them as capital letters, and giving them all female pronouns although one interviewee is a man. For the same reason, we refer to students with female pronouns.

While the first author conducted all interviews and performed the data search in the newspapers, the actual analysis was laid out by both authors. Both researchers are in favour of the ideology of inclusion, but read the data with a critical eye to reveal discrepancies and understand what is going on. The data were collected the year before the economic collapse of autumn 2008. Since then, no significant changes have occurred in the official ideology and structure of support for students with SEN.

### **Findings: discursive themes – common and distinctive**

From the overall data set, we first identified 17 discursive themes that emerged from the analysis, using the questions we sought answers to from the documents. They fall into two main groups: those that are common to all three data sets (1–7) and those that appear only in interviews or media discussion (8–17) – in fact they all appear in both sets. During the continuing analysis and the writing of the article we decided to

Table 1. Discursive themes on inclusive education in official documents, interviews with teachers, and media discussions in Iceland, 2006–2007.

Subsection headings	Discursive themes	Type of dataset		
		Official documents	Interviews and teaching logs	Media
	Common discursive themes			
The flexibility of schools and teachers as a guiding light	(1) The school should adapt itself to students' needs and situation	X	X	X
	(2) Teaching methods should meet students' needs	X	X	X
	(3) Individualised learning	X	X	X
Education is a human rights issue	(4) The school should promote equality in education and prevent discrimination	X	X	X
	(5) The school should not discriminate against students by their status, character or beliefs	X	X	X
Segregation as an appropriate option in an inclusive system?	(6) Special education, even in segregated settings, is regarded as an appropriate resource	X	X	X
Services first – then education	(7) The school offers services	X	X	X
	Distinctive discursive themes			
Special needs in a pecking order	(8) Students are discriminated against according to which special needs they have		X	X
Demands on teachers have increased	(9) It is difficult and extremely complicated for teachers to meet the teaching requirements		X	X
	(10) Demands on teachers have increased		X	X
Some students need to be rescued	(11) Education is aimed at the normal student		X	X
Lack of service – less teaching – less education	(12) There is lack of service		X	X
Resistance, doubts, silences, teachers' guilty feelings	(13) There is resistance and doubts with regard to the inclusive school		X	X
	(14) There is resistance to standardised tests		X	X
	(15) Teachers feel guilty towards students		X	X
	(16) There is silence and hesitation about issues relevant to inclusion		X	
Good or bad luck	(17) It is a question about good or bad luck what kind of students you get		X	

discuss these themes under 10 subheadings. Table 1 gives the discursive themes, divided into these two categories. In group 1, we have placed what we call *common discursive themes*, which includes themes that, more or less, reflect a positive attitude towards the official policy of inclusion. In group 2, *distinctive discursive themes*, we placed themes that reflect more doubts or criticisms of the official policy, or statements to the effect that the policy is not working.

### ***Common discursive themes***

The common themes group appears in all three data sets as undisputed educational issues. This comprises a view on education and the role of educational organisations, which could be generally accepted as good values. The wording is rooted in general human rights with regard to educational issues.

### ***The flexibility of schools and teachers as a guiding light***

The theme of school flexibility is very strong in all three data sets. It has reference to three ideas: the adaptation of the school, that teaching methods should meet students' needs and individualised learning. The Act reads as follows:

Compulsory schools shall make an effort to carry out their activities to correspond as fully as possible with the nature and needs of their pupils and encourage the overall development, well-being and education of each individual. (The Compulsory School Act No. 66/1995, Article 2, official edition in English)

The general part of the Curriculum states: 'It is the responsibility of each school to adapt their own instruction as best suits the needs of their pupils' (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture 2004, 22). These quotes echo in the other two data sets:

All individuals, really, regardless of position or handicap, whether physical or mental, they must all have access to our school system and the school must accept each and every one on his or her grounds. (Teacher F, Interview 1; all translations of the quotes, except of the Acts, are made with the assistance of a professional translator)

The concept 'school for everyone' has been a guiding light in Icelandic school policies during the past few years. This means that all children should be given the opportunity to attend school in their own district, whatever their circumstances may be (Media article no. 29 – 20 March 2007).

According to the views presented in these quotes, there is a general agreement that the school should be flexible and able to customise itself to whatever the student needs.

In the Act and the Curriculum, the theme that teaching methods should meet the needs of the students is presented as a vital part of quality education in schools, which allows for diversity among students. The media articles reflect this, since it is taken for granted that schools practise teaching methods that meet students' needs as the Act stipulates. A slightly different viewpoint appears in the interviews with teachers, as they mention that they *try* to use various teaching methods, but it is not always that easy. They claim that the main demand placed upon them is to practise 'individualised'<sup>1</sup> teaching and learning:

And those techniques are gradually being introduced, that all the students are not always in the same place [in the study material], and I can say for myself that I am just beginning to understand this. (Teacher H, Interview 2)

An example of how a teacher changed her teaching methods back to traditional ways of teaching because of a student with mental impairment:

Because I work such a lot with thematic projects and I have really had to cut down on this quite a bit because I got a student with a severe developmental handicap at the beginning of the year and therefore I had to start organising small groups with her. (Teacher J, Interview 2)

Here, we have examples of two different reactions to meeting students' personal needs; the former is from a teacher who is traditional in her teaching, preferring all students to follow the study book but is trying to change her habits in that regard. The latter is an example from a teacher who is exceptional in the teacher sample because of the length of time she has been practising theme work. She found, however, that she needed to restrict this method when a student with developmental disability came to her classroom in order to be flexible and cater to certain needs. Both teachers refer to the demand for individualised learning when explaining changes in their teaching methods.

### ***Education is a human rights issue***

Under this heading, we have placed two related themes: that the school should promote equality in education and prevent discrimination and that the school should not discriminate against students by their status, character or beliefs. We place them together, because both relevant legislation – (Lög um jafna stöðu og jafnan rétt kvenna og karla nr. [Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women and Men, No.] 96/2000; Lög um málefni fatlaðs fólks nr. [Act on the Affairs of Disabled People, No.] 59/1992; The Compulsory School Act No. 66/1995) – and the Curriculum strongly emphasise such views as a matter of human rights. In the media discussion, this view comes through more as a description of how the education system should be, rather than how it is; for example, that the Icelandic education system should be based on 'notions of justice and equality where all the people in Iceland should gain the opportunity to realise their potential, regardless of domicile, age, gender, nationality and ability' (Media article no. 9 – 18 April 2007).

In the overall data set, this theme is probably the least disputed. There seems to be an agreement that this is a good thing, not only for students, but also for society.

### ***Segregation as an appropriate option in an inclusive system?***

According to law, the main policy is that the instruction shall be provided in the home school (The Compulsory School Act No. 66/1995, Article 37). However, the discourse contains a disclaimer to the effect that if the school cannot offer specific solutions or does not consider it justifiable or possible to meet students' needs, the school or the parents can suggest an alternative resource:

If a child's parents or guardians, teachers or other specialists feel that the child is not receiving suitable instruction in its home school, the parents or guardians may apply for it to attend a special school. (The Compulsory School Act No. 66/1995, Article 37)

With regard to school practice, segregated solutions are considered relevant according to the Act on Compulsory Education:

Children and young people, who face problems in their studies due to specific learning difficulties, emotional or social difficulties and/or handicaps, cf. Article 2 of Act No. 59/[1992], are entitled to *special support instruction*. Such instruction may be on an individual basis or in a group within or outside of the regular classroom, in special classes within schools or in special schools (our emphasis). (The Compulsory School Act No. 66/1995, Article 37)

The following view concerning such an arrangement appears among teachers; for example, regarding the discussion on whether or not students are taken out of the classroom to receive special education:

Yes, I think we do this and have done this in such a way that the more special needs, or disabilities, the child has, the more we have taken it out [of the classroom]. (Teacher D, Interview 1)

When it comes to the relevance of special units for students with certain impairments, most of the teachers see it as a positive arrangement:

I feel as if the units we have as for example those with hearing impairment come into a school, foreigners, or, say, immigrants into a school and also, say, autistic, and they receive support within the school and I feel this is really positive because then they are partly in the [regular] class too. (Teacher I, Interview 1)

Clearly, and despite the fact that policy documents, teachers and the media discussion draw up a picture of a school system that endeavours to include everyone, segregated resources and settings are not seen as a negative issue, but rather as a normal solution in an inclusive system. Such segregated settings, however, may produce not only exclusion but also barriers to learning.

### ***Services first – then education***

The idea of a school which provides a wide range of services is strong in all the data sets and is presented in such a way that service is seen as a key element and an inherent factor in teachers' work in an inclusive school. A quote from one teacher is representative of this view:

Inclusive schools as I see this are really schools where all [students] receive the service that suits them regardless of their situation and ability . . . and then students are supposed to be able to be together in the same classroom; it does not matter whether they are mentally or physically disabled, they are in all cases supposed to be able to receive study materials and services that suit them; an effort is made to meet the needs of each and everyone. (Teacher G, Interview 1)

The idea of service does not only refer to teachers and their work; it has a wider reference to the whole school and its staff. It is, for example, regarded normal to hire additional staff for certain students, make changes to buildings if they are unsuitable and buy specialised equipment for students' special needs.

### ***Distinctive themes***

The themes in this group appear in interview data and the media discussion, but not in the official document. The discourse is characterised by negative comments, doubts or

controversial references and this could be the reason that they are not to be found in the policy documents, at least not as they appear here. A common feature for this theme is that it is critical of or in opposition to the official inclusive ideology.

### ***Special needs in a pecking order***

As pointed out above, it is clearly stated both in the Act and the Curriculum that discrimination in any sense is not permitted in Icelandic schools. However, in the media articles, there is significant discussion to the effect that some students are discriminated against according to which special needs they have. This applies to students who are blind and with hearing impairments. It is stated that they do not receive an education that meets their needs due to lack of teachers' expertise in this area. The situation is said to be serious and examples given of families who recently moved abroad so their children could receive an appropriate education. Older students who received their education in the School for the Deaf (amalgamated with a regular in 1998) tell a similar story in a newspaper article, i.e. that they have been 'deprived of their right to education' and likewise:

The deaf and the hearing-impaired say that society has let them down with regard to their basic education. Their process of compulsory education was certainly long. The teaching, however, was not based on their needs and therefore the learning yielded poor results. [As one student put it]: 'We also had this in common that our education in the School for the Deaf was seriously inadequate and in no way comparable with the education our peers received in the general school system.' (Media article no. 33 – 18 March 2007)

In the interviews, teachers also mentioned a group of students, whose needs the school has not managed to meet. This group comprises students of immigrant parents, and teachers express concerns about these students and their helplessness in meeting their needs at school:

The support they receive to be able to become part of the group is by no means sufficient because they do not speak the language and they are not taken care of as would be done in case of other special needs. We have perhaps a rather striking example now; the case of a child who is on the way to losing both sight and hearing and this matter is being attended to, you see, by recruiting an individual who is to undergo special training to be able to look after her and this is of course splendid, but perhaps we see here a striking difference in this respect. (Teacher F, Interview 1)

An example of the problem teachers' mention is a shortage of relevant study books for students who do not understand Icelandic, especially in mathematics as there is so much reading material in the new mathematics textbooks.

In interviews with teachers they mention that generally their teaching is very much focused on the study books they use and therefore their teaching methods are monotonous.

### ***Demands on teachers have increased***

Both in media discussion and interviews with teachers, it is stated that demands on teachers have increased, especially in line with an emphasis on individualised learning, as this way of learning involves a number of challenges for teachers to deal with and new procedures for them to learn. Many of the teachers claim that demands have increased

so that they have difficulties in meeting them as their working environment has remained unchanged. A prominent aspect of the discourse in this context is that these new demands create an additional workload on teachers and teachers feel they have reached the end of their tether as their time schedule does not allow for more tasks and new obligations. Some teachers express this more frankly than others:

We have taken on far too much; teachers are also to blame for this. The experts now also say: you are supposed to deal with all those situations, you are supposed to plan the study of 25 students, regardless of how varied their needs are, so that everyone is offered study plans that suit their level of ability and interest. Reality is just not like that. The school is to offer a solution to everything between heaven and earth, and we are to overcome every difficulty, no matter what the student's disability may be, whether this has to do with bullying, friendship or something of that nature. (Teacher I, Interview 2)

These quotes reflect how the teachers interviewed believe that their framework of duties cannot accommodate more tasks. What they refer to as 'an additional workload' has to do with duties and obligations that can be defined as something other than 'direct teaching', such as various arrangements for students who are not considered to be 'normal students' in terms of learning or special needs.

### ***Some students need to be rescued***

Although the Act and the Curriculum prescribe an individualised approach to learning, the way of teaching is more than less arranged around the normal student. According to the teachers interviewed, the normal student is the one who can proceed further along through the study books without extra support from the teacher. Students who are defined by the teachers as good students tend to work quite independently and very often with a minimum of teacher intervention. This also applies to immigrant students:

I have two immigrant students; this student came two years ago, but she is nevertheless doing a lot better for she has strong academic abilities, and she performs well, but one must then take care not to forget her and continue to find material for her. (Teacher H, Interview 1)

Teachers basically organise their teaching for the normal student, which means that the focus is on a group of students rather than individual students. This is seen by many of the teachers as a preferable approach: 'That is why it is highly preferable to have a class of students composed of your average Tom, Dick and Harry. Then the process is smooth and relatively problem-free' (Teacher A, Interview 1).

Despite a heavy emphasis in policy documents on diversity in teaching and learning methods and a focus on each individual, it seems that teachers still consider that their work should centre around a group of students who they consider to be without any special needs.

### ***Lack of service – less teaching – less education***

The theme on the lack of service is related to other themes; for example, as that demands on teachers have increased in the sense that teachers want additional requirements placed upon them to be followed by improved services in schools. The interviews indicate that this has failed. Students and families are seen as customers, and

students with special needs are seen as requiring particular types of service. In this context, service means money and personnel:

For of course there is lack of money and staff, because it is not enough just to place all the students in the same class without regard to ability, they need service and they are not receiving this with only one teacher. (Teacher G, Interview 1)

In this example, as in many other similar situations, teachers refer to the idea that they are not able to offer students individual service – or personal teaching – if they are the only professional person in the classroom.

### ***Resistance, doubts, silences, teachers' guilty feelings***

A prominent discursive theme in the media is a statement to the effect that although in literal terms, there should be equality in education, it is not so in reality. This mostly applies to children who are blind and deaf but also to children with developmental disability or with challenging behaviour:

It is a matter of general knowledge that even though Icelandic society is said to be based on the principle of equality, this is not really the case. Certain groups and individuals face low quality circumstances with regard to education, since they are unable to avail themselves of the educational opportunities on offer to the general public. This, for example, applies to blind people. (Media article no. 24 – 23 March 2007)

According to the national curriculum guide for the compulsory school, all schools are to receive all children, regardless of whether they are disabled or not. This fundamental educational principle conforms to the values and philosophy of life among the Icelandic population of today. But is this really the case? Unfortunately not. (Media article no. 257 – 15 May 2006)

There are also indications of doubts as to how relevant the regular school is for all children. A teacher working in Reykjavík wrote a letter in a newspaper about educational matters in Reykjavík, including the policy on inclusive education which she refers to as a policy which Reykjavík Municipality has been working on for some years and is based on the ideology of equal human rights for all. Her conclusion is:

Nevertheless, I have some doubts as to whether this policy is in fact realistic. If an individual with severe developmental disabilities is to be able to study at a conventional primary school, many changes will have to be implemented. (Media article no. 296 – 15 March 2006)

One of the teachers interviewed expresses an attitude shared by the majority of the teachers interviewed when she talks about the difference between the special schools and the situation now:

In the special schools they were provided with all conceivable kinds of service; those individuals [students with significant impairments] were attended to by many more staff members in the special schools than is the case here; here they are just added to the general classes – it is not possible just to state that this is an inclusive school and then let everyone in. (Teacher I, Interview 1)

This last quote is in line with ideas comprising the theme that increased demands on teachers constitute an addition to teachers' work and the notion of teaching as a

service. Many of the teachers refer to the action of closing down the special schools as a process that is not completed because ‘they’ (i.e. the educational authorities) omitted to move the staff with the students into the regular schools.

The discourse of 9 out of 10 teachers was overwhelmingly negative when talking about standardised tests in 4th, 7th and 10th grade, although the most severe criticism is directed at the final tests in grade 10.<sup>2</sup> The teachers claimed that the tests in grade 10 controlled their teaching, how to teach and what. Moreover, they say the tests are an obstacle in their professional work and hinder them in being flexible and diverse in their teaching as the curriculum expects them to be. The majority of the teachers do not like the tests as they say they do not measure students’ real ability and some other important aspects of the school life. Good teachers are said to simply ignore the tests and go down their own path. One teacher considers the tests important for the students’ future:

The fact is, however, whether we like it or not, that we must in my opinion take them [the tests] much more seriously, for this in fact relates to the child’s future or future potential, regardless of what its plans may be; we have to get them through those standardised tests, or else they are faced with significantly reduced opportunities for further study. (Teacher F, Interview 1)

The loudest complaints regarding the tests have to do with the contradiction which, according to the teachers, is revealed in the premise that teachers should, on the one hand, practise individualised teaching, and on the other hand, that the nature of the tests, which are standardised, allows very little flexibility. Teachers see this as an attack on their professionalism and at odds with inclusive education. This corresponds to media discussions where the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, introduced the idea to abandon the tests in grade 10 to open up for new ways of assessment.

In the interviews with teachers, there is much discourse on the guilt they feel towards students. They feel they never do enough for students who need something extra. The following is an example from a teacher about her student who has language and speech difficulties:

But then, on the other hand, I worry about the child, that I am not doing enough for her just as I say to her parents, I am not doing enough for her, and she often just sits there without any help, and all day I am not thinking of anything to do for her; she is just there with her friends, doing something and one just hopes for the best – this is how it is too. (Teacher I, Interview 2)

But you always feel guilty, because you are to meet everyone’s needs and you want to, you know, this is of course like being some kind of superwoman, you see; sometimes, this may be working . . . going too deeply into it, but yet letting them somehow feel that they are part of the whole, that they are not too different. (Teacher J, Interview 2)

Although the teaching is more than less aimed at the normal student according to teachers, they also feel guilty towards the normal students who they do not manage to give enough attention as their energy is too much directed towards students who need something extra.

The interviews with teachers indicate that they appear hesitant in expressing themselves about issues regarding inclusion, inclusive education and student impairments or disabilities. This reluctance emerges as a few seconds of silence or hesitation before they say what they want to say about these issues. This is not incidental, applying only to a few teachers in the group of the interviewees, but generally manifested in the interview data. We see this as a form of reflective hesitation.

To us it seems that teachers are not comfortable discussing the topic of inclusive education; they consciously choose the ‘right’ words as if wanting to be ‘politically correct’ in the way they express themselves. This theme was not obvious in the data, but by comparison with interviews with Dutch teachers taken at the same time to serve as data for a related project (Gunnthorsdottir 2013) it became clear that the Icelandic interviews had this distinctive feature.

### ***Good or bad luck***

As stated above, teachers seem to think in terms of the normal student and organise their teaching around this idea. Teachers tend to feel they have good or bad luck when a student with special educational needs is placed in their classroom. They are out of luck if such a student is placed in their regular classroom – because of extra workload or the feeling of him or her being an addition to the pedagogical structure. This is in fact a very important issue in their minds:

It is just an element of good or bad luck whether you end up having a lot of work to do in connection with a pupil, whatever [the work] it may be. Perhaps too much contact with parents is needed because of behaviour problems, or it may have to do with the study load, adapting the study material or something like that because the student has severe dyslexia or something of that kind. It is not really taken into account that in such cases you either need more time or some form of remuneration for solving this or that problem, you see. (Teacher A, Interview 1)

The teachers seem to believe that they should be able to require extra resources or ‘some special arrangements . . . that your workload is lightened in some other way, or something like that . . .’ (Teacher A, Interview 1) if you have students with special educational needs in the classroom.

### **Discussion**

We have traced most of the discursive themes that characterise the teachers’ discourse on inclusive education to what teachers think about ideology and practice. In brief, teachers talked about their experience of including students with various disabilities and learning difficulties, both good practices they have participated in and less successful examples. They talked much less, indeed almost not at all, about the ideology of inclusion or theories of teaching and learning – not even when asked directly. In general, the teachers have become well acquainted with the various types of medical diagnosis of individual students. In line with that, most of their talk about teaching methods referred to how to teach individuals with certain labels indicating special educational needs. As a result, most of the teachers complained about the lack of resources needed to really aim the whole class instruction towards inclusive structures.

We first discuss the main patterns that we see the discursive themes fall into, then we identify what we believe is the chief legitimating principle in the discourse of the teachers, and finally we consider the historical conjuncture where this discourse occurs.

### ***Teachers’ contradictory views on inclusive education***

Based on our study, we argue that Icelandic teachers’ discourse on inclusive education is characterised by contradictory and in many ways incompatible views. There seems to

be a general agreement on the benefit of inclusion for most students, especially those identified as vulnerable, such as students with developmental disabilities. These views refer to social inclusion and human rights issues. At the same time, the teachers have numerous reservations as to whether and how inclusive practice is really possible. We will now explain in more detail by means of patterns that these views seem to fall into.

The first main pattern we want to highlight is that *the interviewees do not see inclusion as inherent in the job of teaching*; to them, inclusion is an additional task, whereas educating normal learners is the main task. They feel that the purpose of this new additional task is to fix ‘this and that’; as a result, inclusion signifies increased demands on teachers. This leads to an attitude about luck concerning ‘what kind’ of students you get in your classroom. This is obviously in conflict with the law which considers it normal to have diverse learners with regard to the composition of Icelandic compulsory school students (The Compulsory School Act No. 66/1995). Vlachou’s description of inclusive education policy as tending to be dissociated from the broader educational context is relevant in this context. She argues that this lack of a holistic perspective then leads to a situation where the ‘education of disabled pupils is not necessarily a matter of general concern thus, whatever reforms are needed for the education of disabled students are not necessarily part of the broader educational changes’ (Vlachou 2004, 8; see also Marinósson 2011). Our findings indicate that the teachers would prefer to have less diverse class groups; then teaching would be relatively problem-free, without the additional burdens imposed by the policy of inclusion. They probably often teach accordingly. This situation involves a paradox: the teaching is aimed at the normal student, but nevertheless an effort is directed towards students who are not defined as normal, which then leads to the feeling of ‘normal students’ even being left out. This is perfectly rational if it is seen as evidence of a bipolar conception of either inclusion or non-inclusion of any students with SEN. It, therefore, seems to serve the professional interest of teachers (and all kinds of other interests) to focus on the ‘normal’ and see the difficult ones as ‘the others’ (see also Marinósson 2011). According to Tetler (2005), this is an example of a ‘normalise the child’-approach where the type and degree of a child’s disability sets the limit to ‘how’ inclusive schools want to be.

The second pattern relates to the notion that *students need an official diagnosis to be offered relevant support and teaching* and in that regard SEN are in a pecking order. Yet our analysis of the discourse, especially with the use of interviews with teachers and scrutiny of articles in newspapers, indicates that the school system may have failed in ensuring that teachers are equipped to respond to students’ specific learning needs, even though proper diagnosis has been performed. Furthermore, our analysis of the data suggests that teachers may be too focused on certain teaching methods, such as using textbooks, so that the methodology may act as a barrier for certain students, especially those who have not received any particular diagnosis, but, nevertheless, have special needs. The discourse is characterised by the view that we have failed to create a flexible school (Slee 2011; Tetler 2005) which responds to all learners regardless of their special needs or disability.

The third pattern refers to the fabric of segregation and appears – especially among teachers and in the media – as a *discourse on segregated issues in schooling as good or bad*. One of the most apparent discursive themes refers to special needs and disability, e.g. autism, behaviour problems, blind and deaf children and students who are ‘slow’ – as well as ‘normal’ and ‘good’ students. Dunne (2009, 49) refers to this idea as an

‘othering’ discourse; she found in her research that ‘inclusion was heavily characterised by processes of othering’. Tetler asks if they are ‘full members of the community of the class, or is their role that of a guest?’ (2005, 270). Although this approach is in clear contrast with the inclusive ideology, it seems that schools and teachers choose this way and the picture we get is that ‘difference is managed within educational systems through the identification and labelling of individuals and groups and through the inter-related processes of inclusion and exclusion’ (Armstrong, Armstrong, and Spandagou 2011, 30–1). By labelling children as having special educational needs, the school system devalues one group of students compared to another and at the same time obscures their diversity. Booth points out that this ‘encourages educational difficulties to be seen primarily in terms of the deficiencies of children thus deflecting attention away from the contextual barriers to learning’ (2005, 151).

The fourth pattern relates to *how participants have involved themselves in the discourse*. Teachers have adopted certain positions that we have identified in the form of discursive themes that they use to legitimise what they say and do and do not do. For instance, teachers justify their attitudes by claiming they do not receive enough support from the system and therefore it is not realistic that their teaching corresponds to established policy. Teachers stress the importance of inclusive ideas as a human rights issue but because of an incomplete and insufficient framework, there are limits to what they think they can do. Nevertheless, some teachers’ comments suggest that they think that they do not lack the competence to teach diverse students, but that adverse outer circumstances prevent successful practice (Teacher J, Interview 1). Tetler (2005) identifies a similar trend and distinguishes between teachers’ espoused theory and teachers’ theory in use which may comprise opposing ideas.

### ***Legitimizing principle: good ideology but not realistic in practice?***

In our analysis, we detected the undertone that something has gone wrong; the ideology is considered good but the system does not work. Dunne (2009) has reported on the same idea: that inclusion was seen as a good thing, ‘a common sense inclusion’ that does not work. This has become the legitimating principle of the teachers’ discourse: inclusion is good but not particularly realistic, given the resources that are available.

Further, in the years before and when the interviews were conducted, individualisation was attracting growing attention as a new approach in teaching. Our data and analysis give reasons to believe that individualisation has promoted segregated thinking – that is in opposition to ideas on differentiation – and thus stimulated the view that individual needs are seen as individual problems, subsequently leading to the conclusion that students’ needs are not an issue of the whole classroom.

In the interviews, we identified reluctance to talk about issues regarding inclusion, inclusive education and even about students with impairments or disabilities. We cannot be sure whether this is caused by lack of confidence to talk about these issues as pedagogical or whether the teachers are afraid of not being politically correct in what they say. This hesitance was much less obvious in interviews with Dutch teachers conducted at the same time (Gunnthorsdottir 2013). We conclude that the Icelandic teachers might not want to say anything that could contradict the human rights perspective of inclusion which they support and want to support. Teachers’ perception of additional workload and yet their hesitation to overtly assert that inclusion might not work in practice is an interesting topic to consider when formulating policy on inclusion and the education of children with special educational needs.

***Historical conjuncture: an ideological clash***

At the outset, we asked what characterises and legitimises teachers' discourse on inclusive education, what are the contradictions in official discourse on inclusive education as well as in that of teachers, and how have teachers involved themselves in the discourse. In our analysis, we defined common and distinctive themes as legitimating principles that indicate how teachers reflect and express different concerns on inclusive education. We have identified these patterns as an ensemble in the form of a conjuncture of conflicting ideas. To us it seems that teachers are lost in what is good or bad and right or wrong and are confused about what belongs to their job. They feel inclusive practices involve additional tasks but are hesitant to assert this.

The negative side of these conflicts – and therefore damaging to inclusive ideology and practice – is the creation of a situation we believe is an *ideological clash*; that is, how various ideologies and practices (e.g. issues on integration, inclusion, human rights, differentiation, individualised learning etc.) have piled up in the discourse, creating patterns of contradictions and being driven forward in contrast or opposition to each other (see also Riddell and Weedon 2010). In that sense, we argue that a new policy emphasis – inclusion – has been *added* to the old ones without a mutual agreement as to how these ideas should be assimilated in an effort to reform the school community so that it can accommodate all students as they are.

**Final words**

Our findings have highlighted that the actual problem in terms of teachers and inclusive education is that the teachers in our study look at inclusion as an additional task. The interviewees did not see a mismatch between the values of human rights they hold and their view that inclusion is an additional task. This is worth taking seriously, especially in the light that inclusive ideology is even more strongly highlighted in the most recent legislation (Lög um grunnskóla nr. [Compulsory School Act No.] 91/2008) than in previous legislation. Does this mean that the attitudes of teachers constitute the main obstacle? Or is the obstacle inherent in the attempt to medicalise SEN in order to fight for appropriate resources? There are numerous impediments, both in Iceland and internationally, and we possess no magic solutions that would change those circumstances.

Traditional teaching in compulsory schools has been to a class group of students, but not to individuals. There have been pressures on schools and teachers to improve standards and achievements (Dunne 2009; Riddell and Weedon 2010; Vlachou 2004) and the most recent Icelandic legislation continues and even strengthens the expectations for inclusive practices. Above, we worried that more emphasis on individualisation might stimulate the view that problems lie with the students. But individualisation could also emphasise the strengths of individuals who have special educational needs.

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## Notes

1. We prefer to use the term *individualised learning* instead of *differentiated learning* for the Icelandic term *einstaklingsmiðun* or *einstaklingsmiðað nám* as it presents a direct translation of the term and has in the discussion a strong reference to individual-based learning. In the Icelandic discussion, the Icelandic term seems to refer incidentally to either differentiated learning or individualised learning.
2. The final tests in grade 10 have now been made obligatory which they were not when the interviews were taken. They also used to determine whether students obtained access to certain secondary schools or not. This was abolished by The Compulsory School Act No. 91/2008.

## Notes on Contributors

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## **Conflicts in teachers' professional practices and perspectives about inclusion in Icelandic compulsory schools**

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### **Abstract**

Inclusive education policy, now the norm in many parts of the world including Iceland, is highly dependent on teachers for its successful implementation. Research on inclusion often attempts to identify teachers' attitudes of inclusion (against/for). This article takes a different approach. It focuses on teachers' perspectives of their professional practices; that is, how teachers understand what it means to be and practise as a teacher. We interviewed 10 Icelandic compulsory school teachers and also examined teaching logs and associated documents. The findings suggest that the teachers participating in this study have conflicting expectations towards their professional practice. They have unclear ideas about the inclusive ideology, and external factors influence teachers' perception of their professional practice more than reflective practices. We suggest that these findings may well be applicable beyond the Icelandic context, and that they have implications for the overall inservice and preservice education offered to teachers.

**Keywords:** Inclusive education, teachers' perspectives, teachers' professional practices.

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study is to understand Icelandic compulsory school teachers' professional practices and perspectives in schools that are expected by law to aim for inclusive education.

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Iceland adopted the vision of the *Salamanca Statement<sup>2</sup> and framework for Action on Special Educational Needs* (UNESCO 1994) in 1995 when the Minister of education had the statement and framework for action translated and sent to every school in the country in order to spell out and clarify educational policy. The vision is characterised by humanistic and democratic values, child-centred pedagogy, diversity as the norm, quality education for all children and the use of technical and administrative arrangements to deliver education according to the needs of individual learners (cf. Jóhannesson 2006). The terms inclusive schooling and inclusive education are anchored in the Salamanca Statement and vision. As an international policy document, the statement provides a foundation for national and local education policy, but derives its practical meaning from relevant cultural context. The actual term *inclusive education*, however, first appeared in the compulsory education law from 2008 in paragraph 16 that covered children with disabilities and special needs (The Compulsory School Act No. 91/2008). The most recent policy changes are that the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child was incorporated into Icelandic law in 2013. The bank crisis (the banks in Iceland collapsed in 2008), the fall of the krona and the currency embargo since 2008 has seriously affected both public and private spending and set the nation's economy back several years (Wade 2009). In the period of 2008 to 2013, government and municipalities placed a great deal of emphasis on counteracting the impact of the

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<sup>2</sup> The Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) is based on a World Conference on Special Needs Education in Salamanca, Spain 1994 and represents the provisions and recommendations of 92 governments and 25 international organizations.

economic crisis by protecting the welfare side of the school system and students' wellbeing. Even though the new compulsory school laws (2008), the National Curriculum Guide (2011) and economic cuts did impact schools, these have not yet changed the way teachers work and think about their work (personal communication Marinósson, Logadóttir, Olgeirsson 2014). Schools have changed slowly despite happenings in the Icelandic society and culture in the intervening years. Therefore we feel confident that even though the study was carried out in 2007<sup>3</sup>, the data and the findings are still valid.

The research questions are:

1. What characterises teachers' ideas of their professional practice in a school that is expected to aim for inclusive education?
2. In what ways do teachers' perspectives on their students' learning and learning potential coincide with ideas about inclusive education?

In our view, these questions cast light on how teachers understand their professional practice within an inclusive ideology. Professional practice refers to the work a teacher performs in his or her role as a teacher.

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<sup>3</sup> The first author began her doctoral studies at the Institute of Education, London University in January 2006. In September 2008, however, the Icelandic banks collapsed and the country was on the verge of bankruptcy. This had unexpected consequences for the first author's educational and financial plans and consequently she transferred her studies to the University of Iceland.

### **Theoretical framework and main concepts**

The research is framed within the interpretive paradigm (Bogdan and Biklen 2003; Ferguson and Ferguson 1995) and informed by social constructionism (Berger and Luckmann 1966). These approaches engage with how humans create and recreate meaning grounded in the idea that the world is constructed through and by our social and cultural context (Schwandt 2007). We apply this approach in order to understand and interpret how the teachers in the study constructed their experiences in their work with students, their own professional work and their ideas on inclusive education.

Teaching is now defined as a more complex job than it was a few decades ago, for example due to consequences of social change (Jóhannesson 2006; Jóhannesson, Geirsdóttir and Finnbogason 2002; The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture 2012), and teachers are expected to become highly capable so that they can deal with the multiple tasks of modern teaching (Vlachou 1997). In this context, Hargreaves (2000) argues that “there are increasing efforts to build strong professional cultures of collaboration to develop common purpose, to cope with uncertainty and complexity” (165). This calls for collegially managed schools (Busher and Saran 1995), requiring high quality leadership, inspiring teachers to retain their autonomy of decision making when working with students and placing educational and pedagogical issues at the forefront. According to this understanding, the notion of the teacher as a deliverer is replaced by the notion of the teacher as a facilitator or task manager (Esteve 2000; Hoyle and John 1995). This implies that teachers’ practices need to

become more reflective (Day 1995; Day and Smethem 2009). We adhere to this perspective of teachers' professional practices because it underlines the view that teaching is a collaborative activity (Day 1995; Slee 2011) performed by multiple agents, including other teachers, specialists, teacher aides, students and their families.

In this article inclusive education is understood as a democratic approach to quality and equity education for all children where active participation of diverse students in the learning community of the school is at the forefront (Allan 2012; Armstrong, Armstrong and Spandagou 2010, 2011; Kozleski, Artiles and Waitoller 2011). This understanding presupposes that the term is understood both as a process and an aim in itself. It focuses on our effort to understand what restricts and excludes certain students from active participation (Richardson and Powell 2011) in schools, and what connects students and strengthens their collaboration, learning and participation.

### **The study**

We used qualitative methods (Bogdan and Biklen 2003; Denzin 2005; Flick 2006; Wolcot 1995) influenced by the interpretive paradigm (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Schwandt 2000). Ferguson and Ferguson (1995) characterise the methodology associated with the paradigm "as the systematic collection and analysis of the stories people tell about how they interpret reality" (105).

The primary method for collecting data was interviews, teaching logs kept by some of the interviewees for one week and secondary data sources in the form of documentation. Our professional and personal

experiences informed and focused the research. The first author worked as a primary and upper secondary teacher for seven years and has taught at a university since 2008. She is also the mother of three children, one of whom has impairments (see Gunnþórsdóttir 2003). The second author is a university professor, with more than four decades of teaching experience, and a researcher in the sociology of education and disability studies. She is also a parent of a man with impairments (see Bjarnason 2003).

### *Data*

The research is based on three sets of data. The first set of data is based on semi-structured interviews with ten classroom teachers from three compulsory schools in Iceland. The schools were chosen by asking the local education authority to name three schools that were seen to be guided by the inclusive education ideology in their practices. The interviews were conducted by the first author in February to May 2007. Each interview lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. The teachers, one male and nine females, were all classroom teachers in grades 1–10 (the compulsory level in Iceland) when the interviews took place. The gender construction was inevitable as those teachers were the only ones who taught the classes concerned in the schools. Their teaching experience varied from 5–25 years. Most of them had been teaching in the same town during their teaching career.

The second set of data consists of teaching logs from four of the ten teachers. The teachers used the logs to report on one or two students in their classrooms, identified with special needs. Teachers kept the logs over five days and filled out one A4 format each day, where they

registered one school curriculum activity of the targeted student. They described what the student had done in for example math or Icelandic lessons on the particular day. At the end of that week, those teachers were interviewed for the second time (here referred to as interview 2) to discuss the logs and the first interview. The logs are used here as complementary data throwing light on the interview data and providing examples of teachers' professional practice with students identified with special needs.

The third set of data consists of written documents such as Icelandic educational legislation, particularly since 1995 (The Compulsory School Act 66/1995), other policy documents, national curricula, and ordinances. These documents set out the main guidelines for teachers both according to policy and practice.

### ***Data analysis***

The interviews were transcribed verbatim the day after they were conducted. The teaching logs were useful for revealing what approaches teachers chose to use in working with students, what methods they used and why. They were analysed both separately, as an independent 'document', and in coherence with the interview material. The policy documents on Icelandic education were analysed in parallel with the interviews and logs throughout the analysis and writing process. In the process of analysis common themes were identified in the data which are introduced in the findings chapter.

### ***Limitations and ethical issues***

Although Icelandic schools have for a long time been relatively homogeneous in terms of ideology and structure (see Gunnþórsdóttir

in print) the three schools and the teachers involved in this research cannot be seen as representative of all Icelandic schools and teachers. Even though the number of teachers in our sample is small, we suggest that the findings are likely to exhibit verisimilitude to similar findings elsewhere and can serve as a valuable contribution to the awareness of how the research participants understand what it means to be and practise as teachers in the context of inclusive education. Even though we adhere to a broad definition of the term inclusive education, we concentrate here largely on data concerning teachers' professional practice in the context of students identified with special needs. This may seem inappropriate, but in order to understand teachers' perspectives on inclusive education we found it useful to focus on those students, because they have had a stronger reference than other groups to the general understanding of the inclusive ideology (Slee 2011, 116–119). There were important ethical concerns regarding the participants, the schools and their locations. The Icelandic school and teacher community is small, as the population of Iceland is only 325.671 people (Statistics Iceland 2014). Thus, we have camouflaged the schools, teachers and locations in order to minimise the risk of unwanted identification of the research participants who were promised anonymity.

## **Findings**

Three major themes emerged from the data. The first is directed at exploring teachers' conflicting perspectives and expectations towards their work; the second centres on teachers' conceptualisation of

inclusive education; and the third on external factors impacting teachers' professional practice such as the legal framework.

***Teachers' conflicting expectations towards their work***

Two sub-themes emerged under this heading. The former is on teachers' perspectives and expectations concerning their students' learning abilities and potential and the latter is on tensions within practice related to issues of support and collaboration.

Teachers' perspectives and expectations

Firstly, the interviewees emphasised the importance of individualised learning<sup>4</sup> for all their students but, at the same time, described certain of their students as having additional needs and some defined those students as “an addition” to the regular class without bringing in extra resources.

Most of the teachers focused more on their students' weaknesses rather than their strong sides. The additional support these students received was often provided in segregated groups as María explained: “They [two students] are very slow readers and need to be separate [from the class] and get additional instruction in reading” (Interview 1).

Elísa:

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<sup>4</sup>We prefer to use the term *individualised learning* instead of *differentiated learning* for the Icelandic term *einstaklingsmiðun* or *einstaklingsmiðað nám* as it presents a direct translation of the term and has in the discussion a strong reference to individual-based learning. In the Icelandic discussion, the Icelandic term seems to refer incidentally to either differentiated learning or individualised learning

The weakest-group in math is now taught in a different classroom ... of course we adapt our teaching to those kids; they do not receive the same study materials as the normal child who can handle written examinations. (Elísa interview 1)

Based on the data we developed what we call a Teachers' mind-map of student categories and learning potentials (see figure 1).

**[Figure 1 here please]**

The mind map is based on our interpretation of how teachers referred to and classified their students according to the way they described them. We believe that this demonstrates how the majority of teachers perceive their students as learners. That in turn appears to affect how they think about their instruction practices. There is a danger that these may lead to hindrances to some students' learning and participation and even to their exclusion and segregation. We now refer to the mind map and explain the categories it illustrates. The arrows represent the interrelations of the categories, indicating for example how a category creates a new one. The overall categories teachers used to describe their students were "normal students" and "not normal students". A normal student is the one who can mostly deal with the classroom material with "ordinary support and instructions from teachers" but the not normal student is seen to have additional needs for support, time, pedagogical methods, curriculum adaptation or study materials. Some, but not all, such students had diagnostic labels. In teachers' talk students were placed on a continuum from strong to average to weak students (the third horizontal row in the mind map); strong and average thus belonging to the normal category and weak to the not normal category. The weak students were talked about by the teachers in several subcategories ranging from viable slow learners to hopeless in terms of their academic potential.

Students classified as strong normal students, managed mostly on their own and stayed on track in their work. The teachers neither worried about them nor spent much time with them. The students referred to as average were seen as the normal students. Within that group students ranged from “middle to slow” and the slow learners were seen to be at risk of falling into the category of weak learners. Those students were seen, for example, to be in danger of failing one or more national standardised tests. The teachers were concerned for those students and gave them additional lessons and support, to strengthen their performance and “speed them up” in preparation for taking the tests.

Many of the students classified in the not normal category were seen to be able to benefit from special education, and to succeed in non-academic subjects such as art and craft. A small group of the not normal category was portrayed as hopeless in the sense that “they would never succeed within the school system”. Most of the teachers believed that those students were the responsibility of the special educators and consequently they spent little time working with them.

The teachers expressed dissatisfaction at having to include their less able students in standardised national tests. On the one hand, they claimed that they were expected to use diverse teaching strategies for diverse students, but were supposed, simultaneously, to prepare their students for competitive standardised tests. Such tests are not designed to take account of diverse needs and competences. The teachers experienced these contrary demands as difficult, because they felt that these tests controlled their teaching. Elísa explained:

... those blessed national tests – the controlling witch!! The inclusive school ideas and standardised tests do not go together. We have 40 children in two classes and 11 or 12 are not using the same books as the other children use. But we can only obtain an exemption from the standardised tests for two of those, because they have been diagnosed; the others simply cannot be exempted although their study level is a year or two behind the rest of the class. (Elísa interview 1)

Similar conflicting expectations appeared when teachers talked about their effort to meet students' individualised learning as mentioned above but seem to be stuck in traditional ways of meeting their students needs such as using study books that actually do not suit their students – and even outrage them – instead of using more adequate material. Susanna said about one boy identified with ADHD and mental impairment:

He was with the class in Christian studies last year, but now I had him work with the Little Bible and it's the same with natural science, he is using the study material for third or fourth grade [he is in 6th grade] ... and in English ... he is using the same books as last year, I just had him working with them again.

In this quote we have an example of how decision making based on students' weak side restricts active participation of the student in the learning community and makes him more an outsider than insider of

the classroom. A systematic self-reflection individually or with colleagues based on theoretical assumptions might have opened up for these exclusionary circumstances.

### Support and collaboration

This sub-theme of support and collaboration illuminated the teachers' views on their own work habits as well as on those of the special teachers and teacher aides (normally an unskilled person). The special teachers were described as mainly working with individual students or small groups, in order to improve their skills and abilities. Yet, most of the class teachers said they wished that the special teachers would support them in the classroom, reaching more students in need of assistance. María explained:

I am not really doing that [working individually with students] in the classroom. You see, it is the special teacher who is helping the weaker students individually, while I am in the classroom working with the group as a whole. (María interview 1)

When María and the other teachers were asked if they had discussed this with the special teachers their answer was almost invariably: “there is never time for such discussions”. Hence, the clashing routines and rhythms of the class teachers' and the special teachers' work habits added to the confusion and conflicting expectations of the teachers. A similar tension was described relating to the teacher aides and their lack of skills to work with students according to their needs. Teachers claim that this situation has a diverse effect; instead of acting

as a colleague with shared responsibility, it places more burden on their shoulders as too much time is devoted to “educating” and guiding the teacher aide – about *how to* work with students. Moreover, the teachers were concerned about the teacher aides’ lack of education:

We have also had to witness a student not receiving the service the school is supposed to provide. One of the teacher aides, for example, accompanied a student right up to 10<sup>th</sup> grade and all this time they were not doing any serious work. The teacher did not attend to this student because he did not belong to the special class – he was really somewhere in between ..... and this was just a nice lady, a teacher aide who accompanied him and just did insignificant work with him in class. Of course he learnt nothing. (Elisa interview 2)

Teachers mentioned that having more hands in the classroom to assist them and share the responsibility is useless if the people concerned lack the skills and education to meet students’ needs. Many of them – mostly uneducated women – only wanted to work with students in the lower grades because they do not trust themselves to assist students when the study material gets more specialised and complicated.

The teachers expressed concerns about how support, to themselves and to students, is organised and distributed. The focus is more often on support which results in students being removed or detached from the responsibility of the classroom teachers, instead of creating a

situation that enables the teachers to work in a holistic manner and the students to learn:

External circumstances hinder many children in their studies. Many students, whether with handicaps or not, find it very difficult to work in a large group. Some have the opportunity to leave this environment, where they feel uncomfortable, and move with the special teacher into a small space for an x number of lessons and then they can perhaps focus a little for the first time. If students could be allowed to change their environment more frequently we would be a whole lot more successful with those particular students; because there are countless lessons where those students are merely present, perhaps interrupting others and perhaps just doing nothing. (Klara interview 1)

The teachers would like to see more active collaboration and teamwork both between other teachers, and specialists within and outside the school. They claim that there is a lack of consultation and collaboration and therefore procedures and responsibilities are not always clear. This absence of interaction too often results in unnecessary frustration. The teachers criticise the time and money invested in diagnosing students as a prerequisite for offering them adequate support. The process takes far too long and during the interval – which can be weeks or months - there are no solutions or support for teachers and students. Klara said:

Diagnoses are not always necessary; in many cases we – teachers and parents – know exactly what the child needs and

it is so frustrating having to wait for weeks on end... and then perhaps you receive some advice from the specialist counsellor, down there...but you are not necessarily given the added space or support to meet the needs of those kids.

Taken together, these findings cast a beam of light on common conflicts that teachers face in their teaching. The greater the extent to which the teachers viewed their students' ability and learning potential as fixed and categorised, the harder it was for them to find acceptable solutions. That in itself is also linked to how teachers think about their own professional practice as shown below. Although teachers have access to special teachers and teacher aides their contribution too often stimulates segregative practices rather than the interaction and collaboration which the teachers state that they would prefer. An example of this crystallises in Gudrun's comment when asked about support for teachers: "Support from the school department focuses on the provision of special lessons," which too often means that the support is directed away from the class teacher and the responsibility for the student is transferred to the special teachers or the teacher aides.

### ***Teachers' conceptualisations of inclusive education***

When the teachers were asked about inclusive education, they mostly mentioned individualised learning. The data showed that most of the teachers understood the term "individualised learning" as synonymous with "inclusive education". None of the teachers said that they had really explored inclusive education policy or practice. Elísa had heard about inclusive education and the Salamanca declaration by

coincidence, in the staffroom where one of her colleagues was explaining her postgraduate studies at the university. Susanna said:

I do not have much information about what is meant by inclusive school. I only knew that the municipality has adopted this idea [individualised learning] and of course it has been mentioned at work. I have not taken part in such talk. All my information comes from the school administration and then there is of course this brochure on individualised learning I got... and have not read yet. (Interview 1)

The teachers' understanding of the term inclusive education was most often confined to what Söder (1991) called situational integration, or the idea that all students should be together in the same location, their home schools and, when possible, in ordinary classes irrespective of their needs. Klara said:

It is really this integrated school for everyone ... is it not? And it does not really matter whether or not you have a handicap; everyone is entitled to learn according to their interest, skills and ability like is stated in the National Curriculum Guide ... is that not correct? (Klara interview 1)

Furthermore, the findings show that neither in the interviews nor in the logs did the teachers refer to concepts related to inclusive education, such as quality education, diversity, equity, social justice, participation or democratic schooling. This suggests that the teachers were uninformed about the inclusive ideology as defined in this article and lacked terminology to discuss the policy and practice involved.

***External factors influencing teachers' perceptions of their professional practice***

When asked about their own professional practice and perspectives, the teachers answered “we should”, “we are expected to do...” this or that, or “according to the National Curriculum we must...”. Most claimed that they experienced such external commands as forced up on them from above. This feeling of lack of power over professional practice was more frequently uttered by teachers who taught at the middle and upper levels (grades 4–10) than by those working with younger students. The importance of teaching in preparation for national tests was also used as an explanation for teaching from the centre of the classroom. Julia, who taught in grade 10 said:

It is not really possible to work on something based on the individual all the time..., and yet everyone is supposed to take the same exams; you know, everyone is measured by the same yardstick. (Julia interview 1)

Two teachers in the lower grades (1–3) shared similar ideas, but refused to let the tests control their teaching. Vera said:

I am teaching lower grades and I know full well what is awaiting them [my students], such as the standardised tests in the fourth grade, but I really keep looking at the individual as he is today. This is perhaps because in my opinion those tests do not suit everyone and I prefer to deal with the students as they are... support the skills they have. (Vera interview 1)

The lack of support from the system was also used to explain why the teachers were unable to work in the manner they said they desired, as

well as being overloaded by various professional tasks and demands. The words of Kristin are representative of these ideas:

Teachers play their part in this; they keep saying: “I must sort out this situation, I must sort out this situation” and the experts now say: “you should be able to solve all the problems; you are supposed to be able to plan lessons for 25 students, regardless of their individual differences, in such a way that everyone is provided with suitable learning materials. But this is just not realistic ... those are excessive demands. (Kristin interview 2)

In general the teachers felt they did not lack the competence to teach students with special needs, but they claimed that the organisation of the schools and the educational structure, lack of resources and external demands hindered them in responding adequately to their students’ additional needs. The findings suggest that the teachers felt external factors affected their control over the conditions within which they worked, creating a situation where they felt powerless vis-à-vis the education system.

## **Discussion**

In our first research question we asked, what characterises teachers’ ideas of their professional practice in a school that is expected to aim for inclusive education? The results suggest that the teachers’ perspectives on their work were somewhat unclear and fragmentary. If this is correct, it could relate to our findings which indicate that the teachers did not engage with much systematic self-reflection

underpinned by theoretical associations. Day (1995) found that teachers who were active in producing knowledge about their own teaching were also likely to promote reflective practices. Thus, because of lack of self-reflection it appears to have been difficult for the teachers to identify which teaching approaches might lead to either segregation or inclusionary practices. In order to discuss and reflect, teachers need a forum and opportunity to explore terminology and theoretical arguments. Vlachou (1997) has highlighted that teaching is a complex and skilled activity, which calls for a highly developed ability to hold in balance a multitude of demands and tensions. Teachers, therefore, need to “learn to live with dilemma, contradiction and paradox” (62). Teachers are not – but need to be – reflective practitioners in order to be successful inclusive educators.

In light of the findings concerning the teachers’ descriptions of their professional practices, we argue that they need to be supported to enhance their reflective pedagogical practice. For inclusive education to work, the schools need inquiring reflective practitioners, able to make decisions in situations of uncertainty.

Teachers’ perceptions of lack of power emerged in the data, for example in their perspectives on educational acts, curricula and tests, as if these were external issues imposed upon them. Day (1995) has suggested that teachers have been inclined to reflect on their learning in private. He suggests that reflecting collectively with their professional communities might have positive impact on practice. Such arguments may help us understand why the teachers in this study did not exercise what power they had, for example to reorganise the

work of regular and special teachers and teacher aides in a more collaborative manner.

The findings show that the teachers viewed inclusive education as an external issue separate from their professional practice, which is in line with the findings of Gunnþórsdóttir and Jóhannesson (2013) that inclusion is an additional workload; they were unfamiliar with ideas and concepts on inclusive education and most did not see it as important (or an issue) to incorporate inclusive ideas in their teaching. The support offered to students with special needs is mostly arranged to fit in with the organisation of the school rather than individual students' needs. Such students tend to be grouped together for special lessons, since this was seen to be rational and convenient for resources and planning. This approach is grounded in the historical context of special education (Richardson and Powell 2011) and still deeply interconnected within many schools as a technical and structural solution to a problem.

The second research question was: In what ways do teachers' perspectives on their students' learning and learning potential coincide with ideas about inclusive education? The mind-map helps us to understand how and why the teachers categorised their students and with what consequences. The findings show that many of the teachers constructed almost mutually exclusive student groups, both within and outside their classrooms, while attempting to respond to individual needs in accordance with the ethos of individualised learning. This is contrary to the inclusive ideology. As argued above, the teachers referred to individualised learning in a way that might have resulted in

patterns of segregation. The findings show that most of the teachers believed that those students [identified with SEN] were the responsibility of the special educators and consequently they spent little time working with them. The situation the mind map illustrated could possibly be connected to the existence of special education arrangements which limit teachers' authority over their professional practices and their potential to act as leaders in a team of teachers and professionals. One of the Icelandic head teachers raised this concern when he mentioned the need to change special education practices as he was aware that "by focusing on students' weak sides we would only create tasks for special teachers".

If this interpretation is correct, then it is of concern that the teachers may still be applying practices that originated in a more traditional special education, rather than focusing on meeting diverse individual needs. If diversity is not taken as a starting point in teachers' practices, the system itself is likely to focus and encapsulate their work. The teachers were used to having teacher aides in their classrooms, which seemed to provide favourable conditions for meeting the diverse needs of students. Yet, aides might or might not support the participation of students with additional learning needs or other needs in the school. This is paradoxical because these students were considered, according to the teachers, to receive a service from an inclusive system. We argue that it is evident from the data how categorisation by perceived ability or needs implies that both the stronger and the weaker students may receive little attention from their teachers and miss the chance to develop their skills according to their ability.

It is our understanding that teachers in this research represent ideas where students are seen as needing support to cope with requirements aimed at normal students. As Armstrong, Armstrong and Spandagou (2010) have highlighted, the definition of inclusion one chooses affects teachers' way of teaching. The teachers mostly referred to innovations and school reforms as prescribed by agents outside their schools, documents they knew about but had not yet explored. This is in line with similar trends identified by researchers in Iceland, Europe and elsewhere (see, e.g. Day and Smethem 2009; Jóhannesson, Geirsdóttir and Finnbogason 2002) where governmental interventions resulted in educational policies without teacher support.

Consequently, the teachers did not see it as their task to take the initiative of studying and implementing ideas about inclusive education. As discussed above, this is, however, not solely their task or responsibility, especially – as we argue – considering that inclusive education is about whole school practice (Slee 2011).

## **Conclusion**

The goal of this research was to explore how teachers experience and express their own professional development and their ideas about inclusive education. The theme of segregation is the most dominant theme in the findings and appears both in the teachers' perspectives towards their students as learners, and in how they explained their own teaching practices. This is at odds with any definition of inclusive education and contrary to the image of teachers as interactive and democratic practitioners. The findings demonstrate that the teachers were unaware of the segregative impact of their ideas because these

are grounded in their professional practices, school cultures and organisational structures. Segregative pedagogical practices have thus become generally accepted in the schools under study.

The overall findings suggest that principles of inclusive education such as a democratic schools, equity, social justice and participation are not in concert with the teachers' understandings of their professional practice. Finally, the findings indicate that the teachers may be losing some sense of their potential to affect and change their own pedagogical approaches and their professional work conditions, due to their feelings of disempowerment. Further research is needed to explore teachers' professional development in the context of inclusive education policy and practices. Education systems that aim for inclusive education through legislation and policy must focus on systemic changes followed by adequate support to teachers. It is not useful to force the policy and practice of inclusive education into a system designed for categorisation and segregation (Slee 2011). It is problematic to aim for inclusive education, democratic schooling, and quality education for all unless teachers are encouraged and supported to reflect and act professionally, and become critically aware of the complexities associated with inclusive ideology its policy and practices.

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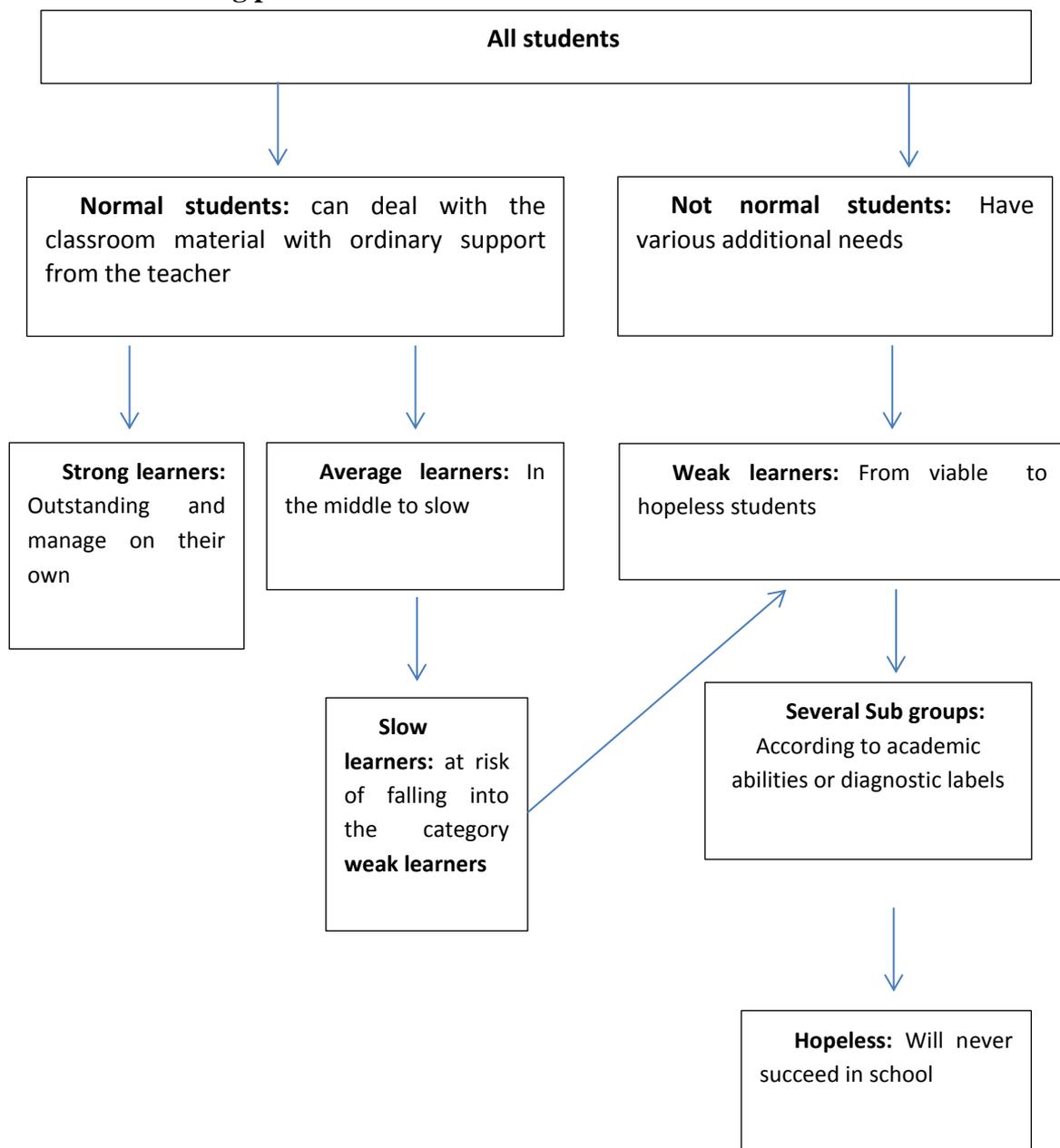
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**Figure 1 – Teachers’ mind-map of categories of students’ abilities and learning potentials**



**APPENDIX B – Question grids used in interviews with teachers and head teachers**

**Grid 1 – Teachers’ Role in an inclusive school**

<b>Themes</b>	<b><u>Column 1</u></b>	<b><u>Column 2</u></b>	<b><u>Column 3</u></b> What I like/see as positive Keywords for further discussions	<b><u>Column 4</u></b> What I’m worried-/not so convinced about Keywords for further discussions
<b>[A]</b> <b>Ideology/ Policy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Holistic whole-child approach</li> <li>• Social model</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Within-child focus</li> <li>• Deficit and medical-model</li> </ul>	A1  A2	A1  A2
<b>[B]</b> <b>Classroom organization</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Withdrawal</li> <li>• Individual and small group direct teaching</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In-class inclusive approach to meet a diversity of pupils</li> </ul>	B1  B2	B1  B2
<b>[C]</b> <b>Assessment and diagnostic</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assessment for learning – pupil-friendly</li> <li>• Pupils self-review of progress</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specialist diagnostic assessment</li> </ul>	C1  C2	C1  C2
<b>[D]</b> <b>Teaching styles</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personalised learning approach to meet the needs of the whole child</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specific individual pupil programmes with little or no transference across the curriculum</li> </ul>	D1  D2	D1  D2

## Grid 2 – The Role of the school and the local community in an inclusive school

<b>Themes</b>	<b><u>Column 1</u></b>	<b><u>Column 2</u></b>	<b><u>Column 3</u></b> What I like/see as positive Keywords for further discussions	<b><u>Column 4</u></b> What I'm worried-/not so convinced about Keywords for further discussions
[A] <b>Ideology/ Policy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on educational outcome</li> <li>• Selection based on learning abilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Holistic focus: The child and the wider community</li> <li>• Fostering different abilities</li> </ul>	A1  A2	A1  A2
[B] <b>Types of schools</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One mainstream school for all children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Special schools for special children</li> </ul>	B1  B2	B1  B2
[C] <b>The school and community</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participation limited to what the child can do</li> <li>• Limited participation outside the school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participation across the curriculum and in society</li> </ul>	C1  C2	C1  C2
[D] <b>Attitude and perception</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Active participation and contribution to the society</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Passive receiver of care</li> </ul>	D1  D2	D1  D2

**Grid 3 –Teachers future vision**

<p><b>ACCORDING TO TEACHERS</b> Keywords for further discussions</p>	<p><b>ACCORDING TO SCHOOL AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY</b> Keywords for further discussions</p>



**APPENDIX C – Researcher prompts in interviews with teachers and head teachers**

**Grid 1 – Teachers’ Role [Researcher - Prompts]**

<p><b>Ideology/Policy</b></p>	<p>* There are wide range of views about what inclusive education is, and as yet there is no fully agreed definition. How would you describe inclusive education?          * For some, inclusion means that schools should adapt to the children needs. How realistic is this ideology if you think about your school and your classroom.</p> <p><u>Go to Grid:</u>          * What might have happened in your school which could be described as a process to become more inclusive?</p> <p><b>Check list:</b>    <input type="checkbox"/> Ideology derived from?    <input type="checkbox"/> Definition based on?    <input type="checkbox"/> Heard about the Salamanca Statement?</p>
<p><b>Classroom Organization</b></p>	<p>What difficulties, regarding classroom organization, can you think about which could be barrier to inclusive classroom practices (diversity of pupils with complex and challenging additional educational needs)</p> <p><u>Got to Grid:</u>  <b>Check list:</b>    <input type="checkbox"/> diversity    <input type="checkbox"/> Resources    <input type="checkbox"/> Collaboration    <input type="checkbox"/> Education/skills                            <input type="checkbox"/> Planning time    <input type="checkbox"/> implementing policy</p>
<p><b>Assessment and Diagnostic</b></p>	<p>How important are Specialist Diagnostic Assessment for teachers?</p> <p><u>Go to Grid:</u>  <b>Check list:</b>    <input type="checkbox"/> The role of SDA for teachers                            <input type="checkbox"/> Tension between inclusion and achieving high exam results</p>



**Grid 2 – The Role of the school and the local community [Researcher - Prompts]**

<p><b>Ideology/Policy</b></p>	<p>For some people, inclusion is seen as a human right issue. What could that involve?</p> <p><b>Check list:</b>   <input type="checkbox"/> Educational issue      <input type="checkbox"/> Link to the wider society      <input type="checkbox"/> Culture</p>
<p><b>Types of schools</b></p>	<p>In some countries there is a choice between special schools or mainstream schools (two track system) in other there is one mainstream school for all children (one track system). What can you think about as both advantage and disadvantage factors in both systems.</p> <p><b>Check list:</b>   <input type="checkbox"/> Choice      <input type="checkbox"/> Limits to inclusion      <input type="checkbox"/> Your own system</p>
<p><b>The school and the Wider community</b></p>	<p>Schools are now being required to move towards more inclusive practices. Do you think our community is also moving in the same direction?</p> <p><b>Check list:</b>      <input type="checkbox"/> changes in schools &gt; changes in the society  <input type="checkbox"/> changes in society &gt; changes in schools  <input type="checkbox"/> Examples of inclusion in the society</p>
<p><b>Attitude and Perception</b></p>	<p>Does inclusion also refer to other members of the society who are excluded on the ground of race, sex, age.....</p> <p><b>Check list:</b>   <input type="checkbox"/> Exclusion      <input type="checkbox"/> Human Rights      <input type="checkbox"/> Education for the future</p>

**Comments:**

## APPENDIX D – Teaching log used by teachers

Please fill in the log as soon as possible after each session

Pupil: _____ Age _____  Special needs/disability _____ assistance _____  Date: _____ Time: _____  Duration of activity _____	Filled in by:  Teacher _____ Classroom _____  Other _____
Curriculum Area(s): _____  Activity: _____	Pupil organization:  1:1 _____ Paired/small group _____  Whole class _____ Self-directed _____  Other: _____
Goal: _____	Why did you choose this goal? _____
Please list the strategies used: _____	Why did you choose to use these strategies? _____
How did the pupil respond? _____	Did she/he reach your teaching purpose? _____
Will you use these strategies again? Or do you think other strategies will be more helpful in reaching your goals? _____	



## APPENDIX E – Interviews in Iceland and the Netherlands – an overview

**Table 3 Interviews in Iceland and the Netherlands – an overview**

### Pilot interviews

	Semi-structured	Question Grid	
February 2007	6 Icelandic students (6-16 years old)		
April 2007		1 Icelandic teacher	

### Main interviews

	Semi-structured		
<b>Iceland</b>			
<b>School A-IS</b>			
February 2007	6 Icelandic teachers		

	Interview – 1 Question Grid	Teaching Log	Interview – 2 Semi-structured
<b>Iceland</b>			
<b>School B-IS</b>			
Teacher A	3 May 2007	7-11 May 2007	14 May 2007
Teacher B	3 May 2007	7-11 May 2007	14 May 2007
Head teacher	3 May 2007		
<b>School C-IS</b>			
Teacher A	4 May 2007	7-11 May 2007	15 May 2007
Teacher B	4 May 2007	7-11 May 2007	15 May 2007
Head teacher	4 May 2007		

	Interview – 1 Question Grid	Teaching Log	Interview – 2 Semi-structured
<b>The Netherlands</b>			
<b>School D-NL</b>			
Teacher A	13 September 2007	17-21 September 2007	24 September 2007
Teacher B	13 September 2007	17-21 September 2007	24 September 2007
Head teacher	13 September 2007		
<b>School E-NL</b>			
Teacher A	14 September 2007	17-21 September 2007	24 September 2007
Teacher B	14 September 2007	17-21 September 2007	24 September 2007
Head teacher	14 September 2007		



