



# **Possibilities for a liberating pedagogy**

A critical exploration of an Icelandic course for asylum seekers.

Evan Jett Lewis

May 2019

MA Thesis

School of Education



**HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS**  
**MENNTAVÍSINDASVIÐ**



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Evan Jett Lewis

MA Thesis in International Studies in Education  
Thesis Supervisor: Brynja Elísabeth Halldórsdóttir

Faculty of Education Studies  
School of Education, University of Iceland  
May, 2019

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This thesis is a 40-credit final project towards the MA degree in International Studies in Education, School of Education, University of Iceland.

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Printing: Háskólaprent  
Reykjavík, 2019

## Preface

This research project, *Possibilities for a liberating pedagogy: A critical exploration of an Icelandic course for asylum seekers*, is a 40 credits thesis and partial fulfilment of an MA degree in International Studies in Education. This research project presented an opportunity for me to further explore my interest in critical pedagogy while also, hopefully, contributing to society in a meaningful way. I am eager to present the results of this study and I hope that its readers will find it useful in some way.

My advisor for this project was Brynja E. Halldórsdóttir, chair of the Department of International Studies in Education and assistant professor at the School of Education. I would like to extend my sincerest thanks to her for assisting me in this project. Her constructive feedback and expertise have been vital in the theorizing and conjuring up of this work. I also wish to acknowledge the assistance of [insert name of specialist advisor] for [her/his] comments and evaluation.

I am particularly grateful for the teachers and students who participated in this study and who accorded me access to the sacred space of the classroom. I hope that my presence was not too much of a nuisance. A very special thank you as well to the students and teachers in the International Studies in Education program who have helped strengthen my critical eye.

Last but not least, I want to thank my mother, who is the source of motivation for all of my endeavors, and my father, who is my best friend. Without their support, the underlying work would have been impossible to complete.

This final thesis is written by me, the undersigned. I have acquainted myself with the University of Iceland Code of Ethics. I have followed the norms of ethics in research regarding the acquisition and dissemination of information, and the interpretation of results and have referenced all content used in this thesis. I confirmed this with my signature.

Evan Jett Lewis

Reykjavík, May 7th 2019



## Abstract

Second-language learning courses that are often offered to asylum seekers provide a unique opportunity for a pedagogy of critique to be implemented. However, there is essentially no existing research in Iceland, and very little internationally, that considers the practicality of implementing a pedagogy of critique within second-language classrooms for asylum seekers. Moreover, the experiences of teachers and students within these programs have not been considered to the degree that allows for a genuine exploration of what these courses are like and how critical pedagogy could fit into their existing structures.

This qualitative case study seeks to develop a deep understanding of the Red Cross' "Icelandic for Asylum Seekers" course through the lens of critical pedagogy. My goal is to contribute to the knowledge regarding education for asylum seekers in Iceland, as well as to the broader field of critical pedagogy and its practical applications within second-language learning programs geared towards this group of people. The theory of critical pedagogy functioned as a framework that informed my approach to this research as well as a lens through which I analyzed my data.

The primary methods of data collection used were participant observations, semi-structured, in-depth interviews of students and teachers, field notes, and to a lesser extent document analysis. The specific methods utilized in this research were selected to allow for a more comprehensive understanding of the program vis-à-vis observed classroom practices, teacher and student dynamics, and the individual experiences and perceptions of teachers and students within the program. Thematic analysis was used to make sense of the data collected. These methods of data collection and analysis allowed for a better understanding of the specific areas of tension that hindered the asylum seekers students from experiencing a liberating learning experience.

The findings suggest that there were three major areas of tension that hindered the students from experiencing a culturally relevant and liberating learning experience: teachers' inability to get to know their students, teachers' pedagogical methods and approaches, teachers' lack of formal multicultural education training, and the material conditions of the classroom.

This qualitative case study may be of interest to teachers and program coordinators responsible for teaching and devising second language learning programs for asylum seekers.

## Ágrip

Rannsóknir hafa sýnt að tíðni landsflóttta hefur ekki verið jafn há svo áratugum skiptir. Að sama skapi hefur flæði hælisleitenda yfir landamæri haldist í hendur við uppsveiflu öfgaþjóðernissinna og aukningu á fordómum gegn innflytjendum. Þetta á það til að endurspeglast í stefnubreytingum og aðgerðum þjóðanna sem taka á móti hælisleitendum. Ennfremur er oft horft fram hjá mannréttindum hælisleitenda þar sem þeir hafa ekki ríkisborgararétt og hlutskipti þeirra á vinnumarkaðinum útilokar þá frá ýmis konar þjónustu sem tryggir velferð þeirra, þ.m.t. menntun. Þessi aukning fordóma í samfélaginu í heild sinni gerir það að verkum að þörf er á breyttu viðhorfi í menntakerfinu þar sem leggja þurfi meiri áherslu á að þjálfra gagnrýna hugsun og siðferðiskennd í stað hefðbundinnar kennslu. Slík menntun myndi ekki einungis gagnast flóttamönnum heldur einnig vinna gegn mismunun meðal annarra samfélagsþegna.

Tungumálanámskeið sem oft eru boðin hælisleitendum bjóða upp á kjörið tækifæri til þess að innleiða kennslu af þessum hætti. Hins vegar er mikill skortur á rannsóknum, bæði á Íslandi og erlendis, sem sýna fram á hagnýtni slíkrar innleiðingar. Upplifun kennara og nemenda á þessum námskeiðum hefur heldur ekki verið könnuð og því erfitt að fullyrða hvernig gagnrýnin kennsla (e. critical pedagogy) passi inn í núverandi uppbyggingu námskeiðanna.

Þessi eigindlega rannsókn leitast við að skoða námskeiðið “Íslenska fyrir hælisleitendur” á vegum Rauða Kross Íslands út frá sjónarhóli gagnrýnnar kennslu. Markmið rannsóknarinnar er að auka þekkingu á menntun hælisleitenda á Íslandi og víkka núverandi þekkingu á sviði gagnrýnnar kennslu og hagnýtni hennar í tungumálanámskeiðum fyrir þennan hóp samfélagsþegna. Reynt var að nota kenningar og fræði á sviði gagnrýnnar kennslu sem ramma til þess að nálgast rannsóknina og vinna rannsóknargögn.

Helstu aðferðir við gagnaöflun í rannsókninni voru vettvangskannanir, viðtöl við hælisleitendur og kennara, persónulegar glósur og athuganir og að einhverju leyti lestur opinberra skjala. Aðferðirnar sem notaðar voru í rannsókninni voru valdar til þess að hægt væri að öðlast dýpri skilning á núverandi kennsluvenjum, samskiptum milli nemenda og kennara og reynslu og viðhorfi einstaklinga á námskeiðunum. Þemagreining var svo notuð til greiningar á söfnuðum gögnum. Þessar aðferðir gagnaöflunar gefa betri skilning á þeim spennuflötum sem koma í veg fyrir að hælisleitendur fái kennslu sem eflir virka þátttöku þeirra í samfélaginu.

Niðurstöður rannsóknarinnar benda til að helst séu það fjórir spennuflétir sem hindra það að nemendur fái kennslu sem stuðlar að því að þeir geti að samrýmst íslenskum menningarheim og samfélagi: það að kennarar ná ekki að kynnast nemendum sínum

nægilega vel, aðferðir og nálgun þeirra við kennsluna, skortur á formlegri þjálfun kennara í að kenna nemendum frá mismunandi menningarheimum, og takmarkanir kennslugagna.

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# 1 Introduction

My interest in conducting this research largely stems from my desire to learn more about the intersection of second-language learning for asylum seekers and critical pedagogy. Since my discovery of Freire's writings, my excitement for critical pedagogy has informed my belief that a radical and progressive teaching philosophy that provokes students to consider and respond to the dominant structures that inform their lived reality is essential to creating a liberating learning experience. Second-language learning courses that are often offered to asylum seekers provide a unique opportunity for a pedagogy of this type to be implemented. However, there is essentially no existing research in Iceland, and very little internationally, that considers the practicality of implementing a pedagogy of critique within second-language classrooms for asylum seekers. Moreover, the experiences of teachers and students within these programs have not been considered to the degree that allows for a genuine exploration of what these courses are like and how critical pedagogy could fit into their existing structures. My goal for this research is to bring to light the experiences of teachers and students within the Red Cross' "Icelandic for Asylum Seekers" program in order to open a dialogue that would hopefully lead to a fuller discussion of how asylum seekers enrolled in second-language learning programs in Iceland can experience a pedagogy that is more culturally relevant and liberating.

A study carried out by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) showed that forced displacement worldwide is at its highest in decades and that the rate at which people are becoming displaced is rapidly increasing. The study shows that a staggering 68.5 million people worldwide have been forcefully uprooted from their homes as 2018 came to an end, resulting from geopolitical conflict, natural disasters, civil war, sexual violence, famine, poverty, and economic hardship (UNHCR, 2018). Today, mass exoduses have become more numerous around the globe: the refugee crisis in Syria has gleaned much international attention as millions of Syrians fleeing violence have crossed the Mediterranean, often unsuccessfully, into Europe. Desperate border-crossers fleeing extreme violence from Latin American countries have been placed in holding centers along the Mexico-U.S. border. The conflict between Iraq and Islamic State of Iraq and Syria has caused thousands of Iraqis to flee to neighboring countries. The world's refugee crisis is one of the most complex issues facing the global community today and has become a focus in a multitude of countries.

The flow of displaced persons through national borders has coincided with a rise in xenophobia - often mirrored in the policies and practices of countries responsible for receiving asylum seekers (Keyl, 2017). A publication by the United Nations Office of the High

Commissioner for Human Rights (2001) regarding international migration and discrimination mentions that “xenophobia and racism have become manifest in some societies which have received substantial numbers of immigrants, as workers or as asylum-seekers. In those countries the migrants have become the targets in internal disputes about national identity” (p.1). The increase in institutionalized xenophobia and its overt and covert manifestations in nations’ social structures demands a restructuring of educational praxis that opposes traditional pedagogy and promotes the development of critical thinking and social justice. Keyl (2017) states that,

A justification for a novel approach to pedagogical theory responding to subaltern transnational movement arises from an urgency to explain how we conceptualize and “do” education for subaltern groups (and learners who share spaces with marginalized border-crossers), whose lived experiences are often impacted by structural forces beyond their control. (pp.174-175)

Introducing a systematic transformation of education that is rooted in social justice and critical thinking would not only facilitate asylum seekers’ ability to navigate through the social barriers that exist in the host country, but it would also aid in combatting racism, xenophobia, and other forms of discrimination that exist among the citizenry of nations responding to asylum seeker flow into their borders (OHCHR, 2013).

## **1.2 Purpose and significance of this study**

The purpose of this research project is to develop a deep understanding of the “Icelandic for Asylum Seekers” course offered by the Icelandic Red Cross. Through the use of participant observations, in-depth interviews, field notes, and document analysis, I bring to light the experiences of teachers and students within the program, the teaching and learning practices utilized within the classroom, as well as the problems and issues that students and teachers face in relation to the class. I use the theory of critical pedagogy as a tool to guide me through the data collection process and to make sense of the data collected, in order to come to a fuller understanding of the program. I hope that my study will contribute to the knowledge regarding education for asylum seekers in Iceland, as well as to the broader field of critical pedagogy and its practical application within second-language learning programs geared towards asylum seekers.

The research questions that inform this study are:

- a) What can critical pedagogy tell us about the “Icelandic for Asylum Seekers” course offered by the Icelandic Red Cross?

- i. How can critical pedagogy illuminate the experiences of teachers and students in the program?
- ii. What are the areas of tension that hinder the students from experiencing a liberating and culturally relevant learning experience in the classroom?

### 1.3 Defining key terms

For the purpose of this study it is necessary to clarify the differences in *asylum seekers*, *refugees*, and *quota refugees*. The term “refugee” has become popularized and is most often used among the general public when referring to each of these groups. This is problematic as each group receives a different degree of support and experiences the resettlement process in varying ways. According to the UNHCR (2018), a *refugee* is “someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war, or violence [and] has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group.”

*Quota refugees* are displaced persons who have been transferred to other countries for resettlement under the UNHCR Resettlement Program. A country normally sets a quota signifying how many refugees they will allow to resettle in their country. Once the quota refugee has arrived in the country, they receive a package of services to assist them in the resettlement process (UNHCR, 2019). In Iceland, the Icelandic Refugee Committee and the Icelandic Red Cross work in close co-operation with municipal authorities to establish a one-year comprehensive resettlement program for quota refugees. This program, financed by the government, includes housing, financial assistance, counseling, access to support families, and enrollment in Icelandic language courses and introductory courses on Icelandic society (UNHCR, 2016).

According to the UNHCR an *asylum seeker* is someone whose request for refugee status has yet to be approved. They must partake in the refugee status determination process, which if their application is approved, they then gain the status of refugee and are granted the protection and services that are offered to refugees by the state (UNHCR, “Asylum Seekers”). Refugee status determination is a legal process by which national governments or the UNHCR decides whether an asylum seeker who is seeking international protection is considered a refugee under international or state law. In this way, while asylum seekers are not officially considered refugees, they can apply to obtain refugee status and the international protections that come with that recognition (UNHCR, “Refugee Status Determination”). Their applications are often rejected, however, under the Dublin Regulation which prevents an applicant from applying for asylum in multiple countries within

the European Union. Under the Dublin Regulation asylum seekers are to be deported to the country within which they first entered the EU, where their application for asylum would then be processed. That country is responsible for rejecting or approving the asylum seekers claim and the asylum seeker is not able to re-apply for international protection in another state. This has caused issues in countries such as Greece and Italy, which have become popular entrance points for asylum seekers travelling to Europe (Smyth, 2018).

In these cases, the asylum seeker is then sent back to the country in which they first arrived within the EU (Ammirati, 2015). Destination countries have policies and practices in place to control asylum seeker flow and to assist their settlement within the host country. While waiting for a decision to be made on their asylum requests, asylum seekers often do not have access to the same benefits that are available to citizens or residents of that country. In several European countries, including Iceland, asylum seekers are not given the right to work, which cuts them off from benefits that are normally available to those who are part of a country's labor force. These benefits often include access to the housing market, adequate health care, and other benefits that come with participating in a labor union. Financial constraints also hinder the asylum seekers access to education.

Temporary or permanent resident status is commonly granted in most European countries based on job acquisition or acceptance into a university program. However, without access to a job or the financial means to enroll in higher education, asylum seekers are often unable to obtain the status of resident (Mulhall & Khambule, 2018; Sentamu, 2018). Moreover, they are frequently placed in accommodation that is overcrowded, unsanitary, and isolated (Bulman, 2018; Ingvarsson, 2015). Navigating the complex system for proving refugee status can place asylum seekers in positions of precarity as they attempt to prove legitimacy. Often treated as criminals for simply being persecuted in their own country, the asylum seeker's rights are regularly neglected as they are confined in detention centers without access to education or social protection ("Refugees and Asylum Seekers", 2013).

#### **1.4 Structure of thesis**

This thesis is divided into seven chapters. The first chapter introduces the reader to the subject of my research and provides general insight into asylum seeker education as a global issue. I also distinguish between the terms "asylum seeker" and "refugee" as often each are used interchangeably by the general public but have two distinct meanings. The second chapter consists of the literature review which provides the reader with background information and situates my research within the local context of Iceland - delving into the country's policies and practices pertaining to asylum seeker flow and hospitality. This

chapter also introduces the reader to critical pedagogy which informs my theoretical approach to this research. Critical pedagogy was not only used as an analytical tool, but also played a major role in the research design process. The third chapter introduces the participants and details the case study research methodology that I utilize. I expound on the specific methods used in the data collection and analysis process, as well as explore my position as the primary researcher in this study. This chapter ends with a discussion of ethics as well as limitations to the study. The fourth chapter includes the research findings and is divided into three sections that include a report of the data that was gathered from participants observations, document analysis, and interviews with students and teachers respectively. Themes are developed in this chapter. The fifth chapter answers the research questions and explores the findings through the lens of critical pedagogy. This chapter discusses the barriers to implementing a pedagogy of critique within the classroom, details the implications of the research findings, and poses questions for further inquiry.

## 2 Literature Review

In this chapter, I will provide the reader with background information as well as situate my research within the local context of Iceland – discussing the country’s approach to asylum seeker flow and hospitality. I also explore the landscape of critical pedagogy and its role within second-language education and asylum seeker education. Critical pedagogy played a primary role in the data collection process as it framed my approach to the observations that I conducted and aided in the conjuring up of interview questions. It was also utilized as a lens through which I analyzed data.

### 2.1 Second language learning for asylum seekers

A variety of free language learning programs for asylum seekers exist in other Nordic countries, such as Sweden, where Swedish language learning is offered to asylum seekers by many different voluntary organizations and educational associations. Asylum seeker students also have the opportunity to participate in language cafes and study circles within Sweden (Migrationsverket, 2018). In Denmark, Danish courses are offered at adult education schools, in cooperation with the Danish Red Cross, that provide asylum seekers with ‘goal-oriented’ language lessons. In this case, asylum seekers over the age of 18 are interviewed in adult learning and career centers and are asked about their education, work experience, competences, and goals. These goal-oriented lessons tailor the language learning process to the specific needs of the students. Students are taught to use Danish in real-life circumstances by participating in learning activities that have fixed objectives. For instance, students can become acquainted with formal Danish by partaking in lessons that have them analyse and write up formal emails or CV’s (Rodekors, n.d.). In Norway, asylum seekers are offered training courses that give insight into Norwegian society through the use of knowledge-based dialogue and reflection. Classes are offered in 29 different host municipalities and topics discussed regard equality and protection against discrimination, threat against democracy and democratic values, domestic violence, and many more. These courses are also offered in a language understood by the participant (UDI, 2017). It should be noted that these countries do have longer histories of dealing with migration and therefore their responses in dealing with asylum seeker populations cannot be compared to the actions that Iceland has taken in regards to asylum seekers. Though, they can be used as examples to learn from.

With no means to work or further their education, the asylum determination process can be tedious for asylum seekers who are waiting for a decision to be made on their application. A study in the UK that looked into the ‘experiences of waiting’ for asylum

seekers found that their descriptions were consistent with the view of waiting as “passive, empty, ‘devalued’ time” (Rotter, 2016). In the same vein, another study in Sweden bared similar results in which one asylum seeker stated that “[they] have no life apart from thinking about this residence permit” (Brekke, 2004). As the process of waiting for a decision to be made on their applications can be monotonous, free language learning courses are often attended by asylum seekers as a constructive way to pass time (UNESCO, 2018).

Language learning courses can play a pivotal role for forced migrants who have a legitimate interest in becoming full members of a given society. Learning the host country’s national language is often a priority and attending basic language courses can provide stability and regularity in their lives (UNESCO, 2018). A study in the UK showed that for asylum seekers “language was both the key and the barrier to indicators of wellbeing and success” (Language barrier leaves refugees facing struggle to rebuild their lives, 2016). Though, access to second-language learning courses can be extremely difficult given financial, legal, and cultural constraints, there are programs in many countries that offer them for free and that cater specifically to asylum seekers. In Sweden, Swedish courses are offered by a variety of voluntary organizations and educational associations, free of charge, to asylum seekers who are awaiting a decision on their asylum applications (Folkuniversitetet, 2019). The Cambridge initiative, *Access to English for Refugees and Asylum Seekers* is a program designed to improve access to English language learning and support for refugees and asylum seekers in the UK (Gifford, 2017). In Denmark, Danish courses are offered for free at adult education schools in cooperation with the Danish Red Cross (Danish Red Cross, n.d.). Without access to these courses and the opportunity to learn the national language of the host country, asylum seekers can become disadvantaged in their ability to access resources, plead their cases for asylum, and navigate through society.

## **2.2 Critical pedagogy**

Rooted in the theory of critical pedagogy, this study seeks to gain a holistic understanding of the “Icelandic for Asylum Seekers” program offered by the Red Cross in Iceland. Critical pedagogy was utilized as both a tool to guide me through the data collection process and a lens through which the data was analyzed. Using a critical perspective to analyze the data collected in this research helped bring to light issues within the program that hindered the asylum seeker students from experiencing a relevant and critically engaging pedagogy.

Critical pedagogy emphasizes a critique of the “banking model of education” in which students are viewed as containers that are to be filled with knowledge imparted to them by the teacher (Leistyna & McLaren, 2002). The banking model of education emphasises the teacher as the center of the classroom and often places them in the front of the class with

the students seated in desks facing the teacher. White, Cooper, and Mackey (2014) point out that, “A teacher, standing before a class in front of students seated in rows expecting students to respond in unison – the loudest voice getting the most attention – neither promotes nor guarantees learning” (p.130). Memorization techniques are often used in classrooms that mirror the banking model of education. Freire (1970) expounds on this concept in his highly influential book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, stating that,

Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat. This is the "banking" concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits.

These techniques may allow for students to acquire relevant knowledge, but it doesn't allow for them to transfer that knowledge to new situations and use it to solve problems (Meyer, 2002).

Critical pedagogy argues that oppression is reinforced within the banking model of education as critical thinking and the students' ownership of knowledge is often ignored and disregarded as the basis of knowledge construction. It posits that mainstream pedagogical practices perpetuate a disengagement with the “larger historical, ideological, and economic conditions out of which today's social and institutional crises have emerged...by maintaining dominant beliefs, values, and interests through particular teaching practices and bodies of knowledge that are legitimized, circulated, and consumed in the classroom” (Leistyna & McLaren, 2002, p.15). The dominant beliefs, attitudes, and values of a given society are those shared by the majority of the people within that society. They are often mirrored, at the exclusion of other value and belief systems, in what has been referred to in literature as the hidden curriculum (Leistyna & McLaren, 2002). Giroux (1983) describes the hidden curriculum as “those unstated norms, values, and beliefs embedded in and transmitted to students through the underlying rules that structure the routines and social relationships in school and classroom life” (p.47). Through the lens of critical pedagogy, mainstream teaching practices are characterized as “membership-oriented” in which students' knowledge acquisition consists of developing the necessary skills and forms of cultural capital that allow them to uncritically navigate through the public and institutional spaces within the larger society (Sleeter & McLaren, 1995). This means that most teaching practices are geared towards teaching students to assimilate into a given society, losing their sense of self in the process. Advocates of this type of teaching seek to prepare students, often those who are “in need”, with the skills and knowledge necessary to compete in the classroom as well as the job market. Examples of cultural capital include any type of knowledge or skill

that adheres to the dominant culture and enables social mobility (Throsby, 1999). In this way, proponents of critical pedagogy take the premise that learning is rooted in experience and that teachers should value students' previous experiences rather than the cultural capital they bring into the classroom (Nieto, 1999a). Instead of teaching students cultural knowledge and focusing on building from what they already know about the dominant culture in order to facilitate their assimilation into society, proponents of critical pedagogy suggest that it is more valuable for students to examine the values and assumptions that are reflected in bodies of knowledge and link that information to their own experiences in order to provide them with the tools to not only survive within the mainstream, but to transform it (Leistyna & McLaren, 2002).

In honoring students' experiences, critical pedagogy advocates education that leads to critical consciousness, or what Freire termed "conscientization" (Freire, 1970). Giroux (2010) states that critical pedagogy has developed into an "educational movement, guided by passion and principle, to help students develop consciousness of freedom, recognize authoritarian tendencies, and connect knowledge to power and the ability to take constructive action" (p.67). As a result, conscientization allows students to become more aware of their position within society and gives them the capacity to improve their life conditions (Freire, 1970).

Critical pedagogy endeavors to expose and reverse the social inequalities perpetuated in mainstream classrooms through problem-posing pedagogy and critical self-reflection. Critical self-reflection is intended to help teachers, and educational policy makers examine the nature and origins of their own cultural assumptions, and "how they may affect the education process, students, ...and the asymmetries of power that exist within the institutions where they work and live" (Leistyna & McLaren, 2002, p.19). In contesting the banking model of education, critical pedagogy encourages examining whose interests are being served within the greater education system and whose voices and narratives are being systematically excluded. It seeks to gain insight into the way certain knowledge production supports the interests of those in power. Interrogating the larger social structures that inform students' and teachers' educational experiences allows educators to recognize the factors that lead to social inequalities and exclusion within educational settings (Sleeter & May, 2010).

### **2.2.1 Critical pedagogy in practice**

Critical pedagogy in practice demands a step away from the traditional methods that are used in the mainstream classroom. Educator, Ira Shor (1992), defined critical pedagogy praxis as

[the] habits of thought, reading, writing, and speaking which go beneath surface meaning, first impressions, dominant myths, official pronouncements, traditional cliches, received wisdom, and mere opinions, to understand the deep meaning, root causes, social context, ideology, and personal consequences of any action, event, object, process, organization, experience, text, subject matter, policy, mass media, or discourse ( p.129)

It brings into the arena of schooling insurgent classroom practices which serve to threaten the familiar and problematize the norms of mainstream cultural life (Sleeter & McLaren, 1995).

Introducing a problem-posing pedagogy within the classroom is hailed as a radical response to the banking model of education. Problem-posing education refers to the model of teaching emphasized by Freire in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, by which students and teachers engage in a dialogical process that promotes the students' questioning of the world around them and the structures and institutions that inform their experience. It fosters communication between teachers and students that allows for them to learn from each other (Freire, 2001). As a pedagogical method, problem-posing requires that teachers actively listen to their students and present to them known situations to discuss and critically reflect upon (Kabilan, 1999).

Teachers must also genuinely value everyone's presence in the classroom and foster their contribution to the learning process. Hooks (1994) states that "these contributions are resources" (p.8). It is important, then, for teachers to become learners alongside their students – engaging in dialogue that allows for them to learn more about the experiences of their students and become active participants in their lives. They must become experts beyond their field of knowledge, and immerse themselves in the culture, customs, and lived experiences of the students they aim to teach.

Critical pedagogy asks teachers to engage in a process of critical self-reflection in order to gain insights into their own pedagogic practices. Freire (1970) referred to this process of continual, experiential, and intellectual growth for teachers as one of the primary components of critical pedagogy. Boon (2011) states that,

This responsibility is a process of continual, intellectual, experiential, attitudinal growth for teachers. It is an ongoing commitment to try to discover more about our classes, to identify problems or puzzles, and experiment with possible methods to solve them. (p.28)

This means that teachers should dedicate time to reflect on the successes and problems that occur within their classrooms. Aliakbari and Faraji (2011) state that in order to “[produce] an open and equal environment, [teachers] must engage in deep self-reflection about their position and the effects of their authority in the classroom.” As teaching can be a rather hectic process, teachers often do not have the time to consider the reasons for and implications of the choices they make in the classroom. Yukawa (2011) states that “there is often too much unfolding at one time to process, respond to, and remember all aspects of a particular lesson” (p.28). Teachers must create opportunities for them to revisit their experiences in the classroom in order to become more aware of what it is that they actually do, understand it, and develop from it (Yukawa, 2011). Part of this process involves challenging teachers to continually advance their literacy and knowledge while also reflecting on their teaching practices in order to empower themselves for social change (Shor, 1992).

Critical pedagogy also promotes the use of classroom materials that engage students with their lived reality and facilitate critical reflection. Decisions regarding the materials used within the classroom should be made based on the needs and interests of the students. Critical educators often use visual images that can be related to aspects of the students’ lived experiences. Aliakbari and Faraji (2011) state that

CP lesson plan should be based on authentic materials such as TV, commercials, video movie, etc. which are representative of the culture that are to be examined by the students and which serve as the basis for discussion and critical reflection of the culture.

The context and themes of written materials that are studied in class should be discussed in a way that relates to the students’ and teachers’ lived experiences (Kincheloe, 2005). They should also help students connect what they have learned in the classroom to existing issues in society and prepare them to take necessary actions for its improvement.

### **2.3 Second-language learning methodologies**

There are several methodologies of teaching that are utilized in the second-language learning classroom. Each methodology utilizes different methods and techniques and, therefore, different materials and activities in the classroom. I will only briefly discuss two of the more common approaches to second-language teaching and their main features, activities, and techniques - the grammar-translation methodology, and the communicative methodology. The two methodologies have very obvious differences in terms of their practical applications and approaches.

### **2.3.1 The grammar-translation method**

The grammar-translation method is the most traditional method used in language teaching, dating back to the late nineteenth century (Asl, 2015). It promotes using rote memorization techniques such as repetition and grammar drills in order to learn grammar rules. In this case, normally the teacher, who plays an authoritarian role in the classroom, explains grammatical rules and then utilizes exercises in which students apply what they have been taught. These exercises normally involve fill-in-the-blank questions or asking the students to orally repeat information. Often there is no attempt at authentic oral communication as these exercises might only consist of a single word or a phrase (Ludwig, 2015; Sierra, 1995). Sierra (1995) points out that the grammar-translation method “emphasises the study and translation of the written language, as it is considered superior to spoken language” (p.113). This method also emphasizes the sentence or the word as the basic unit of teaching, as vocabulary is normally taught in the form of lists of isolated words. One major disadvantage of this method is that it emphasizes the more mechanical aspects of a language rather than the contextual ways in which the language is used. Also, because the grammar-translation method is not an interactive method, student participation and involvement is not frequently utilized in lessons. As learning through exposure, active use, and experience has become the preferred method in modern language teaching, the grammar-translation model dependence on memorization of grammar rules and vocabulary has given it the reputation of being somewhat outdated (Asl, 2015).

### **2.3.2 The communicative method**

The communicative approach to second-language teaching is the most widely used approach in second-language teaching today and is often regarded as the antithesis of, or a reaction to, the grammar-translation method (Asl, 2015). Its primary feature is an emphasis on communicating through interaction and real-life experience. The communicative approach utilizes a variety of learning materials that are meant to foster classroom communication and discussion. Often, teachers will use authentic material that expose students to the second-language as it is used in real-life situations (e.g. formal emails, sample CV's). Ludwig (2015) states that,

[the communicative approach] emphasizes the learner's ability to communicate various functions, such as asking and answering questions, making requests, describing, narrating and comparing. Task assignment and problem-solving - two key components of critical thinking - are the means through which the communicative approach operates.

Other methods that are utilized in this approach are role-playing, which allows students to become familiar with, and aware of, different social situations that involve the use of the second-language, as well as problem-solving activities. Group work is also advocated under this approach (Sierra, 1995).

The primary advantage of the communicative approach is that, according to Asl (2015), it passes “the responsibility of learning on to the learners and acquiring those to speak more will increase their fluency, as well as their confidence in the target language” (p.23). Also, by enhancing communicative competencies, the students can develop a sense of achievement that helps make the classroom more enjoyable and purposeful (Ludwig, 2015). This approach is considered the most beneficial in modern language teaching and, in this way, has not been scrutinized or critiqued to the degree that other, more traditional approaches have (Asl, 2015).

### **2.3.3 Using students’ known languages in the second-language learning classroom**

It has become a common practice within second-language learning classrooms for teachers to solely use the target language (TL) and avoid using students’ first languages, only as a last resort. There are many differing views in the academic community regarding the importance and value of utilizing the students’ known languages in the classroom and to what extent it should be used. Recent studies show that, especially for beginners, utilizing either the student’s first language or a language that is common among the teacher and the student, is essential to the second-language learning process. Advocates of this technique stress that the goal in utilizing the known language is not to take away time from using the TL, but to use it in a more regulated way that allows for a greater understanding of the TL (Cameron, 2001). Butzkamm (2003) points out that utilizing the students known languages in the classroom in a principled and deliberate way “launches, as it were, the pupils’ canoes into the foreign-language current, which then grabs hold of them and carries them safely downstream” (pp. 32–33). The benefits of using a student’s first or known language in the second-language classroom are wide-ranging. It can allow for a more fluid explanation of grammar concepts and vocabulary words (Yu & Littlewood, 2009). Yu and Littlewood (2009) state that employing students’ known languages in second-language learning classrooms is an “efficient way of clarifying the meanings of words, structures or utterances, so that students can progress more quickly to the more important stage of active use and internalization” (p.78). In this way, using students’ known languages in the second-language learning classroom should not be avoided. Though it should not be used in excess, it is beneficial when used in a regulated way that allows for students to clarify new concepts in the TL.

## 2.4 Critical pedagogy in second-language learning

Second-language educators who are proponents of critical pedagogy reject the status quo of language education which has become packaged in a way that eliminates much of the creativity that led many teachers into the field in the first place (Reagan, 2010). Rather, they utilize an approach to second-language teaching that focuses on the relationship between language learning and social change - where the goal in the classroom is to increase students' understanding of why things are the way they are and how they got to be that way (Morgan, 1998). The study of languages is used in ways that promotes social justice through education that relates the classroom to the wider social context.

Within the framework of critical pedagogy, language is regarded as a constructive force rather than a neutral medium of sounds and symbols (Duranti, 2011). Widodo, Perfecto, Canh, & Buripakdi (2018) state that "language is understood...as having both structural and functional dimensions, socially implicated as discourse and thus involved in the construction of individuals and the maintenance and change of societal structures" (p.114). In this way, language has the capacity to unite communities while also allowing for people to make clear distinctions between "us" and "them," where "we" are the people who speak a language and "they," are the others who do not. Teachers who then utilize critical pedagogy in the language learning classroom have the capacity to oppose dominant ideologies when they decide to teach language as a constructive method for social change rather than solely as a communicative tool (Jeyaraj & Harland, 2014).

Critical pedagogy in second-language learning operates on the basic premise that classroom materials and teaching approaches should relate to the students' socio-political and cultural background (Ooiwa-Yoshizawa, 2012). Yoshizawa (2012) states that, "topics should be locally situated and should meet learner needs in the society which they live in" (p.23). Classroom discussions are normally centered on subjects relating to the environment, social identity, and gender roles (Morgan, 1998). Freire, in his work with illiterate peasants in Brazil, developed a unique approach to teaching language that involved the use of a single word that related to his students' lives, such as "favela" (slum) or tijolo (brick), around which class discussion would be based (Peters & Roberts, 2011). Another method could be to utilize representations of non-traditional gender orientations in lessons that typically feature the use of the traditional "man" and "woman" dichotomization and their associated gender roles (Ooiwa-Yoshizawa, 2012). Problem-posing and rights analysis are also used prevalently in the critical second-language classroom. Fostering second-language learners' exploration of social issues that directly affect their lives and teaching them ways to claim their rights in society increases their potential to actively and meaningfully participate in their community (Yoshizawa, 2012).

Critical pedagogy in second-language courses can be valuable for ethnic and language minority groups who, without proper social and linguistic competencies, often face hardships navigating in a new country (MaKay and Wong, 1996; Yoshizawa, 2012). As the role of language learning can be extremely valuable within the process of introducing learners to a new culture, it can be powerful when it promotes students' capacity to think critically. Since critical pedagogy is about finding 'possibilities of articulation' rather than the 'medium of voice', students, instead of learning how to write and speak fluently, are taught language that truly matters to them instead of language that prepares them for a future career. Language learning, in this sense, is more authentic and humanistic rather than superficial and market-oriented (Jeyaraj & Harland, 2014). By fostering an exploration of the relationship between the content learned in the classroom to the wider social context, language teachers dedicated to critical pedagogy create a space where students are encouraged to be aware of the society that they live in and the social, political, and local issues that directly concern them.

## **2.5 Critical pedagogy in asylum seeker education**

The importance of a pedagogy that utilizes the experiences of marginalized and disenfranchised border-crossers is often not considered in market-oriented societies that do not value the liberating and empowering attributes of education. Western nations generally promote a type of education that is centered on "changing the student into a 'rational' or educated person, constructed by the acquisition of knowledge that is not within their social context" (Keyl, 2017, p.186). This is perhaps even truer in the context of education for border-crossers and migrants whose diverse backgrounds and circumstances are often not considered when developing educational policy and support that caters to their particular needs (Taylor & Sidhu, 2012).

Keyl (2017) states that "marginalized border crossers are in need of educational services that better "fit" and contextualize their lived experiences" (p.190). In this way, critical pedagogy offers much by emphasizing the exploration of students' and teachers' identities, lived experiences, and socio-political circumstances in order to shed light on the factors that affect their experience in society. It addresses the unique and special needs of asylum seekers through the imparting of critical and reflective skills. Allowing students and teachers to reflect on their experiences and the issues that they live with every day is important for developing an authentic and engaging educational experience (Nieto, 1999).

Critical pedagogy exists in the field of education largely as a theory of pedagogy rather than a practical guide for educators to draw from to inform their teaching (Ellsworth, 1989). Giroux (1988) stated that critical pedagogy has yet to "posit a theoretical discourse and set

of categories for constructing forms of knowledge, classroom social relationships, and visions of the future that give substance to the meaning of critical pedagogy” (p.37-38). In this way, teachers are often left to glean practical information from other teachers’ experiences of using critical pedagogy in the classroom or make use of their own assumptions about what critical pedagogy looks like in practice when attempting to utilize it within their classroom. Moreover, critical pedagogy is often not discussed within the context of asylum seeker education. This makes a theorizing about the practical applications of critical pedagogy within asylum seeker education rather complex. However, critical pedagogy does proffer ideas and ways of thinking that teachers can utilize to explore new teaching practices that work within different educational contexts.

Though the literature regarding critical pedagogy in the context of asylum seekers education exists mostly in the form of theoretical frameworks, its practical functions have been explored in qualitative research carried out by teacher-researchers who have attempted to implement critical pedagogy in asylum seeker classrooms of their own. The practical methods utilized in these cases were largely rooted in a dialogical approach that allowed for the teachers to learn more about their students while simultaneously engaging them with the sociopolitical context in which they were situated. Couch’s (2017) attempt to implement a pedagogy of critique in a refugee classroom along the Thai Burma border involved an exploration of the music her students listened to on the border:

To start with I asked the class what music [they] like to listen to on the border. Students were keen to tell me about a Burmese band called ‘Iron Cross’ – the most popular band in Burma. They play western style music with Burmese lyrics that first have to be approved by a Board of censors. Students all comment that Lay Phyu, the group’s lead singer, is the most admired celebrity in the country because he taunts the government at every opportunity. In class we listened to songs from an album called ‘Power 54’. Students told me that apparently it was on the shelves and people were buying it before the government realised 54 is Aung San Suu Kyi’s street address. Another time, his hair was down to his waist and the government told him to cut it. So he shaved his head. And then a military officer asked him to perform at the wedding of his son and Lay Phyu said, ‘These are not our people’. Using this as a starting point allowed a discussion around...rebellion, resistance and disaffection. (pp.136-137)

In this example, Couch utilizes a culturally relevant pedagogy to engage in a dialogical process that allows for her to explore her students’ cultural backgrounds while simultaneously allowing for her students to critically examine their own cultural and

socio-political backgrounds. Although there were several challenges that emerged in the process, Couch (2017) posits that,

Ultimately, what stands out is that, even in these challenging conditions, critical and humanising pedagogy based on dialogue affirmed, validated and gave voice to student's experiences, creating space for a collaborative learning and empowering and transformative educational experiences for the student and the teacher. (p.142)

While the students in Couch's classroom all had their own experiences of living in and escaping from Burma, they were a largely monocultural group. Implementing a culturally relevant and critical pedagogy in this case posed a specific set of challenges that might not be present in a classroom with a different demographic makeup.

Though the context within which a pedagogy of critique is implemented largely influences the specific methods that are utilized, the dialogical process is a technique that is commonly used among teachers engaged in critical pedagogy praxis (Halabi, 2017). It provides greater access to, and a better understanding of different worlds and how individuals give meaning to their worlds (hooks, 2001). Jansen (2009) states that it is "the people there, the bodies in the classroom, who carry knowledge within themselves, that must be engaged, interrupted and transformed" (p.258). The critical educator's awareness of the circumstances that affect their students' lived experiences is crucial in informing the specific methods utilized when teaching border crossers who face economic hardship and discrimination on multiples fronts (Keyl, 2017).

## **2.6 The importance of professional training for teachers in multicultural classrooms**

Asylum seeker classrooms are often multicultural and can pose a challenge for teachers who are inexperienced in teaching diverse classrooms or do not have proper training in teaching students from different cultural backgrounds. In this way, professional development in multicultural classroom settings is crucial in order to be able to properly respond to the challenges that may arise in these classrooms. Nieto (2000) states that,

Educators frequently rely on their own experiences and common sense when they teach. However, educational research...generally provides a better source for educational practice. Rather than relying on convention or tradition or what seems to work, it is more effective to look to research for ways to improve teaching (Nieto, p.6)

Studies show that professional multicultural education training for teachers is crucial to creating liberating learning spaces in multicultural classrooms. Courses that prepare educators to teach culturally diverse students are vital to supporting their ability to provide an education that is culturally and critically responsive. Teachers begin to value their students' home cultures and bring them into the classroom. Alismail (2016) states that "...preservice training is a very important factor in helping educators recognize the effects of cultural and racial diversity on students" (p.139). Effectively training teachers to teach in a multicultural setting allows them to become better prepared to achieve equity and social justice within multicultural classrooms.

Tran (2015) points out that "Teachers informed by multicultural pedagogy, value multilingual and multicultural students...as resources and expertise instead of viewing them as foreigners" (p.263). In this way, teachers' attitudes towards multiculturalism can change, and as they become more accepting of their students' diversity, they can begin to incorporate culturally relevant teaching strategies within the classroom (Alismail, 2016).

## **2.7 Country context**

Iceland is an island located in the North Atlantic Ocean. The majority of its inhabitants live in coastal towns that are peppered along the country's borders. As such, it is not easily accessible for most people fleeing conflict and persecution around the world. Reykjavík, its capital and largest city, consists of roughly 217,000 of the country's 350,000 inhabitants (World Population Review, 2018). The country's geographic location and political history have served to limit the number of foreign-born people entering the country's borders when compared to other Scandinavian and European countries. Iceland's immigration policy was rather strict up until 1994 when the country became a member of the EEA - making it much easier for citizens of the EU to come to work in Iceland. Though statistics show that the number of refugees, and asylum seekers entering Iceland has been rather low when compared to neighboring countries, it has not been unaffected by the refugee crisis (Eydal & Ottósdóttir, 2009). Statistics presented by The Directorate of Immigration indicate that Iceland has experienced an exponentially sharp increase in the number of asylum seekers entering the country within the past five years (The Directorate of Immigration, 2019). Data from the UNHCR shows a 254% increase in asylum seeker applications in 2016 with 310 applications processed in 2015 and roughly 1,100 processed in 2016. Since 2016, the number of asylum seeker applications has exceeded 1,000; the majority of which are men who made up roughly 65% of the asylum seeker population in 2015 and 2017 (Statistics Iceland, 2017).

As asylum seekers continue to arrive in Iceland, there is a wide spectrum of opinions regarding how to adjust policy to manage their reception and welfare. Currently, the

Icelandic laws on asylum seekers are laid down in the Act on Foreigners and Regulation on Foreigners. The reception and assistance of asylum seekers in Iceland are carried out through the cooperation of the Ministry of Welfare, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, municipalities, and the Icelandic Red Cross. The Icelandic Red Cross is responsible for providing “asylum seekers with consultation and safeguarding their interests during case procedures by the authorities. This entails the provision of an attorney from the Red Cross, upon the asylum seeker’s arrival in Iceland, who informs her/him of the services provided by the Red Cross, talks to the asylum seeker about her/his legal rights in Iceland, and joins the applicant in interviews with the Directorate of Immigration (The Directorate of Immigration, n.d.).

During the processing of an asylum seeker’s case, services are provided by the Directorate of Immigration (UTL) and the social services of the municipality in which they are housed. Service agreements are made between UTL and the respective municipality regarding the types of assistance that is made available to them:

According to the agreements, the applicant is guaranteed housing, meals and other basic service. Basic service refers, among other things, to medical service, schooling and kindergarten for children, leisure activities and travels within the municipality. The Directorate of Immigration decides which municipality will provide the service to the applicant, taking into account his/her needs and the capability of the municipality to provide the service as needed. (The Directorate of Immigration, n.d.)

Asylum seekers are prohibited by law from working in Iceland and the only means of education they have access to are classes that are offered by NGO’s like the Icelandic Red Cross (Fontaine, 2016). Fontaine (2018) notes that,

Put into practice, when asylum seekers are already denied by law the right to work, is that these applicants are left without any financial support while they await deportation. This can mean weeks without a means to buy food, and in some cases they are also denied bus tickets to get anywhere where food donations might be on offer. As asylum seeker shelters also forbid visitations from volunteers who might bring them food, these people are left isolated and without a means of support while awaiting deportation.

Recently, much attention has been centered on the quality of services provided to asylum seekers by the state. A report in the *Reykjavik Grapevine* revealed that many of the residents in asylum seeker shelters in Reykjavik have likened their housing

situation to a prison - with personal testimony from an Icelandic police officer confirming that the residency conditions within these shelters are actually worse than in Icelandic prisons. Other concerned subjects have pointed out that the conditions within these shelters may be in violation of international law (Fontaine, 2016). Moreover, the quality of education that asylum seeker children are receiving in Icelandic compulsory schools has been a particular area of critique with the Reykjavik Department of Education still discussing the best options for including them in the Icelandic education system (Uteuova, 2019).

Iceland is a signatory of the Dublin Regulation, according to which the responsibility of processing an asylum application is placed on the member state through which the asylum seeker first entered Europe. The agreement gives member states the right, though not the obligation, to send asylum seekers back to their first point of departure before coming to Iceland (Sigurðadottír, 2010). Sigurðadottír (2010) states that,

the essential role of the Dublin Regulation is to ensure that asylum seekers have a guarantee that their case will be taken up in one of the EU's member countries, usually understood as the first country of arrival, and to ensure that asylum seekers cannot move from country to country within the EU in order to stay there longer. (p.22)

The Dublin Regulation has caused much controversy and has been criticized heavily by major institutions, including the UNHCR, for not achieving its goals and for keeping refugees and asylum seekers on Europe's borders. Benjamín Julian (2015), member of the Icelandic grassroots organization Ekki Fleiri Brottvísanir ("No More Deportations") stated in an interview with Paul Fontaine of the Reykjavik Grapevine that,

We should be allowing them to move around, which will naturally reduce their concentration in Greece, Malta, Italy, Calais and so on. We'd also stop breaking their freedom of travel in the bargain. Additionally, very few refugees get here without having been caught in another country by the Dublin Regulation. Thus, we end up deporting almost everyone that applies for asylum here.

Other organizations and institutions in Iceland have also been outspoken about dropping the Dublin Regulation, including the Icelandic Red Cross (Fontaine, 2015). The reality is that a large amount of asylum seekers applying for protection in Iceland are deported on grounds of the Dublin Regulation. For instance, in 2018, 152 asylum seekers were deported due to the Dublin Regulation, while 109 were granted protection in Iceland (The Directorate of Immigration, 2018). In 2017, 235 asylum

seekers were rejected as a result of the regulation while 84 were granted protection in Iceland (The Directorate of Immigration, 2017).

### **2.7.1 Political rhetoric regarding the reception of asylum seekers**

In recent years, increasing restrictions have been placed on asylum seekers in Iceland at the hands of a conservative Minister of Justice and Directorate of Immigration. Much of the political discussion regarding their reception has been symptomatic of a hardline stance that paints this group in a negative light. Recently, Iceland's Minister of Justice, Sigríður Andersen, has been criticized for unilaterally placing further and unnecessary restrictions on asylum seekers. Regulations have been made by her that limit the granting of asylum based on health issues as well as strip asylum seekers of support while they await deportation - making the asylum-seeking process even more unbearable than it already is (Fontaine, 2018). In 2015, Andersen also announced that she would like to make the Dublin Regulation stricter and even considered eliminating laws that allow for asylum seekers to be granted residency on the basis of family reunification (Ástvaldsson, 2019). Furthermore, she drafted a regulation in 2018 that would have the Icelandic government pay up to €1,000 to withdraw their applications (Fontaine, 2018).

The Icelandic government has also been adamant about restricting asylum seekers access to the general public, and vice versa. In 2016, Iceland's Ministry of Interior, which is responsible for overseeing the actions of the Directorate of Immigration, confirmed a policy that forbids journalists and volunteers from visiting asylum seekers where they live - making it more difficult for the public to access them in order to learn about their living situations. One volunteer reportedly received an email from Davíð Jón Kristjánsson, a project manager at the Directorate of Immigration (UTL), which stated that "making [asylum seeker] home lives easier is not on offer." In another instance, the UTL director, Kristín Völundardóttir, recently made a statement comparing asylum seekers to tourists looking for free lodging and food. The unwelcoming rhetoric from major government players is a reflection of how this group is treated in the Icelandic system.

### **2.7.2 Asylum seeker education policy and market-oriented rhetoric**

In market-oriented societies, education is most often discussed, on the political front, in the language of economics, where an investment in education is equated with an investment in the national economy. This is perhaps even truer in regards to the education of immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers who are generally seen as sources of cheap labor. Often detached from the larger context of human rights, educational services are habitually conceptualized within the framework of nations' economies (Villalobos, 2005).

Much of the political discourse in Iceland pertaining to the education of foreign-born people is fixated towards viewing them as a potential source of labor, rather than through the lens of human rights. For instance, in the *Parliamentary Resolution on an action plan for immigrant issues* (2008) in Iceland, it is stated that

the government urges all public bodies, whether they are owned by the state or the local authorities, to take measures to make it easy for their employees of foreign origin to attend Icelandic courses and to ensure that they enjoy complete equality with other employees as regards wages and terms, entitlements, facilities, professional development and continuing education... the aim being to ensure that they will continue to be active participants in the labour market” (pp.22-26)

While this document focuses on immigrants within the labor market, its language offers much in terms of the opinions of the Icelandic government regarding the importance of education for foreign-born people in general.

The opportunities for asylum seekers to learn Icelandic within a classroom setting are very minimal outside of the classes offered by the Icelandic Red Cross. The courses that are available are not free to the public and, in this way, are generally inaccessible to asylum seekers who are already living on small means. Mimir, an adult learning center in Reykjavik, offers Icelandic courses for immigrants and foreign-born people who want to learn Icelandic. These courses are rather costly for asylum seekers who receive a weekly allowance that barely covers their weekly food expenses (Fontaine, 2018). Even then, much of the discourse on Mimir’s website is centered on those who are already part of the Icelandic labor market. For instance, the company’s purpose statement, presented on their website, is “to create opportunities for learning for people with short formal schooling and to encourage people in the labor market for lifelong learning and career development,” as well as to “enable individuals to obtain an education and improve their position on the labour market” (Mímir, n.d.). Multikulti is another learning center in Reykjavik that offers Icelandic language courses for adults. However, the cost of their courses usually exists outside of the asylum seekers budget (Fontaine, 2018). The Tin Can Factory is also a language learning center that is popular among immigrants living in Reykjavik. However, their courses are only accessible to those who are legal residents of Iceland, making them unavailable to asylum seekers. Courses offered by these companies are usually made more affordable for those who are part of the Icelandic labor market and members of an Icelandic labor union. Often the unions in Iceland will provide a 75% refund, or more, to existing members

participating in these programs (Mohammed, 2017). Financial constraints are perhaps the primary reason that asylum seekers do not enroll in these courses. The Icelandic courses offered by the Red Cross are more popular among asylum seekers in Iceland as they are available free of charge.

Education is a vehicle for empowerment that can give asylum seekers the tools to participate meaningfully in society. To consider its benefits solely within the framework of a nation's economy diminishes its emancipatory value. The UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education, Mr. Vernor Villalobos (2005), stated that, "we need to start thinking once again about societies rather than the economy, and to understand that sound education begets sound knowledge and appropriate abilities" (p.6). While it is sensible to equate education and literacy with economic reward, it is rather flawed to consider these benefits as education's sole aim.

The current political rhetoric in Iceland is fixated towards conceptualizing educational programs for immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers through a market-oriented lens that views them as a potential source of labor, rather than through the lens of human rights. Until education is valued as a human right and as a vehicle for empowerment creating an authentic and liberating education for asylum seekers in Iceland will be a challenge. Critical pedagogy, then, can play a role in responding to this challenge by allowing for students to critique, expose, and reverse the current social structures that perpetuate market-oriented rhetoric. This study draws heavily from the theory of critical pedagogy as a framework that informed my approach to this research as well as a lens through which I analyzed my data. In the following chapter I will discuss the research methodology as well as the ethical implications and limitations of this study.

### 3 Methodology

This chapter discusses the methodology, data collection methods, and modes of analysis that were utilized in this research. I begin with a brief exploration of the case study approach and my reasons for adopting it as the primary methodological framework for this research. Furthermore, I discuss the participant selection process which involved the use of purposive sampling. The primary methods of data collection used in this study were participant observations, semi-structured, in-depth interviews of two asylum seeker students and four teachers, and to a lesser extent document analysis. I juxtaposed these different data sources against each other in order to validate the emerging themes. The specific methods utilized in this research were selected to allow for a more comprehensive understanding of the program vis-à-vis classroom practices, teacher and student dynamics, and the individual experiences and perceptions of teachers and students within the program. Thematic analysis was used to make sense of the data collected via observations, field notes, interviews, and document analysis. These methods of data collection and analysis present a better understanding of the specific areas of tension that hindered a liberating pedagogy from being implemented within the classroom. This chapter also includes a discussion of the ethical implications and limitations involved in this research as well as my position as the primary investigator.

#### 3.1 Case study approach

This research is a qualitative study that seeks to explore the “Icelandic for Asylum Seekers” course offered by the Icelandic Red Cross through the lens of critical pedagogy. The methodological framework that informs my research is the case study approach. Creswell (2007) defines the case study as,

a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case-based themes. (p.73)

Creswell distinguishes between three different approaches that researchers can utilize within the case study paradigm - the single instrumental case study, the collective case study, and the intrinsic case study. Within a single instrumental case study and a collective case study the researcher focuses on one issue and then selects one or more cases that exemplify the issue. In this research, I utilize the intrinsic case study approach which focuses

on the case itself (a program, a classroom, and etc.) as the case presents a unique situation (Creswell, 2007).

The procedures for conducting an intrinsic case study are multi-faceted. Drawing on Stake's approach (1995) to conducting a case study, it is essential for the researcher to first determine whether the case study is appropriate, given the research questions that are being asked. Creswell (2007) states that the "case study is a good approach when the inquirer has clearly identifiable cases with boundaries and seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of the case" (p.100). The researcher must then identify the case, which can be a program, event, activity, or person. The data collection follows and normally utilizes multiple methods of gathering data in a process of triangulation that strengthens the validity of the collected data through cross-verification (Stake, 1995). This synthesis of multiple data collection methods adds to the breadth and depth of the research and allows for a more robust exploration of the case that is being studied (Yin, 2003). In this way, the intrinsic case study approach was fitting, as my study utilized multiple methods of data collection to provide a thorough exploration of a particular bounded case, the Red Cross' "Icelandic for Asylum Seekers" course.

## **3.2 Data collection**

This study utilized four different qualitative data collection methods: participant observations, semi-structured interviews with teachers and students, field notes, and to a lesser degree document analysis. Participant observations, in case study research, position the researcher within the case, allowing for them to see what the participants do – not just what they say they do. Interviews enable the researcher to glean information from conversation that is otherwise concealed in observations. Field notes make tangible what is observed. Document analyses supplement the observations and interviews and allow for further exploration of themes.

### **3.2.1 Participant observations**

The primary method of data collection used in this case study was participant observations. Stake (1995) points out that "observations work the researcher toward a greater understanding of the case" (p.60). In observations, the researcher has access to a depth of understanding by directly observing people and what they do and say at the scene. Used in conjunction with other qualitative methods, participant observations can allow for a thicker description of the case being studied. In this particular study, observations occurred mostly within, but were not limited to, the classroom.

My use of participant observations in the classroom focused on gauging the rhythm of the classroom by observing pedagogical techniques, class activities, materials used, student participation, and teacher-student dynamics. Data was recorded to a larger extent after the participant observations took place. This was done for two reasons. One reason, and perhaps of chief concern to me, is that note taking in public can often be seen as an objectifying practice. Although the teachers and students knew of my reasons for being in the classroom, I was not fully aware of how they would respond to the act of public notetaking and did not want to risk making anyone feel uncomfortable. Another reason is that participant observation places the researcher in the thick of things and demands their active participation within what is being observed. DeWalt and DeWalt (1998) point out that, “the observer becomes part of what is being observed” (p.261). Taking rigorous notes during the observations would have only served as a hindrance to my fully engaging in the classroom. That is not to say that notes were not recorded during observations. In these very few instances, I used the “Notes” application on my phone to quickly jot down specific occurrences that I observed during the class to expounded on afterwards, as well as information pertaining to class demographics (sex of students/teachers, number of students/teachers, etc.).

I conducted a total of eight participant observations over an eight-week period. The observations took place during the normal class hours (17:30 - 19:00). I would occasionally come to the class early to help the teachers set up and to familiarize myself with pre-class activities (preparing snacks, setting up equipment, teacher-student engagement, etc.). Informal observations and conversations with teachers and students during this time supplemented the information gathered during the formal observations. The majority of the observations were spent sitting with the students in the classroom, though I did spend some time in the back of the class as a nonparticipant. This was my first experience conducting research as a participant observer in any sort of educational setting. It was also my first time in a class that was taught in a language that is not my own and of which I have only limited knowledge.

### **3.2.2 Interviews**

Conducting interviews is a chief component of qualitative research. They allow the researcher to “...understand the world from the subjects’ point of view, to unfold the meaning of their experiences” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p.3). Interviews are useful to obtain detailed information about personal feelings, perceptions, and opinions. They are often combined with participant observations to allow for a deeper understanding of actions that are observed (Esterberg, 2002). Esterberg (2002) points out that “during the process of observing, researchers naturally ask questions about the ongoing action” (p.85). In this case,

interviews supplemented the observations and enabled a fuller understanding of what was observed by exploring what teachers and students say about what they do.

The interviews used in this research were semi-structured, in-depth interviews with open-ended questions. Semi-structured interviews are much less rigid than structured interviews. Esterberg (2002), states that “in semi-structured interviews, the goal is to explore a topic more openly and to allow interviewees to express their opinions and ideas in their own words” (p.87). The semi-structured nature of the interviews I conducted enabled a free flow exchange of dialogue; much in the same way as an everyday conversation. This form of interview has been highly regarded in qualitative research because it establishes a neutral environment that reduces the probability of researcher bias, allowing for the production of more robust and reliable information as well as creating the space for the participant to co-manage the interview (Jamshed, 2014). The in-depth interview is a fundamental aspect of the case study methodology as it promotes an exploration of “the understandings, experiences, and imaginings of research participants” and “the significance of the meanings they generate” (Mason, 2002, p.1). Stake (1995) notes that “the case will not be seen the same by everyone,” and so it is essential to obtain the descriptions and interpretations of others as a means of exploring the case more fully (p.64).

A number of scholars have argued that in-depth interviews are beneficial when studying groups that are situated on the periphery of a given society (Devault, 1999; Reinhartz, 1992). Not only do they allow for a deeper understanding of teachers’ and students’ perspectives - they also serve as an expressive platform for asylum seekers as often their marginalization pushes them to the sidelines of social discourse (Esterberg, 2002). An important element of critical pedagogy is allowing students to reflect on their experiences and the issues that they live with every day in order to create a more authentic and engaging educational experience (Nieto, 1999). In-depth interviews, then, serve as a tool of empowerment when students and teachers are given a voice and treated as experts and agents of their own stories. Additionally, they can be used to provide insights into how teaching and learning can be improved for them.

I conducted six interviews with four teachers and two students over a two-month period that began in September 2018 and ended in November 2018. Each participant was formally interviewed once, though I had several informal interactions with both teachers and students. The teacher participants were all of Icelandic descent and female. One of the student participants was Eastern European while the other did not disclose to me his nationality. Each interview lasted roughly 30 to 45 minutes and was conducted immediately before or after each class. All interviews were audio-recorded for transcription purposes. An interview guide was used in all interviews but was manipulated as the data collection and

analysis process unfolded. The interview guides were loosely followed as the questions asked were largely determined by the subsequent flow of the interview.

**Table 1: Overview of the interview participants.**

Interview		Pseudonyms	Professional Background
1	Volunteer teacher	Ásta	Social worker for Reykjavik
2	Volunteer teacher	Aldis	Textiles teacher
3	Volunteer teacher	Bryndis	Special education and speech therapy
4	Volunteer teacher	Eva	Former language teacher
5	Asylum seeker student	Tyler	Experience in construction
6	Asylum seeker student	David	n/a

**3.2.3 Field notes**

I utilized field notes as supplements to the formal data collection methods. In the course of collecting and reflecting on data, field notes are researcher’s account of what they hear, see, and experience during the process. DeWalt, DeWalt, & Wayland (1998) posit that field notes are the “careful record of observation, conversation, and informal interview carried out on a day-by-day basis by the researcher” (p.271). They allow for a thicker description of what is being observed by lending detail and complexity to the research. The field notes that were recorded enriched the data collected in observations and interviews and allowed for a more robust understanding of the “Icelandic for Asylum Seekers” course.

At the same time, field notes are a product that is constructed by the researcher. As field notes are subjective in nature, they play an important role in the realization of my subjectivity throughout the entire research process. Therefore, I journaled my thought observations by recording my sensations as I experienced them throughout the study (Maharaj, 2015). In doing so, I was able to actively seek out my subjectivity and come to terms with how my beliefs, opinions, and experiences may inform the research process. It is not my desire to eradicate my subjectivity from the process of research. Rather, I view this process as a way to, as Peshkin (1988) states, “enable myself to manage [my subjectivity] – to preclude it from being unwittingly burdensome – as I progress through collecting, analysing, and writing up my data” (p.20).

**3.2.4 Document analysis**

Document analysis was used to a lesser degree in this research to further develop themes and to add to my discussion on the mainstream rhetoric towards the education of foreign-born people in Iceland. I analyzed class handouts that were given to the students and used as lesson material. The class handouts were taken from the textbook *Íslenska fyrir alla*

("Icelandic for Everyone") which was composed in cooperation with the Education and Service Training Center and funded by the Ministry of Education in Iceland. I also analyzed the *2008 Parliamentary Resolution on an Action Plan for Immigrant Issues in Iceland* to better gauge the government's response to immigrant education in Iceland, which offered much in terms of how the Icelandic government conceptualizes and values the education of foreign-born people in general. In this way, document analysis was two-fold as it played a minor role in data analysis as well as in the review of literature.

### **3.3 Population sample**

The teacher and student interviewees were chosen through the process of purposive sampling as the demographic requirements for the study restricted the use of random participant selection. In this case, I interviewed the four teachers in the program and two students who had attended the course regularly. The teacher and student participants all had a decent understanding of the English language and were able to express themselves easily. Both of the student participants were male which had benefits and drawbacks. Its primary drawback was that I was not able to explore the experiences of female students who made up, on average, half of the classroom. The major benefit was that my identity as a male not only helped me gain access to the student participants but it also facilitated the building of trust between us. Having similar identity markers to research participants aided in the developing of rapport (Esterberg, 2002).

### **3.4 Data analysis**

In this study, data analysis was more of an unfolding and emergent process as I began developing themes at the onset of the data collection phase. I looked for recurring themes that related to critical pedagogy in the context of classroom practices, teacher and student dynamics, and the individual experiences and perceptions of teachers and students within the classroom. The emergent nature of this research played a major role in the observations and interviews that I carried out as the research unfolded. The first observations that I conducted served as a catalyst for the remainder of the data collection process and as a foundation upon which I framed interview questions and subsequent observations in order to build upon emerging themes.

After interviews were conducted, I transcribed them myself – which allowed for a deeper engagement with the data. I read over the raw data line by line and labelled with codes each of participants expressions that pertained to the research questions. I then looked for similarities and differences between the codes and grouped them into themes

and subcategories. I reread the interviews and sorted out quotes that related to each of the themes and subcategories that emerged.

### **3.5 Ethical considerations**

Ethical considerations take on added significance in case-study research where researchers often work closely with research participants – whether as a participant observer or as an interviewer engaged in face-to-face conversation. They require the researcher to understand their position within the research and to reflect on their relations with those involved. In this study, ethical implications were considered throughout the entire research process: as results were imagined, relationships developed, and as participants were represented in the final product.

#### **3.5.1 Ethical Issues**

The first step I took to formalize my research was to officially register it with the Data Protection Authority (Personuvernd) in Iceland. I then met with the head teacher of the program to ask for permission to enter the classroom and conduct observations. This meeting was also a time for me to discuss with her the nature of my research, my plans, and my goals.

The framework of relation ethics informed my approach to ethics in this study. Relation ethics requires researchers to not simply adhere to the common ethical trope of “do no harm”. It demands a “fidelity to relationships” that asks the researcher to become empathetic listeners, removing judgement and disbelief as they attend to participants’ stories (Noddings, 1986). Lopez (1990) states that...

The stories people tell have a way of taking care of them. If stories come to you, care for them. And learn to give them away where they are needed. Sometimes a person needs a story more than food to stay alive. That is why we put these stories in each other’s memory. This is how people care for themselves. (p.60)

It emphasizes the responsibility of the researcher to care for the participant and the stories that they tell by being active listeners and conscious speakers. In this regard, respecting each other’s stories and paying attention to what we say and how what participants say tells us what to think about what hurts them is extremely important. Within Noddings framework of “fidelity to relationships” researchers are also asked to consider the long-term relational responsibilities they have toward the participants involved in the research (Noddings, 1986).

Maintaining privacy and confidentiality is of paramount importance within the relational paradigm. In this regard, I used pseudonyms for the student and teacher participants as a

way to minimize the possibility of inadvertently exposing their identities. The interviews were recorded upon the participant's approval and all data was stored on a password protected personal network drive that only I had access to.

Research that involves marginalized persons as participants requires the researcher to consider the extent to which participants may feel obliged to give consent in a context structured by relations of authority between the researcher and the participants. The researcher must ensure that the participant's consent is given freely and voluntarily and not influenced by the power dynamics that may exist between the two subjects. Gaining consent from research participants was, therefore, an iterative process that was not only negotiated by the signing of a consent form, but also verbally and non-verbally renegotiated throughout the entire research process. In this way, participation in this study was voluntary and the interviewees were asked to sign a form of consent stating the purpose of the research as well as their ability to withdraw from the interviews at any time without stating any particular reason. Consent was also verbally reaffirmed before and after each interview to ensure that the interviewee's participation was voluntary and that their autonomy was respected.

It is not my intention to use the data collected in interviews to generalize about the experiences a singular group. While the students enrolled in the course had many experiences in common, including their status as asylum seekers, they were far from being a homogeneous group. Sleeter and McLaren (1995) point out that "...groups are not discrete, freestanding entities, since all of us are racialized, genderized, and so forth; we all belong to multiple collectivities and define ourselves accordingly, although groups are constituted overwhelmingly within asymmetrical relations of power" (p.11). The classroom was a deeply divided space that consisted of students with different regional origins, social statuses, experiences, and learning approaches.

The uncertainty surrounding their cases made them highly aware of persons and situations that could potentially influence the outcome. This became apparent, when after an interview with one of the students, I was asked if the conversation would affect the outcome of the decision made on his application. I made it clear to both student interview participants that the research that I was doing was entirely separated from their asylum cases and that the information that they gave me would have no effect on the outcome of their cases and would be private.

### **3.5.2 The researcher's position**

It is important to examine the personal biases, ideas, and contexts that inform my position within the research as a 25-year-old, white, immigrant male from the U.S. The

values and judgements I bring into this research have largely been formed by my experiences growing up in the United States' rural south as well as my experiences as an immigrant in Iceland. I often struggled negotiating the values of respect, equality, and philanthropy that were instilled within me as a young child growing up in a predominantly Christian environment and the frequent outward expressions of contempt I witnessed from family and community members towards social groups they did not identify with. I often concealed my liberal beliefs in fear that I would be excluded from certain social groups within my hometown and school. While my status as a white male in the U.S. has been met with much privilege, I often found myself relating to and advocating for those on the margins of society.

My experiences as a white male in a multiracial high school have also served to inform my approach to this research. I found that the people I associated myself with throughout high school were mostly non-white minority students. When I graduated from high school and immediately found myself in a university setting, I grew puzzled with the reality that a majority of my African-American and Latin American friends found themselves in as they navigated through low-wage jobs and, in some cases, reverted to drug dealing. How could so many of the students I associated with and saw as equals not be given the same opportunity or motivation to pursue higher education? This led me to become critical of the ways in which the larger social and educational structures that existed in the U.S. served to reinforce systematic social inequalities.

It would be naïve to dismiss the importance of my migration to Iceland and the role that my experiences as a foreign student have played in informing my approach to this research. My expressive capacity has been severely limited in a country whose official language I do not speak fluently. Although most Icelanders have developed a fluency in the English language (my native tongue), I often find myself uncomfortable in social settings in which more than one Icelander is present. I am either entirely excluded from conversation or find myself directly or indirectly pressuring them to speak English. It is in this capacity that I became sensitive to, and personally aware of, the challenges that language can pose within the integration process. Also, my studies within the International Studies in Education program at the University of Iceland have served to strengthen my critical eye as I have completed several courses that explored themes of social injustice and inequality and their perpetuation within social institutions and society at large.

### **3.6 Limitations of the study**

A major limitation of the study was the **language barrier** that existed between myself and the research participants. This problem was most noticeable at the inception of the data

collection process, as I individually introduced myself to some of the students in the classroom. There were many instances in which I had to pull away from conversation due to misinterpretation and confusion. It seemed as though all of the students had, at least, a very basic understanding of the English language and I am aware that perhaps my own vernacular and jargon had an effect on conversational understanding. It would be remiss for me to state that my incapacity to communicate clearly with many of the students in the classroom did not affect the participation selection process.

My inability to speak Icelandic fluently also played a limiting role in this research as the classes were taught in Icelandic. This did not prove to be as major of a problem as I had originally thought as the level of Icelandic used in the course was very basic, so I understood most things. However, as is important in participant observations, there were perhaps few pedagogical and conversational pieces that I did not understand that could have added to the richness of the observations. For instance, I was unable to comprehend fully much of what the teachers were saying in dialogue with each other before and after the class started.

The language barrier also presented itself as a minor limitation during the interviews with students and teachers alike. Though all of the interview participants were knowledgeable of the English language, none of them knew it as their first language and many struggled with comprehension and clarification issues when more complex concepts were being discussed. I found myself, in a few instances, having to rephrase interview questions to make them more understandable or skip them entirely.

Another factor that limited the data collection process was the highly fluctuating attendance rate among the students in the class. Several of the students that I introduced myself to in the first class that I observed were not present in many of the following classes. This became an issue for me during the participant selection process as many of the students I had planned to ask to participate did not show up to subsequent classes and therefore were not able to be interviewed. In this way, the student participant selection process was rather limited in scope and perhaps the research would have benefited from a more robust student population sample.

It is important to also recognize the time constraints as limitations to this study. As this research is in partial fulfillment of an MA degree, there was a specific time frame within which I was required to conduct observations, carry out interviews, analyze data, and write up the thesis. Among other reasons, the limited time in which I was able to collect data hindered my ability to conduct more interviews with other students. Perhaps this study would have benefited from a wider time frame that would allow me to conduct more interviews with students.

The lack of prior research pertaining to asylum seeker education in Iceland also presented itself as a limitation to the study. Most of the research done in Iceland regarding the education of displaced persons is centered around quota refugee children in Icelandic public schools. In this way, accessing information pertaining to adult asylum seekers was rather difficult and not very fruitful. It became apparent to me that this demographic is severely underrepresented in academic and non-academic research in Iceland. There is little to no tangible or written material that exists regarding the “Icelandic for Asylum Seekers” course and, therefore, the background information that I gathered for this study was largely produced using observations and information gathered in interviews with teachers and students

## 4 Findings

This chapter is a presentation of the research findings, which were gathered from observations, field notes, and teacher and student interviews. The themes that emerged as the data collection and analysis phases unfolded allow for a more robust understanding of the program vis-à-vis classroom practices, teacher and student dynamics, and the individual experiences of teachers and students within the program. They also give insight into the specific areas of tension that hindered the students from a more liberating and culturally relevant learning experience within the classroom. This chapter opens with a general overview of the “Icelandic for Asylum Seekers” course for context, which is followed by an exploration of the major themes that emerged as the research unfolded. A discussion that links the findings to the study’s research questions is presented in the following chapter.

### 4.1 The “Icelandic for Asylum Seekers” course

In this subchapter, I describe the general characteristics of the “Icelandic for Asylum Seekers” program which were identified largely through observations and field notes. I also extrapolated much data from the Red Cross’ and Icelandic Red Cross’ websites. I begin with a brief overview of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement as an umbrella organization that consists of several distinct satellite entities in countries all over the world which, though legally independent from each other, are united within the movement through common basic principles and objectives. I then discuss the Icelandic Red Cross and its role within Iceland. The aim here is to provide the reader with a more comprehensive understanding of the “Icelandic for Asylum Seekers” course by exploring the institutional context within which it exists.

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is a global humanitarian movement that was founded in Geneva, Switzerland in 1863. It is an umbrella term that refers to all national and international organizations authorized to represent the movement and all of the activities they undertake to mitigate human suffering around the world. The relief organization is among the largest in the world with entities in almost every country. The primary goal of all Red Cross and Red Crescent undertakings is “to help those who suffer, without discrimination whether it be during conflict, in response to natural or man-made disasters, or to alleviate the suffering brought by conditions of chronic poverty” (American Red Cross, 2019). The organization functions differently in each country in which it is present, according to the stipulations of the respective government - though generally it provides relief services and social programs to people affected by conflict within their country. The work of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is guided by seven

fundamental principles which were formulated by the International Conference of the Red Cross in Geneva in 1986: Humanity, Impartiality, Neutrality, Independence, Voluntary Service, Unity, and Universality (International Committee of the Red Cross, n.d).

The Icelandic Red Cross has been active since 1973 and does work domestically as well as on an international level in cooperation with Red Cross and Red Crescent organizations in other countries. Its main goal is to “bring assistance and help where it is needed...and to improve and strengthen Icelandic society and respond to emergencies” (Rauði Krossin, n.d.). 42 branches exist in Iceland, which carry out different projects according to where help is needed the most. All of the work of the Icelandic Red Cross is guided by the movement’s seven fundamental principles (Rauði Krossin, n.d.). The Icelandic Red Cross, along with the several projects that they carry out nationally, is involved in providing second language learning opportunities for foreign-born people. The classes that they provide are free and cater to those seeking to learn Icelandic. This research focuses on one of those courses in particular that is geared toward teaching Icelandic to asylum seekers.

The “Icelandic for Asylum Seekers” course is a free Icelandic language learning program for asylum seekers that is offered by the Icelandic Red Cross. As such, it is guided by the statutes of the international movement. Though the program is in its infant stage, it has a structure that has been developed by the teachers through trial and error. In its current state, the course runs for six weeks and is held every Monday and Thursday at the Red Cross building in Hafnarfjörður. Once the six-week period has ended, there is a two-week break period until the classes start again. Class times are from 17:30 to 19:00. The decision to hold the classes in Hafnarfjörður was made as it seems to be the best location for the students, who are mostly being housed at a shelter nearby.

The course consisted of five Icelandic teachers in total with often two teachers leading each class. On two occasions I noticed that there were four teachers in attendance. According to the course syllabus, every class period a different subject was to be explored. Though, this rule was loosely followed as the teachers based each lesson on the completion of the previous lesson, what materials were available in the classroom, and which students were present that day. The course is considered a beginners’ level course and, as such, the subjects that were discussed were very basic such as numbers, alphabets, dates, colors, and etc. There was no grading or tracking system in the classroom. Classes were held in one of the Red Cross satellite buildings in Hafnarfjörður which is centrally located in the heart of the city, next to a mall called Fjörður, and a very short walk from the bus stop. The majority of the students, if not all of them, took advantage of Iceland’s bus system, Straeto, to get to the class. I noticed that many of the students who came early to Hafnarfjörður chose to wait

inside of the mall or the city library before the class started. The doors to the classroom normally opened about 15 minutes before class time.

During my observations I found that the classroom demographics altered frequently as student attendance fluctuated. For instance, I observed one class that consisted of ten students and another that consisted of 27. There were classes with a majority of females and other classes with a majority of males. Many of the students were from countries whose national language is Arabic, though there were few from Spanish speaking countries and Eastern European countries such as Georgia, Albania, and Moldova. This data was based on information the students were asked to write on name tags that were placed in front of them. This initiative provided asylum seekers with the opportunity to not only learn Icelandic, but also to engage and socialize with other students as the living conditions for asylum seekers in Iceland can be very isolating. In a way, the classroom was also a social house.

#### **4.2 “It’s all very neutral”: Getting to know the students**

One of my primary focuses going into the data collection phase was gauging how/if the teachers in the classroom interacted with their students in a way that allowed for them to go beyond a surface level understanding of their lives. My goal was to measure if the teachers were building relationships with their students and attempting to utilize their interests, learning styles, beliefs and experiences to inform their teaching practices.

The observations that I conducted proffered much in terms of my understanding of the teachers’ involvement with their students. Overall, I noticed a general disengagement with the students that did not exceed beyond a familiarization of the students’ names and their country or territory of origin (which was made public to the classroom as the students were asked to write this information on a folded piece of paper that was then placed in front of them on their desk). The reliability of this specific practice was questioned, though, as one of the students revealed to me that the information that he presented on the paper was untrue, as he was cautious of how some of the other students in the classroom would perceive him based on his nationality. Regardless, all of the teachers seemed to make a conscious effort to memorize and call each student by their name and were extremely welcoming to new students.

The distance between the teachers and students served to solidify the role of the teacher as separate from that of the student. It seemed that the students played a more passive role as beneficiaries of the knowledge being bestowed upon them while the teachers were the epistemological figures of authority within the classroom. It became clear that the pre-existing knowledge and experiences of the students were not being explored.

In the interviews, nearly all of the teachers expressed difficulty or an inability to get to know their students on a deep level. There were four major factors that hindered them from developing a deeper relationship with their students; the short time frame of the class, the fluctuating student attendance rates, the Red Cross' principle of maintaining neutrality, as well as their individual beliefs. Aldis stated that she did not learn about her students' backgrounds because of her desire to maintain neutrality.

I don't really get to know their backgrounds. I just find out from which country they are...because it's also that you have to keep this distance so you're not talking about anything personal about yourself or them. It's all very neutral.

Bryndís expressed a similar sentiment:

Well it's a good question because I struggled with it for a while. I see my "not involvement" as the Red Cross basic rule of not being partial - not providing one with something that another does not get.

Aldis' adherence to the Red Cross' principle of neutrality was apparent, though not forthrightly expressed. Her detachment from her students also stemmed from her belief that she was unable to truly impact her students' lives unless they were allowed to stay in Iceland:

I'm not trying to impact their lives. I'm just trying to do the best that I can here and I'm not trying to...because I have no means to do that because it all depends on whether these people are allowed to stay or not. And most of these people are sent away. And it's very...you really have to be able to have this distance and not cross the line. Some have asked to be my friend on Facebook and I said sorry it's not possible. (Aldis)

For Bryndís, getting to know her students was outside of the role that she had perceived herself taking in the classroom:

I really don't get to know the students. Because well we know where they are from, know their names, and etc. But other than that, it's very coincidental. I don't see it as my role to question them about their backgrounds in detail. There are other people they have told their stories to like a million times I suppose. So, acting that here too...I don't.

Instead of actively trying to learn about her students, Bryndís explained that she takes a more passive role. Rather than probing into their experiences, she includes it only if they take the initiative to divulge it to her:

...It's more like if they provide something from their background then I include it but I don't require information. In my opinion, they must take the initiative. For example, they have told me that West in Persian is "hestur" so various things like that. That's just one example but they provide the information if they want.  
(Bryndís)

Though not directly stated, it became apparent that Bryndís was open to learning from her students.

Ásta held the belief that her role in the classroom was not bigger than making the students feel welcome and appreciated. Getting to know her students was not necessarily important for her:

My aim is quite clear here, let the student feel good when they are here so they know that they are welcome, they are appreciated, they belong to the Red Cross and this classroom...so my role is not bigger than that, so no I think it is not important for me to know the students and I take my role quite seriously so I feel with the people, but my role is not to talk about where they come from or where they are going.

Eva expressed somewhat of a different sentiment when asked about whether she thought it was important to get to know her students':

Yes, I think that it is very important. I want to create an atmosphere where my students are happy to be here and where they think that it is OK to speak to the other students and hopefully to speak to the teachers.

Though she was of the belief that it was important to get know her students, she was unable to due to the short time frame of the program as well as the constant flux in student attendance:

... but in a course that is only six weeks it's kind of limited, how well you get to know your students. You get to know them but not at the same level as if you were teaching this particular group the whole winter. And the group changes so frequently, we get new students almost every single week throughout the whole course, so that presents itself as a challenge. (Eva)

When the students came to the teachers with questions pertaining to their lives outside of the classroom, they would divert them to other people within the Red Cross who could help them:

I have made my boundaries quite clear for example last class there was this student who asked if he could volunteer with the Red Cross. I directed him to someone who could answer him. And told him that you are welcome to come to the Red Cross whenever you want and my colleague will contact him. (Ásta)

Eva pointed out that she made clear boundaries at the beginning of the course:

Well early on we explain to them that we are just their teachers and that there are people that could assist them in different ways. It is the only thing, and right thing to do because it wouldn't be nice if I really got to know one or two and not the others...I can't do that.

Critical pedagogy is a dialogical process that asks teachers to learn about their students beyond the surface level. It insists that teachers become learners alongside their students as well as students of their students. It also asks them to become experts beyond their field of knowledge, and immerse themselves in the culture and experiences of the students they aim to teach (White, Cooper, & Mackey, 2014). Relationship building is key to teaching critically as it allows teachers to familiarize themselves with the social positions of their students and further gauge their students' learning styles, interests, and beliefs (Aliakbari & Faraji, 2011). Giroux (1985) refers to teachers as "transformative intellectuals" who have the skill and capacity to critique and reverse existing inequalities in society. Aliakbari and Faraji (2011) elaborate on this notion by pointing out that, "the role of this transformative intellectual...is to learn from students, appreciate their viewpoints and to take part in the dialogical process" (p.80).

Through the observations and interviews it became apparent that the teachers in the class were not able or not willing to get to know their students for different reasons. The Red Cross' principle of maintaining neutrality seemed to have informed the teachers' policy on this matter greatly, though most of the teachers simply did not see it as their role to learn about their students' backgrounds and experiences. The short time frame of the course as well as the shifting student attendance rates were also reasons that were stated. The relationship between the teachers and students was emblematic of the banking model of education which positions the teacher as the purveyor of unquestioned knowledge and the student as a passive beneficiary. There were three primary factors that prevented the teachers' from getting to know their

students: the flux in student attendance, the Red Cross' principle of maintaining neutrality, and the teachers' own beliefs regarding their role in the classroom.

#### **4.2.1 Institutional restraints**

Within the "Icelandic for Asylum Seekers" program, institutional restraints were imposed upon the teachers, as members of the Icelandic Red Cross, that hindered them from getting to know their students on a deeper level. The Red Cross' fundamental principles of maintaining neutrality and impartiality greatly informed how the teachers engaged with their students and, through the statements of the teachers in this study, it became clear that they adhered, rather strictly, to these principles.

The teachers were very careful not to be too actively involved in their students' lives. They skirted conversational topics that were outside of the scope of learning Icelandic and avoided talking about the real challenges in their students' lives. Adhering to the Red Cross' principle of neutrality, which states that, "in order to continue to enjoy the confidence of all, the Red Cross may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature". This meant that the teachers were required to maintain a distance from their students. While this principle does not necessarily prevent the teachers from discussing more mundane daily activities such as going to the store, or taking a bus, it prevents them from engaging with the students in a way that allows for them to learn about their actual challenges and needs within Icelandic society, and the world at large, and assisting them in exploring ways to respond to these challenges. For the teachers, upholding the principle of impartiality meant that they were not allowed to provide any sort of assistance to one student without providing the same assistance to another. These two principles in conjunction framed the teachers' approach to engaging with their students. In this way, even if the teachers wished to engage with their students in a way that allowed for an exploration of their lives, within the institutional structure of the Red Cross, it was prohibited (International Committee of the Red Cross, 1979).

#### **4.2.2 Teachers' personal beliefs**

Red Cross volunteers working with asylum seekers go through a very brief training session that only touches the surface of how they should interact with them. Generally, volunteer teachers are told not to discuss extremely personal matters with their students, as the students could become attached to them and think that they are able to influence their cases. However, there is no practical information given in these training sessions regarding the specific topics that can be discussed in conversation with them and what sort of advice could be given to them by the teachers. In other words, the line between what knowledge is acceptable to relay to the students and what is unacceptable is very thin. Therefore, each of

the teachers in the “Icelandic for Asylum Seekers” classroom were interpreting this rule in a specific way and utilizing their own interpretation of what should be discussed with their students and what should not be.

Though institutional barriers were in place that prevented the teachers from engaging in a dialogic pedagogy, the findings suggested that the teachers’ own beliefs regarding their role in the classroom also contributed to their disengagement with the students. Most of the teachers believed that it wasn’t their place to learn about their students and that it was not necessary to partake in a dialogical process with them. They adhered to the Red Cross’ principles of impartiality and neutrality not only out of fear of the institutional consequences, but because they genuinely believed it was the right thing to do. The teachers in the course interpreted this rule in a way that simplified their role to one that separated them from their students and further solidified their position as the “store-house of knowledge” within the classroom.

Overall, when educators fail to recognize that education is inherently political and do not attempt to actively engage with the socio-political backgrounds of their students, they participate inadvertently in a paradigm that perpetuates social injustice. It is important, then, for teachers to have an ethical and political commitment to transforming social inequalities if humanization is to be actualized within the classroom.

#### **4.3 “It’s just like when you’re teaching children”: Teaching approaches and methods**

A main focus of this research was on gauging the teachers’ pedagogical approaches and methods through the lens of critical pedagogy. By critically analyzing the teachers’ instructional methods, their interaction with students, and their insights on their own teaching practices I was able to identify teaching strategies that aligned with those practiced within the banking model of education and that hindered the students from experiencing a liberating learning experience.

My time in the classroom and my conversations with teachers and students offered much in terms of my understanding of the teaching approaches and methods that were utilized within the class. Overall, the predominant style of teaching was rooted in rote memorization techniques. There was no deeper exploration of grammar concepts and vocabulary words. One of the students, Tyler, likened the class to a ‘survival kit’:

Well this class, basically they are focusing on survival. It’s like a survival kit. There is no explanation of how grammar is changing and why...Well there is some kind of explaining between the difference in male and female objects but it is like...

‘know it as it is, don’t understand it’. If it were a real Icelandic school, they would probably be explaining how and why...first because the timing is less and it is not like a proper school...just like helping to understand.

Teacher participants reflected this sentiment in interviews when asked about their own approaches to teaching. One of the teachers, Aldis, stated that she takes the same approach to teaching asylum seekers as she does to teaching children:

It’s just like when you’re teaching children, you just have to be friendly and open but at the same time you know you have to have a barrier. Because it is very...it’s essential that people feel that they feel liked and that the atmosphere is friendly.

In this way, Aldis’ did not really see her students as adults with a breadth of knowledge and experiences to draw from.

#### **4.3.1 Repetition**

Instead of utilizing problem-posing methods and critical reflection, the teachers relied heavily on the use of repetition and rote memorization techniques. Teachers spent a large portion of each class period in the front of the classroom saying vocabulary word and then asking the class to repeat after them. In one instance, during a lesson on the pronunciation and declension of Icelandic numbers, the teachers simply pointed to a number that was projected onto a big screen, said it out loud to the class, and then asked the class to repeat it. The teachers went through the list of words or numbers few times before they asked the students to say each number unassisted. Only a very small number of students were able to repeat the numbers without help. This same method was utilized quite frequently – during lessons about months, days of the week, vowel pronunciation, colors, and alphabets. When I asked Eva about the methods utilized in the classroom, she stated that,

we have to make the students learn a few sentences...verbs, and nouns and stuff like that and we tend to use repetition quite a bit – say it out loud, then repeat, and repeat – because repetition really works. We try to make it interesting, though, but I don’t know if that works.

Occasionally, the dynamics shifted and a few of the students were asked to come to the front of the classroom to be used as props, in which case the class became slightly more interactive. This was used mostly when discussing inflections within the Icelandic language based on number and gender. One activity involved the students standing up to stretch and pointing to the body part that the teacher signified.

Depending on the number of teachers in the classroom that day, after a short break for snacks and coffee, the students were split into groups for an activity that was based on the material taught in the previous lesson. The activities were usually more hands-on and interactive - allowing for the teachers to make use of a more individualized approach, though repetition was still predominantly used within the groups. In one group exercise, the teachers handed out a sheet with random numbers listed on it. They would say out loud one of the numbers on the paper and then ask one of the students to point to that number. This was done until all of the numbers on the sheet were crossed off.

When I asked one of the students, David, what he thought about the teaching methods used in the classroom, he stated that,

They repeat a lot of things, like the things that are in the kitchen like knifur, gafarl..it is a good activity because you can memorize more quickly – It is like a play. But, I think they repeat too much. Every time that I go to class they repeat everything from the beginning so it's like they are stretching four lessons into six classes.

David's description complements my own observations, during which I noticed frequent repetition of material that was taught in past lessons. I found that the teachers often steered away from the syllabus and took a more inadvertent approach to lesson planning. Sometimes the lessons were thought of promptly before the class started. During my interview with Bryndís I asked her what topics they would be covering in that day's lesson:

Well, it's kind of getting confusing because we should have taken numbers this week but started last week so, colors, prepositions, numbers, kind of everything is mixed up and we are trying to help people get some sense into that.

In this way, not only was repetition being used as a pedagogical method, but students who attended the classes regularly were accustomed to being presented with material that was repeated from class to class.

Overall, the pedagogical methods utilized by the teachers in the classrooms were first and foremost about transferring basic Icelandic culture and Icelandic language skills. Their teaching techniques often took advantage of methods that asked students to memorize and repeat without considering the relational value of the knowledge they are receiving. Skills in Icelandic would certainly have benefited the students, but the teachers missed out on the opportunity to utilize more engaging and relevant teaching methods by failing to provide students with the chance to benefit from their previous learning styles and academic and cultural knowledge. Rather than building off of the students' past and current experiences

and making use of their previous knowledge acquisition and known languages as a tool to learn Icelandic, the teachers utilized pedagogical methods, such as repetition, that distanced them from their students' histories and backgrounds. This can be seen in the teachers' use of Icelandic only in the classroom as well as in their practice of spending a large portion of each class period in front of the room asking students to repeat vocabulary words. Moreover, the teachers often introduced and repeated isolated words, such as "blýantur" or "pappír" without contextualizing or connecting the information to the students' lives in ways that could benefit them. For instance, the students were not encouraged to make the connection that one could use a pencil ("blýantur") and paper ("pappír") to write letters to government officials stating their grievances and demands. By utilizing rote methods that did not allow for the students' to explore the relationship between the content learned in the classroom to the wider social context, the teachers were unable create a space where students were encouraged to be more aware of the society that they live in and the social, political, and local issues that directly concern them.

Teaching by rote ignores the actual educational needs of the students and hinders their intellectual potential. It asks students to memorize certain bits of information without allowing for a fuller and deeper understanding of it. By solely using repetition and memorization techniques and not engaging with the students' lived reality in a way that utilizes their previous experiences, the teachers in the classroom were unable to provide the students with information that could better equip them to critically navigate through society and respond to the injustices that they may face in Iceland and around the world. In contrast, if the teachers in the program were to base lessons on and utilize methods that are informed by students' intellectual and cultural needs and relevant to their everyday lives, they can promote culturally relevant learning. Students would then be able to develop a deeper understanding of why things are the way they are as they connect the knowledge they have learned to their everyday lives.

#### **4.3.2 "Mælt með að bara sé töluð íslenska við hópinn": Icelandic-only policy**

The teachers adhered, rather strictly, to the practice of speaking only Icelandic within the classroom. This practice that was observed in observations and also promoted by the teachers in interviews and informal conversations. Upon reading the course syllabus, I noticed that the use of Icelandic-only in the classroom was more of a policy that was agreed upon by all of the teachers. It was even mentioned in the course syllabus where it stated, "Mælt með að bara sé töluð íslenska við hópinn" (It is recommended that Icelandic be spoken with the group).

There was little to no use of the students' first languages or English in the classroom. It became apparent to me after several observations and informal conversations that, though understood on different levels, English was the common language of the classroom. The teachers never used English or any other language to clarify concepts that students were having trouble with. In a few instances, when a student responded to the teacher or asked a question using English, a language common to them both, he/she was met with a response in Icelandic.

Bryndís was of the opinion that English was being used too frequently in other classes offered by the Red Cross and she wanted Icelandic to be used more:

I would like for more people to learn Icelandic and I would like for the Red Cross to begin to use more Icelandic. Because it is common for them to use English so I would like to see more Icelandic.

As an outsider, I often felt apprehensive in the classroom when communicating with some of the teachers in English. Although, all of them knew that I was not fluent in Icelandic, many of them would proceed to talk to me in Icelandic until I forthrightly stated that I did not understand them. This made communicating with some of the teachers very difficult. In one instance, as I introduced myself to Ásta in English, she continually spoke to me only in Icelandic, even as I responded to her in English. She decided to switch to English only later in the conversation when I asked her kindly if she could speak in English. She ended the conversation stating that they (the teachers) only use Icelandic within the classroom. As I continued observations, Ásta would often open up conversations with me in Icelandic. I experienced much pressure to not speak with some of the teachers at all, as I did not want to force them to speak English if they were uncomfortable with it.

I had observed that during many of the lessons, several of the students, particularly the ones who were attending the class for the first time, seemed rather confused and disconnected during the lecture portion of the class. During one lesson in particular, I noticed a few of the students looking to each other with expressions of perplexity that signified that they were not fully grasping what was being taught to them. David expressed his frustration regarding the teachers' Icelandic-only practices,

It would be nice for the teacher to not only talk Icelandic. They should also try to speak in English. It's more easy to understand. You can read, you can memorize everything and it would be for sure more easy.

David stated his appreciation for the few times that the teachers did speak English: "Some teachers speak just Icelandic but there are some teachers who will give you like a small piece

to help you think about it...It is a good thing.” In reference to one of the teachers, he pointed out that “she doesn’t talk in English. She knows English but doesn’t explain anything in English, it is a bit difficult.”

This rule was not enforced to the point where the students were unable to speak their first language with each other. They were able to speak in whichever language they preferred when talking to each other, though when communicating with the teachers, Icelandic was urged. In specific cases where the teachers had no choice but to speak English, it was spoken – though, with a sense of unease.

The teachers’ usage of an Icelandic-only policy in the classroom prevented them from constructively using the students’ known languages as a foundation for learning Icelandic. The students’ known languages were largely ignored. It was unclear in the data why the teachers thought that it was best to utilize an Icelandic-only policy, though, it could be linked to their lack of former training in multicultural education as well as to their desire to maintain neutrality in the classroom. If the teachers were to have had more experience in multicultural classrooms and more knowledge regarding proper methods to utilize in these settings, perhaps the students’ known languages would have been used as valuable resources for learning Icelandic. This would be an interesting topic for further research. Overall, by not utilizing the students’ known languages as a foundation for learning Icelandic, the teachers were unable to establish a more culturally relevant and critically engaging learning experience that built off of the students’ prior knowledge. By using Icelandic only in the classroom, the students were forced to learn Icelandic at face value. They were not encouraged to use their known languages as a tool to clarify meanings and concepts in Icelandic.

#### **4.3.3 Creating an exciting and welcoming environment**

Nearly all of the teachers pointed out that their primary aim was to make the students feel welcome in the classroom. They all carried a smile with them throughout the class period and gave individual assistance to students when needed. When new students walked in during lessons, one of the two teachers would happily greet them and hand them a notebook and pencil to allow for them to take notes. Snacks and refreshments were provided during break time and were very much enjoyed by all of the students. Mothers and fathers were also able to bring their children to the classroom which encouraged them to attend the class, rather than stay at home with their children.

David and Tyler both acknowledged that their teachers were passionate about what they were doing. Tyler pointed out that all of the teachers, “... are nice. I think they are dedicated to their work. I see them, they are so motivated and they are happy to teach.” David stated

that his favorite teachers were Ásta and Bryndís because they have a lot of energy in the classroom.

Ásta saw it as her role to make the students feel comfortable in the class:

I think most just when I define my role as quite simple when I enter the room. It's my main aim to make people feel well when they are here that they are feeling welcome that they are appreciated and that they have a voice.

She was always full of energy and her enthusiasm and eagerness to teach was nearly palpable. Rather than standing in the front of the classroom during the lessons, she would often navigate around and sit with the students while one of the other teachers gave the lecture.

People come here and the door is open. You can always come here, you are welcomed and you are appreciated regardless of where you're from, you are just here right now and then you walk out and it's just this time when you are here...that's my job to serve people when they are here. (Ásta)

Eva stated that "it's important to create an environment where my students are happy to be here and that they feel like it's OK to speak in class and to each other." Though she was always warm and welcoming to students who arrived late to class, Eva later expressed in an interview, her discontent regarding the class's open-door policy:

I think that the door should be closed at six o'clock so that gives us more uninterrupted time to teach. We are always interrupted by new students coming in even up until the end of the class. It's a little bit inconvenient and I am mostly thinking about the students because we have to stop what we are doing and welcome the newcomers.

In the class that I observed after my interview with Eva, I noticed a sign on the door that stated that the doors will lock at six o'clock. The class was interrupted twice by students who were late and trying to enter the classroom. The teachers kindly allowed them to come into the classroom and participate in the lesson.

All of the teachers, to different degrees, showed and expressed a desire to establish a welcoming and exciting learning environment for their students. They genuinely valued each of the student's presence and ensured that all of the students were active participants in the classroom. Students in the back of the room were regularly called on to participate in the

lecture. During the second half of the lesson, the teachers would sit with the students in their groups as they led the activity and showed each individual student much attention.

#### **4.4 Material conditions in the classroom**

During my observation and interviews I gathered much about the material conditions of the classroom, the learning material used in the classroom, as well as the teachers' opinions of them. The classroom itself was about 100 square meters and had a mini kitchen. There were several windows along one side of the room which allowed for some natural light to enter the room, though, in the heart of winter there was very little sunlight. When the classes were held on evenings in which the sun had already set, the class was heavily lit by electric lights which were installed in the ceiling. Though the classroom was located on the building's second floor, there was an elevator that allowed for those who were either unable or unwilling to take steps to have access to the classroom. There were six long tables that sat about eight students and were located in the middle of the classroom. In the front of the classroom, on the opposite side of the room's entrance, there was a podium and a large drop-down screen on which projections were cast from an overhead projector. The teachers often projected worksheets that they had found on the internet (using a laptop which was normally situated on the podium) onto the big drop-down screen in the front of the classroom. They spent much of their time standing in the front of the classroom, while the students were situated at tables directly in front of them. The tables and chairs that were used in the classroom were all in good shape and not noticeably worn down. There was a very small area with one tiny sofa and a few bean bags that was positioned behind the teachers and, therefore, was mostly not used. The classroom was spacious which allowed for unhindered movement within the room - though, during the short recess, the snacks table was rather crowded and I noticed that few of the more reserved students waited for the others to finish grabbing their refreshments before they decided to. In one incident, all the snacks were finished before one of the students was able to take some for himself. This student asked one of the other students at his table if he could have one of his cookies because he wasn't able to grab one since the snacks were all finished. The student replied with a smirk on his face, "no, you don't let me use your phone at the camp and you expect me to let you have one of my cookies?"

The teachers often used a projector to display online material that came from the textbook *Íslenska fyrir alla*, which they used to guide them through the lectures. Notebooks and pencils were given to each of the students for note-taking purposes. Worksheets, which were also mostly gleaned from the *Íslenska fyrir alla* textbook, were also given to students after lectures and were completed as a class, with the teachers' assistance. Eva pointed out

that while they mostly go by the textbook, there are few handouts that “we improvise and make ourselves, though the main structure is in the book”. Ásta was critical of the textbook material that was used in the classroom:

It’s reflective of a kind of nationalism, or if there is some hidden signs based from ethnicity or gender or anything else, because at least now when I was looking at what we are teaching in schools in Iceland actually my teacher did research on history books in Iceland and in terms of ethnicity and there we could see that the aspect of nationalism was quite strong. So, I think if we would do this program, take it to the next level, we should look at the material and read it through the lens of sociology or anthropology.

The teachers would also work with some of the objects in the classroom, to further clarify the meaning of certain Icelandic nouns. Most of the objects used in these lessons included kitchen items (the classroom was equipped with a miniature kitchen) and stationery such as notebooks, pencils, and paper. Eva supported the use of learning materials that were related to real life experiences “like going to the restaurant, role-playing, very short conversations, and situations from everyday life”. She also liked using learning material that you could touch, like games and puzzles. However, she was also of the impression that the classroom was lacking in materials:

We need more materials. It would be nice to have more materials. I know exactly what I would like to have and maybe the others are happy with what there is, but I could see some more interesting things being used in our teaching. (Eva)

The teachers also had problems dealing with faulty equipment:

Well, we should/could be able to use the internet and overhead projector but the computer is more often not working. So, we have this table for writing, we have not a lot but we have stuff like from home. (Bryndís)

This meant that they often had to improvise.

The material conditions of the classroom, as well as the materials that teachers used in class lessons, did not allow for them to teach to their fullest potential. The teachers’ constant dealings with faulty classroom equipment meant that they had to change their lesson plans frequently and could not follow the course schedule as planned. Furthermore, the materials that were used by the teachers did not critically engage the students with their lived reality. The materials that were used as props mostly came from objects in the classroom, such as notebooks, paper, pencils, kitchen utensils, and etc. While utilizing these

materials can be useful in allowing for students to become familiar with commonplace objects, it does not equip them with the skills that allow for them to fully engage with their surroundings and properly respond to iniquity in their lives. The textbook handouts illustrated fundamental language concepts - such as the Icelandic alphabet, numbers, and basic vocabulary words - however, there was no demonstration as to how the information could be used to the students' benefit. One of the teachers hinted that the textbook material they used contained nationalistic undertones.

Critical pedagogy promotes the use of classroom materials that engage students with their lived reality and facilitate critical reflection. Decisions regarding the learning materials used within the asylum seeker classroom should be made based on the needs and interests of the students. However, the needs and interests of the students were never brought to light, and therefore, the teachers were unable to determine which materials should be used in order for the students' needs and interests to be met. Furthermore, knowledge from written materials that are studied in class should be contextualized and utilized in practical ways that allow for the students to make sense of what they are being taught, rather than at face value. They should also help students link their knowledge to existing problems in society and take necessary actions for its improvement.

#### **4.5 Responding to multiculturalism in the classroom**

Though the student demographic was in a constant flux, the classroom was a highly multicultural and multiethnic environment. The students that I conversed with were from a wide range of countries including Palestine, Syria, China, Moldova, and Columbia. On average, the number of women and men in the class were comparable, though slightly fluctuated from one class to the next. The majority of the classes that I observed consisted of predominantly male students, though few had more female students. The teachers in the classroom were all Icelandic, white, and female.

Responding to the challenge of teaching such a diverse student group was an issue for several of the teachers. Aldis pointed out that the biggest challenge for her was the "language problem and the cultural barrier". She mentioned that the teachers had difficulty utilizing any specific methods in the classroom because "the people are so different". Eva echoed this sentiment:

In our case, they have a very different background. So, of course it is a challenge to meet new people and with different backgrounds and try to teach everyone in a way that values their importance and background. When I was teaching in the public school here in Iceland it was easier because I knew that my students had

completed different courses in high school. I knew that they were used to studying and had some self-discipline, and they had certain methods of learning. In our group here, you don't know. You don't know their background or what their education has been so it's a very interesting challenge.

Teaching in such a multicultural environment was a new experience for the teachers whose previous teaching experiences were in classrooms with predominantly Icelandic students.

#### **4.5.1 Gauging the teachers' theoretical approaches to teaching in a diverse setting**

Of the four teacher participants, three had previous experience teaching in a formal setting. Only one had previous experience teaching languages (though not Icelandic) and none had any teacher training related to multicultural education. They all responded to the reality of multiculturalism in the classroom in different ways, though none stated that they were guided by any theories in the field of multicultural education, or from any other theories in the general field of education.

The teachers' mentioned that their pedagogical approaches, rather, were largely influenced by their own personal teaching and learning experiences in other classroom settings as well as in the "Icelandic for Asylum Seekers" classroom. Bryndís who has a background in special education, psychology, and speech therapy, pointed out that while she was aware of various theories, she tried to stay away from them:

Well, I know pretty much about various theories in the field of psychology for example or teaching theories but...and also, I know theories about acquiring language like Chomsky and...well I really try and kind of avoid theories in a way.

She mentioned that she adhered to a "learning by doing" approach and that her stratagem for dealing with diversity in the classroom was largely influenced by her experiences in the course, rather than any particular theories.

Ásta did not mention any particular theory that informed her teaching approach, stating, rather, that she is guided by her background in social anthropology:

Yea. I think that social anthropology is a great ground for working with people from different backgrounds or coming from different environments and the difference can be "if the world is a town, the town is quite different so we all come from the same town.

Aldis expressed that she did not adhere to any educational theories - she just "approached them with an open-mind".

Nearly all of the teachers stated that teaching such a diverse group of students was a major pedagogical challenge for them and although few of the teachers expressed a willingness to adapt their teaching practices to better serve a multicultural classroom, the presence of various and overlapping identities in the classroom involving gender, religion, ethnicity, language, and transnationalism was a reality that the teachers had trouble adapting to. These differences in the classroom made it difficult for the teachers to utilize any specific methods and was a challenge for those who were former teachers in the Icelandic school system - where they were used to teaching mostly Icelandic students and were familiar with their students' cultural backgrounds, learning styles, and educational history. In this course, the teachers did not know their students' backgrounds or what previous education they had received and, therefore, were unable to engage with their past experiences in order to create a relevant learning environment.

The teachers' lack of formal multicultural education training contributed to their inability to engage with the students and provide them with a culturally relevant pedagogy. Many of the teacher participants relied on methods that they developed from their past experiences in largely homogeneous classrooms in Iceland and current experiences in the asylum seeker classroom, rather than from methods in the field of multicultural education. For instance, Bryndís adhered to a "learning by doing" approach in which her methods for dealing with diversity in the classroom were largely informed by her experience in the course. Ásta relied on her background in social anthropology as grounds for navigating the multicultural environment of the classroom. All of the teachers were extremely supportive and helpful to the students; however, their teaching approaches were not informed by any formalized training in the field of multicultural education.

#### **4.6 Teachers reflections on their practice**

Though the teachers experienced several challenges in the classroom, they all expressed that they have learned from this teaching experience and have adapted their teaching practices throughout their time as teachers in the course. When I asked Bryndís if she had modified her teaching approach in any way since she started teaching the course she stated:

Oh yea. Everything is different. There were lots of people from various societies, backgrounds, and that's not very usual, or has not been very usual here in Iceland, so I had to, like, think and read and try to figure out what to avoid and figure out things that might lead to cultural clashes.

Bryndís expressed that she was continually learning things from teaching a class with so many different students:

It's like a reward but I think I have myself benefited more from getting to know people from various countries and various ways of being and discovering how we are all kind of the same.

Eva, without mentioning any specific methods that she used, expressed that although it was a “challenge to start teaching new people with different backgrounds” she “[tried] to teach so that everyone learns”. She mentioned that her teaching approach has changed much since she started teaching asylum seekers and stopped teaching in Icelandic public schools, where she knew which academic level her students were at and which teaching and learning techniques they had been accustomed to while in the Icelandic school system. Aldis stated that her teaching approach changed with each group: “I think you always adapt your teaching method based on the group, because each and every group is different”.

#### **4.7 Student demographic in flux**

The classroom demographics shifted tremendously from class to class. The teachers never really knew which and how many students would show up each day. The classes that I observed had anywhere from 10 to 27 students on any given day and the ratio of female to male students fluctuated with each class, though males were a majority in most of the classes. Several of the students who were present in the first classes that I observed were not present in subsequent classes. The fluctuating student attendance rate was a major issue for nearly all of the teachers.

Bryndís stated that the biggest challenge for her was that the group of students changed so frequently:

This group is kind of a vague concept because it varies all of the time. The groups fluctuate a lot so we cannot really suppose that people knew what was going on in the last class and you cannot assume that you will have them in future classes.

When I asked her how she dealt with this issue she pointed out that, “everything requires spontaneity.” Eva echoed a similar sentiment:

The situation in the classroom changes from one day to the next, from one week to the next and You don't know how many students you will have in any given class. And unfortunately, people are sent back to the country in which they came

from and so the group is always changing. For example, we had three students tonight who had only been in Iceland for like six days.

It was a challenge for the teachers to get on in a class in which students did not show up regularly. This hampered their ability to properly track their students' progress in the course. It also hindered their ability to get to know their students on a level that could facilitate a culturally relevant and engaging pedagogy. Aldis expressed that it was difficult to progress in the classroom with different lessons because people were not showing up regularly: "that is the problem. You never know who comes and you never know...So maybe you're always doing the same thing. It's a little difficult to get on." In this way, the teachers struggled to devise a solid course plan and lesson plans that built off of the students' prior knowledge.

All of the teachers were faced with the challenge of teaching a classroom that was in a constant state of flux. Student attendance shifted tremendously from class to class and teachers were unable to properly gauge which students would be present on any given day. It was not fully clear if deportations were the sole contributor to the students' irregular attendance in the course, as one of the student participants expressed to me that some of the other students who had attended the course simply lost interest: "There was one guy I talked to who said that, 'I wasn't attending classes in my home country and they expect me to come to class here and learn a language?'" (Tyler). The students' reasons for losing interest in the course could have been due to the teachers' inability to utilize their experiences and engage with them in an authentic and relevant way. Also, frustration caused by the teachers' use of Icelandic only in the classroom could have hindered the students' interest in the course. In this way, the confusion that some of the students faced as they were unable to comprehend their teachers served as a barrier that perhaps kept them from regularly attending the course. This could be a good topic for further research. In any case, the teachers were unable to spend the time with their students that is necessary for a pedagogy that is rooted in dialogue to be implemented. This, overall, hindered their ability to get to know their students on a level that could facilitate a culturally relevant and engaging pedagogy.

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In this chapter, I have identified the major themes that arose during the data collection and analysis process. I discussed the "Icelandic for Asylum Seekers" program in general and then

explored the more specific aspects of the class through the lens of critical pedagogy. The findings suggest that there were four major areas of tension that hindered the students from experiencing a culturally relevant and liberating learning experience: teachers' inability to get to know their students, teachers' pedagogical methods and approaches, teachers' lack of formal multicultural education training, and the material conditions of the classroom. In the following chapter, I will discuss these barriers in depth and use the research findings to answer the research questions.

## **5 Implications for reform**

The purpose of this research project is to contribute to the knowledge regarding education for asylum seekers in Iceland, as well as to the broader field of critical pedagogy and its practical applications within second-language learning programs geared towards asylum seekers. The study's primary goal is to shed light on the experiences of teachers and students within the program, the teaching and learning practices utilized within the classroom, as well as the problems and issues that students and teachers face in relation to the class.

The findings suggested that much needs to be done in order for asylum seekers in Iceland to have access to second language learning that is meaningful and authentic. Reform should primarily be made within the classroom - however, as much of what goes on in the classroom is informed by, and a reflection of the larger political and social forces in society, changes should also be made on a societal level.

### **5.1 Bridging the Multicultural Gap**

The multicultural gap between the teachers and the students in the classroom was an area of tension that hindered the teachers from providing an authentic and relevant educational experience. This could be attributed to two factors - the fact that the teachers were unable to learn about the issues in their students' lives as well as their lack of professional development in the field of multicultural education.

#### **5.1.1 Learning about asylum seekers experiences**

None of the teachers were inclined to communicate with their students in ways that allowed for a deeper exploration of their lived realities and experiences, though they could have greatly benefited from it. The data suggested that this was mostly due to their adherence to, and interpretation of, the Red Cross' principle of maintaining neutrality. For them, adhering to this principle meant maintaining a safe distance from their students - enough of a distance to make it clear that their only role within the classroom was to teach Icelandic. There are different avenues, however, for the teachers to learn about the experiences and concerns of asylum seekers outside of the classroom, where the Red Cross rules of engagement do not apply. For instance, several online sources exist - in the form of exploratory studies, case studies, and descriptive research - that focus on the issues that asylum seekers face in countries within which they are seeking asylum. In Iceland, news sources such as the Reykjavik Grapevine, frequently publishes articles discussing the issues and injustices that asylum seekers face at the hands of the Icelandic government. There are also groups on Facebook that are geared towards giving asylum seekers a voice in Iceland

and rallying up support for them. These groups often provide details regarding the demands of asylum seekers within the Icelandic system. It would also be beneficial for the teachers to attend events that are held for asylum seekers outside of the confines of the Red Cross. There are organizations in Iceland, such as Andrymí, that host events for the general public, immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers in Iceland to come together and socialize with each other, providing a great opportunity for people who wish to converse with asylum seekers and learn more about their struggles and concerns. The teachers in the “Icelandic for Asylum Seekers” course can then take the information that they have learned about the experiences of asylum seekers in Iceland and utilize it in the classroom. Learning about the issues that asylum seekers face in Iceland is a necessary prerequisite to providing them with education that is authentic and culturally relevant.

### **5.1.2 Multicultural education training programs for volunteer teachers**

When compared to other Nordic countries, multiculturalism in Iceland is a relatively new phenomenon. Teachers in Iceland who once taught relatively homogeneous populations are now challenged to meet the needs of students who are not only culturally, but also linguistically diverse. This means that it is important for teachers with diverse student groups to have access to professional multicultural education training programs so that they can develop the skills necessary to properly respond to challenges that may arise in the classroom. Multicultural development is not only beneficial for teachers, though. As they learn to adapt to culturally diverse classroom environments and become fully prepared to teach in these settings, they also greatly benefit their students.

Professional multicultural education training is valuable for teachers who wish to create liberating learning spaces within multicultural classrooms. It is beneficial in preparing teachers to teach culturally diverse students in ways that are culturally and critically responsive and can allow for teachers to begin to value their students’ home cultures and bring them into the classroom. There are only a few organizations, however, in Iceland that offer systematic professional training in the field of multicultural education. Training initiatives offered by local institutions such as ÍSBRÚ, Mimir Simenntum, Namsflokkur Reykjavíkur and Framtið I nýju landi (Project Springboard) have been referenced in studies in Iceland that look at teachers’ participation in multicultural development programs (Tran, 2015). In this way, as cultural diversity becomes an increasing reality in Iceland, professional training in multicultural education should be made more accessible to educators and should be promoted as a necessary prerequisite for teaching in multicultural classrooms.

The data revealed that responding to diversity in the classroom was a major challenge for most of the teachers. In this way, encouraging teachers to take part in multicultural

development programs in Iceland could help eliminate some of the barriers that presented themselves as a result of a lack of experience and training in teaching diverse classrooms. Although the teachers in the “Icelandic for Asylum Seekers” program were all volunteers and, therefore, not required to have degrees in teaching or prior teaching experience, they could have benefited from participating in these programs before and during their time as volunteer teachers.

## **5.2 Creating more opportunities for asylum seekers to learn Icelandic**

Creating more opportunities in Iceland for asylum seekers to learn the Icelandic language would also be beneficial. As of now, the only institution that offers language courses, free of charge, to asylum seekers is the Icelandic Red Cross. However, the institutional limitations that are imposed upon the teachers as members of the Red Cross hinder their ability to get to know their students and create an authentic and culturally relevant learning experience. Therefore, it would be valuable if there were other properly funded non-governmental or grassroots organizations in Iceland that offered Icelandic language learning services to asylum seekers. Teachers working within these programs would not then be restrained by the same institutional barriers that the teachers in this study were. In this way, asylum seekers would greatly benefit from a more contextualized and well thought out language learning program that encourages teachers to take into account the lived experiences of their students as well as considers other factors such as fluctuating student attendance rates, needs for their stay in Iceland, as well the socio-cultural context of their students’ lived experiences in the asylum process.

## **5.3 Societal reform**

Changes need to be made on a socio-political level if asylum seekers are to have access to quality education, not only in Iceland, but around the world. As long as market-oriented societies, such as Iceland, view foreign-born people as potential sources of labor, rather than through the lens of human rights, education for this group of people will always be inadequate. There needs to be a common concern for reforming education systems and models of pedagogical practice within society. Giroux (2011) points out that the current system of pedagogy is a “much-narrowed form of pedagogy that focuses on memorization...and helping students find a good fit within a wider market-oriented culture of commodification, standardization, and conformity” (p.8). In this model, the empowering potential of pedagogy is subordinated to a regime that silences learners and promotes social inequality. Education, rather, should be viewed as a force to challenge dominant

assumptions and as a solution to societal injustices where teachers work with their students to encourage their active participation in matters that directly pertain to their life.

### **5.3.1 Elimination of Dublin Regulation**

The Minister of Justice and the Icelandic Directorate of Immigration must make an active effort to end the country's commitment to the Dublin Regulation. Not only is the Dublin Regulation harmful to those asylum seekers who have crossed multiple borders within the EU, it has also created bottlenecks at asylum seeker entry points within Europe. This means that asylum seekers are being concentrated along Europe's borders in countries such as Greece, Italy, and Malta. Very few asylum seekers reach Iceland without having entered another country who is a signatory of the Dublin Regulation, and are therefore deported. Statistics in Iceland show that the majority of asylum seekers that are deported are rejected due to the Dublin Regulation (The Directorate of Immigration, 2019).

It is not clear whether deportations were the sole contributor to the students' shifting attendance rate, or if emotional or physical stressors played a role as well. As a vulnerable population, asylum seekers are more susceptible to extrinsic and intrinsic factors that could hinder their participation in activities and programs that are created for them. Statistics show, however, that a large percentage of asylum seekers are deported due to the Dublin Regulation. If asylum seekers were not faced with the constant threat of being deported based on the Dublin Regulation, they might be more willing to attend Icelandic courses as their chances of gaining international protection or receiving refugee status and staying in Iceland are higher. In this way, attendance issues could perhaps be skirted if Iceland were to drop the Dublin Regulation entirely. In terms of the "Icelandic for Asylum Seekers" course, if students were to attend classes regularly, teachers would be able to spend the time with them that is necessary to learn about their individual learning styles and build off of their past knowledge.

## 6 Conclusion

Education, in its many forms, is a public good that should be valued and advanced by the community and the people that it serves. I wish to encourage the people of the communities that host asylum seekers to become more active in supporting their right to education. Working in solidarity with those on the periphery of society is paramount and can be done inside or outside of institutional structures, professionally or by volunteers, in an organized fashion or spontaneously. Recently, the Icelandic community has shown much support towards asylum seekers facing deportation. With continued support, the Icelandic community can ensure that asylum seekers human rights are observed and respected.

The primary goal of this research was to develop a deep understanding of the "Icelandic for Asylum Seekers" course through the lens of critical pedagogy. I wanted to examine, first-hand, how the class functioned through my own observations as well as from the perspective of the teachers and students in order to shed light on the experiences of teachers and students within the program, the teaching and learning practices utilized within the classroom, as well as the problems and issues that students and teachers face in relation to the class. Using the lens of critical pedagogy allowed me to examine the areas of tension that existed within the classroom, as well as in the society at large, that inhibited the students from taking part in a liberating learning experience.

The primary research question that informed this study was,

What can critical pedagogy tell us about the "Icelandic for Asylum Seekers" course offered by the Icelandic Red Cross?

I utilized two sub-questions which helped me answer this question:

A) How can critical pedagogy illuminate the experiences of teachers and students in the program?

B) What are the areas of tension that hinder the students from experiencing a liberating and culturally relevant learning experience in the classroom?

The findings indicated that there were four major areas of tension that hindered the students from experiencing a culturally relevant and liberating learning experience: teachers' inability to get to know their students, teachers' pedagogical methods and approaches,

teachers' lack of formal multicultural education training, and the material conditions of the classroom.

The teachers' inability to learn about their students' social situations largely stemmed from the fact that student attendance was in a constant state of flux. This inhibited the teachers from spending the time with their students that is necessary for a pedagogy that is rooted in dialogue to be implemented. Institutional forces also played a role in keeping the teachers from engaging with their students. As volunteer members of the Red Cross, the teachers were responsible for upholding and adhering to the principles and statutes laid out by the organization. By upholding these principles, primarily that of maintaining neutrality and impartiality, the teachers were very careful not to be too actively involved in their students' lives. The teachers own beliefs also contributed to their disengagement with the students in the classroom. Many of them did not see it as their role to get to know them.

The teachers expressed difficulties dealing with the diverse nature of the classroom which could be attributed to their lack of formal multicultural education training. Proper training in multicultural education would have perhaps better prepared the teachers to respond to the challenges of teaching people with different cultural backgrounds. It should be noted here, however, that the majority of the teachers in the program were retirees who are more likely to be set in their ways - making it more challenging for pedagogical changes to be implemented within the classroom.

The teachers' methods and practices resembled that of the banking model of education which places the teacher as the active participant in the classroom and the student as passive objects. Their use of rote memorization techniques did not allow for the students to relate the content learned in the classroom to the wider social context.

The material conditions of the classroom also contributed to the teachers' inability to provide an engaging and culturally relevant pedagogy. They could have benefited from the use of more materials that critically engaged the students with their lived reality.

This study, in no way is intended to devalue the role that the Red Cross and the "Icelandic for Asylum Seekers" course play in the lives of asylum seekers who wish to learn Icelandic. It is noted that the Red Cross and the teachers in this program are invaluable resources in the lives of asylum seekers and their work and motives are highly venerated. Also, it is not my intention to place sole responsibility on the individual teachers or the Red Cross for the issues that arose within the program that hindered the students from a liberating learning experience. These barriers, as this study points out are rather a product of the larger structural and institutional forces that inform the society that we live in.

For me, this research project presented an opportunity to further explore my interest in critical pedagogy while also familiarizing myself with the factors that affect the education

of asylum seekers in Iceland. I believe that It is important for educators and policy-makers to look more closely at the obstacles that hinder asylum seeker students from experiencing an authentic and transformative education not only in second language learning classrooms but in other classrooms that are geared toward them. I hope that this research will assist teachers and others involved in educating asylum seekers to consider how their pedagogical methods and approaches affect their students and how the classroom can be better equipped to allow for a more liberating and authentic learning experience. I contend that without a serious commitment to making education a tool for radical social and economic changes necessary to the survival of humankind, the value of said education is of little use.

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## **Appendix A: Consent form for teachers**

You are invited to participate in a research study that seeks to explore the lived reality of teachers and asylum seeker students in an Icelandic for asylum seekers course offered by the Red Cross. You were selected as a potential participant due to your experience with teaching asylum seekers. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is conducted by: Evan Lewis, MA candidate in International Studies in Education program, Haskoli Islands.

### **Background Information**

The purpose of this study is to develop an understanding of the experiences of teachers and asylum seeker students. It seeks to shed light on their lived reality by exploring their experiences as students and your experiences as their teacher.

### **Procedures**

If you agree to participate in this study you will be asked to take part in one in-depth, semi-structured interview. The interview will be roughly 20-30 minutes long and will be done outside of class-time, either during lunch, during a free period, or after school. The arrangements will be made according to your schedule. I will be asking you about your experiences teaching asylum seekers and the specific practices you utilize in the classroom. Given your approval, the interviews will be audio recorded.

Here are a few examples of the questions that I will ask you: Can you tell me about your experience teaching students with different cultural backgrounds? Is it a challenge? If so, in what ways is it challenging? What is your perception of the role that you play in the asylum seekers' life?

### **Risks and Benefits of being in the Study**

A risk associated with this study is that you will be asked to share personal information and experiences that may have been difficult and can have an effect on one's emotional state.

You will receive no direct benefits for participating in this study; however, the stories that you tell will help inform other teachers and adults of the situation and experiences which can help create a better experience for asylum seeker students and their teachers.

### **Compensation**

There is no direct compensation.

### **Confidentiality**

This study is anonymous. Your given name will not be used in the reproduction of the data that is gathered and any information obtained that pertains to this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential.

The records of this study will be kept strictly confidential. Research records will be stored in a locked file, and all electronic information will be coded and secured using a password protected file. Audio recordings will be used as part of the data collection process but will only be accessible to me and will be erased, after the transcription process is completed. All other records obtained during the study will be erased by October of 2018, upon completion of the final draft. I will also ask for your participation in the revision process of the project in order to gain your approval of the final report and to ensure the authenticity of its content.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decline to participate or withdraw from participation at any time. Withdrawing from the study or refusing to participate will not affect your relationship with myself or anyone else involved in the study. Also, you can agree to be in the study now and change your mind later without any penalty.

**Contacts and Questions**

You may ask any questions you have at any time before, during, or after the study by contacting the researcher, Evan Lewis, by email at [ejl2@hi.is](mailto:ejl2@hi.is), by phone at +18042141916, or by mail at Bergstadastraeti 55, 101 Reykjavik.

You may also contact the researcher’s thesis advisor, Brynja E. Gudjonsson, by email at [brynhall@hi.is](mailto:brynhall@hi.is) or by phone at 5255236.

**Statement of Consent**

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided above and have decided to participate in the study. If you later decide that you wish to withdraw your permission to participate in the study you may do so with no repercussions. You will be given a copy of this document.

\_\_\_\_\_ I MAY be audio recorded.  
\_\_\_\_\_ I MAY NOT be audio recorded.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Investigator: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_



## **Appendix B: Consent form for students**

You are invited to participate in a research study that seeks to explore the lived reality of teachers and asylum seeker students in an Icelandic for asylum seekers course offered by the Red Cross. You were selected as a potential participant due to your position as a student enrolled in this course. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is conducted by: Evan Lewis, MA candidate in International Studies in Education program, Haskoli Islands.

### **Background Information**

The purpose of this study is to develop an understanding of the experiences of teachers and asylum seeker students. It seeks to shed light on their lived reality by exploring your experiences as students and their experiences as their teacher.

### **Procedures**

If you agree to participate in this study you will be asked to take part in one in-depth, semi-structured interview. The interview will be roughly 20-30 minutes long and will be done outside of class-time, either during lunch, during a free period, or after school. The arrangements will be made according to your schedule. Given your approval, the interviews will be audio recorded.

Here are a few examples of the questions that I will ask you: Can you tell me about your experience as a student in this course? Is it a challenge? If so, in what ways is it challenging? What is your perception of the role that your teacher plays in your life?

### **Risks and Benefits of being in the Study**

A risk associated with this study is that you will be asked to share personal information and experiences that may have been difficult and can have an effect on one's emotional state.

You will receive no direct benefits for participating in this study; however, the stories that you tell will help inform other teachers and adults of the situation and experiences which can help create a better experience for asylum seeker students and their teachers.

### **Compensation**

There is no direct compensation.

### **Confidentiality**

This study is anonymous. Your given name will not be used in the reproduction of the data that is gathered and any information obtained that pertains to this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential.

The records of this study will be kept strictly confidential. Research records will be stored in a locked file, and all electronic information will be coded and secured using a password protected file. Audio recordings will be used as part of the data collection process but will

only be accessible to me and will be erased, after the transcription process is completed. All other records obtained during the study will be erased by October of 2018, upon completion of the final draft. I will also ask for your participation in the revision process of the project in order to gain your approval of the final report and to ensure the authenticity of its content.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decline to participate or withdraw from participation at any time. Withdrawing from the study or refusing to participate will not affect your relationship with myself or anyone else involved in the study. Also, you can agree to be in the study now and change your mind later without any penalty.

**Contacts and Questions**

You may ask any questions you have at any time before, during, or after the study by contacting the researcher, Evan Lewis, by email at [ejl2@hi.is](mailto:ejl2@hi.is), by phone at +18042141916, or by mail at Bergstadastraeti 55, 101 Reykjavik.

You may also contact the researcher’s thesis advisor, Brynja E. Gudjonsson, by email at [brynhall@hi.is](mailto:brynhall@hi.is) or by phone at 5255236.

**Statement of Consent**

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided above and have decided to participate in the study. If you later decide that you wish to withdraw your permission to participate in the study you may do so with no repercussions. You will be given a copy of this document.

\_\_\_\_\_ I MAY be audio recorded.

\_\_\_\_\_ I MAY NOT be audio recorded.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Investigator: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# Appendix C: Teacher Interview Protocol

## Introduction

*I'd like to thank you for being willing to take part in the interview aspect of my study. As mentioned in the letter you received, this study seeks to examine the extent to which Icelandic as a Second Language teachers who teach asylum seekers define, implement, and understand critical pedagogy.*

*Our interview today will last approximately 45 minutes during which I will be asking general and specific questions about yourself and your experiences teaching asylum seekers.*

*Before we get started, I just wanted to remind you that there are no right or wrong answers and that the information you give is confidential and will be used only in this research.*

*[review consent form and ask if it is still permissible to record interview]*

*If yes: Thank you. Please let me know if at any time you would like me to stop the audio recording or delete any segment of the conversation that you would not like to be recorded.*

*If no: No problem. I will only take notes of our conversation.*

*Do you have any questions before we begin the interview?*

### Demographic Information

- b) Gender:
- c) What is your ethnicity? Are you Icelandic?
- d) Have you ever thought about the role that your ethnic or cultural identity plays in the education of students with different backgrounds?

### Teaching Experience

- e) What is the highest level of formal education you have received?
- f) How long have you been teaching in general?
- g) Do you have any former training in teaching Icelandic as a Second Language?
- h) Do you have any professional development experience in the field of multicultural education?
- i) What is your experience with teaching people with different cultural backgrounds?
  - i. What are some of the challenges you have encountered in your teaching?

Can you tell me about your experience teaching asylum seekers?

- j) Why did you get involved?
- k) How long have you been teaching Icelandic to asylum seekers?
- l) Is it a challenge? If so, in what ways?
- m) have you had to modify your teaching to work with this group of students?
- n) Do you feel that there is a pressure put on you to teach in a specific way?

How do you get to know your students?

- o) Do you think that it is important to get to know your students?
- p) How do you balance maintaining the principle of neutrality (keeping your distance from them) and getting to know your students?
- q) How do you think your students benefit from learning Icelandic?
- r) Do you think that it is important for you to learn any of the languages that your students speak?

Tell me about your teaching? What kind of methods do you use? Where do you get your materials from?

What have you found most helpful in teaching and developing your teaching with this group?

- s) Are there any theories or teachers that have influenced your teaching practices?

Could you tell me a little bit more about this program? When did it start? What is the structure?

- t) Do you know of any other organization that offers free Icelandic courses to asylum seekers who want to learn Iceland?

How do you think this experience has benefited or allowed you to grow as a person?

What would make this program better?

Would you like to add something?

*Before we conclude this interview, is there anything else you would like to tell me about your experiences in this program?*

*Thank you for your time, if any questions or concerns arise regarding what was mentioned in this conversation, please contact me at [ejl2@hi.is](mailto:ejl2@hi.is).*

# Appendix D: Student Interview Protocol

## Introduction

*I'd like to thank you for being willing to take part in the interview aspect of my study. My study looks at how teachers approach teaching Icelandic to asylum seekers and how asylum seeker students experience the Icelandic courses offered to them by the Red Cross. Our interview today will last approximately 45 minutes during which I will be asking general and specific questions about yourself and your experiences in the Icelandic as a second language classroom.*

*Before we get started I just wanted to remind you that there are no right or wrong answers and that the information you give is confidential and will be used only in this research.*

*Do you have any questions before we begin the interview?*

### Demographic Information

- u) Age:
- v) Previous School Experience?
- w) Gender:
- x) Nationality:
- y) Ethnicity:
- z) Religious affiliation:
- aa) What does it mean to be (state ethnicity)?

### Educational background

- bb) Could you describe what your experience was like for you before moving to Iceland?
- cc) Where did you attend school before moving to Iceland?
- dd) What were your opinions of these schools?
- ee) What were your favorite classes and why?
- ff) What was your favorite part of the school day and why?
- gg) What was the primary language of instruction in these schools?
- hh) What activities outside of school did you participate in?

### Life in Iceland

- ii) What does being in Iceland mean to you?
- jj) When did you start attending Icelandic classes?
- kk) What made you want to attend these classes?
- ll) Do you think that it is important for you to learn Icelandic?
  - i. Why?
- mm) What were/are the biggest differences between the classes you attended in [home country] and this class?
- nn) What are your opinions regarding the class that you attend now?
- oo) What are the materials you are learning in this class?
  - i. Do you find any of the material engaging or interesting?

ii. Do you think that the material you are learning in this class is in any way related to your life outside of the school?

If so, how?

Do you think that it is better preparing you for the future?

pp) What has been your experience in the classroom?

qq) Is it easy for you to get to class? Do you have trouble finding transportation to class?

rr) Are there any reasons why you would not attend this course?

ss) Tell me about your teachers?

*Before we conclude this interview, is there anything else you would like to tell me about your experiences in this course?*

*Thank you for your time, if any questions or concerns arise regarding what was mentioned in this conversation, please contact me at [ejl2@hi.is](mailto:ejl2@hi.is).*

## Appendix D: Observation Protocol

Observation Date:

Description of Environment:

Teacher(s):

Number of Students:

Total:

Female:

Male:

Class Beginning Time \_\_\_\_\_

Class Ending Time \_\_\_\_\_

Observation Summary:

Observation Details:

How is the room arranged?

What were the lesson objectives?

What were the main features of the lesson?

What materials were used?

Describe the teachers' use of these materials?

What teaching methods were used?

How did the teachers engage with the students?

How was language used? Mostly Icelandic? Any English?

How did students respond to the use of Icelandic only?

How did the teachers give demonstrations?

How did the students participate?

Were there any unexpected occurrences and how did the teacher(s) handle them?

How does the teacher use eye contact, voice inflection, proximity, etc.?

How did the teachers praise and encourage students?

Examples of feedback?

Did the teachers give balanced guidance?

How does the classroom atmosphere have an impact on the learning process?

What were the students' reactions to the lesson?

What features of the last observation did you recognize in this observation?

Reflection