INTERNATIONALLY EDUCATED TEACHERS
AND STUDENT TEACHERS IN ICELAND:
TWO QUALITATIVE STUDIES[*]

Hanna Ragnarsdóttir, *University of Iceland*

This article draws upon two qualitative studies with internationally educated teachers and teacher assistants in preschools in Iceland as well as ethnic minority student teachers at the Iceland University of Education. The common research question in both studies is whether the experiences of these teachers reveal barriers to integration within the Icelandic educational system. The theoretical framework draws on writings and research on equal rights in education, critical multiculturalism and multicultural education as a basis for school development and marginalization and discrimination within schools and universities. The findings of both studies reveal barriers to integration and marginalization.

In recent years, Iceland has seen major demographic changes with an increasing number

of immigrants. As a result, schools in Iceland have generally become increasingly ethnically

diverse both in terms of staff and students. Changes in staff composition in schools in Iceland

have started debates on issues such as whether current leadership models in schools are based on

equity and seek to promote ethnic diversity or exclude, marginalize, and discriminate against

internationally educated teachers; whether voices of ethnic minority employees are silenced or

heard; whether leadership models promote individual abilities and cultural capital; and whether

conflicting cultural and religious values affect school ethos and simultaneously affect children in

---

schools. Issues concerning teacher certification for internationally educated teachers have also been debated, for example in relation to minimum proficiency requirements in the Icelandic language. In this article, which draws upon research with internationally educated teachers and teacher assistants in preschools in Iceland as well as ethnic minority student teachers, the main focus is on the position of internationally educated teachers within schools and society that are becoming increasingly diverse. The common research question in both studies is whether the experiences of these teachers reveal barriers to integration within the Icelandic educational system. The theoretical framework draws on writings and research on equal rights in education, critical multiculturalism and multicultural education as a basis for school development and marginalization and discrimination within schools and universities.

Theoretical background

Equal Rights in Education, School Development and Leadership

Many scholars have addressed the issues of increased ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity in the development of societies. Most of them agree that this development will continue into an unforeseeable future (Mor Barak, 2005). Migration, communication and collaboration across national borders bring important challenges and opportunities for school development. One of the challenges and opportunities is the growing diversity among teachers in various educational settings. In Iceland as in many other countries, the last decades have seen changes within schools towards increasing diversity in the ethnic origins, first languages, and religions of teachers and teacher assistants. The field of critical multiculturalism has focused on many challenges in modern societies, including the field of education, such as questions of cultural rights of minority

groups, common rights, whether cultural differences are temporary or permanent, why they are important and how to communicate across cultural borders (Ragnarsdóttir, 2007).

Some writers focusing on educational systems have debated the development of higher education within multicultural societies, partly related to policy making in international as well as European collaboration. Altbach (2004) notes that an era of globalization has begun within higher education, characterized by new international contracts and organization. He emphasizes that if universities isolate themselves from economical and social developments they will become irrelevant from society. Bauman (1997) stresses the importance of universities being multivocal. He notes that as it is difficult to predict what sort of specialization will be necessary in the future, it is important that universities support different ideas, approaches and visions. Some writers have suggested that education at all school levels should be revised in relation to the increasing diversity within societies. Education in many or perhaps most countries has developed in relation to the defined needs of a particular majority or majorities. Different approaches would thus include a wider approach to culture and society and be aimed at the diverse needs of the whole population (Ragnarsdóttir, 2005). According to many writers, universities in general and teacher education in particular need to address issues of diversity, different languages and globalization in their programs (Cordeiro et al, 2003; Noddings, 2005; Ragnarsdóttir and Blöndal, 2007). Teacher education programs should thus among other things be developed with the goal of preparing students for the realities of schools and society. At the same time universities generally and teacher education programs particularly should be aware of and respect the diversity within their institutions. According to Gundara (2000), a diverse and multicultural student group and multicultural education is a new challenge for universities, not least for teacher education, and calls for changes in policies and commitments of particular

institutions; increased knowledge and development of teachers; a more diverse group of teachers; general organizational changes in teacher education, and a stronger relationship between universities and society and its development. Gundara notes that these factors are generally lacking in universities in Europe, which tend to be tailored to the needs of particular groups of citizens.

Taylor (2000) points out that universities should develop cultures that reflect the diversity of their students or the diversity they intend to attract. Universities thus need organizational cultures that accept the value of diversity and empower minorities. He also notes that equal accessibility of various groups to universities is not enough; in addition, all students within a university should be empowered to participate in creating a common organizational culture. Sergiovanni´s (1999) writings on schools as societies and leadership are important in this respect. He notes that leadership and organization are important in developing multicultural education. Schools can be realms of different "societies", providing their citizens with theories and frameworks. He adds that schools should first of all be purposeful societies, where the citizens have developed a common way of thinking, common ideology and adopted certain core values. Sergiovanni also discusses societies for all in schools where mutual respect prevails towards economic, religious, cultural, ethnic, and family diversity. Ryan (2003, 2006) maintains that diverse groups of students and teachers demand extensive knowledge of principals, teachers and other staff in schools on multicultural issues and issues concerning minority groups. He notes that principals in diverse schools regularly address issues related to diversity.

The writings of Schein (2004) on organizational culture and leadership are also useful in the discussion of diversity among teachers and students and the development of school cultures that promote equity and diversity. He defines the culture of a group as

a pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. (p. 17)

Schein notes that it is within the power of leaders to enhance diversity and encourage subculture formation. In the light of the present changes in the world toward globalism and increased cultural diversity, Schein concludes that organizations and their leaders will have to become perpetual learners. This involves, among other requirements, that leaders have faith in people and are committed to diversity. The more turbulent the environment, Schein notes, the more likely it is that the more diverse organization will have the resources to cope with unpredicted events. The learning leader should therefore stimulate diversity and promulgate the assumption that diversity is desirable at the individual and subgroup levels. However, for diversity to be a resource, Schein adds, the subcultures must be connected and must learn to value each other enough to learn something of each other´s culture and language. Schein concludes that the central task for the learning leader is to ensure good cross-cultural communication and understanding throughout the organization. However, creating diversity does not mean letting diverse parts of the system run independently without coordination. To optimize diversity requires some high-order coordination mechanisms and mutual cultural understanding (Schein, 2004). Fullan (2001) has similarly discussed organizational culture and change and emphasized that in school development the focus should be on school cultures as each school is unique in this respect.

Many of the concepts introduced thus far appear in a declaration on higher education in Europe made by ministers of education participating in the Bologna process (Bologna Secretariat, 2007). It appears that a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) is being planned as one means of responding to globalization, and is based on academic freedom, mobility of

students and staff, equal opportunities and democracy as well as other factors. One part of the development of the EHEA is a declaration that university education should decrease inequality in society and that university students who begin, participate and finish university education reflect the diversity in society. It has also been emphasized that universities must respond to the needs of their students (London Communiqué, 2007).

If one of the main roles of universities is to minimize social inequality, both as concerns accessibility and education, the next step is to design models and basic ideologies of education within universities. The tenets of multicultural education have developed as a response to social inequality and include endeavours to prevent the marginalization of minority groups and empower students for participation. Parekh (2006), who has discussed the development of multicultural societies and their desirable political structures, notes that one of the conditions for equality, stability, cohesion and activity in a multicultural society is multicultural education at all school levels. He emphasizes that individuals in multicultural societies must be empowered to participate and that a common identity should be developed which all citizens share. The development of such an identity takes place within the education system.

Multicultural Education

Multicultural education has been developed by a number of writers in recent decades. Banks (2005) emphasizes that multicultural education can represent at least three phenomena: an idea or concept, an educational reform movement, and a process. Multicultural education, according to Banks, incorporates the idea that all students – regardless of their gender and social class and their ethnic, racial, or cultural characteristics – should have an equal opportunity to learn in school. Banks also emphasizes that some students, because of these characteristics, have

a better chance to learn in schools as they are currently structured than do students who belong to other groups or who have different cultural characteristics. Education is thus focused on the needs of students belonging to one or more of the majority groups in society. This means that in many cases the experiences, culture and history of other cultural, linguistic or religious groups is ignored, thus affecting students in a negative way, retaining discrimination and preventing the knowledge and approaches of other groups from being acknowledged and respected.

Nieto (1999) notes that low expectations towards ethnic minority students in each society is the largest obstacle for their success. She emphasizes the importance of believing in students´ abilities and making demands. She also notes that being tolerant and flexible towards the different needs of students is one thing, another is not requiring that each student does his or her best.

Internationally Educated Teachers and Ethnic Minority Student Teachers

According to research, many of the factors discussed above apply to internationally educated teachers and ethnic minority student teachers. Barriers to integration, low expectations, and ignorance or apathy towards their experiences have been reported in various studies.

Pilkington (2004) notes that institutionalized racism, generally defined as an institution´s inadequacy in providing people with appropriate and professional services because of their skin color, culture or origins, is common in universities. Institutional racism can also appear as discrimination in access to universities, discrimination against students by teachers, and lack of options or uniformity in teaching and learning (Back, 2004; Sharma, 2004). In schools in some countries, the majority of teachers belong to the majority culture while the students are ethnically and racially diverse (Ladson-Billings, 2001; Lumby & Coleman, 2007). It is also quite common

in some countries that leaders belong to dominant groups, e.g., white, middle class men. The

ethnicity, culture and history of the leader and his or her relationship with the school community

are other important factors to consider (Lumby & Coleman, 2007). Many writers consider a

diverse group of teachers to have more understanding of the needs of a diverse group of students.

This understanding is based on the different experiences within a diverse group of teachers. One

of the challenges in many schools is that teacher groups are not as ethnically, linguistically and

religiously diverse as student groups (Howard, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2001; Lassen, 2007;

Lumby & Coleman, 2007; Ragnarsdóttir & Blöndal, 2007). Cordeiro et al (2003) note that

writers should reflect on what globalization means for children in schools and in relation to this,

what sort of education student teachers should have to educate children in globalized societies.

The marginalization of students at different levels of the school system is well known in

many countries. Ethnic minority students are categorized on the basis of lack or want rather than

strength and abilities. In the case of Iceland, the Icelandic language becomes the criteria by

which student ability is measured. Lack of Icelandic abilities thus means deficiency and students

are categorized and marginalized on the basis of this lack or deficiency (Ragnarsdóttir, 2008).

Ryan and Hellmundt (2005) note the importance of respecting what each student brings to his or

her educational setting and building on this in the student´s education.

The discussion above draws attention to some main considerations concerning education

in multicultural societies, teacher education and the education of children at different school

levels. To summarize, many writers agree that in modern multicultural societies universities

should be accessible for all and equitable in structure and content; higher education, including

teacher education should honor cultural diversity in a critical manner; and teachers at all levels

should have knowledge about the issues facing multicultural societies as well as basic ideologies

and values for teaching diverse groups of students. Furthermore, it is important that in multicultural societies, schools and universities acknowledge and promote diversity among their teaching staff and other personnel.

Research has shown many similarities concerning on the one hand the experiences of ethnic minority children in schools, and on the other the experiences of internationally educated teachers in schools and ethnic minority student teachers in universities. All these groups have experiences of marginalization and barriers to integration. The two studies presented below reveal a number of similarities between the experiences of ethnic minority student teachers and internationally educated teachers.

The Icelandic context and Educational System

The growing multicultural population in Iceland (Figure) has not generated appropriate responses among institutions in Iceland. In other words, development within institutions ranging from the municipal to the governmental level has not been congruent to the new reality, i.e., the changing demographics (Ragnarsdóttir, 2008). In general, the Icelandic National curriculum guides for preschools and basic schools (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 1999, 2004) are mainstream centric. Educational policy appearing in national curriculum guides for different school levels in Iceland generally emphasizes equal rights of children to education. However, at the same time the curriculum guides are to a large extent based on nationalistic and Christian (Lutheran Protestant) values and centred on the ethnic majority, i.e., the Icelanders.
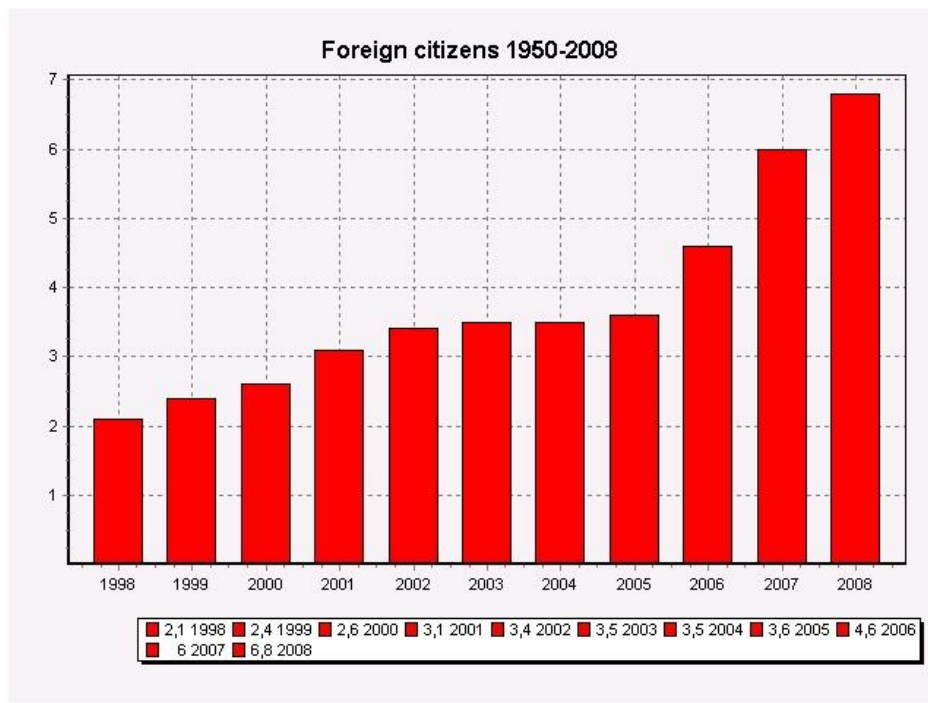
Figure. Foreign citizens in Iceland 1998-2008, percentage of total population (Statistics Iceland, 2008a).

In Icelandic schools, diversity has increased in recent decades, both in terms of teachers and students (Lassen, 2007; Statistics Iceland, 2008b). The same applies to universities, where teacher education programs have also seen more diverse student groups (Ragnarsdóttir and Blöndal, 2007). However, the ratio of internationally educated teachers to Icelandic teachers is generally not as high as the ratio of ethnic minority children to Icelandic students in schools.

Two Icelandic Studies

Below, the findings of two studies will be introduced and discussed. These are (i) a study on the experiences of ethnic minority students in teacher education programs in Iceland (2005 – 2006), and (ii) a qualitative study on preschools as multicultural workplaces (2007 – 2008).

Ethnic Minority Students at the Iceland University of Education:

Positions and Experiences

      In 2007, 48 ethnic minority student teachers from twenty different countries studied at the Iceland University of Education. In addition, around twenty exchange students studied at the university each term. Altogether these students comprised approximately 5.9% of the total student population. The number of ethnic minority students at the Iceland University of Education has grown in the last years, as well as ethnic minority students at the University of Iceland. The two universities merged in July 2008.

      The study introduced and discussed below is a qualitative interview study conducted in 2006. The main focus of the study was ethnic minority students' perceptions and experiences at the Iceland University of Education with respect to its curriculum, cooperation (among students and between students and teachers), and ethos. The objective of the study was to analyze the ethnic minority students' experiences of studying at the IUE. Its more general purpose was to initiate debate and generate new knowledge about diversity, equity, and school ethos at the level of higher education generally and at the Iceland University of Education particularly in light of societal changes towards increasing cultural and religious diversity in Iceland in the last decade (Ragnarsdóttir, 2008). These changes are reflected in growing cultural, linguistic and religious diversity among student populations in Icelandic universities (e.g., see Háskóli Íslands, 2007a, 2007b). The third purpose was to fulfill the IUE´s equity policy (Kennaraháskóli Íslands, 2004), which aimed, for example, to "ensure that those who apply or study at the University will have an equal position, such that minority status is taken into account in the enrollment of new students, in the structure and practice of teaching and services". The policy also stated that "the studies (at the University) should increase open-mindedness, decrease prejudice and improve

understanding of discrimination and inequality in schools and societies generally". The main

value of the study is that it can lead to improvement and implement changes in the curriculum,

institutional culture and ethos within the University. Also, it can initiate debate in Iceland

generally on how institutional culture and ethos, as well as organizational structures in higher

education and at other school levels, can either discriminate against or empower ethnic minority

students. The study reveals the viewpoints of ethnic minority students in a society where rapid

demographic changes are taking place and links to general developments in higher education in

Europe (Bologna Secretariat, 2007).

The methodology chosen in this study was qualitative research as this has been

considered democratic and convenient in gaining insights into the viewpoints of individuals

marginalized in society (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Data was collected through semi-structured

interviews in order to obtain the viewpoints of the participants as clearly as possible (Flick, 2006;

Kvale, 1996). A sequence of themes was used for discussion (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). The

main themes included the participants´ former studies; the antecedents and reasons for studying

at the IUE; students' experiences of studying at IUE; their interaction and collaboration with

teachers, other staff and students; the culture and ethos of IUE; and students' future plans.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling on the basis of their particular

experiences and specialized knowledge (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000) from the group of

ethnic minority students studying at the Iceland University of Education in the year 2005-2006.

The participants were all regular full- or part-time students; none of them were exchange

students. Of the 40 ethnic minority students originally approached, 16 agreed to take part in the

study and were interviewed from January to July 2006. The participants were students in

preschool teacher education (7), teacher education (7), teaching studies for teacher certification

(1) and social education (1). At the time of the study the participants had all lived in Iceland less than 15 years and they all have first languages other than Icelandic and are studying in Icelandic programs. The participants came from Chile (1), Denmark (2), France (1), Germany (2), Italy (1), Netherlands (1), Philippines (2), Russia-Estonia (1), Sweden (4), and the U.S.A. (1). The languages of the interviews were chosen by the participants. Fourteen interviews were conducted in Icelandic, two in English.

Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with two heads of divisions and two student counselors in order to collect data on their views and experiences regarding the changing and increasingly diverse student groups within the University and services provided to ethnic minority students. Questions to the heads of divisions and student counselors included whether changes had occurred or were foreseen in curriculum development, instruction, teaching methods and assessment as a result of the increased student diversity; what parts of the studies seemed to be most difficult and challenging for the ethnic minority students; whether the students had access to the assistance required and their overall satisfaction.

The interviews were all transcribed, coded and categorized (Peräkylä, 2005; Silverman, 2006; Wolcott, 2001). Below the main findings from the interviews will be described and discussed.

Findings

The sixteen participating students spoke twelve different first languages, including three Scandinavian. Within the group, altogether fifteen languages were represented. The students were all very strong and qualified individuals with diverse experiences and education. Ten out of sixteen held one or more university degrees. They were all women and all, except two, had

13

Icelandic partners.

The ethnic minority students were generally satisfied with their studies at the IUE and felt they were well organized and on a high level. They felt that they had received a warm welcome when they began their studies, that the services provided at the IUE were personal and warm, and that the environment and ethos were likewise.

However, the students felt that they had not been able to make proper use of the resources and experiences they had brought to the university. They spoke of lack of compassion and interest towards them (in the classroom).

Many of the students talked about being valued, respected and categorized only on the basis of their knowledge in Icelandic. An American student noted that comments such as "You are diligent, you speak well" became annoying after a while and she felt that her other strengths, knowledge and capabilities were ignored while the focus was entirely on her Icelandic knowledge. Some of the students alluded to, while others spoke directly of, a hierarchy of languages and nationalities within the university and in Icelandic society generally. A Scandinavian student noted that the foreign students were in a way categorized within the university on the basis of their nationalities and levels of "foreignness": "A Swedish person is 50% foreigner, a Thai person is 200%, a Spanish person is 150%". She based her opinion on the behavior and attitudes of other students and teachers towards the foreign students and their status within the student group.

Many students in the study described their negative experiences from the first year of study and how their self-confidence decreased. Many of them felt marginalized and isolated, and felt they were not included in the class work and were not welcome in class discussions. Many spoke of not being valued as capable individuals. The students also talked of being silenced in

classes and their self respect diminishing particularly in the first year as their teachers and fellow students were disinterested in their contributions in classes. An Asian student said: "I feel insulted, sometimes hurt…It´s all about dignity". And a European student said: "I am a nuisance". The Scandinavian students, however, seemed to have experienced less marginalization than the other students. Most of the students noted that their knowledge in Icelandic determined their status while some said their nationality and culture did so as well. They also described how the perceived lack, i.e., *not* knowing Icelandic and *not* being Icelandic, was what really marginalized them.

The students particularly described how difficult it was to find groups to collaborate with in the various assignments in the studies. They talked about being left out when the students were choosing their partners. An Asian student noted that she was generally the only one left when the groups had been formed: "I ended up doing it on my own – like always". A European student described a similar experience: "I was the only one left, I and a girl who has severe learning difficulties. Another European student said: "It is so difficult to become connected with the group". The students described the shortcomings in the group work, particularly that the students chose their own groups. A European student said: "The students who remain in the same groups in all projects learn nothing about communication". Another European student said: "I always end up in groups with students that have learning difficulties…it is very annoying". An Asian student described how she was left out and ended up with a homosexual person with disabilities, but emphasized that their collaboration was good: "He was handicapped and gay…it was terrific". The students agreed that it is important that the teachers control the work in groups more decisively to prevent the isolation and marginalization of students. They also noted that training in collaboration and teamwork is needed.

When in groups the students also described bad experiences, such as their contributions to assignments not being acknowledged and even left out. An Asian student noted: "It is too insulting, to not be able to help in the group work. It is too insulting to be alone always". A European student said: "It is as if I were stupid… as if I am not trusted, for example, in assignments, and not listened to". An Asian student described how she felt her contributions to assignments had been left out: "Everything I have done does not come up in the final thesis".

Another kind of experience emerged in their training in the schools, particularly in the preschools. The students training in the preschools described good experiences and how they felt that their contributions were highly appreciated by the teachers and children. They noted that they felt how much their first languages were needed in the preschools. An Asian student said: "In my teacher´s training I could make use of my mother language. I saw how the children flourished when I spoke to them in my language". An American student said: "The children all come to me when they hear me speaking my language". The students training in the basic schools told another story. Some of them said that they would not be ready to teach in Icelandic schools after finishing their teacher education. They mentioned their lack of Icelandic knowledge and fear of being humiliated by their students as the main reasons for not wanting to become classroom teachers.

Some of the students saw themselves as being role models for other minorities in their studies. An Asian student said: "I enjoy this, I want to encourage my people and foreigners generally… not to give up, let your interest guide you and let your dreams come true". The students also talked about having survived and having become stronger as a result of the difficulties. An Asian student said: "Because of the challenges I´m still here". Another Asian student said: "I was there on my own... and I survived! I am very satisfied with the studies. I

have learnt a lot and my self-confidence has increased. I am a stronger person". An American student said: "My experiences from the studies and living in Iceland have changed me a lot. I have gained a different perspective now, through ´Icelandic eyes´, and I am more independent".

The students agreed on how important it was to have Icelandic partners to support them in their studies. They said that without the support of their Icelandic husbands it would have been difficult to study and that they probably would not have started their studies in the first place.

The main findings from the interviews with the heads of divisions and student counselors in many ways correspond to the findings from the student interviews. They noted that problems occurring were mainly related to group work and that they needed to improve services for foreign students and the flow of information to students as well as to teachers. For example, they noted that teachers needed to have information on the first languages and nationalities of students earlier. They also agreed that systematic teamwork in the beginning is important for 'breaking the ice', establishing an introduction, and employing diverse teaching methods. They also mentioned that student diversity was too often seen as a problem.

The conclusions of the study indicate that although the accessibility of ethnic minority students to the university appears to be good, certain difficulties are evident when they begin their studies. The difficulties appear to stem from the fact that the university is in many ways unprepared for diverse student groups. The teachers appear not to have the knowledge, experiences or measures to prevent the development of marginalization and barriers to integration within their classes. Neither do they have the knowledge and training to build on the resources and capital the foreign students bring.

Preschools as multicultural workplaces

The study on preschools as multicultural workplaces introduced and discussed below attempts to look at experiences from ethnically diverse preschools and draw on these experiences in further discussions on ethnic diversity in schools in Iceland as well as suggesting school reform agendas suitable for ethnically diverse workplaces.

The study consisted of two parts, the first part focusing on teachers, the second on preschool principals. The aim of the first part of the study on ethnic minority women as teachers and teacher assistants in Icelandic preschools was to explore the common as well as individual experiences and outlooks of ethnic minority women as professionals and employees in Icelandic schools. The aim of the second part of the study was to explore whether leadership styles or models of preschool principals combined with their general views on diversity influence the school ethos and whether they translate into the everyday work within the preschool.

The first part was a focus group study on the experiences of ethnic minority teachers in Icelandic preschools which took place from February to June 2007. The main advantage of focus groups in comparison to participant observation is the opportunity to observe a large amount of interaction on a topic in a limited period of time based on the researcher´s ability to assemble and direct the focus group sessions. This control is also a disadvantage however, because it means that focus groups are in some sense unnatural social settings (Morgan, 1997). The participants were six groups of teachers in six preschools in three ethnically diverse areas of Reykjavík (see Table). Each group included all the ethnic minority teachers and teacher assistants in each school (except for those not available at the time) or 3-8 participants. Purposive sampling was used in that the participants were chosen particularly because of subject of the study, i.e. their experiences of being ethnic minority teachers and their specialized knowledge (Cohen, Manion

and Morrison, 2000). All the teachers are immigrants who had at the time of the study had lived

in Iceland for up to ten years. Two sessions of interviews with each group took place in the

spring of 2007. In the focus group interviews the teachers were asked to reflect on their

experiences of working in the preschools; how they felt their education, language proficiency

and former experiences were transferred to their working place; whether these were drawn upon

or neglected; whether they felt accepted as part of the staff; and how they related to the parents,

children, other teachers and principals. Furthermore, they were asked whether they had

experienced conflicts concerning values, culture, or religious matters in their workplace.

Table shows the numbers and origins of the ethnic minority teachers.

School	Numbers of ethnic minority staff	Countries of origin
School A	4 out of 21	Albania, Bulgaria, Turkey, Venezuela
School B	6 out of 15	Chile, Philippines, India, Jamaica, Ukraine (2)
School C	7 out of 16	England, Egypt, Kurdistan, Poland (3), Serbia
School D	4 out of 17	Philippines, Russia, Latvia, Thailand
School E	4 out of 30	Philippines, Cape Verde, Columbia, Peru
School F	5 out of 20	England, Philippines, Romania, Serbia, Sweden

Table. Numbers and origins of the ethnic minority teachers in the six preschools.

The second part of the study consisted of semi-structured interviews with the principals in the

preschools, from January to May 2008, with the exception that one of the six principals declined

the opportunity for an interview. In the interviews, policies, outlooks and models of leadership

and school development lead by the preschool principals were considered as well as school ethos

and school culture. The contents of the interviews included questions concerning the antecedent

for the diverse group of teachers in the preschool; particular reasons for hiring ethnic minority teachers and staff; their status and positions within the preschool; the challenges and opportunities of leading an ethnically diverse group of teachers; agendas, ideologies, and professional working theories of the principals; policies, outlooks and models of leadership and school development; whether these had changed in relation to the new diverse reality within the teachers´ groups; the most straining tasks or situations the principals faced; their reactions to those situations; and parents´ views on diversity among staff.

Findings

The findings of the study outline the realities of being a teacher or teacher assistant from an ethnic minority in particular preschools in three ethnically diverse areas of Reykjavík and reveal common experiences of these teachers. The findings shed light on the main obstacles to inclusion in these schools while highlighting the main value conflicts and reveal whether current leadership models promote ethnic diversity and equity.

At the time of the study, the teachers in each of the six preschools had worked in their positions from 6 months to 9 ½ years. A number of themes emerged clearly from the data from the focus group interviews. These included the wish for successful integration into Icelandic society as well as experiences of loneliness, misunderstanding, lack of communication, racism and marginalization. A teacher assistant from Egypt said: "I started my work in the preschool to learn about the culture and ideology of the people who were working with my children - I wanted and needed to know where they were coming from". Describing her wish for successful integration in the workplace she said: "I just want to be one of you". A teacher assistant from Cape Verde said: "My dream is that my children will be educated and have a better life than I

have". In the interviews many of the teachers described their mixed feelings. A teacher assistant from Columbia described Iceland as a paradise, but also noted how difficult it had been to adjust to Icelandic society and that patience and courage was necessary: "We have to be brave". A teacher assistant from Kurdistan described having felt extremely lonely in Iceland at first, although her husband was with her, but then she had two children. She said: "After you have children you are not lonely, you are a family". A teacher from England described the difficulties of adjusting although she had an Icelandic husband and had lived in Iceland for many years: "I would not recommend a cross-cultural marriage to anybody". Some teachers talked about having been criticized in their work more than the other teachers. A teacher from the Philippines said: "I'm not perfect, I'm human, I make mistakes".

The teachers also discussed language issues extensively, such as their language abilities not being appreciated and their education not being acknowledged. Many of the teachers were happy in their jobs and felt that they had worked hard to get where they were. Others saw their jobs as opportunities to learn Icelandic before seeking employment in their educational fields. Many of the teachers had university degrees in fields such as engineering, law, chemistry, nursing and education. Some teachers described how important some of the parents made them feel, because of their first languages and similar experiences. A teacher assistant from Latvia said: "When the foreign parents learned that I was a foreigner too, floodgates opened". The teachers all agreed that the biggest challenge they faced was the language. To them language was the key to society, but simultaneously also the largest obstacle in fulfilling their dreams. The teachers were afraid of misunderstanding and being misunderstood in their interactions with colleagues, principals and parents. However, they said that the children were very helpful while they were learning Icelandic and that they appreciated how the children corrected their language

and pronunciation without hesitation.

The teachers described their pride and ambitions, their gains and losses in workplaces in Iceland generally and in the preschools particularly. They also talked about the importance of respect in workplaces and the many positive aspects of diversity. A teacher from Serbia said: "Sometimes it´s nice to be different". A teacher assistant from Egypt said: "We are like mixed seasoning". The issues of leadership and school ethos also came up. These issues lead to further questions, such as what factors influenced the school ethos and what roles the principals, teachers and other staff, parents and children played in developing school ethos.

Obvious differences appeared among the schools as concerned job satisfaction and experiences; feelings of being appreciated and important for the workplace; feelings of being included in the workplace and of making a difference there. Differences in school culture and ethos appeared. The leadership models seemed to vary, as well as experiences and outlooks of principals. In one focus group it appeared that the employees sometimes disappeared quietly from the preschool. A teacher assistant from the Philippines said: "Sometimes new employees go to the store and never return".

In the second part of the study, the interviews with the preschool principals revealed both similarities and differences in their professional approaches. The preschool principals with the exception of one had long experiences of leadership and well developed professional working theories. Three of the six principals showed a particular interest in matters of diversity and equality and had led development projects on these issues in their preschools. One of the principals said: "I am aware of the importance of supporting the children´s linguistic development, so if possible I choose the teachers on the basis of their mother languages... It is also important to have, for example Muslim teachers that can better relate to the Muslim parents

and children". She also said: "Although we have certain basic professional theories and policy in our preschool we welcome new, different and challenging input from our teachers".

When questioned on the issue of hiring teachers and other staff, most of the preschool principals said that they originally hired people with first languages other than Icelandic when no Icelanders applied for the jobs. However, they noted that at first they had used other criteria and higher demands when hiring people with other first languages. One of the principals said: "The first foreign person applying here had a very good education so I decided to hire her. And she is still here. And because of the positive experience from this first foreign teacher I decided to hire more foreign teachers". Three of the principals noted that their criteria in hiring had changed to focusing first on the person and character, and second on the origins and languages of the people applying. One of the principals said: "I evaluate the first impression. I always interview the applicants and evaluate their presence and their way of communicating". Most of the principals said that with time they had learnt to value the diversity of the applicants. One of the principals said: "We try to bring out the best in everyone and discuss what we have in common. We are not trying to emphasize anything else".

Concerning the matter of how they chose their applicants, the principals all claimed that they had laid clear boundaries when it came to hiring teachers who had first languages other than Icelandic. These boundaries involved establishing proportions of ethnic minority staff in each department and levels of knowledge in Icelandic. In other words, some of them noted that they were careful about keeping the proportion of ethnic minority staff lower than 50% of the total staff in each department. Some of them said they had clear ideas about the level of Icelandic knowledge they required for hiring a certain person. One of the principals said: "Of course we have to guarantee that the children learn Icelandic here; we have to prepare them for the

Icelandic environment".

Issues of trust and understanding appeared in most of the interviews with the principals. Some of them claimed that it was difficult to trust some of the ethnic minority teachers, i.e., they described the possibility of misunderstanding or miscommunication in staff meetings, the lack of understanding of preschool ideology and pedagogy, and the feeling that the ethnic minority teachers pretended not to understand or ignored what they were asked to do. One of the principals said, talking about one of her teachers who had been working in the preschool for many years: "I am beginning to think that it is not that she does not understand our pedagogic emphasis, but that she has different views on things, a different ideology... it is something deeper than a misunderstanding". The same principal added: "There are language difficulties and incomprehensions and... sometimes you think they do not understand, but they do understand and then they are just making their own arbitrary decisions".

To summarize, the findings from the first part of the study showed differences in school ethos and culture between the six preschools. Indications of this appeared in the focus group interviews and were confirmed in the interviews with the principals. The three preschools where school culture and ethos promotes diversity and equality according to the findings from the focus group interviews had principals that were aware of and had knowledge in these fields and showed interest in diversity and related issues. These principals had long working experiences and met challenges with positive mind sets. They showed interest in a variety of cultures, languages and education. They openly valued diversity among staff and children and they did not reveal a deficit approach to diversity. The other principals, although fairly positive towards diversity in the interviews, did not show the same conviction when it came to the importance of diversity for the preschools and more scepticism when discussing the opportunities it could bring

to the schools. They clearly had a deficit approach to diversity, seeing it as problematic rather than providing new opportunities.

Discussion and Conclusion

The common research question introduced in the beginning of this article focused on whether the experiences of internationally educated teachers and ethnic minority student teachers in Iceland reveal barriers to integration within the Icelandic educational system. The findings of both studies referred to above reveal barriers to integration at different levels of the educational system.

At the preschool level, barriers to integration include lack of knowledge and understanding among principals and other staff of the schools. In relation to these findings, Ryan´s (2003, 2006) writings on the importance of extensive knowledge of principals, teachers and other staff in schools on multicultural issues are relevant as well as Schein´s (2004) writings on the important task for leaders to ensure good cross-cultural communication and mutual cultural understanding in organizations. Nationalistic sentiments appearing in the emphasis on retaining Icelandic cultural heritage and Icelandic language appear in rules and guidelines applied by principals in hiring foreign staff. Some principals thus limit the percentage of foreign staff in the schools. Barriers to full participation of internationally educated teachers emerge in a variety of settings within the schools in the studies referred to above, from inhibitions to read for the children as their unsatisfactory accent in Icelandic is said to have negative influence on the children´s language development, to mistrust as the internationally educated teachers are said not to have full understanding of the ideological and pedagogical principles applied in the schools and therefore not to be trusted to work with the children without supervision. Ladson-Billings

(2001) and Lumby and Coleman (2007) have drawn attention to the fact that in schools in some countries, the majority of teachers belong to the majority culture while the students are ethnically and racially diverse. In this respect, the ethnicity, culture, and history of the leader and his or her relationship with the school community is an important factor to consider (Lumby & Coleman, 2007). In the preschool study introduced above all the principals were Icelandic while the teachers and other staff had diverse backgrounds. As described above, the relationships between principals and teachers varied from one preschool to another.

At the university level, the findings of the study on ethnic minority student teachers revealed marginalization and exclusion although the students noted that the ethos of the university was positive and the programmes were of high quality. The barriers they faced were not being included in student groups and being silenced. Bauman (1997) has called for universities being multivocal while Gundara (2000) has called for policy and commitment of universities in the light of increasing diversity. Taylor (2000) has similarly contended that universities need organizational cultures that accept the value of diversity and empower minorities. Altbach (2004) has warned against universities isolating themselves from economic and social developments. All these authors provide important theoretical guidelines for the development of universities in diverse societies. Issues of marginalization and exclusion of students at all school levels call for ideological developments in education where the experiences, cultures, history and languages of students are valued, acknowledged and respected (Banks, 2005; Nieto, 1999; Noddings, 2005; Ryan and Hellmundt, 2005).

As noted in the beginning of this article, the Icelandic educational system has generally not responded sufficiently to the changing demographics in Iceland. Ideological frameworks and values within educational policy and national curriculum guides are based on the majority

culture (see Banks, 2005) and although they state equity as a principle, implementation within diverse school settings may not be apparent as evidenced by the two studies reported on here. Teacher education programs are generally focused on the experiences of Icelandic teachers in Icelandic schools, again aimed at the majority culture. However, a new International Studies in Education program has now been launched to provide variety of teacher education (Háskóli Íslands, 2008). Similarly, new multicultural policies for schools at different levels are being developed in a number of municipalities in Iceland and progressive projects focusing on social equality and diversity are being implemented. Research on positive and negative experiences of ethnic minority teachers in Iceland is an important addition to the growing field of multicultural educational research in Iceland. It will presumably give important directions for improvement within the Icelandic educational system in the light of the increasing diversity in Icelandic society.

References

Altbach, P. G. (2004). Globalisation and the university: Myths and realities in an unequal world. *Tertiary Education and Management, 10,* 3–25.

Back, L. (2004). Ivory towers? The academy and racism. In I. Law, D. Phillips & L. Turney (Eds.), *Institutional racism in higher education* (pp. 1–6). Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham.

Banks, J. A. (2005). Multicultural education: Characteristics and goals. In J. A. Banks & C. A. M. Banks (Eds.), *Multicultural education: Issues and perspectives* (5th edition update), (pp. 3–30). New York: John Wiley and Sons.

Bauman, Z. (1997). Universities old, new and different. In A. Smith & F. Webster (Eds.), *The postmodern university? Contested visions of higher education in society* (pp. 17–26). Buckingham: SRHE and Open University Press.

Bologna Secretariat Website. Department for education and skills. (2007). *Towards the European Higher Education Area: Responding to challenges in a globalised world.* Retrieved July 20, 2007, from http://www.dfes.gov.uk/bologna/uploads/documents/LondonCommuniquefinalwithLondonlogo.pdf

Cohen, L., Manion, L. & Morrison, K . (2000). *Research methods in education* (5th ed.). London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Cordeiro, P. A., Bloom, D. A., Engelbrecht, G., Conzalez, B., Kissock, C. & Wan, Y. (2003). *A call for the internationalization of teacher education in an era of globalization: A paper presented by the Global and International Teacher Education Committee of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education.* Retrieved May 31, 2007, from http://www.atea.edu.au/ConfPapers/2003/Reviewed%20Papers/Cordeiro.doc

Denzin, N. K. & Lincoln, Y. S. (2005). Introduction: The discipline and practice of qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd edition), (pp. 1–32). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Flick, U. (2006). *An introduction to qualitative research* (3rd edition). London: Sage.

Fullan, M. (2001). *Leading in a culture of change.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Gundara, J. S. (2000). *Interculturalism, education and inclusion.* London: Paul Chapman.

Háskóli Íslands/University of Iceland. (2007a). *Erlendir stúdentar og þjóðerni þeirra/Foreign students and their nationalities.* Retrieved July 30, 2007, from http://www.hi.is/page/stad_utlond_erlstud

Háskóli Íslands/University of Iceland. (2007b). *Skiptistúdentar til og frá HÍ 1992 2007/Exchange students to and from the UI 1992 – 2007.* Retrieved July 30, 2007 from http://www.hi.is/pub/rann/stadtolur/althjodasamskipti/skiptinemar.htm

Háskóli Íslands/University of Iceland. (2008). *Alþjóðlegt nám í menntunarfræði/International studies in education.* Retrieved November 29, 2008, from http://www.hi.is/is/menntavisindasvid_deildir/uppeldis_og_menntunarfraedideild/nam/nam

Howard, G. R. (1999). *We can´t teach what we don´t know: White teachers, multiracial schools.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Kennaraháskóli Íslands/Iceland University of Education. (2004). *Jafnréttisáætlun KHÍ/Equity policy of the Iceland University of Eduation.* Retrieved November 29, 2008, from http://www.khi.is/files/jafnrettis.pdf

Kvale, S. (1996). *Interviews.* Thousand Oaks, Ca: Sage.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1994). *The dreamkeepers. Successful teachers of African American children.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2001). *Crossing over to Canaan. The journey of new teachers in diverse classrooms.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Lassen, B. H. (2007). *Í tveimur menningarheimum: Reynsla og upplifun kennara af erlendum uppruna af því að starfa í grunnskólum á Íslandi.* Unpublished master´s thesis, Iceland University of Education, Reykjavík, Iceland.

London Communiqué. (2007). *Towards the European Higher Education Area: Responding to challenges in a globalised world.* Retrieved October 26, 2008, from http://www.eua.be/fileadmin/user_upload/files/Publications/Londoncommunique.pdf

Lumby, J. & Coleman, M. (2007). *Leadership and diversity. Challenging theory and practice in education.* Los Angeles: Sage.

Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. (1999). *National curriculum guide for preschools.* Retrieved November 24, 2008, from http://bella.stjr.is/utgafur/leikskensk.pdf

Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. (2004). *National curriculum guide for compulsory school: General section.* Retrieved November 24, 2008, from http://bella.mrn.stjr.is/utgafur/general.pdf

Mor Barak, M. (2005). *Managing diversity. Toward a globally inclusive workplace.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Morgan, D. (1997). *Focus groups as qualitative research* (2nd edition). Thousand Oaks, CA:

Sage.

Nieto, S. (1999). *The light in their eyes. Creating multicultural learning communities.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Noddings, N. (Ed.), (2005). *Educating citizens for global awareness.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Parekh, B. (2006). *Rethinking multiculturalism. Cultural diversity and political theory* (2nd edition). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Peräkylä, A. (2005). Analysing talk and text. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd edition), (pp. 869–886). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Pilkington, A. (2004). Institutional racism in the academy? Comparing the police and university in Midshire. In I. Law, D. Phillips & L. Turney (Eds.), *Institutional racism in higher education* (pp. 15–26). Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham.

Ragnarsdóttir, H. (2005). Fjölmenning í námi við Kennaraháskóla Íslands/Multicultural issues in education at the Iceland University of Education. In G. L. Marinósson, Þ. Blöndal & Þ. Jóhannsdóttir (Eds.), *Nám í nýju samhengi. Erindi á málþingi um framtíðarskipan náms við Kennaraháskóla Íslands 11. og 12. ágúst 2005* (pp. 129–139). Reykjavík: Rannsóknarstofnun Kennaraháskóla Íslands.

Ragnarsdóttir, H. (2007). Fjölmenningarfræði/Multicultural studies. In H. Ragnarsdóttir, E. S. Jónsdóttir & M. Þ. Bernharðsson (Eds.), *Fjölmenning á Íslandi* (pp. 17–40). Reykjavík: Rannsóknastofa í fjölmenningarfræðum KHÍ and Háskólaútgáfan.

Ragnarsdóttir, H. (2008). *Collisions and continuities: Ten immigrant families and their children in Icelandic society and schools.* Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag Dr. Müller.

Ragnarsdóttir, H. & Blöndal, H. (2007). Háskólastigið í ljósi hnattvæðingar. Rannsókn á stöðu og reynslu erlendra nemenda við Kennaraháskóla Íslands/Higher education in the light of globalisation. A study on the experiences of foreign students at the Iceland University of Education. *Uppeldi og menntun, 16*, 161–182.

Ryan, J. (2003). *Leading diverse schools.* Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic.

Ryan, J. (2006). *Inclusive leadership.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
Ryan, J. & Hellmundt, S. (2005). Maximising international students´ 'cultural capital'. In J. Carroll & J. Ryan (Eds.), *Teaching international students. Improving learning for all* (bls. 13–16). London: Routledge.

Schein, E. H. (2004). *Organizational culture and leadership* (3rd edition). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Sergiovanni, T. J. (1999). *Building community in schools.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Sharma, S. (2004). Transforming the curriculum? The problem with multiculturalism. In I. Law, D. Phillips & L. Turney (Eds.), *Institutional racism in higher education* (pp. 105–117). Stoke on Trent and Sterling: Trentham Books.

Silverman, D. (2006). *Interpreting qualitative data*. London: Sage.

Statistics Iceland. (2008a). *Citizenship and country of birth. Foreign citizens in Iceland 1998-2008*. Retrieved November 24, 2008, from http://www.statice.is/Statistics/Population/Citizenship-and-country-of-birth

Statistics Iceland. (2008b). *Education.* Retrieved November 30, 2008, from http://www.statice.is/Statistics/Education

Taylor, P. (2000). The engagement of minority ethnic groups in higher education: Experiences from the UK. In L. Thomas & M. Cooper (Eds.), *Changing the culture of the Campus: Towards an inclusive higher education* (pp. 197–208). Stoke-on-Trent: Staffordshire University Press.

Wolcott, H. (2001). *Writing up qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.