

## SPECIAL ISSUE

# Teachers of Immigrant Background in Iceland and Norway: Opportunities and Challenges

Kirsten Lauritsen<sup>1</sup> & Hanna Ragnarsdóttir<sup>2</sup>

*Nord-Trondelag University College/School of Education, University of Iceland*

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The paper examines findings from interviews with five teachers of immigrant background in preschools in Iceland and two teachers in preschools and two in elementary schools in Norway, all conducted in spring, 2013. The aim of the research was to understand these teachers' experiences, opportunities and challenges within both teacher education and teaching in Iceland and Norway. The research in the two countries applies a narrative approach, where the teachers reflect on their experiences of teaching and teacher education in Iceland or Norway (Holstein & Gubrium, 2012). The theoretical framework includes writings on equal rights for participation, equal access and opportunities for teachers and students in school settings that are diverse in terms of ethnicities, languages and religions (Gundara, 2000; Reid & Santoro, 2006; Schmidt & Block, 2010). The lens of critical multiculturalism (May & Sleeter, 2010) is applied in order to understand power and conflict within these settings. The findings indicate that although the teachers have faced various challenges in Iceland and Norway – related to language, educational experiences, pedagogical issues and prejudice – some have had opportunities to flourish in their schools. The research is part of a group project being carried out by members of the *Diverse Teachers for Diverse Learners* network with funding from NordForsk Researchers Network.

**Keywords:** Teachers of immigrant background, preschools, elementary schools, equality, participation.

Denne artikkelen undersøker funn fra intervjuer med fem lærere med innvandrerbakgrunn i barnehager på Island og to lærere i barnehager og to i grunnskoler i Norge, alt gjennomført våren 2013. Målet med forskningen er å forstå disse lærernes erfaringer, muligheter og utfordringer, både i lærerutdanning og undervisning i Island og Norge. Forskningen i begge land har en narrativ tilnærming, der lærerne reflekterer over sine erfaringer med undervisning og

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<sup>1</sup> Email: [Kirsten.Lauritsen@hint.no](mailto:Kirsten.Lauritsen@hint.no)

<sup>2</sup> Email: [hannar@hi.is](mailto:hannar@hi.is)

lærerutdanning i Island eller Norge (Holstein & Gubrium, 2012). Det teoretiske rammeverket berører tema som like rettigheter for deltakelse, lik tilgang og muligheter for lærere og elever i skolesettinger som er mangfoldige når det gjelder etnisitet, språk og religion (Gundara, 2000; Reid & Santoro, 2006; Schmidt & Block, 2010). Med et fokus på kritisk multikulturalisme (May & Sleeter, 2010) prøver artikkelen å bidra til økt forståelse av makt og konflikt i disse settingene. Til tross for at lærerne i undersøkelsene har møtt ulike utfordringer når det gjelder språk, undervisning, pedagogiske problemstillinger og fordommer, i både Island og Norge, tyder funnene på at flere av lærerne opplever at de har hatt muligheter til å utvikle seg og trives i sine skoler. Denne undersøkelsen er en del av et felles prosjekt utført av medlemmer av Teachers for Diverse Diverse Learners Network, med finansiering fra Nordforsk Forskernettverk.

## Introduction

In recent years scholars in many countries have addressed issues related to diversity in schools. With growing teacher and student diversity, addressing issues of equality and social justice becomes important to counteract the marginalization of minority groups in school settings (Hansen & Ragnarsdóttir, 2010). The incongruity between student diversity and teacher diversity has also been addressed (Ladson-Billings, 2001; Lumby & Coleman, 2007; Schmidt & Block, 2010), as have the effects of diverse cultural and religious values on the development of school cultures (Hansen & Ragnarsdóttir, 2010; Lumby & Coleman, 2007).

The authors of this article share an interest in questions of social justice and equity in the education of children with ethnic minority backgrounds, at all levels. Teachers of immigrant background are an important part of educational contexts which aim to attain equal rights to education, whatever the cultural or linguistic background. In this research some of the teachers of immigrant background are educated in their country of origin, others in Norway or Iceland. Our experiences both from Iceland and Norway are that too few teachers of immigrant background are employed and that those that are, are not employed to their fullest potential. Our research interest lies in exploring experiences of teachers of immigrant background, focusing on both obstacles for and sources of cooperation in the schools where they work.

In this paper we examine findings from interviews conducted in the spring of 2013 with nine teachers of immigrant background: five teaching in preschools in Iceland, and two in preschools and two in elementary schools in Norway. The aim of the research was to understand these teachers' experiences, opportunities and challenges within both teacher education and teaching in Iceland and Norway.

## The Icelandic and Norwegian Educational Contexts

The education system in Iceland has been gradually responding to the recent, rapidly changing demographics in Iceland towards increasing ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity. While the ratio of non-Icelandic citizens to the total population was 1.8 per cent in 1995, in 2013 it had risen to 6.7 per cent (Statistics Iceland, 2014). In response,

new legislation covering all three school levels (Lög um framhaldsskóla nr. 92/2008; Lög um grunnskóla nr. 91/2008; Lög um leikskóla nr. 90/2008) and new National Curriculum Guides (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2014) all include a clearer focus on diversity than in earlier acts and curricula. Legislation governing pre-, compulsory, and upper secondary schools in Iceland is based on principles of equality and stipulates that schools should benefit all pupils and educate each child effectively. However, as current research suggests, many obstacles stand in the way of implementing practices fostering equality. Findings from recent research in Iceland indicate that pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds encounter obstacles to educational access and participation (Ragnarsdóttir, 2008), and that teachers from ethnic minority backgrounds experience marginalization and exclusion (Ragnarsdóttir, 2010; Ragnarsdóttir & Blöndal, 2007, 2010).

In Norway, an earlier national curriculum, *Mønsterplanen M-87*, included rights to mother tongue teaching, Norwegian as a second language and bilingual subject teaching. International research supported these rights, based on a wide range of arguments: literacy training should begin in children's best language, which is often the home language; such education would give students access to the richness of their ethnic cultural inheritance; moreover, it would promote identity confirmation and prevent assimilation. However, ten years later, the national curriculum – L97 – restricted the right to mother tongue teaching to “pupils that have too weak mastery of the Norwegian language to be able to follow ‘ordinary education’”. From having been a collective right it was reduced to an individual right, and this trend was continued in the 2006 national curriculum “Knowledge Promotion”, or *Kunnskapsløftet* (Engen, 2014, pp. 62-65). Teachers of immigrant background are important to the education system. However, the availability of trained teachers of immigrant background is very low, especially in rural areas.

The teachers of immigrant background in Norway whose narratives are presented in this research have a teacher education or some other form of higher education either from their home country or from Norway, or they are in the process of getting such education.

## **Theoretical Background**

The theoretical framework in this paper includes writings on equal rights for participation, equal access and opportunities for teachers and students in school settings which are diverse in terms of ethnicities, languages and religions (Bartolo & Smyth, 2009; Gundara, 2000; Reid & Santoro, 2006; Schmidt & Block, 2010), and the development of multicultural learning communities (Banks, 2007; Nieto, 2010). The lens of critical multiculturalism (May & Sleeter, 2010) will be applied in order to understand power and conflict within these settings, and how obstacles for inclusion can be eliminated with new visions and structures for school communities.

Our research is also inspired by earlier studies of schools and preschools or kindergartens in the fields of sociology, anthropology and education (Andersen, 2002; Bundgaard & Gulløv, 2008; Gjervan, Bleka, & Andersen, 2006; Korsvold, 2008; Lauritsen, 2009, 2011; Lunneblad, 2009; Nilsen, 2000; Palludan, 2005), and also by

migration and refugee studies (Berg, Fladstad, & Lauritsen, 2006; Berg & Lauritsen, 2009; Valenta, 2008; Ålund & Schierup, 1991).

### ***Equality and Participation in Multicultural School Settings***

Approaches of critical multiculturalism focus on the position of minority groups in societies from a critical perspective on these societies and their educational systems. These perspectives analyze which societal factors cause and maintain unequal social status (see Banks, 2007; May & Sleeter, 2010; Nieto, 2010; Parekh, 2006). Parekh (2006) has claimed that obtaining equality in today's multicultural societies is a challenge, and that each society needs to find its balance and ensure equal opportunities and equal access through active communication and agreements of groups without losing their coherence. The same challenges apply to schools in multicultural societies that need to critically address inequalities and ensure voice, dialogue, equality, empowerment and social justice for their individual students and teachers (Nieto, 2010). Research has revealed that teaching builds primarily on the experiences and knowledge of the majority of students, and students with other languages or dialects are sometimes treated with disrespect, meaning that students from minority groups may not be able to identify with the majority (see Bhatti, 1999; Brooker, 2002; Gay, 2000; Gundara, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Nieto, 2010). Similarly, teachers of immigrant background face obstacles to inclusion (Ragnarsdóttir & Blöndal, 2007, 2010; Santoro, 2007; Schmidt & Block, 2010).

In order to be able to base decisions on social justice and equality, teachers, leaders and other staff need to have an understanding of diverse cultures, religions, languages and values (Lumby & Coleman, 2007; Ryan, 2003, 2006; Schein, 2004). Leaders also need to be aware of and critically address unequal power positions of staff. Schein (2004) and Ryan (2006) have emphasized that leaders need to be committed to diversity and ensure participation, intercultural communication and understanding in their institutions.

### ***Teachers of Immigrant Background and Professional Identity***

According to Akkerman & Meijer (2011), recent conceptualizations of teacher identity seem to reflect postmodern views on identity, describing teacher identity as both unitary and multiple, both continuous and discontinuous, and both individual and social. The authors contrast this view to the teacher identity existing before, "when teacher identity was more or less seen as the possession of a defined set of assets required for the profession" (see also e.g. Rosenshine & Stevens, 1986).

Some of the teachers in our research are educated as teachers in their countries of origin, and may be said to fit these descriptions of hybrid identities. Some of them have held positions as subject teachers in science, mathematics, language or other subjects. Their professional identities are therefore not primarily the identities of "teachers of immigrant backgrounds". Having fled or moved has changed their professional opportunities, and some of them are not accepted as teachers in their current country of residence. They sometimes describe working as a mother tongue

teacher (teaching students' home language) as a necessity more than a choice of professional identity or personal interest.

Several studies have focused on the experiences of teachers of immigrant background and their struggle for a professional identity in the schools where they work (Dewilde, 2013; Lauritsen, 2011; Otterstad, 2008; Valenta & Berg, 2008). Dewilde describes the lack of cooperation between the Somali teacher Mohammed and the Norwegian teacher Mette: "(...) there was little communication between them, before or after the lessons, as well as during the lessons." They thus conformed to the patterns of what Creese in 2005 has called "in-class language support with no consultation between teachers" (Dewilde, 2013, p. 118). Valenta & Berg (2008) studied a group of mother tongue teachers in Norway, many of whom after receiving supplementary subject teacher education, expressed a wish to work as subject teachers, enter into the social network of ordinary teachers and away from the marginalization that many minority language teachers experience.

## Method

The aim of the research in both countries was to understand the experiences of teachers of immigrant background regarding their teacher education and their teaching in Iceland or Norway including the opportunities and challenges they experienced. The research was conducted separately and the analysis completed separately and then compared.

A qualitative methodology was applied in both countries as this is "of specific relevance to the study of social relations, owing to the fact of the pluralization of life worlds" (Flick, 2006, p. 11). Flick (2006) argues that locally, temporally and situationally limited narratives are now required, and furthermore, that "rapid social change and the resulting diversification of life worlds are increasingly confronting social researchers with new social contexts and perspectives" (Flick, 2006). In our research, we applied a narrative approach, where the teachers reflected on their experiences of teaching and teacher education in Iceland and Norway. Semi-structured interviews, oral and written narratives were used to collect data.

In Iceland, data was collected in semi-structured interviews with five teachers of immigrant background in preschools in during February to May 2013. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as a method to give the participants the chance to express themselves openly, although within a set framework (Kvale, 1996). Sampling was purposive in that preschool teachers of immigrant background were particularly chosen for the research (Flick, 2006). Information about staff was obtained from websites of preschools in the Reykjavík area and the five preschool teachers were chosen from the list of staff, employed in five different preschools. When contacted, they all agreed to participate in the research. The interviews lasted around one hour each and were all in Icelandic. The teachers chose the settings of the interview and could choose between Icelandic and English as languages in the interviews. Each interview concluded with a narrative where the teachers reflected on and discussed their daily work, challenges and successes. The five preschool teachers are all women and come from five different countries in three continents, Africa, Asia and North America. When interviewed, they were 31 to 42 years old and had lived in Iceland for 9 to 17 years. They have been

given the following pseudonyms: Catherine, Hesi, Minrada, Nina and Zita. They all finished their preschool teacher education in Iceland, while some of them had finished other studies in other countries before they came to Iceland. At the time of the interviews, Catherine and Hesi were division heads, Nina was a principal, and Minrada and Zita worked as preschool teachers.

In Norway the informants were recruited strategically in much the same way as in Iceland, based on knowledge about the schools and cultural diversity in each of them, but also based on formal networks and contacts developed over years of research and teacher education. The four teachers of immigrant background who were chosen to be part of the research, worked in different communities and had several years of experience from different schools and school levels in Norway. They were all women between the ages of 30 and 40, from three different Asian countries and were given the pseudonyms of Amina, Leyla, Nun and Pook. They all worked as temporary teachers, most of the time in more than one school at a time. The teachers were informed about the purpose of the research, the focus on their own experiences as teachers of immigrant background and that we would secure their anonymity. In the Norwegian part of the research, written narratives were chosen as method of data collection.

Because both Norway and Iceland are small countries, we chose not to reveal the informants' specific countries of origins, since we considered that their profession together with this information would make them too identifiable. We are aware that we lose out on some finer distinctions in the understanding of the data by so doing, but we considered anonymity requirements to demand such a choice.

In the chapter on findings, quotes from the interviews and narratives in Icelandic and Norwegian have been translated into English by the authors.

The analysis was completed separately in each country and then compared. The comparison focused on the recurring common themes from both countries.

### ***Analyzing Interviews and Narratives – Some Methodological Considerations***

Narratives may be defined as “extended speech acts about substantial or compelling aspects of life – relationships, work, illness trauma, or conflict”, often labeled *personal narratives* and may be presented in informal diaries, journals, letters or orally related material (Chase, 2005). Several researchers offer insight into different ways of making sense of this kind of data (Gubrium & Holstein, 2012). Regardless of the type of narrative a researcher employs, the method still has to involve “conceptualization, working hypotheses, data collection, data management, and different forms of representations, such as report-writing, therapeutic insight, and cultural criticism” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2012, p. 4).

There is a tendency in current narrative research to view narratives as forms of action, wherein the narrator actively constructs the narrative reality as a means to an end. This view of narratives implies that a search for some kind of “truth” in narratives is not what it is about. A more important question is what the narrator can achieve socially through his or her story.

Frank (2012) proposes that researchers engaging in narrative analysis should recognize that any individual voice is actually a dialogue between voices: “Stories are

composed from fragments of previous stories and we need to remain suspicious of regarding the stories as monologues” (p. 33). As researchers our task is to bring different voices that express similar experiences in connection to each other, in order to facilitate a dialogue.

## **Findings**

In this chapter we introduce the four common recurring themes emerging from our data in both countries. These include references to opportunities, challenges and obstacles within the following themes: Education and passion for teaching; leadership, organization and cooperation; trust and belonging and development of professional identities.

### ***Education and Passion for Teaching***

In her narrative Amina explained that it is hard for women in her country of origin to go to school or find opportunities to work, whereas in Norway “there are plenty of opportunities of education for adults, or to work”. The lens Amina used to compare former experiences and what she believed to be the situation and systems for education and work in Norway is important in order to understand the way in which she has made use of the opportunities offered to her. She has taken every opportunity to learn Norwegian, move on to secondary education and employment since she arrived. She has four children, works as an interpreter for the community and a local business, is a temporary worker in a kindergarten and assistant at an elementary school. In addition, she has Norwegian training on Mondays and support in Norwegian for vocational students on Thursdays. So she holds several positions in order to piece together full-time employment. In several studies this is described as stressful and a position that the teachers are trying to move away from (Valenta & Berg, 2008).

Some of the informants in Norway holding positions as teachers do not have teacher education from their countries of origin, but they do have other higher education. Pook has a master’s degree and has worked as an environment researcher in her home country. However, her work did entail training and teaching students who came for research practice from local universities or university colleges. When she came to Norway, Pook decided to study multicultural pedagogy. The class gatherings offered her a possibility to meet with other minority language teachers and exchange experiences with them. She thought that having this education might make it easier to find a permanent job in schools. Her goal is to become a subject teacher or first language teacher.

One of the narratives was told by Leyla who had a high school education from her country of origin in general subjects, but could not study further because of the political situation. Leyla had work practice in a kindergarten after coming to Norway, and said that all the children there were Norwegian, and that this helped her develop her Norwegian language. She had a three-month trial period, which was prolonged, because “my employer and I were satisfied with each other”. The way Leyla presented this emphasized that she was taking part in the decision and felt empowered. Later, Leyla came to work in another kindergarten where she experienced communication

problems both at the work place and at her children's primary school. She said that staff meetings, parent calls and messages were significant challenges that she described as "really big language problems for both sides". Leyla eventually accepted an offer given to the staff of immigrant background to study to become preschool teachers. Although she felt very insecure because of the language difficulties, she received much support both from her head teacher and her husband. Her husband argued that Norwegian kindergartens and minority groups in Norway had a need for more teachers of immigrant background. She studied part-time at a university college for four years, parallel to working in a kindergarten and being the mother of four children. She went to readings after class and to classes every other weekend, and even had to move to another municipality to finish her last practice period. She said that this was a lucky move, because "the supervisor was so good, and I was clever, too". She managed to get a job in another kindergarten in this community afterwards. Leyla expressed both pride and self-satisfaction with her efforts and results in education and work practice. She presented herself as very competent, having a good work career, even though she and colleagues still have some language and communication problems.

In Iceland, the teachers were educated in Icelandic universities and they felt this had been important for their integration into Icelandic society as well as their professional development. Catherine, who is a division head, said: "Adapting in Iceland was difficult. I finally felt integrated when I began my studies [in preschool teacher education]. I felt equal. This affected my professional development as a teacher. Equal opportunities."

One of the teachers noted that postgraduate studies in education were extremely important for professional development. After having some experience working in preschools after her undergraduate teacher education, Nina decided to enroll in a master's program in teacher education. She described the experience as an eye-opener where she could connect her experience of teaching to the content of the program. Nina described this in the following way: "Wow, I learnt so much! Reflected on what I learnt. Finally I got it! This was really good. I became much better ... Graduate studies with teachers from other school levels. Really useful." Nina further explained how during her studies she had felt a new sense of belonging and being integrated into the teaching profession. She also described how by reflecting on her experience of teaching it became more valuable and significant for her, and how she felt empowered by this reflection.

Similarly, in Norway, the teacher Pook said that she was very happy with her education, and states that she is enjoying her work as a minority language teacher. Like Amina she stresses that "The work is more than money". Leyla too said that she has a good work career, learns a lot every day and feels that both her colleagues and children's parents are supporting her all the time. Amina didn't consider becoming a teacher in her country of origin "because the systems are so difficult in the school." Her motivation to work with children in Norway is partly explained by her having witnessed children in her country of origin missing such opportunities. Both the school system Amina describes and the lack of possibilities for women are closely linked to the history of a country that has been at war or occupied for decades:

I would like to become someone partaking in helping children and young people. It is important to me and I smile when I have helped someone to crack the reading code or other difficult tasks, because there are those who are interested in both subjects and human beings. I do not simply want a job that gives me money, but one that also lets me use my interests.

Amina presented her goal as giving her pupils both educational and social care. Her self-evaluation is that she is good at communicating with children, she finds them open, honest, direct and easy to talk with, and states that she feels that she has a lot to learn from them.

The preschool teachers in Iceland all described their work with both passion and professional ambition. They all particularly mentioned their passion for working with diverse groups of children and parents. The teachers have faced various challenges in their work and in teacher education but in spite of obstacles, they relate their opportunities primarily to support from principals, colleagues and parents, and being inspired by the children or favourable school cultures generally. Nina and Catherine noted that they had found their dream jobs and did not want to go back to their countries of origin. Nina said: "This is totally my dream job. But as a principal I miss being close to the children. I am trying to teach as much as I can ... But then I need to step back into my office." Catherine talked about how much she loved working with the children and how fulfilling her everyday work at the preschool was. She described her passion of working with children and how this had helped her in becoming more content with herself:

I just wanted to be around children, I think I understand them very well, just how it is to be different ... to have a teacher who understands them very well and I feel so much emotion, the feeling of being around children ... it is just so very different.

Zita talked about the exciting experiences of working with the children and how she had by chance started to work in a preschool and soon felt the passion for the work:

And then I got a little bit excited with working in a preschool because everything was so different from everything that I knew, how people would come in contact with the kids, with the children and all the thought behind everything you were saying and doing with the children, you know, it was just ... so exciting.

Catherine said that she had felt this passion and enthusiasm already in her studies and that she did not understand why the other students did not feel the same: "They couldn't be bothered to study; I felt so different."

### ***Leadership, Organization and Cooperation***

In Iceland, some of the preschool teachers described how some educational policies and their implementations within the preschools became barriers to creativity and

professionalism. Catherine noted, “This is nothing ... for me as I said; it is something we just have to do. We cannot create, we cannot do many things. It is like ... being in a box.”

One challenge that several of the teachers of immigrant background talk about, is lack of experience with immigrant children (and employees) in some of the schools they work in. Being the first teacher of immigrant background at a school often implies pioneering the kind of work and cooperation that the majority teachers are not accustomed to. The lack of experience and cultural competence of the majority may take different forms, sometimes as resistance towards ideas coming from these new teachers (Lauritsen, 2011). Some also told about feeling isolated in their schools, both socially and in their teaching. Working in several schools at the same time may also add to these challenges, both for the teachers of immigrant background and the schools they enter, since some of the teachers have to relate to many schools and social settings concurrently.

At one of the schools in Norway, Nun said that “the leaders do not have much knowledge about mother tongue teaching”. The lack of experience gave her “some problems in cooperating with other teachers”. She described an episode when she did not get help from a teacher in charge of giving data assistance. He asked if she was an employee at the school. The underlying assumption was that she was not, and that as an outsider she was not entitled to assistance from him. She was shocked by this experience, and found it a very negative signal from the administration. She was very critical towards the principal, who had failed to inform all staff members that she was a fellow employee. Nun also tried to establish tripartite cooperation between the contact teacher, the one who taught basic Norwegian and herself, but concluded that “there is too little cooperation at this school. The teacher works by herself, prepares mostly by herself and does not know which subjects the basic Norwegian teacher is working with”. She had access to the pupils’ weekly plans, and that helped, but she felt that she experienced only one-way contact, where she had to be very active in order to get the information she needed to do a good job.

Another of the schools Nun described had “a lot of experience to include minority language pupils with majority language pupils”, and where she had the freedom to develop plans and to tell the other teachers what she intended to do: “I speak to the leader and the contact teacher and then we do it”. She gave an example of a celebration she had initiated, where a Buddhist monk visited the school. Nun concluded that this gave both the minority students the possibility of feeling included, as well as all students a chance to learn “different issues concerning the multicultural society”. The freedom and mutual respect that according to Nun’s narrative characterizes this particular school community, seem to lead to increased educational creativity and to the possibility for all students to learn.

The preschool teachers in Iceland all talked about bonding with immigrant parents and that sharing the common experiences of immigration created these special relationships. In relation to parents, the principal Nina noted, “They find it good having a principal who understands their position and builds on it.” The preschool teachers in Iceland also described some ways in which immigrant parents still experience exclusion, although many official initiatives in recent years have counteracted this. Nina described this as a continuing battle for equality:

The survey for parents is only in Icelandic – and I get ready for battle! I try to cooperate with an institution where decisions are made ... We need to reach out to the parents. I keep reminding them (the municipality), in all our meetings. There is a special situation (in my preschool), 83% of the children are of foreign background.

One of the examples of tripartite cooperation provided by Pook, is from having Buddhism as a topic in the subject RLE (religion, life view and ethics). She describes how the RLE teacher, the contact teacher and herself are planning together, trying to find the best possible work methods and learning outcomes for all in the class.

In Pook's narrative, the positive experiences of cooperation with other teachers in the school dominated her story. However, she also described challenges in being a teacher of immigrant background:

You need to be flexible at work. For instance sometimes parents call at night to get help with different things, even though it is not connected to school, but you need to consider yourself where the limits are (...) The teacher of immigrant background needs to handle high pace at work. Things may turn up that require good concentration when you talk with people ... from different cultural backgrounds, even when you speak the same language (...).

The job is demanding, and the teacher of immigrant background has to be active, flexible and able to cooperate with both leaders, teachers, students, parents and local communities.

### ***Trust and Belonging***

The teachers in Iceland had some problems in connecting with colleagues and discussed situations where they felt marginalized and not respected. After graduating from preschool teacher education in Iceland, Hesi applied for a division head position and got the job. As a new division head, she described situations where she felt misunderstood and experienced disrespect which she related partly to the fact that she was a recently graduated preschool teacher among staff who had been working in the preschool for a long time, most of them not educated as preschool teachers. She felt that a tension which she related to differences in age, experiences, education and background was relieved with time when she had managed to build an atmosphere of trust.

The preschool teachers in Iceland all talked about making efforts to connect, and in all cases this took longer than they had expected. However, Nina noted that only when she became principal did she manage to connect well with the Icelanders: "I have always tried to connect with my colleagues, but I always end up with the foreigners. Now that I have risen (to become a principal) I connect better with the Icelanders. They show me more respect." However, Nina also described situations in meetings with other principals in the municipality where she felt marginalized: "Within the group of principals I am the first one to get guidance or mentoring for two years. I have the feeling this is

because I am a foreigner even though they don't say this." Nina explained that normally guidance or mentoring is for one year.

Analyzing the experience related by Nun above, we can see several elements that seem to work against her being included in the educational network at one of the schools. Being there only once a week, having to deal with a lack of information from the administration, not getting help with data and struggling to establish fruitful cooperation with her colleagues, are all elements that seem to work towards marginalizing her – and also her minority students, who might have benefitted from closer cooperation between their teachers. Not being included socially or in teacher cooperation made it difficult for her to do her job properly and it made her feel that she did not really belong there. Several of the other teachers of immigrant background in Norway described similar experiences.

Some of the preschool teachers of immigrant background in Iceland felt they were not trusted and were excluded from decision-making. Nina described how other principals addressed her and made her feel inferior: "The principals often say: Are you sure you understand? Are you following us? But this is becoming more rare. Perhaps because I have succeeded and I have gained experience." She added:

Before [I became principal] they did not trust me to be alone with a group of children. They always needed to check if I understood. But the [professional] literature was all in English. So I probably understood best of all of them!

Minrada felt that she was excluded from decision-making concerning development and structural changes within her preschool, even though she was one of the few educated among the staff:

I am not happy about the leadership now ... I feel the flow of information is not good enough in the preschool ... I am an educated teacher but still I feel ... someone has already decided for me how I should work and this is without asking me or talking to me.

She also described situations where she felt excluded:

For example in the autumn, I have to move to another division, follow one group of children from us, but this had been decided without asking me or letting me know, but such things I feel ... a little ... I do not totally agree with this.

Teachers in both countries describe situations where they feel marginalized and excluded. The lack of the sense of belonging is evident for many of the teachers. It is striking that even the principals describe events where they feel marginalized.

### ***Development of Professional Identities – And Obstacles***

Lack of educated preschool teachers is a challenge in many areas of Iceland, and this creates difficulties in maintaining a high standard of work. The preschool teachers in

Iceland talked about this as one of the main challenges in their workplaces. Minrada noted:

It is maybe not really what I expected to experience, I had so many expectations for the job, professional, but we are, not everyone who works in the preschool is an educated teacher; it is often difficult to work with people who have not learnt about pedagogy or other subjects related to children.

Catherine says the atmosphere is not good enough because many of the staff are not happy and see their jobs as temporary, but it is difficult for her as a division head to change this:

Either I am going to feel bad or just do something for the children, but I often just think, I maybe talk more to the children than to the staff, only because when I begin talking it is a bit boring and nobody smiles. It is just ... depressing here ... I am talking to the children and [the other staff] are talking about something else or one is going to the washroom while the other one is talking on the phone ... day after day and you say it again and again, then I always get the same answer: "I am going to apply for another job anyway."

The preschool teachers in Iceland also talked about how difficult it was to start work after their studies with people who have worked there for many years. Catherine described this in the following way:

... I thought it was simply like this, that I could use what I have learnt, everything, everything I have learnt. But it was not like this at all, the most difficult part was to work with the staff who have been in the preschool for a long time ... when I found something I wanted to do, a decision had already been made on what we needed to do, so I couldn't create anything, but in fact it is still the problem.

Several of our informants are struggling for acceptance as professional teachers in settings where practically all their colleagues belong to the majority and have taken their education in the country where they teach. Some of them feel that they have succeeded in negotiating a position for themselves after some time, but we were also told stories about teachers who ate their lunch alone in a classroom or in the car on their way to the next school. In her narrative Amina described her interests as "reading books and internet, working with children and young children with or without special needs, go for walks, the nature, family and friends and voluntary work". Amina's self-presentation underlined interests that might have been reported by any woman, regardless of ethnic or linguistic background. Her statement might thus be analyzed as an attempt to write herself into the community of women and teachers in Norwegian schools. The research showed both strategies of giving up, avoiding further efforts, just doing their jobs – but also the opposite option of never giving up and keeping up the struggle for a professional and social position in the schools.

## Discussion And Conclusion

In our research we applied a narrative approach, where the teachers reflected on their experiences of teaching and teacher education in Iceland or Norway and in their countries of origin. We set out to understand power and conflict within their school settings, and how obstacles for inclusion can be eliminated with new visions and structures for school communities (Banks, 2007; Gundara, 2000; May & Sleeter, 2010; Reid & Santoro, 2006; Schmidt & Block, 2010). The research has provided insights into the experiences of teachers of immigrant background in Norway and Iceland which seem to be largely similar across the national contexts. Systemic barriers seem to be at play in both countries.

One important finding is the weight the teachers in our research put on having been educated in their current country of residence. This has provided them with a network of teachers of immigrant background, and given them a formal competence that has been crucial in order to raise their status in cooperation with the majority teachers in the schools where they work. Support from employers and family has been crucial in order to be able to take on an education. This poses challenges to the educational institution concerning targeted recruitment, curriculum adjustments, academic language tutoring and following up on students of immigrant background, securing that they complete their education, because both these students and the society need their competence. In spite of having a local education, some of the teachers in our research describe how majority language teachers in some of the schools do not welcome new ideas and suggestions of bringing minority students' experiences, culture or religion into the curriculum of the schools. Similar findings have been reported in a number of other studies (Bhatti, 1999; Brooker, 2002; Gay, 2000; Gundara, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Nieto, 2010; Ragnarsdóttir & Blöndal, 2007, 2010; Santoro, 2007; Schmidt & Block, 2010). There was even an example where one of the teachers in our research didn't receive data, because the teacher in charge questioned her belonging to the school community and therefore her right to such assistance. The teacher in question blamed the school manager for this incident, for not having given adequate information about her position at the school. But it might also be seen as an example of the difficulty many teachers of immigrant background find themselves in, having to work hard to be accepted as professionals in many schools. Lumby & Coleman (2007), Ryan (2003, 2006) and Schein (2004) have all emphasized that in order to be able to base decisions on social justice and equality, teachers, leaders and other staff need to have an understanding of diverse cultures, religions, languages and values. Such understanding seems to be lacking in some of the schools of the teachers in our two studies.

Even teachers of immigrant background who have taken positions as leaders give examples of situations where their professionalism is questioned by others, and where they are the only ones in a group of leaders that are picked out to receive special tutoring on leadership. One of them speculates that this might have something to do with being a foreigner, and that she has to prove herself to a much higher extent than other leaders at her level. Parekh (2006) has argued that societies need to ensure equal opportunities and equal access through active communication and agreements of groups without losing their coherence. Similarly, Nieto (2010) has claimed that schools in multicultural societies need to critically address inequalities and ensure voice,

dialogue, equality, empowerment and social justice for their individual students and teachers. According to the findings introduced above, the schools in Iceland and Norway lack these critical approaches and active communication described by Nieto (2010) and Parekh (2006).

Over time, several of the teachers in this research succeed in being accepted as professionals and as leaders, but they all agree that it takes considerable time. The positive experiences of cooperation that are also presented in some of the narratives, are by several informants connected to development over time, in schools having more experiences with minority students and teachers.

But even though there are obstacles to teachers of immigrant background being accepted as necessary professions in schools both in Norway and Iceland, there is a tendency in all the narratives of a real passion for being a teacher and for further development in the profession. Hard work and support from leaders, teachers and students, as well as from their families, seem to be crucial in helping the teachers of immigrant background overcome some of the obstacles that also have been demonstrated in this research. Women in the seventies, combining family, education and jobs talked about the double load they were carrying. Some of the women in this research present a triple load of raising a family, entering into education and working in a new context while facing obstacles in being seen by some teachers and school leaders as foreigners, as not belonging. It is only through hard work, carrying this load, and helped on by a passion for children and the teaching profession, that quite a few of them succeed. The responsibility for further development of a multicultural teaching profession lies in educational institutions at all levels, as well as in the surrounding societies. Equal opportunities and equal access (Parekh, 2006) need to be ensured by educational authorities in both countries and schools must support dialogue, equality, empowerment and social justice (Nieto, 2010) for both students and teachers.

### **Notes on contributors:**

**Kirsten Lauritsen** is Associate Professor at The Department of Teacher Education at Nord-Trøndelag University College. She is a social anthropologist and educator, with research topics related to immigration and refugee related issues (living conditions in asylum centres, repatriation, unaccompanied minors and cultural diversity in schools and kindergartens).

**Hanna Ragnarsdóttir** is Professor of Multicultural Studies in the School of Education, University of Iceland. She holds an MSc degree in anthropology from the London School of Economics and a Dr.philos in education from the University of Oslo. Her research focuses on immigrant children and families in Iceland, multicultural education, and, school reform.

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