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Exploring the Rhetoric
How Does Iceland's Curriculum Reform Address Student Diversity at the Upper Secondary Level?

The findings presented in this paper inform two distinct but complementary doctoral studies, which draw on multicultural and human rights education and critical curriculum theories. Curriculum and education policy reform in Iceland has been influenced by global trends and internal changes in demographics, politics and economics. Building on the work of Jónsdóttir and Ragnarsdóttir (2010), who trace the development of educational policy and curricula in relation to the development of a multicultural society in Iceland, this paper explores the change in curriculum discourse in the 2004 and 2011 upper secondary national curriculum guides and the 2008 Upper Secondary School Act (no. 92/2008) in addressing student diversity at the upper secondary level through multicultural and human rights education. The paper draws on the schooling experiences of Vietnamese youth to assess the extent to which official discourse promotes multiculturalism and responds to the learning needs of this diverse group of students. The discourse analysis is guided by an adaptation of Gorski's typology on multicultural teacher education, which depicts three multicultural education approaches: the conservative, the liberal and the critical (Gorski, 2009). The authors conclude that the discourse in the 2011 Icelandic national curriculum guide for upper secondary school (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2011) reflects a shift from a conservative approach in previous policy documents, to one that reflects characteristics of a critical multicultural approach. However, this reflection lacks consistency in representing an explicit philosophical foundation rooted in the theories of critical multicultural and human rights education.

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Orðræðugreining: Hvernig tekur hin nýja íslenska námskrá um framhaldsskóla tillit til menningarlegs margbreytileika nemenda?
Niðurstöðurnar sem hér eru kynntar byggja á tveimur doktorsritgerðum sem báðar leggja áherslu á fjölmenningarlega menntun, mannréttinda menntun og gagnrýna hugmyndafræði um námskrár. Þær breytingar sem orðið hafa á íslensku menntakerfi og námsskrám á liðnum árum hafa átt sér stað í ljósi alþjóðlegra strauma og samfélagslegrar þróunar. Greinin byggir meðal annars á niðurstöðum rannsóknar Elsu Sigríðar Jónsdóttur og Hönnu Ragnarsdóttir (2010) sem

benda til að þær breytingar sem orðið hafa á námskrám og menntastefnu megi m.a. rekja til þess að Ísland er nú fjölmenningarlegt samfélag. Í þessari grein gerum við að umræðuefni þær orðræðubreytingar sem greina má í aðalnámskrá framhaldsskóla 2004 og 2011 (Mennta- og menningarmálaráðuneytið, 2004, 2011), sem og í lögum um framhaldsskóla frá 2008 (númer 92/2008), er snerta málefni nemenda af erlendum uppruna og lúta að fjölmenningarlegri menntun og mannréttinda menntun. Greinin byggir á reynslu víetnamskra ungmenna af skólagöngu á Íslandi og sýn þeirra á þarfir nemenda af erlendum uppruna í ljósi fjölmenningarlegrar menntunar og mati á því hvort þessum þörfum sé mætt. Orðræðugreiningin byggir á flokkunarkerfi Gorskis (2009) er lítur að fjölmenningarlegri menntun kennara, en henni má skipta upp í þrjár ólíkar nálganir, íhaldsama, frjálslynda og gagnrýna. Það er niðurstaða höfunda að sú orðræða sem greina má í aðalnámskrá framhaldsskóla frá 2011 varpi ljósi á breytingar í átt frá íhaldssemi, sem greina má í fyrri námskrá, í átt að viðhorfum í anda gagnrýninnar fjölmenningarhyggju. Þó gætir víða ósamræmis sem rekja má til þess að enn vantar uppá að fyrir liggi skýr hugmyndafræðilegur grunnur í anda gagnrýninnar fjölmenningarhyggju og mannréttinda menntunar.

Höfundar eru doktorsnemar á Menntavísindasviði Háskóla Íslands.

Introduction

The findings presented in this paper are intended to inform two distinct but interrelated ongoing doctoral studies. The first study aims to determine how the 2011 curriculum reforms in Iceland benefit or disadvantage an ethnically diverse student body at the upper secondary level in general and youth of Vietnamese background in particular, drawing on multicultural education theories. The second study aims to explore how upper secondary school teachers perceive, experience and enact curricular change that promotes human rights, drawing on human rights education and critical curriculum theories.

Curriculum and education policy reform in Iceland has been influenced by global trends and internal changes in demographics, politics and economics. Building on the work of Jónsdóttir and Ragnarsdóttir (2010), who trace the development of educational policy and curricula in relation to the development of a multicultural society in Iceland, the paper aims to explore the change in curriculum discourse in the 2004 and 2011 upper secondary school national curriculum guides (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2004, 2011) and the 2008 Upper Secondary School Act (no. 92/2008) in addressing student diversity through multicultural and human rights education.

The paper will first provide a theoretical review of multicultural education (ME) and human rights education (HRE). The review will include reference to different typologies of ME drawn from the literature, thus providing the theoretical and philosophical framework for the discourse analysis process. The section on the context of the study presents the changing demographics in Iceland and a description of the education situation with emphasis on the upper secondary level. This is followed by the methodological approach and methods, which includes the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of critical discourse analysis and Banks' (2010a) five-fold criteria for education reform, which is used in this study to categorise the schooling experiences of Vietnamese youth. The analysis of the main findings is carried out using an adaptation of Gorski's (2009) typology of multicultural teacher education approaches, allowing us to draw conclusions on the extent to which students' experience of diversity is perpetuated or challenged in the official curricular and policy discourse.

We acknowledge the challenge of combining two studies representing diverse albeit inter-related theories, multiculturalism and human rights. In our attempt to represent core values and principles in a common normative framework and given our focus on discourse to assess the role and the responsibility of the state to ensure quality schooling for all, we open ourselves up to the risk of oversimplification in our policy analysis. However, our intention is to feed into the public debate on policy and practice related to multiculturalism and human rights education.

Literature review of theoretical and philosophical foundations

This paper acknowledges socio-economic status, gender, race, language, disability and religion, in addition to ethnicity, as important components of student diversity (Holm & Londen, 2010) within a school context. The term multicultural applies to education discourse that is inclusive as regards student diversity, as opposed to a discourse that consciously or unconsciously favours students represented by the dominant ideology or culture. The nuances of inclusion and exclusion are defined in terms of a conservative, liberal and critical multicultural approach.

All societies, as in the case of Iceland, are increasingly becoming diverse as a result of global migration trends. Based on constitutional and national legal frameworks informed by international declarations and conventions, the role of the liberal nation-state includes identification of ways to address the complexities involved in increasingly diverse societies. The approach adopted by governments is politically, economically and culturally influenced, and government discourse reflects the official position regarding migration and an emerging diverse citizenship. Horsta and Gitz-Johansen (2010) refer to the concept of hegemony to describe power and dominance that controls discourse and public perceptions towards certain social topics. This can be understood as both conscious and unconscious hegemony.

According to Horsta and Gitz-Johansen (2010), monocultural discourse reflects a situation where the dominant culture within a nation-state is seen as the norm, and the minority culture's inability to integrate into this norm is seen as a failure of these groups to cope with national standards (Ibid). Multicultural discourse, in contrast, reflects diversity as the norm and does not create a binary standpoint of "them" against "us" (Ibid). Conceptualisations of multicultural education vary as seen in the work of Banks (2007), Gay (2000) and Nieto (2004) and other scholars in the field. In an analysis of definitions and conceptions of multicultural education based on the work of scholars in the field, Gorski (2009) identified five defining principles of multicultural education. However, he argues that empirical data points to multicultural teacher education failing to reflect these principles, thus creating a gap between multiculturalism understood in terms of human relations or celebration of diversity at one extreme of the spectrum and a multiculturalism committed to education equity and social justice at the other (Ibid). This has resulted in the development of a number of typologies amongst scholars, which includes the work of Grant and Sleeter (2006) and Jenks, Lee & Kanipol (2001).

Grant and Sleeter (2006) propose a five-approach typology, consisting of: a) an assimilationist approach; b) a prejudice reduction and interpersonal harmony approach; c) a specific target group approach; d) a multicultural approach that addresses issues of power and privilege; and e) a social constructivist multicultural approach that promotes democratic schooling, critical consciousness and examination of social justice and social action.

Jenks *et al.* (2001), informed by the work of Mclaren (1994), identified three types of multicultural teacher education training: a) conservative multiculturalism; b) liberal multi-

culturalism; and c) critical multiculturalism. Although conservative multiculturalists may support the concept of equality, they do so in terms of a commitment to those who are willing to adopt "mainstream culture and its attending values, mores, and norms" (Gorski, 2009, p. 311). Liberal multiculturalists may appreciate difference and recognise pluralism, but they distance themselves from issues of power, control and privilege. The critical multiculturalist position, in contrast, urges educators to understand their work within a larger sociopolitical context, for "it is the job of multicultural education, according to critical multiculturalists, to expose these relationships and reconstruct schooling in ways that dismantle, rather than reify social stratification" (Ibid).

The focus on one's sociopolitical philosophy (the values and orientations that inform one's practice) complement the social reconstructionist theoretical approach of Grant and Sleeter (2006). Gorski (2009) combines the conservative, liberal and critical framework of Jenks *et al.* (2001) with the work of Grant and Sleeter (2006) and develops five multicultural teacher education approaches whose theoretical and philosophical orientations of multicultural education and their specific purpose are more precisely nuanced. An adaptation of Gorski's typology is used in this study to guide the discourse analysis process (see *Table 1*).

Gorski's model provides an interesting analytical framework for the doctoral studies represented by this paper in that both multicultural and human rights education theories and philosophies are are reflected in the typology. Osler and Starkey's (2010, p. 47) human rights framework allows key human rights concepts to be understood in terms of the realisation of justice and peace, the ultimate goal. Underpinning this goal is the entitlement of all citizens to equal dignity and equality of rights and democratic practices that safeguard fundamental freedoms. The human rights framework further represents the need for participation and the exercise of citizenship in order to achieve effective democratic practice, whilst four cosmopolitan principles serve to inform all other concepts within the framework. These are universality, indivisibility, solidarity and reciprocity (Ibid). Within the context of the school community, human rights education reflects these concepts and promotes the principles that serve as the framework's foundations. This implies education in, through and for human rights.

Education in human rights refers to normative and legal dimensions focused on a process of education that entails "sharing content about international human standards as embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and other treaties and covenants to which countries subscribe" (Tibbits, 2008, p. 3). The emphasis on the legal aspect of human rights education is to monitor the accountability of governments to uphold human rights obligations (Ibid). Education through human rights refers to normative and cultural dimensions focused on a process of education that "provides skills, knowledge, and motivation to individuals to transform their own lives and realities so that they are more consistent with human rights norms and values" (Ibid). The emphasis on the cultural aspect of human rights education ensures that the learner is the focus of the teaching and learning process and is able to make connections between her own life and the concepts and principles associated with human rights. Education for human rights refers to normative and transformative dimensions focused on a process of education that "involves civic actions designed to actualise values and moral principles and ideals beyond those of existing laws and conventions" (Banks, 2010b, p. 61). The emphasis on the transformative aspect of human rights education is to promote social justice, and is perhaps the most challenging dimension for a school. Human rights education thus implies a learning process that emphasises critical examination of systemic influences of power, oppression, dominance, inequity and injustice as well as social activism to engage in

transformative social acts. As such, human rights education is represented under the critical model of multicultural education in our typology (see *Table 1*).

The context of the study

Iceland has experienced rapid demographic change over the past decade and a half, aligning the country more closely with the experience of its nordic and european neighbours in terms of global trends of migration and increasingly diverse populations. The population was placed at 319,575 in January 2012 (Statistics Iceland, 2012) with evidence of a strong growth in its immigrant population since 1996 when it was 1.8 per cent. In January 2011, this figure had risen to 8 per cent of the total population, and female immigrants currently exceed the number of males for the first time since 2006 (Statistics Iceland, 2011).[1] Poles, who make up 36.8 per cent of the total immigrant population, represent the largest immigrant group (Statistics Iceland, 2011). Vietnamese immigrants total 495, a figure that does not include children who are born in Iceland of Vietnamese parents (Ibid). The number of these second-generation immigrants is rising. The change in demographics in Iceland raises questions on the appropriateness of the education system to accommodate the needs of an increasingly diverse student population.

Upper secondary schooling in Iceland is managed and financed through the central government. Since 1987, there has been one law for all upper secondary schools. This has ensured standardisation across grammar, industrial-vocational and comprehensive schools. Although the structure of the system and the curriculum framework is provided by central government, there appears to be increasing autonomy as regards scope for independent action (Blöndal *et al.*, 2011). Comprehensive schools offer a mixture of courses, combining aspects of both grammar and industrial-vocational schools. In recent years, around half of young people aged 16–19 have attended comprehensive schools, a third grammar schools and only around 7 per cent have attended the specialised industrial-vocational schools (Ibid). Although over 90 per cent of 16-year-olds have been enrolling in the upper secondary level annually since 2000, the extremely high dropout rate amongst upper secondary school students is challenging the system (Ibid). "An Icelandic study of a cohort born in 1975 showed that around 40% had not yet finished upper secondary school at the age of 24 (keeping in mind that the normal completion age for most study programmes is 20)" (Blöndal *et al.*, 2011, p. 241). However, the flexibility of the Icelandic upper secondary school system leads to gradual completion as shown by a dropout rate that is quite high for both males and females of every age group, but that gradually decreases with age to reach a low of around 20 per cent for females in their 30s, and for males in their 40s (Ibid). A forthcoming report indicates that the dropout rate is greater outside the capital region, among students from families with low socio-economic status and from vocational programmes (Blöndal & Jónasson, 2003; Blöndal & Adalbjarnardottir*,* in press).

The current education reforms in Iceland have been influenced by both internal and external factors and global initiatives promoting education for the 21st century (informal meeting with Ministry of Education representatives, January 2012). New education acts were passed in Iceland in Spring 2008, followed by a revised General Section of the national curriculum guides in May 2011, applicable for all school levels from preschool to the upper secondary school level. A key and significant change from the 2004 national curriculum guides was the introduction of an explicit pedagogic discourse promoting holistic and multidimensional programming. The emphasis of the new curriculum guides is on six inter-dependent and integrated foundational threads, referred to as "pillars" by

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[1] "An immigrant is a person born abroad with two foreign born parents and four foreign born grandparents, whereas a second-generation immigrant is born in Iceland having two immigrant parents" (Statistics Iceland, 2011).

the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2011). These pillars comprise health and welfare; literacy; sustainability; democracy and human rights; equality; and creativity. The 2008 upper secondary education act is also significant in that it marked the end of a centralised system introduced in 1996, which had emphasised synchronisation of standards amongst schools. The emphasis on decentralisation places responsibility on individual schools to develop their own curricula and assessment processes.

Methodological Approach

In this paper, we explore the change in curricular discourse in addressing student diversity by comparing the discourse used in the 2004 and 2011 upper secondary curriculum guides and the 2008 Upper Secondary School Act. The specific research question that guides this paper is: What does the official discourse in the 2004 and 2011 upper secondary national curriculum guides and the 2008 Upper Secondary School Act suggest as regards the theoretical and philosophical position based on a multicultural education typology?

Drawing on Anh-Dao Tran's research proposal on upper secondary education in Iceland's multicultural society, we use the narratives of Vietnamese students at the upper secondary level to investigate the status of policy and curricular documents in addressing their specific learning needs from a multicultural perspective. Banks (2010a, p. 5) has identified five aspects of educational reform that aim to increase educational success among minority students with multicultural backgrounds. His five-fold dimension to reform includes:

1. "Content integration," which requires that the materials teachers use reflect cultural diversity.
2. "Knowledge construction," which requires that the curriculum be organized so that students engage in critical thinking, through step by step building of their understanding of how knowledge is influenced and constructed. Knowledge construction is a pedagogy that engages teachers and students in interacting with knowledge. It is a process that assists students to analyse the different concepts, themes and issues of multiculturalism. The process ends with a transformation approach where the pupils actively problem-solve social issues.
3. "Prejudice reduction," in which curricula that brings about the reduction of racial prejudice and improves racial attitudes among students is used.
4. "Equity pedagogy," in which teachers modify their teaching techniques to facilitate the success of students who don't come from the mainstream culture. Teachers are trained to be aware of how their own perceptions reflect their habits and culture, and how these can be barriers to the success of their students from different cultures.
5. An "empowering school culture and social structure," which requires building a school culture that involves everybody who contributes to the academic success of a school's students, including students of different racial, ethnic or cultural groups. The agents in bringing this about include teachers, principals, parents and other school professionals, and all aspects of the school must take part in this empowering process.

These dimensions offer criteria that can be used to analyse the experiences of the Vietnamese youth represented in this study and to explore the issues faced by an ethnically and linguistically diverse group of students in upper secondary schools in Iceland. By relating our student data to the five-fold dimension of educational reform identified by Banks, we can start to build up a picture of the schooling experience and the aspects that

facilitate and/or constrain educational success for these students. This picture will provide the context for the discourse analysis process.

The addition of a human rights lens to the analysis of curricular and policy discourse, assists us in drawing conclusions on the multicultural positioning of the government in its role and responsibility in ensuring the right to education of the child (CRC article 28), and in particular the right to a human rights education and one that reflects multicultural principles (CRC article 29).

In the context of Iceland, the concepts of equality, democracy and human rights are not new in education discourse. However, for the first time they have been used as foundational "pillars of education" (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2011, p. 15), forming the core of the school curriculum. For this reason, the authors decided to embark on a joint initiative to analyse curricular and policy discourse to better understand how these concepts are applied in the official disourse and to determine the philosophical and theoretical orientation of the government in addressing student diversity through multicultural and human rights education.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) as a method of analysis aims to expose the hidden messages and voices of power and inequality within the choices of words, the construction of sentences and the manipulation of the language (Fairclough, 1989; McGregor, 2003). Words used orally or in written text in each context reflect bias in how we see ourselves and our social, political and historical background (Ibid). Language conveys different discourses and purposes depending on whether the goal is to exercise power, set guidelines or regulations, expand knowledge or negotiate relationships. Through CDA we can identify and better understand the conscious/unconscious and explicit/implicit intentions of the governing body in relation to the context in which official documents were written and determine their relevance as regards multicultural and human rights education to address student diversity.

As acknowledged by van Dijk (1988), CDA does not have a unitary theoretical framework or methodology because it is best viewed as a shared perspective encompassing a range of approaches instead of one school. However, one key principle of CDA is that the way we write, and what we say is not arbitrary – it is purposeful, whether or not the choices are conscious or unconscious (Ibid). From a social constructionist perspective, our understanding of the role of language is that rather than reflect reality, it represents how we categorise the world; it represents culturally and historically specified social actions that have a role in producing our social world (knowledge, identities, and social relations) and maintaining social patterns; it creates common truths through social interaction; and it leads to different social actions through the social construction of knowledge that will inevitably have social consequences (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 5–6). The critical analyst believes in a research process that is ethical and political in that it always benefits a specific group, with benefits bestowed upon those who are marginalised in society as a result of unjust societal organisation and structures (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 21 in Ibid).

Fairclough (2002) points out that an order of discourse represents an open system rather than one that is closed or rigid. He also highlights the risks associated with what happens in actual interaction. The process through which discourses become operationalised in economies and societies represents the dialectics of discourse and includes "representations of how things are and have been, as well as imaginaries – representations of how things might or could or should be" (Ibid, p 3), thus representing possible social practices, networks of social practices, possible syntheses of activities, subjects, social relations, instruments, objects, values and forms of consciousness (Ibid). In the context of schooling, these elements may become enacted or even inculcated, or not. Enactment implies adop-

tion of certain practices in line with the new discourse, whilst inculcation refers to internalisation of the new ways of being and doing. Fairclough defines inculcation as "a matter of...people coming to their own discourses, to position themselves inside them, to act and think and talk and see themselves in terms of new discourses" (Ibid, p. 4). He further identifies different stages of inculcation. These include rhetorical deployment, when "people learn new discourses and use them for certain purposes while at the same time self-consciously keeping a distance from them" (Ibid, p. 4). This may lead to ownership, explained as becoming "unconsciously positioned within a discourse" (Ibid, p. 4), reflecting the dialectics of inculcation. These dialectics are not only evident in styles of discourse but also in bodies, postures, gestures, ways of moving and so forth. They are also evident in the representation process – "that is people not only act and interact within networks of social practices, they also interpret and represent to themselves and each other what they do, and these interpretations and representations shape and reshape what they do" (Ibid, p. 4). However, there is nothing inevitable about the dialectics of discourse. As Fairclough points out, " a new discourse may come into an institution or organisation without being enacted or inculcated. It may be enacted, yet never fully inculcated" (Ibid, p. 4). He further points out that the conditions of possibility for, and the constraints upon, the dialects of discourse need to be identified and understood.

It is not in the scope of this paper to provide an analysis of the operationalisation of the discourse presented in the curricular and policy documents, beyond referring to the perspectives of upper secondary students of Vietnamese origin. The focus is on the discourse in the texts in relation to official positioning or purpose of multicultural and human rights education theories and philosophies, and not on individual teaching practices or philosophies.

Methods

The authors worked with data collected by one of the researchers, Anh-Dao Tran, to develop a picture of the teaching and learning experience of the Vietnamese youth at the upper secondary school level. Data used in this paper were drawn from interviews taken with 13 students from upper secondary schools. All students had previously attended school in Vietnam and had been in Iceland for no more than eight years at the time of their interview. Ten of the 13 students were contacted for follow-up interviews. Of these ten, three had dropped out of school and two had graduated.

The student data was categorised using Banks' five-fold dimension to educational reform. The data corresponded to three of the five aspects presented by Banks: "content integration"; "knowledge construction"; and "equity pedagogy". Data that relates to the descriptions for "prejudice reduction" and "an empowering school culture and social structure" was not found. This does not imply that issues around these two aspects of educational reform are absent in the schooling experience of the students, but rather they did not appear as prominent features of experience in the interviews.

Once the student data had been categorised under the three aspects presented by Banks – namely "content integration"; "knowledge construction"; and "equity pedagogy" – the authors identified the relevant sections of the 2004 and 2011 upper secondary school national curriculum guides and the 2008 Upper Secondary School Act that related to these aspects of curriculum reform. Using critical discourse analysis, the authors analysed the text in the relevant sections, focusing on the ways that multicultural and human rights education is theoretically and philosophically conceptualised by the official discourse.

The analysis process was informed by Gorski's (2009) typology drawn from the work of Grant and Sleeter (2006) and Jenks et al. (2001). *Table 1* represents the theoretical tool that we used to analyse the discourse in the curricular and policy texts and is based on the typology provided by Gorski (2009, p. 312). The analysis was limited to contextual and descriptive parts of the text in the curricular documents, such as objectives and study programme descriptions, in order to capture the theoretical and philosophical dimensions of the official curriculum. However, influenced by the work of Gorski, the analysis process then used the selected text to pull out key words or phrases that would allow patterns of language to emerge to illustrate positioning with a certain approach represented in the typology. As Gorski explains, this allows patterns of thought and meaning to emerge and illustrate consistent theoretical or philosophical orientations, thus providing a more objective and focused analysis. The specific questions that guided the analysis process were taken directly from the work of Gorski (2009, p. 312): a) What theoretical or philosophical groundings are evident, implicitly or explicitly, in the text?; b) What theoretical or philosophical groundings are suggested by what is absent from the text?

Limitations of the research include the language of analysis. Both researchers are non-native Icelandic speakers. Although one of the researchers is fluent in Icelandic, the discourse analysis was conducted using the English translation of the curriculum and policy documents. The authors began by cross-checking with the official Icelandic version of the documents and by discussing their findings with native Icelandic speakers who were asked to verify the meaning of certain words. As the process became extremely time-consuming and at times complicated due to different interpretations of certain concepts, it was decided to focus on only the English versions of each document. Although the researchers acknowledge these limitations, justification lies in viewing the documents as those officially recognised and approved by the Ministry and accessible to the public through the Ministry website.

Analaysis of findings

Vietnamese students' experiences of schooling

By relating the student data to the five-fold dimension of educational reform identified by Banks, we started to build up a picture of the aspects of the schooling experience that facilitated or constrained the students' potential for educational achievement. This picture guided the selection of the contextual text for the discourse analysis and thus forms an important part of our findings.

One of Banks' five-fold dimensions to educational reform is "knowledge construction," which requires that the curriculum is organised so that students engage in critical thinking, through step-by-step building of their understanding of how knowledge is influenced and constructed. The experience of students who participated in the research indicate that they have not been able to build on the maths knowledge they brought with them into the Icelandic classrooms:

> There is maths, the subject that helps us, Vietnamese, because the teaching of maths here [in Icelandic upper secondary education schools] is too easy. I completed almost all maths study in 12th grade; thus I could actually start maths level 403 here, but I had to start from the beginning for credits purpose. I took 203,303, 403 and 503. Actually, it was not until I got to maths 603 before I learned something new. (MyThanh)

What this experience indicates is a schooling process that has failed to recognise or place value on what students experience or learn before they arrive in Iceland.

Acknowledgement of academic and pragmatic knowledge from the lived experience of learning in a different cultural environment is an important aspect of knowledge construction, and according to Banks involves a transformation approach where the pupils actively problem-solve social issues.

Icelandic as a Second Language (ÍSA) is offered as part of the school programme. Students also attend the mainstream classes in other subject areas. However, their experience of attending these classes, which are taught in Icelandic, suggests that limited knowledge of Icelandic restricts their potential for learning:

> I can learn but a lot of times, because we [Vietnamese students] don't share the same language [as Icelanders], I can't grasp the deeper meaning. I look at words, I can say that I understand, but I don't comprehend their whole meanings. This is why it is hard. (NhuTam)

If we consider this example in terms of Banks' "content integration," understood as the materials used by teachers reflecting cultural diversity, the implication is that teachers do not adopt practices that are culturally responsive. Despite the strategy of ÍSA to address the needs of students with immigrant backgrounds, culturally sensitive practice in mainstream classes appears to be amiss. Even though the students find their subject teachers friendly and enthusiastic in trying to help them when they do not understand the class content, the pedagogic practice of the teachers appears to be limited to using English and gesturing, which students often found ineffective. As one secondary school graduate explained, in relation to newcomers and their schooling experience at the upper secondary level:

> If they didn't know [the language] because they had only been here two or three years and they came to school, then they couldn't speak, couldn't write, didn't know what to do. The teachers didn't mind them, but if they didn't understand anything then they just failed the class. The teachers didn't want to help at all. It just meant that they had not the proficiency in Icelandic to take such a class... If they knew English then the teachers could help them. (NgocBao)

Banks describes "equity pedagogy" as teachers modifying their teaching techniques to facilitate the success of students who don't come from the mainstream culture. Students provided examples that reflect their vulnerability, frustration and a sense of feeling deskilled, again in reference to the use of English:

> Using English was good for students who know English. But because I don't know a lot of English, it was difficult to understand. (HoangOanh)

> ...the group of foreign students, not the Vietnamese group, Americans or some people like that...they were already proficient in English – in class the teacher also used English. This was the reason they understood a lot, i.e. we [Vietnamese students] understood 50 per cent, but the others [students with English] must understand up to 80–90 per cent. (ThanhNga)

The students expressed recognition of teachers' limited skills to deal with their needs beyond the use of English:

> I think, with Icelanders, the only ways they can use to explain are with English orally [besides Icelandic] and gestures. But, there are concepts that cannot be conveyed by gestures. These are the issues. (ThanhNga)

Based on the experience of the students, relevant sections of the 2004 and 2011 upper secondary school national curriculum guides and the 2008 Upper Secondary School Act were identified for analysis. These sections related to Banks' dimensions of "content integration," "knowledge construction" and "equity pedagogy" (Banks, 2010a) and tended to focus on learning and teaching objectives, the curriculum and study programmes and on text specifically related to student rights and responsibilities. For example, in the 2008 Upper Secondary School Act we focused on Article 2 of Chaper 1; Chapter 5; and Article 35 of Chapter 6. In the 2004 Icelandic national curriculum guide for upper secondary school, we focused on Section 3 (Roles, objectives and working methods of upper secondary schools); Section 4 (Structure of academic programmes – programmes of study); Section 6 (School curriculum guide); and Section 7 (Roles and responsibilities of schools and students). In the 2011 Icelandic national curriculum guide for upper secondary school, we selected the corresponding sections in order to determine the discourse shifts and how these reflected changing theoretical and philosophical positioning of the government regarding multicultural and human rights education (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2004, 2011).

Analysis of the curricular and policy texts

Under Article 32 of the 2008 Upper Secondary School Act, the entitlement of all individuals who have reached the age of 16 to enrol in the upper secondary level is made explicit, reflecting equitable access. The objective of the upper secondary school level under Article 2 also implies equitable participation by taking into account the individual needs of each student:

> The objective of the upper secondary school is to encourage the overall development of all pupils and encourage their active participation in democratic society by offering studies suitable to the needs of each pupil.
> (The Upper Secondary School Act No. 92/2008, p.1)

Nevertheless, this section of the act makes no explicit reference to multicultural or human rights principles in its description of the objectives of schooling, such as cosmopolitan citizenship, universality, reciprocity, solidarity, etc. Article 2 states as its objective for upper secondary schools the development of an education that has the goal to:

> Prepare pupils for employment...strengthen its pupils' skills in the Icelandic language, both spoken and written, develop moral values, sense of responsibility, self-confidence, broadmindedness and tolerance in its pupils, train them to apply discipline, autonomous working methods and critical thought, teach them to appreciate cultural values and encourage them to seek further knowledge. (The Upper Secondary School Act No. 92/2008, p. 1)

Analysis of the text under this article indicates a consistency with Jenks *et al.'s* (2001) notion of conservative multiculturalism given the emphasis placed on preparation for employment and the Icelandic language stated in the opening two sentences of the text. Based on the typology, this implies an assimilationist approach to education, aimed at preparing pupils to function and achieve in mainstream society. The objectives of the 2004 Icelandic national curriculum guide for upper secondary school makes specific reference to students having "gained good insight into Icelandic society" as outcomes of learning and for schools to "meet the needs of students of foreign origin through the active teaching of Icelandic by educating them about Icelandic society and culture" (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2004, p. 7). We suggest that this reflects an education approach that promotes nationalising "the other" in line with the conservative/assimilationist model in our typology (see *Table 1*). One could argue that the reference in the text to

"rights and responsibilities of individuals in democratic socities" and the use of terms such as "moral values", "tolerance" and "respect themselves and others," suggest a liberal stance to multicultural education based on the typology description depicting interpersonal harmony and cultural sensitivity. However, we suggest that the open framing of the text can also imply an emphasis on national "cultural values" (The Upper Secondary School Act, no. 92/2008, p. 1). The absence of reference to multiple cultures in the text reinforces our argument that the discourse reflects both a conservative and a liberal theoretical and philosophical positioning.

In fact, we argue that the use of wording such as "tolerance" in an objective statement, opens up an implied notion of accepted hierarchical social relations that require skills to ensure interpersonal harmony. Explicit referencing to terms associated with multiculturalism and human rights, such as solidarity, reciprocity, universality and critical social transformation are absent from the objectives of both the education act and the 2004 curriculum guide. In this respect, we suggest that these two documents fall short in their reflection of critical democractic processes and shared values as essential components of critical multiculturalism, as defined in our analytical framework (see *Table 1*).

In section 4.1 of the 2004 curriculum guide, the use of the terms "maturity, interest and learning capacity" to refer to different stages of learning readiness, serves to conceal the specific needs of students who fall outside the dominant norm, such as the Vietnamese students represented in this study.

> Students who are starting upper secondary education differ in readiness, maturity, interests and learning capacity. Course planning in upper secondary schools takes these different needs into account and therefore an effort should be made to help all students find a suitable programme of study in which they can control their progression of learning as much as possible.
> (Ministry of Education, Science and Education, 2004, p. 8)

Interview data indicate that students' prior learning was not acknowledged. The discourse used in section 7.6 of the 2004 curriculum guide is explicit in its focus on the right of the student to demonstrate competence in a certain subject area. However, the absence of discourse that recognises the challenges and/or constraints faced by students as a result of systemic constraints indicates an official multicultural positioning that is conservative and that could be perceived as discriminatory.

> If doubts arise as to how evaluation should be conducted, students should be given the benefit of the doubt or given a competence test to allow them to prove their competence in the relevant subject or field.
> (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2004, p. 25)

Article 35 of the 2008 Upper Secondary School Act makes an explicit reference to addressing the needs of students with a language other than Icelandic as their mother tongue. The article states that although Icelandic is the instructional language of school, students have the right to learn Icelandic as a second language in order to give them the option to develop their first language elsewhere:

> The language of instruction in upper secondary schools shall be Icelandic.

> Pupils who do not have Icelandic as their native language have the right for instruction in Icelandic as second language...The objective is to provide pupils, whose native language is not Icelandic, with the opportunity to maintain their native language as an optional subject, through distance learning or otherwise.
> (The Upper Secondary School Act No. 92/2008:13)

The discourse suggests that emphasis is placed on the right of the student rather than the responsibility of the system in providing these students with appropriate opportunities to enrich their native language. The implication is that responsibility lies with the students themselves to develop their native language "through distance learning or otherwise" (Ibid, p. 13).

The underlying official message in this text is one of assimilation in that the context is national in its focus on the Icelandic culture, society and culture. The discourse also fails to place an active responsibility on the system to assist the student to ensure her/his right. The text generates a sense of tolerance to diversity, characteristic of the conservative approach in our typology but fails to convey a sense of committment to support the student to ensure the right to access and attain a quality education by critically refecting on the role of the institution. The non-commital stance emphasised through language depicts minimal responsibility on the part of the institution.

> Schools should **make an effort** to meet the needs of students of foreign origin through the active teaching of Icelandic, by educating them about Icelandic society and culture, and by providing other types of assistance, *insofar as possible* [italics added]. (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2004, p. 7)

Notions of critical examination or transformative action are explicitly absent from the discourse in both the 2008 Upper Secondary School Act and the 2004 curriculum guide, indicating an official positioning that is distanced from a critical multicultural orientation. Rather, the analysis carried out on the 2008 Upper Secondary School Act and the 2004 curriculum guide points to an official position that is predominantly conservative in addressing student diversity through multicultural and human rights education.

The most prominent shift in discourse that we identified during our analysis of the 2011 curriculum guide relates to its inclusion of the six foundational pillars, which are referenced throughout the document. Both social and educational objectives are implied through a discourse that aligns itself more explicitly to the liberal approach than was evidenced in the 2004 curriculum guide and the 2008 act.

> The fundamental pillars refer to social, cultural, environmental and ecolgial literacy...they are socially oriented as they are to promote increased equality and democracy and to ensure well-educated and healthy citizens, both for participating in and for changing and improving society and also for contemporary employment. (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2011, p. 14)

In contrast to how the objective of schooling is presented in Article two of the education act, where the emphasis is placed on schooling for employment, the text in the new curriculum guide dilutes the importance placed on preparation for employment and implies a more holistic, developmental role of schooling. This is achieved by positioning the focus on employment and further studies at the end of the sentence as opposed to the beginning, as is the case in the 2008 act.

> ...it is to encourage the overall development of all pupils...it is also to prepare pupils for employment and further studies.
> (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2011, p. 30)

However, perhaps the most prominent shift in discourse is reflected in the use of the notion of societal 'change' and 'transformation', more in line with discourse applied to critical approaches of multicultural education. This referencing is consistent in that it is implied in the majority of sections of the 2011 curriculum document, and made explicit in each of the

descriptions of the six pillars. This is achieved through transformative imagery such as, "rewriting the world" (Ibid, p. 17) in true Freirean style; "shaping society" (Ibid, p. 19); and "capability for action" (Ibid, p. 18). Furthermore, the text under each pillar conveys an underlying message of schooling to challenge current norms, in line with the philosophical and theoretical roots of critical multiculturalism as defined in the typology:

> In school activities it is important to approach tasks in an integral manner, applying professional broadmindedness and, when appropriate, interdisciplinary methods. This can necessitate unconventional teaching methods and unusual approach to school activities.
> (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2011, p. 16)

> Creativity disrupts traditional patterns, rules and systems and shows phenomena and recevied ideas in a different light.
> (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2011, p. 22)

The language in each of the six pillar descriptions references an understanding of sociopolitical contexts that demand critical examination and a sense of transformative action, thus implying an offical shift away from a position of neutrality or conservatism to one that recognises a need to fight systemic influences of power, oppression, dominance, inequity and injustice through formal school processes and practices.

However, there are examples in the text where the discourse reflects mixed messages and presents philosophical and theoretical inconsistencies. For example, under the description of the pillars, the reference to terms such as *rights* and *responsibilities* are conveyed in relation to shared collectivity. The language under the pillars reflects the human rights cosmopolitan principles of solidarity and reciprocity. However, in the text that refers to exemptions from the curriculum guide under section 16 of the 2011 document, specific reference is made to students whose native language is not Icelandic (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2011, p. 83). As in the 2004 document, the discourse suggests that emphasis is placed on the right of the student rather than the responsibility of the school in providing these students with appropriate opportunities to enrich their native language. As in the 2004 curriculum document, the language explicitly places the responsibility on the student in the statement, "the upper secondary school is not responsible for these studies but can act as intermediary" (Ibid, 2011, p. 83). The text also applies noncommital language such as, "should make an effort," language which is strongly political in its simplicity and apparent neutrality, which assumes alignment with a conservative and assimilationist multicultural approach. The conservative positioning is reinforced by language that, unconsciously we believe, presents two different groups of students as 'the other', by implying notions of deficiency through the term "assistance" and failing to include the rich experience both bring with them:

> Special attention should be paid to Icelandic students who have spent long periods overseas. Many of these students require assistance parallel to that organised for students of foreign origin.
> (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2011, p. 83)

Horsta and Gitz-Joansen (2010, p. 137) argue that "the multicultural position implies a break with a discourse that reflects a naturalized majority position (a majority position which does not question its own normativity, but regards it as natural) and essentialized minority positions (minority positions which are constructed in essentialized terms by the dominant discourse)." Although the curricular and policy documents do not always essentialise minority positions, they fail to *explicitly* promote a notion of schooling that reflects critical examination and social transformation to address student diversity.

Kymlicka in Banks (2010b) refers to multicultural citizenship as recognition of "the right and need for students to maintain commitments to their cultural communities, to a transnational community, and to the nation-state in which they are legal citizens" (Ibid, p. 52). This implies cosmopolitanism, a concept that is conspicuous in its absence in each of the three official policy documents analysed in this paper – an absence that, we suggest, is likely to perpetuate the inequities already faced by an increasingly diverse student population at the upper secondary level.

Conclusions

As the Republic of Iceland is a signatory of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989), its constitution secures the right to education for all children living in the country, as articulated under article 28. In article 29 of the convention, explicit reference is made to the right of the child to a human rights education and one that reflects the principles of multicultural education (CRC, 1989). The 2011 national curriculum guide for upper secondary level (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2011), based on the 2008 Upper Secondary School Act, presents a comprehensive framework of education and a guide for school objectives and goals. The student voices used in this paper indicate an inequitable schooling experience for immigrant children, linked to cultural and language constraints. The experiences of the Vietnamese youth group suggest that teachers are not adequately prepared to respond to their learning needs and lack the relevant skills that an effective multicultural education demands. Although we cannot assume to link curricular and policy discourse to explain the classroom or school experience of the students, without acknowledging the impact of differing philosophies and the strengths and limitations of individual schools and teachers, we can draw conclusions on the extent to which their experience is perpetuated or challenged in the official discourse.

Based on our analysis of curricular and policy documents, we argue that the discourse in the most recent national curriculum (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2011) reflects a shift from a conservative approach in previous policy documents to one that reflects characteristics of a critical muticultural approach. However, this reflection lacks consistency in representing an explicit philosophical foundation rooted in the theories of critical multicultural and human rights education.

We conclude that the discourse in the most recent national curriculum guide of 2011 opens up the opportunity and space for deliberative dialogue and public debate, not only on the need to prepare teachers for their role in addressing the diverse needs of an increasingly diverse student population, but also on the need to collaboratively work towards a common philosophical and theoretical approach to multiculturalism that will facilitate practical responses to students' perceptions of how they experience diversity.

Table 1 – Analytical Framework (adapted from Gorski, 2009, p. 313)			
Multicultural Theoretical and Philosophical Positioning			
Approaches			**Questions**
1. Conservative	1a) Assimilationist	1a) Teaching the "Other"	How do we nationalise minorities through teaching? How can we help them to adjust and achieve within the dominant norm? How do we prepare them for participation in mainstream market-driven economies?
2. Liberal	2a) Human relations focused on prejudice reduction and interpersonal harmony	2a) Teaching with cultural sensitivity and tolerance	How do we engender a sense of tolerance to diversity; cultural sensitivity; celebration of diversity and foster intergroup relations?
		2b) Teaching with multicultural competence	How do we meet the diverse learning needs of students?
	2b) Single-group studies		How do we improve the social conditions of a single group?
3. Critical	3a) Multicultural education	3a) Teaching in socio-political context	How do we engender a critical examination of systemic influences of power, oppression, dominance, inequity and injustice?
	3b) Multicultural and social reconstructionist	3b) Teaching as resistance and counter-hegemonic practice	How do we engender a sense of transformative action to fight systemic influences of power, oppression, dominance, inequity and injustice?

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