School Leaders' Perceptions of Contemporary Change at the Upper Secondary School Level in Iceland

Interaction of actors and social structures facilitating or constraining change

Guðrún Ragnarsdóttir

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

UNIVERSITY OF ICELAND
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

School Leaders' Perceptions of Contemporary Change at the Upper Secondary School Level in Iceland

Interaction of actors and social structures facilitating or constraining change

Guðrún Ragnarsdóttir

Supervisors

Professor Ingólfur Ásgeir Jóhannesson

Professor Jón Torfi Jónasson

Doctoral committee

Ingólfur Ásgeir Jóhannesson, University of Iceland

Jón Torfi Jónasson, University of Iceland

Lisbeth Lundahl, Umeå University

Opponents

Elisabet Nihlfors, Uppsala University

Monica Johansson, University of Gothenburg

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of a PhD degree

Faculty of Teacher Education

School of Education, University of Iceland

April 2018

School leaders' perceptions of the contemporary change at the upper secondary school level in Iceland. Interaction of actors and social structures facilitating and constraining change

A thesis for a PhD-degree in Education

Printed at: Háskólaprent
Reykjavík, 2018

Acknowledgements

This doctoral thesis is part of a PhD degree from University of Iceland, School of Education, Faculty of Teacher Education. The thesis is part of the comprehensive research project: *Upper Secondary School Practices in Iceland: Teaching and Learning – Students' Engagement and Initiative*.

This PhD journey would not have been possible without all the funds that I received from Aldarafmælissjóður Háskólans (The University of Iceland Anniversary Fund), Háskólasjóður Eimskipafélags Íslands (The University of Iceland Eimskip Fund), and from Rannsóknasjóður Háskóla Íslands (University of Iceland Research Fund). Finally, from February 2015, I held a part-time adjunct position which included a small research time component. All these important contributions are kindly thanked.

Many others have made it possible for me to travel and participate in the international research community and deserve gratitude. These are the School of Education at the University of Iceland, Bandalag háskólamanna (Association of Academics), the Nordic Centre of Excellence Justice through Education in the Nordic Countries (JustEd). NordForsk funded part of my study time in Finland in spring 2013, and JustEd supported me to participate in the JustEd Summer School in 2014. JustEd also supported the transcription of the data, the English editing, and the professional comparation of the Icelandic quotes to English translation, as well as with the mobility grant I received to visit Umeå to work with Lisbeth Lundahl.

The process of this PhD journey has not been linear and has been rather complex. I entered the journey with longitudinal data from three datasets of questionnaires on the work and well-being of educators, then I collected data through a research post to map, characterise, and assess publications targeted at upper secondary schools in Iceland, and I joined the research group on Upper Secondary School Practices that also belonged to JustEd as Team 7.

As a result of this complexity, the list of people and groups I feel I should thank will be quite long. I want to start with all the participants at all levels of the research journey. Your input was extremely important and highly appreciated. I owe considerable thanks to Team 7 in JustEd for the learning experience, inspiring conversation, and constructive feedback. I

also want to thank the PhD students that have joined me in the learning process. Thank you Valgerður S. Bjarnadóttir for being my online pillow and constructive friend 24-seven. Thank you Eyrún María Rúnarsdóttir, Sunna Gestsdóttir, Anna Björk Sverrisdóttir, Eva Harðardóttir, and Susan Elizabeth Gollifer for being here physically. I also want to thank my Pestalozzi friends, especially Pascale Moimpoint-Gillard, for encouraging me to start this journey and Charlot Cassar for editing some of the sections and giving good advice. I also want to thank Rafn Kjartansson and Randi Whitney Stebbins for professional editing. Working with both of you is pleasant, constructive, and educational. I also want to thank Allyson Macdonald and Brynja Elisabeth Halldórsdóttir who worked with me in my research post and the Teachers' Union that funded the surveys in 2010 and 2012, in particular Aðalheiður Steingrímsdóttir, the former head of the Association of Icelandic Upper Secondary Schools and her team.

My committee have been encouraging. I want to thank them for broadening my point of view and constructively challenging my line of thought. I am thankful for your support and how instrumental you have been throughout this process. In your company, I have learned a lot about methods, theories, how to network, and accuracy.

Finally, the thesis is dedicated to my family: my husband Jón Bender; our children Elísabet Soffía Bender; Ragnar Þór Bender; Sófus Máni Bender; and our parents, Elísabet Guðbjörg Karlsdóttir; Ragnar Kristinn Guðmundsson; Soffía Hrafnhildur Jónsdóttir; and Gunnþór Bender. All of them have provided me with endless inspiration, love, and support throughout my life.

Abstract

Social, political and technological developments bring about change in the global society. However, it is often argued that education does not develop as rapidly and in line with these changes. This study explores how school leaders perceive their roles, power, and agency when leading change at the upper secondary school level in Iceland. School leaders' perceptions of the interactions between actors and social structures that may facilitate or constrain change are elucidated. The study also identifies what school leaders consider to be the most significant challenges regarding educational change.

Twenty-one school leaders in nine upper secondary schools in Iceland were interviewed. Two or three school leaders were selected to be interviewed in each school in relation to the management structure the school. Schools had been selected through stratified sampling based on the school types. The data is discussed in the light of theories on institutions and organisations, institutional and organisational leadership, different response categories for macro-level demands for change, and policy enactment.

The findings show complex patterns of interactions between various actors and social structures that impact change across system boundaries of the upper secondary school level in Iceland. The predominant governing culture of upper secondary schooling fell within the institutional characteristics of education. Most of the actors were seen to protect the traditions, values, and norms in the field of education although some of them were seen to support change. The institutional governance plays a significant role in constraining change. Nevertheless, some macro-level and meso-level actors trickled the processes of deinstitutionalisation after external or internal crisis or because of other innovative ideas generated within or between the selected upper secondary schools. In this way, new ideas often travelled horizontally throughout the organisational field of the upper secondary education.

The most significant challenge identified by the school leaders when leading change was directly related to the content of academic subjects. School leaders only had partial agency and limited power to promote change in subject content. In contrast, they claimed to have considerable pedagogical leadership in relation to teaching and assessment methods. The nine participating schools enacted the policy in the 2008 legislation and the

2011 national curriculum differently, and it is evident that many self-sustained subunits were seen to be operating within the schools. The most explicit resistance to change was reported to arise from faculty members of traditional academic subjects, in particular mathematics. The school leaders usually responded either as institutional or organisational leaders depending on the issues at stake, the operating dynamics in their respective schools, or the pressure from the macro actors.

The apparent isomorphism among education systems worldwide suggests that lessons from Iceland may be valuable for the global school community, both as theoretical and practical contribution.

Ágrip

Upplifun og reynsla skólastjórnenda af breytingum í íslenskum framhaldsskólum samtímans

Gagnvirk áhrif einstaklinga, hópa og félagskerfa

Á alheimsvísu einkennir mikil og hröð þróun samtímann, stjórnmálin og tæknina. Í tengslum við það færa margir rök fyrir því að menntakerfið þróist hægt og alls ekki í takti við aðrar breytingar. Þetta doktorsverkefni varpar ljósi á hvernig skólastjórnendur í íslenskum framhaldsskólum upplifa hlutverk sitt, völd og getu til aðgerða við innleiðingu breytinga. Sýn skólastjórnenda á samspil ólíkra einstaklinga, hópa og félagskerfa sem letja eða hvetja breytingar er einnig skoðuð. Rannsóknin fjallar jafnframt um hvað skólastjórnendur mátu sem sína mestu áskorunina við innleiðingu menntabreytinga.

Tekin voru viðtöl við 21 stjórnanda í níu framhaldsskólum víðs vegar um landið. Skólarnir og stjórnendur voru valdir með lagskiptu tilviljanaúrtaki meðal annars út frá tegund skóla, stærð og staðsetningu. Tveir eða þrír skólastjórnendur voru valdir í hverjum skóla út frá stjórnkerfi hvers skóla. Viðtölin eru rædd í ljósi kenninga um stofnanir og skipulagsheildir, kenninga um leiðtoga stofnana annars vegar og skipulagsheilda hins vegar, kenninga um ólík viðbrögð skóla við ytri kröfum um breytingar og kenninga sem varpa ljósi á það hvort breytingar nái í gegn eða ekki.

Niðurstöðurnar sýna flókið mynstur gagnkvæmra áhrifa á breytingar, milli ólíkra einstaklinga, hópa og félagskerfa, þvert á mörk framhaldsskólastigsins á Íslandi. Sú menning sem stýrir framhaldsskólastiginu fellur undir einkenni stofnana. Viðmælendur komu með dæmi sem sýndu að flestir áhrifahópar verja þær hefðir sem þar hafa skapast ásamt viðteknum gildum og viðmiðum innan menntunar, á meðan aðrir hópar studdu breytingar. Þessi stofnanastýring er sterkt afl sem á stóran þátt í að hægja á og jafnvel hindra breytingar í framhaldsskólum. Einstaka hópar úr ytra umhverfi skóla sem og innan þeirra komu af stað ferli breytinga í kjölfar ytri eða innri kreppu eða vegna hugmynda um nýbreytni. Með þessum hætti bárust nýjar hugmyndir milli framhaldsskóla.

Mesta áskorunin sem skólastjórnendur fjölluðu um við innleiðingu menntabreytinga tengdist inntaki bóknámsáfanga. Þeir lýstu því yfir að þeir gætu lítil áhrif haft á inntak náms og sögðust hafa takmörkuð völd til að ýta undir breytingar á inntaki. Þeir lýstu því aftur á móti hvernig þeir hefðu umtalsverða möguleika til forystu þegar kemur að kennsluháttum og

námsmati. Þeir níu framhaldsskólar sem tóku þátt í rannsókninni virkjuðu með ólíkum hætti þá stefnu sem boðuð var með lögunum 2008 og aðalnámskrá 2011. Afar skýrt kemur fram í gögnunum að margar sjálfstætt starfandi einingar voru ráðandi innan skólanna. Skólastjórnendur töldu mesta viðnámið gegn breytingum vera í fagdeildum hefðbundins bóknáms, einkum í stærðfræði. Þeir lýstu dæmum um það hvernig þeir brugðust við sem féllu ýmist undir hugmyndir um leiðtogar stofnana eða leiðtogar skipulagsheilda eftir því hvaða viðfangsefni þeir voru að fást við hverju sinni, ráðandi menningu innan skólans eða vegna utanaðkomandi þrýstings.

Table of contents

Table of figures

Table of tables

1 What, who, and why

The term educational change refers to a wide spanning process according to Akkerman, Bronkhorst, and Zitter (2013), and its meaning ranges from small changes in the educational practices of individual teachers to whole-school approaches or even to comprehensive action such as implementing curricula throughout all regional or national school levels, as is the process here in Iceland.

The focus of this thesis is on contemporary change as experienced by school leaders at the upper secondary school level in Iceland, especially in the aftermath of the Upper Secondary Education Act passed in 2008 (Upper Secondary School Education Act No. 92/2008) and during the implementation of the national curriculum guide in 2011 (English translation published in 2012) (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012). The act and the curriculum guide promote the creation and implementation of a decentralised school curriculum. This currently places upper secondary schools in the middle of change.

The national curriculum guide (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012) calls for ongoing educational development as a whole-school approach that includes the active participation of all stakeholders. The demand for ongoing change is also visible in various policy documents on external and internal evaluation in schools (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2010a). Professional development is also supposed to play an important role in promoting change, as is also pointed out by many scholars (Frost, 2012; Fullan, 2007; Horn & Little, 2010; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006).

The interest of the study is to understand the interactions and effects of various influences and elements that facilitate or constrain change within and across system boundaries. A distinction is made between actors and social structures (Scott, 2014) and highlights what is commonly referred to in the literature as the dynamics of change (e.g. Fullan, 2011; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2012; Kauko, Simola, Varjo, & Kalalahti, 2012; Malone, 2013; Thornton, Ocasio, & Lounsbury, 2012). Thus, the main aim of the study is to shed light on how school leaders perceive their roles, power, and agency when leading change at the upper secondary school level in Iceland. The process also elucidates their perceptions of the interactions between actors and social structures that may facilitate or constrain change. The study also explores what school leaders consider to be their most significant challenges regarding educational change.

In formulating the aim of this study, the verbs *facilitate* and *constrain* are used. The term facilitate implies a number of related verbs, including stimulate, boost, urge, motivate, catalyse, foster, and enable. Throughout the thesis, the verb *facilitate* is mostly used while synonyms are used to make a semantic point. Similarly, the verb *constrain* is an umbrella term that covers different, but kindred, phenomena such as resistance, actions leading to delay and slower processes, instances of stagnation and no change, or when change occurs really slowly, perhaps for a number of reasons. Moreover, the term *change* is used throughout the thesis to refer to what is also called reform, innovation, transformation, development, with or without the adjective educational in front of it.

In total, 21 school leaders, school directors (*skólameistarar*) and members of middle management from nine upper secondary schools from all over Iceland were interviewed in this study. This group of practitioners was centrally placed and connected to both outside interest groups and frameworks and inside interests and influences. Their positions give them a strategic place and overview, and their experiences are central to shedding light on the research questions (see Section 5.2).

To analyse the data, lenses derived from both the institutional and organisational literature was used to probe the variety of interactions between principal actors and social structures influencing change in upper secondary schools as seen by the leadership group. Institutions and organisations are presented by meta-theories of institutional logic (Thornton et al., 2012). I mainly leaned on Scott's (2014) ideas on the same phenomenon when defining important concepts relevant to the analysis. The theories draw attention to the complexity of interactions across system boundaries at the macro, meso, and micro levels of schools (Kauko et al., 2012; Thornton et al., 2012). Recent studies (Kraatz, 2009; Raffaelli & Glynn, 2015; Washington, Boal, & Davis, 2008) draw attention to leaders' roles in change within the setup of institutions and organisations. These recent theoretical structures helped to situate the interviewees and understand their perceived roles in the processes of change in their school. Moreover, I used Waks's (2007) ideas on fundamental educational and fundamental organisational change, Coburn's (2004) categories for different responses to macro-level demand for change when evaluating how school personnel respond. To go deeper into the origin and the reason for different responses, I used Ball, Maguire, and Braun's (2012) ideas on policy enactment to critically analyse the data.

In Chapter 2, the focus is on the development of upper secondary education in Iceland and its contemporary arrangement. This is done to provide relevant

background information. In Chapter 3, the conceptual framework is introduced. Chapter 4 provides the literature overview, while Chapter 5 gives ideas about apparent gaps in theory and research and important research questions and describes how they are based on the theories and the literature. Chapter 6 describes the methods used in the study. The findings and ensuing discussion are presented in Chapters 7, 8, and 9. Chapter 10 holds the conclusion.

2 The development of upper secondary education in Iceland and its current structure

Several scholars (Ball et al., 2012; Tyack & Cuban, 1995; Kraatz, 2009; Raffaelli & Glynn, 2015) claim that history moulds all development. In this section, first the most important steps taken while the upper secondary school level in Iceland was being developed is traced. Then, the current status of upper secondary education system is described.

2.1 Development of upper secondary education in Iceland

The systems for grammar and vocational schools were constructed separately (Jónasson, 1992). The two systems gradually converged and became, in small steps, more streamlined until they merged into the upper secondary school system we know today. In the beginning, there were separate acts for the various parts of the system, and even specific acts for each school (Jónasson, 2008). It was not until 1946 that a very general frame for the school system was passed, such that all schools operated under an act on the school system and educational duties (Act on the School System and Educational Duties No. 22/1946).

The oldest grammar school in Iceland, following the Latin tradition, is called Reykjavík Junior College (Menntaskólinn í Reykjavík), or MR as it is commonly known (Reykjavík Junior College, n.d.). Its legacy is very important as it has retained time-honoured traditions in the curriculum and teaching methods for a long time and also retained very high respect among prospective students and many parents. Several grammar schools were also established around the island following the legacy and traditions of the Latin model. Most of the grammar schools today and primarily offer academic programmes as entrance to the university and the system are class-based (Akureyri Junior College, 2015; Reykjavík Junior College, n.d.; Thorarensen, Vilmundarson, & Hilmarsson, 2008). Students in class-based-system (*bekkjarkerfi*) follow the same student group throughout their study time, and all of the students in the same class attend the same courses.

Harðarson (2011) traces the tradition and the roots of the Icelandic grammar schools back to the "humanism and romanticism" (p. 123) of the 18th century, on one hand, and to the Danish liberal traditions from the time when Iceland was under the Danish king until 1918, on the other. The Latin schools retained their form until 1904, when the modern grammar schools took over with more diverse

subjects than were in the Latin school. Harðarson (2011) also points out how the subjects in the grammar school curriculum have largely remained the same since 1904. Hence, the root and legacy of the grammar schools, as they look like today, has its origins in Latin school traditions.

In the late 19th century, a break from the academic tradition occurred when several vocational schools were established around the island, initially agricultural schools for farmers, i.e. for men at the time, and schools focusing on home economics for women. The first industry-related vocational school was established in 1904 (Guðmundsson, 1993). Until that time, or from 1873, master craftsmen from Reykjavík offered several courses supporting their trades (Technical College of Reykjavík, n.d.).

From the beginning of the 20th century, vocationally oriented schools with different specialisations for adolescents began to appear in the country. Additionally, schools for teachers, skippers, clergy, and medical doctors (Jónasson, 1998a) were established. Schools for the clergy and medical doctors were then established in the 19th century and the University of Iceland offered these study paths in 1911 (Hálfdanarson, Matthíasdóttir, Guðmundsson, & Karlsson, 2011).

This development reached far into the 20th century. In 1949, the idea of industrial training boards began (Vocational Education Act No. 46/1949). The first general act involving certified trade schools was then passed in 1955 (Industrial Vocational Act No. 45/1955). At that time, the study time was rather short. The compulsory part was eight weeks in vocational school, in addition to the on-the-job vocational training (Stefánsdóttir, 2001). However, vocational schools did not gain legal status until 1966 (Act on Vocational Education No. 68/1966). The compulsory study time became longer, varying from one to up to two years in basic studies where students learned the theories related to the vocational track they studied parallel to the practical component of their studies (Stefánsdóttir, 2001). By that time, vocational education had been transformed to be more akin to the general upper secondary system (Jónasson, 2008).

As the grammar school, both literally and as an idea, became calcified in its status as the mainstay of Icelandic post-compulsory education, a flurry of activity at this level, in the shape of various institutions, continued throughout the 20th century. A host of general educational and vocational schools were established during the early part of the 20th century (Guttormsson, 2008). Important structuring took place in 1946, but there were still many part of the post-compulsory system.

An important act on the upper secondary school level was adopted in 1970 (Act on Grammar Schools No. 12/1970). Since, the term upper secondary school

(f*ramhaldsskóli*) has been used as a synonym for the schools belonging to the school level (Jónasson, 2008). The core of the act was constructed around the aim of grammar schools, the length of the programmes, educational material according to the students' needs, and the mixed-gender system.

In 1972, an important break with tradition was introduced with the unit-credit system (*áfangakerfi*) when Hamrahlíð College (2016), or MH, originally founded in 1966, changed its operations from a class-based grammar school. Students attending schools with unit-credit system follow different student groups throughout their time of study time, they select in what order they take some of the courses, as well as the number of credits they take each term. The innovative practices of MH entered into legislation in 1973, when the Act on Comprehensive Schools No. 14/1973 was approved. The acts also allowed for the emergence of academic and vocational programmes jointly into a comprehensive school. The first comprehensive school, Fjölbrautaskólinn í Breiðholti, became operational in 1975 (Jónasson, 2008). There were a number of important ideas which inspired the adoption of the comprehensive model in Iceland. Ingólfsson (2014) noted how important and symbolic this transformation was for the upper secondary school level, and from that time, comprehensive schools started to be established throughout the island. Thus, academic and vocational programmes started to emerge under the same roof.

Hansen (1987) highlights how the Icelandic government presented a bill in the mid-1970s to comprehensively reconstruct upper secondary education. He states that the main implementation focus at the time was on technical solutions, while historical and cultural elements incorporated in traditional grammar schools and their autonomy were neglected. It was, however, not until 1988 that the merging of the academic and vocational programmes gained formal legitimacy with the Act on Upper Secondary Schools No. 57/1988.

Originally, the grammar schools were mainly catered to upper class boys, but gradually they all became mixed-gender (Jónasson, 2008). However, it was not until 1996, with the Act on Upper Secondary Schools No. 80/1996, that students with intellectual disabilities were ensured access to upper secondary education.

Today, the aim is for more inclusive and comprehensive upper secondary education. There are, however, still upper secondary schools in Iceland that select students by both academic performance and social status (The Commercial College of Iceland, 2016). These changes towards democratic values and schooling for all have been integrated into the current legislation and curricula (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012; Upper Secondary Education Act No. 92/2008).

A reform implemented in public administration impacted upper secondary education in in the early 1990s (Ingólfsson, 2014). The reform was influenced by the ideology of new public management (NPM) that was impacting the Western world at the time. The main focus of a more general reform in the public sphere, as summarised by Kristinsson (2006), was to increase privatisation, transferring activities from the state to the municipalities and changing strategies in budgeting, performance, and human resources. Accountability, benchmarking, and comparisons increased along with NPM. According to Mýrdal, Jóhannesson, Geirsdóttir, and Finnbogason (2001), NPM developed when school directors were implementing the ideas. Their conclusion is in line with Jónsson and Pálsson (2007), who describe how the concept of NPM developed in the context of social change in Iceland.

Compulsory schools in Iceland were transferred to the municipalities as part of the effort to increase decentralisation of the schools (Hansen, Jóhannsson, & Lárusdóttir, 2004). However, upper secondary schools remained under the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (hereafter MoESC). Power was systematically transferred to the upper secondary schools to create and implement their school-based curriculum in 2008 (Upper Secondary Education Act No. 92/2008). It should, however, be kept in mind that there are two different forms of decentralisation for the two school levels. Municipalities do not lay between the Ministry and the upper secondary schools as they do for the compulsory schools. The compulsory schools are under a centralised curriculum created on behalf of the MoESC, while the upper secondary schools are decentralised and create and implement their own school curriculum based on a quite open national curriculum guide (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012). The upper secondary schools need, nevertheless, approval from the Ministry.

The system of internal and external evaluation was part of the NPM wave first implemented in upper secondary school legislation in 1996 (Act on Upper Secondary Schools No. 80/1996); it was continued in the 2008 legislation (Upper Secondary Education Act No. 92/2008). The aim of external evaluation is to monitor the quality of upper secondary schools by: 1) providing information on school practices, effectiveness, and development to the main stakeholders; 2) ensuring operation according the laws, regulations and national curricula; 3) improving the quality of learning and school practices; 4) ensuring school reform, and 5) guaranteeing students' rights and legal services.

The upper secondary school level is not monitored by national and international benchmarking to the same degree as it is in many other countries. The school level is, however, monitored using OECD comparisons (Ragnarsdóttir

& Jóhannesson, 2014), but there are no national tests similar to the benchmarking taking place at the compulsory school level.

Based on Jóhannesson, Geirsdóttir and Finnbogason (2002) work, it is possible to conclude that the schools became more hierarchical and business-like over time. These changes, alongside the reform in 1995, have not been without criticism, as they highlight. They further describe in their research an increased emphasis on performance management. They note a stronger focus on school performance and efficiency. Moreover, measurable aims appear as discursive themes in the underlying public documents, for example, agreements where schools become contractors. Furthermore, the authors address the silence around the term decentralisation in the underlying public documents they have evaluated. The term is not mentioned at all when referring to the upper secondary school level. However, the transfer of compulsory schools to the municipalities is discussed instead of decentralisation. The authors describe it as decentralisation rhetoric. Moreover, Jóhannesson et al. (2002) criticise an increased emphasis on external and internal evaluations at the cost of placing the child in the centre in order to achieve democratic aims in education.

The ideology of formula funding was implemented accompanying a regulation on upper secondary schools (Regulation on formula funding to calculate the teaching cost at the upper secondary school level No. 335/1999). This tool is used to distribute financial resources to the upper secondary schools. The distribution is based on school type and size, location, and programme combinations. The aim is to ensure professionalism in schools, as noted in the regulations, and promote financial discipline in teaching, school operations, and purchase of capital assets. Formula funding is also meant to make it possible to increase or reduce support regarding specific educational purposes in a consistent way, while at the same time considering the specific circumstances of individual schools. Formula funding aims at distributing financial resources fairly, thus functioning as a management model by looking at financial circumstances and the annual national budget. As described here, the distribution depends on school performance.

Thus, there have been substantial developments both at the system level, where there have been major institutional developments, but also at the organisational level, noting the influence of the NPM. Despite these notable developments, some of the institutional features of the Latin school are still visible in the system, and the robust rise of the numbers completing university entrance examinations was remarkably stable for the whole of the 20th century and into the 21st (Jónasson, 1997; 2003).

2.2 Current upper secondary education

The formal education system in Iceland consists of preschool (ages 1–6 years), compulsory (ages 6–16 years), upper secondary (ages 16–19 years and upwards), and higher education. While most children attend preschool at the early childhood level, it is not obligatory. The municipalities provide education at the preschool and compulsory school levels, and the state operates most of the upper secondary schools. In spring 2008, legislation for the three school levels was designed and published simultaneously (Compulsory School Act No. 91/2008; Preschool (Nursery Schools) Act No. 90/2008; Upper Secondary Education Act No. 92/2008), and the national curriculum guides for the school levels followed in 2011 (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012).

The role of the upper secondary education is threefold, as seen in Figure 1: 1) educate students for democratic citizenship (EDC) and to prepare them for life in general, 2) further education, and 3) preparation for the labour market (Upper Secondary Education Act No. 92/2008). Providing this level of schooling is an educational obligation of the state. All individuals who has completed education at the compulsory school level or reached the age of 16 are entitled to enrol in upper secondary school and study until the age of 18. In 2015, the upper secondary education which was previously organised as four years of study changed into three years, on average, even though the credit system still allows both slower and faster progress. Some schools were given a brief grace period to implement the change. After completing upper secondary school, students often seek more specialised education in the universities or join the labour market (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2014a).

The school setting (see Figure 1) of the upper secondary schools have two main dimensions: the school type, with three different categories of grammar, vocational, and comprehensive schools, and the school organisation, which can be either class-based or unit-credit based (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2014).

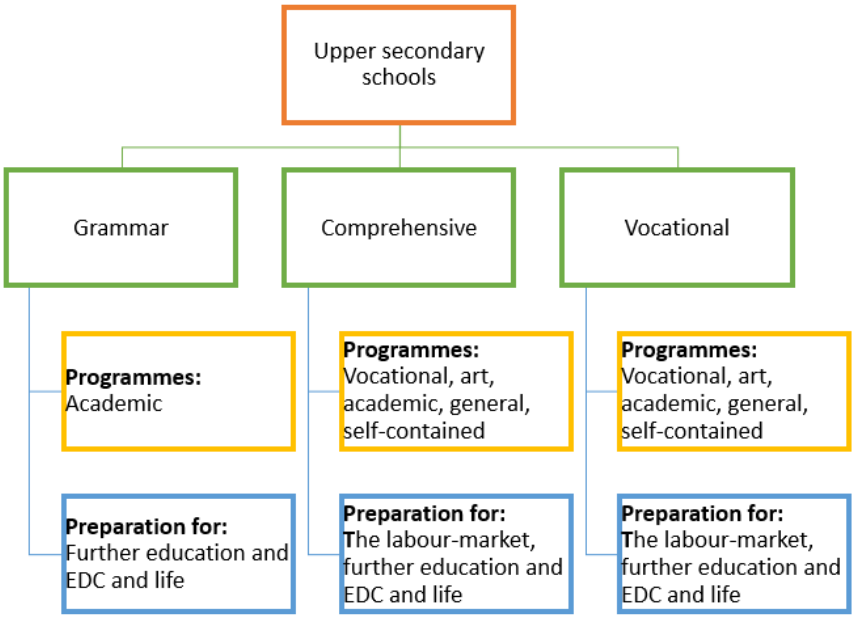

Figure 1. Upper secondary schools: Programmes and roles

Grammar schools mainly base their educational settings on traditional academic programmes and their structure is, in most cases, school-class-based. As noted, in schools with a class-based system, students follow the same student group throughout the school year and sometimes throughout their entire time of study. If they do not pass the school year, they need to repeat the whole year. The Icelandic name, *menntaskóli*, is often translated as gymnasium, with the exception of The Commercial College of Iceland (Verzlunarskóli Íslands), which belongs to this category. Almost all of the grammar schools receive more applicants than they can accommodate and select their students by grades, and at least one school claims to select students based on other issues such as social abilities gained from extracurricular activities (The Commercial College of Iceland, 2016).

The main idea of the unit-credit system used in comprehensive and vocational schools is flexibility it affords and ease of transfer between programmes. Students can mix courses of study depending on the courses offered by the schools. In the unit-credit system where the students do not follow the same student group, and if they do not pass one or more courses, they do not need to repeat the whole school year, only the course(s) that they did not pass.

The comprehensive and vocational schools consist of a mixture of academic, art, and vocational programmes, depending on school speciality. Vocational programmes provide training for specific trades or occupations, some of which are industry related and legally protected, while others are not. After graduating from vocational programmes that are industry related and educating students for legally protected occupations, students can attend study paths leading to master craftsman examinations. Academic programmes prepare students for further education at the in universities.

Comprehensive and vocational schools also offer general programmes for those students who have not reached the entrance requirements for other study paths at the school (Jónasson & Óskarsdóttir, 2016) and self-contained programmes for students with intellectual disabilities. The large majority of programmes and subjects in vocational schools have a professional orientation and traditional academic subjects are taught across programmes. The schools also offers other educational opportunities that are not part of formal, upper secondary schools and will not be discussed here (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2014).

The system of upper secondary schools is, in general, open to all students of all ages throughout their life span (Jónasson & Óskarsdóttir, 2016). In 2013, 27,118 students (Statistics Iceland, 2013a) studied in 34 schools spread over the island. One third of the students attended vocational programmes (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2016). The upper secondary schools have about 100 different programmes, including 87 vocational paths of study that vary in content and length from two to four years (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2014). Despite the fact that the majority of the programmes at the upper secondary school level are classified as vocational programmes, most of the students, or two third, graduate from academic programmes. The gap between graduation from these two study paths increased rapidly from 1970, when the number of students graduating from these two tracks was nearly equal, or around 500 students. Since then, the number of vocational students has almost remained constant, while the number of students graduating from academic programmes continued to increase (Jónasson & Óskarsdóttir, 2016).

The most common academic paths are natural sciences, social sciences, and languages. All the three school types offer traditional academic matriculation exams (Figure 1). Vocational and comprehensive schools also offer academic courses for students seeking matriculation exams as entrance to universities.

2.2.1 Actors with formal legal status

The professionals in upper secondary schools' work within the framework of the Upper Secondary Education Act No. 92/2008, national curriculum guide (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012), and the legislative framework for public services, known as Legislation of Public Administration (Public Administration Act No. 37/1993) and Legislation of Information (Information Act No. 50/1996). These acts create a working frame for public staff.

Several actors have formal involvement in the upper secondary school level in Iceland according to the act, but their scope of action varies. This variation raises questions about different powers and abilities to have an impact at the school level. The actors are either classified as external or internal actors (see Table 1) of the schools. External actors do not have a working or learning position in an upper secondary school, while internal actors have formal working or learning positions. Some of the actors can, however, be judged to be both external and internal. Below, these actors are discussed in the order they are presented in the table.

Table 1. Stakeholders in upper secondary education according to the Upper Secondary Education Act No. 92/2008

External actors
• Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture (MoESC) • Association of Icelandic Upper Secondary Schools, a subunit of the Teachers' Union • Other school levels: compulsory schools and universities • Councils for vocational studies • Vocational expert panels • Vocational committees • School boards • Local community
Internal actors
• School staff: school directors, teachers, and career and guidance counsellors • Student associations • Parent councils • School councils

As for the external actors, the MoESC and the minister are quite visible in the legislation (Upper Secondary Education Act No. 92/2008). The upper secondary

school level operates under the MoESC, which acts as a policy maker for schools by determining the frameworks of operation and promoting legislation and regulations. The MoESC is responsible for hiring school directors, study leaves of the educators, financial resources for the schools, all kinds of contracts, advisory bodies, the evaluation system, residence halls at public schools, initial investment costs of public schools, support, and the innovation fund for the lower school levels (kindergarten, compulsory schools, and the upper secondary schools).

The minister has considerable power and is quite visible within the act. The minister assumes responsibility for general administration, works in cooperation with local authorities, and nominates most of the councils and committees for the schools. In addition, the minister appoints the school director for each school, stipulates various rules and regulations, awards accreditations, and establishes contracts and agreements. Furthermore, the minister accredits the composition of the different tracks and ensures that the programmes meet the requirements of the university level. Specific operation guidelines and exemptions to the teacher educational requirements fall under the auspices of the minister. Operational funding based on formula funding and the general government budget guidelines are mediated by the minister.

The Teachers' Union lacks visibility in the Upper Secondary Education Act No. 92/2008. The Union is only noted in relation to vocational councils, then as having a representative in the councils.

The labour market as represented by delegates from companies is given considerable formal authority in the act. Vocational councils are extensively elaborated on. The tasks of the vocational councils is to consult with the minister regarding the aims of the vocational programmes and the competencies of students. Similar consultations with the universities are not mentioned in the act. Vocational councils set frameworks for the division of studies between schools and workplace training, provide suggestions for the structure and content of assessment, keep a record of companies and workplaces that fulfil the conditions for workplace studies, suggest study programmes, and review and report to the educational authorities on study paths. Vocational councils can create an expert panel for each occupation or occupational field. The expert panel consults on innovation in and development of the occupations and suggests specific experimental and developmental activities. Vocational councils then form the regulatory framework for the expert panels.

The labour market not only has formal involvement at the school level through the vocational councils, but also via vocational committees. The committee consults with the minister on policy making and the execution of

vocational studies. Additionally, the committee is a liaison for cooperation and coordination between the vocational councils and offers opinions on divisions and classifications of occupations among vocational councils.

School boards operate in each school as noted in the act. The aim of the school boards is to monitor the schools and give the school directors advice regarding programmes, curriculum, agreements, human resources, and financial planning. The aim is also to promote optimal service for the nearest environment, maintaining a strong connection to the labour market and social and cultural life. The boards provide the minister with a review of the applications for school director. Each board consists of two members appointed by the municipality and three appointed by the minister without external nomination. Three, non-voting members are nominated each year to the school board, one by the teachers, one by the students, and one by the parents. These observers can speak freely and submit proposals. The school director attends the meetings and acts as the chair. As addressed here, the act reinforces unequal power relations between the board members.

The local community is only mentioned in relation to cooperation in building and running schools at the local level.

Adjacent school levels are named in the legislation. The compulsory school level is only mentioned regarding the approval and registration of freshmen the upper secondary schools and when discussing the innovation fund and the legislation of formal education for teachers and career and guidance counsellors. In a similar vein, the university level is only discussed as the receiving school level after the matriculation examination and regarding examinations. The university level lacks visability in the act as compared to the significant influence of the labour market via school boards, vocational councils, expert panels, and vocational committees. This imbalance between actors contradicts the aim of the school level as preparing students for further education, for a job, and active participation in a democratic society.

The internal actors in the Upper Secondary Education Act No. 92/2008 are also given formal legal status. They are, however, not as visible in the act as compared to external actors, especially the labour market. School directors are mentioned more than any other position in the act, as noted by Jóhannesson (2016). The school director is responsible for daily administration, according to the rules of law, regulations, and the national curriculum guide (Upper Secondary Education Act No. 92/2008).

Teachers are not significantly in focus in the Upper Secondary Education Act No. 92/2008, even though they are mentioned most often after school directors (Jóhannesson, 2016). Then they are mainly discussed in relation to formal

matters. Their role is only mentioned in relation to student assessment under the school director's supervision, and the acts do not mention their teaching role. This contradicts the statements in the national curriculum guide (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012), that say student assessment is the teacher's responsibilities. It is also noteworthy how teaching is not seen as one of the leading roles of teachers. The national curriculum guide (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012) states, however, that the role of teachers is diverse, including teaching, diverse types of administration, "upbringing, counselling, research, and school development" (p. 266). The guide claims teacher professionalism should affect student welfare and education in general. Teacher professionalism is also specified from the perspective of evaluation of the schools, where school directors, in cooperation with the employees, are responsible for the functional quality of their upper secondary school. One of the places where teachers are also mentioned in the act is when addressing teacher meetings. At these meetings, school development, school curriculum, the organisation of learning, teaching methods, student assessment, and assessment periods are to be discussed.

Career and guidance counsellors are reported as eligible to serve as school directors and they are also noted in a short paragraph on the students' rights to have guidance from career and guidance counsellors. Other staff are discussed briefly, and only librarians received special, but limited, attention. Nevertheless, more diverse professional groups work at the school level, such as social pedagogues, occupational therapists, psychologists, professionals in health care, directors of finance, and other staff service areas, but none of them are discussed in the act.

Students have limited, formal involvement in the schools according to the act. Their avenue is via school meetings that take place at least once annually. These meetings are an attempt to increase the democratic participation of students in the schools. The meeting is for student representatives and all employees. This setup is rife for unequal power relations, with a few student representatives facing all the school employees. Students are also discussed in the act from the perspective of student associations having the role of protecting student interests and their welfare, as well as organizing student social events.

The school councils and parent councils are vaguely mentioned in the act and are overshadowed by the influence of the labour market. The councils act directly in each school. The school councils consist of the school director, assistant director, and student and teacher representatives. The role of the school council is to provide support and advice to the school director. Parent

councils support school practices, work on behalf of student interests, and promote cooperation between parents and guardians and the school.

2.2.2 Working conditions and the formal educational background of teachers and school leaders

In October 2011 there were 1,915 teachers working in upper secondary schools in Iceland (Statistics Iceland, 2013). Approximately one-third of these teachers were 50 to 59 years old, and up to one-fifth were 60 and older as shown in Figure 2 (Statistics Iceland, 2018a). In Iceland, the age for retirement is generally 67, but public employees can work until 70. This means that almost half of the teachers working in upper secondary schools at that time had reached the second half of their career.

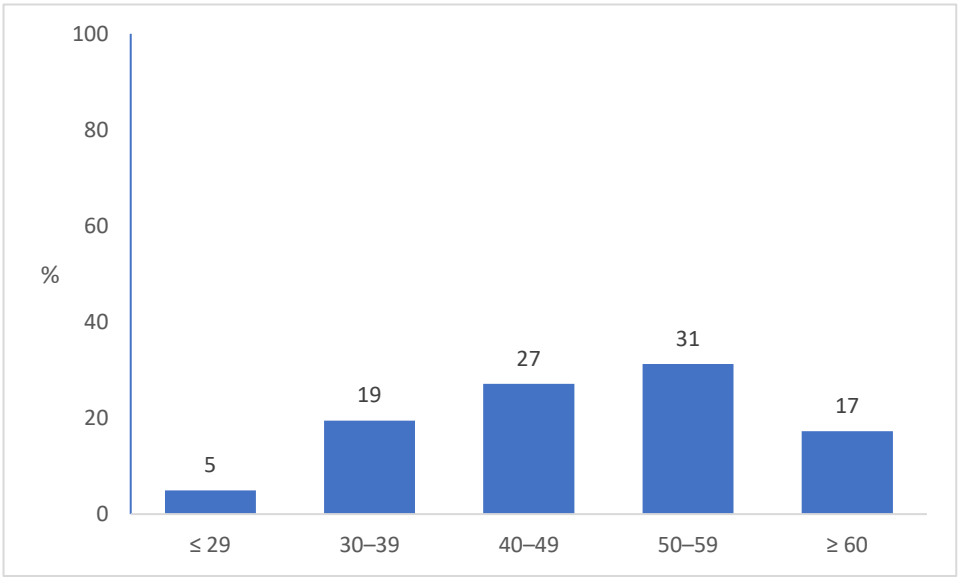

Figure 2. The age range of Upper secondary school teachers (N = 1889).

Currently, upper secondary school teachers teaching vocational subjects need to be qualified master craftsmen (a qualification is based upon work experience and a study programme at the upper secondary school level) and have completed at least a one-year diploma in teacher education at undergraduate level from a university to obtain a teaching licence. While a teacher teaching academic subjects at the upper secondary school level needs to have at least a bachelor's degree in the subject they teach as well as a two years master's degree in teacher education. However, if a person holds a master's degree in a field other than

teacher education, then that same person only needs an additional one-year diploma in teacher education at the graduate level to obtain a teacher's license (Act on the Education and Recruitment of Teachers and Administrators of Preschools, Compulsory Schools and Upper Secondary Schools No. 87/2008). Before 2008, the teachers licence for upper secondary teachers teaching academic subjects was a diploma in teacher education for teaching licence, but the system was the same as it is today for master craftsmen.

In 2011–2012, relatively few of the total upper secondary school teachers' population had an upper secondary degree, amounting to only 3%. Usually these teachers were teaching vocational subjects without having a teachers' licence. Two-thirds of the teachers' population had an undergraduate university degree, usually along with a teaching licence, and one-third had a graduate degree, of which 27% had a master's degree and 2% a doctoral degree (Statistics Iceland, 2018b). In total, 87% of the teachers had a teaching licence (Statistics Iceland, 2018a). This shows that upper secondary school teachers have either a degree in a master craftsman or a university degree in an academic subject.

The Minister selects a school director for each school from a pool of applicants. The position requires a teaching licence at the upper secondary school level and additional education in administration or teaching experience at the school level (Act on the Education and Recruitment of Teachers and Administrators of Preschools, Compulsory Schools and Upper Secondary Schools No. 87/2008). Hence, the school directors, without exception, have been teachers at the upper secondary level.

The school director hires other school administrators (Upper Secondary Education Act No. 92/2008); the number of which depends on the size and complexity of the school. This gives the school directors formal authority to organise the governing structure of the schools, if that is what they wish.

As previously noted, the school director is responsible for daily administration of the school according to the rules of law, regulations, and the national curriculum guide (Upper Secondary Education Act No. 92/2008).

School contracts (Icel. skólasamningar) between the ministry and the individual upper secondary schools are renewed every two to four years to establish a framework for dialogue between the ministry and the schools and to increase the cooperation between the parties. However, they also serve to allow the ministry more effective inspections of the upper secondary. The contracts deal with the duties of the contracting parties regarding regular cooperation and flow and disclosure of information. They also include information on the roles of the schools and their core study programmes, operational projects, finance, and other relevant issues (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, n.d.b).

The ministry also communicates with the school directors and monitors the schools through the external and internal evaluation system described in Section 2.1. After the evaluation process, they communicate through action plans constructed by school leaders to respond to the outcome of the external evaluation. The formula funding already discussed in Sections 2.1 and 2.2.1 is part of this process. The ministry also communicates with school leaders through regular, formal group meetings as well as ad hoc, informal meetings on an individual basis.

In 2011–2012, 49 (2.5%) upper secondary teachers worked as school directors, 29 (1.5%) as assistant school directors, and 207 (10.5%) as middle managers filling other managements positions, either part-time or full-time (Statistics Iceland, 2018b). The general governing structure of the upper secondary schools in Iceland was analysed by studying web pages of schools in the capital area, which covered the main school categories. The terminology on school leaders, their roles, and hierarchical levels are addressed in Table 2.

Table 2. Common roles of Icelandic school administration at the upper secondary school level

Term	Icelandic term	Role	Hierarchy
School director	Skólameistari Rektor	Responsible for school operations and all actions taken by the school.	Upper level
Assistant director	Aðstoðar-skólameistari Konrektor	Assists the director of the school and is the replacement in his/her absence. In small schools, the assistant director carries out all responsibilities described below.	Middle level
Registar	Áfangastjóri	Responsible for the school syllabus and timetables for students and the teachers. Is also responsible for admissions and graduation.	Middle level
Director of teaching and learning	Kennslustjóri Sviðsstjóri Námsstjóri	Responsible for all the teaching and learning that takes place in the school, as well as curriculum leadership and development, staff authority and professional development, and cooperation with parents and other interest groups.	Middle level
Depart-ment director	Fagstjóri Deildarstjóri	Acts as a subject curriculum leader and is responsible for teaching plans, textbook selection, assessment methods, teachers cooperation and coordination, development, and curriculum creation.	Lower level
Project managers	Verkefna-stjórar	Responsible for specific projects that vary from one school to another.	Lower level

2.2.3 Wages and collective bargaining agreements

School directors are not part of a union for the purpose of pay negotiation, as they fall directly under the national wage council (Icel. kjararáð). The council is an independent body that determines the salaries, remunerations, and all other benefits for staff in the highest governmental positions. It, inter alia, regulates wages for the president of Iceland, members of parliament, judges, and the directors of ministries and other state institutions (The National Wage Council, n.d.).

Middle managers in upper secondary schools holding more than a 50% managerial position, upper secondary school teachers, and career and guidance counsellors are part of the Upper Secondary School Teachers Association, a sub-division of the Teachers' Union (hereafter Teachers' Union (n.d.b)). The union negotiates collective bargaining agreements on their behalf with the Ministry of Finance in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture.

The collective bargaining agreements of upper secondary school teachers before the teachers' strike in 2014 included nine teaching months per year. Full-time teachers were expected to teach 24, 40-minute lessons per week, although some teachers with longer tenure had fewer teaching hours. The total combined teaching and student assessment days were 175, which equals 145 days of teaching and 30 days of evaluation over one school year. The working time was divided into preparation, teaching, and other work-related activities. In addition to the nine months, there were four days at the beginning and the end of each term, for a total of eight days per term and 16 days a year. At the beginning of each term, the time was dedicated to preparation. At the end of the term, the time was used for completing the term. Additionally, ten days a year were allocated to professional development. Those days were conducted outside of the school term and were under the control of the individual teachers. The school director could additionally allocated up to 3.9 hours to teachers monthly for coordination of school business, school meetings, and professional development (Ministry of Finance, 2005). This means that upper secondary school teachers' autonomy in professional development was, and still is, almost complete in Iceland.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture had a framework for the number of students in each class in the subject areas. The number of students in academic studies was 25 students per class and school directors could add 25% to that figure, or expand the class size to 31 students, before requesting special permission from the teacher (see Table 3, Column 2). For vocational studies, the target number was 12 students, with a maximum of 15 students per class, except in computer science. There, the target was 15 with a maximum of 19 students

(Advertisement on the Ratio of Units, Taught Lesson-Group Sizes and Changeable Norms in Upper Secondary Schools No. 4/2001).

Table 3. Comparison of the number of students in each subject categories before and after the new wage and working agreements

	Before the teachers' strike		**After the teachers' strike**		
Subject fields	**N**	**25%**	**N**	**Min**	**Max***
Academic	25	31			
Academic and sport			25	17	29
Natural sciences			22	15	26
Computer sciences	15	19	15	12	22
Vocational	12	15			
Vocational: practical training			12	8	14
Vocational (other teaching than practical) and art			15	10	18

*Each student exceeding the maximum limit comes with additional costs.

After the teachers' strikes in March and April of 2014, a new collective bargaining agreement between the Ministry of Finance (2014) and the Teachers' Union (n.d.a) was negotiated. The subject categories changed, as well as the number of students in each student group (Table 3, Column 3). The agreement included 180 days of teaching and assessing, as compared to 175 before, and the boundary between teaching and assessment periods was made considerably more flexible. The work of teachers is divided into three categories and spans a total of 1800 working hours per year:

A. Teaching and assessment are 1,440 hours of work per year.
B. In total, 360 hours per year are allotted to tasks other than teaching.
C. Extra responsibilities are deducted from category A.

Currently, the work of the teachers is evaluated based on different categories depending on the nature of the subject fields, the level of the subject taught, if the same subject is repeated by the same teacher, and the different number of students in the classes. How teachers organise and prepare lessons within the syllabus, the time teachers dedicate to preparation, how the teaching is

organised (i.e. practical training, direct teaching, or other teaching methods), and time spent with students are also part of the evaluation. Various forms of cooperation are evaluated, as is participation in innovation projects and implementation of new ideas. The nature of the assessment methods also counts, i.e., continuous assessment, final exams, and/or formative assessment. This diversity is meant to even the evaluated workload between teachers with and between subject fields in accord with the actual workload.

The criteria for the number of students in each classroom is slightly different now and contains more subcategories (see Table 3, Column 3). The school director has greater financial restrictions when planning and filling the student groups. After the 20% limit, each extra student added to the student group is more expensive for the school since the teacher receives a higher salary. Once the 25% limit is reached, the cost per student is doubled. There is also a minimum number of students in each group that was not part of the previous agreement.

2.2.4 Current policies

The upper secondary school level is undergoing a period of change set off by legislation in 2008 (Upper Secondary Education Act No. 92/2008) and the national curriculum guide in 2011 (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012). According to additional legislation (Amendment No. 71/2010 to the Upper Secondary Education Act No. 92/2008), the implementation was supposed to be complete in 2015, but still in 2017 some schools have not fully implemented all aspects of the curriculum as appear in the approval process of MoESC (n.d.a). The national curriculum guide (2011) expresses a demand and motivation for ongoing educational change and active professional development. Thus, practitioners working at the upper secondary school level in Iceland play a key role as change agents in decentralised curriculum creation and implementation (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012; Upper Secondary School Act No. 92/2008).

The law referred to above contained notable changes from previous educational legislation and national curricula (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 1999, 2012; Upper Secondary Education Act No. 80/1996; Upper Secondary School Act No. 92/2008). Ten categories of curricular change are highlighted here. The first two are the decentralised curriculum design and implementation; and the new credit system called upper secondary school credits (*framhaldsskólaeiningar*). Thirdly, only three compulsory subjects, Icelandic, mathematics, and English, exist across all upper secondary programmes and only a few subjects for matriculation examinations are discussed. In constrast, quite a number of subjects received considerable space

in the 1999 curriculum. Fourthly, a strong focus is placed on knowledge, skills, and competence-based education. The fifth category is the six fundamental pillars across programmes and school practices: literacy, sustainability, democracy and human rights, equality, health and well-being, and creativity. The sixth category relates to an attempt to give vocational and academic studies equal formal status within the education system. The seventh category allows for a shorter time to complete the school level. The eighth is a stronger emphasis on programmatic diversity. The ninth, focusses on increased student support. The final category covers the expanded role of the teaching profession and includes active participation in school development and its implementation. Changes in practice and professional development form a discursive theme in the guide, as well as the fundamental pillars and competence-based education.

The national curriculum guide (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012) left undiscussed most of the subjects from the previous National Curriculum of 1999. In the first draft of the curriculum guide the mandatory subjects, Icelandic, English, and mathematics were the only subjects in focus. However, after intense protests from certain groups of teachers, Danish joined subjects listed in the final curriculum guide as the third language.

The change manifested in the 2008 act has diverse and interrelated origins. Notable among these are the historical legacy within education as previously noted in Section 2.1, the political arena, and the public, societal discourse as will be discussed in the following text.

The political perspective is influenced by international and national sources due to developmental issues, agreements, regulations, and legislation. The decentralised emphasis in curriculum design and implementation entered legislation in 2008 (Upper Secondary School Act No. 92/2008), partly adapted from the international, neo-liberal wave that spread across the Western world late last century and entered the public services in Iceland in 1995 (Kristinsson, 2006). However, we can also assume that decentralisation is meant to motivate and empower practitioners at the upper secondary school level to use their experience, expertise, and knowledge to meet an increasingly diverse student body and to support ongoing professional development and general educational change.

Moreover, competence-based education in the national curriculum guide (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012) has roots in international agreements from the European Commission (2008). The six fundamental pillars mentioned above developed from the key competences. The national curriculum guide (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012) clarifies the link between these ideas as follows, “[k]ey competence is to link the fundamental

pillars to the objectives of student competence upon graduation" (p. 31). The pillars are also a political act in line with Iceland 2020 – Governmental Policy Statement for the Economy and Community (Prime Minister's Office, n.d.) and in line wtih other policy documents (Ministry for the Environment and Natural Resources, n.d.) and regulations (Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women and Men No. 10/2008). The pillar of democracy, including human rights education and education for democratic citizenship, traces its source to the European Commission (Green, Leney, & Wolf, 1999; Schimmelfennig & Scholtz, 2008) and the Council of Europe (Huber, Mompoint-Gailard, Degésys, Loizidou, Harris, & Ivatts, 2011). Iceland has been part of the Council since 1950 (Ministry for Foreign Affairs, n.d.). Thus, European agreements coming from the Council have an impact in Iceland.

Furthermore, diverse interest groups were involved at different levels in the writing of the national curriculum guide (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012), for example, experts and researchers from the university level, upper secondary school teachers, school leaders, and stakeholders from the labour market (Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, 2010b). These interest groups contributed their knowledge and experience from the scientific community, the field, and the labour market.

2.2.5 Recent political debate

There has been an ongoing political debate for a decade now on shortening the matriculation examination programmes at the upper secondary school level in Iceland, and this idea had support irrespective of the political party in charge during each election period. The idea has also received support from the Confederation of Employers (Association of Teachers in Upper Secondary Schools, n.d.; Business Iceland, n.d.; Guðmundsson, 2010; Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, 2003, 2004; Sverrisdóttir, 2013). This debate on shorter upper secondary education can be traced back to 1971, as highlighted in a report written by the The Reykjavík School Inspectorate (*fræðsluskrifstofa*) in Reykjavík (Reykjavík School Inspectorate, 1971). It can even be traced further back to a 1963 newspaper report on a conference. The minister of education, Gíslason, introduced in the paper the idea of shortening the matriculation examination programmes to two years (Morgunblaðið, 1963). The discussion continued, however intermittently, over 40 years before the idea was finally implemented.

From the beginning, it was difficult to implement the amendment of the Upper Secondary Education Act No. 92/2008 and the ideology of the national curriculum guide (Ragnarsdóttir & Jóhannesson, 2014). The existing bargaining agreements and the working time definitions for the professions were not in

accord with the legislation and the curricula. Therefore, the collective agreements for upper secondary school teachers were under debate.

In 2014, upper secondary school teachers and other educators belonging to the union went on strike, claiming they had fallen far behind comparable professions in salaries. In parallel with the negotiation on the bargaining agreements, the government used the opportunity to reconstruct the working definitions of upper secondary school teachers in cooperation with the Teachers' Union. The reason was due to an imbalanced and unjust system. Teaching hours and student numbers in each group were ill-adjusted to the increased diversity of students attending the school levels, and the work and workload of different groups of teachers were unequal (Ragnarsdóttir, 2012a; 2012b; 2012c). Teachers have also experienced a changing role and increased work demands (Reynisdóttir & Jóhannesson, 2013). Thus, a state of turmoil existed regarding the creation and implementation of a decentralised curriculum, the new credit system, lengthening of the school year, changes to the evaluation period, current collective bargaining (Ragnarsdóttir & Jóhannesson, 2014), and shortening the study paths at the upper secondary school level, as previously discussed.

The Minister of Education, Science and Culture used the discourse of shortening the upper secondary programmes as a negotiation tool when negotiating for new collective bargaining agreements. He offered the education professionals on strike higher salaries if they agreed to the shortened terms (Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs, 2014). The outcome was a new agreement with a commitment on behalf of the main stakeholders to further pursue the new work definitions in line with the legislation (Upper Secondary Education Ac No. 92/2008) and the national curriculum guide (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012).

The registration system for upper secondary school students, in combination with marketization, reinforces the academic elite when schools compete for students with high academic performance and social capacity (DV, 2017). The MoESC tried to change the recruitment process by demanding schools to offer 45% of students in their local environment seats in their local schools. However, some parents fought against the change and complained to The Althing Ombudsman (2010) in Iceland, who requested that the new recruitment system be withdrawn. This analysis of segregation between elite and not-so-elitist, as well as academic vs. vocational, is in line with the conclusions drawn by Jóhannesson et al. (2002).

Formula funding as a tool has been under debate for a while now and the financial crisis added extra pressure on the schools according to the National Audit Office (2014). The main debate revolves around transparency and

complexity. School directors point out how unclear the formula funding is and that it does not support professionalism of educators. They also point out unrealistic salary benchmarks and indicate that the tool does not serve as a useful communication instrument for the schools and the Ministry. Furthermore, students' dropout rates vary from one school to another due to diverse student populations and different study paths. Hence, the performance criteria are often judged to be unfair.

In 2014, the parliament, called Althing, restricted somewhat the accessibility at the school level for students 25 years old and older studying for matriculation exam programmes, and unexpected cuts in the government's budgeting draft followed (Althing, 2014, 2015). This intervention caused an intensive public debate (Markúsdóttir, 2015; Pétursson, 2014). Now, these students need to find other solutions if they wish to attain a degree in academic programmes at the upper secondary school level. This political act brings in inequality between study paths. Students following academic paths need to complete their matriculation exams before 25, while vocational students can study in upper secondary schools throughout their lives. This political act contradicts Jóhannesson and Bjarnadóttir's (2016) conclusion in an interview study with students who returned to school about the importance of having the opportunity to attend academic programmes within the upper secondary school level.

3 Conceptual and analytical framework

When studying upper secondary schools and their social and educational environment, institutional and organisational lenses (e.g. Kraatz, 2009; Raffaelli & Glynn, 2015; Scott, 2014; Thornton et al., 2012) are used in the thesis to build an analytical framework. This is done to understand the interactions and effects of various influences and elements that facilitate or constrain change across system boundaries. Here, the influences are traced either to actors or to social structures as grouped by Scott (2014). Both conceptual categories will guide the following discussion.

A theoretical discussion is used to understand schools and to relate infrastructures as institutions, organisations, or both. The theories are useful in identifying topics that otherwise might have been overlooked. Nevertheless, the theories do not impede topics arising from the data. The concepts in the analytical framework mainly rely on the leading scholars in the field, such as the works of Scott (2014), and Thornton et al. (2012), but the writing of other theorists, such as Coburn (2004), Waks (2007), Ball et al. (2012), Selznick (1949; 1957), Washington et al. (2008), and Kraatz (2009) are used to enhance the framework.

Lawrence, Leca, and Zilber (2013) trace writing about institutions and organisations back to Selznick (1949; 1957). In the 1980s, the phenomenon of institutions and organisations was brought to life under the umbrella of neo-institutionalism by DiMaggio and Powell (1983) and Meyer and Rowan (1977). The theories are broad and comprise several, interrelated concepts.

In this section, the principal concepts that underpin the conceptual and analytical framework are defined. The focus is first on actors and social structures, where actors can be either individuals or groups of people, while social structures are humanly created activities and their relations (Scott, 2014). Thereafter, the focus will be on the varying nature of organisations and institutions, where Scott's (2014) ideas about the phenomena are utilised (see also Ball, 1987; Thornton et al. 2012; Waks, 2007), but also the ideas of Kraatz (2009), Raffaelli and Glynn (2015), and Washington et al. (2008). Thereafter, the theoretical discussion will turn to the difference between institutional and organisational leadership (Kraatz, 2009; Raffaelli & Glynn, 2015; Selznick, 1949; 1957; Washington et al., 2008). Then the focus will be on three system levels: macro, meso, and micro (see Erez & Gati, 2004; Thornton et al. 2012) and their boundaries (Kauko et al., 2012; Thornton et al., 2012) in order to understand the

dynamics of change (Fullan, 2011; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2012; Kauko et al., 2012; Malone, 2013; Thornton et al., 2012) and its complexity. Hence, the ideas incorporated in the theories of institutional logic (Thornton et al., 2012) are useful in offering models for social arenas and societal subsystems. Following that, the attention will be on macro-level demands for change, which Ball et al. (2012) would call policy implementation. The way in which schools respond to this will be based on Coburn's (2004) classification of teachers' responses to macro-level demand for change, which is what Ball et al. (2012) would rather refer to as policy enactment. In the end, the analytical framework is summarised.

3.1 Actors and social structures

In developing the analytical framework, I first draw on Scott's (2014) definition of actors. He defines the concept as an individual or a group of individuals that interact and create the social landscape of our lives. An actor, according to Scott (2014), can belong to a profession, associations of various kinds, the general population, organisation, or organisational field. Based on this, when more than one person collectively act together, then the group is also called an actor. The same person usually takes on various roles and interacts at several levels in society.

Further, Scott (2014) highlights how actors are socially moulded through "processing institutionally defined identities including capacities, rights, and responsibilities. The institutional elements at work are primarily cultural-cognitive, especially in their constructive capacity and normative" (p. 228). It is, therefore, the context of the institutional frame, according to Scott, that determines the degree to which, and in what sense, a person or a group can have an impact on change. Hence, when analysing any given actor, it is important to determine the context that moulds the actor's performance.

In Scott's (2014) discussion of agents, he addresses actors and change in relation to the concept of agency which he defines as an actor's "ability to have some effect on the social world—altering the rules, relational ties, or distribution of resources" (p. 94). He describes how different actors have various agencies, or capacities, to act, and "the amount of agency varies greatly" (p. 95) depending on the social structures and boundaries, as well as on the personal characteristics and abilities of the actor. Thus, according to Scott (2014), agency is modulated by the personal characteristics of the actors, social characteristics of the structures, and by the characteristics of the institutions. The actors' actions should be analysed in terms of the agency. For example, their potential to act. In this dissertation, the agency of identified actors and their capacity to act is examined to analyse their impact on and influence over change at the upper

secondary school level. The agency of the identified actors and their ability to act will be compared to the formal position of actors in public documents, as discussed in Section 2.2.1, and their actual impact in educational practices at the school level.

As indicated by Scott (2014), agency delivers power in institutional processes. Similarly, Thornton et al. (2012) point out that the concepts of power and agency are closely related, as agency reflects the power to act. When discussing the notion of power, Scott's (2014) definition of bottom-up and top-down approaches is useful. Bottom-up approaches are in operation when subordinated groups in the hierarchical ladder are given, or assume the power, to make changes and influence other actors to enforce their interests and values. Mirroring bottom-up approaches, top-down approaches are ideas, commands, and directives, usually from those with higher hierarchal ranking (Hallinger, 2003; Scott, 2014). This occurs, for example, when actors ranking higher in the hierarchical ladder authorise actors in lower position to make changes.

When discussing agency and power, it is also important to consider authority. Weber (1947) defines authority as "the probability that certain specific commands (or all commands) from a given source will be obeyed by a given group of persons" (p. 324). The group follows willingly as they consider the control over them legitimate according to Blau and Scott (1962). But what is legitimacy? Legitimacy, according to Scott (2014), is power generated and generalised by a group or the whole society as being something good and desirable. Hence, legitimacy is socially constructed and controlled by norms, values, and traditions.

In relation to legitimate authority, Hoy and Miskel (2013) point out how organisations "are created and controlled" (p. 230). Further, they indicate that, through legitimate authority, aims, social structures, organisational personnel, and control establish and steer certain behaviour within organisations. The same applies to certain activities within organisations. Then Hoy and Miskel (2013) echo their understanding of legitimate authority in schools and highlight three main characteristics: "(1) willingness of subordinates to comply; (2) a suspension of the subordinates' criteria for making a decision prior to a directive; and (3) a power relationship legitimized by the norms of a group" (p. 231).

In actors' interactions, tensions can arise that vary in nature and scope. The terms competition (Ball et al., 2012) are also used when actors compete over resources, power struggle (Thornton et al., 2012) when groups clash over power, and inertia (Scott, 2014) when unshakable principles and traditions guide human behaviour. These terms are an important part of the analytical framework and help to understand the degree of resistance to change. In addition, they describe

how different kinds of social structures and situations influence the interaction of actors.

When discussing actors and agency, it is important to consider social structures. Scott (2014) leans towards Giddens' (see 1979; 1984) definition of structuration when describing social structures. Scott (2014) states that social structure "involves the patterning of social activities and relation through time and across space. Social structures only exist as patterned social activities, incorporating rules, relations, and resources reproduced over time" (p. 93). Since social structures are usually created by humans, they can be both products, such as agreements, acts, rules, objects, frameworks, or other resources, as well as platforms where social actions take place. Thornton et al. (2012), however, claim that Giddens neglects vested interests when defining social structure and highlight that such interests are often self-oriented. They also indicate that Giddens overlooks power and proclivities in his discussion on social structures. They claim that self-interest, proclivities, and power govern which structures dominate and survive. Thornton and associates (2012) further suggest that actors use power systematically to express their interests based on their locations within the system. This is relevant in the current work when looking at various kinds of change, and if and how it is enacted.

The concept of social structures is important, since various parts of the system can have an impact by virtue of their status as rules or law, such as the law on upper secondary education. These constitute social structures which may substantially mould the operation of the investigated upper secondary schools. This would also hold for financial remuneration that is intended to steer the operation of the upper secondary schools and consists of a cumbersome, or at least complicated, rule system or even the physical space in school buildings. Social structures, therefore, are devised by actors and are important steering influences.

Scott (2014), Thornton et al. (2012), Coburn (2004), and Ball et al. (2012) indicate that different actors and social structures can either facilitate or constrain change in the setting in which they operate or even across system boundaries. They can be grouped based on their different identities, capacities, rights, and responsibilities (Scott, 2014) in relation to the upper secondary school level in Iceland. Some of the actors have formal legal status, as discussed in Section 2.2.1. There, some actors are given considerable space, while others are not even mentioned. This gives some actors more power than others and draws attention to the interaction between agency and power as discussed by Scott (2014) and Thornton et al. (2012).

3.2 Organisations and institutions

In the school and leadership literature, both phenomena of organisations and institutions loom high, but are often used separately. In this connection, two

important perspectives are brought in. They relate to the different natures of organisations and institutions. Are they different types of entities that apply to totally different spheres of the social world? Also, are they only different in kind, and can they, in principle, exist at the same level within the education system?

Education encompasses a huge arena with different operational levels and a variety of interactions between actors and social structures. In this context, it will be argued that the ideas of organisations and institutions can fruitfully be used as an analytical framework. The leading scholars guiding the analytical framework are Scott (2014) and his work on organisations and institutions as well as Selznick (see Kraatz, 2009; Raffaelli & Glynn, 2015; Selznick, 1949; 1957; Washington et al., 2008) who also focuses on organisational and institutional leadership. Then Waks's (2007) ideas on fundamental educational and fundamental organisational change. These scholars' work will facilitate understanding of the phenomenon of education, the upper secondary school level in general, and in several, specific upper secondary schools. This is done in order to present a more holistic picture of the dynamics involved and to draw attention to the complexity of interactions and the effects of various actors and social structures within the system and across system boundaries of the school level.

When it comes to organisations, Waks's (2007) definition of the term refers to a structural unity were certain work and tasks take place. Washington et al. (2008) agree and give the simple argument that organisations are rational instruments designed around a job. Ball (1987), however, defines organisations in a more complex way. Organisations, as he writes, consist of individuals in their every day practices when dealing with others within the circumstances of their work. Their circumstances are linked to the setups, management, and "intra-organisational processes" (p. 3) of change and development within individual organisations. Ball describes how social psychologists use groups and organisations in the same way as organisational theories use the term meso level.

Scott's (2014) understanding of organisations and organisational fields differs partly from other scholars. He sees organisations as more separated from their environment than institutions. They are a socially constructed unit developed by the individuals acting within them. These individuals usually consist of homogeneous populations performing rather uniform work. In this relation, Scott (2014) argues that organisations operate in a specific arena and are defined functionally, technically, and institutionally. Organisations are also associated with partners, regulations, and resources. They usually control their performance with top-down approaches through hierarchical structures, rules,

and regulations that are shaped and regulated by institutions. Thus, some organisational activities are controlled down the hierarchical ladder by rules and regulations as an attempt to control the behaviour within them. This puts the focus "on the structure and tactics of the enforcement agency" (p. 207), while others are bottom-up. In organisational settings, the emphasis is on the meaning of system and the way in which they are constructed and reconstructed in social actions.

Scott (2014) defines organisational fields as a set of "diverse, interdependent organisations that participate in a common meaning system" (p. 106). Thus, it is possible to say that the upper secondary school level in Iceland forms an organisational field with all the diverse, interdependent upper secondary schools participating together as a unit within the education system. Scott (2014) also points out how institutional logic, relational systems, and organisational field boundaries are the key concepts of organisational fields. In relation to this, the ideas of Kraatz and Moore's (2002) on interorganisational learning are beneficial in describing the connection between organisations, as the term refers to the diffusion of current ideas between organisations. They also point out how leaders are important when bringing current ideas into an organisation. Kraatz and Moore (2002) emphasise migration of leaders between organisations as a way to diffuse new ideas. In this thesis, their idea on interorganisational learning is used to understand how new ideas flow between schools.

Selznick (1949; 1957) suggested that organisations and institutions could be viewed as certain archetypes (see also Kraatz, 2009; Raffaelli & Glynn, 2015). In line with Scott's (2014) definition of organisations, Kraatz (2009) and Raffaelli and Glynn (2015) view organisations as independent units that are narrowly and technically defined. They state that organisations are constructed socially by individuals and designed rationally to achieve clear and fixed aims to move forward. The staff within organisations fill formal positions and the administrative structure of organisations are formal. The existence and decisions are justified on technical grounds, for example, in terms of efficiency.

In contrast to organisations, institutions as defined by Washington et al. (2008) are some kind of natural product based on social needs where the pressure comes from external sources, on one hand, and the internal sources, on the other, or from the inside of the organisation. Similarly, Waks (2007) argues that institutions form the background of all the organisations within the same field. Based on these definitions, it is possible to conclude that education is the institutional background of all schools as organisations.

Scott (2014) stresses, however, that institutions have jurisdiction over several levels by operating, either alone or together, throughout the world or within

subunits of organisations. Diving deeper into his definition on institutions. The term refers to a number of elements that, in combination with related activities and resources, provide for stability and meaning. Scott details this definition by stating that institutions are complex, long-lasting, and socially constructed by symbolic elements. The symbolic elements are "regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive" (p. 57). These three elements are the three pillars of institutions. The regulative pillar represents the legislative frame and the systems of rules and regulations controlling the organisations. The normative pillar refers to "normative rules that introduce perspective, evaluative, and obligatory dimensions of social life" (p. 64). Professional roles, values, and norms fall, for example, under the normative pillar. Finally, the cultural-cognitive pillar consists of "shared conceptions that constitute the nature of social reality and the frames through which meaning is made" (p. 67).

Scott (2014) indicates that institutions create their backgrounds based on the past, and this transfers across generations. The phenomenon of institutions according to him represents stability where processes are monitored by diverse actors that resist change. Therefore, similar ideas, habits, norms, purposes, and frameworks guide human behaviour and mechanisms within institutions. As previously discussed, social activities take place within institutions and are supported by diverse resources. Despite of resistance to change, Scott emphasises how institutions undergo slow change over a long period of time.

Selznick (1949; 1957), Kraatz (2009), and Raffaelli and Glynn (2015) define institutions as informal units infused by values and identities emerging from society. Institutions are politically diverse in nature and their aims are not rigid. Institutions are broken into subcategories and their administrative structure is generally informal. Both norms and shared beliefs are in force and relationships are interpersonal. Interest groups also have impact within institutions and gained ideology guides their actions. These scholars (Selznick, 1949; 1957; Kraatz, 2009; Raffaelli & Glynn, 2015) also claim that institutions are composed of persons who are able to step out of their roles and who are deeply affected by the external context and heavily impacted by the organisational history and its rationale for existence.

When it comes to the connection between institutions and organisations, Greenwood, Oliver, Suddaby, and Sahlin-Andersson (2008), Thornton et al. (2012) and Zilber (2016) show that institutional logic shapes behaviour within organisations. In a similar vein, Scott (2014) describes how a broad range of cultural norms influences organisational behaviour. To take this further, Thornton and Ocasio (2008) state the following: "Key constructs in the analysis of organization, such as efficiency, rationality, participation, and values are not

neutral, but are themselves shaped by the logics of inter-institutional systems" (p. 105). Scott (2014) claims that the mechanism of institutions constrains the structure of organisations and their activities. Recent studies on organisations focus, however, on how organisations and individuals emphasise change and affect institutions in interactive processes.

Selznick (1957; 1996) brings a different perspective to the connection between organisations and institutions by identifying the process of organisations turning into institutions as institutionalisation. In Selznick's 1996 paper, he defines it as the "emergence of orderly, stable, socially integrating patterns out of unstable, loosely organized, or narrowly technical activities" (p. 271). Washington et al., (2008) take a similar view and point out that some organisations can, over time, develop into institutions. Kraatz (2009) agrees with Washington and associates (2008) and further emphasises the importance of studying organisations as institutions. Correspondingly, Ansell, Boin, and Farjoun (2015) describe how organisations turn into institutions after processes of institutionalisation. They, however, stress that an institution is more than an organisation. An institution, as they see it, is an organisation that "has become valued by employees, clients and stakeholders . . . embedded in the society, as a symbol of that society's aspirations and accomplishments" (p. 91). Further, they describe organisations as being in a different place in the process. Similarly, Scott (2014) points out how a system of actions are institutionalised when "actors in an ongoing relation oriented their action to a common set of normative standards and value patterns" (p. 16). Scott stresses that such actions are "motivated by moral rather than by instrumental concerns" (p. 16). In that way, culture influences human behaviour.

In contrast, Kraatz and Moore (2002) introduce the term "deinstitutionalisation" (p. 121), referring to processes that are the opposite of institutionalisation. The term, as defined by Oliver (1992), refers to "the erosion or discontinuity of an institutionalized organisational activity or practice" (p. 563). Deinstitutionalisation explains how stability can transfer to a more organic process of change. Kraatz and Moore (2002) also point out that pressure from society and the political landscape can promote deinstitutionalisation, the same is visible in Oliver's (1992) work. He especially points out change in governments, rules and regulations. When it comes to the societal landscape, he emphasises that societal values impact the political landscape. Oliver (1992) also states that several internal influences can lead to deinstitutionalisation of an organisation, such as performance challenges and crises. He indicates that success within organisations maintains institutionalisation. He further states that situations, such as conflicts, change of power and leaders, and weak mechanisms of socialisation lead to deinstitutionalisation.

Scott (2014), however, states that "[d]einstitutionalisation refers to the processes by which institutions are weaken and disappear" (p. 166). Scott also refers to Oliver (1992) when describing how "functional, political and social" (p. 167) pressures stimulate the processes of institutionalisation. Functional pressure usually occurs during performance crises in institutionalised practices; political pressure occurs, however, when power is differently distributed. Finally, social pressures occur when changes in groups and general normative consensus are deconstructed. He further states when discussing functional pressure that deinstitutionalisation "can be reframed as institutional change" (p. 167).

Reflecting on organisations and institutions as shown above scholars, it is possible to cluster schools on one hand having characteristics of organisations and the other hand as having the characteristics of institutions. Ball (1987) agrees and states that schools are prearranged as organisations. They form a structural unit with several hierarchical levels. They are constructed by individuals working within the schools, where the main aim is to teach and learn. The professionals working in the schools have different legal agency. Schools have also characteristics of institutions as they are governed by values and honour customs, norms, and traditions that have accompanied education for centuries as discussed in Section 2.1. Jónasson (2016) agrees and notes how complicated the system of education is. He affirms that the system of education, the schools as an interconnected system of organisational fields, and individual schools, can be regarded as institutions functioning as units resting on stable principles, traditions, values, and norms. The institutional characteristics of education have considerable powers that are difficult to overcome. Thus, each school tends to function as an organisation or an institution depending on the characteristics of the individual school and the involved actors and social structures.

3.3 Organisational and institutional leadership

The theories of leadership within institutions and organisations (Kraatz, 2009; Raffaelli & Glynn, 2015; Selznick, 1949; 1957) imply that both types of entities can be led, even though scholars do not necessarily imply that institutions and organisations are at the same level. Thus, the leadership literature is important from at least two perspectives. First, it brings up questions about the level or category of the different entities. Second, it draws attention to the different types of leaders.

Given the understanding that a school can have the characteristics of both an organisation and an institution, as discussed in Section 3.2, the school leadership may be affected by both as well. Thus, effective educational leaders need to be viewed not only as administrative heads of organisations, but also as institutional

leaders. Kraatz (2009), Raffaelli and Glynn (2015), and Washington et al. (2008) discuss how scholars have neglected the existence of institutional leadership over the last decades by mainly emphasising organisational leadership. All of them focus on bringing to life Selznick's (1957) work on institutional leadership by updating his theories.

Raffaelli and Glynn (2015) make an effort to define the term value. Their definition is rather broad and goes beyond the individual level. They combine the ideas of Schwarts (1999) and Snow, Rochford, Worden, and Benford (1986) by highlighting individuals and organisations carrying on the values from the past to the future. History plays a significant role in this process. In this way, values form the building blocks of the organisations. These values then guide social actors within the organisation when selecting actions and evaluating the events taking place within the organisation and the people involved. This is done when social actors clarify their own judgment and actions taken. Hence, values of individuals are linked to the values carried out by leaders and the organisation as the whole. Since Scott (2014) talks about the societal impact in his writing and Thornton et al. (2012) discuss the impact from the macro level in the theories of institutional logic, it is possible to assume that the values carried out by society and the macro level influence the values held by the organisations all the way down to the individuals acting there.

As reported, Kraatz (2009), Raffaelli and Glynn (2015), and Washington et al. (2008) differentiate between institutional and organisational leadership (see Table 4). All of them describe how institutional leaders tend to protect the institutional norms and values of the organisation. They point out that organisational leaders act more like managers, focusing on the function of the organisation and its technical parts, while institutional leaders strive to maintain the homeostasis of the organisation by protecting its history.

Table 4. The difference between institutional and organisational leadership (Washington et al., 2008, p. 730)

	Organisational leadership	Institutional leadership
Agency	The leaders are instrumental and rational in their actions.	The leaders promote the values embodied in the organisations and tend to mute and constrain change.
Power	The leaders are task-oriented and strive to guide subordinates with their charisma. By doing so, they are hierarchical and supervisory.	The leaders are political striving to influence and negotiate.
Role of vision	The leaders focus on moving the organisation forward to new aims and challenges.	The leaders attempt to reconnect the organisation to its original values.

Washington et al. (2008) describe the way that institutional leaders promote the status quo of their organisations by infusing it with values when defending the existing organisational practices. The leaders infuse the institutional values to

> manage the internal consistency . . . develop external supporting mechanism that lead to increasing legitimacy of the organization . . . enabling a wide range of interaction inside and outside of the organization, . . . [and how they] must overcome external enemies. (p. 731)

Raffaelli and Glynn (2015) agree and point out the importance of social actors as leaders when acting within their organisations. The leaders tend to establish and maintain the institutional values of the organisation. In that way, leaders convert organisations into institutions. The leaders participating in Raffaelli and Glynn's (2015) research, fit into this frame. They claim to "function as transformational mechanisms of value infusion in the institutionalization of organizations" (p. 283). In a similar vein, the institutional leader, according to Selznick (1957), acts as an "agent of institutionalisation" (p. 57). Similarly, Lawrence et al. (2013) argue that leaders play "an important role in shaping organizations as institutions through their distinctive institutional work" (p. 1026). However, leaders do not

act alone in the process of institutionalisation. Other organisational actors promote the same processes (Raffaelli & Glynn, 2015).

Raffaelli and Glynn (2015) view an organisational leader as "a rational actor with a narrow and formal role" (p. 288). This is the same criteria that Selznick (1957) uses when describing administrative management. Raffaelli and Glynn (2015) specify that interpersonal relationships are incorporated in the social order of institutions. They highlight actions in organisations as governed by norms and beliefs, with the members acting in such setups governed by mission and ideology embedded in their history, traditions, and norms while within the organisational setup they are "role bounded" (p. 288). In such setups, leaders promote their schools as institution and act as protectors of the integrity of the institution and its values. Institutional leaders cannot, however, look past the administrative part of their organisations. Hence, they also act as administrative managers.

Raffaelli (2013) indicates that leaders act both as institutional leaders and agents of change and Besharov and Khurana (2015) and Raffaelli and Glynn (2015) state that institutional leaders also operate as organisational leaders when they carry out administrative work. Raffaelli and Glynn see organisations and institutions as "holistic patterns of systems, structures, goals and other arrangements and, as a result, should reveal a distinctive and different set of associated values" (p. 290). Similarly, Dickson, Castaño, Magomaeva, and Hartog (2012) note that educational leadership is closely linked to organisational culture and the institutional context of individual schools, as well as cross-level influences.

The divide between institutional and organisational leadership is not as sharp and clear as it may appear and says nothing about the leadership style the school leaders aim to promote or claim to use. For example, their intention could be to act as instructional leaders, promote distributed leadership, or focus on transformational leadership as the leadership styles identified and discussed by Muijs (2011).

Kraatz and Moore (2002) suggest that some institutionalists view institutions as being "beyond the control of individuals and as constitutive of actors and action" (p. 122), but they challenge the idea by pointing out how individuals, especially leaders, are important in this manner and influence institutions.

Selznick (1957) highlights a challenge when leaders within the same organisational field are usually trained within similar organisations holding equivalent values and missions. Through such socialisation, stability is promoted. This is most likely the case in Iceland. School leaders need to have at least a one-year diploma in education, and it is common for them to have been working as

teachers within the school where they take on the leadership position. Hence, stability and institutionalisation are likely to occur within upper secondary schools.

3.4 Macro, meso, and micro levels

The theories of institutional logic on the interactions between several social arenas and societal subsystems (Scott, 2014; Thornton et al., 2012), are seen to provide important perspectives given the wide scope of the research. The theories fit well in the context of this research as it focuses on structures, diverse actors at several levels, and their agency affecting the dynamics of change at the upper secondary school level in Iceland and beyond. Zilber (2016) emphasises that institutional logic integrates "structure and agency, the material and the symbolic" (p. 138), as well as the interactions of actors across system boundaries.

Because of the wide scope addressing different levels of the educational system and in line with the definitions suggested by Thornton et al. (2012), the terms macro, meso, and micro level are used as a means to emphasise the actors' differential access to schools and to describe various paths and boundaries within the system.

The micro level embodies the individuals as actors, or the smallest social unit operating within organisations or at other levels (Thornton et al., 2012; Zilber, 2016). In this thesis, the individuals act directly within the schools as teachers, school leaders, other school staff, or students.

Groups of individuals constitute different factions at the meso level. The meso level is what Thornton et al. (2012) refers to as the organisational level and represents groups of individuals from the micro level of organisations who share similar identities and backgrounds (Scott, 2014). Their similarities could, for example, be based on the work that is performed, the different ways work is accomplished, and structural unity (Waks, 2007). In this dissertation, the work that is performed in upper secondary schools in Iceland. The structural unity can refer to teachers with similar educational backgrounds who focus on teaching their subjects, or to other professionals working within the schools who share identities and background, groups of students, or even individual schools where the personnel share the identity of the school to which they belong.

The schools are not a phenomenon isolated from the outside world, but part of a larger picture. The environment enveloping the organisations that is called the macro level or similar to what Thornton et al. (2012) calls the societal level. The macro level in this study represents the formal, external environment of schools as organisations. Thornton and associates (2012) claims the macro level being part of the so-called inter-institutional system, which is constructed by

interconnected institutions with different aims and purposes. These institutions form diverse components of life in society. For example, these can be health care or the education systems. This study refers to a subset of this wide-reaching levels. Here the macro level refers particularly to the part that explicitly belongs to education, i.e. the MoESC, the Teachers' Union, the universities and to a certain extent the labour market.

The metatheory of institutional logic (Thornton et al., 2012) incorporates neo-institutional theory where macro structure, culture, and agency are presented through a cross-level process explaining how institutions facilitate or constrain change. Therefore, this fits well with the main aim of the thesis which is that of investigating how macro structures, culture, and agency are presented through a cross-level process explaining how actors and social structures facilitate or constrain change at the upper secondary school level in Iceland.

In the educational arena the notion of autonomy of students is quite common, but in the present context, the autonomy of teachers is seen as advantageous. Some scholars link the term autonomy to institutional theories (Scott, 2014; Thornton et al. 2012). Yet the term is often used loosely and without being properly defined. Ryan and Deci (2000; 2008), however, make an attempt to define the term. They see it as the ability to act without imposed external control. Autonomy refers to the willingness to endorse one's action and the experience of having a choice. Similarly, Barrow and Milburn (1990) describe autonomy as self-government. They claim that an autonomous person thinks individually and acts independently. However, they point out that a person can never be completely self-directed and free from external control. Barrow and Milburn argue that "[b]eing autonomous is essentially a matter of seeing oneself as responsible for one's beliefs and assumptions . . . willing to examine them for oneself" (p. 31). Similarly, Little (1991), defines autonomy as the "capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action" (p.4). Çakici (2015) points out how difficult it is to pin down the notion of autonomy. He states that it is "balanced by our mutual dependence on each other in society. Thus, it is a question of social interdependence" (p.32).

Smith (2001) draws several characteristics of teacher autonomy from the literature, i.e., self-directed professional actions. In relation to professional action, he highlights the aspects of freedom from control and teachers' capacity to direct their actions in their professional settings. Professional development is also under the scope of self-direction and, in the same way as professional actions, is connected to freedom from control and the teachers' capacity to direct their own professional development.

As traced here, autonomy is the state of being self-governing within a larger structure of rules and regulations. In contrast, independence is the state of not being dependent on another. The concept of independence implies a possible rejection of rules and regulations, but this is not the case with autonomy. It has been suggested that the autonomy of the teaching profession increases as the grade level increases (Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006; Ingvarsdóttir, 2006, 2011; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001). Therefore, upper secondary school teachers may have considerable autonomy since they rank fairly high in the school hierarchy of the educational system. Considerable autonomy in the teaching profession may, therefore, impact change at the school level.

The metatheory of institutional logic is based both on theoretical perspectives and empirical background, as noted by Thornton et al. (2012). They describe how the theoretical mechanisms of institutional logic explain the partial autonomy of actors within social structure. The different possibilities for partial autonomy explain how institutions facilitate and constrain actors. This creates a theory of institutional stability and change. This perspective of institutional stability and change facilitates the understanding of how and to what extent autonomy interacts with change at the upper secondary school level in Iceland.

Placing Thornton and associates' (2012) discussion on autonomy in the context of the education system, Hargreaves and Goodson (2006) note that the autonomy of the teaching profession increases when moving up the hierarchal ladder of the school system.

Zilber (2016) claims that most studies use the perspective suggested by institutional logic, focus on the macro and meso level and criticises how few studies focus on the micro level. He points out the importance of the micro level in connection to the larger perspective of organisations, institutions, and societal life in general. The present study stresses all three levels as perceived by the school leaders to avoid bias. The intension is to include all the three levels in the same study; macro, meso, and micro, as suggested by Zilber, including the top-down influences, with its demands from the macro level to the micro level and the bottom-up influences, which includes impact from the micro to meso and all the way to the macro level.

3.5 Dynamics of change

The boundaries between the macro, meso and mciro levels, and how the levels and actors interact, are important in understanding what is commonly referred to in the literature as the dynamics of educational change (Fullan, 2011; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2012; Malone, 2013; Scott, 2014; Smith, 2007; Thornton et al., 2012). Dynamics of change, according to Kauko et al. (2012), are closely linked to the processes of change and refer to complex social relations and interactions among the actors and across system boundaries of macro, meso,

and micro levels. Similarly, Erez and Gati (2004) define these dynamics as pertaining "to the interrelationships among the various levels of culture and the way they impact each other" (p. 587). They also discuss the dynamics in relation to the same macro, meso and micro levels. In the analysis of the thesis, the identified actors participating in change at the upper secondary school level in Iceland will be located at the macro, meso, and micro levels in order to facilitate understanding of the dynamics of change at the school level in as broad and holistic way as possible.

Some scholars distinguish between first- and second-order change (e.g. Conley, 1993; Cuban 1992; Smith, 2008; Watzlawick, Weakland, & Fisch, 1974) within the field of education. Smith (2008) summarises what he terms the dynamics of change discussion in his writing about first- and second-order change. There, he suggests that first-order change refers to a rather superficial change intended to enhance a stable system that may, in fact, not change at all. He refers, inter alia, to Cuban (1988) who defines first-order change as "reforms that assume that the existing organizational goals and structures are basically adequate and what needs to be done is to correct deficiencies in policies and practices" (p. 228). Second-order change is typically seen as what Smith (2008) calls substantial or significant change of an organisation or a system. These, Cuban (1988) would define as changes that

> aim at altering the fundamental ways of achieving organisational goals because of major dissatisfaction with current arrangements . . . introduce new goals and interventions that transform the familiar ways of doing things into novel solution to persistent problems. The point is to reframe the original problems and restructure organisational conditions to conform with the predefined problems. (p. 229)

As shown here, Cuban's terminology only refers to organisations for both types of changes. Waks (2007) suggests that the ideas of both organisations and institutions should be brought in when discussing change in education; the former does not suffice. He argues that it is useful to distinguish

> sharply between change at the organizational and the institutional levels, to show that the mechanisms of change at these levels are entirely different, and then to establish by means of conceptual argument that fundamental educational change takes place not at the organizational but rather at the institutional level. (p. 279)

Here, Waks (2007) challenges prior understanding of first- and second-order change, mainly the understanding of Cuban, by stressing that fundamental educational change is, in fact, more than a change in organisations. He claims that it is a change at the institutional level. Based on his critique of the use of first- and second-order change, he reconceptualises educational change. In doing so, he introduces and distinguishes between two terms: fundamental organisational change and fundamental educational change. He claims that fundamental organisational change takes place when an organisation readjusts to new institutional norms and ideas. Clarifying this definition, he notes that "[i]t means putting an existing organization in a new working order, through functional or structural alterations, so that the organization is once again ordained within the institutional order" (p. 294). Thus, he argues that the changes that deserve the name fundamental change take place at the level of the organisation, even though they are within the institutional order. He describes fundamental educational change as a change in education as a social institution. According to Waks (2007), this occurs when ideas, norms, arrangements, and frameworks are changed. In his conspet, it is crucial to note how this perspective intertwines the organisational and the institutional levels, even if the terminology still keeps them separate. Furthermore, it also casts doubt on the usefulness of using the terms superficial and fundamental educational change.

3.6 The macro-level demand for change and different meso-level responses

Coburn (2001; 2004) points out that teachers mediate the message of change given by the external environment of schools. She argues that teachers tend to construct and reconstruct the intended change in their given professional context. Therefore, some messages are left out, others are reconstructed, and still others emerge (Coburn, 2001).

Coburn (2004) identifies five categories of teacher responses when reacting to pressure from the macro level. In that way, teachers mediate the macro pressure. The first response category is rejection, which occurs when new ideas are dismissed within schools. The second response is decoupling, or a symbolic response, and refers to symbolic change with no internal influences. Third, parallel structures occur where simultaneous approaches are used for different stable forces and priorities. Fourth, assimilation refers to situations whereby messages from the macro level are interpreted and transformed to fit with the existing understanding of educators. In such superficial changes, the structure and practices of the schools are maintained. The fifth, and final response

category, is accommodation. It is identified as a deconstruction of existing understanding to charter new information when reacting to demands from the macro level, yielding to a major change in teaching practices.

As noted, Coburn (2004) are studying teachers in her research on different responses to macro demand for chagne. Liljenberg (2015) and Gunnulfsen and Møller (2017) have also made use of Coburn's categorisation when analysing how school leaders respond to macro demand for change. In this study, Coburn's categorisation will be used when looking at how school leaders see themselves, different teachers or groups of teachers in their schools respond differently to macro-level demands for change. Therefore, her categorisation is used in drawing attention to different types of responses, where the ideas come from, and how diverse actors influence, facilitate, or, constrain change at the upper secondary school level in Iceland. It is particularly useful when trying to analyse these reactions generally, but also to understand to what extent upper secondary schools can be discussed as homogeneous entities, among themselves and even within their individual confines.

With reference to policy, Ball and associates (2012) draw attention to the important distinction between policy implementation and policy enactment. In this context, it should be noted that they mainly focus on the classroom and teachers in their work, rather than on school leaders. Their perspective may, nevertheless, throw important light on school leaders' views on teachers' responses to macro-level demands for change. Therefore, it is presented here as a possibly useful heuristic when analysing the data. Their ideas also fit well with Coburn's (2004) clusters and may thus add to the explanatory analysis done based on Coburn. Ball et al. (2012) use the term policy enactment to describe the complex interactive processes taking place in different schools with similar settings when implementing new policies in schools. They state that "local resources, material and human, and diffuse sets of discourses and values are deployed in a complex and hybrid process of enactment" (p. 6), when policy is implemented. Thus, they develop a distinction between policy enactment, i.e., what actually takes place and policy implementation, i.e. what is generally intended, and the main terminology introduced earlier on actors and social structures fits well with their concepts of resources, material, and humans.

Thus, implementation refers to the processes of actions on behalf of the government or the authorities to put the policies into practice. Enactment, however, explains how policy is received in an individual school, for example, the way in which each school welcomes, the intended policy implementation, or challenges or resists it. In this context, Braun, Ball, Maguire, and Hoskins (2011) outline diverse factors impacting policy enactments in schools. The factors

depend on the school contexts, how students are taken into the schools, historical perspective, school personnel, school culture and ethos, and various materials, such as housing, and finance. They also highlight the impact from the external level. Therefore, they pinpoint the importance of taking the context seriously when implementing policy and understanding what is enacted.

Ball, Maguire, Braun, and Hoskins (2011b) take an ontological position when viewing the relationship between teachers and policies in schools. On one hand, they state that ontological position helps to investigate which policies enter the field and who the consumers are, and on the other, it helps to conceptualise how policies are interpreted and understood. They emphasise the link between "power within the processes of policy enactment" (p. 622) by describing how different actors hold different power. In this context, they describe how teachers are "constructed in a network of social practices" (p. 611), and through that network, they are infused by power relations. Therefore, teachers as noted by Ball et al. (2012), steer the local situation when enacting new policy. They see "policy enactment as a dynamic and non-linear aspect of the whole complex that makes up the policy process for which policy in school is just one part" (p. 6). Therefore, the actual enactment may become incongruent with implementation.

Ball, Maguire, Braun, and Hoskins (2011a) also emphasise that policy is constructed by diverse, interrelated, and complex activities. In this dissertation, some of these activities are discussed as social structures in line with Scott's (2014) definition of social structures. The actors then hold different power (Ball et al., 2011a; Scott, 2014; Thornton et al., 2012) and control the intended change. In this context, Ball and associates (2011), problematise the power, since policy usually assumes the power to be equally distributed between educational actors, which is obviously not true for schools constructed as organisations with various levels of hierarchy.

Braun, Maguire, and Ball (2010) show how one school is self-reliant and independent when enacting and adapting policy to the school, while the exact opposite appears in another school. The reasons mainly rest on the advantages the school has at the local level and its hierarchal position, on one hand, and the culture and self-understanding held by the staff, on the other. The staff saw themselves as part of a successful, inclusive, and progressive school. Braun and associates (2010) conclude in their study that an interrelated link between policy, practice, and positioning is needed when implementing and enacting change.

The point of arrival of new policy can vary in space and time, and it can have a different trajectory as reported by Ball et al. (2012). They indicate that policy change speaks differently to different educational actors across different situations and practices. The concept of policy enactment is used to understand

"diverse factors and variables" (p. 6) around policy change. Ball and associates (2011b) call attention to teachers' work as agents when meditating policy. In doing so, the history of previous policy implementations matters, as well as the meaning of teaching, professional practices, subjectivity, and their local environment that are constructed by policy concepts that have developed over time. Hence, they constitute the building blocks of the professional practices in schools.

Ball et al. (2012) suggest the following should be taken to account when analysing and contextualising the complexity of policy change:

> situated contexts (e.g. locale, school histories and intakes)
>
> professional cultures (e.g. values, teacher commitments and experiences, and 'policy management' in schools)
>
> material contexts (e.g. staffing, budgets, buildings, technology and infrastructure)
>
> external contexts (e.g. degree and quality of LA support; pressures and expectations from broader policy context, such as Ofsted ratings, league table positions, legal requirements and responsibilities). (p. 21)

To approach the situated context, the organisational field of the upper secondary schools was put in an historical perspective in Chapter 2, and the same is true for material and external contexts. The dimension of the professional culture of both the teachers and school leaders is also being discussed in Chapter 4, in connection to the research overview. This will then be contextualised in the interviews with the school leaders and discussed in following chapters. A very important contribution of the research by Ball and his associates is the importance of the context at the meso and even the micro levels. Thus, macro level influences can give rise to a multitude of different dynamics, varying between schools and even within schools. This reinforces Coburn's (2004) argument that school responses to pressure for change are likely to be different. What is not explicit in Ball's discussion, is the contribution of institutional categories, e.g. as contributed by curricular subjects or pay agreements to the school responses.

3.7 Overview of the principal concepts

The analytical framework is developed in order to analyse school leaders' perceptions of what affects their efforts to change, in particular what facilitates or constrains change at the upper secondary school level in Iceland. It has been argued above that the two concepts, actors and social structures, as definded by Scott (2014), would be particularly helpful for this task and therefore form the core of the analytical framework, and will be used as the main concepts of the research questions. These two concepts also guide the structure of the thesis. The actors and social structures will then be located at the macro, meso, and micro levels (Scott, 2014; Thornton et al., 2008) to describe the system boundaries at the upper secondary school level and the interaction of actors and social structures across these levels.

When examining change in schools, it has also been shown above that the terms organisations and institutions are important. These two concepts are used interchangeably in colloquial language, and often at the same level, e.g. when it comes to schools and other public entities. However, as demonstrated above, in the theoretical realm, the theories of organisations and institutions consist of several interrelated concepts that have different meanings which must be taken into account when attempting to understand the dynamics of change in schools.

The definition of the term organisation is relatively similar between the leading scholars. In this thesis the term organisation is understood as a unit that is designed around a particular task. However, when it comes to the term institution, the denotation is more varying. Waks (2007) states that institutions form the background of organisations, and Scott (2014) views institutions as having jurisdiction over organisations. According to both Scott and Waks, institutions are somehow in the background of organisations, and in that way, they control what happens within organisations. In addition, Scott (2014) describes institutions as representing stability, where social structures, created by actors with vested interest, slow down the processes of change and the same actors (as well as others) monitore and resist the intended change. Furthermore, within institutions, as Scott sees it, similar ideas, habits, norms, purposes, and frameworks guide human behaviour and mechanisms. Further, he claims institutions to be complex, long-lasting, and socially constructed by regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive elements.

Other scholars, bringing Selznick's (1949; 1957) work to life, have a similar understanding of the term institution (see also Kraatz, 2009; Raffaelli & Glynn, 2015; Washington et al., 2008). They add a useful aspect to the conceptualisations of Scott (2014) and Waks (2007) in relation to change. These scholars describe interactive processes between both the organisational and

institutional characteristics of a unit (Kraatz, 2009; Raffaelli & Glynn, 2015; Selznick, 1949; 1957; Washington et al., 2008). They describe how organisations can, for example, change into institutions over time through the processes of institutionalisation (Ansell et al., 2015; Selznick, 1996; Scott, 2014), and how institutional caracteristics are loosened through the processes of deinstitutionalisation (Kraatz & Moore, 2002; Oliver, 1992; Scott, 2014).

The characteristics of institutional and organisational leadership (Kraatz, 2009; Raffaelli & Glynn, 2015; Selznick, 1949; 1957; Washington et al. 2008) are likewise highly relevant in relation to institutions and organisations to better understand the dynamics of change and the school leaders' perceptions of their own agency, power, and vision when it comes to change at the upper secondary school level in Iceland.

These ideas related to institutions and organisations bring us back to the term change. In the light of the above terminology, change takes place within the organisational characteristics of schools, or when institutional characteristics are loosened through the processes of deinstitutionalisation (Kraatz & Moore, 2002; Oliver, 1992; Scott, 2012), and the fact that leaders usually act as organisational leaders when guiding change (Kraatz, 2009; Raffaelli & Glynn, 2015; Washington et al., 2008). In contrast to organisations, institutions represent more stability when diverse actors monitor and attempt to influence an intended change and determine its fate. Leaders acting within the institutional environment usually act as institutional leaders and constrain what takes place by silencing the intended change, reinforcing stability, and protecting the existing values held by groups at the meso or macro levels, or even when promoting their own values (Kraatz, 2009; Raffaelli & Glynn, 2015; Washington et al., 2008). Despite these ideas that change mainly takes place within organisational characteristics of units, some scholars (see Scott, 2014; Waks, 2007) describe how institutions change over time. This is certainly true and the change that occurs usually becomes part of the existing institutional norms over time through the processes of institutionalisation.

Waks's (2007) ideas on fundamental organisational change and fundamental educational change are utilised in the thesis to map change at the school level and evaluate its origin and impact. Subsequently, Coburn's (2004) ideas on how teachers tend to react to macro-level demands for change in five different ways are used to estimate if the intended change reaches the organisational field of upper secondary schools, particularly the underlying upper secondary schools. The categories are; rejection, decoupling, parallel structures, assimilation, and accommodation. For similar purpose, the ideas presented by Balls and associates (2012) on the term "policy enactment" are useful to delve deeper into the

concept and dynamics of change in schools. Both Coburn (2004) and Ball et al. (2012) focus on teachers in this manner. Their ideas, however, are echoed on school leaders' perceptions of how teachers enact change in the schools they lead.

4 Research overview

After exploring the theoretical context, it is important to study relevant research on social structures and actors facilitating or constraining change in schools. The focus of the study is relatively broad, ranging from actors to social structures across borders of upper secondary education. Therefore, the research overview presents appropriate examples of relevant research rather than being "complete". The rationale behind the overview is presenting work linked to the main concepts in the conceptual framework, i.e. actors and social structures. The main focus is on a Nordic context since Iceland is considered both historically and geographically part of the Nordic countries, and thus, has a similar social and educational system. Some international research is also presented in this overview, primarily in leadership and educational change. The distinction between actors and social structures is unclear in some cases and difficult to categorise. Given such challenges, the research outcomes will be placed in the most appropriate sections below.

4.1 Social structures

Social structures are seen as objects and frameworks constructed by actors, for example, agreements, acts, rules, or other resources. These structures are created by actors and develop though time and space (Scott, 2014). The social structures are divided into political and economic structures. Cultural structures are, however, placed under the section of actors since it is difficult to split these two elements, as they appear to be two sides of the same coin and important to discuss simultaneously. The same holds true for universities and the social structures created by the universities, such as formal education, the system of professional development, educational research, and academic disciplines.

Gollifer and Tran (2012) describe how political discourse and economic factors are dominant influences in Iceland. This is in line with our conclusion (Ragnarsdóttir & Jóhannesson, 2014), noting how the economic crisis, political discourse, and social tensions impact change and have negatively affected curriculum creation and its implementation in upper secondary schools with resulting delays. Hence, the implementation of the Upper Secondary Education Act No. 2008 came under criticism after the economic collapse in October 2008.

Our previous study (Ragnarsdóttir & Jóhannesson, 2014) also points out how Iceland, in the first decade of the 21st century, spent more than most of the other

OECD countries on education, or around 8% of the GDP. During the economic crisis after the banking collapse, the public expenditure on education as a percentage of total public expenditure dropped. Narrowing the focus to the upper secondary school level, Iceland was below average in spending per student long before the banks collapsed. The spending per student dropped considerably, especially in 2010. Nevertheless, Icelandic upper secondary school teachers spent, on average, more hours with students compared to the OECD average, and they had more working hours compared to their peers in the OECD countries.

After the economic crisis, the number of teachers remained constant, but the number of students increased by 4% (Ragnarsdóttir & Jóhannesson, 2014). At that time, compared to the GDP, the annual teacher's salary was among the lowest in the OECD countries. Before the crisis, most upper secondary school teachers in Iceland typically held a more than full-time position. However, after the crisis, the rate of teachers teaching more than full time dropped at the same time that the student/teacher ratio increased. The teachers had less opportunity to serve students with special educational needs, and they experienced an increased workload. This part of our study (Ragnarsdóttir & Jóhannesson, 2014) agrees with the study of Davíðsdóttir, Guðbjörnsdóttir, Sigurðardóttir, Jónsdóttir, Hansen, Jóhansson and Lárusdóttir (2012). Our study (Ragnarsdóttir & Jóhannesson, 2014) also indicates lower job satisfaction and higher occupational stress among teachers. The findings clearly show extra pressure on teachers in times of economic crisis and increased social tensions between the main stakeholders in curriculum creation and the implementation processes.

We now move to the literature on the social structures of accountability, benchmarking, and school evaluations. Compelling evidence of privatisation throughout the Western world has increased dramatically as noted by Ball and Youdell (2007). They describe how this development impacts equity, students, and the school staff. Administrative resources also changed while the demand to serve the market and consumers increased. They further indicate that there is a constant call to be up-to-date and competitive. This they refer to as "hidden privatisation" (p. 3) under the banner of reform in education. Many terms and ideas fall under this category, such as accountability, school development, efficiency, various forms of choices, and so on. Ball and Youdell (2007) argue how both the ethos and values of education are threatened due to this development.

From another reserch angle related to marketisation, Holm and Lundström (2011) interviewed eight upper secondary school leaders in Sweden who highlighted the presence of the market in their everyday work. They pointed out the paradox of increased competition enabling school development, but also

causing increased stress and insecurity among the staff. The principals also reported a greater emphasis on economic concerns in their own pedagogical role as school leaders. Their conclusions are relevant when looking at change and school leadership in Iceland, even though the upper secondary system in Iceland is not as marketised as in Sweden.

When looking at a study on accountability in Norway, Paulsen and Høyer (2016) indicate that a range of social technologies, such as national and international accountability, have been institutionalised in two main dimensions through regulative system of "longstanding norms of teaching profession and traditional policy cultures in education, on one hand, and the reform agendas and the instruments influenced by the OECD, on the other" (p. 99). Their conclusion is relevant for this study, which focuses on school leadership, other important actors, and social structures such as accountability at the upper secondary school level in Iceland, particularly on the impact of the internal and external evaluation systems discussed in Section 2.1 and how they may be controlled by predominant norms and traditions.

In another study on accountability in Sweden, Hult, Lundström, and Edström (2016) interviewed eight compulsory school principals who played a key role in the schools' evaluation processes. The principals reported that they had considerable responsibility when conducting and using various kinds of evaluations in their schools. They felt overwhelmed by external pressures and shared concerns about the extra work that was demanded of them. Despite the challenges, the school leaders stressed that evaluations could be of some use when developing educational practices and improving student achievement in general, if they were performed in close relation to practice and teachers.

No research was found that focused on a similar kind of social structure at the upper secondary schools in Iceland. However, two Icelandic scholars, Sigurjónsdóttir (2010) and Ólafsdóttir (2016), have studied external evaluations at the compulsory school level in Iceland. Sigurjónsdóttir (2010) highlights the general success of the implementation processes of the external evaluation system, and she further points out how school principals have utilised the results to create an effective dialog among school employees on both the strengths and weaknesses of the school practices. The superintendents have also used the results of individual schools when meeting with the school principals, and most of the teachers welcome the evaluations taking place in the classrooms. In a few cases, flaws appeared in the communication between the teachers and the inspector, but these were typically solved through cooperating with the concerned principals.

Ólafsdóttir (2016) provides a glimpse into the history of the development of external evaluation in compulsory schools in Iceland. Her findings indicate that the external evaluation system originated from international trends at the same time that the NPM was taking its first steps in Iceland. She reports how part "of the new public management was the devolution of government services and authority to lower levels of government, increasing school autonomy and greater accountability for outcome" (p. 2). She pinpoints obstacles in the implementation processes when neither authorities nor stakeholders were convinced of the need for external evaluation, and they did not see the urgency for the implementation. She also points out an unclear division of responsibilities when the Icelandic government believed that the local authorities were responsible for the school development and quality, but the local authorities believed it was the government's responsibility. Today, both actors assume shared responsibility.

As shown through this overview on accountability and market forces, the topic is more studied in the other Nordic countries, and the Nordic scholars presented here are usually more critical than the two scholars who have written on the topic in Iceland. These two scholars, Sigurjónsdóttir (2010) and Ólafsdóttir (2016), provide mostly descriptive overviews of the history in Iceland as compared to the scholars in other Nordic countries who use a critical approach. We now move to the curricula and school subjects as a social structure.

Curriculum guides, according to Luke, Woods, and Weir (2013) provide normative declarations on what students ought to learn and how curricula are primarily accountable for academic and social outcomes at the cost of other important skills that are needed for active democratic participation. Similarly, Jónasson (2016) reports on the solid structure of curricula and how deeply it is grounded in norms and traditions of cultures and nations, hence creating inertia for change. Deng (2013) is in agreement with Jónasson's point of view by stating that subjects are humanly constructed and have different connections to academic disciplines and applied fields. He notes that curricular subjects establish "an institutionally defined field of knowledge and practice for teaching and learning" (p. 40).

Similarly, Bleazby (2015) points out how some curricular subjects are thought to be more valuable than others. Subjects like mathematics and physics are highly valued as being both abstract and theoretical. Low status subjects, such as sports or auto mechanics, with a physical and practical orientation are judged to be less valuable in the community. She refers to it as "the traditional curriculum hierarchy" (p. 671). Bleazby (2015) further points out that it is problematic when subjects, such as physics and mathematics, are perceived to be more valuable

than other subjects and indicates that this is echoed in both social and economic values.

4.2 Actors

Scott (2014) defines actors as individuals or groups of people forming the social landscape of our lives. Actors process institutional identities, such as capacities, rights, and responsibilities. As discussed in Section 2.2.1, policy documents related to the upper secondary school level identify diverse actors who hold different degree of agency at the school level and play different roles in the schools.

Fullan (2007) notes that change consists of complex social processes of diverse actors. These actors understand and experience the process of change differently. Change, as Fullan (2007) sees it, is a long-term journey that needs to be carefully organised by involving diverse individuals and groups of experts. Such multidisciplinary groups debate the pros and cons of a situation and finally come to a consensus of the best solution in a well organised change process. But who are these interested groups and what information is available on their influence on change? In this section, the attention is directed to literature on educational actors, organised from macro actors to micro actors.

4.2.1 Actors at the macro level

As shown, several scholars highlight how international actors impact schools through demands incorporated in accountability (Ball & Youdell, 2007; Hult et al., 2016;) and international trends (Alexiadou, Fink-Hafner, & Lange, 2010; Daun, 2007). Other scholars report ministries as powerful actors (Bleazby, 2015; Coburn, 2004; Domitrovich, Bradshaw, Poduska, Hoagwood, Buckley, Olin, & Lalongo, 2008; Ragnarsdóttir & Jóhannesson, 2014). Still other scholars emphasise the impact from the universities (Deng, 2013; Jónasson, 2016), or interest groups from the labour market (Jónasson, 1998b; Wheelahan, 2007) and the teacher unions (Paulsen, Nihlfors, Brinkkjær, & Risku, 2016; Ragnarsdóttir & Jóhannesson, 2014). Several scholars focus on the ever-changing society (Eiríksdóttir & Jóhannesson, 2016; Reynisdóttir & Jóhannesson, 2013), still others on compulsory schools (Óskarsdóttir, 2012; Sverrisdóttir, 2013), school boards (Ingvarsson, 2008; Johansson, Nihlfors, Steen, & Karlsson, 2016; Moos, Kofod, & Brinkkjær, 2016; Paulsen & Høyer, 2016), and the social environment closest to the schools (Domitrovich et al., 2008; Eiríksdóttir & Jóhannesson, 2016). These macro actors then promote various social structures that impact change in schools. Some of the macro actors will be elaborated upon in this section, while

others received attention in Section 4.1. Starting with the labour market and international trends.

In a paper on academic vocational divide in Finland, Sweden, and Iceland, Nylund, Rosvall, Eiríksdóttir, Holm, Isopahkala-Bouret, Niemi and Ragnarsdóttir (2018) claim that the neo-liberal discourse in the countries' policy documents mainly emphasise market relevance and employability. These trends seem to increase the gap between academic and vocational programmes in the countries studied, mainly through different knowledge construction between the study paths. They also highlight the relatively low expectations of vocational students in textbook and projects in Sweden and Finland. In the end, they claim these trends to reduce opportunities for vocational students to transfer and study at the university level.

Relatively few scholars focus on the labour market and vocational education in Iceland. Jónasson (1998b) lists diverse macro actors in Iceland, some of which reports work against the vocational programmes at the upper secondary school level despite rhetorical claims that they support and strengthen vocational education. These actors include the MoESC, the municipalities, compulsory schools, society, and the the labour market itself. He also highlights several social structures promoted by these actors. For example, the freedom within the educational system, a strong focus on academic success, wage differences, finances, and the ever-changing society encourage students to keep their options open by studying academically oriented programmes. Along similar lines, Wheelahan (2007) points out how the principle of the market forcefully steers vocational education. Some companies in Iceland inhibit development within the trades by offering low student salaries, as described by Jónasson (1998b). He also claims that the small size of the Icelandic labour market does not favour workplace training.

Eiríksdóttir (2018) studied the dual vocational system in Iceland using interviews with students, vocational upper secondary teachers, and trainers in the certified trades. Her findings show different lengths of work-based learning between study paths and tension between the pedagogical aims of work-based learning and how costly it is. She also highlights a paradox related to work-based learning. If work-based learning is offered early in the process, then it provides students with a sense of the workplace, but offering it late in the process is not effective since students have already started to work. Based on the conclusions of these scholars (Eiríksdóttir, 2018; Jónasson, 1998b) and the construction of the educational system in Iceland, it is likely that the labour market impacts the vocational programmes in the comprehensive and vocational schools.

Society at large impacts education in various ways, all from the demand to have upper secondary schools in rural areas to a positive impact schools have for rural development. Åberg-Bengtsson (2009) highlights the importance of rural schools for Sweden. The same applies to Autti and Hyry-Beihammer (2014). They conclude that schools in the rural areas play a significant social role by impacting the well-being of a rural community and its human, cultural, and social capital.

The ideas of school boards can be clustered under societal influences since some of the school board members comes from the labour marked. School boards operate in every upper secondary school in Iceland and are supposed to impact upper secondary education in Iceland as discussed in Section 2.2.1. Similar setups of school boards are seen in the other Nordic countries, but their tasks vary. In Denmark, the tasks of school boards are related to general information about the school administration, the resources, economy, and school budgeting (Moos et al., 2016). But in Norway, there turned out to be a clear gap between the impact of the school boards and the municipalities, as highlighted by Paulsen and Høyer (2016). The task of school boards in Norway is related to finance and budgeting. General information from the school administration is also part of the agenda. When it comes to Sweden, the most important tasks of the school boards are to discuss student performance and progress in regard to the aims of the school, as reported by Johansson and associates (2016). In Iceland, Ingvarsson (2008) claims the boards maintain their regulatory role in the schools, but their power and influence are rather weak when compared to their status in the Upper Secondary Education Act No. 92/2008. Many issues affect their power, such as lack of cooperation with the MoESC, their selection process, and the vested interests of the school board members in the schools. In addition, the fact that board members transfer their power systematically to the school director results in the meetings being conducted mainly to inform the board members. These challenges lead to unclear power and low agency in the school board members. As shown, the tasks of the school boards in the Nordic countries varies, but they all share the responsibilities of budgeting and finance. Sweden, however, stands out when focusing on student performance.

Technological development and its impact in schools also fall under societal influences. Eiríksdóttir and Jóhannesson (2016) studied the views of mathematics and vocational teachers at the upper secondary school level in Iceland and used data from the same comprehensive research project as is used in this thesis. They point out that changes in the community impact upper secondary school teachers mainly through technological development. The same is identified in a study interviewing 12, experienced upper secondary school teachers in Iceland conducted by Reynisdóttir and Jóhannesson (2013). They

emphasise increased demand to use information technology in upper secondary schools in Iceland.

The Teachers' Union is also an important actor in education. Paulsen et al. (2016) point out how the teachers' unions (as well as the civil service agencies) in Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden impact schools. In these countries, most salary agreements are negotiated at the national level while "rules for requirements and personnel management" (p. 226) are dealt with at the municipal level, between the union and civil servants. This middle layer is not relevant for the upper secondary school level in Iceland, as the schools operate directly under the MoESC (Upper Secondary Education Act No. 92/2008).

Ragnarsdóttir and Jóhannesson (2014) describe how the Teachers' Union and other stakeholders in Iceland have influenced the implementation of the Upper Secondary Education Act No. 92/2008 and the National Curriculum Guide from 2011. The president of the Teachers' Union; the Minister of Education, Science and Culture; some school leaders in upper secondary schools; and some teachers participated in a public debate about the implementation of the curriculum. The MoESC and the school leaders were trying to implement the changes, while the union and the teachers contended that the changes were not in line with the collective bargaining agreement for educators in the upper secondary schools. They also concluded that the MoESC neglected to pay the teachers for the extra work incorporated in the implementation processes. It is likely that this debate is still relevant since the collective bargaining agreements are an ongoing concern for teachers and their union, as highlighted in Sections 2.2.3 and 2.2.4.

Several scholars show how universities exercise control through many social structures, such as academic disciplines (Deng, 2013; Jónasson 2016; Lambert, 2014), formal education, professional development (Fullan, 2007; Horn & Little, 2010; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006), and educational research (Cooper, Levin, & Campbell, 2009; Hammersley 2005; Lingard & Gale, 2010; Morrison, 2007). Further, Jónasson (2016) highlights how universities generally act as gatekeepers to lower school levels through entrance tests, admission requirements, and teacher education. Therefore, it is relevant to gauge their impact at the upper secondary school level in Iceland.

Deng (2013) argues that academic disciplines from the university level are either continuous, discontinuous, or different, but always relate to part of school subjects. The most relevant for this thesis is the academic disciplines at the university level and how they define and outline subjects at the lower school levels. The knowledge incorporated in an academic discipline is transmitted in order to develop the intellectual capacity of the learner to maintain and reproduce the academic culture. The main purpose, according to Deng (2013), is

to attract learners into the academic community by studying the same methods as the academic experts. While doing so, other important aspects of schooling are left out, such as practical, technical, tacit, local, and community competences. Furthermore, the learners' attitudes, interests, and emotions, as well as economic, social, and political needs and development in education are generally neglected. Similarly, Lambert (2014) describes the relationship with university disciplines where the subject knowledge is usually produced. He notes how subjects deliver boundaries and identities to teachers and give them a collective resource, i.e., through subject associations. Therefore, the universities play an important role in constructing knowledge. This relationship of academic subjects to practice within upper secondary schools may be relevant in understanding how they develop or can be changed.

The universities provide formal education for teachers and school leaders, and they sometimes offer professional development. Change is often stimulated through these channels, as highlighted by several scholars (Fullan, 2007; Horn & Little, 2010; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006) who state that professional development with teamwork stimulates the active involvement of employees. Hence, professional development is an important element in fostering educational change and channelling it into educational practices. Socially based strategies, such as addressed by Fullan (2007), focus on collaboration and cohesion and develop and empower relationships to increase trust.

In general, educational research is intended to be a source of change and school development (Cooper et al., 2009; Hammersley 2005; Lingard & Gale, 2010; Morrison, 2007; Sleeter, 2014; Yates, 2004). Educational research mainly originates at the university level, where academic researchers conduct studies as part of their academic obligations (Ragnarsdóttir, Jóhannesson, Jónasson, Halldórsdóttir, & Macdonald, n.d.). Teachers and school leaders also attain or extend their formal education or ongoing professional development in the universities, and quite a few of them receive master's (e.g. Reynisdóttir, 2012; see also Reynisdóttir & Jóhannesson, 2013) or even doctoral degrees (e.g. Ingólfsson, 2014; Þorgeirsdóttir, 2016). Hence, the impact of educational research deserves some attention when studying change.

Regarding the influence from the compulsory school level in Iceland, Óskarsdóttir (2012) and Sverrisdóttir (2014) both emphasise that the cooperation between upper secondary schools and compulsory schools is determined by the upper secondary schools. This follows similar lines as the universities control over the upper secondary school level, and this continues down the hierarchical ladder of the school system, as previously discussed.

4.2.2 Actors and cultural structures in schools

Schools at the same school level are partly organised in an analogous way, serve the same age group, follow the same laws, and aim in a similar direction. However, the schools' culture, history, student population, location, and personnel differ. Therefore, it is relevant to ask what the upper secondary schools have in common and what are the possible reasons for both resistance to and inertia in change. This section begins with a general discussion of the characteristic of upper secondary education. Then, it focuses on the active participation of teachers and school leaders and their leadership styles, as well as on the diverse school cultures and different implementation methods. The section ends with a discussion of the active participation of students in educational change.

Levin (2013) and Hargreaves and Goodson (2006) note that it is more difficult to effect change in secondary schools than in schools at a lower level. As reported by Levin (2013), the secondary schools are generally larger and not as personal as schools for younger learners. The teachers also have a higher degree of autonomy than teachers in lower levels. The same applies most likely to the upper secondary education as being both subject oriented and in general larger than the compulsory schools. A high degree of autonomy for upper secondary school teachers is agreed upon by other scholars (Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006; Ingvarsdóttir, 2006; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001). Ingvarsdóttir (2006) and McLaughlin and Talbert (2001) describe how teacher isolation increases when reaching higher up in the school system. Teachers in Denmark claim that good teaching rests in their autonomy to practise their own judgment, as reported by Hansen, Bøje, and Beck (2014).

The content of subjects is also viewed as part of the upper secondary school teachers' autonomy and, therefore, difficult to change. Harðarson (2010b) indicates that mathematics, natural sciences, and history teachers in upper secondary schools in Iceland tend to protect the subject they teach as an independent discipline, and they mediate traditions through the subject. From this perspective, Jónasson's (2016) concerns are relevant. He points out that the vested interest of teachers constrains change, and it is highly linked to their job security and livelihood.

Along similar lines, Levin (2013) notes that secondary schools are more subject-oriented than schools at lower levels, and students also move between subject experts in secondary schools. The schools at the school level are divided into faculties with a homogeneous group of professionals. Thus, whole school approaches are more difficult to establish in secondary schools than in schools

from lower levels. Levin (2013) emphasises three main barriers regarding change in secondary education:

1. The admission requirements of higher education shape both the programmes and the structures at the school level,
2. The way in which the school level is organised around subjects and disciplines, such as curriculum, staff, syllabus, and credits,
3. High content demand and lack of other important skills and knowledge for everyday life.

Deng (2007) and Thurlings, Evers, and Vermeulen (2015) highlight how the subject matters when making change. They further conclude that subject faculties generally constrain change. In a comparative interview study with upper secondary school teachers in Finland, Germany, and Estonia on professional autonomy in curriculum composition, Erss, Kalmus, and Autio (2016) show different tendencies between the countries. In Finland and Estonia, the focus is on teacher autonomy and empowerment through curriculum development. This is, however, not in line with the teachers' perceptions in Estonia, where they perceive the opposite. Erss and associates (2016) also indicate how the willingness to enact the curriculum depends on teachers' social status and involvement in decision making.

In interviews with teachers in secondary alternative schools in Toronto, Bascia and Maton (2016) show how small schools with limited personnel, a small administrative structure, and intensive teacher workloads facilitate change. These elements, at the same time, hinder teachers from working outside of the school. In larger, mainstream schools with extensive academic faculty divisions, teachers within the department worked more closely together than in schools with weaker subject boundaries. Within such structures, teachers had greater anonymity and the gap was larger between administration, department heads, and teachers. The teachers in mainstream schools were more likely to obtain professional development and participate in writing curriculum. In their summary, Bascia and Maton (2016) state that loose coupling facilitates change within the system of alternative schools.

The job of upper secondary school teachers in Iceland has changed over time and has become more complex, as noted by Reynisdóttir and Jóhannesson (2013). Paperwork is seen by the teachers as bureaucratic and perceived to be greater than before. Meetings and cooperation have increased, and the demand to use information technology has intensified. There is also a greater variety of teaching methods, an increased diversity of students, and a stronger focus on curriculum writing and implementation. A study conducted by Eiríksdóttir and

Jóhannesson (2016) concurs with these findings. They point out that changes in the community, impact upper secondary school teachers through technological development.

We now move from research on the general structure of upper secondary schools to the actors in the schools. The research literature indicates that change is more likely to be sustained with the active involvement of leaders, practitioners, and the main stakeholders (Barsh, Capozzi, & Davidson, 2008; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Hopkins & Levin, 2000; Stein & Coburn, 2008). The work of these groups are incorporated in the social, cultural, and organisational context of schools (Hodkinson, Biesta, & James, 2008; Samuelsson & Lindblad, 2015), but also constructed by economic and financial resources (Davíðsdóttir et al., 2012; Gollifer & Tran, 2012; Ragnarsdóttir & Jóhannesson, 2014), society, politics, and the educational history (Goodson, 2003; Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006; Samuelsson & Lindblad, 2015). Even though many scholars indicate that macro-level actors influence change, some scholars point out that the teaching profession and school leadership are the key actors in educational change (Fullan, 2007; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Some researchers state that, in successful educational change, school leaders direct the change, based both on external and internal knowledge, and they try to find the best track for ideas (Fullan, 2009; Hoy & Miskel, 2013).

Fullan (2007) argues that educational change occurs at many levels, from changes made by individual teachers to changes at the administration level, to changes across the whole school. Change at the school level is more likely to foster educational practices than change at the individual level and, thus, become more sustainable. He focuses on the feelings and emotions of educators in the implementation process and argues for creating a mixture of a working environment that is tight and loose within the interactive culture of change.

A supportive school culture also facilitates change (Thurlings et al., 2015). According to Oterkiil and Ertesvåg (2012), this is based on the school's readiness for change, leadership, and implementation capacity. However, a culture receptive to change and with the human resource capacity will be more likely to foster change, as reported by Fullan (2007). Consequently, capacity for change needs to be promoted in school cultures at an institutional level. The success of such a promotion depends on school leaders and the professional capital of the teaching profession, as reported by Hargreaves and Fullan (2012). Frost (2012) also focuses on school culture. He states that a professional learning culture is brought about through leadership when school leaders create a culture of change through desirable communication, charisma, and clear expectations. These leaders share a clear vision in education and identify desirable values and

proclivities of teachers. Thurlings et al. (2015) agree and point out that the school leaders' that support, give guidance, and feedback, facilitate change.

Professional learning communities with good relationships with the university level are intended to make change, as pointed out by Fullan (2007). He claims that professional learning communities in schools with support from universities and active, lifelong learning empower the teaching profession to make educational change. This is consistent with Tyack and Cuban (1995), who argue that most learning communities experience ongoing changes. Schools that take this seriously usually promote ongoing change as a natural part of everyday school life. Bolam, McMahon, Stoll, Thomas, Wallace, Greenwood, and Smith (2005), as well as Frost (2012), describe how eight, interactive components of professional learning communities support teachers in their efforts to take risks, develop their educational practices, and nurture their leadership. These components are as follows: shared vision and values; joint responsibility for student learning; cooperation with the main focus on learning; professional learning as groups and individuals; reflective professional research; partnership, networking, and openness; inclusive membership; and mutual trust, respect, and support. Similarly, Sigurðardóttir (2006, 2010) describes how professional learning communities exist when education professionals engage in a continuous cycle of learning through reflection and inquiry. Her study in Iceland indicates a relationship between effectiveness in schools and professional learning communities. Therefore, she states that it is possible to achieve better student outcomes if schools engage in professional learning communities. It is important to have the community of educators in mind when studying change. The ideas of professional learning communities are somewhat normative and may lack a critical standpoint.

Action oriented research is an example of research at the upper secondary level in Iceland that is, perhaps, closest to the ideas discussed above. The work of Þorgeirsdóttir (2016) falls under that category. She, however, takes on a different standpoint than that the presented in the literature in that she is more theoretical. She studied teachers' use of action research and activity theory in an upper secondary school in Iceland where she worked as an assistant school director. In a so-called change laboratory, 20 teachers in her school promoted their own professional development with support from an external academic consultant. Collectively, they developed a model to foster professional development. The teachers improved their own agency in the change laboratory by focusing on their own practices. The activity theory provided the teachers "with conceptual frameworks, historical analysis and tools to analyse" (Þorgeirsdóttir, 2016, p. 3), while the action research provided the teachers with methods and tools to carry out and evaluate the change. The teachers enabled

students to voice their opinions while making the changes, activating their own learning, and developing their own teaching methods and agency to do interdisciplinary work. In the process, the teachers learned both as individuals and collectively.

A greate deal of research emhasises the important role of school leaders when making change and the professional learning cultures in schools. Jones and Harris (2014) studied the international literature on principals leading successful change. They state how principals create the culture of trust by respecting the professionals to make the right decisions collectively to improve their own pedagogical practices and create the right conditions for professional learning. By so doing, they are more successful in leading change than others. In such processes, the core of the principal's work is to hinder barriers leading to the professional isolation of teachers. Similarly, Frost (2012) notes how a professional learning culture cannot be implemented. Rather, it is constituted through leadership. The school leaders create the culture of change through desirable communication, charisma, and clear expectations. They have a clear vision and identify desirable values.

In a similar vein, Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, and Hopkins (2006) report that school leaders' values affect the entire school community, and these values result in the priorities within the school. The shared identities of successful school leaders that positively implement educational change are a clear vision, personal values, such as caring for employees and students, and teamwork (Buchanan & Huczynski, 2010; Hord, 2008; Hoy & Miskel, 2013; Keith, 2008). Sigurjónsdóttir and Hansen (2014) concur in their study of school principals working in compulsory schools in Iceland, and they add professional leadership to this list. Moreover, they show that in schools having strong professional leadership, the middle management layer forms a bridge between the school head and groups of teachers and is an important catalyst for change. Fullan and Hargreaves (2012) state that leaders empower educators towards educational change by applying a mixture of push when they can, pull whenever needed, and nudge all the time to move the system forward.

Several scholars highlight the fact that distributed leadership is meant to promote organisational change and feed into the discussion of professional learning communities (Harris, 2011; Harris, Leithwood, Day, Sammons, & Hopkins, 2007; Leithwood, Mascall, & Strauss, 2009). Distributed leadership and transformative leadership have the same orientation, which is to share leadership. They are more likely to create educational change than instructional leaders or top-down actions. According to Hallinger (2003), the main characteristics of transformative leadership refer to second order effects in

educational change, including motivation of practitioners, particularly teachers, to take the initiative, instead of the top-down power of the school director. Furthermore, such leadership motivates lifelong learning and learning communities, a trustful relationship between the leader and educators, and individual support and empowerment. Practitioners work around shared aims and visions by identifying personal aims and linking them to school policy documents.

Copland's (2003) research indicates, however, that capacity-building for educational change is equally important to distributed leadership in the change process. To the contrary, other research indicates that a top-down approach facilitates change (Fraser, Dougill, Mabee, Reed, & McAlpine, 2006), but Smeds, Haho, and Alvesalo (2003) call for a mixture of both top-down and bottom-up approaches.

According to Matthews and Crow (2009), professional leadership includes a willingness to change, rather than simply maintain, the status quo. In such ideology, both leaders and followers share aims, as in transformative leadership discussed above. Key elements in professional leadership include: 1) an agent of change; 2) leadership; 3) willingness of those concerned; and 4) shared aims of main actors towards enhanced educational performance.

Several researchers suggest that school leaders should emphasise improving teaching practices to gain better student outcomes (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). At the personal level, it is important to understand what kind of motivation, competence, and behaviour is needed for educational change (Flaspohler, Duffy, Wandersman, Stillman, & Maras, 2008). Shared aims and ownership are important to employees, according to some scholars (Buchanan & Huczynski, 2010; Hallinger, 2003; Matthews & Crow, 2009).

Motivation is important in educational change and, according to Fullan (2007), there is a need to identify biases before taking action. He supports his arguments by referring to Dewey's work, which advocates a combination of doing and thinking reflectively throughout the learning process and reducing the gap between planning and doing (i.e. Dewey, 1997). Fullan (2007) also states that participants in educational change must see the need for change and believe in it. He further emphasises the importance of starting with actions to create new beliefs, plan, and establish ownership and a shared vision. Both Fullan (2007) and Kotter (1996) talk about well-planned and coordinated implementation steps to promote change. McLaughlin (1990) argues, however, that successful educational change is characterised by a shared adaptation process and local factors, rather than coordinated implementation and centralised programme

guidelines and methods. Teachers' contributions are as important as a policy guide.

It is well documented among scholars that change increases stress and insecurity among employees and that this may constrain change (see Fullan, 2007; Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012; Kotter, 1996). Our previous study (Ragnarsdóttir & Jóhannesson, 2014) indicates lower job satisfaction and higher occupational stress among teachers in the period of curriculum creation and implementation in Iceland. Ball et al. (2011b) also identified workload, stress, pressure, and lack of time among upper secondary school teachers when focusing on policy change. Excessive stress and workload during periods of change can hinder the innovative process, as stated by Hallinger (2003). Buchanan and Huczynski (2010) agree and indicate that low performance and morale, in combination with high staff turnover and stress, are sources of highly negative impacts on change.

As previously demonstrated, it is evident that many interrelated actors and social structures facilitate change, such as active participation of school leaders and their leadership style, a professional learning culture in schools, as well as teachers' ownership of and active participation in change.

Eiríksdóttir and Jóhannesson (2016) argue that upper secondary school teachers in Iceland have considerable power to elaborate and implement macro-level demands for change incorporated in the decentralised curriculum creation and implementation. They also point out that school policy and teacher cooperation can have a modelling effect on educational practices, and they identified differences between the subject teachers they studied. The mathematics teachers showed a more conservative attitude towards change than the vocational teachers. Further, they stress that the forces affecting teachers' work mainly come from their nearest environment, such as school policy and students' attitudes, wishes, abilities, and conditions.

Another important aspect that deserves attention when leading change is the fact that schools respond differently to external demands (Coburn, 2004). Liljenberg (2015) reports that seven school leaders in three compulsory schools in Sweden responded to external demands for change in a symbolic way when converting neoliberal demands. They emphasised fitting the demands into the predominant norms and values in their own schools. Likewise, Gunnulfsen and Møller (2017) conclude some school leaders responded in a symbolic way, others used parallel structure, and still others used assimilation when responding to policy demands on national tests in Norway. Coburn (2005) studied elementary school principals in California. She determined that the principals emphasised that teachers' learning, and enactment were influenced when reading policy.

Teachers were given access to policy ideas and allowed to participate in adding their interpretations and adjustments. The principals also established different learning conditions for the teachers in their schools. All of this was influenced by their own perceptions of how teachers learn and read instructions.

Public documents address the importants of active participation of students in schools (Huber et al. 2011; Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2012; Upper Secondary Education Act No. 92/2008). Mitra, Serriere, and Stoicovy (2012), however, indicate how problematic the existing power relations between students, teachers and school leaders are when trying to establish democratic schools. Their conclusions may explain why it is difficult to activate students for change. They highlight the lack of student participation in everyday practices of schools in the different power relations incorporated in the institutional norms of educational settings. Authority and power are held by both school leaders and teachers. This system provides inequality and segregation between school leaders, teachers, and students

This section has, for the most part, addressed studies on change, school culture, active participation of teachers, and school leadership. In most instances, these studies are normative and may, as a result, lack a critical component. They mainly address the positive sides of change, school culture, and school leadership. Literature on school leadership often neglects, for example, the prospect of authority and power. While normative literature is important, it is also important to look at these issues critically. The conceptual framework presented in Chapter 3 provides a critical backbone to the somehow normative literature presented here. Jónasson (2016) arrived at a similar conclusion on the literature on change. He claims it lacks theoretical and conceptual connections. Furthermore, as indicated here, the upper secondary schools in Iceland are under researched in the areas discussed in this section.

As shown, a new policy is enacted in a different way by teachers and school leaders in schools and the process is not a streamlined. These studies indicate how rare it is that policy is enacted in a holistic way in the schools. The school history, culture, professional personnel, setup, and location matter to when and if a policy is enacted.

5 Gaps, aims, and research questions

After having developed the conceptual framework and reviewed previous studies pertaining to this research, several gaps have been identified. This journey has supported the original aim presented in Chapter 1 but also enlarged it and helped to expand and develop the research questions. Here, the gaps are highlighted as they emerge from theories and literature and clarify the origin and basis of each of the research questions in the thesis.

5.1 Identified gaps in theory and literature

Many scholars have indicated an absence of institutional analysis in education. Chen and Ke (2014) discuss how scholars in education neglect the impact from the macro level on different school units. They also state that researchers ignore the complex interactions between the macro environment and what happens holistically in the schools. In a similar vein, Burch (2007) indicates that educational researchers have not fully explored the interaction between the theories of institutions and organisations. These criticisms are worth exploring. The theories of institutions and organisations are not commonly used within the field of education, especially in Iceland, and they have never been used on the upper secondary school level, as far as the study determines. Kraatz (2009), Raffaelli and Glynn (2015), and Washington et al. (2008) state that scholars have also neglected the existence of institutional leadership over the last decades by mainly emphasising organisational leadership. This study intends to react to these observations and use the theoretical lenses they suggest.

An overview of how isolated the literature is when it comes to actors and social structure has been provided in Chapter 4 and how the link between actors and social structures, particularly in Iceland, has been neglected. Leadership, change, and the upper secondary school level in Iceland has been under researched, although recent trends and developments (Ragnarsdóttir et al., n.d.).

Some macro-level actors and social structures in the field of education are hardly looked at, and are rarely studied in relation to other actors and social structures at the meso and micro levels. There are, however, a vast number of studies on leadership and change, although these are primarily international. In these, the focus is usually normative and lacking a critical and holistic standpoint, as highlighted in In Section 4.2.2.

The intention in this study is to contribute to filling in these gaps by looking at school leaders' perceptions concerning the macro-level actors and relevant social structures influencing change at the upper secondary school level in Iceland. The lenses of organisations and institutions are used, where the focus is also on intuitional and organisational leadership. These lenses provide an opportunity to look at the data differently and open a platform for theorising around educational change and leadership.

5.2 The aim and research questions

The focus of this study is to understand the interaction and effect of various influences and elements that facilitate or constrain change across system boundaries. The terms actors and social structures are used as key terms in these respect, and highlight what is commonly referred to in the literature as the dynamics of change (e.g. Hargreaves & Shirley, 2012; Kauko et al., 2012; Malone, 2013; Thornton et al., 2012). Therefore, the main aim of the study is to shed light on how school leaders perceive their roles, power, and agency when leading change at the upper secondary school level in Iceland. In the process, their perceptions of the interaction of actors and social structures that may facilitate or constrain change are also elucidated. Furthermore, their most significant challenges regarding educational change are explored. The aim spurs more specific and precise questions inspired by the conceptual framework in Chapter 3. The questions were driven by an interactive process throughout the reading and writing journey, in parallel with the procedure of data analysis (Stake, 1995). Below, each of the research question is briefly described and the way in which they derived. The first question is what do school leaders identify as educational change at the school level and how can such change be categorised? This is a somewhat preliminary question, largely inspired by Waks's (2007) ideas on fundamental educational change defined in Section 3.5, but also on the educational change literature reported in Section 4.2.2.

Question two is inspired by the view that, generally, the literature on change and leadership somewhat neglects external influences on educational change (Chen & Ke, 2014). Thus, the theoretical background on institutions and organisations is useful in shedding light on change in a broader and more complex context by considering both external and internal influences. Hence, theories are grounded in empirical research and describe the interaction between actors and social structures, influencing change at the three levels, meso, macro, and micro, and focusing on the different lenses of institutions and organisations (see Raffaelli & Glynn, 2015; Scott, 2014; Thornton et al., 2012). Hence, the main actors who participate in the discourse on change at the upper

secondary school level was identified to shed light on the interaction among the actors working across system boundaries. These actors may create competition or lead to social tension, power struggles, neutrality, or even synergy that can either facilitate or constrain change. Therefore, it is asked: Who do school leaders see as the principal actors participating in educational change and how do they interact in facilitating or constraining change?

There are not only actors operating, but also social structures (Scott, 2014). Consequently, it is important to ask the third question: What social structures do school leaders see operating in educational change and what impact do they consider these to have in facilitating or constraining change? Based on research questions two and three, the discussion of the findings will be divided into two main clusters incorporated in these questions, actors and social structures.

The fourth question, what kinds of agency, power and vision do school leaders describe they have and to what extent can they be judged to operate as institutional or organisational leaders, emerges from the theoretical background on institutions vs. organisations (Scott, 2014; Thornton et al., 2012) and institutional leadership vs. organisational leadership (see Kraatz, 2009; Raffaelli & Glynn, 2015; Selznick, 1957; Washington et al., 2008).

The final question is about the views the leaders hold on methods or strategies for implementing change and is what methods do school leaders see as important when implementing change and how do they reflect on and promote these methods in their every day practices? The question stems from the discussion in Sections 3.3 and 4.2.2. This covered several important concepts related to implementing methods (Fullan, 2007; Kotter, 1996), such as the importance of ownership and shared aims (Hallinger, 2003; Matthews & Crow, 2009), trust, teamwork, and the bottom-up approach (Hallinger, 2003; Harris et al., 2007; Leithwood et al., 2009). Also, discussions about successful leadership styles as a whole-school approach (Barsh et al., 2008; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Hopkins & Levin, 2000), Coburn's (2004) five categories of policy responses and Ball et al. (2012) ideas on policy enactment come into play. In all cases, active participation of all employees and other interest groups was requested (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

Together, the research questions are as follows:

1. What do school leaders identify as educational change at the school level and how can such change be categorised?
2. Who do school leaders see as the principal actors participating in educational change and how do they interact in facilitating or constraining change?

3. What social structures do school leaders see operating in educational change and what impact do they consider these to have in facilitating or constraining change?
4. What kinds of agency, power, and vision do school leaders describe they have and to what extent can they be judged to operate as institutional or organisational leaders?
5. What methods do school leaders see as important when implementing change and how do they reflect on and promote these methods in their every day practices?

6 Methods

A common way to answer similar research questions as developed in Chapter 5 is to use interviews with school leaders. Interviews allow both the depth of probing and the flexibility necessary in data collection (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Green & Thorogood, 2004; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009), given the diversity of the schools in question and the consequent differences in the scope of the interviewees' jobs. Interviews form a subcategory of qualitative methodology (Braun & Clarke, 2006). They involve interaction between the interviewer and the interviewees and are a fruitful, perhaps an optimal, method in gaining understanding of social relations and experiences (Green & Thorogood, 2004). The researcher and the interviewee cooperate in an unstructured dialogue to evaluate the context of the research theme (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) through a shared understanding that develops in their relations and communications (Jónsdóttir, 2003).

The interviews are used to shed light on school leaders' perceptions of contemporary change as stipulated in the upper secondary school legislation enacted in 2008 and the national curriculum guide published in 2011 (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012). The interviewees were also asked about the changes taking place in their schools, as seen from the school leaders' perspective. Furthermore, they were asked how they placed these changes in the context of education in general and, to some extent, the changes taking place in society.

Upper secondary school leaders are in a central position due to their status within the education system. Their location is optimal for evaluating the complexity of contemporary change. They are connected to various actors, both within and outside their schools, and have an overview of the main operating social structures that impact the school level. With the interviews of school leaders, the aim was to provide a multidimensional and a holistic picture of what facilitates and constrains change at the school level.

The interviews with the school leaders are part of a comprehensive research project in the upper secondary school level in Iceland, entitled Upper Secondary School Practices in Iceland: Teaching and Learning – Student Engagement and Initiative (Appendix A). Nine upper secondary schools were visited by a group of researchers who observed teaching, took classroom photographs, and interviewed school leaders and teachers individually and students in groups. Lesson plans and school curricula were also collected. This project is part of the

NordForsk-funded Nordic Centre of Excellence, Justice Through Education (JustEd) in the Nordic Countries, 2013–2018 (Justice Through Education, 2016).

6.1 Participating schools and school leaders

Nine upper secondary schools were selected from a stratified population. At the time, there were 34 upper secondary schools listed on the MoESC web page. Three, small and specialised schools (in fisheries and home economics) were excluded before the sampling took place. The remaining 31 schools were stratified into the following subcategories (Óskarsdóttir, 2016):

A) According to school type: grammar, vocational, and comprehensive schools;

B) according to sizes: small and large schools;

C) according to the age of the schools; and

D) by geographical location of the schools: Reykjavík, the capital city of Iceland; Reykjavík surroundings; and other districts.

There were 17 schools in total outside the capital city area and 14 in Reykjavík and four neighbouring towns at the time when the sample was selected. The schools outside Reykjavík were located in towns with from about 1,000 to 17,000 thousand inhabitants, except two schools located in smaller, country-side villages.

The nine schools were drawn from cards that had been assigned a number based on the clusters described in one of the 15 categories designed from A–D above. The main criteria were to select only one school from each category (Óskarsdóttir, 2016). In the end, all but one category was represented in the sample, but no schools were in five of the 15 categories.

To maintain anonymity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; McMillan, 2012), I only provide a distinction between school types (Table 5). At the time of the data collection, only two out of the 31 schools fit the vocational school category. Thus, that school type, if in the sample, is presented as a comprehensive school for the sake of anonymity. For the same reason, the selected schools and participants were given pseudonyms. The pseudonyms of the schools are based on islands around Iceland. Therefore, all of the schools were given the suffix -ey, or *island*. In cases where the information was considered especially sensitive, the schools are referred to as Schools 1–9 instead of using the initial pseudonyms, so that this information could not be matched with other information in the dissertation.

Table 5. School types and pseudonyms of both the schools and the selected school leaders

School	School type	Names of participants
Akurey	Comprehensive	Agnes, school director Arna, middle manager
Brokey	Comprehensive	Binna, school director Björg, middle manager Brynja, middle manager
Drangey	Grammar	Dagný, school director Dröfn, middle manager
Eldey	Comprehensive	Elísabet, school director Erna, middle manager Ester, middle manager
Flatey	Grammar	Fanney, school director Fjóla, middle manager Fönn, middle manager
Grímsey	Comprehensive	Gló, school director Gyða, middle manager
Heimaey	Grammar	Harpa, school director Hildur, middle manager
Jökuley	Comprehensive	Jakobína, school director Jónína, middle manager
Kolbeinsey	Comprehensive	Karolína, school director Kristín, middle manager

Once the schools had been selected, they were approached in order to ascertain whether they were willing to participate in the entire study, usually by a phone call from the project leader (my first supervisor). Also, in a letter sent immediately after the first contact, it was explained there what the study would involve before the oral agreement was made we could perform our study in the school. All schools approached agreed to take part.

In total, 21 school leaders were selected for interviews. A stratified sample was also used when selecting the leaders in three categories related to the complexity of the school hierarchy (see also Table 2, Section 2.2.1). The school

director was always part of the sample, and another leader was selected from the middle management layer in the schools with flat hierarchical structures. In schools with a steep hierarchical structure, three school leaders were selected: the school director, a school leader from the higher middle management layer working next to the school director, and the third leader from the lower middle management layer working next to the teachers. The participants from the middle management layer were randomly selected. Those who are not school directors are referred to as middle managers, and when adressing the administrators as a group, they are called school leaders. For the purposes of anonymity, these two middle management layers are not referred to separately.

All the participants have a teaching certificate and teaching experience at the upper secondary school level. Their ages were between the mid-thirties and the mid-sixties. The school directors were, on average, older than the assistant school directors, and the assistant school directors were, on average, older than the middle managers.

The backgrounds of the school leaders were diverse, although almost all of them had a university degree. Two of them had a master craftsman's licence (Icel. meistarabréf í iðngrein), 19 had a BA or BSc degree. In an addition, 12 of them had a master´s degree, and at least eight had a degreee or diploma in leadership. In order to prevent traceability (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; McMillan, 2012), it is deemed prudent not to provide more details.

For the same reason of preventing traceability, all participants, regardless of their actual gender, were given a female pseudonym to hide their identities (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; McMillan, 2012). They received a pseudonym with the same letter as the first letter of the school pseudonym. In the findings chapter, when the quotes were thought to be traceable or sensitive, the pseudonyms are left out altogether (see also Section 6.4.1).

6.2 Data collection

Data collection took place from October 2013 to November 2014. The interviews with the school leaders were conducted by me and, in most cases, also by Jón Torfi Jónasson, my supervisor. In two of the smaller schools in the sample, I acted alone, or in a total of four interviews out of 21.

Most of the interviews took place in the offices of participants or in meeting rooms in the schools. The interviews lasted from 48 to 118 minutes and all of them were recorded. They were supported by an interview framework (Appendix B), which was loosely followed. Thus, the interviews can be classified as semi-structured. This form of interview allows the participants to express

themselves thoroughly in an unstructured dialogue with the researcher(s) (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

We went through the whole interview framework in each school. In some cases, we excluded descriptive questions if a leader in the same school had already discussed specific items such as the governing structure of the school or division of labour, even if we accept that they might have had somewhat different perceptions of the formal structure of the school. Similarly, when an item was only or particularly relevant to one type of leader, i.e. the finance and the personnel were more discussed by the school director than the middle management interviewees, it was omitted in other interviews.

When visiting large schools with steep hierarchical structures, we needed to make sure we covered the main categories by keeping in mind what the other leaders in the same school had said. Therefore, having two of us acting together was helpful when monitoring the interview framework and making sure that we covered the main categories in the interview framework.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim, either by master's students participating in other parts of the research project or by assistants. Following the transcription, we carefully verified the transcripts by listening to the interviews twice while reading the texts and adjusted the transcriptions accordingly.

6.3 Data analysis

On the bases of Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis was used as a main approach to analyse the interviews. They describe the approach as a pedestal method of qualitative methodology offering flexibility when analysing conversations to generate the themes and when using both a theoretical and an epistemological perspective concurrently. By doing so, the thematic analysis becomes a helpful method in shedding light on how the participating school leaders perceive the issues addressed in the study, i.e., contemporary change at the upper secondary school level in Iceland. In the analysis, I built on the themes that appeared from the conversations with school leaders.

Braun and Clarke (2006) explain how thematic analysis is used to identify, analyse, thematise, and interpret data. They describe how themes can arise both from several participants addressing the same topic or from one participant spending some time discussing a topic. They stress the equal importance of both scenarios, as long as they shed light on the research questions. This perspective turned out to be quite important since we visited heterogeneous schools with diverse students and employee populations. Thus, the settings are not the same, and different experiences and working environments often lead to different operational challenges. This scenario difference is stressed in the findings by

identifying whether the majority of participants discussed the same topic or if one participant, or only very few, dwelt on a theme.

The analysis was based on the conceptual framework proposed in Chapter 3 and the research questions introduced in Chapter 5. I went back and forth between the theoretical underpinnings of the dissertation and the transcript data. As described by Braun and Clarke (2006), I inductively added to the conceptual framework when reading new articles and re-reading the ones from earlier. In parallel, I analysed the transcript data. In doing so, I extended the scope of the conceptual framework. This reflection gave me the opportunity to look at the data from a structured angle. There, I discerned themes, suggested by theory, that I otherwise might not have noticed, but I also generated other themes.

First, I carefully read the transcriptions to become familiar with the data and to gain an overview. After gaining an overview, I directed my attention towards the actors and social structures as defined and discussed in Section 3.1. I began by coding for actors with formal involvement at the upper secondary school level (see Section 2.2.1). Next, I searched for other actors discussed in the transcriptions. In parallel with the coding, I collected excerpts from the transcript data and placed the excerpts under the relevant categories of actors. Subsequently, I coded for the social structures (Scott, 2014). Then, I mirrored the excerpts in the theoretical underpinnings of institutions and organisations (see Section 3.2) to gain a deeper understanding of what facilitates and constrains change.

After that round of coding and categorisation, I printed out all the selected excerpts, cut them apart, and started to scaffold them in a more logical way. After the scaffolding process, I found it important to divide the findings into two main chapters, one on social structures and another on actors.

I used the three main pillars of institutions when designing the findings chapter on social structures. These are the regulative, normative, and cultural cognitive pillars (Scott, 2014). In the end, the two most significant institutional pillars guided the findings (see Table 6): the regulative pillar and the normative pillar of institutions (Scott, 2014). Excerpts matching the cultural cognitive pillar of institution where not as predominant. Hence, the pillar is not part of the headings but is discussed in relevant sections.

I used the same approach for actors. Then I placed the excerpts under macro-, meso-, and micro-level actors (Table 6). Subsequently, I clustered the excerpts into themes based on the theoretical discussion in Chapter 3. Other themes were generated inductively and integrated (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Table 6. Emerging themes and central concepts located at different levels (macro, meso, and micro): Actors and social structures

Actors and social structures

Actors at the macro level
• Ministry of Education, Science and Culture
  o Regulative pillars: The government
  ▪ Legislation and the national curriculum guide
  ▪ Financial regulations and budget cuts
  ▪ Collective bargaining agreements
  ▪ Accountability
• The Teachers' Union
• The university level
  o Normative pillars: The university level
  ▪ School leaders' and teachers' formal education and professional development
  ▪ Educational research
  ▪ The status of subjects
• The compulsory school level
• Vocational interest groups
• Societal influences and the local community
• Actors from the international influences
• Other upper secondary school: Horizontal influences

Actors at the meso level • The selected upper secondary schools: The heterogeneity and homogeneity • Policy enactment: Vertical influences • Institutionalisation and deinstitutionalisation: Horizontal influences and timing • Flow within the upper secondary schools: Horizontal influences • Parents and guardians • Students
Actors at the micro level • Teachers • School leaders

In line with Ball et al. (2012), the notion of timing emerged from the transcribed data, but in a different way than they discussed. Here, it is linked to both the processes of institutionalisation (Asnell et al. 2015; Kraatz, 2009; Scott, 2014; Selznick 1957; 1996) and deinstitutionalisation (Kraatz & Moore, 2002; Oliver, 1992; Scott, 2014). I coded for those examples and collected relevant excerpts (see Table 6).

As there is a consistent continuation of vertical influences promoted by macro-level actors, I used theories focusing on educators at the meso level responding to a macro-level demand for change (Coburn, 2004; Scott, 2014). I started to code for examples describing how school leaders perceived the implementation processes in their schools in relation to macro-level demand for change coming from the Upper Secondary Education Act No. 92/2008 and the National Curriculum Guide (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012). Then I looked at school leaders from the same schools together and collected excerpts describing their ideas on implementation processes. After that, I classified the schools into the following clusters (see Section 3.5): rejection, decoupling, parallel structures, assimilation, and accommodation (Coburn, 2004) based on the participants' discourse. The phenomenon of "pioneering" was added to this classification.

Concurrently, I used the theories of institutional and organisational leadership (Kraatz, 2009; Raffaelli & Glynn, 2015; Washington et al., 2008) to understand how school leaders perceived their roles, agency, and power (see Section 3.3) when dealing with different priorities and diverse cultures at force in their schools. Then I used the term enactment as introduced by Ball et al. (2012) and discussed in Section 3.5 to highlight and better explain the gap between policy implementation and policy enactment.

At the end of the process, I once again reviewed the transcribed data and listened to the interviews in parallel. I did this to reassess the atmosphere and the spirit of each interview in order to double-check and find missing themes in an attempt to fill gaps in the analysis.

6.4 Ethical concerns

Various ethical issues arise within a research project like this as being complex and comprehensive. This study began before the ethical committee approved the ethical guidance for scientific research at the University of Iceland (Research Ethics Committee, 2014). Nevertheless, all the criteria discussed in the ethical guidelines have been taken into consideration in this thesis. Three aspects of ethical concerns are the focus of this section: anonymity in the reporting of the data, the interviews with the school leaders that form the basis of this study, and the translations of excerpts from Icelandic to English.

6.4.1 Anonymity

In interviews, it is important to use pseudonyms and omit as much as possible of what can point to individual persons without interfering with the interview stories (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; McMillan, 2012). Therefore, anonymity, of both

the selected schools and the participants are important. This is a matter of principle, rather than being related to sensitive issues, even though there are instances where a school leader might very likely have expressed her views differently had there not been a commitment to anonymity. That is why I went to considerable length to ensure that the comments cannot be traced.

Iceland is a small country with only 325,000 inhabitants (as of 2014). Thus, a certain intimacy that comes from people knowing each other guides the society. When looking at the number of upper secondary schools, the society becomes even smaller with only 34 upper secondary schools at the time of data collection, with total 27,118 students (Statistics Iceland, 2013a), 1,915 upper secondary school teachers (Statistics Iceland, 2013b), 34 school directors, and arround 100 middle managers in more than 50% managerial positions (Teachers' Union, n.d.). In such a small community, some specific discourse and particular stories are quite well known in and out of the schools, and the excerpts may, therefore, be traceable. In such cases, it is difficult to guarantee anonymity. To prevent traceability, I used several tactics when hiding both the schools and participants. I changed the name of the selected schools, combined two levels of school sizes (medium and small), combined two school types (vocational and comprehensive) and did not provide a precise location of the schools (they are either listed as in the capital city area or outside it). In some cases, I also gave the schools other pseudonyms than addressed in Table 5 to respect their anonymity. Then I used letters to distinguish between the schools (see Sections 8.2.2).

When dealing with the participants, I gave them all female pseudonyms and represented them all in one gender (female). Using one gender should not influence our interpretations, since the focus is not on gender differences. I also did not provide precise titles of the participants from the middle management layer or where within the structure they are located. When discussing issues, I considered sensitive, I did not use their pseudonyms. Nevertheless, it was sometimes necessary to provide some information about the school type and their approximate location (capital area or outside of it) when discussing the different environments and what school leaders confront in their daily practices.

As a part of the procedure, the recorded interviews will be destroyed in one year from the defence of this thesis. This matter because the voices of the interviewees might be recognised, but this is not possible from the transcripts.

6.4.2 Interviews

Informed approval is essential, since human beings are part of the study and when confidentiality and anonymity are required. Thus, participants decided in

all cases whether they wanted to participate or not (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; McMillan, 2012).

In interviews, it is important for the researcher to be aware of her or his position, try to stay neutral, and to avoid influencing the data (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; McMillan, 2012). From the beginning of the data collection, Jón Torfi and I focused on being as open, transparent, and forthcoming as we could. We obtained informed consent from participants, promised anonymity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; McMillan, 2012), and focused on trust-building by giving information about the purpose of the research, the research design, and the research team (Alderson & Morrow, 2004; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; McMillan, 2012; Yow, 2005). However, we tried our best not to be too specific to avoid biasing our respondents towards some views that might be thought to hold a negative influence on the quality of the data (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Yow, 2005).

We are aware of our position as part of the research instrument. Our position can easily affect the quality of the research, scientific knowledge, moral integrity, sensitivity, and commitments. We, therefore, tried our best not to disturb the participants' stories (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; McMillan, 2012).

Both of us are insiders at the upper secondary school level in Iceland and are being active in various fields. We have a broad overview of the school level and are known by most of our interviewees. I am a former upper secondary school teacher, middle manager, and a curriculum leader. Jón Torfi is a well-known researcher, university teacher, and a former Dean of School of Education, and he has held other leading positions at the University of Iceland. Many of the interviewees were his former students in teacher training. It is important to have this context in mind when reading the thesis, both with its pros and cons (O'Reilly, 2008; Webster & John, 2010). Nevertheless, our inside knowledge can be valuable and gives us the opportunity to delve deeper and better understand relationships. At the same time, it is possible that it influenced the participants' stories.

We cooperated in the data collection while participants were alone in the room with us. This can create an uneven power relation (McQueen & Knussen, 2002). However, it can also be positive to cooperate since we counterbalanced one another in the data collection by filling the gaps when needed. Therefore, the data is richer, deeper, and more valuable. It is, however, equally important, when considering this uneven power position, to be aware that school leaders in Iceland are in a power position of their own due to their professional status at the top of the upper secondary school hierarchy and to working closely with the

MoESC. We never had the feeling that there was any hint of intimidation in the interviews.

6.4.3 Translation

The translation from one language to another language can raise both ethical and epistemological questions (Li, 2011). In order to reduce this effect, we worked hard at preserving the meaning of the text in the translation process. I translated the excerpts to English; Jón Torfi double-checked the initial translations and my understanding as taking part in most of the interviews. Finally, a professional translator adjudicated our outcomes by comparing the Icelandic excerpts to the translations.

6.5 Strengths and limitations

Various strengths and limitations arise in all research projects, and this study is no exception. The main strength of interviews and thematic analysis, according to McMillan (2012), lies in a more profound understanding than is obtainable by a survey. The method allows the researcher to delve deeper into the research theme in a dynamic interaction with the interviewees. The method also enables the researcher to control the conversation, by asking for clarification or elaboration, and to facilitate transcription of the raw data. The approach provides the opportunity to interpret nonverbal behaviour, as well as providing a historical perspective. However, interviews also have weaknesses in regard to indirect information, expectations, biases, and skills, that can affect the results. It can be difficult to go in depth and draw out real reactions. Participants may feel insecure or uncomfortable, give unclear messages, or be uncooperative. But there is no reason to believe that any of these potential shortcomings are more valid a threat than occurs with standard questionnaires.

Braun and Clarke (2006) describe how flexible and meaningful thematic analysis is in gaining a deep understanding of complex phenomena accompanying interviews, such as those presented in this analysis of contemporary educational change as is the focus of this study and the interaction of actors and social structures facilitating or constraining change as perceived by the participating school leaders. But it should also be noted that thematic analysis has been criticised precisely for its flexibility.

The schools and the participants in the study reflect reasonably well the social environment of Iceland regarding the diversity of student population, teachers, school leaders, and school types. In total, 29% of the upper secondary schools were part of the sample, 33% of the student population (Óskarsdóttir, 2016), 29% of school directors, and 13% of the middle management population. The

distribution of the schools did not spread equally around the island, 44% the selected schools are located at the capital area, as compared to 32% of the school population. Nevertheless, given how well the sample represents the school population and includes a variety of schools along a number of important dimensions, the study probably gives a good picture of Icelandic upper secondary schools and their operation as seen from the perspective of the school leadership at the micro, meso, and macro levels.

In our view, the interviewees were willing to participate and showed interest in the research topic. Almost all of them were honest and open. This gave us rich and diverse data, and some items, issues, and themes came up spontaneously during the interviews.

A comprehensive research project with interwoven pillars (Appendix A) and many researchers having different interests, focus, and expertise, has its pros and cons. The research team was composed of individuals varying in age, expertise, and competencies that sought support and knowledge from each other. Some of us could give more inside information on the school level as having recently worked either in a comprehensive or grammar school inside or outside the capital area. We provided information about the lingo found in the field and assisted those researchers who did not have recent connections to the schools. While the more experienced researchers guided us, the less experienced, in the research process.

Because of the wide scope of the project as a whole, the interview framework for the school leaders' interviews became rather long and comprehensive. In some cases, this led to a somewhat superficial overview of the school level due to trying to cover the wide range at the cost of depth. Hence, Jón Torfi Jónasson, and I tried to deal with that problem by distributing some questions between the participants within the same school to meet the various foci of the research group. In that way, we sought a balance between our own aims and priorities and the interests of our colleagues.

More importantly, after I started to analyse the data and discuss the content of the interviews with Jón Torfi, in particular on inertia to change and the norms and traditions governing the schools, the analytical focus shifted somewhat from an organisational to an institutional basis. If the theoretical perspective that I gradually developed had been taken into account from the beginning, some of the questions might have been different and the interviews would possibly have developed differently.

The data collection period was somewhat long, and also important events took place in the middle of it. The period lasted over a year, from late October 2013 to early November 2014. Different issues were in focus at different schools

during this time, in particular as we covered different periods of collective agreements and a teachers' strike. Developments that could not be ignored by the research team. In our view, it affected the attitudes of our participants in the second part of the interview journey, since both new collective bargaining agreements with new working time definitions occurred in the middle of data collection.

The schools outside of Reykjavík were all visited during a similar time, late in the research period. This fact may also account for differences between the school districts as it may have contributed to more diversity within the research focus and given us broader perspective.

By the time we completed the interviews in the sample, we experienced saturation in terms of the data collected, and it was clear that less new came from the school leaders as the process came to a close. Therefore, it is fair to assume that we covered the main aspects of educational change at the upper secondary school level as perceived by school leadership.

While the validity of the data was not systematically evaluated, we did not notice any contradictions in the information we were provided with, even though we found different perspectives within a particular school. The fact that we interviewed two or three school leaders in each school allowed us, in some cases, to examine the validity of the interviews with respect to factually-based responses within the same school by comparing them internally. Sometimes we could also use the inside knowledge gained from the research team collecting data from other groups, such as teachers and students, in the same school. This took place during team meetings. We also identified similar stories and the same names within the same districts that gave us ideas about the truthfulness of the interviews.

7 Findings: Social structures

The influences found in the interviews are clustered into actors and social structures based on the Scott's (2014) definitions of the terms. When framing the results, they are organised around these two main concepts, starting with social structures. Scott (2014) defines social structures as objects and frameworks created by actors, for example agreements, acts, rules, or other resources.

Several social structures were generated from the data. Some are at the governmental level, such as the legislation on upper secondary education, the national curriculum guide for the upper secondary school level, the evaluation system, and the financial model of formula funding used to distribute resources to the upper secondary schools. This category also has collective bargaining agreements negotiated by the Ministry of Finance. The formal education and professional development of teachers and school leaders consolidate as an important structure, as well as educational research usually promoted by university staff and, sometimes, teachers or school leaders when adding to their formal education. Likewise, the status of subjects or disciplines constitute a very visible and influential structure that is intertwined with control by the university level, society, and the educational professionals working in upper secondary schools. The following sections evolve around the regulative and normative pillars of institutions (Scott, 2014) generated from the study.

7.1 Regulative pillars: The government

As noted in Section 3.2, three pillars constitute the symbolic elements of institutions. The pillar in focus here is the regulative pillar, representing the legislative frames and the system of rules and regulations (Scott, 2014) that control schools in Iceland. Under this section falls the legislation and the national curriculum guide controlling the upper secondary schools, the economic structures, collective bargaining agreements, and accountability. These regulative pillars will be discussed in that order.

7.1.1 Legislation and the national curriculum guide

Most of the interviewees noted that laws and regulations played a leading role and guided the work in upper secondary schools. Fanney reported how ideas "very often come from the top because change does not always start before

making political decisions on new acts". There, she was emphasising the governing impact of the MoESC. Based on this, older acts are institutionalised, and new acts bring a process of deinstitutionalisation until they become institutionalised again.

However, the MoESC initiative gave the schools the freedom to change via decentralised actions, as passed in the Act on the Upper Secondary School Level No. 92/2008 and further elaborated on in the national curriculum guide for the school level in 2011 (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012). In so doing, the MoESC kindled deinstitutionalisation in upper secondary schools. Decentralisation enabled the schools to develop towards their internally shared aims, specialisations, and ongoing development. Bearing that in mind, the MoESC had systematically transferred power to the schools, as noted by some of the school leaders. By doing that, the MoESC had opened up the opportunity to escape from the shackles of the institutional characteristics that had governed upper secondary schools for decades. Thus, Dagný, along with many other participants, reported that the

> government of course sets the lines . . . in 2008 the emphasis was on decentralisation, giving the schools an opportunity to create their own curriculum and . . . focus on their strong sides and characteristics.

Most of the school leaders celebrated the decentralisation made explicit in the Upper Secondary Education Act No. 92/2008 and its formulation in the national curriculum guide in 2011. The power that was centralised (Upper Secondary Education Act No. 80/1996) was now systematically transferred down the hierarchical ladder of the school system. Nevertheless, it was repeatedly pointed out that the legislative structures for the school level constrained change when protecting powerful academic subjects in the acts (Upper Secondary Education Act No. 92/2008), the national curriculum guide and through the act protecting public employees (Administrative Procedures Act No. 37/1993). All this impacted the way school leaders went about change, as these structures promoted the processes of institutionalisation. However, several examples discussed by the school leaders fit the idea of deinstitutionalisation, i.e., the decentralisation incorporated in the Upper Secondary Education Act No. 92/2008.

Jakobína was pleased with the curricular freedom given by the legislation, but she referred to the fact that most of the schools were not assuming the power incorporated in the decentralisation:

> We are so lucky to have the opportunity to work within the framework of the new curriculum . . . the new curriculum gives us so many new opportunities . . . the biggest gift that the Icelandic nation has got, but there are incredibly few realising it.

Despite the "beauty" of decentralisation, as noted by Jakobína, the national curriculum guide was not above criticism, mainly from the perspective of subject hierarchy. Some pointed out how the guide protected the existing practices rooted in upper secondary schools via its subjects with long histories dominating the curriculum. This particularly applied to the mandatory subjects of Icelandic, English, and mathematics that were now stipulated as the only obligatory subjects across the curricular programmes.

According to Brynja, "it is stated that some subjects are more important . . . than others . . . these core subjects". Further, she emphasised how constraining this could be to the growth of other subjects. Similarly, Arna reflected on how "the curriculum affects . . . the self-esteem of vocational studies". She was, as was Brynja, reflecting on the subject hierarchy in the national curriculum guide that promotes the core academic subjects and keeps silent about others.

As shown, well recognised, powerful academic subjects with long histories are emphasised over newer subjects. This subject hierarchy is considered to constrain creativity and place undue and highly unequal weight on subject fields. Despite emphasis on this subject hierarchy, the school leaders also described how new courses came to the fore when changing the curriculum, such as the interdisciplinary courses.

In fact, legislation on upper secondary schools was not the only legal instrument referred to when discussing change, but also the Act on Administrative Procedures Act No. 37/1993, highlighting how constraining these acts of parliament are. One school director reported, in line with some of the other interviewees, how the legislation protects the employees in such a way that teachers' professional judgement cannot be influenced, and that the teachers sit firmly in their positions whatever their professional stance. She continued:

> The rights and responsibility of the state employees are extremely hindering . . . this act is probably the most hindering of all . . . that is really impossible to dismiss . . . a state employee, . . . [proposed] change often suggests it might be better to have a different employee, but it is just not really possible . . . A big proportion of teachers is possibly not interested in change . . . but sometimes I

> would be inclined simply to dismiss these employees . . . because they are not developing with the school, they are not participating in the change that we [the school leaders] want . . . they can sit on the side without participating.

It is clear when she stated: "the change we want" she is emphasising change in her school but faces constraints through institutionalised regulative social structures, in this case the Administrative Procedures Act No. 37/1993. Another middle manager agreed, but from the students' perspective. She noted how "intolerable it is . . . for students . . . to be stuck with staff or individuals that are completely unfit" due to this legal instrument. Another school director additionally reported:

> I lack resources if I have teachers that do not do well in teaching surveys again and again. Yes, I discuss it with the person concerned and try to establish training . . . I just get the Teachers' Union against me if I give a formal warning.

In addition, she referred to the power of the Teachers' Union and how it protected union members in terms of their professional autonomy.

Many of the participants emphasised how financial limitations obstructed the possibility of fully implementing the changes stipulated in acts and regulations. For instance, one school director reported, how

> it is obviously worst of all when it is not possible to enforce acts and regulations, for some reasons – for financial reasons.

Another school director added:

> The ministry . . . has just allowed us [the school] to develop as we want and stood by us . . . in the methods and philosophy.

She kept on by discussing the financial constraints as "this general influence by the government, you understand, the cuts". Finances, also determined by the government, limit the freedom of the schools and seriously restrict what they can implement as a positive response to decentralisation. Still other school directors took these worries further, and reflected on the past:

> The ministry was extremely difficult in the beginning due to money, unclear working processes . . . it was very difficult to get answers, difficult to get precise responses; this has changed dramatically.

Here, she is highlighting the progress she perceives within the MoESC. As shown, the school leaders discuss concurrent the legislative regulative social structures and finance. Finance was also discussed from a broader economic prospect.

7.1.2 Financial regulations and budget cuts

The financial status of the selected schools was intensively discussed by the interviewees. They looked at it from various viewpoints and how it impacts the daily work of the school leaders. Formula funding turned out to be a prominent topic. It was seen as causing inequality and reinforcing the status quo.

Dagný described how her "school is bankrupt". Further, Fanney reflected on how the lack of "the overhead cost . . . has treated us badly", and Gló worried about the general "impact of the state authority, you understand, the cuts" as did most of the participating school directors. Further, Karolína reported that "finance . . . constrain[s]" educational change and school development.

The school leaders noted how formula funding constrains by discouraging any flexibility and initiative and enforcing homogeneous pedagogical practices. The school leaders also pointed out how the focus on formula funding emphasises productivity at the cost of fairness. According to Agnes, formula funding is "a steering factor and had, therefore, of course, some impact" on changes at the school level. Brynja described it as a "thumb screw . . . it creates pressure on school leaders . . . on having larger groups . . . they need to cut down courses and ideas". Binna shared a similar opinion and described how she needed "to fill courses with students to have financially efficient student groups" therefore, "the Ministry is clearly an inhibitory" in educational change. Thus, the funding formula came up repeatedly where the school leaders expressed very similar concerns about constrains and inflexibility.

School size was also under discussion in relation to finance. Small schools in rural areas were considered to suffer more than schools in the capital city and in larger communities. Similarly, Kristín worried about the size of her school from the perspective of rural development, "the school is . . . shrinking rapidly" and Jakobína talked about how a "rural hostile parliamentary bill" is bad for rural development in general. Karolína agreed and noted that "students in small schools are more expensive than in big schools - this is just economics".

The finances sat heavily on the shoulders of the school directors and created a distinct division of labour. The school directors described it as a burden, while

middle management showed a kind of alienation from the issue. Thus, Dröfn reported that the school director takes care of “all financial intervention” and that she “totally avoids all financial decisions”. A similar discourse of burden and alienation appeared in the data from other participating schools and was highly dependent on each school’s hierarchical structure.

There was a consensus that dealing with financial issues took far too much time from school directors at the expense of educational considerations, pedagogical matters, and development. Many school leaders complained about how much time and energy was spent on financial aspects and described their desire to show more pedagogical leadership, which they did not find sufficient time for. There were, however, definite attempts in this direction. When Binna “first came here, the school was in a financial deficit. Therefore, I started to focus on finance”. After some time, she resisted being totally controlled by this ongoing situation and started to focus on internal educational actions and school development. Similarly, Jakobína claimed that school leaders should show educational leadership rather than being a financial officer. Most of the school directors agreed.

Some of the school leaders complained about the unexpected intervention made by the MoESC that restricted the access of learners over 25 years of age to upper secondary school. Most of these require the schools to respond with internal changes, but to a varying degree. Some of the school directors described how this intervensiton had a negative financial consequences for the school. The school leaders feared that this change would lead to a lower number of students in small, rural schools and that vocational and comprehensive schools, where the average age of students is higher than in traditional grammar schools, would suffer.

The largest part of the financial expenditure of upper secondary schools lies in teachers’ salaries, or up to 80% as noted by some school directors. Therefore, the teachers’ collective bargaining agreements are important in the financial context.

7.1.3 Collective bargaining agreements

The collective bargaining agreements before the teachers’ strike in 2014 obstructed educational change at the school level, according to the participating school leaders, mainly because the agreements had not been adjusted to the changes amended in the Upper Secondary Education Act No. 92/2008 and the national curriculum guide. This gap produced a huge dilemma inside and outside of schools by reinforcing the past with outdated structures. Therefore, the school leaders were stuck within the social structure of outdated agreements. In this

section, it is important to recall the content of Chapter 2 on the two collective bargaining agreements and the fact that the interviews crossed the two different agreement periods.

Hildur described how her school "could not go all the way . . . because the teachers' collective bargaining agreements did not follow". In a similar direction, Jónína described "a constant fight . . . about teachers' working time definitions and how everything is stuck and stiff". Binna delayed curriculum creation and implementation due to a "lack of money and because the teachers were adamant; we are not going to work on this without getting paid for it". She further described how teachers are "very cooperative, but they do not bend the wage contracts". All this indicates how constraining the agreements are.

The school leaders complained about the lack of control. Agnes reflected on rigid agreements and the school leaders' lack of authority.

> The teachers' bargaining agreements have been extremely difficult for school operations and have controlled school practices intensively . . . [as well as] the working time of teachers . . . the fact that school leaders do not have any sovereignty or only sovereignty over four hours per week on top of teaching duties, this makes all change and all development much more time consuming.

Agnes also complained about the fact that she "does not have any authority" over the division of the working time of teachers, and that she cannot even control the professional development of teachers. She described how the collective agreements slowed down change processes. Agnes is eager to promote ongoing change in her school where she can have the control as the school director acting on the top of the hierarchical ladder of the school.

Ester agreed with Agnes, and noted that she has been unable to get "out of this frame . . . we need to have teachers floating . . . collective bargaining agreements hinder this". And Binna had doubts about "the utilisation of time – the bargaining agreements hinder development there. I would like to have more flexibility in the utilisation of time". Fanney reflected on how "much attention is paid to teachers' salaries and any such challenges are getting in our way, so that it is impossible to work professionally as much as one wants to do". School leaders want to be able to change the pedagogical practices in their schools with a different setup of the curriculum and novel modes of teacher cooperation. However, the old collective agreements did not, as they saw it, harmonize with their ideas and the ideology of the Upper Secondary Education Act No. 92/2008

and the national curriculum guide. So, they felt their hands were tied within the agreements.

Furthermore, student assessment entered the picture from the viewpoint of collective agreements due to a change in assessment period as described in Section 2.2.3. Jónína, in line with some other interviewees, described how her school had been "struggling because of student assessment" and inflexible collective agreements.

Equally important are agreements on the professional development of teachers, which are an aspect of collective agreements. Elísabet described

> constraints . . . from the perspective of professional development . . . there we always face the collective bargaining agreements; we are not allowed to do this . . . take up this time [see Chapter 2] and then we need to pay, and teachers shall personally take care of their professional development [two weeks per year for professional development], and we cannot intervene . . . this is not at all good for the school, that it cannot become more instrumental in influencing what is happening.

Elísabet outlined how agreements on professional development prevented her ideas from becoming instrumental in accordance with the school's needs when developing the school. She could not organise professional development, as a whole-school approach, to support the change implemented in Eldey. The schools are stuck in the constraining structure of the agreements. In a similar vein, one school leader explained her attempt to organise professional development as part of everyday practices in her school instead of using the summertime, as teachers usually did. When trying to do so, she faced the union.

> This [flexibility] is even authorised in the collective bargaining agreements, but you always get resistance and the union always comes and tells us that we are forcing people to do some work, although 99% of the staff is happy.

Some of the school leaders maintained that the Teachers' Union is protecting the autonomy of teachers through insitutionalised collective bargaining agreements by preventing the school leaders from supporting change through professional development.

Competition for sabbaticals was also described as a hindering change. Brynja argued:

> You get one year paid sabbatical, once in your career. You can forget about it until after 20 years of teaching experience due to the competition . . . it is far too late in many cases.

Brynja called for more frequent sabbaticals for upper secondary school teachers to prevent stagnation and to promote continuous change.

7.1.4 Accountability

The outcome of internal and external evaluations prompts change in the upper secondary schools, according to the participating school leaders. Thus, ongoing change is reinforced by the Upper Secondary Education Act No. 92/2008 as it stipulates these evaluations and the corresponding responses by the schools. The act and related public documents produced by the MoESC require schools to carry out internal evaluations every year and internal actions are assessed by means of external evaluation. The path moves down the hierarchical ladder, from the higher authority to the schools through the external evaluation system, then down the hierarchical ladder of the schools from the administration layer to the classrooms through the internal evaluation system. Two major themes came up under this umbrella. The external evaluation system and internal evaluation are tools to monitor the schools and feed into school development.

From the perspective of internal evaluation, a discussion came up on monitoring the curriculum change taking place in the participating schools. Ester noted how her school Eldey „has not" monitored educational change. Kristín agreed by stating how "shamefully little" she monitors the change taking place in the school. Nevertheless, Dagný described how Drangey collected additional data through submitting "all kinds of surveys when we started" the implementation process. She, however, did not describe how the process was monitored and the effort did not seem to have been systematically followed. These are all leaders who used traditional internal evaluation methods with fixed surveys.

Within the theme of internal evaluations, the school leaders described three different ways of performing evaluation in the nine selected schools. Three schools worked according to an international quality standard system, two schools based the evaluation on so called democratic evaluation, and the remaining four schools used the rather traditional way of survey's.

Within an international quality standard system, everything is systematised and registered, for example ideas for change. Fjóla described how new courses are taken through

> a process in our quality system where you need to explain everything regarding the change - now it is not only registered in documents. An action plan is created . . . then we evaluate it on a regular basis.

Agnes reported the following about an international quality standard system used in Akurey.

> I have meetings with all of them [subject leaders] . . . once per term . . . [each subject leader] writes a report on the work of the faculty and, as a follow-up to the report, I meet with the individual subject leader on . . . the content of the report . . . the ideas that he envisages for development and change in the subject and thus this brings lots of ideas to me . . . I select . . . about five to ten of these issues after each term and suggest them for discussion at a meeting in the quality committee, thereby those ideas are brought into a formal procedure.

The school leaders using an international quality standard system as being their internal evaluation system described a strong focus on change and how it is systematised and controlled down the hierarchical ladder of their schools. As shown in the case of Agnes she selects what new ideas take place in her school. She, as a school director, can constrain new proposals and promote stagnation within selected fields. She shows examples of being both institutional leader when using her own power and values when selecting the priorities in Akurey and organisational leader when promoting ongoing development.

Conversely, leaders in Heimaey and Grímsey strived to actively monitor the change taking place in their schools by incorporating the internal evaluation system in the monitoring process. The leaders in these two schools claim to use what they called a “democratic evaluation system” where both teachers and students were actively part of the process in a reflective way. Gyða in Grímsey reported that they

> tried just in our own internal evaluation system to evaluate [the curriculum implementation] . . . we submitted a questionnaire for teachers and . . . tried a little bit to reflect on how we are doing this, how we want to do this, are we on the right track and are we doing what we say we are doing?

When the leaders in Grímsey monitored the implementation of the formative assessment in the school, they "used the result in one developmental day . . . where we tried a bit to reflect on our work". Gyða described the evaluation meetings with students in Grímsvötn as follows:

> We operate a little bit differently from others. We do not use written evaluation; on the contrary [name of the school director] and myself, we launch meetings in groups that are very formal, always the same procedure and always the same rules and there we often get something from them [the students] that we can use and often hopefully implementing it . . . various things have appeared. They have given us ideas we have used and school practices have changed after tips from them.

Subsequently, she described how students are "extremely happy with this arrangement" partly due to the democratic process and their freedom of choice.

Similarly, Harpa from Heimaey developed a democratic evaluation system for the school. She described how they collected information when they re-evaluated the curriculum design procedures the year before:

> We assembled lots of data on the procedure that had been used . . . we gathered a considerable amount of evidence on the process that had taken place; we listened to the staff and the students and derived ideas from this . . . there have been some changes and we will continue to extract ideas just from this information.

Her colleague Hildur noted that departments in the school "organize democratic self-evaluation . . . each faculty tries to look at something and follow the changes through . . . but not particularly theoretically or systematically". Harpa pointed out that they

> assess the internal evaluation reports each term . . . collect a good deal of data and submit a plan of action as a next step and then the self-evaluation committee follows this up.

As described in Heimaey and Grímsey, both teachers and students are actively included when monitoring change, and some ideas are generated and implemented from this work. Ongoing change is actively promoted in the schools, but the leaders emphasised working both up and down the hierarchical

structure in the school, unlike what is described within the framework of an international quality standard system.

The school registration system was also discussed as a source of change. Erna described how she regularly performs an evaluation in her school to feed to the school leadership. “I am always evaluating and exploring figures and such” from the school registration system *Inna* to spur the leaders in their school towards development and to support decision making. She noted that the registration system was used to lead various operations in Eldey. In this way, actions were guided down the hierarchical ladder of the school.

Independent inspectors hired by the MoESC perform external evaluations in the schools. Fanney described how external evaluation affects “for example, the evaluation of maths teaching [special report on mathematics]” in upper secondary schools in Iceland (Jónsdóttir, Briem, Hreinsdóttir, Þórarinsson, Magnússon, & Möller, 2014). Hildur also discussed the same report. Harpa reflected, however, on the “the external evaluation of the school, and we had meetings on what we could change, and also on what we would change”. She described the link with internal evaluation and action plans, as did Kristín and Karólína.

The examples indicate that the system of external evaluation promoted change in the schools, as at least it was intended to do. The government, as a higher authority, directed the schools down the hierarchical ladder of the school system when authorising the external evaluation. However, the external evaluations do not have same impact, means, and depth as the internal evaluations seem to have in the schools since they were mainly discussed if the individual school was being evaluated at the time we visited.

Until now, the focus of the findings has been on social structures promoted by the MoESC and the regulative pillars from the government. The university level also has an impact by promoting social structures incorporated in formal and continuing education for both teachers and school leaders, as well as through educational research and some issues stipulated in university subjects.

7.2 Normative pillars: The university level

The normative pillar of institutions (Scott, 2014) present perspectives, evaluations, and mandatory features of the society. Professional roles, values, and norms fall hereunder. The control the university level hold on upper secondary schools fits under this category, as well as formal educational and professional development of educators, the impact of educational research, and the status of school subjects.

7.2.1 School leaders' and teachers' formal education and professional development

The impact of formal education and professional development were generated from the data. Both systems promoted ongoing change according to the interviewees. The universities in Iceland were reported as important in this respect by offering learning opportunities and inspiring both teachers and school leaders towards new ideas and change.

Ester described how a group of vocational teachers, adding to their formal education to obtain a teaching licence, became inspired towards learner-centred ideas in the spirit of Dewey and individualisation. The group implemented the idea into their own practices ten years later when they had the opportunity to change due to amendments in legislation. Previously, they did not have the opportunity to make the change because of the centralised curriculum.

In a similar vein, Agnes reflected on the importance of the university level in developing new knowledge and as a support when implementing change. She called for more interactive communication and support.

> In most of the cases . . . [the interaction is] beneficial since we can usually gain the additional strength that we need to start change… we call to our aid external people, often from the university, who communicate [relevant] research and work and other things that are going on . . . I would, of course, like to see, somehow, more connection between those two levels, somehow, more flow . . . we need this information.

Kristín also noted how important the university is in constructing knowledge through formal education and professional development. Thus, promoting ongoing change in the school:

> We have presenters, for example [name of a university professor], who paid us a visit and talked about formative assessment . . . here we have, of course, people attaining their formal education that have been useful to us, of course . . . when someone one goes and educates him/herself and or, yes, or decides to develop, somehow, in the job, of course, it has its impact among all the staff.

Similarly, Arna described how they had made a point of listening "to those teachers" who were obtaining their formal education and gather ideas about speakers from the universities they recommended inviting to teachers' meetings

focusing on professional development or educational change. Here, the leaders act as organisational leaders by focussing on working orthogonally towards the hierarchical ladder of the school by empowering the teachers and promoting ongoing change.

The formal education of school leadership was also important. Fjóla described how her study in public administration, focusing on change management, had been useful in leading change in Flatey. Jakobína and Jónína described how they used their educational backgrounds and master theses to establish Jökuley.

Some school leaders went abroad for their master's studies when strengthening their skills and competencies, and others intended to do so. Gló implemented formative assessment as a whole-school approach after attaining her master's study abroad. She used "much research" from her master's thesis when implementing educational change. Harpa described how she strengthened her financial skills in her sabbatical when obtaining her master's degree abroad, more precisely to improve her skills in budgeting and human resources. Gló wanted to use her upcoming sabbatical to travel and gain more knowledge about professional capital.

In Section 7.1.3, professional development was viewed from the perspective of collective bargaining agreements. Now the focus is on the more positive phenomena of professional development, the school leaders' perceptions of change promoted by professional development and vice versa.

In line with many of the interviewees, Harpa pointed out how "professional development plays a key role in educational change". Fjóla agreed and noted how they, the leaders in Flatey, were "perhaps, not diligent enough . . . to educate in the beginning . . . around change and maybe not attentive enough to realise how this works on . . . teachers" and did not reach the expected outcome. I deduct that the leaders were fully aware of the important link between change and professional development. The same went for teachers, according to Agnes. She noted how they had started to think about how to

> develop as teachers in this environment of change . . . A huge majority of the teacher group here in this school is strongly aware of this implementation, and of the change it calls for regarding professional development; we use the teachers' meetings in this context.

The teachers on the frontline of change in Heimaey had also engaged in professional development to be up to date. Harpa noted that:

> The most radical teachers have gone through formal professional development [at the university level] and are maybe the ones who have reached furthest in all development and pedagogical progress.

The school leaders were not excluded from their own professional development and some actively engaged in such improvement as part of their everyday practice. Thus, Agnes tried

> to use all the time I possibly have for . . . retraining, to seek meetings, conferences and workshops where school topics are discussed, as well as innovation . . . something I can use for the development of the school.

Most of the school leaders complained about the dilemma within the professional development system. The dilemma is the contradiction between the autonomy of teachers over their own professional development and the school's need towards specific development. Therefore, most leaders called for increased sovereignty over teachers' professional development. Agnes described how professional development "is primarily built on their [teachers'] interest". She continued:

> School leaders do not have any authority over the division of teachers' working hours [related to professional development] . . . to see if professional development takes place, or not . . . and . . . all teacher training takes place out of the schools . . . I cannot point out an exciting course . . . that . . . fits into existing projects.

Here, Agnes was reflecting on the fact that she cannot direct her teachers to training fitting the overall aim, or the need, of the school since teachers' autonomy over their own professional development is protected in the collective bargaining agreements. Elísabet described how the leaders in Eldey had "tried some options regarding professional development . . . but, we always end up with the collective bargaining agreements" that hinder their actions. "It is not good that the schools cannot be instrumental in influencing what is happening" in their own educational settings. Many of the interviewees made a similar point.

Harpa also reflected on teachers' autonomy over their own professional development. She

> would like to see the two weeks in retraining which are [now] part of the summer period . . . inside the active school year [then] school

> leaders and teachers control it and . . . organise this retraining together . . . I want to build it into the school time [to meet the need of the school].

Binna also believed, that "professional development should take place within the schools". As shown, most of the school leaders want to act, in greater extent, as organisational leaders by integrating professional development into the school to be able to promote ongoing change as part of everyday school practice. These ideas, however, contradicted what Dröfn said about the importance of teacher autonomy, trust, and ownership in their own professional development. "Teachers take part in courses in their own field and completely control this process . . . I feel the best solution lies in cooperation between whole departments".

Through formal education and professional development, educational research came in as a social structure impacting change and, as before, originated from the university level.

7.2.2 Educational research

The extent of the use or knowledge of educational research or how it is used in the schools was explored. This was seen as highly relevant considering the current, world-wide emphasis on research in academic circles, concomitant with extensive educational research globally, together with a growing interest in research-based practice in education. At least six themes came up: school leaders' understanding of the term educational research, educational research as a prerequisite for change, action research as part of everyday practices, school development and formal education, dissemination of research knowledge when academic experts give talks or act as experts at school meetings, impact of research journals, and homogeneity of research. In several cases, there was evidence of educational research promoting change both through bottom-up and top-down approaches.

Most of interviewees made no distinction between information in educational research versus reports. Some of the leaders mentioned miscellaneous reports. They were on innovation, the well-being of teachers, health promotion for young people in Iceland, information presented by the University of Iceland about the disposition of their students, and reports from Statistics Iceland informing the university about where their students went for a college education. These reports contain evidence that the school leaders used to inform their educational practices.

Most were, however, uncertain as to whether educational research, narrowly defined, could lead to change. Agnes had doubts about the effects of the research as a leading force in educational change. “Oh, well, it is quite minimal, I would say”. The same goes for Karolína, who said “I am not so sure”. Fönn stated that educational research is not a precondition for change. The majority of the interviewees agreed with the three of them, at least in general terms.

There are, however, notable examples to the contrary in the data. The school directors Binna and Gló seemed to dive more deeply into educational research as a prerequisite for change than the other leaders. They described how they read and tried to implement new ideas into their own practices based on their readings. They were both in favour of the book *Professional Capital* by Fullan and Hargreaves (2012). Gló described how “extremely exciting” their ideas are, and she intended to spend her sabbatical studying their work. As discussed before, Gló based the implementation of change in her school on studies that she used in her master’s thesis. She “knew a lot of research that all said the same, lectures are not the best form of teaching . . . ideally they [the teaching methods] should be more diverse”. Further, Binna described how she “found . . . a book . . . that” inspired her and asked some colleagues in the school to dig deeper into its content with success. However, she was fully aware “how sensitive it is to use such interventions” as a top-down approach. She stated that her

> main conclusion is that it is difficult to change from the top, it needs to come from the people . . . somehow, I need to give them the tools, inspire their ideas in the way that they discover it by themselves . . . this is the complication.

Here Binna was trying use organisational principles to make change in the school via professional development, and she danced between directives, freedom, and ownership. Kristín, however, described how a former employee of the school evaluated a new cross-curricular course in Kolbeinsey as part of her formal education at the university level, and how they “have since had it [the research] in mind” when redesigning the course. Here, Kristín was describing how the staff in Kolbeinsey used acquired knowledge as a basis for change in the course when redesigning it. Similarly, Arna described how research knowledge

> actually comes through with the teachers who are this force for change; they influence the education, influence our policy here inside . . . the group that has been attaining their formal education at the university . . . has clearly brought in . . . this research [focus].

Some of the other interviewees had similar stories. Arna also pointed out how the teachers were used as potential change agents at teachers' meetings:

> One teacher discussed her master's research . . . it is . . . a good example of this changing force affecting the education and the policy development in here.

Here, the initiative of employees attaining formal education was used to reinforce change in Akurey, thus classified as a bottom-up approach.

The impression from the interviews is that the use of educational research tends to be initiated by the school directors. Brynja described the changes that occurred in the school Brokey when a new school director was hired. The new director "has made quite a special effort in bringing research and academic work and debate into the school". Binna reflected the same when she described her vision and priorities as school director. Similarly, Erna conveyed that "professional focus" came with the school director. Erna continued to say that it was "so important . . . that there is leadership in these matters and initiative". Here, Erna was reporting how active use of educational research in every day practices of the school is highly linked to the person selected to be the school director. The process is stimulated by this person's initiative, capacity, priorities, and professionalism. This initiative of the school directors promotes change via top-down influence, and the school leader acts as an organisational leader, trying to deinstitutionalise the school.

One of the school directors was actively engaged in educational research. She described how she collected data in her school and wrote several articles as part of her own formal education in cooperation with a university researcher. Throughout that work, she gained inside knowledge that she appreciated and found useful for her school:

> It has just been lots of fun . . . it has just given me a lot, and what I have been doing in my study . . . I have been researching and I have been reading the research of others . . . I have been researching the practices in my own school and I have got a lot out of it and taken in depth interviews with students . . . and got an overview of many students in my school and I have come to conclusions that sometimes surprised me . . . this has affected my views on education and has certainly had an impact on what I am telling my colleagues here.

Teachers' research of their own work is limited, as Dröfn described, "[n]ot much". Most of the school leaders agreed with Dröfn. For instance, Brynja sated "[i]t could definitely be more, teachers drive too much on automatic pilot, I think". However, the leaders described how teachers on sabbaticals, active professional development, or continuing their formal education had performed action research as part of that journey. Such methods are not actively implemented in everyday school practice when the teachers return to work. None of the school directors described action research as a whole-school approach in their schools.

Nevertheless, some dissemination of research knowledge seems to occur with academic experts giving talks at meetings in schools, as already discussed. Agnes described how they "have been getting . . . individuals, mostly academics who have been distributing their own results, or other current research results".

Arna reflected on the national curriculum guide from a different perspective than highlighted in Section 7.1.1. She pointed out how educational research is in the background of the curriculum. "It is quite clear that those who have been leading the new curriculum have been examining available research". Fjóla agreed. Here, Arna and Fjóla pointed out how research knowledge has impacted the creation of the national curriculum guide. Thus, the impact of educational research is indirect but stimulates new ideas in the schools.

Few of the participating school leaders reported looking for international literature. However, the Icelandic e-journal Netla appeared to play the most important role in school practices and school development in general. There seemed to be some reading of the journal among practitioners, and they spread the knowledge they gained through discussions. Gló described how they "came across articles" that they used as a ground for professional discussions in several teachers' meetings, and Karolína described how teachers "distribute articles from the e-journal Netla and send to one another". Taking us further afield, Fönn noted how she tried to monitor what is going on through her professor from abroad. He "points out what he comes across that might be of interest to me". And Agnes reported how she tries

> to read from the web. We have . . . been involved a lot in technological activities and development . . . connecting information and communication technology and then, of course, one tries to follow news and articles published on the internet.

Karólína emphasised, however, the gap that opened up after completing her formal education due to a lack of time to read and develop when she started at

her job again. She described how she used to “read when adding to my formal education . . . I always looked at Netla, but now I am not really looking for research . . . after I finished my studies”. Her account is similar to the stories on action research discussed earlier. When educators come back to their work after attaining formal education, they seem to drown in everyday tasks.

Finally, some of the interviewees complained about the lack of research targeted at certain programmes and disciplines. Fjóla described how “educational research projects aimed at the upper secondary school level in Iceland are not that many and do not focus at all on vocational studies”. Elísabet agreed and added her concerns about the lack of “emphasis on the work of upper secondary schools, the vocational programmes in particular” and the general absence of reflective practice. Similarly, Jakobína described how “research in schools like ours is very rare” and, therefore, the research is not useful to them. She led a school that differed in a multitude of ways from most upper secondary schools in Iceland. The research produced by the university level was criticised by implication because it did not fit the concerns of the upper secondary schools; the school leaders clearly felt that a huge gap needs to be filled.

Most of the school leaders did not base curriculum implementation in their schools on existing research knowledge, nor did they monitor the change. As noted, both the upper secondary school teachers and the school leaders were educated at the university level and some of them also attained their professional development at the school level. Therefore, it is interesting to see how the universities specifically impact the subjects and subject fields at the upper secondary school level.

7.2.3 The status of subjects

In general, the school leaders have the agency to interfere with pedagogical tools and encourage pedagogical renewal. They, however, did not want to interfere with the content of subjects, despite having strong opinions in several cases about outdated content and textbooks in some subjects.

Most of the school leaders claimed to face slow change, especially in content. Karolína reflected on slow development of “new courses and changed [courses] and interdisciplinary work . . . that is probably due to conservatism and nothing else”. Similarly, Kristín described how “subjects are so compartmentalised” and how difficult it was to escape from these constraints.

When the teachers in Akurey were asked to design new study programmes for academic paths, Arna said:

> When we ask people in natural sciences to create natural science programmes, when we ask people in social science to create social science programmes, and when people in languages to create language programmes . . . [then we see] small BSc programmes [emerging].

This shows that academic programmes at upper secondary level are a feeder for the academic disciplines at university level. Teachers based their work on their formal education and seem to heavily rely on the conventions of their subjects. Some even stuck within their subject frames, as noted by some of the school leaders. The values of subject disciplines are reinforced at the university level and impact the development at the upper secondary school level. This helps explains how institutionalised subjects are.

There turned out to be a difference between subject fields in these manoeuvres. One school leader, for example, described it more as "struggle and resistance within academic studies" than in other disciplines in her school. The same opinion is reflected in the comments of her colleague, who described how the academic programmes base their work on "old tools . . . [and have] basically not developed much". The crisis is most significant within mathematics, Icelandic, and English, according to one school leader. Further, she spoke vividly about the crisis in Icelandic language teaching. "Should the teaching be based so much on literature?" she asked and suggested to "try to teach Icelandic as a language . . . they [the students] just simply . . . need it". Other school leaders had similar worries: "There are very different opinions about the value of teaching phonetics in Icelandic".

Fanney discussed a corresponding crisis in mathematics, which perhaps was the subject that elicited the strongest feelings.

> I am so interested in mathematics, and I think that I have had a lot of problems with the maths teachers, because they do not want to change. There were of course such outdated methods being used, outdated material . . . ancient tradition, outdated textbooks, so dull, so repulsive for a big group of students, such a big portion of Icelandic students and I would just like to say that math teaching in Iceland is a just a black spot on the Icelandic school system.

The interviewees experienced the natural sciences being more marked by traditions, as compared to social sciences and languages. Mathematics and physics are even more deeply rooted in traditions and norms than other disciplines. Harpa spoke in depth about the reasons for these difference within

the academic courses. According to her, the roots lie in a different vision and history:

> The older section of the maths faculty is the most conservative . . . maintaining that innovation is a certain threat to the faithful devotion required in maths and physics . . . the conflict lies in this theoretical part . . . how much should be seen as preparation for life and work in a democratic society and how far we can go [in that direction] at the expense of theory, or the academic part, [the roots lie in] the working methods . . . people's experience of what it is . . . to be a teacher . . . and linked to seeing themselves as persons within the subject.

The roots, according to Harpa, lie in different working methods and how the teachers see themselves as part of the subject and the continuation of the academic discipline at the university level. She highlighted the theoretical part as the operating force in physics and mathematics. Thus, the school leaders seemed to have quite strong views on the subjects, but felt, perhaps unexpectedly, powerless to stimulate what they saw as necessary changes.

Similarly, some of the school leaders had difficulties when implementing the six fundamental pillars, as stipulated by the new curriculum guide, as a cross-curricular theme. The school leaders reported, for example, more difficulties when implementing the six fundamental pillars in mathematics than in social science, and their argument was that social sciences are more interdisciplinary than mathematics. Hence, some subject teachers resisted this aspect more than others. Karolína stated:

> Subjects differ when dealing with all these fancy terms that come with the new curriculum . . . a little debate here when we are working on the new curriculum. In social sciences things seem to … work better regarding this matter, but apparently worse in maths and natural sciences.

The same difference between disciplines is also reflected in society in general. Hildur described a difference "in-between disciplines" when she discussed the societal request. Students studying natural sciences "are thought to have all paths open". This means that students graduating from natural sciences programmes at the upper secondary school level can enter any university discipline they want. While students learning "languages and social science" are expected to be engaged in studies characterised by "broad [knowledge] and . . .

more freedom of choice" throughout the period of study and do not have the same opportunities as students graduating from the natural science programmes since they are lacking mathematics and some natural sciences.

Agnes looked at this from a wider perspective. According to her, it is possible

> to enter every subject, both in academic and vocational courses, and find such [views] and note the people who hold them, the teachers I would say . . . this was taught like this when I was in this . . . this is . . . classical in my subject, this is the base . . . classic that every teacher and . . . each subject . . . sees as a base in my subject . . . for example Icelandic sagas; teachers of Icelandic in upper secondary schools would probably be reluctant to agree not to teach at least one of the sagas . . . we have not yet broken down these walls.

Here Agnes is referring to the institutional walls within each subject in all programmes.

There are also several examples of conservatism and resistance to change within the vocational studies. Agnes noted:

> I was at a meeting yesterday, we were talking about shortening the study period of vocational programmes and then an example was given that one course in [name of a vocational subject and she described the exact content] . . . then no one is performing it any more . . . this is an example of a classic component in one subject that is still taught despite the fact that this is not carried on in any single [name of the vocation and the company type it belongs to]

According to the leadership in comprehensive schools, change of content seemed to take place more easily within vocational subjects than in academic subjects. Erna, for example,

> found out . . . that it is a considerable change here in [several vocational] courses . . . they are always reacting . . . they just change the content and what they are teaching . . . not in compliance with the course description, or aims or anything, but they changed this because they felt the need.

Despite the strong opinions of school leadership on old-fashioned content, they claimed that they lacked the authority and agency to promote change. Fanney

tried to influence the teaching of a third language in her school. She faced resistance when trying to determine whether it should be taught.

> We are having trouble with the third language . . . we are still trying to teach it . . . why? Then the language teachers just say no [to a suggestion of discontinuation] we will only go so far and no further; so of course, we will teach a third language in all programmes.

Similarly, Binna noted that

> it can be . . . a sensitive matter . . . to intervene, because also, that is a bit of a tradition, . . . , but I cannot tell mathematicians what they should do or how they should do it; each and every one needs to do as he believes is right.

She was reflecting on the traditions constructed in the frame of each subject. Along similar vein, Gló remarked that she did not have the "authority" to interfere with the content of the subjects. "I can only motivate teachers to come up with ideas, and we have been pushing it. This needs to be teacher driven". Fanney agreed that the team of leaders "do not tell teachers how to do things . . . then I feel that I cannot say whether things may be this way or another". Here, teacher autonomy and expertise in a subject moulds the actions of the school leadership at the school level.

Still another manifestation of subject fields was incorporated in the buildings and the physical space available. For instance, Gló described that when designing a new building for Grímsey, she organised the school in cooperation with the teachers, "with reference to subject fields . . . we want to create communities . . . and dialogue between teachers and students". Here she is, like all the other school leaders, reinforcing the institutional values at force in the school. She is acting as an institutional leader by muting and constraining change by acting along the existing culture and values held by the subject teachers. There are, however, examples of major content change at the school level. Jakobína saw it as "part of the job . . . each term to have new courses", and Kristín and Harpa described how Heimaey established an interdisciplinary course where some traditional academic courses were combined and refreshed.

Based on these reflections, it is possible to identify institutional characteristics by looking at traditions and norms within every subject and discipline. The natural sciences programmes are, however, more deep-rooted in traditions and norms than languages and social sciences, according to the

interviewees. The institutional characteristics seemed to be most explicit in physics, mathematics, and Icelandic than other subjects.

The leaders also gained permission to intervene in and lead pedagogical change and renewal in their schools. Erna noted how change "needs to impact the teaching". This is in line with Binna's ideas when she reflected on a big problem regarding the teaching methods at Brokey. She said that "we are unable to meet the students; their study results are not good enough". Björk, the school director of Brokey, described an intervention in cooperation with a group of teachers trying to counteract low student performance. She had the authority to impact the pedagogy, both teaching methods and assessments. Gló, like most of the school leaders, described how "all the attention and energy has been spent on developing teaching methods". She had been promoting learner-centred pedagogy, information technology, and formative assessment as a whole-school approach in Grímsey.

After exploring these diverse social structures from controlling neoliberal tools, such as accountability, formula funding, and collective bargaining agreements, on one hand, to social platforms, such as formal education and professional development discussed by the school leaders on the other, the identified actors will be at focus in the second findings chapter.

8 Findings: Actors

Actors, according to Scott (2014), are either individuals or a group of people forming the social landscape of our lives. They process institutional identities based on their capacities, rights, and responsibilities. Several actors were generated from the data (see Table 7). These actors are classified as political, educational, and societal actors, depending on how the school leaders talked about them, their origins, and positions in society. All except one of the actors reported by the school leaders have formal involvement at the school level via policy documents, as discussed in Section 2.2.1. Their space and focus in the legislation differs (Upper Secondary Education Act No. 92/2008).

Table 7. Actors generated from the data

Levels	Political actors	Educational actors	Societal actors
Macro	MoESC The Teachers' Union Universities	Universities Compulsory schools Other upper secondary schools International education actors Vocational interest groups School boards	Societal influences
Meso		The participating upper secondary schools Educators (various kinds of professional groups)	Parents Students
Micro		Individual teachers School leaders	

The same actor can have influence at more than one level. School leaders, for example, operate at the micro level when working with an individual teacher. When leading change in the school, they operate at the meso level. The same applies to many of the other actors. Hence, their inferred influence was placed under the best-fitting category. This chapter on actors is organised according to the three levels, macro, meso, and micro, using criteria which were discussed in Section 3.4 and suggested Thornton et al. (2012) and Erez and Gati (2004).

8.1 Actors at the macro level

The schools are not an isolated phenomenon but part of a larger picture, that is termed the macro level (Thornton et al., 2012). According to Waks (2007), the external environment of schools in which the schools as organisations function as part of the larger society. The interaction and impact of macro-level actors will be discussed accordingly.

The MoESC was intensively discussed by the school leadership, as well as the Teachers' Union. Both groups were discussed as political actors contending with each other via an intensive power struggle. Other school levels were also addressed, mainly the university and the compulsory school levels, as well as international influences, councils for vocational studies, and professional interest groups. Finally, school surroundings were dealt with. Most of the influences from these actors were presented as vertical influences with top-down demands. Horizontal influences were also discussed, for example when the flow of existing knowledge and experiences occurred between upper secondary schools.

8.1.1 Ministry of Education, Science and Culture

The MoESC was seen by the interviewees as a powerful, political macro-actor influencing the upper secondary school level by promoting all the regulative pillars of institutions discussed in Section 7.1. The school leaders highlighted the slow processes of change incorporated in the traditional system and fluctuating political actions from one election period to another. Some of the leaders saw the MoESC as giving them freedom to change, while others misunderstood their freedom.

Many metaphors were used when discussing the system. Erna noted how "long it takes to turn an oil tanker, schools are a bit like that", and Elísabet used the metaphor of

> an aircraft carrier; it takes a long time to to turn it, and we need to just speed up that process . . . in that way that we are not reacting three, four, five years after it [the change] is here and becomes a fact.

In these words, Elísabet, wanted to react faster to social and technological change. She pointed out how slowly the school system reacts. Thus, the study paths, such as vocational programmes basing their education and training on technology, were considered a long way behind all technological development. She wanted to change this. Most of the school leaders in the participating

comprehensive schools agreed and explained how stuck they were in an traditional system.

Brynja described the insufficient discussions taking place in the system. She pointed out that the time table is not in harmony with the needs of the school's diverse student population. She called for a new revolution, similar to the revolution taking place when the unit-credit system, on the one hand, and the comprehensive system, on the other, were developed.

> I do not know how they are going to bring it about . . . considering the opportunities it seems to provide, the system is out of date. To be working in so many minutes, in this room, having 30 students to achieve efficiency . . . I think it is a time for a revolution.

Kristín described, how "fluctuating" the MoESC had been in this process and how "the execution on behalf of the ministry is extremely disorganised". Kristín then contradicts herself by stating how "positive it is . . . that the school attains freedom, but I worry a bit whether it will be chaotic [the change made by the schools]". Kristín and some of the other school leaders were still looking for more directives and assistance from the ministry.

Karólína reflected on how teachers' ownership is lacking:

> The change is not their wish [the teachers'] and if you get a directive to change without maybe seeing it yet that something good is included in the change . . . then it is extremely difficult to start . . . I think that this is what has been affecting us.

Kristín agreed by saying how bad it was that "the need did not grow within the school community; it came from the top and then it is maybe harder to make it work". Karolína and Kristín were directing their focus towards teachers and their lack of ownership. They wanted to emphasise bottom-up approaches where teachers could employ their own ideas, and they wanted to avoid top-down directives on behalf of the MoESC. Karolína and Kristín were uncertain about the power transferred to them in the act. On the one hand, they talked about the need for teacher initiative to change and, on the other, the legal frame as a directive from the top. This kind of contradiction was common in the discourse of participating school leaders.

Gló, however, had a different point of view. She said that "the ministry . . . has just let us develop as we wish and stood by us in methods and policy making". Conversely, she described how "this general impact of the government, you see,

the cuts" impacted and constrained the schools in their operation. Elísabet agreed about the freedom the schools had

> in relation to the curriculum; they [the employees at the MoESC] have been flexible in giving permission for experimental teaching, so I have not much to say about the ministry as a constraint per se.

The MoESC was also seen by the school leaders in sharp contrast with the Teachers' Union, as will be the focus of the coming section. In this section, it is possible to conclude that some schools had assumed power in the decentralisation and are moving their schools forward, while others were stuck in same traditional rut, and the MoESC seems to be giving mixed messages.

8.1.2 The Teachers' Union

The Teachers' Union was seen as a political actor located at the macro level and strongly resisting the change promoted by the MoESC (see Section 7.1). The Teachers' Union heavily emphasised protecting the accumulated rights of the teaching profession. Doing so promoted institutionalisation and stagnation at the school level, as highlighted by many participants.

Tensions between upper secondary schools implementing change, the Teachers' Union, and the MoESC turned out to be an important theme that presents the greatest power struggle, according to most of the school leaders. The interviewees felt that the Teachers' Union was an influential actor in constraining change and protecting existing values, traditions, and norms within the schools. Thus, it reinforced institutionalisation at the school level. One leader described "the conflicts between the teacher leadership, the Teachers' Union, and the ministry" when implementing change. Many interviewees discussed those same conflicts. One leader reported that "the worst is how inflexible" everything is. She then described how

> the Teachers' Union reinforces stagnation . . . Is it normal to constrain education in a straitjacket of collective bargaining agreements? And this refers both to the Teachers' Union and the government.

Moreover, one school director reported, quite vividly, that "one of the fiercest debates now is with the Teachers' Union . . . [which is] completely out of line with today's schooling".

Another leader described how the union had been criticising teachers for participating in school development. "Teachers have been accused by the union

representative of going outside the working frame". Her colleague further noted that teachers work according to

> very demarcated agreements [collective bargaining agreements and working time definitions] . . . the teachers are . . . on the brakes . . . it can be extremely dangerous for them to go beyond a certain limit; they cannot create traditions.

Here, she was talking about the union protecting the existing system of allotting time to tasks and reinforcing the institutionalisation of the school level by adhering to traditions. The content, both explicit and implicit, was the time needed to adapt the new curriculum to the school and construct new syllabi in the process. It is important to keep in mind that teachers are not getting paid for the extra work included in the curriculum change and that the Teachers' Union fought for the time the changes take to be recognised in on pay checks. The union was doing this in order to protect the rights and the working conditions that the profession had. Therefore, one leader noted how

> extremely difficult it is . . . to work in this environment where the ministry says one thing and the Teachers' Union [another thing] . . . these bodies do not walk in tandem and . . . the upper secondary schools are somewhere in between, and we do not know what to do.

She described what she saw as the double dilemma arising when the Teachers' Union was protecting the existing system, including the autonomy of the profession, respect for its judgement and salaries, while the ministry was emphasising change.

However, the school leaders felt that the union lacked respect for the professional part of teaching. One leader noted that "[t]he union is not entirely thinking about the professional side of teaching and school leadership" when reflecting on how she thought the Teachers' Union constrained teacher professionalism and development in the schools. Another school director agreed by pointing out that "the Teachers' Union and others are a bit beating down the teaching profession" by hindering teacher participation in curriculum implementation "except getting especially paid for it".

Another director, interviewed after the teachers' strike in early 2014 that resulted in new collective bargaining agreements and working time definitions, still experienced the same struggle. The Teachers' Union was still seen as standing on the brakes and resisting change:

> Teachers are back in the trenches as before the strike . . . I got a letter from the president of the Association of Teachers in Upper Secondary Schools stating that all work related to . . . curriculum creation will not be done in the school unless special payment is received for it. And my understanding was that it was agreed on last spring, in the new collective bargaining agreements, but this is probably not the case.

She was still facing resistance by the union despite new collective agreements. Because of this intensive opposition, she felt she could not keep implementing change.

There are three points to conclude from this discussion. First, that the school leaders wanted to carry out a number of changes afforded by the new curriculum. Second, they did not, in many cases, manage to co-opt the teachers to work on these changes due to resistance from the Teachers' Union. Third, they seemed to attribute the problem to the Teachers' Union rather than the collective bargaining agreements as negotiated by the government.

8.1.3 The university level

The universities, in particular the University of Iceland, functioned as a powerful force with top-down directives from the macro level to the micro level, according to the interviewees. The leaders in upper secondary schools were seeking to strengthen their cooperation with the university level on the basis of equality between the partners. In this section, the institutional influence of the universities is discussed, that is, top-down directives from a higher place in the hierarchical structure of the school system in Iceland. The content of Section 7.2 on the normative pillars of institutions promoted by the university level are important to keep in mind.

Many of the participating school leaders noted how some university faculties wanted a broad base as a preparation for the studies taking place at the university level, while others sought fixed learning outcomes to be achieved by students who graduated from upper secondary schools. The faculties wanting fixed learning outcomes placed institutionalised demand on upper secondary schools. In doing so, the university level protected the existing habits and norms incorporated in the powerful, traditional, academic subjects, as discussed in Section 7.2.3. Dagný noted that universities wanted students with "a general base . . . to know the right working methods and be good at . . . Icelandic, English, and mathematics". These same three subjects are protected in the national curriculum guide and discussed in Section 7.1.1. Further, she reported how

"some faculties at the university impose quite stiff restrictions", such as the natural sciences.

Arna noted that the universities had been fluctuating in their messages to upper secondary schools.

> The first ideas of the University [of Iceland] on what kind of students they want . . . then they came up with another idea that they had in mind in the beginning. They just wanted general broad matriculation exams . . . that impacted here, into our discussion, then . . . it turned out that the university took a U-turn. I think that it just came with the natural sciences faculty when they requested so and so many units in mathematic . . . something undefined.

Here, Arna was referring to different areas of emphasis, depending on university faculties. The faculty of natural sciences placed a more intense restrictions than other university faculties, thus promoting a high degree of institutionalisation through their top-down directives.

These directives originating from the University of Iceland were considered by most of the interviewees to hinder any kind of creative and innovative actions in academic studies at the upper secondary school level. Agnes reflected on the domineering influence of the universities in that "the university sets the lines on what level they require in each subject". And Arna noted that "these requirements, or entrance examinations . . . that shape and steer . . . they are at a dead end and misunderstood". Arna was describing how some faculties within the universities plan to establish entrance examinations to ensure homogeneous knowledge among students and reinforce existing norms and values in a high degree of institutionalisation, as it has always been.

Kristín reflected on the fact that the universities entertained doubts as to "whether they can trust the programmes" of the upper secondary schools. Gló, however, did not want "too much steering" from the university level, and Agnes called for more interactive conversations between the school levels instead of top-down directives. "Is this fitting? . . . the thread is missing", she noted.

It seems clear from the comments of the school leaders that the stance of the universities, particularly the University of Iceland, had much influence on how they thought about the development of their curriculum, both in terms of the syllabi and the content of courses, especially in mathematics, Icelandic, and English. The control is stronger from the faculties of natural sciences than other faculties. Based on the impact of the university level, it is interesting to investigate if the compulsory school level has a corresponding influences at the upper secondary school level.

8.1.4 The compulsory school level

The compulsory schools, also located at the macro level, had only an indirect influence on change in the selected upper secondary schools, according to the school leadership. The school leaders described how they sought to strengthen cooperation with the compulsory schools, competed for compulsory school students, and took the course content at the compulsory school level into consideration.

The upper secondary schools seem to be in cooperation with the comprehensive schools in their localities. Agnes described how Akurey was "in such a great partnership with compulsory schools" in the municipality. She further described the need to "take into account the compulsory schools" and the need for a flow of information and conversation. Björg agreed and explained how her school was strengthening cooperation by "connecting . . . more and more with the compulsory schools . . . around". Brynja outlined, in more detail, their "visit to all the compulsory schools and the discussion with the school head, and we discuss the cooperation".

Dröfn reported a direct kind of influence from the compulsory school level when discussing how the content of subjects in compulsory schools impacted what they taught in Drangey. She described how her school "took out everything that was supposed to be done in compulsory schools" when developing the curriculum: "We went through the [compulsory] curriculums in all subjects". Fanney noted, as did some other interviewees, that she invited guests "from the compulsory school level" to learn more about the work they were doing. Here, the school leaders were describing unidirectional cooperation, down the hierarchical ladder of the school system based on their own needs.

Some of the participating upper secondary school leaders reported that they were seeking a selected group of compulsory school students to study in their schools. In doing so, some of the school leaders were attempting to attract academically gifted students who had already achieved the competence to study certain courses in upper secondary schools or were considered qualified by other means to start earlier than planned. One school director leading a grammar school claimed to have one class in her school with tenth graders that started earlier than their peers. She focused on attracting academically gifted students into her school by inviting them to commence their studies one year earlier than the rest of the students. Fjóla, however, explained how her comprehensive school established

> cooperation with the compulsory schools here in the tenth grade. They are taking courses here [two vocational subjects are

> mentioned] . . . to get to know this [vocational path] since the kids today have no clue about jobs when they select an upper secondary school, they are not selecting a programme they are selecting a school.

Fjóla described how the schools were competing for students and trying to "sell" the vocational paths. She was not in the same position regarding vocational programmes as the school director advertising the academic programmes due to a differential emphasis on vocational and academic subjects at the compulsory school level. Thus, students in compulsory schools did not gain the same insight into vocational subjects as academic subjects.

To sum up, the upper secondary schools were strengthening their cooperation with the compulsory level, mainly to attract better qualified students to their grammar schools or to vocational programmes in comprehensive schools. The interviewees also wanted a better flow of information between the school levels. It was not always clear how this information would be used. One school leader was, however, considering the content taught at compulsory schools that needed to be taken into account when reviewing subjects and study paths in her upper secondary school. This cooperation is based on similar grounds as the cooperation between the university level. It is clear that the compulsory schools have indirect and rather limited impact in upper secondary schools.

8.1.5 Vocational interest groups

The interviewees discussed several interest groups from the macro level belonging to the labour market as important actors at the upper secondary school level. Some of them are vocational professions that are regulated by law, while others are not. Labour market influences, especially vocational interest groups, were seen to be simultaneously supportive towards educational change, neutral in their position, or constraining.

Both Fanney and Ester gave examples of how supportive the labour market can be towards educational change. Fanney noted how "extremely supportive they have been . . . we have been working very closely with the labour market in recent years". This positive impact promotes ongoing educational change within some vocational faculties, thus hindering institutionalisation. Similarly, Ester pointed out that "journeyman's certificate committees influence the study here . . . they tell us what to fix . . . they help us to keep the balance".

Conversely, Ester described "more conservatism" within similar committees that resist change. Agnes noted that "journeyman's certificate committees,

vocational councils, and committees of professions . . . where older teachers sit . . . are fighting for their subject". This reinforced existing statuses and protected norms and traditions in the subject field, maintaining a relatively high degree of institutionalisation. Elísabet agreed and reflected on the "constraints within . . . the industry vocations themselves; they are . . . so narrow and and not much for" change and development. She also noted that the system of

> Vocational councils are a good idea but . . . the human resource is more of a problem than the concept . . . older men who are loyal to their unions . . . and thus nothing may be changed.

Further, she explained that they

> want much more cooperation with the labour market in teaching, especially in vocational teaching, much more interaction and flow between those levels . . . because jobs are developing much faster than 20 years ago.

In these excerpts, Ester and Elísabet described how interest groups belonging to the labour system reinforce institutionalisation. The older generation was also reported as more conservative and protective of vocational study paths in comprehensive schools.

Arna reflected on the following "hostage situation" in which the labour market had some of the vocational programmes.

> [T]he subject associations and journeyman´s certificate committees . . . master training system . . . that are in crisis . . . vocational studies are shrinking; we see fewer master craftsmen and some of them are just shadow master craftsmen . . . this affects where we want to go . . . we want to promote the vocational programmes, but we are dealing with interest groups that protect their own interests and trigger lack of competition on the market.

Erna had a similar perspective. She addressed the power position of the labour market as follows.

> [They] protect themselves and their own interest with tooth and nail and prevent students from receiving training; they do not only build fences, but walls too . . . , it is the subject association . . . such self-interest cannot go hand in hand [with further development].

Here, Erna was describing how the companies control students' progress by preventing them from receiving the training that they need to graduate. Furthermore, she noted that the power rests with the vocational councils.

> It is the subject associations . . . this is not only a case of interests that can work in tandem . . . [the companies look at] low salaries … this attitude inhibits development within the trade.

In this way, the interviewees felt that the vocational labour market interfered with the training and education of students. The labour market is getting low cost employees; it controls the competition on the market, and it prevents students from graduating by not giving them opportunity for training in the field.

Finally, issues regarding supply and demand were discussed. Ester described how they had been dealing with a decline in student numbers. "There was a huge [enrolment] reduction in the financial collapse". There she was referring to the vocational programmes that the financial crisis hit the hardest.

Another manifestation of the impact of supply and demand was linked to saturation within the rural area. Kristín described how the school Kolbeinsey offered an educational opportunity for women in a certain field, but after a while "we saturated the market . . . so the fall in student numbers was enormous, the demand was sharply reduced, and we decided to rest this for a while". The school leaders in Kolbeinsey were, however, constantly looking for educational opportunities that fit the needs of local environment.

Erna described the competition between industry and the schools as developing a new system in parallel with the schools:

> They [industry] are increasing this [creating new system] . . . between components in the education of tradesmen, another system . . . because they consider themselves better – to be better able to control what is happening.

Thus, the vocational labour market was developing an adult education option in parallel with the formal education system at the upper secondary school level. By doing that, they were impacting the market. Thus, it was difficult to determine if the influence of the labour market is positive or negative in general. It is clear that there are both strong positive and negative impacts, as seen by the school leaders. These seem to depend, to a certain extent, on the schools with vocational programmes, but also on occupations.

8.1.6 Societal influences and the local community

Societal influence, also belonging to the macro level, formed two layers: first, as a political demand for upper secondary education in the rural areas and second, as the interest of the school leadership to meet societal demands when developing upper secondary schools. Thus, society itself was important.

I will first discuss the need for upper secondary schools in rural areas. Running schools in rural districts appeared in the data as an indirect influence towards educational change and an important aspect of social justice. One school leader described how they "are trying to serve the nearest community . . . we are educating students to be able to seek jobs here [locally], so they can go on living here and we emphasise technical programmes no less than academic".

One school leader led a relatively new school in a rural area. According to her, the school played a key role in its nearest surroundings. Its existence

> fulfilled a vital need for the students . . . they went away, and the parents often followed . . . and then, of course, this age group was missing from this community . . . it is expensive to send a child away to upper secondary school . . . we now have . . . students from 10th grade [leaving compulsory school] . . . older students . . . this is also to give people educational opportunities.

Kolbeinsey is a school outside the capital area with a longer history. Karólína, the school director, worried about the rural development and the number of the inhabitants. The main threat is the "population decline", and the students who leave the area are those who "attend vocational programmes". She, however, continued to reflect on the "important role" the school played in the community in the town:

> [We are] graduating a huge number of students and . . . people have moved back home for jobs and work here in the local vicinity; that is very important. This is, of course, a workplace . . . both teachers and employees in other tasks . . . and then, of course, a large group of students.

Kristín, her colleague, added how important the role of the school is

> to serve the society, and it must respond to the needs of the society . . . for students and students can keep on living in their own local area . . . to . . . keep its own people and be able to invite people to come and offer people a decent life here . . . raise the educational

> level. It is a large workplace . . . a diversified community . . . from my perspective, the existence of the school here is essential for the community.

Similar to Karólína's concerns about social justice and vocational programmes, Fanney reflected on the unequal educational opportunities from the perspective of vocational studies in rural areas, since the students who wanted to attend vocational programmes needed to leave the town.

> It is a flawed situation that it should depend on where you live in the country, the opportunity that you have to study. It depends on where you live in the country whether you can generally attend vocational programmes.

Fjóla agreed, as did most of the other participants from the rural areas. Young students wanting to choose vocational programmes "need to leave home right" after compulsory school, "otherwise you are spending two years at home in academic studies which are of no use to you".

Arna, as many others, agreed about the importance of upper secondary schools meeting societal demands. She reported that teachers "need to be on their toes . . . they [students] adapt to changes in society and the teachers need to do this as well". Harpa was of the same opinion and spoke eagerly about societal change and emphasised that the schools need to anticipate and lead such changes. She did not want others to change her school; she wanted the school to be in the forefront and meet the needs of society. In a similar vein, Karolína described how

> society asks for different . . . individuals, individuals that are more technically skilled . . . we need somehow to try to chart this . . . and people that can easily change and communicate and such . . . we need to strengthen people in this, both students and teachers.

Further, Fönn reported how the time is right to change the schools in line with modern society.

> Time to move . . . the schools and create . . . a new vision of education . . . to graduate people qualified to participate in society as it is today . . . not to teach the use of tools that belong to [the past], 10–15 years back in time . . . we need to be . . . alert to what

> is happening in society and know the requirements . . . but at the same time, we need to create some kind of base for a dialogue.

The school leaders highlighted the vertical influences from society and strove to be up to date in order to transfer the schools in line with newest trends if possible. They also saw offering diverse educational opportunities around Iceland for upper secondary school students as part of social justice and efficiency. It closes the generation gap, saves money for families, raises the educational level, and brings life to small towns.

Having recounted the very strong societal influences exerted by the various actors, it is very clear that they play a substantial role in moulding individual schools. Their influence is felt as being important, substantial, and affecting the direction in which school leaders attempt to steer their schools. It is very clear that the schools are units within a larger system to which they are attempting to respond in a multitude of ways.

8.1.7 International influences

Most of the participants described a considerable amount of international cooperation in their schools. They emphasised the importance of cooperation when promoting change. The form of this cooperation turned out to be employees travelling abroad to visit schools, individuals or a couple of employees participating in international cooperation, or several teachers and students taking part in such cooperation. The process was interactive, according to the participants, and led to horizontal influences with bottom-up approaches. Some parts of the schools were deinstituitonalised through this processes.

Arna described how “a considerable number of international cooperation projects are running within the school”, and Agnes reported how “such activities give a lot”. Furthermore, Brynja emphasised how “fortunate [they are] to have people who travel a lot abroad”. Dagný supported her point of view by noting how international cooperation is “very empowering and good”. Similarly, Dröfn pointed out how “international cooperation is usually interdisciplinary . . . definitely . . . gives quite a lot”. Here, she was talking about interdisciplinary cooperation between diverse groups of educators. Thus, the impact of such cooperation creates bridges between professional groups and promotes change.

The interviewees described several forms of international cooperation. One school director reflected on how all the employees in the school went to “the United States . . . to focus on [topic]” as a whole-school approach. Another school director went abroad, on her own, to support herself in the creation process of a new upper secondary school in Iceland that she was going to lead. She “looked

at schools that were teaching in different ways and engaging in major innovation". There, she acquired many ideas that she used when establishing the school. Still another school leader reported that school leaders in Iceland went to the USA together as a group of professionals for their own professional development "and listened to a presentation by . . . the presenter is the author of . . . [name of a book author]". The same visit also came up in the discussion with several other school leaders.

The schools also received a considerable number of school visits from the international community, so international cooperation worked in both directions. Such visits and international cooperation prompt deinstitutionalisation of the schools.

8.1.8 Horizontal influences via flow between the upper secondary schools

Diffusion of knowledge horizontally between the upper secondary schools and deinstitutionalisation through such processes are seen in the data. The names of certain innovative school directors or their representatives were frequently mentioned as change actors by the school leaders. These school directors visited other upper secondary schools and disseminated their experiences and ideas. Hence, the schools were also located at the macro level.

Innovative voices were also in our sample. One school director described how she "visited many schools and talked about" her school and the innovation taking place there. Another school director reported that "school leaders compare and try to learn from each other". Still another described how she had a visit "from . . . [name of school] . . . they are describing how they have implemented the new curriculum . . . we are always getting knowledge from others". Similarly, a school director reported how they

> have . . . twice had women from [two schools are mentioned] . . . I would love to have more time both for myself and here, my employees here, just to learn . . . we went twice for school visits since I took over . . . it is good for us, and it is fun.

Similarly, her middle manager described their way to promote school visits as a whole-school approach when "implementing formative assessment".

Moreover, a middle manager described how other schools "look to them" and ask for support, as do other interest groups. According to the other middle manager in the same school, they

> visited us and observed how we are doing this, and we have visited other schools "to get insight . . . , into such . . . freedom . . . I have this feeling that things have started to move.

She was reflecting on the fact that ideas and changes flow between the organisational field of the upper secondary school level and that knowledge construction was taking place.

This indicates that the processes of deinstitutionalisation also occur when schools impact each other through a chain reaction. The same is true when evaluating new trends in the data, such as a considerable number of schools implementing interdisciplinary courses through teamwork with teachers. The same applies to the use of formative assessment.

8.2 Actors at the meso level

The meso level is composed of the upper secondary schools in Iceland, which again, comprise groups of individuals with a structural unity sharing similar identities and backgrounds. This level includes the work performed within the schools and the different ways of accomplishing it (Scott, 2014; Thornton et al., 2012; Waks, 2007).

Both the heterogeneity and homogeneity of the schools is described to understand the different mechanisms operating. The lenses of institutions and organisations (Kraatz, 2009; Raffaelli & Glynn, 2015; Selznick's, 1957; Scott, 2014; Thornton et al. 2012; Washington et al., 2008) are also used hereafter, as well as Coburn's (2004) notions of different school responses to analyse the processes of change taking place within the schools and to see if different actors at the meso level responded differently to macro-level demands for change. In parallel, the ideas of institutional and organisational leadership (Kraatz, 2009; Raffaelli & Glynn, 2015; Selznick's, 1957; Washington et al., 2008) are used to understand the school leaders' reactions to the different responses in their schools. Ball et al.'s (2012) ideas, on enactment is also used to take the analyses further. Thereafter, various forms of horizontal influences are described. In the end, I turn the focus to parents and students.

8.2.1 The heterogeneity and homogeneity of the schools

The selected upper secondary schools were similar in many ways, all providing academic subjects and matriculation examinations, mainly focusing on preparing students for university studies. Seven of the schools were unit-credit based, and two grammar schools had a class-based system. Three of the schools in the

capital city area were large; two were medium or small. One school in another district was large, and three were medium or small.

Five of the schools were in the capital area, four comprehensive schools and one grammar school. One other grammar school and three comprehensive schools were located outside the capital area. All of the selected comprehensive schools offered general programmes for those students who had not reached the entrance requirements for certain study paths at the upper secondary school level and self-contained programmes for students with intellectual disabilities. Neither of the two, class-based grammar schools, however, offered a self-contained programme for students with intellectual disabilities, although one of them offered a general programme. A middle manager in that grammar school noted how the student group was homogeneous and how diversity was lacking within the school:

> This is, of course, extremely comfortable . . . sometimes I think that this is a homogeneous conduct group for students . . . not a cross section of society . . . almost always diligent kids and are just on the auto pilot and do not need much help but they will not necessarily go through life with that kind of people.

The hierarchical structure (see Table 8) of three out of the four largest schools was steep and consisted of several layers and distributed responsibility. All of the other schools manifested a low hierarchical structure and leadership was in the hands of a few employees. The leadership structure in the selected grammar schools was flat. Thus, steep hierarchical structures seemed to be based on the diversity of programmes offered, not school size. The difference between steep and flat hierarchical structures has a historical explanation, since complex comprehensive schools in Iceland often stemmed from some, smaller school units that merged into the new comprehensive school, as noted by one of the school directors. In the emerging process, the school unit was given a place in the administrative structure of the comprehensive school. The reason for such administrative structures may, therefore, lead to classification as an institution.

Table 8. Hierarchical structure

School	Hierarchical structure	School	Hierarchical structure
Akurey	Low	**Grímsey**	Low
Brokey	Steep	**Heimaey**	Low
Drangey	Low	**Jökuley**	Low
Eldey	Steep	**Kolbeinsey**	Low
Flatey	Steep		

Two of the schools in the sample were classified as rural schools with low hierarchical structures. The school leaders in these schools performed almost all the leadership roles in the schools, in addition to other expertise needed relating to student support.

The interviewees leading the rural schools described a certain intimacy with the students, to which they attributed a relatively low dropout rate. For instance, one school director claimed to "have minor dropout" and her colleague explained the low dropout rate by the fact that they "still have an overview over the student" group and are "this personal school". The school director in the same school described how they took action by going out and fetching students who did not show up in school. Low dropout rates also characterised the grammar schools, in all likelihood due to the selection processes of those schools resulting in a dedicated and rather homogeneous group of somewhat elite students, as noted by one of the school leaders from a grammar school.

In line with most of the interviewees, Björg stated that the role of the upper secondary schools was to "prepare [students] for [further] education and work . . . this [schooling] is also a huge element in upbringing". Harpa, however, dived into aspects of democratic values and active participation of students as a whole-school approach. She had a clear vision of democracy in schools, in addition to preparation for further education and the labour market. Such vision was rare among the school leaders. Harpa noted how the role of the upper secondary schools is "preparation for life and work in a democratic society". The same went for Gló. Binna had also recently started to follow this track towards democratic participation of students.

These different viewpoints show that school directors perceive the role of the schools differently, most often depending on the school type they led. The director of a large, comprehensive school had this to say about the main strength of her school.

> The diversity that it offers, and I think that the flexibility is also a huge strength . . . [as well as] the tolerance to try to meet all students . . . vocational and academic . . . on equal terms.

However, the school director of one of the grammar school presented a different point of view. School

> is to strengthen the student . . . to teach working methods, to teach [the student] to be, basically, fully fledged and ready, first and foremost, for further education, at least in this school.

She focussed on the academic part of the school to prepare the students for entering universities. Conversely, a school director in a rural area also emphasised serving the rural area, as noted in Section 8.1.6.

In general terms, the difficulties in implementing change appeared to be greater in large and complex schools than in small and homogeneous schools. The school director leading a small grammar school described how "the school culture here, is extremely precious . . . it is highly important and, I feel . . . a source of great strength for the leader" when leading change. Her colleague agreed:

> The biggest strength is, I think, definitely in communication here within the school; there is such incredibly good morale here . . . I think for example that conflicts here among the employees are unusually rare.

Her explanation lay in homogeneous group of employees in the school:

> Nearly all of them are university graduated people with a master's degree in their subject . . . the group is definitely very homogeneous.

In one complicated, comprehensive school one middle manager reported how "sometimes it is like having many schools under the same roof . . . this is just a reflection of our society, in most cases". Other leaders in her school agreed, and all of them described a huge debate within their school when implementing and discussing the curriculum. This fact brings us to the impact of cultural structures on the school and how it depends on human diversity.

8.2.2 Vertical influences and how schools respond to macro-level influences in decentralised curriculum creation and implementation

The ideas on decentralised curriculum creation and implementation originated at the macro level, as discussed in Section 7.1.1. They were treated or received differently within the selected schools at the meso level. The data are categorised according to Coburn's (2004) five clusters: rejection, decoupling, parallel structures, assimilation, accommodation, and the addition, "pioneering", that were generated from the interviews. Definitions of the clusters and the categories that the participating schools matched are presented in Table 10 and discussed in Section 3.6. In this section, the ideas of institutional and organisational leadership (Kraatz, 2009; Raffaelli & Glynn, 2015; Selznick's, 1957; Washington et al., 2008) as used as defined in Section 3.3 and summarised in Table 4. To hide the identity of the schools in this section, the pseudonyms of the schools are not used. Instead, the schools are numbered from 1–9.

Four of the selected upper secondary schools fall under the category of parallel structures, as derived from the responses of the school leadership. Three of these are comprehensive and large or medium in size (see Table 9). These schools appear to be rejecting part of the amendment to the Upper Secondary Education Act No. 92/2008 which is further developed in the national curriculum guide. Two schools fitt the rejection category, one of the school delayed the change, while another faced considrable resitance among theacers. One school is an example of assimilation, with significant deconstruction to adapt to the amendments specified in the Upper Secondary Education Act No. 92/2008 and the national curriculum guide. The existing system of the school was, however, maintained. Finally, the two, newly established schools did not fit the classification categories, thus forming a new category with the suggested name of pioneering, since the schools had no history and were both designed around the school directors' vision and the pedagogy they believed fit well with the new ideas presented in the national curriculum guide.

Table 9. Meso-level responses

Category	Definition	No. of schools
Rejection	Requirements for change stemming from the macro-level actors are dismissed.	2
Decoupling	Symbolic change with no internal influences.	0
Parallel structures	Simultaneous approaches are used to meet different forces and priorities.	4
Assimilation	Messages from the macro level are incorporated and adapted to the existing understanding of the schools to maintain current structure and existing practices.	1
Accommodation	Deconstruction of existing understanding to charter new information leading to a major change.	0
Pioneering	Newly established school with no history. The school is designed around a specific vision and pedagogy directed by macro-level actors and the school director.	2

The four schools matching the category of parallel structures showed different nuances of the phenomenon, as presented in Table 10. Two, similar approaches were simultaneously at play to meet different forces and priorities among the teachers in the schools.

Table 10. Identified variation of parallel structures

	Types of parallel structures	
School 1	Rejection	Accommodation
School 2	Decoupling	Accommodation
School 3	Rejection	Accommodation
School 4	Decoupling	Accommodation

School 1, within the parallel structure, was still resisting the shortening idea proposed by the government by organising the matriculation programmes with the same number of credits as before but in a shorter period:

> We aim for 240 upper secondary school credits for matriculation exams that are comparable to what we have today . . . we do not see the changes in adjacent school levels that we deem necessary to justify the shortening. Besides, the average study time of our students is three and a half years (middle management leader in School 1).

This was compared to four years for mainstream students. Therefore, the school fit the rejection category when writing the new school curriculum to meet the demand of MoESC to shorten the study time without changing the number of units taught. In this case, Ball et al. (2012) would argue that the macro-level demand for shortening the matriculation programmes was not enacted.

Traditional subjects in School 1 were, however, merged in a new course for all students. Cross-curricular topics based on fundamental pillars were the foundation of the course, and the teachers worked in teams instead of individual teachers working alone in the classroom as before. All of this was in line with the content of the national curriculum guide. Hence, this response is defined as accommodation.

The leaders in School 1 are operating within the institutional and organsational characteristics of the school and promoted the institutional and organisational leadership styles. They are instrumental and rational when supporting the new course and moving it forward to new aims and challenges. Converselely, they are silencing and constraining when the teachers resist the idea of shortening time or study. In this context, they operate as institutional leaders by reconnecting the school to its orginal values, strong academic history and traditions.

School 2 matched the parallel structure, but from a different perspective. The classification is derived from a different working culture that depends on faculty divisions. In this category, the leaders are also promoting both leadership styles.

The teachers in social science and languages made a major change to their teaching practices, as compared to the teachers in natural science and maths. The middle manager in the school described how language and social science teachers “have created many new subjects, and the number of interdisciplinary subjects has increased substantially” throughout the development period. The change in the faculty of languages and social science is classified as accommodation.

However, natural sciences and maths teachers in School 2 complied with the macro-level demands for change in the school curriculum in a symbolic and superficial way. They only changed the names of some courses and study paths,

without changing the teaching practices or the content, as noted by the same middle manager; they "have essentially not changed the content". She was referring to the faculties of natural sciences, mathematics, and physics. This phenomenon is, therefore, classified as decoupling with symbolic and superficial change. The case in School 2 shows that only social science and language teachers enacted the policy in the school.

As noted, the leaders in School 2 promoted two different leadership styles, organisational and institutional, depending on the behaviour of two different groups of teachers. Those teachers working in natural sciences and maths made symbolic and superficial change and show a high degree of institutionalisation. The teachers in social sciences and languages made a dramatic change in their educational practices in the process of deinstitutionalisation. Thus, the agency of school leaders is both instrumental and rational, as in organisational leadership and silencing and constraining, as in institutional leadership.

In School 3, the classification of parallel structures is also based on different working cultures of teachers but within the same vocational study path. The difference, in this case, depended on whether teachers taught lower grade students or advanced students. The middle manager described the situation like this:

> These are teachers for advanced students . . . and a core group [teachers] took an interest, there was the opportunity. I took it, and we started to change the paths for advanced students, but I left the lower grade programme out as a blank sheet . . .

due to the teachers' heavy resistance. Thus, the group of teachers for the lower grade students did not participate in the change. This part of the teaching staff was clustered under the category of rejection, and the study paths kept its institutionalised status. The teachers who taught the advanced students dramatically changed their educational practices through the process of deinstitutionalisation. The teaching and learning methods were changed, as well as the working environment and the setup of the whole programme. The teachers who taught advanced students are clustered under the category of accommodation, involving the deconstruction of existing arrangements to comply with the demand from the MoESC to change the school curriculum and educational practices.

In School 3, the leader of this faculty was also promoting the two different leadership styles depending on the behaviour of the two different groups of teachers. Those teachers working with lower grade students are resisting

change, whereas the teacher group focusing on advanced students are making dramatic changes in their educational practices. Her leadership is instrumental and rational when proceeding the teachers who taught the advanced students, and silencing and constraining when working with the group of teachers for the lower grade students.

It is important to bear in mind that the leaders in Schools 2 and 3 claimed that the processes of change started way before the policy change. In School 2, it was due to a crisis taking place when the number of students declined in one of the programmes. While in School 3, the discussion started when a group of teachers attended formal education and became inspired to change. Nevertheless, the leaders in both schools stated that the big push came from the Upper Secondary Education Act No. 92/2008.

And finally, School 4 is categorized as a parallel structure. The school has established interdisciplinary courses. This can be seen as deconstruction, falling into the category of accommodation through processes of deinstitutionalisation. However, the middle manager in School 4 pointed out how teachers' "carry on with the old ways and try to adjust them" as far as they can. When discussing this further, she noted how it took teachers a long time to crawl out of their "subject holes"; each individual is "protecting his own". It is possible to identify the institutional characteristics incorporated in social structure of the subject field she discussed. Consequently, the subject teachers only made symbolic changes to implement the macro-level demand for change, thus fitting into the decoupling category. As before, when parallel structures take place in the schools, the leaders described characteristics of both institutional and organisational leadership.

School 5 matched the category of rejection. The school director decided to delay the creation of the curriculum and its implementation due to a lack of money, insufficient support from the ministry, and resistance from the teachers. She also pointed out that teachers are "by nature conservative". She also added that she herself was not "shouting . . . hurrah for the new ideology accompanying the new Act; I am, of course, more for the older" curriculum. Here, she applied the leadership style of institutions by silencing and constraining change. She explained that she started to implement the change, but she stopped the process because of the instructions from the union:

> Last school year we aimed at working more on the school curriculum . . . then last autumn the debate began around it, and the union told us in fact that we should not do this . . . not for nothing, and we had no money; therefore, we . . . stopped.

The same goes for School 6. The school director was facing what she described as intensive resistance in her school when trying to implement the ideas from the national curriculum guide and, therefore, having problems when designing and implementing the curriculum. She described how she played the game hide and seek under the banner of professional development when working on the school curriculum to try to motivate teachers and shift their ideas towards change. In vivid language, she explained that when she wants to

> discuss the curriculum . . . I need to call it education, not policy making. This is obviously a totally impossible situation, this is incredible, I'm going to do something, implement something . . . discuss, no.

As a consequence of the situation in School 6, she based the curricular change on a closed group of leaders whom she liked, leaders with similar interests, instead of actively involving the school staff at all levels in the change processes to comply with the demands from the MoESC for changes in the school curriculum. She explains that she was

> working with people who have similar interests as I have, and I maybe feel we are here on a team where there is not much tension, at least not among us that are in this whirlpool of ideas.

Here she showed characteristics of organisational leadership by being hierarchical and supervisory when taking over the writing of the school curriculum as a response to intensive teacher resistance. She is missional and authoritative in her actions. Based on this, the school leaders strove to enact the policy, but the teachers resisted intensively. Therefore, I categorise the teachers' responses as rejection but the school leaders' reaction as decoupling when taking over the curriculum writing.

School 7 was placed in the category of assimilation. A major change had occurred in the school with the deconstruction of the existing understanding that aimed to implement the legislation and the national curriculum guide holistically. The school, however, fit the change into its existing system, or, as noted by one of the school leaders, "[i]t was really just the sincere wish of the staff here to keep the class-based system, it is just what the kids are pursuing". By incorporating the national curriculum guide holistically, it was possible to cluster the school under accommodation. By maintaining the existing class-based system and its current structure, the school fits into assimilation. The history matters here, and the school is partly operates as an institution.

The leaders in School 7 showed all characteristics of organisational leadership. Their agency was instrumental and radical. The power was hierarchical, and supervisory. They saw their role as moving the schools forward to new aims and challenges, while focussing on trusting the teachers to make changes and highly respecting their expertise. At the same time, they emphasised working orthogonally up the hierarchical ladder in the school. The acts seem to be enacted quite holistically in the school while respecting the school history and legacy.

Two of the selected schools (Schools 8 and 9) were newly established and designed around the legislation implemented in 2008. Because of this uniqueness, these schools did not fit within Colburn's (2004) categories. Therefore, these schools were placed in the new category of pioneering. The definition of pioneering is when a newly established school is designed around a specific vision and certain pedagogy led by the vision of school leaders. These school leaders arranged the school's human resources in accordance with their pedagogical vision and the ideas from the Upper Secondary Education Act No. 92/2008 and the national curriculum guide. Thus, the employees knew what to expect and how to work. The leaders in those two schools fall into the category of organisational leadership. The macro-level demand is fully enacted since the schools are designed around its ideology.

The school leader in School 8 pointed out how fortunate they were not to have "an old teachers' lounge". She pointed out that the teachers know what is expected from them and how they are supposed to work. She also highlighted how easy it was to mould them towards school policy. The middle manager claimed that no one came in with "any baggage. They are all so young" and the school director argued that they did not "look at . . . things in the larger context" of traditions and values that tended to guide the teachers' behaviour in other schools.

The school leader in School 9, which was also was clustered as pioneering, claimed the national curriculum guide to be "the biggest gift the Icelandic nation has had". She explained considerable different pedagogical practises in her school. The middle manager in the school described how "it is just not the same to create a new school compared to changing a school. It is the sky and an ocean" between. She pointed out their privilege to be able to "select people that know what is expected from them and know that they are going to work in a system like this. They need to be ready for this". She further explained how they were in a totally "different position than many other upper secondary schools".

When analysing what the schools have been implementing, in an addition to the writing of the new school curriculum, the outcome is diverse. Gló describes

how her main "attention and energy had been spent on developing teaching methods" in Grímsey. Elísabet described the "large pedagogical steps" that had been taken in Eldey. Similarly, Fanney pointed out how willing teachers were to "develop professionally, change teaching methods". Karólína agreed, as did many other school leaders, and added the importance of "diverse teaching methods". Jónína, however, reflected on the increased diversity of the student body. Therefore, she saw a real need in Jökuley to adapt teaching methods to each student group. She explained that

> teaching methods are quite diverse . . . we have been focusing on stopping the form of lectures, and this modification has helped us to accept distance learners . . . and we are starting flipped teaching

to adapt to the needs of distance learners. Flipped teaching was also a popular theme among other school leaders when discussing teaching methods.

Furthermore, Gló in Grímsey pointed out that teachers take so "much interest in a stronger emphasis on interdisciplinary" work across subject fields. Similarly, Arna in Akurey described how they "implemented this interdisciplinary policy . . . to take people out of their professional trenches". A similar interest in interdisciplinary work is at the centre of action in Kolbeinsey. This powerful emphasis on cross-curricular and interdisciplinary work clearly indicates that an integrative and multidisciplinary approach is popular at the upper secondary school level in Iceland. Akurey and Jökuley focused on various learning forms incorporated in ICT and social media.

Formative assessment was intensively discussed by the interviewees as being one of the core areas of emphasis in the national curriculum guide. Fjóla noted how they have been discussing the definitions of

> continuous assessment, what is a final test . . . how much weight it should have . . . and all the fences that teachers create. The assessment here in the school is in fact very diverse

These, themes about assessment were important concerns among many of the participants, and they described them as being in constant development in their schools. Karolína reflected on connection between

> diverse teaching methods . . . formative assessment . . . and then, of course, this completely harmonises with what the students want . . . this is something that is just very important, but it cannot all be achieved during one school year.

Finally, Agnes described how “in a majority of cases” ideas come from teachers “since we are involved in pedagogy, teaching methods, and assessments”.

8.2.3 Horizontal influences: Institutionalisation and deinstitutionalisation

Several examples of institutionalisation (Ansell et al., 2015; Selznick, 1957; 1996; Scott, 2014) and deinstitutionalisation (Kraatz & Moore, 2002; Oliver, 1992; Scott, 2014) within the meso level appeared in the data. Here, two examples are highligthed. In the first example, the school started to operate as an institution through the processes of institutionalisation. In the second example, it is argued that the school weaken its institutional operation through the processes of deinstitutionalisation.

Gló and Gyða, the leaders of Grímsey, worked in a relatively new school, outlined an example that matched the processes of institutionalisation. Gló was “disturbed by the fact that soon we will stop” the entrepreneurial spirit. Based on what she said, it is possible to conclude that Grímsey has slowly changed into an institution. She talked about the challenges involved in the growth of the school and in gaining in reputation and legitimacy on the one hand, and maintaining the innovative spirit on the other.

> We have kept this going until this term . . . It is a little bit difficult to keep up the situation . . . that we are one discussion group, we have started to feel that . . . I of course also feel it socially within the group of the employees . . . that the group has started to break up into smaller units which is new to us . . . so we face challenges as well.

Gyða further described the same issue of institutionalisation in Grímsey, but now from the perspective of school leadership.

> We discuss . . . try to foresee possible variations and . . . think . . . what we see as the optimal outcome and then . . . leave it to the group and initiate discussions and of course, it does not always end as we wanted the most . . . but sometimes . . . maybe it develops more and more in such a way that we do not get as much feedback from the group as we used to do, so the decisions increasingly become ours.

In contrast to the conditions in Grímsey, the upper secondary school Heimaey is a grammar school with a long history. The staff started the change processes before the legislative amendment of 2008. Harpa, the school director, led various

changes at the school, which I argue can be classified as processes of deinstitutionalisation. Some of the changes were spurred by an external crisis due to a decline in student number, some came from the act and the national curriculum guide, while others arose from internal crises accompanying uneven student workload. Hildur described how students in Heimaey had, for a long time, experienced an uneven "workload" throughout their upper secondary school period. When the students started as freshmen, the "workload was way too much", compared to "way too little to do" in the end.

From the beginning of the change processes, Harpa explained to the school personnel how they "should ride on top of the wave in all change, then we have something to say about where we go". Further, Harpa noted that the school

> needed to be on its toes towards the change that arose in the community to . . . maintain its position and so students feel the change here [in the school] . . . somehow a rebel . . . there is no life if people cannot move and are given the space to do so.

Despite the fact that the school director of Heimaey took the initiative to change, "the big occasion was the upper secondary school legislation" according to Hildur, Harpa's colleague.

The example of Heimaey shows that the school director took the initiative to change and transform a traditional grammar school with a long history and strong values from its institutional operation through the processes of deinstitutionalisation. Some of its institutionalised operational forms of schools weaken in the processes. The school director managed to involve a large group of colleagues and teachers in the change journey. Nevertheless, there was some resistance in the school, mainly among teachers of certain subjects.

As suggested in the examples from Grímsey and Heimaey, schools can face both internal and external crises leading to processes of institutionalisation or vice versa through processes of deinstitutionalisation.

Timing turned out to be crucial in the processes of institutionalisation and deinstitutionalisation and intensively discussed by the school leaders. According to them, it takes from 5 to 10 years for schools to enforce change.

Jakobína described Jökuley as constantly redesigning its aims. In that way, she saw her school as organic in all processes, seeking ongoing change:

> In most cases, change is our habit . . . those who are used to a *status quo* situation . . . become extremely tired of change, they feel bad and are uncertain, they do not feel secure. I knew from the

> beginning that I needed to keep it like this, and especially after [N] years, to establish a continuation.

She saw three years as a "warning". After three years, it was important to make another change to prevent stagnation.

During this pioneering time, everything seemed to be difficult, as noted by Erna. "The pioneering work . . . is the most difficult . . . if success is achieved, this will survive". Similarly, Harpa reported how "nothing works" after her first five years as a school leader. After reading articles saying that change takes "seven years . . . I thought I could do this much faster". Agnes agreed and noted that time was needed "for such an incubation period". In a similar vein, Elísabet said:

> It is ten years since we [changed the setup of the school considerably] and . . . there was incredibly intense development at that time . . . If we just look back in time . . . lots of conflicts . . . we managed in those five years to totally change this, so there was a high level of consensus in the group . . . to achieve it, naturally certain acrobatics were needed [as part of the process].

Gló agreed about the time it takes to make a change and noted that

> when starting a new school, several years are needed, maybe up to ten years, to create a reputation, and that was naturally the case here, during the first years.

As showed here, timing and internal and external crises are crucial when launching change.

8.2.4 Horizontal influences via flow within the upper secondary schools

According to the school leadership, knowledge and experience does not only flow between the upper secondary schools, as highlighted in Section 8.1.8, but also within the upper secondary schools at the meso level. Individuals and groups are exchanging ideas and suggestions, and people change their educational practices accordingly. Thus, individuals and faculties are promoting ongoing change horizontally within the schools through the processes of deinstitutionalisation and by bottom-up approaches.

Agnes emphasised how teachers in Akurey were "always running . . . development groups . . . teachers here are enormously willing to participate". Hildur used the metaphor of teachers being "infected" by one another when she

answered a questiong about where ideas come from within the school. Harpa, however, described how "the conversation has been spreading . . . having a far-reaching effect", referring to a major change happening in her school due to a crisis accompanying a reduction in enrolments in one of the school's study paths. Due to the crisis, the teachers changed their programmes and the way they taught. The change then impacted other faculties and programmes. Most of the other interviewees, who were working in schools that are involved in change processes, expressed a similar sentiment of deinstitutionalisation.

When Fanney was asked from where the ideas originate, she noted that "sometimes they come from teachers, sometimes from the school leaders". The students were rarely mentioned in this context by any of the interviewees. Elísabet, however, emphasised how changes were driven "actually by the employees rather than us [the school leaders]; of course, we want to establish this, pedal at it, but the employees are pushing just as hard". Elísabet was describing a bottom-up approach regarding teachers' initiatives for change.

Staff meetings in the schools were often used to disseminate good practices. Hence, Fanney described how "sometimes we ask people within the school to present . . . development in their teaching". Agnes and Arna agreed and noted that they used the teacher meetings intensively to disseminate good teaching practices.

Informal talks in the staffroom or in the halls were also claimed to have an impact. Agnes reflected on the power of change and how individuals circulated knowledge and inspired one another in informal encounters.

> Lots of discussions are at play here internally, and the others are attracted by these developments . . . They feel powerless when everyone is doing a lot of things . . . when shaping these initiatives [the development activities in the school] and teaching them [students] for the first time, then everyone, during all coffee breaks and lunches, . . . came together . . . I felt the other teachers were a bit jealous . . . they felt as if they were missing out on something.

Arna described it as some "ambience at the workplace . . . discussion on educational matters . . . trends in technology . . . flipped teaching or whatever; it is very topical". Similarly, Karolína described a working environment of peer-support when teachers get ideas. Teachers "help one another, for example by going into each other's classes and writing study plans together".

Ester led several vocational programmes in Eldey. She was developing one of the programmes towards learner-centred ideas and active participation of

students in an innovative way. When she was asked about the impact within the school, she reported that other faculties "are so keen to adopt this . . . people see lots of opportunities in this". Elísabet and Erna, her colleagues, agreed.

All of the leaders in schools that are actively changing their school practices describe the power of bottom-up approaches and how a chain reaction of empowerment happens between individuals and groups within their schools through the process of deinstitutionalisation. The power of one group positively impacts others and motivates them toward change. In that way, policy is enacted. But it is also important to have in mind that some of the change are not only inspired by policy change, but rather spurred by or from an internal crisis or a change desire of school personnel.

8.2.5 Parents and guardians

Parents and guardians apparently have an indirect and rather limited impact as change actors in upper secondary schools, especially when acting in association. Occasional examples were found on their direct impact in schools. Parents and guardians, however, influenced their children's selection of schools. Through such guidance, their impact was substantial. School selection, then part of the macro-level influences, and resistance to change at the meso level were themes that were generated from the analysis.

Gló led Grímsey, a relatively new school, and described how the "youngest children in [name of the area] did not apply for places in the first few years . . . the parents do not trust us". The phenomenon that Gló described is highly related to norms and traditions incorporated in parents' notions that good, traditional grammar schools are the best preparation for the future. Fjóla agreed, noting that parents

> tell their children to take first the matriculation exam before studying [a vocational programme] . . . blind faith in matriculation examinations.

Gló shared Fjóla's opinion that most of the parents "want their children to finish matriculation exams". Furthermore, Karólína reflected on the "rich tradition, my father and my mother were enrolled in [name of a grammar school]". This is also in line with Björg and Fjóla's discourse. Further, Fanney reflected that

> it is a custom that my child should take the same path as I did. That is, to take an academic line and then naturally select a grammar school . . . you are encouraging your child to educate themselves away [from the town].

Thus, the school leaders gave examples on parents reinforcing the schools as institution by resisting change and guiding their child towards traditional academic paths, despite the fact that the child might have different needs or interests. Parents may, perhaps, be working against the societal need for more people to enter occupational life with technical and vocational skills.

Fanney reported on an example of parents who vigorously resisted a new learning opportunity for their child. The child did not meet the minimum standard for entrance to most of the other programmes on offer in the school.

> Angry parents came yesterday to complain that their child does not get proper teaching or proper education . . . He was almost . . . a dropout and we offered him this new learning opportunity . . . They [students attending the new programme] have been going to workplaces with a good success, increased their self-esteem and even found a job for the summer if they performed well.

Similarly, Karolína noted "that parents are not entirely ready to accept that the student or their child is joining" programmes for students who do not fulfil the entrance requirements to other study paths in the schools. Fönn agreed, adding that "parents' understanding of the learning ability of their child" is often missing.

In other respects, parents were hardly mentioned, although some leaders gave several, vague examples of parent councils and cooperation. For example, a parents' association complained about a teacher's absence due to sick leave. Nevertheless, parents and guardians also had their impact in rural areas as discussed in Section 8.1.6.

8.2.6 Students

Based on the focus of the conversation with the school leaders, students had only an indirect and rather limited impact as change actors at the meso level. This is so despite a clear mandate in policy documents (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012; Upper Secondary Education Act No. 92/2008) on the active involvement of students and democratic processes meant to characterise a whole-school approach. Nevertheless, the school leadership maintained that individual students and groups did have some impact. The mechanisms by which change was supposed to take place were often not easily visible.

School leaders did not actively include students when implementing change Thus, the students' power as change actors was limited. When Kristín was asked about democratic processes and inclusion of students when designing and

implementing the curriculum, she reported, in line with most of the other leaders, that they had not "taken students with us in this process, I must admit". Fönn however, described how they are

> trying to activate students to participate in the change with us since this is their school, this is their workplace; they should have something to say, [but they have not succeeded in doing that, in her judgement].

Binna was one of the few school leaders who had tried to dedicate a whole school day to student voices. During that day, the students were given the opportunity to discuss and debate about school practices. At the end of the day, the students proposed ideas for change. Gló proceeded differently. She interviewed students as part of the evaluation system in Grímsey. Similarly, Harpa actively integrated students through a democratic evaluation system as part of the internal evaluation system of Heimaey. These examples show that voices of students were listened to in a few schools. These schools had clear and formal channels for students to have their impact, but this depended highly on the school directors' views on democratic processes and active student participation.

Fanney gave examples of student initiatives such as establishing a course with content that the students requested in order to support their future dreams. There are occasional examples similar to this in the data. For instance, Fjóla explained how some new ideas came "from students", and she noted that "teachers listen to students' ideas" as well. Thus, teachers and school leaders might have offered informal paths for students to request change, either regarding courses on offer or changing the educational practices in individual courses.

Schools compete for students during the selection period in the spring. This means that new courses or programmes had been built up if teachers in the schools offer new courses that are popular and other courses disappeared when the enrolment where not sufficient. This situation was, to a large extent, sustained in the capital area. In rural regions, students did not have as much choice, and rural schools accepted almost all applications. Arna described the influence of school choice in the capital region as depending on:

> fashion waves . . . it is just. . . an education market that is in front, schools move in and fall out of fashion, and we see the media shape the fashion wave . . . this message comes of course from the society, and it also derives from the counsellors in compulsory schools.

Further, Brynja reflected on similar phenomena of marketisation when describing how the upper secondary school, Brokey, in the capital area had "very well equipped vocational departments with very few students". Most of the freshmen were systematically directed to academic programmes and to certain schools by their guardians, as well as by career and guidance counsellors.

Similarly, Ester noted that "[w]e have been dealing with . . . a brain drain of students . . . there was a reduction [in student numbers] during the financial crisis". Fanney referred to subjects being discontinued and others taking their place. "French dropped out, and Spanish came in instead". Harpa and Hildur had a similar story regarding the problem of third language learning paths in Heimaey. "It is popular among students to learn Spanish . . . whereas . . . they have stopped learning German or French".

Fjóla reported that as a consequence of the "reduction in student numbers", the teachers were facing fewer taught hours per week. One of those teachers took initiative to launch a new subject in cooperation with the school leaders in Flatey. "Then suddenly his position changed".

Elísabet described an increased "need for [name of a profession], not only in Iceland but throughout the world as well . . . there we created a new opportunity that we did not have before". Therefore, Eldey took the chance and successfully offered a new learning opportunity for students.

Both school leaders and teachers needed to react to feedback from the student market and find new opportunities in offering new courses, study paths, or programmes, as well as in cancelling courses, study paths, or programmes. This type of change seems only to take place under external pressure leading to an internal crisis and reinforces the processes of deinstitutionalisation within the schools.

8.3 Actors at the micro level

The micro level embodies individuals acting within each school and the interaction between those actors (Thornton et al., 2012; Zilber, 2016). In this section, the upper secondary school teachers and the school leadership will be discussed as individuals since other professions were rarely discussed by the school leaders.

8.3.1 Teachers

Teachers turned out to be a prominent theme in the discourse of the school leaders. It is important to put this section in context with Sections 8.2.1 and 8.2.2 on the diversity of schools and how differently schools, faculties, or groups of

teachers respond to macro-level demands for change. These sections highlight how some departments, and even schools, had made a considerable change and developed holistically, while others resisted change. The discussion in this section is directed towards individual teachers and their interactions with the school leadership and with other teachers, identified as micro-level actors.

According to the participating school leaders, the older generation of teachers was seen to protect existing norms and traditions in the school. Some of them literally prevented school development and reinforced the institutional part of schooling. These teachers were believed to have some support from the Teachers' Union and the labour market, mainly the vocational interest groups, as noted in Section 8.1.5. Young teachers, however, were generally regarded as coming up with new ideas and desiring change in pedagogical practices. To word it differently, the younger generation of teachers generally strove to promote change.

In line with the majority of interviewees, Agnes noted that "the greatest power lies, of course, with the employee . . . [his or her] willingness to change". Her colleague, Arna, agreed. She described how the teacher "is always the key person in what happens in the classroom and in what way it develops". Fjóla reflected on how "state of mind [makes a difference]. If someone is against change, then it is more difficult and if you are for it then everything is easier". The school leadership's emphasis was on the power of the person participating in change and the importance of state of mind.

Nevertheless, the majority of leaders experienced considerable resistance, fear, and competition among teachers. One school director noted how constraints are „internal, first and foremost, in the teacher group". Another school director agreed, adding that "teachers do not want to change this, they just want to have this as it has always been".

A school director was of the same opinion and described how teachers "are by nature conservative and so is schooling". The other leaders expressed similar sentiments. The leaders also pointed out how some teachers did not want to change in general. These teachers reinforced their schools as institution by protecting existing norms and traditions incorporated in the school settings. The interviewees pointed out how one powerful individual could sometimes block change. For instance, one middle manager reflected on institutional characteristics when they described how teachers worked according to "old values and do not want to change . . . this is blocked by bulldog attitudes in the teachers' ranks . . . this affects morale".

The problem of high average age in the teaching profession repeatedly came up in the interviews, and this age profile was blamed for the conservatism

experienced by the school leadership and for reinforcing how institutionalised the schools were in fact. High age in the teaching profession was considered to be among the most hindering elements. A school director reported that "conservatism is, of course, a very strong factor since we have a relatively high age level" in the teaching profession. Another reflected on how "it is difficult to teach an old dog new tricks". Another school leader agreed by saying:

> [t]he teacher group is aging heavily . . . it is naturally always people that are thinking about their own comfort zone, always putting themselves in the first place.

A middle manager noted that the older part of the teaching profession held the change processes hostage. She described how "it does not take an old teacher an extremely long time to kill" the entrepreneurial spirit in her school. She claimed to have the so-called "forty-seven problem", meaning that a disproportionate number of teachers were born in and around 1947 and would soon retire. It was generally noted that many of those teachers were in a holding pattern and tended not to actively participate in school development. Furthermore, she described how she could not hire a qualified teacher due to the competition in the labour market. She reported how "young professionals are not ready for the teachers' salaries" that the older ones accept.

A middle manager described that new teachers enter the teaching profession, "and then the state of mind changes". Changes become so much easier in the school. This shows how the school changed through the processes of deinstitutionalisation happening in parallel with new and fresh teachers that break up the norms and traditions within the schools.

Similarly, some leaders focused on the option to hire "only young teachers", as described by one school director. Thus, she systematically attracted young teachers to be able to cultivate them as change agent's *vis-à-vis* the school philosophy. "Almost no one comes with some [baggage] along, these people are so young". She continued. "They are not looking . . . at the things from the larger context [here referring to salary structures etc.]". However, as the school became older, the teachers "just gain union awareness . . . the entrepreneurial spirit and the power . . . has from the beginning dominated everything . . . I have tried not to misuse it".

In keeping with this school director's emphasis on hiring young employees to develop the school, a middle manager leading another new school described her hiring in this manner: "to be able to hire people who know what to expect, knowing that they are entering a certain system, they need to be ready for it".

Thus, they are "in a different position than other upper secondary schools . . . we start in" a new system. The school leaders were all aware of their own privilege in not leading "an old teacher room", as reported by one of the school directors where traditions, norms, and old values were at play. One of the same middle managers reported that "it is just not the same establishing a new school and changing a school, there is a vast difference".

Another manifestation of resistance and the so-called "forty-seven problem" could be seen in the decision of the school leaders in schools with a longer history to make change by soliciting the aid of young faculty that had a different pedagogical vision and the energy to make a change. The other teachers were left alone, as one of the school leader clearly reported.

> A team of [N] persons . . . who worked on this change; we worked on this together, we wrote the curriculum, when we got the funds to make this change . . . This team of [N] persons . . . rewrote all the tasks . . . so we had everything ready . . . there was the core of persons of interest . . . there was the opportunity, I grabbed it.

One school leader outlined her attempts "to establish good cooperation between [two departments] . . . the gap is amazingly big" when she described the conflict as "an individual conflict to further their own egos, and people never agree on anything". Another school leader had a similar story when describing competition between four leaders of strong academic subjects:

> There you can find the great conflicts; everyone wants to promote their teaching subject . . . this is related to occupational security; my subject is what I want to keep and protect.

Furthermore, a middle manager reported competition in her school during the time when students select courses for the coming term. During that period, the teachers compete for a certain distribution of teaching hours, and therefore their salaries, by attracting students to the courses they teach. She talked about "competition, in fact, this is a definite conflict . . . between teachers . . . 'my courses, your courses', and they have gone so far as stealing students from one another". She argued that this constrained development and initiative. The subjects as a socially structured phenomenon reinforce institutionalisation and stagnation.

A school director described how

> each subject defines [what is needed] . . . we are shortening the study time; is not this [material] just going to be thrown away? And then the teachers show their claws. Who is going to decide this and especially older teachers . . . who have maybe been selected to sit on examination committees; those are often teachers that are supporting . . . the subject by fostering the notion that everyone needs to learn . . . a certain base that we are not using now.

She was describing how teachers are competing about which courses would be retained in a shorter study time at the upper secondary school level and which courses would be dropped.

Such competition and resistance affects emotions and caused stress among employees within the schools. A school director described how time was needed in educational change to "let the wounds heal", and a middle manager in her school described in vivid language how

> teachers are afraid of change . . . afraid . . . that the authority will now roll over them with some unfair and improper workload . . . This puts all the anxiety stations on alert . . . we have been on some kind of rollercoaster, and . . . there have been extreme swings, sometimes really fun and pleasant, and sometimes everything crazy and everyone is just mad . . . it is also because we are going into a new environment we do not know how to deal with.

Another middle manager from another school stated that

> insecurity and uncertainty . . . there are far too many changes happening at the same time . . . fewer positions . . . so it is a really fragile state here, people are very defensive and protect their own position.

This has also been described in the discussion about competition between subjects and individuals. Still another middle manager from another school reflected on feelings when reporting that "some have been left wounded" by the change debate in her school. Further, she noted "how human communication" tends to curb change in general as do "internal conflicts". She reported that "change fatigue" appeared in her school after a long period of change.

To sum this up, the younger generation of teachers seem to promote and enact change as compared to the older generation. The subjects also have an impact, as do competition and vested interests in relation to livelihoods.

8.3.2 School leaders

The school leaders saw themselves partly as actors at the micro level and partly as acting at the meso level through impacting and cooperating with macro-level actors. The following section outlines the school leaders' perceptions of themselves acting at the micro level.

The participating leaders somehow danced between pressures and ideas from the macro level, their own ideas, and resistance within the schools, that was to a certain extent, they felt, baked by the Teachers' Union. Thus, the school leaders saw themselves as change actors performing their roles between the institutional walls of the schools and ideas from the macro level. In other words, the leaders found themselves operating at the micro and meso levels and sometimes at the macro level, as indicated above.

Most of the interviewees said they made an effort to support and guide the staff when making a change. They highlighted the importance of bottom-up approaches, ownership, and active involvement by the teachers. Nevertheless, only a few of them focused on trusting, without reservation, their employees. One relied on the importance of persuasion and few on the power of the middle management layer.

Some of the participating leaders saw themselves as change actors striving constantly seeking new aims for and aspects of school development. Agnes was one of them. She reflected on her constant desire to develop:

> As a leader, I feel that I am not doing my job if I have no development underway, even in times of cutbacks . . . I am so open to all kinds of changes and actively seek them; it is sometimes said to me that I do not thrive unless something is happening.

Binna described how she met institutional walls in Brokey when she was hired to lead the school. She came in, eager to change, but soon she recognised that Brokey functioned as an institution. The employees protected the history of the school and its traditions and norms:

> I came surely eager to change . . . but I soon sensed that . . . people safeguard the school history . . . then I learned . . . to respect the history of the school and figured it out that I cannot come into a structure like this and plan to [change]; the structure is living its own life and has its own being . . . it takes a long time to change direction . . . it needs to happen in good harmony, but on the other hand, of course, I need to provoke, and and be disagreeable as well.

Soon she learned to dance around the institutional walls in Brokey by promoting change through the teachers' professional development. Under the hat of professional development, it was safe to make changes. By doing that, she moved her school through the processes of deinstitutionalisation, at least in some respects:

> I . . . found . . . a book that I bought and read . . . and it inspired me so I let my people start . . . then I talked to [a name of a teacher] . . . and, you know, she was immediately interested, and we established a small reading group. . . and they went to . . . a workshop . . . and . . . right away created some methods . . . [they] handed in a report and they presented the outcome among teachers and I want to keep on working like this.

She was trying to establish ongoing change within the school through the path of professional development to promote grassroots change. To do this, she had established a study circle.

One school leader reported that one middle manager in her school hindered the implementation of the changes in the national curriculum guide. She highlighted how difficult it is when her colleague

> stops [the growth] . . . because we have only one dinosaur that will never do anything and if the dinosaur is [in the school leadership], then it is extremely difficult.

The leader was protecting the existing values of the school.

The school leaders seemed to realise the double role they played when leading change, and how important it is to read the atmosphere and forces at play in each school well. Hence, they sometimes acted simultaneously as institutional leaders and organisational leaders depending on the tasks they performed and the cultural structure of the school and subjects, as highlighted in Section 8.2.2.

Arna described her double role as one of the school leaders in Akurey. On the one hand, her role was to facilitate change. On the other hand, she needed to resist some changes and protect the school as an institution. She looked at herself "as an important employee to facilitate change, but at the same time . . . a conservative element . . . then I need to be solidly in-between". In that way, the school leaders protected the existing values of the schools they lead.

The leaders discussed the thin, delicate line between ownership and leadership. Several school leaders, however, felt a lack of authority and wanted to be able to be more in control. Some of the leaders were not consistent in their discourse on this issue.

One school leader, in charge of a traditional grammar school, had accomplished a major change in educational practices in her school. She noted how she gave the teachers "a piece of paper with a headline . . . but I have not yet written the actual text". Usually, she got more or less the outcome she wanted, but more importantly she distributed ownership of the task. Furthermore, she said that:

> by not making every decision for people they are made to feel the ownership but, to own something, then, then they are also responsible . . . I think, however, that people feel they own the change they are participating in.

She focused on giving her employees the opportunity to create ownership of the tasks. In addition, she emphasised leaving out her

> signature . . . It feels good to hear when people talk about the change . . . and do not remember that I was part of it, and they experience it as part of their job . . . It is also good if they do not remember that I established it [the change] in the beginning, or my co-workers, co-administrators.

Similarly, Gló reflected on the importance of ownership. She also added active participation of employees and the important role of school leaders in educational change. She pointed out that school leaders "must lead" the change, but at the same time, be able to create opportunities for ownership. "It is important that the group owns the idea and the implementation, then you must always, somehow, be able to do both" lead and create the opportunity for ownership. Gló continued to say how time-consuming active participation of all the employees is "because everyone is part of all actions", but she found it worth it. Regardless of how time-consuming it is, she stressed that she was "not going to stop", as she strongly believed in the active participation of her employees. Dagný in Drangey agreed. She focused on the professional capital and empowerment of the teaching profession.

> When we were working on the curriculum, we transferred the power systematically to the groups and interdisciplinary work . . . the teachers are great experts.

She further described how everyone needed to

> rethink their own contribution from the start [of the change] and let go . . . At one moment, I asked everyone to vote whether we should start the change or not. People unanimously agreed . . . We are on this journey [together], and . . . as I said, everyone is really working on it; there is disagreement of course but, you see, everyone is still on board.

Dagný also described her leadership strategy in line with Gló. She reported the importance of taking the lead.

> I do not have a decision-making phobia [if needed] . . . I want everyone to feel that I stand by my people . . . I feel I am working with really nice people and great experts. I feel that I am rather leading the group than being . . . their commander.

By doing that she supported her staff in a warm and constructive way. At the same time she promoted top-down and bottom-up approaches.

Kristín, like Gló and Dagný, wanted "to guide and support rather than control with an iron grip". She saw herself as a democratic leader and reported how "people have just worked on this very professionally and conscientiously and in cooperation . . . we take democratic decisions" in Kolbeinsey. Gyða noted that:

> [i]t is rare that issues are presented in that way, here at work, that it is a directive from the top . . . we have . . . teachers' meetings where . . . everything is on the table . . . it is a platform really where people can just discuss, learn from each other, compare.

Gyða described the working culture in Grímsey as democratic with active participation of the employees. Everyone was actively included in the process of change and decision making. In a way, the leaders were working orthogonally across the hierarchical ladder of the school.

Dagný strongly emphasised trusting her teachers to take the initiative and repeatedly claimed to be so fortunate as to have great experts in Drangey. Brynja in Brokey shared that opinion.

> We need to avoid having this too centralised . . . with everything coming from the top . . . We should rather use the professionals [meaning teachers, they] are . . . very good and intelligent experts and and actually just trust them . . . to seek the best possible way for their own departments . . . and then obviously to expect that they, those departments, work together as one whole team.

Brynja also pointed out the hierarchical structure in her school when describing her vision for departments working together rather than making the change holistically across departmental borders as in Drangey and Grímsey. It must be borne in mind that Brokey was a complex, large comprehensive school, while Drangey was a rather homogeneous grammar school.

In Eldey, the culture was different from Grímsey and Drangey. The change was led by innovative teachers, and the others were left out. Thus, Erna noted that "if people can participate, and get the feeling that they are making the change . . . and get the scope to change", then the employees could feel that they are part of the process and own it. Here, she added the importance of giving the employees space to change.

Some of the interviewees discussed their own authority and the focus on controlling the action in their schools. The discourse of Agnes and Fjóla manifested top-down directives. Both emphasised their authority due to their positions on the top of the hierarchical ladder in their schools. They show supervisory power as part of the setup of organisational leadership. Fjóla noted that:

> [p]art of being one of the chief administrators is that . . . the power to decide is mine . . . I consult with others . . . I think the employees here in the school . . . have much to say . . . regarding decisions. But I do not know whether that is entirely their experience.

Similarly, Agnes reported that "[e]ssentially it does not matter where the idea comes from". However, when an idea originates from among the staff, "they, of course, first need to sell the leaders the idea . . . there needs to be some framework in the beginning". Here, she described how important it was for her, as the director of the school, to control the change taking place in the school and authorise it down the hierarchical ladder of her school. Hence, she acts as an organisational leader.

Further, Agnes strongly emphasised the active participation of leaders when implementing change, at least during the initial stages, as she noted. "I think…

that . . . the leaders strongly need to be part of each project, at least in the beginning". Her perspective conveyed some lack of trust and her actions can be clustered under organisational leadership as previously discussed.

Fanney also show characteristics of authority. With reference to financial problems, Fanney explained her crisis in motivating her staff at Flatey while creating and implementing the school curriculum. Furthermore, she described her decision when taking over the curriculum writing with a selected group of employees.

> Teachers cannot work on the curriculum unless they are paid for it, and we do not have any money to do this; then we just need to work on it by ourselves [the leadership], so this final work . . . when we . . . present it to the teachers, then we say it is your conclusion; we just worked through this for you . . . This is not policy making or something that fell from the sky, nothing that we have originated; this is just what came out of our work last year and the year before.

Unlike Agnes and Fanney, Erna in Eldey described the power of persuasion and noted how important it is to "convince people about what you want to change and that it has its impact". When convincing the employees, Ester, Erna's colleague, pointed out that it was

> dialogue first and foremost . . . never use directives from the top . . . It is first and foremost to sow the seeds . . . discuss back and forward, turn, and inspire the employees, to work on the change out of interest because . . . if we work on those assumptions, then the quality is so much more, and it will be so much more rewarding and much more infectious".

She is refering the the power of carisma to guide subordinates. This falls under the category of organisational leadership.

When Ester discussed the impact of decentralisation in her school, she described how she "assumed power to take action". She noted how she had

> enough authority to do the things . . . that need to be done . . . [the name of the school director] . . . has given us a lot of freedom, and I would say that I have used it very well.

Here, she was describing her important role as a member of middle management when making changes and acting as organisatonal leader. However, when talking

about “us”, she referred to several teachers willing to go for the change. The others were left out and not prepared to participate, as previously highlighted. In line with most of the interviewees, Karolína also noted how difficult it was to motivate the whole group. “[S]ome are open and ready, and quite willing to change, but others are not”.

Finally, when analysing the discourses of those leaders who opted for bottom-up approaches, the predominant phrasing is characterised by the first person plural pronouns of “we”, “us”, and “ours”. Such terminology seems to facilitate change and increase the ownership by the employees. Conversely, the top-down proclamation is characterised by the first person singular of “I” or “mine”. These school leaders, preferring top-down directives and demonstrations of authority, seemed to experience more resistance and power struggles than the others.

9 Discussion

School leaders identified diverse influences that facilitated or constrained change at the upper secondary school level. These elements arose from various actors with different degree of involvement at the schools, but also from numerous social structures. The school leaders described a considerable number of changes and social structures authorised by the macro-level actors and indicated that these demands affected the dynamics within the schools. Further, they also highlighted how different teachers and groups of teachers responded differently to the macro-level demands for change.

School leaders used various approaches when implementing change. Their agency, power, and vision varied and depended on the issues, situations, and dynamics in their schools. In order to understand these dynamics better, the findings on actors and social structures will be brought together and discussed in light of theories, research, and current practices. These findings will first be viewed in light of the background of the study. Secondly, the findings are connected to the research questions, conceptual framework, and the relevant empirical information. Then, the conceptual challenges that I had to tackle are discussed, and, lastly, the implications of the study are summarised and discussed.

9.1 Diverse schools and social justice

Information on the background of the selected schools facilitates an understanding of the diverse cultures in the schools, as well as their heterogeneity and homogeneity. The participating upper secondary schools were somewhat alike since they all offered academic subjects and programmes. They were, however, different in terms of diversity of programmes, school size, geographical location, systems, hierarchical structures, and human resources.

School directors perceived the role of upper secondary schools differently, depending on the type of school they led. Those in charge of grammar schools saw the role of the school as preparation for higher education. Leaders from comprehensive schools emphasised a broader role, ranging from the adolescence development and serving student diversity, to preparing youth for further education, academic or vocational, or for a job. Thus, the school leaders in comprehensive schools viewed the schools' role as more in line with the acts

guiding the upper secondary schools (Upper Secondary Education Act No. 92/2008). However, relatively few school directors focused on preparing for active participation in a democratic society, even though three of the nine school directors gave the issue some importance by promoting channels for active, democratic participation among teachers and students. This raises questions as to whether democratic participation of students, teachers, and other stakeholders is actually given its due attention and, in fact, contradicts what the law demands.

In principle, the upper secondary school as a whole is for all students (Upper Secondary Education Act No. 92/2008). When considering the selected upper secondary schools, some questions on social justice arise. Grammar schools seemed to be exempt from offering general programmes for students who had not met the entrance requirements for other study paths at the schools and from offering programmes or learning opportunities for students with intellectual disabilities. Related to this notion of segregation, class-based systems only offer academic programmes for a selected group of students in traditional grammar schools, and the students in grammar schools cannot enjoy the company of a diverse student population. One of the school leaders from a grammar school expressed concern about the homogeneity of the student body and group of teachers in the school and saw this as a problem.

Another equality concern was mentioned in the interviews with the school leaders of comprehensive schools when emphasising educational opportunities in relation to rural development and the right of students to study in their local community until 18 years of age. This concern is related to the fact that students in rural communities who wish to join vocational programmes need to leave their homes earlier than their peers who pursue academic studies. As noted by some leaders, these students tend to enrol in academic programmes for two years, which are of little or no use to them in relation to the vocational occupations for which they aim.

9.2 Addressing the research questions and the issues they raise

The metatheory of institutional logic (Scott, 2014; Thornton et al., 2012) is part of the analytical framework in this thesis as elaborated on in Chapter 3. The theory explains how macro-level structures, culture, and agency are presented through a cross-level process. The differences and connections between institutions and organisations are important in order to determine what actors and social structures facilitate or constrain change. Therefore, the theoretical lenses of institutions and organisations (e.g. Kraatz, 2009; Raffaelli & Glynn, 2015; Scott, 2014; Selznick, 1949; 1957) and institutional and organisational

leadership (Kraatz, 2009; Raffaelli & Glynn, 2015; Selznick, 1949; 1957; Washington et al. 2008) are used to understand the interviews with the school leaders. Each of the five research questions that emerged from the theories and the underlying research will be discussed subsequently.

9.2.1 Content, nature, and origin of educational change

The first research question is: What do school leaders identify as educational change at the school level and how can such change be categorised? Most of the change emerging from the interviews grew from the social structures discussed in Chapter 7, and many of the change were instigated by the macro-level actors, while others where instigated by the meso-level and micro-level actors (see Sections 8.1, 8.2 and 8.3). The answer to the first part of research question one, on what the school leaders identified as change, is both long and complex. The school leaders reported a substantial number of changes and new developments influencing upper secondary education in Iceland. Table 11 summarises change emerging from the data, varying from the change that school leaders had to facilitate based on the on finance, formula funding, and the economic crisis to innovative practises taking place within the schools.

The most prominent category discussed by the school leaders where the biases related to formula funding and how constraining it was, in particular in remedying the deficiencies. In this context, the consequences of the financial crisis were reported by all the interviewees. Some of the school leaders discussed issues related to accountability (i.e. external and internal evaluations) as well as supply and demand in the field of education. They described the situation as marketisation. These marketisation tendencies and, in particular, developments relating to competition between schools for students was cosidred challanging.

The school leaders also discussed how the Administrative Procedures Act No. 37/1993, the Upper Secondary Education Act No. 92/2008, and the national curriculum guide impact change. Parallel to this, the school leaders discussed the double dilemma regarding collective agreements (see also Chapter 2). Some interviewees discussed the shorter path of study leading to matriculation examinations (three years instead of four as was the norm), as well as intervention that restricted the access of learners over 25 years of age to upper secondary school. Most of these require the schools to respond with internal changes, but to a varying degree. Some of the school directors said that the latter measure would have negative financial consequences on individual schools. The school leaders feared that this change would lead to a lower number of students in small, rural schools at upper secondary education. They also feared that

vocational and comprehensive schools, where the average age of students is higher than in traditional grammar schools, would suffer.

All interviewees also discussed the decentralised ideology of the legislative changes introduced in 2008 (Upper Secondary Education Act No. 92/2008), the consequent implementation process in the schools, and the requirements outlined in the national curriculum guide. The school leaders also explained the modifications taking place in the participating schools. They discussed the work around the creation of a school curriculum, its general implementation, and new ideas engendered by the whole process. Thus, teaching and learning in various forms were discussed, as well as testing and assessment methods. Moreover, the use of computers and other technology (ICT), professional development inside and outside the schools, and general developments stimulated by formal education and educational research were topics of interest.

The focus of the school leaders interviewed before the teacher strike in the upper secondary schools in Iceland (March 17th to April 5th, 2014) was on the financial crisis and its effect on schooling, as well as what they tended to call outdated collective agreements. A shift was noted in the issues highlighted in the discourse of school leaders before and after the teacher strike. All of the leaders discussed the decentralised curriculum creation and its implementation, as well as competition and power struggles linked to the implementation processes. However, the school leaders interviewed after the teachers' strike and the new collective bargaining agreements (autumn 2014) were more positive, focusing on opportunities and professional development rather than obstacles. Simultaneously, increasing tension appeared in the interviewees' discourse around the implementation processes and the collective bargaining agreements. The influence of the Teachers' Union regarding the new contracts rose again. The differences relating to the geographical locations of the schools, school sizes, and their financial status were also predominant.

Table 11. Categories of change elements as reported by school leaders

Macro-level demand for change	Macro actors	Meso-level change
• Finance and formula funding (Section 7.1.2) • Change spurred on by external and internal evaluations (Section 7.1.4) • Legislation (Section 7.1.1) • National curriculum guide (Section 7.1.1)	MoESC and the government	• School policy (Section 8.2.2) • Designing, writing, and implementing the school curriculum (discussed throughout the thesis) • New and adjusted study paths and courses (Section 8.2.2) • Teaching and learning (Section 8.2.2) • Interdisciplinary work and team teaching (Section 8.2.2) • Testing and assessment (Section 8.2.2) • Use of computers, social media, and technology (Section 8.2.2) • Professional development and formal education (Sections 7.1.3, 7.2.1, 7.2.2, and 8.1.3)
• Economic crisis (Section 7.1.2)	Society, government and the MoESC	
• Restricted access to the school level (Section 7.1.2)	MoESC	
• Change related to school marketisation (Sections 7.1.4, 8.1.4, and 8.1.6)	Parents, students, society, MoESC, and opportunities offered by schools in the vicinity	
• Collective bargaining agreements (Sections 7.1.3, 8.1.1, and 8.1.2)	MoESC and the Teachers' Union	
• Change spurred by formal education and educational research (Sections 7.2.1, 7.2.2, and 8.1.3)	Universities	
• Cooperation with compulsory schools (Section 8.1.4)	Compulsory schools and MoESC	
• Shorter study paths for matriculation examination (Section 8.2.2)	MoESC and the labour market	

The second part of question one, on how educational change can be categorised, is possible to answer in more than one way. The idea on horizontal and vertical influences emerging from the data will be discussed here as a possible conceptual premise. Also, the theories introduced in Section 3.5, that can work alone or in concert with other theories, even in connection with a conceptualisation like the one that developed from this study on vertical and horizontal influences.

The following discussion begins with the possible conceptualisation growing from the data. Then the discussion will be on the theories presented in Section 3.5, starting with first- and second-order change (Cuban, 1988; Smith, 2008). The ideas on fundamental educational change and fundamental organisational change introduced by Waks (2007) follow. In the end, the policy implementation and policy enactment offered by Ball and associates (2012) is considered. In all cases, the challenges regarding the conceptualisations will be discussed.

The discussion starts with the vertical and horizontal influences emerging from the interviews. When exploring the data, it is clear that the change originating from the macro-level actors can be categorised as a top-down approach (Columns 1 and 2 (the responses to it) in Table 11). Ideas, commands, and directives are made from those with higher hierarchal ranking or authority, or actors ranking higher in the hierarchical ladder authorise actors in lower positions to make changes (Fraser et al., 2006; Hallinger, 2003; Scott, 2014; Smeds et al., 2003; Zilber, 2016).

Several examples of top-down approaches emerged from the data. The financial crises discussed by the school leaders originated from social influences, as it was controlled by many interrelated elements in the society. The leaders also mentioned how the MoESC reacted after the crisis and how it directly impacted school practices due to austerity measures.

The marketisation tendencies discussed by the participants was instigated by the MoESC when setting up the selection processes for 10th graders. The participants also discussed the behaviour of the market in regards to parents impact on students' selection of schools and the opportunities offered by schools in the vicinity. All led to new educational opportunities, or in some cases, situations where the schools needed to drop some educational opportunities for students.

The agreements, frameworks, rules, regulations, and legislations discussed by the school leaders can also be categorised as top-down approaches influencing change. They discussed how these administrative measures are led by the MoESC and the Ministry of Finance both located at the macro level. They also highligted how they are monitored and contraballanced by the Teachers' Union.

Then the school leaders explained the modifications taking place in the participating schools that are instigated by the macro-level actors (see Column 3, Table 11). Therefore, this study agrees with the Fraser et al. (2006) statement of how top-down approaches facilitate change.

Yet, this is not the whole story. Several examples of bottom-up approaches also emerged from the data. Bottom-up approaches are in operation when subordinated groups in the hierarchical ladder are given, or assume, the power to make changes and influence other actors to enforce their interests and values (Scott, 2014; Smeds, 2003; Zilber, 2016). Some school leaders explained that they had started to develop and implement new ideas in their schools before the formal policy change in 2008, but they also described how the legislation had enabled them to take the change further than they could do within the given institutional framework of upper secondary education at the time. Based on this, it is questionable whether the new acts and policies came first or if the ideas and growth developed within the schools and were later transmitted through the policy documents and acts.

As noted in Sections 8.1.8 and 8.2.4, school leaders also explained what was categorised in the study as horizontal influences. Horizontal influences were used for initiatives for change prompted by students, parents, teachers, or school leaders. The initiatives took place either within the same school, between schools, or in other educational settings belonging to upper secondary education. In this way, there turned out to be a flow and diffusion of knowledge and experiences. It is particularly interesting to explore the growth of interdisciplinary courses, team teaching, and formative assessment from the perspective of horizontal influences. All these examples of horizontal influences can be categorised as bottom-up approaches and are, therefore, evidence of how such approaches facilitate change. Hence, this study also agrees with Smeds, Haho, and Alvesalo's (2003) emphasis on a mixture of both top-down and bottom-up approaches when leading change.

In summary, vertical influences explain an interactive process between the actors belonging to the macro, meso, and micro levels and the incorporated social structures. Hence, vertical influences consist of two subcomponents, top-down approaches (Fraser et al., 2006; Hallinger, 2003; Scott, 2014; Smeds et al., 2003; Zilber, 2016) and bottom-up approaches (Smeds et al., 2003; Zilber, 2016).

In contrast to vertical influences, horizontal influences are seen as independent initiatives for change promoted by meso-level actors or other actors within the same level. Horizontal influences are interactive processes between actors within and between organisations within the same organisational field. The initiative takes place either within the same school,

between schools, or in other educational settings belonging to the organisational field. In this way, there is a flow and diffusion of knowledge and experiences. Two subcomponents for horizontal influences are also proposed based on the findings. These components are internal horizontal influences and external horizontal influences. Internal horizontal influences explain the chain reaction of innovative ideas taking place within schools, while external horizontal influences happen through contact between schools and other national or international educational units within the same organisational field of upper secondary schools.

Using vertical and horizontal influences facilitates the understanding of the origin of the intended change and clarifies which actors are operating across the system boundary of education. It also explains the interactive processes between and within the macro, meso, and micro levels of the education system.

Using the concepts of first- and second-order change is another possibility when categorising change (Cuban, 1988; Smith, 2008). But those categories mainly emphasised the degree and the depth of the change according to Smith (2008) and refer only to a change taking place in organisations not in institutions. In review, Smith (2008) defines first-order change as superficial change that is intended to enhance a stable system that may, in fact, not change at all. Similarly, Cuban (1988) defines it as "reforms that assume that the existing organizational goals and structures are basically adequate" (p. 228). When using the category of first-order change, it is possible to cluster the first column on macro level demand for change in Table 11 as first-order change since it includes reforms (Cuban, 1988) if we assume that the definition of reforms includes changes in rules and regulations that are demanded from macro actors. Are the responses as superficial as Smith (2008) claims? In some respects, they are, as is evident in this study since the intended change does not reach the schools holistically, as is evident in Section 8.2.2. Even though some of the changes reported in the third column in Table 11 reach the administration level, some other subunits, such as subject faculties, tend to resist it. Yet, it is also evident in this study that some of the schools have made substantial change when responding to the reforms, i.e., the pioneering schools.

When using the definition of second-order change, the emerging horizontal influences may fit the definition, as well as the change that has been made in the pioneering schools, since second-order change is typically seen as what Smith (2008) calls a substantial or significant change of an organisation or system.

The categorisation of first- and second-order change does not clarify what actors are operating across the system boundaries in education, the change

spurred inside the schools, the understanding of the origin of the intended change, or the interactive processes between the macro, meso, and micro levels.

The data certainly supports the importance of distinguishing between fundamental educational change and fundamental organisational change. Most of the school leaders described what can be classified as fundamental educational change as being a change in ideas, norms, arrangements, and frameworks. The first columns in Table 11 may match the Waks (2007) definition on fundamental educational change. The first column includes the change instigated from the macro-level actors and represent change in laws, rules, and regulations. The issues reported in the third column of Table 11 mostly match the category of fundamental organisational change as they all explain the changes taking place within the schools when schools are adjusting to the new institutional norms and ideas requested by macro-level actors.

When it comes to Waks's (2007) definition on fundamental educational change, it is not clear if he is only referring to the macro impact on change or if organisations can influence educational change, as emphasised in this study. He also seems to neglect the actors and their origins in his conceptualisation.

His definition is more explicit when it comes to fundamental organisational change. Even though it is not clear if he charters directly the themes emerging from this study, A) when schools impact educational (institutional) change, and B) horizontal influences. These two items are not transparent in his definitions. Further, it is questionable if the prefix fundamental is needed in Waks's (2007) conceptualisation since he does not define that word and its meaning is not transparent.

Ball et al.'s (2012) distinction between policy implementation and policy enactment may also be useful when categorising change. They describe implementation as processes of actions on behalf of the government or other educational authorities when policies are placed into practices. Enactment, however, explains how policy is received in individual schools or by school personnel. Based on this, it is possible to categorise Column 1 in Table 11 as policy implementation and Column 3 as enactment. But their categorisation does not tell the whole story since, as is clear, based on the findings presented in Section 8.2.2, even though the school leaders intend to implement change amended in rules and regulation, they do not achieve their aim due to huge resistance from groups of teachers. The same challenge rose when using Ball et al.'s (2012) definition when categorising change as when using the other categories discussed above. All of them neglect the fact that change and innovative ideas also arise from the grass-roots level and travel horizontally within and between the individual organisational fields.

As shown in this analysis, most of the conceptualisations on change are somehow unclear or lack transparency. Nevertheless, it might be fruitful in future investigations to draw on the conclusions of this study and add the ideas of vertical and horizontal influences to Waks's (2007) ideas on fundamental organisational change and fundamental educational change or using the categorisations in parallel. Doing so may clarify what actors operate across the system boundaries of education, facilitate the understanding of the origin of the intended change, and explain the interactive processes between the macro, meso, and micro levels.

9.2.2 Macro level: Principal actors and social structures

The second and third research questions are covered together as they are so closely related. The second is: Who do school leaders see as the principal actors participating in educational change and how do they interact in facilitating or constraining change? The third is: What social structures do school leaders see operating in educational change and what impact do they consider these to have in facilitating or constraining change? The findings show the complexity of interactions and influences and the effects of the diverse actors and social structures located at the macro level. Thus, the former question focuses on actors and the latter on social structures.

The school leaders identified numerous macro-level actors (see Table 7, Chapter 8) having political, educational, or socital impact. Based on the school leaders' perceptions, the MoESC, the Teachers' Union, and the universities are clustered as political actors. However, the universities were also perceived as an educational actor. The school leaders viewed the MoESC as the most important and powerful political actor influencing the upper secondary schools. By its nature, it is at the top of the hierarchical ladder of the education system and highly linked to the politics at play at any given time.

The actors simultaneously create and are influenced by social structures. This interaction between the actors and social structures affects change at the upper secondary school level in different ways. The most significant social structures appeared in the data are the regulative structures (Scott, 2014) originating from the ministries and the government in general, i.e., legislation and the national curriculum guide (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012) for the upper secondary school level, rules and regulations, the system of accountability, economic structures, and collective bargaining agreements (including the system of professional development). However, the normative (Scott, 2014) social structures are controlled by the university level through the system of formal education and the practice of professional development, educational research,

and the status of some curricular subjects. Some of the structures are highlighted and discussed in Section 9.2.1, Table 11.

9.2.2.1 The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture and the Teachers' Union as centres of power

At the macro level, the school leaders viewed the MoESC and Teachers' Union as two centres of power. School leadership highlighted a power struggle between the MoESC and the Teachers' Union. The Union strongly resisted some of the demands for change promoted by MoESC by challenging their power. As a result, the Teachers' Union and the MoESC were often in sharp conflict with each other, as reported by the leaders.

The MoESC influenced upper secondary schools mainly through top-down directives via various institutionalised social structures. Their control fits under Scott's (2014) regulative pillar of institutions representing the legislative frameworks and the systems of rules and regulations. These social structures were sometimes discussed as demanding homogeneous educational practices and, in several cases, promoting change. The school leaders saw the MoESC, on the one hand, as being conservative and, on the other, as giving them freedom via decentralised curriculum creation and implementation.

The regulative control (Scott, 2014) amended in the Upper Secondary Education Act No. 92/2008 and the 2011 national curriculum guide (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012) clearly endorsed change but simultaneously created crisis within the schools. Previously, the MoESC endorsed a centralised curriculum promoted in an earlier education act from 1996 and the curriculum guide from 1999 (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 1999). In 2008, the MoESC relinquished their power and encouraged the schools to create their own special tracks or curricular characteristics.

Oliver (1992) and Kraatz and Moore (2002) concur that macro-level actors, in this case the MoESC, create crisis when policy is implemented. All of the school leaders in this study described a crisis to some degree in their schools. This is because the existing institutionalised practices in the schools were challenged and the processes of deinstitutionalisation (Kraatz & Moore, 2002; Oliver, 1992) was trickled in the schools through macro-level demand for change.

Despite the positive attitude towards the provisions for change incorporated in the policy documents, some school leaders felt that the national curriculum guide (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012) protected existing practices rooted in the institutional regulative (Scott, 2014) structures for the school level, the setup of the upper secondary schools, and the education system in general. This is in line with Deng (2013), who describes that the curriculum

establishes “an institutionally defined field of knowledge and practice for teaching and learning” (p. 40). Similarly, Jónasson (2016) reports on the solid structure of the curriculum and adds that it is deeply grounded in norms and traditions of cultures and nations. Levin (2013) similarly emphasises the curriculum when reflecting on barriers for change in secondary education. He pinpoints that the control of the curriculum depends on how it remains organised around subjects. This is only partly true for the national curriculum guide (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012) in Iceland since it is designed around only three core subjects but silent about other subject fields, as described in Section 2.2.4.

Hence, some leaders indicated that the traditional mandatory academic subjects of Icelandic, English, and mathematics, dominate the national curriculum guide (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012), being the only obligatory subjects taught across the curriculum programmes. School leadership considered the subject hierarchy to hinder creativity, maintain stagnation, and place unequal weight on subject fields. These findings are in accord with recent studies. Luke et al. (2013) note, for example, that academic outcomes are a predominant factor in education. Similarly, Bleazby (2015) points out how some subjects are seen to be more valuable than others are. Bleazby (2015) mainly highlights mathematics and physics, while subjects which are typically linked to physical and practical orientation, are judged as less valuable by the community. She refers to this as “the traditional curriculum hierarchy” (p. 671). In this regard, Thornton et al.’s (2012) reflections on social structures are relevant. They claim that some actors misuse their power systematically when creating social structures based on their self-interests.

The move from the previously centralised curriculum (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 1999) to the current decentralised national curriculum guide (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012) is a move away from a centralised macro-level authority to a meso-level authority. In the processes of change in the upper secondary schools, some leaders complained about the lack of cooperation from the MoESC and called for more guidance and supervision, while others wanted more control and power. The school leaders calling for more guidance and control from the MoESC have apparently not assumed the power transferred to them and their employees in the legislation, or perhaps, they misinterpreted the meaning of it. Based on this, it is possible to conclude that they hold tight to the institutional aspects promoted in the previous act and curriculum guide (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 1999) that are characterised by centralisation. As noted by one school director, this newfound freedom has brought about feelings of insecurity. Based on the school directors’ comments, however, it remains uncertain how far this curricular freedom

actually extends and how far the leaders, or rather the school personnel, can actually go since the curriculums must still be approved by the MoESC (Upper Secondary Education Act No. 92/2008).

The Upper Secondary Educaion Act No. 92/2008 and the national curriculum guide (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012) were not the only regulative structures discussed by school leaders. Some of them also reflected on the constraining nature of the Act on Administrative Procedures Act No. 37/1993. The school leaders highlighted what can be clustered as institutional barriers in this act and its protective nature regarding state employees. They also discussed how the Teachers' Union intensively used the act to protect their union members if the school directors tried to dismiss a teacher. The legislative frame protects state employees and, in so doing, promotes and protects the existing institutionalised practices. Nevertheless, it is important to note how important the act is in preventing misjudgements of school directors, students, and others. In most cases, while complaining about the constraints they felt as organisational leaders, they also acknowledged, in principle, the sensibility of a protective framework.

It is also important to look at the regulative social structures (Scott, 2014) incorporated in the system of accountability when discussing the control made by the MoESC. Paulsen and Høyer (2016) indicate that the system of accountability in Norway is institutionalised. They highlight agendas associated with reforms and international influences in their analyses. The same partly applies to Iceland. The upper secondary schools are monitored by both internal and external evaluations, and the agenda is to monitor the schools and promote change (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2010a; Upper Secondary Education Act No. 92/2008). The control travels down the hierarchical ladder, from the highest authority of the school level (MoESC) to the schools and then from the school director down the hierarchical ladder in the schools. The upper secondary school level is, however, excluded from international and national tests and comparisons (See Section 2.2.5). The dropout rate and other metrics are measured. Therefore, the data show only limited evidence of international accountability being in place at the upper secondary school level in Iceland.

When discussing the internal evaluation system, schools can be classified into three main categories based on the school leaders' interviews: schools using the democratic evaluation system in which the school leaders name their system; an international quality standard system; and other, more traditional systems, as mainly using surveys.

Leaders using the democratic evaluation system strived to actively monitor change accompanying the policy change through the internal evaluation system

of the schools. These schools were judged to reach quite far when enacting the policy as compared to other schools, as shown in Section 9.2.3.2. These schools actively relied on teachers and students in the evaluation processes, and several ideas were agreed upon by teachers and students to be implemented in school practice. Hult et al. (2016) concluded the same about the importance of performing evaluations in close contact with teachers. This study adds the importance of actively integrating students in the process. These school leaders acted as organisational leaders by being instrumental and rational in their actions (Washington et al., 2007). They, also, empowered subordinates by working ontologically within the hierarchical ladder of the schools.

Along a different path, school leaders using an international quality standard system were more directive towards their subordinates within the hierarchical ladder of the school, instead of working at the grassroots level as done in schools using democratic evaluation systems. The school leaders explained how middle management in the schools wrote reports and offered suggestions for change. The school director, often together with an appointed committee, made decisions about which ideas would be implemented and which ideas would be dismissed. Thus, the school directors in the schools using an international quality standard system had the authority and control. These school leaders worked within the organisational structure of their schools and were clustered as organisational leaders. When school directors omitted part of the change proposed by school personnel based on their personal values and priorities, their agency showed characteristics of institutional leadership by muting and constraining change (Washington et al., 2008).

Schools using more traditional evaluation systems based on surveys claimed not to monitor the educational change in their schools. Therefore, they did not use their system to promote change to the same extent as other schools.

In these examples of different evaluation systems, questions emerge related to which kinds of change take place, who authorises change within schools, and who has ownership of such processes. Change seemed to be spurred by democratic evaluation systems and an international quality standard system as opposed to other forms of evaluation systems. Within the democratic evaluation system, the grassroots level (teachers and students) participated to a greater extent, indicating a greater sense of ownership. However, these judgements rely on the reports of the actors themselves. Hence, further studies are suggested to deepen the understanding of the issue.

Some of the interviewees, in discussing the external evaluation of their schools, indicated that they had developed action plans when giving feedback to government officials working at the MoESC. This conclusion is partly supported

by Sigurjónsdóttir (2010). She claims that school principals in compulsory schools have utilised the results of the external evaluation reports to create an effective dialogue among school employees on both the strengths and weaknesses of school practices.

External school evaluators do not perform classroom observations. They only ask about the educational practices in group interviews with teachers and students (Guðmundsson & Þorsteinsson, 2016). This fact brings us to the autonomy and isolation of the teaching profession (Ingvarsdóttir, 2006, 2011; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001) and supports the fact that upper secondary teachers' autonomy over their own educational practises hinders the authority of evaluators to enter and evaluate the classrooms. Hence, both school leaders and the MoESC only have partial agency (Scott, 2014) in relation to classrooms. The fact that the evaluation system in Iceland excludes teaching practices contradicts Paulsen and Høyer's (2016) conclusions on institutionalised and normative evaluation systems in Norway. They state that the system tends to regulate traditional teaching practices, while in Iceland this is not the case. This is very important as it brings up, if indirectly, the question of to what extent the organisational mandate of school leaders extends into the classroom.

It can also be argued that external evaluations are more institutionalised than internal evaluations. They, in turn, reinforce the institutionalised character of upper secondary education. External evaluations may tend to promote homogeneous practices when all the schools are monitored in the same way by the same inspectors using the same evaluation frame focusing on the same aspects of schooling based on a call from the MoESC and rules and legislation. The silence about other kinds of educational practices in schools that are not part of the evaluation framework promotes a risk for institutionalisation.

The upper secondary schools are heavily subject to the regulative (Scott, 2014) economic structures controlled by the MoESC, and this was an important theme in the data. The schools' financial status was intensively discussed by the school leadership from various viewpoints, ranging from distribution of finances, cuts, and how social justice is affected by the financial rules.

The economic crisis and cuts were discussed in the first part of the research period. Most of the sample schools had exceeded their allocated budgets. Some school leaders described the financial statuses of the schools as generally lacking overhead fees and some leaders also described the status as the schools were bankrupt. This criticism is in line with the content in the report from the National Audit Office (2014) in Iceland that argues that the financial crisis has added pressure on school leaders to meet the efficiency requirements of the government. Many of the participants emphasised that financial limitations had

obstructed the possibility of fully implementing the changes proposed in the Upper Secondary Education Acts No. 92/2008 and the national curriculum guide (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012) and indicated that they restricted possible implementation. The research of Davíðsdóttir et al. (2012) and my own earlier study (see Ragnarsdóttir & Jóhannesson, 2014) also point to these problems.

Financial concerns weighed heavily on the shoulders of the school directors. They described this as burdensome, while the middle managers showed some distance from the issue. This phenomenon is highly dependent on a school's hierarchical structure. In large, complex schools with steep hierarchical structures, school directors tended to act independently concerning financial decisions since the middle management often did not want to interfere with finance. This is consistent with the legislative framework for the school level (Upper Secondary Education Act No. 92/2008) that attributes all financial responsibility to the school director. This difference in financial responsibility is questionable and creates a distinct division of labour.

School directors further reported that financial burdens hindered them from becoming educational visionaries and acting on educational and pedagogical matters, as most of them desired. The same is found in Sweden, as reported in a study conducted by Holm and Lundström (2011). Their study showed that principals generally experience a greater emphasis on economic concerns at the cost of pedagogical leadership. Braun, Ball, Maguire, and Hoskins (2011) also agree and state that low financial support impacts policy enactment in secondary education in England.

Formula funding (see also Sections 2.1 and 2.2.5) was heavily criticised and seen by the school leaders to be an inflexible system that does not meet the needs and diversity of schools. The leaders discussed the unjust nature of this arrangement and how it reinforces homogeneous pedagogical practices that are not in line with modern schooling. The school leaders indicated that formula funding creates pressure on school directors to have larger groups of students and to cut subjects and new ideas once they do not meet the efficiency requirements of the formula. Based on the perceptions of the school leaders, it can be concluded that formula funding reinforces institutionalised, regulative, and normative (Scott, 2014) forces.

Schools are financed based on the number of students and the diversity of programmes offered. A school that offers vocational programmes gets more for their students than schools offering only academic programmes. Therefore, as applies to this study, homogeneous schools suffered more financially than heterogeneous schools, as did small schools in rural areas as compared to larger

schools in urban communities. The same applies to Sweden, as highlighted in a study on small rural schools conducted by Åberg-Bengtsson (2009). This criticism is also in line with the content of the report from the National Audit Office (2014). They state that formula funding lacked transparency and had unclear salary benchmarks. This was deemed by school leaders to be unfair regarding student dropout rates, diverse student populations, and different study paths in heterogeneous schools. The performance criteria as reported by th National Audit Office (2014) are unfair and formula funding is far too complex. They also state that formula funding hinders educator professionalism. It is clear from the conclusion of this study that formula funding needs to be deconstructed and moved towards a more just and modern practice that takes school and students diversity into account. The funding formula apparently takes much of the administrative initiative and power given by law to the leadership squarely out of their hands.

The regulative (Scott, 2014) social structure of collective bargaining agreements turned out to promote institutionalised practices. Based on the indications in the data on the collective bargaining agreements, it is possible to cluster the agreements both as regulative and normative pillars of institutions (Scott, 2014). The leaders claimed they lacked time and control as teachers were only able to spend four hours per week outside of teaching duties in school development and other related tasks according to the collective bargaining agreements. They reported that this system slowed down and constrained innovative ideas in their schools. Some of them wanted the teachers to be more flexible and less bound by the time table and school terms. Others wanted to change the pedagogical practices in their schools, creating a different setup and a novel mode of teacher cooperation. With the collective bargaining agreements, the school leaders felt that they could not make the changes they wanted. This is in line with the barriers addressed by Levin (2013), who describes how constraining the subjects, syllabi, credits, and timetables are in secondary education.

The system of professional development is also integrated into the collective bargaining agreements. The agreements formally place the professional development under the autonomy of teachers. Therefore, school leaders felt trapped in the system. They claimed to have limited time for professional development of school personnel during the active school hours and emphasised that the system could be better managed. Many school directors complained about their lack of control over teachers' professional development and difficulty in developing a joint pedagogical vision for their schools. Most of them strongly believed that professional development should take place within the working day as an integral part of everyday practices. Their wishes are in line with

Ingvarsdóttir's (2011) suggestion that the continuing education of English teachers could be better placed as an integrated part of a school's daily practices.

The main challenges regarding professional development, as expressed by the leadership, are associated with teachers' autonomy and the extent to which it is protected in the collective bargaining agreements. The school leaders highlighted the dilemma of respecting this autonomy while simultaneously emphasising the school's need for specific development. Due to the strong emhasies on teachers' autonomy over their own professional development, school leaders only had partial agency (Scott, 2014) or, in fact, very limited agency to conduct professional development in upper secondary schools as a natural part of everyday practices.

School leaders have called for increased formal authority over the system of professional development to be able to bring together professional development and change. The institutional barriers in the system of professional development are at odds with the suggestions of many scholars to put professional development at the centre of change (Fullan, 2007; Horn & Little, 2010; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006).

The leaders interviewed after the teachers' strike in early spring 2014 still felt trapped in the same institutional frames as before, despite the new collective bargaining agreements that amended different working time definitions. They continued to face resistance to certain changes from the Teachers' Union. Paulsen and associates (2016) agree with this conclusion regarding the power of the Teachers' Union and point out how the teachers' unions in Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden affect schools, as most salary agreements are negotiated through the unions at the national level.

Some school leaders challenged the contradictions addressed by the Teachers' Union regarding professionalism and accumulative rights of the teaching profession. One school director described it as if the union were "beating down" the profession, instead of professionally empowering and supporting them. Similarly, some leaders reported a lack of respect for the professional part of teaching and contended that the union had a negative impact on both teacher and school leader professionalism through the union's institutionalised and normative ideas (Scott, 2014).

It is important to bear in mind when judging the actions of the Teachers' Union that the nature of their focus is to protect the accumulated rights of the teaching profession, which fits with Scott's (2014) notion of a normative pillar. This was explicitly acknowledged by some of the complaining leaders. Initially, the MoESC was doing very little to resolve the gap between older collective bargaining agreements and the demands and extra work accompanying the

Upper Secondary Education Act No. 92/2008 and the national curriculum guide (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012). It was not until six years after the legislative changes (see Sections 2.2.2 and 2.2.3) that a new collective bargaining agreement was accepted.

It is, of course, important to be very precise about this discourse on the Teachers' Union. In some cases, the school leaders sympathised with the union's agenda in protecting the employees and acting on demands that were not within the realm of the teachers and for which teachers were not being remunerated. The union objected to such tasks being taken on by teachers. This understanding became clear when some school leaders delayed the implementation of the curriculum due to this double dilemma – respecting teachers' wage battles and following the demands of the MoESC.

The school leaders also complained about the power that the Teachers' Union had over professional development of teachers. The leaders gave several examples of how they felt that the union impeded the process when they strove to organise professional development within the schools. By doing so, the Teachers' Union reinforced the schools as institutions by constraining the school leaders' ability to become instrumental and rational agents of change, as most of them wanted. In such a situation, the leaders were required to act as institutional leaders (Washington et al., 2008) by accepting the status quo. They went with the values incorporated in the traditional system of professional development and the conservative view of the Teachers' Union. This example shows that sometimes it is not the choice of the school leaders to act as institutional leaders.

As shown, both the MoESC and the Teachers' Union exerted institutionalised control over the upper secondary schools, which either opposed or neutralised the freedom the law had given to schools and their leaders. The MoESC control turned out to be regulative (Scott, 2014), with numerous rules and legislative frames controlling and slowing down the creativity and processes of change in the schools. On the other hand, the institutionalised control held by the Teachers Union is normative (Scott, 2014) when the union is protecting the professional role of teachers, their values, and the norms accompanying the history of the profession. The above analysis shows very clearly that, when discussing the formal role and formal authority of school leaders, they are often placed within an organisational frame. It is, however, of paramount importance to fully take into account all of the regulative and normative institutional constraints operating at the same time.

9.2.2.2 The university paradox

Similar to the MoESC and the Teachers' Union, the universities were also seen as a centre of power and discussed as one of the macro-level actors. The school leaders mainly focused on University of Iceland when discussing the university level. The paradoxes concerning the university level were explicit. They were viewed by school leaders as being both political and educational. They were deemed political by having admission requirements and entrance examinations and in their controlling stance on the content taught in academic subjects. Thus, they were constraining the upper secondary schools and reinforcing them as institutions. The university level was considered educational while preparing a diverse group of professionals and maintaining their ongoing professional development. In this respect, they were empowering.

The university level promotes normative (Scott, 2014), institutionalised social structures when promoting values and norms incorporated in powerful academic subjects and through its professional role as supplying university experts. In that way, it directly and indirectly controls what takes place in upper secondary schools. The control held by the university level is not as formal or bound in laws and regulations as the regulative (Scott, 2014) control exerted by the MoESC and discussed in Section 9.2.2.1, but it appeared to have equal status in the data.

Deng (2013) indicates that subject teachers tend to safeguard the subjects they teach and maintain their existent by multiplying the ideas learned at the university level. This is also visible in Levin's (2013) conclusions on barriers for change in secondary education and the fact that higher education shapes both programmes and structures in secondary education. Jónasson (2016) takes the concerns of Levin and Deng further and puts forth that subject teachers have a vested interest when it comes to change. Their interests are linked to their ideas and vision as being subject experts "culturally and intellectually" (p. 8) connected to the field in which they have been taught throughout their formal education. The same applies to this study. School leaders gave several examples of vested interests held by upper secondary school teachers. They explained that teachers tended to safeguard the subject they learned at the university level and echo the academic university culture in their own upper secondary practices. At the same time, school leaders claimed to lack authority and agency to promote change in content, and they felt powerless to stimulate what they saw as necessary changes.

Jónasson (2016) indicates how problematic this is when making changes and causes teacher education, in particular, to be mainly organised around the same traditional subjects controlling other university faculties. His concerns apply both

to upper secondary school teachers and school leaders in Iceland who receive a teacher's licence after a bachelor's degree and another degree in education, as described in Section 2.2.2. Therefore, actors may be ambivalent towards new ideas of content and interdisciplinary work. It is possible to take the Jónasson's (2016) concerns one step further and view them from the perspective of a teacher's licence given by the MoESC. Again, the same subject fields are protected and accepted in the regulations on the licensure of educators (Rules on Evaluation Committee for Pre-Schools, Compulsory Schools and Upper Secondary Schools No. 241/2009). The university, the Teachers' Union, and the MoESC are the stakeholders in control of these rules. As clearly stated in the rules, it is not possible to become an upper secondary school teacher if the subject is not recognised as a field in upper secondary schools. The regulative (Scott, 2014), institutionalised force of the rule hinders, or at least hampers, new subjects from entering the field and protects the older, existing subjects in upper secondary schools. It is clear that there is a vested interest in control when looking at this fact through the theoretical lenses of Thornton et al. (2012). They claim actors' self-interests, proclivities, and power govern most social structures as the actors use their power systematically to express their interests when designing the structures and determining which social structures should endure.

Universities in Iceland do not directly regulate the flow of students between the school levels, since everyone holding matriculation examination has the right to study at the school level. But universities indicate what is important to study in upper secondary schools in order to do well, and in that way, school leaders claim that the universities control the upper secondary schools. Some university faculties administer entrance examinations (University of Iceland, 2015, 2016a, 2016b) to control the flow of students. The entrance examinations are only (in 2017) administered in the faculties of medicine and law at the University of Iceland. Other faculties control the flow of students with admission requirements. The faculties request a certain number of credits in specific academic subjects. Usually, these are the same subjects that dominate the national curriculum guide (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012) as previously discussed in Section 9.2.2.1. More restrictive admission requirements are set by faculties within the School of Engineering, Natural Sciences, and faculties within the School of Health at the University of Iceland than in other faculties.

Some school leaders found the directives promoted by the University of Iceland extremely constraining, conservative, and unidirectional. They also explained how these directives constrain creative and innovative actions in academic programmes at the upper secondary level. Jónasson (2016) shares the same concerns as school leaders regarding the entrance examinations and

admission requirements. He states that the universities act as gatekeepers for the lower school levels

In contrast to the normative (Scott, 2014) and restraining stance taken by the university level, school leaders also addressed the universities as promoting ongoing change, mainly through formal education, professional development, and the dissemination of research knowledge.

The school leaders provided several examples about they or their colleagues had actively used their formal education, mainly their master studies, when leading their schools towards change. If they felt that they lacked competence, they often added to their formal education depending on their own needs and the needs of the school. They further indicated that new ideas were implemented using such processes.

The school leaders' disclosures are in line with some scholars (e.g., Frost, 2012; Fullan, 2007), who highlight the importance of formal education and professional development when developing schools. Some interviewees reflected that teachers at the frontline of change are actively engaged in professional development and further pursue their formal education to remain up-to-date. According to one leader, these were the teachers who typically advanced the furthest in all development and pedagogical aspects in the school. These examples highlight the importance of formal education, professional development, and teacher sabbaticals.

Several interviewees explained the power of teamwork in this manner and Frost (2012) concurs. The participants described the positive impact that could occur when several subject teachers or school leaders pursued professional development together as a group. Some interviewees saw this as the best solution for professional development. The notion of subject teachers pursuing professional development together may, however, reinforce ongoing institutionalisation in subject faculties. Since, teachers happen to protect the existing institutional compartmentalisation of subjects at the cost of cross-curricular preferences and whole-school approaches. In this way, existing values are constructed and reinforced within the curricular subjects.

The same applies to school leaders when they promote their own professional development as a group. Both school leaders and teachers hold a degree in education as required by the acts on education and recruitment of educators (Act on the Education and Recruitment of Teachers and Administrators of Preschools, Compulsory Schools and Upper Secondary Schools No. 87/2008). They all have teaching experience, and most of them are socially constructed in the school they lead. A certain risk of socialisation and stability is promoted through such dissemination, as highlighted by Selznick (1957). He

points out that leaders are trained in an analogous way and, therefore, hold similar values and missions that sometimes promote stability.

Some leaders also described a widening gap between formal education and professional development and day-to-day practices when both leaders and teachers returned to work after higher-level studies. Teachers and school leaders struggled to bridge the gap. They were confronted with a lack of time in the daily work routine, and they did not have time to read journals or, more importantly, to plan and implement new ideas. Nelson, Leffler, and Hansen (2009) came to the same conclusion regarding the use of research evidence. They reported that users, such as teachers, experience time constraints, information overload, and a strict format as the main obstacles in actively using educational research in their practices. This limitation highlights the importance of integrating professional development as part of everyday practices to establish continual and ongoing change as described by Frost (2012).

In general, education research is intended to be a source of change and school development (Cooper et al., 2009; Hammersley, 2005; Lingard & Gale, 2010; Morrison, 2007; Yates, 2004). In this regard, some school leaders stated that pedagogical experts from the universities visited the schools on a regular basis to support the teachers' professional development. Such instances were, however, fewer than expected given the narrow time that the school leaders and teachers have to promote professional development in school.

Despite the positive impact of formal education and professional development, educational research seemed to have very limited and indirect impact on educational practices as compared to reports and evaluations discussed in Section 9.2.2.1. Nelson et al. (2009) indicated that school heads consider educational research valuable, but that it occupied a secondary role in decision making. Although participating school leaders in this study agreed, they did not place much value on the importance of educational research nor did they see it as either a motivator or a precondition for change. There existed, however, examples of school leaders who delved into educational research and used it to guide developments in their schools.

Active use of educational research in everyday school practices was highly linked to the person selected as a school director. The process was stimulated by this person's initiative, capacity, priorities, and professionalism, as described by several school leaders. A few school directors used educational research as a basis for change. They indicated that they read research and implemented new ideas into their own practices based on their reading and, in turn, influenced teachers and other school leaders. This conclusion is in line with Frost (2012), who states that a professional learning culture is brought about through

leadership when school leaders create a culture of change through desirable communication, charisma, and clear expectations. Such leaders share a sharp vision in education and identify desirable values and proclivities in teachers.

Some school leaders complained about the lack of research targeted at certain programmes and disciplines. The research produced at the university level, or rather the lack thereof, was criticised here by implication. The focus, or orientation, of university research did not fit the concerns of the upper secondary schools, and school leaders clearly felt that there was a huge gap that needed to be filled. Similarly, Hemsley-Brown and Sharp (2003) and Nelson and associates (2009) highlighted the gap between available knowledge and the application of educational research to improve practice. They indicated that researchers tend to seek knowledge, while practitioners look for new solutions to improve their practices. Sleeter (2014) also concluded that the research focus of the papers that she evaluated was often somewhat narrow and isolated, rather than holistic, large-scale, and directed towards collaboration. Levin (2004) shared similar concerns when reflecting on the choice of research content and indicated that it was often too narrow and close to the researcher's interest, rather than serving the needs of the audience and main stakeholders.

The conclusion of this study on the normative pillars (Scott, 2014) held by the university level on academic subjects in upper secondary schools in Iceland provides robust evidence as to how the universities (or the University of Iceland) reinforce very solid institutions when it comes to subjects from the perspectives of the school leaders interviewed. It must, however, not be forgotten that the university level also promotes change in schools through professional development, formal education, and dissemination of research outcomes.

9.2.2.3 The compulsory schools

Another educational actor located at the macro level and discussed by the school leadership is the compulsory school level. Based on the school leaders' perceptions, the compulsory school level has a rather indirect and limited impact on upper secondary schools.

The influence of the compulsory schools is along the line of the cooperation and the dialogue at the university level, down the hierarchical ladder of the education system, and based on the needs of the upper secondary schools. Both Óskarsdóttir (2012) and Sverrisdóttir (2014) highlight a gap between the school levels and lack of cooperation. Sverrisdóttir (2014) explains the gap between the school levels with reference to different social structures, such as teachers' educational backgrounds, collective bargaining agreements, and administration.

In the current study, only one instance of direct influence was discussed by the school leaders. The school leaders described how they looked at the content and subjects taught in compulsory school when writing and implementing the school curriculum, and they deleted all repetition. The school leaders seem to have taken in account one of Sverrisdóttir's (2014) concerns about content repetition between the compulsory and the upper secondary schools in several academic subjects.

The school leaders in this study described how the upper secondary schools are trying to increase cooperation between school levels. The upper secondary schools outside of the capital area and the schools in smaller communities seem to have a different working relationship with compulsory schools than the schools in the capital area. In smaller communities, the intimacy is greater and the cooperation is closer than in larger communities.

It is particularly interesting to look at the different manifestations of vocational and academic programmes in relation to students' recruitment from the compulsory schools. One explanation can be traced to the unchallenged and unsubstantiated notion that the matriculation examination is the best preparation for university and for life in general. There is a marked difference in the social status of the academic professions as compared to vocational occupations and the opportunities that both provide. Some school leaders in this study visited the compulsory schools with the aim, as also reported by Sverrisdóttir (2014), to recruit students to study in in their upper secondary schools. From this perspective, the leaders in the comprehensive and grammar schools presented different scenarios. The differences within the upper secondary schools also vary between vocational and academic programmes. The school leaders in comprehensive schools indicated that they were trying to sell vocational paths by creating awareness about the existing programmes in their schools and possible future occupational opportunities, since the compulsory school students have limited knowledge about other educational opportunities than academic programmes. Jónasson (1998b) agreed and added that some compulsory schools and municipalities fail when teaching vocational subjects at the compulsory school level. The leaders of grammar schools compete, however, for academically gifted students. This focus clearly mirrors the general status of vocational programmes in society and the strong belief in academic programmes.

9.2.2.4 Societal influences

The need for the upper secondary schools to be in tune with today's society was important, as well as the importance of rural schools and the saturation of the education market. Hence, the societal influences were located at the macro

level. The impact from the society can by clustered under the cultural-cognitive pillar of institutions since it fits under the nature of the social reality (Scott, 2014).

The societal and technical development impact change in upper secondary schools. Eiríksdóttir and Jóhannesson (2016) describe how societal changes affect the upper secondary schools in Iceland, for example, the popularity of smartphones and Reynisdóttir and Jóhannesson (2013) report an increased demand to use information technology in upper secondary schools. The same applies to this study. Some of the school leaders described the importance of the schools, teachers, and students anticipation of rapid societal change and adaptation to it. Their main justification was that society was calling for different individuals, e.g., individuals who are more flexible and can easily adapt to change, those who are technologically competent, and those with good communication skills. This is in line with the belief of many scholars (Binkley, Erstad, Herman, Raizen, Ripley, Miller-Ricci, & Rumble, 2012; Jónasson, 2016; Reimers & Chung, 2016) who argue for different education and student competences to tackle the future.

Åberg-Bengtsson (2009) points out the importance of rural schools for Sweden, and the same applies in this study. The demand for upper secondary education in rural areas turned out to be an important aspect of social justice. Rural school leaders sought to serve the nearest community, and rural societal actors fought for the existence of the upper secondary school in their locality. By so doing, they increased the educational level in the rural setting, filled the age gap, counteracted rural migration, and attracted educated teachers to live in the community. Hence, the upper secondary schools positively impacted rural development. The same is true for Finland. A study conducted by Autti and Hyry-Beihammer (2014) conclude that schools in rural areas play a significance social role by impacting the well-being of individual rural communities and their human, cultural, and social capital. This message was very clear from the school leaders, but especially from those from rural schools.

Several items in relation to supply and demand arose when the school leaders discussed the influences of the society with regard to market saturation. Saturation of the market affected the educational opportunities in rural schools and some leaders have been dealing with a decline in student numbers due to the financial crisis of 2008. This event led to an attendance drop in some vocational programmes that prepared students for occupations affected the most by the financial crisis. Jónasson (1998b) similarly noted the volatility of the vocational market in Iceland and the extent to which apprenticeship slots, wages, and finances affected its development.

9.2.2.5 Vocational interest groups

School leaders directing the comprehensive schools reported the involvement and the impact of the labour market with respect to their official aim for the upper secondary schools to prepare students for an occupation (Upper Secondary Education Act No. 92/2008) also belonging to the macro level. On a similar note, Wheelahan (2007) indicates that the labor market steers vocational education and how leading market forces relate to vocational education.

Leaders in comprehensive schools discussed several interest groups from the labour market with varying perspectives, and most of them were groups from industry-related and legally regulated vocational occupations. The interest groups included journeymen's certificate committees, vocational councils, occupational committees, and interest groups that are part of the system of master training.

The school leaders saw these interest groups as supporting educational change, and thus, reinforcing change; being neutral in their position; or constraining, by supporting old norms and traditions, all at the same time. The school leaders called, however, for greater cooperation with the labour market as well as increased interaction and better information flow between schools and the trades to be able to keep up with constant change and offer quality education in vocational programmes. As noted, some vocational interest groups supported within vocational departments. On the contrary, more conservatism and resistance was reported from other interest groups. Resistance usually had its origins among the older personnel, as reported by the school leaders. These actors were fighting for their vocational subjects and showed loyalty to their unions, thus reinforcing the existing status quo and protecting norms and traditions incorporated in the vocational subject fields. By doing so they were clearly reinforcing schools as institutions.

Certain concerns arose in the data regarding what was referred to as the "hostage situation" in which the labour market held some vocational programmes. The school leaders explained how some interest groups protected their own interests by controlling market competition. They described, for example, how they felt some companies and vocational occupations effectively prevented students from receiving training, controlled students' learning progress, and even hindered them from graduating. Along similar lines, some companies inhibit development within the trade by offering low student salaries. The school leaders reported that such companies try to prolong students' training time. The hostage situation described by school leaders is completely unacceptable and calls for an overhaul of the system. In a similar vein, Jónasson (1998b) pointed out that diverse macro forces work against vocational education

at the upper secondary school level in Iceland, despite rhetorical claims of support. These forces are promoted by the MoESC, the municipalities, compulsory schools, society, and the labour market as he sees it. The social structures promoted by these actors are incorporated in the freedom within the education system, a strong focus on academic success in society, wage differences, finances, and an ever-changing society that stimulates students to keep all options open. He also describes how these structures lead to stagnation within vocational studies.

One school leader pinpointed how the labour market had developed a system in parallel with the formal education system at the school level. Hence, the schools were simultaneously competing with industry in developing cooperation within the same interest groups. This raised the question as to whether Iceland and its current population are large enough for such competition. In this respect, Jónasson (1998b) stated that the structure of the labour market in Iceland is not in favour of workplace training due to its small size.

When comparing the impact of the labour market on the upper secondary schools to the impact of the universities, the outcome is interesting. The labour market has considerable space and regulative impact in the Upper Secondary Education Act No. 92/2008 (see Section 2.2.1), while the university level is discussed only as a receiving school and in relation to examinations in upper secondary schools. Despite the differences and the unequal statuses in the legal documents, the university level seems to influence the upper secondary schools more than the labour market.

9.2.2.6 Actors at the macro level: a summary

Ball and associates (2012) indicate that diverse macro-level actors and different resources and materials influence policy enactment in schools in a complex and hybrid way. The same applies in this study when looking at the various macro-level actors presented in Table 7 and the complex social structures impacting change in a hybrid, interactive, and complex way, as already discussed in Section 9.2.2.

The most powerful actors turned out to be the MoESC, the Teachers' Union, and the university level promoting various institutionalised social structures that are mainly regulative and normative. The MoESC mainly promotes regulative, institutionalised social structures (Scott, 2014), the Teachers' Union and the universities, partly mediated via normative social structures (Scott, 2014), and the society promote the institutionalised cultural cognitive pillars (Scott, 2014) of schools as institutions.

By law, the schools, especially through the school leaders, have gained considerable organisational freedom, which is recognised by the school leaders. However, they are operating within a multitude of regulative and normative institutional social structures that overpower their leeway to a large degree.

9.2.3 Meso level: Principal actors and social structures

The second and third research questions are also answered here, as in Section 9.2.2, but from the perspective of meso-level actors, but also research questions number four and five. The second is: Who do school leaders see as the principal actors participating in educational change and how do they interact in facilitating or constraining change? The third is: What social structures do school leaders see operating in educational change and what impact do they consider these to have in facilitating or constraining change? The fourth and fifth questions are mainly relevant in Section 9.2.3.2 on policy enactment. The fourth research question was designed to probe important aspects of the perceived nature of leadership adopted by the interviewees. This is discussed within a framework of institutional and organisational leadership (Kraatz, 2009; Raffaelli & Glynn, 2015; Selznick, 1949; 1957; Washington et al. 2008). The question is: What kinds of agency, power, and vision do school leaders describe they have and to what extent can they be judged to operate as institutional or organisational leaders? The fifth question of what methods do school leaders see as important when implementing change and how do they reflect on and promote these methods in their everyday practices was designed to understand what kinds of implementation methods school leaders used when implementing change.

The interviewed school leaders emphasised the notion of teachers, and school leaders almost exclusively as actors at the meso level (see Table 7, Chapter 8). They also discussed students and parents, but not to the same extent as expected. Other staff members, such as social pedagogues and career and guidance counsellors, were generally absent from the discussion on actors in upper secondary education. This contradicts the ideology of the national curriculum guide regarding a whole-school approach in educational change and the active involvement of stakeholders (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012). The same silence towards these actors appears in the Upper Secondary Education Act No. 92/2008, as reflected in Section 2.2.1. The most significant social structures at the meso level turned out to be the subject hierarchy and different school and faculty cultures. Both these structures can be seen as the different side of the same coin and fit the cultural-cognitive pillar of institutions (Scott, 2014) as being constitute as the nature of social reality inside and outside of schools.

The following sections focus on the meso level and discuss actors and social structures together. The discussion will start with school leaders' perceptions of parent and student influences. Then, it will move to policy enactment, the interaction between institutionalisation and deinstitutionalisation, and end with agency and subject hierarchy.

9.2.3.1 Parents and students

As parents and students are part of every day practices in schools, they belong to the meso level. They also belong the macro level, inter alia, when they influence the influx of students.

Relatively few formal channels are available for parents within the system of upper secondary education to influence the schools. The only channel discussed in the act are parent councils. In contrast to formal channels for parents, there are many channels within the system for student influence within the schools. These channels include participation in internal and external evaluations, school meetings, school committees, and democratic teaching and learning methods (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012; Upper Secondary Education Act No. 92/2008).

However, there turned out to be a gap between these formal channels promoted in the public documents and the reality in the schools. In terms of parent councils, few of the school leaders gave examples fitting that formal path for parents. The examples were generally weak, such as when a parent association complained about a teacher's absence due to sick leave. The lack of influence is somewhat at odds with the ideas on active participation of parents and goes against the ideology of democratic values.

There were, however, occasional examples of informal parental influence in the data, mainly regarding choice of schools and resistance to change. School leaders viewed parents as hindering change by directing their children to academic programmes and certain grammar schools, usually popular schools with long histories. Thus, the school leaders saw parents as having complete trust in the ability of the matriculation examination to guarantee the best preparation for the university level. By doing so, parents systematically directed their child to go through the same path that they had followed, as claimed by some school leaders, even though their children may have different educational needs or interests. These examples indicate that the cultural cognitive pillar of intuition (Scott, 2014) is at force. This cultural cognitive pillar consists of "shared conceptions that constitute the nature of social reality and the frames through which meaning is made" (p. 67). In the relation to the cultural cognitive pillar in this study, parents shared perceptions on what constitutes the proper upper secondary education is at force.

Similarly, Braun et al. (2011) highlight how student recruitment and competition impact policy enactment in secondary education in England. The phenomenon of proper upper secondary education in this study is highly related to norms and traditions incorporated in parents' notions that good traditional grammar schools are the best preparation for the future. In this way, parents promote the schools as institution particularly when it comes to academic programmes. This is mirrored in the curriculum hierarchy of subjects reported by Bleazby (2015) and echoed in both the social and economic values that academic subjects are judged to be more valuable and have a higher status in the subject hierarchy than vocational subjects. It is an issue of to what extent the school leaders are justified in ascribing the choice of tracks to the parents to the extent they did, but they did this through powerful, concrete examples. Jónasson (1997, 2003) ascribes the exponential growth of upper secondary education during the 20th century in all the Nordic countries to the students themselves. Perhaps he undervalued the influence of the parents.

The same applies to students, only a few examples of student influence were found in the data. These included student calls for new subjects to be introduced, active participation by students during one school day, and student influence within the system of internal evaluations. This conclusion does not seem to fit well with the role of the school level to prepare students for active participation in a democratic society (Upper Secondary School Act No. 92/2008, para 28). Active participation of students turned out to be highly dependent on the initiative and vision of the school directors themselves. Mitra et al. (2012) report the same when describing a link between school leaders' emphasis on democratic participation and students' voices in educational change.

Only three school directors out of nine in this study stressed their vision of democratic participation and several actions they had taken in the direction of students' active participation as a whole-school approach. Two of those directors implemented democratic, internal evaluation tools. All of them can be judged to be visionary school directors. They showed more success in implementing the school curriculum with the active participation of students as opposed to other schools. These same school leaders also emphasised teachers' active participation.

Mitra et al. (2012) explains these challenges by the lack of students' participation in everyday school practices and in the different power relations incorporated in the institutional norms of the educational settings. According to them, the problem lies in the authority held by both school leaders and teachers. The Icelandic system, like most education systems, tends to promote inequality and segregation between school leaders, teachers, and students.

As shown, parental and students impact is limited in the selected upper secondary schools and follows a similar line as the impact of the society, compulsory schools, and universities that worship academic programmes and university professions.

9.2.3.2 Policy enactment

Above (Section 9.2.2) various macro-level actors intending to promote change or impact change in one way or another at the meso level, was discussed. However, the literature (see Ball 2012; Braun et al., 2010; Coburn, 2004; Gunnulfsen & Møller, 2017) suggests that macro-level actors do not always succeed in their intentions. In this regard, Ball et al. (2012) highlight that each school challenges the intended policy implementation. The same is true for this study.

The school leaders clearly wanted to carry out a number of changes accompanying the Upper Secondary Education Act No. 92/2008 and the national curriculum guide (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012). In many cases, they could not manage to convince the teachers. Based on the interviews, resistance and difficulties when implementing change turned out to be greater in the larger and more complex schools than in the smaller or more uniform schools. There turned out to be an apparent altered culture within the schools when responding to macro-level demand for change that is deeply rooted in the school culture and history, different faculties, and the origin of subjects and programmes. The schools also differed regarding the age of the employees, and the school leaders described more resistance among the older teacher population.

The school leaders in this study realised the dual role they play when leading change and the importance of understanding the culture and forces at play in their schools. Many of the leaders saw their role as facilitating and promoting ongoing changes along the hierarchical ladder of the school and reinforcing the school as organisation. However, they also viewed their role as resisting changes and protecting the institutional structure of their school, then acting as intuitional leaders. This clearly shows that the divide between institutional and organisational leadership is not as sharp and clear as it appears to be.

The divide between institutional and organisational leadership says nothing about the leadership style the school leaders themselves aim to promote or claim to use. Instead, their reactions seem to be based on the cultural control of the school (Scott, 2014). Raffaelli (2013) indicates that leaders act both as institutional leaders and agents of change. Besharov and Khurana (2015) and Raffaelli and Glynn (2015) both state that institutional leaders also operate as organisational leaders when they carry out administrative work. They see organisations and institutions as “holistic patterns of systems, structures, goals

and other arrangements and, as a result, should reveal a distinctive and different set of associated values" (p. 290).

The leaders generally saw themselves at the frontline of changes, which is in accordance with many scholars (see Barsh et al., 2008; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Hopkins & Levin, 2000; Stein & Coburn, 2008), acting as organisational leaders and describing their educational visions and desires for change. Nonetheless, they were wedged between political ideas and interests, professional ideas of various groups, and vested interests of several interest groups. When dealing with this diversity, they acted as institutional leaders. This shows how school leaders only have partial agency (Scott, 2014) and authority (Thornton et al., 2012) to act within the schools depending on the degree of institutionalisation (Ansell et al., 2015) within the subjects and the institutional demands from the macro-level actors (Scott, 2012; Thornton et al., 2012). Hence, school leaders could rarely fully promote the change they intended. To understand this complexity better, it is useful to look at the schools individually using the lens provided by Coburn (2004) and combine her classifications with school leaders' reported agency, power, and vision. This perspective becomes important when responding to and reflecting on research question four on what kinds of agency, power, and vision do school leaders describe they have and to what extent can they be judged to operate as institutional or organisational leaders? In doing so the way the school leaders interact with the prevailing culture in the school they lead is explained and why they cannot, as leaders with a substantial mandate, fully promote their ideas is clarified.

Two of the schools fit Coburns' (2004) rejection category, and the new ideas accompanying the national curriculum guide (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012) were, in general, rejected. Both schools were comprehensive and large, with relatively long histories. Hence, teachers in both schools promoted the normative pillar (Scott, 2014) of institutions.

In one of the schools, rejection was due to lack of money, insuffient support from the ministry, and resistance from the groups of teachers. The school director applied the leadership style of institutions (Kraatz, 2009; Raffaelli & Glynn, 2015; Selznick, 1949; 1957; Washington et al. 2008) when making the decision to not respond to the macro-level demand for change by remaining silent or not attempting to change the school curriculum. She decided to be true to the original aims of the school, the existing values, its history, and the school practices. However, she did not rule out the possibility of change if the MoESC altered the conditions by rewarding her teachers for implementing the intended changes in the school curriculum.

The same applies to the other school fitting the rejection category. Based on the data, there was greater resistance from groups of teachers in this school. Unlike the other school director applying the leadership style of institutions, this school director acted to trying to control the situation. She applied the leadership style of organisations (Washington et al., 2008) when selecting several leaders from the administrative layer to design and co-write the school curriculum with her. Hence, the school director and several leaders from the administrative level took over the writing of the school curriculum. She justified her actions by stating that the selected administrative group shared similar values. Hence, her actions corresponded partly to the characteristics of institutional leadership (Washington et al., 2008) when considering the values aspects of her justification. The school director was hierarchical in her supervision, so it is also possible to place her school under the decoupling category since she ignored some of the teachers by leaving them out. It is very likely that teachers with the considerably autonomy typically found in upper secondary schools (Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006; Ingvarsdóttir, 2006; 2011) will resist change even more in conjunction with such a takeover and will not feel ownership over the school curriculum.

Four schools matched the category of parallel structures (Coburn, 2004) since simultaneous approaches appeared in all of the schools. They showed different nuances of the phenomenon depending on the culture of academic subjects embedded in the faculty divisions, different groups of teachers, or different priorities of tasks within the schools. Three of the schools were comprehensive and large. Parts of the Upper Secondary Education Act No. 92/2008 were dismissed in the schools. All of them showed some characteristics of accommodation in parallel with the categories of decoupling or rejection (Coburn, 2004). Thus, different approaches were used to meet different forces and priorities within the schools.

All of the leaders in the schools categorised under paralell structures described examples of both institutional and organisational leadership styles (Washington et al., 2008). They were instrumental and rational when supporting innovative groups of teacher. In so doing, they acted as organisational leaders. Conversely, they remained silent or constrained change when working with groups of teachers resisting change. In this context, they operated as institutional leaders by reconnecting the school to its original values.

In these cases, part of the school staff in the four schools reinforced the normative pillar of the school as an institution and maintained this part of the school throughout the processes of institutionalisation (Asnell et al., 2015; Kraatz, 2009; Scott, 2014; Selznick, 1949; 1957). The other part, however,

promoted the schools as pure organisations (Kraatz, 2009; Raffaelli and Glynn, 2015; Scott, 2012; Selznick, 1949; 1957) through the processes of deinstitutionalisation (Kraatz and Moore, 2002; Oliver, 1992).

One grammar school was judged to be an example of assimilation (Coburn, 2004) with significant deconstruction to adapt to the changes specified in the Upper Secondary Education Acts No. 92/2008 and the national curriculum guide (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012). This school's leaders showed characteristics of organisational leadership (Washington et al., 2008). Their agency was instrumental and radical. Their power was hierarchical and supervisory when necessary, but usually they emphasised a bottom-up approach. They showed the characteristics of charismatic leaders and they envisioned their role as moving the organisation forward to meet new aims and challenges. Unlike what is categorised under organisational leadership in Washington et al. (2008), these school leaders emphasised trusting staff for change to take place. The school personnel decided on democratic processes to keep the existing system in the school. In that way, the school director and her personnel were political in regard to the system in which the school operates and acted as institutional leaders by saying that the history of the school matters. Braun et al. (2010) point out that the hierarchal position of the school matters when enacting policy. Schools with a high degree of legitimacy and high self-reliance tend to control the change taking place in their schools, as was true for this grammar school. The reasons mainly rest on the advantages the school had in society and the fact that the school director focused on trust and democratic actions.

Finally, the two newly established schools did not fit in any of the categories Coburn (2004) creats. Thus, the study suggest the new category of "pioneering". The schools both had short histories and were designed around the school directors' visions and the pedagogy, both of which fit well with the changes in the Upper Secondary Education Act No. 92/2008 and the national curriculum guide (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012). The teachers knew what was expected of them and how to work to meet the new requirements and the school directors' ideas. The leaders in these two schools fall into the category of organisational leadership (Washington et al., 2008). The privilege of being in a new system was somewhat important. The schools fitting this category did not build on history and could hire the younger teachers to act as change agents. The pioneering schools with a younger proportion of teachers had an advantage over the other schools since the existing tradition in education and the school history was not in the way of school leaders leading the pioneering schools

The addition of the concept of "pioneering" to Coburn's (2004) five categories of responses to macro-level demand is important and highlights how her theory neglected the idea of new schools entering individual organisational fields. Pioneering is defined as new establishment of a school with no history. Schools are designed around a specific vision and pedagogy directed by macro-level actors and school directors ideas. The employees are hired according to the ruling pedagogy and know well what to expect and how to work.

Similarly, Gunnulfsen and Møller (2017) concluded that the dominant response mechanism in Norway when the schools responded to policy demands on national tests was symbolic response, parallel structure, or assimilation. Liljenberg (2015) noted that seven compulsory school leaders responded to external demands in a symbolic way when converting neoliberal demands to fit the predominant norms and values in their own schools. In this study, two schools fit the rejection category (even though the school leaders in one of the school matched the decoupling category), four were parallel structures, one was assimilation and two fit the new category of pioneering. Harðarson (2010a) saw a similar reaction, he points out that the older grammar schools in Iceland responded less to the national curriculum changes in 1999 than the younger comprehensive schools. Harðarson (2010a) also suggested that the younger schools accomplished greater change than the older ones.

Based on this analysis, it is possible to conclude that the nine, selected upper secondary schools enacted the policy in different ways and that many self-sustained sub-units are apparent within the same upper secondary school. Hence, school leaders only have partial agency (Scott, 2014) and power to promote change. This conclusion challenges the extent to which schools can be considered to be an individual unit working holistically towards change. From this perspective, it is particularly interesting to reflect on Fullan's (2007) conclusion that change takes place both at the individual and the school level. However, change at the school level is more likely to foster educational practices and become more sustainable. This emphasis raises questions as to whether change in the upper secondary schools can be sustained in current setups.

9.2.3.3 The interaction between institutionalisation and deinstitutionalisation

From the data, it is evident that there are instances of schools at the meso level reaching different places in the process of instituionalisation (Kraatz, 2009; Raffaelli & Glynn, 2015; Selznick, 1949; 1957; Washington et al., 2008), through the processes of institutionalisation (Ansell et al., 2015; Kraatz, 2009; Selznick, 1957; 1996; Scott, 2014) and deinstitutionalisation (Kraatz & Moore, 2002; Oliver, 1992; Scott, 2014). For clarification two examples are discussed.

School leaders in one of the selected schools gave several examples that support how the school had gradually become an institution through the processes of institutionalisation. The school leaders explained how difficult it was to maintain the organisational spirit that they built up when the school was newer and smaller. After some time, administrative processes and self-sustained subject units became the predominant operational form of the school. A description of such transformation is presented by several scholars (Ansell et al., 2015; Kraatz, 2009; Selznick, 1957; 1996; Washington et al., 2008) who argue that, when organisations become larger and older, they gradually turn into self-sustained institutions through the processes of institutionalisation. Both the teachers and the school leaders in the school started to act accordingly. Innovative pedagogical matters that were implemented as a whole-school approach slowly became the responsibility of departments and the pedagogical vision merged with the core values of the school, thus becoming institutionalised. Looking at this process through Scott's (2014) work, the actions of school personnel in the school began to be motivated by moral rather than instrumental concerns, and the school cultural structures developed and influenced human behaviour.

The schools clearly reached a different degree in the processes of institutionalisation, as Ansell et al. (2015) discuss. The term period, or incubation period as one of the school leader said, turned out to be an important aspect when the school leaders gave examples fitting the processes of institutionalisation. They estimated this period lasts from three to ten years depending on the types of changes. After this time, the schools began to be motivated by moral rather than instrumental concerns and the schools' cultural structures start to influence human behaviour (Scott, 2014). The length of the period depends on the issues involved, the school culture, and its complexity. Even though the exact point in time cannot be specified, it is valuable to introduce this idea in order to clarify the process taking place.

School leaders in the other school gave examples of the opposite. The school moved from being institution to operate rather as organisation after processes of deinstitutionalisation (Kraatz & Moore, 2002; Oliver, 1992; Scott, 2014) that occurs when stability is transferred to a more organic and instrumental mechanism of change. The reason for this was an internal crisis (Oliver, 1992). The students felt that they had a far too heavy a workload in the first years of their studies, while having too little to do towards the end of their education. The school director also explained what can be categorised as an external crisis (Kraatz & Moore, 2002; Oliver, 1992) due to a decline in student numbers in one programme.

9.2.3.4 Agency and subject hierarchy

This section is an independent continuation of Section 9.2.3.2 as it also responds to the second, third, and fourth research questions and continues the discussion on the dynamics at play at the meso level. As implied in previous sections the agency of school leaders depends on the autonomy of the actor they want to influence, and the incorporated social structures. Thornton et al., (2012) agrees and states how full agency of one actor seems to lead to only partial autonomy of another actor.

As noted by Hargreaves and Goodson (2006) and Ingvarsdóttir (2006; 2011), the autonomy of the teaching profession increases when moving up the hierarchal ladder of the school system. Hence, upper secondary school teachers seemed to have considerable autonomy in various fields of school practices, and their autonomy is inversely proportional to the amount of agency held by school leaders.

When looking at the change that took place in the schools, the school leaders' agency varied depending on the changes they wanted. Most school leaders indicated that they could promote ongoing change in the upper secondary schools when focusing on pedagogical concerns relating to teaching methods and student assessment. They also described how they have agency to control this aspect of teaching and learning down the hierarchical ladder and when leading the school as an organisation. In doing so, they were judged to act as organisational leaders where their agency was instrumental and rational, and they guide their subordinates (Besharov & Khurana, 2015; Kraatz, 2009; Raffaelli & Glynn, 2015; Selznick, 1957; Washington et al., 2008).

School leaders also claimed to face slow change, especially in regard to the content taught. This is manifested in the fact that the school leaders did not want to, or were not able to, interfere with the subject content despite having strong ideas on how outdated it may be. Subject content is viewed as being under upper secondary school teachers' control (Ingvarsdóttir, 2006; 2011; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001) but is also controlled by the university level (Deng, 2013; Jónasson, 2016), as discussed in Section 9.2.2.2. Hence, school leaders felt they were lacking the agency and the power to interfere with content. They showed characteristics of institutional leaders where their agency was muted or constrained. They accepted the situation and reconnected the schools to their original values (Washington et al., 2008). To be more precises, the values held by the subject faculites.

Delving deeper into the phenomena of subjects in upper secondary schools, the school leaders reported institutional barriers in every single subject. However, there was a difference between disciplines. The school leaders

experienced more resistance among the academic disciplines as compared to the vocational disciplines. They explained that academic programmes in general based their work on old content and methods that have not developed much over time. Such institutional characteristics turned out to be most explicit in mathematics, according to the school leaders. Eiríksdóttir and Jóhannesson (2016) also identified similar trends in interviews with mathematics and vocational teachers at the upper secondary school level in Iceland.

School leaders in this study also reported conservatism among physics teachers. This is in line with the conclusion of the National Research Council Committee on Undergraduate Physics Education Research and Implementation (2013). They report slow or scarce change in physics teaching for more than 50 years. The school leaders further reported slow change and resistance to change among Icelandic teachers and Sverrisdóttir (2014) agrees in her study. She pointed out the necessity of reconsidering the teaching methods and content in Icelandic instruction. The leaders in the current study also described how some natural science programmes were more conservative and institutionalised as compared to social sciences, foreign languages, and vocational studies.

Bleazby (2015) also agreed with the institutional ranking and described a curriculum hierarchy of subjects. Harðarson (2010b) identified controlling traditions in each subject in his study on mathematics, natural sciences, and history teachers in upper secondary schools in Iceland. These teachers tended to protect the subject they taught as independent disciplines. He further reports that teachers mediated traditions through the subjects they teach.

The roots, according to one of the school director, lay in different working methods and how the teachers see themselves as a part of the subject. This perception indicates how academic programmes at the upper secondary level are mirrored in the academic discipline at the university level, as Deng (2013) would report. The same is supported by another school leader who described how subject teachers in the upper secondary school level created mini bachelor degree programmes when designing school curriculum. These two examples show how upper secondary school teachers base their work on formal university education. They are stuck within their subject (Deng, 2013) when describing how teachers maintain and reproduce university academic culture. Deng (2013) further described how teachers intend, by transferring the academic culture to the students, to attract them into the academic community in which they grew up.

As reported above, school leaders did respect the existing values incorporated in each subject and the expertise of the subject teachers in relation to content taught. Therefore, they relied heavily on the professional expertise of

the subject teachers and acted as institutional leaders by muting and constraining change (Besharov & Khurana, 2015; Kraatz, 2009; Raffaelli & Glynn, 2015; Selznick, 1957; Washington et al., 2008). Their vision in this regard was to reconnect the subject facilities to their original values. In doing so both the leaders and the teachers reinforced the normative pillar of the schools as institutions (Scott, 2014). The normative rules of the subjects were at force, as well as the professional expertise of subject teachers.

As shown, the different power of subjects and faculties in schools, as well as the power accompanying increased teaching experience impact change in upper secondary schools. In that way, the upper secondary school teachers, as was also shown in Ball and associates (2012), steered the situation in their localities. This also highlights how teachers and school leaders in Iceland are constructed in different networks and social practices in the schools, as pointed out by Ball et al. (2011b). In this regard, Ball and associates (2012) states that school personnel diffuse various sets of values and discourses. That indicates that different values control various subjects and professionals in those subjects.

It is possible to conclude that school leaders at the upper secondary school level in Iceland lack authority and agency to promote change in content and feel powerless to stimulate what they view as necessary changes. It is also clear that the upper secondary school staff have not fully taken on the power transferred to them with the decentralisation of the school curriculum, though some faculties and units did change more than others.

9.2.4 Micro level: Principal actors and social structures

The second, third, and fifth research questions are also in focus here, but from the perspective of micro-level actors. The second question is: Who do school leaders see as the principal actors participating in educational change and how do they interact in facilitating or constraining change? The third question is: What social structures do school leaders see operating in educational change and what impact do they consider these to have in facilitating or constraining change? The fifth research questions is: What methods do school leaders see as important when implementing change and how do they reflect on and promote these methods in their everyday practices?

The findings show the complexity of interactions and influences at the micro level, mainly linked to school leaders and teachers. The following discussion will delve into the implementation methods that school leaders claim they use, the challenges around upper secondary school teachers' conservativism and teaching experience, and competition between teachers.

9.2.4.1 School leadership and implementation methods

Most school leaders strongly believed in their own active participation in educational change, which is in line with what other scholars have found (Barsh et. al., 2008; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Matthews & Crow, 2009; Stein & Coburn, 2008). Several school leaders described how they sought to support and guide teachers when making changes. Thurlings et al. (2015) note how school leaders who support teachers and give both guidance and feedback facilitate change. As highlighted in this study, school leaders' capacity to facilitate change depends, for example, on what kind of change they are leading and the predominant culture in the school they lead.

The school leadership emphasised the power of the person participating in change. They saw teachers as being central to the educational change process. Teachers are described as owners of pedagogical traditions and subject content, as already described in the context of institutionalised curriculum and subjects, and they can, to a certain extent, allow change or very definitely forbid it, as highlighted by the school leaders. Therefore, teachers have considerable autonomy and control over what happens in their classrooms in terms of pedagogical approaches and educational content. However, school leaders claimed to have recently gained pedagogical agency in relation to teaching and assessment methods as discussed before.

Active participation of teachers is crucial in all change, as agreed upon by many scholars (Fullan, 2007; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Hopkins & Levin, 2000; McLaughlin, 1990; Stein & Coburn, 2008). The participating school leaders also discussed the importance of teacher willingness to change, and how willingness of participants in general facilitates the change taking place in their own educational settings. In line with Matthews and Crow (2009) argumentation, the leaders in this study reflected on the importance of teachers' motivation. Similarly, Fullan (2007) and some of the leader´s in this study emphasis on the importance of a positive mind-set.

In general, school leaders viewed themselves as important actors facilitating change, bridging gaps between departments within their schools, and motivating diverse groups of teachers. Fullan (2007) agrees with the school leaders by stating that motivation is important and, at times, overcomes bias when leading change. Nevertheless, many of the school leaders emphasised that they try to work across the hierarchical ladder in the school, rather than using top-down demands and directives. The top-down approach is generally considered to facilitate change (Fraser et al., 2006). However, Smeds et al. (2003) call for a mixture of both top-down and bottom-up methods.

It is difficult to address bottom-up approaches without linking the discussion to ownership, which is generally considered to facilitate change (Buchanan & Huczynski, 2010; Hallinger, 2003; Matthews & Crow, 2009). The school leaders highlighted the importance of ownership and bottom-up approaches in various forms. Some heavily emphasised the creation of opportunities to establish ownership when making change. Others focused on giving the employees space and power to make important decisions. Still others stressed the importance of promoting active participation in the entire process at all levels. One school director described the importance of giving teachers the main credit for the changes made in the school and of staying in the shadows when celebrating the outcome. One leader described the importance of persuasion when encouraging people to change and many school leaders focused on dialogue to facilitate change, rather than using directives from the top to inspire the employees to change. These target an innate interest to improve the quality in the change processes, while ensuring happiness throughout the process. Another school leader saw her role as providing tools for change, inspiring teachers to such an extent that they recognise the need for change, and thus, promoting a bottom-up approach.

Some leaders were, however, aware of the delicate and thin line between ownership and leadership. Fullan´s (2007) study agrees with the school leaders and reports a mixture of a tight and lose control in working environments. In a similar vein, Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) stated that leaders empower educators towards educational change by applying a mixture of push when they can, pull when needed, and nudge all the time to move forward.

The assertion of top-down approaches and a request for increased authority was also highlighted in the data. These proclamations were characterised by the first person singular of “I” or “my”. The discourse of those school directors manifested the top-down directives. They described how they worked down the hierarchical ladder in their schools, discussing their own authority as school director with a focus on controlling action and aiming for greater authority over many of the social structures discussed in previous sections. They also described considerable resistance in their schools and reported power struggles.

The importance of shared aims when making change is emphasised by many scholars (Buchanan & Huczynski, 2010; Hallinger, 2003; Matthews & Crow, 2009). Flaspohler et al. (2008) describe the importance of understanding the kind of motivation, competence, and behaviour needed at the personal level to promote educational change. This emphasis was not common in the data and this comes as no surprise given that the majority of the leaders were mostly

concerned with the department and teacher autonomy and, in so doing, neglected the idea of developing the school holistically.

The school Grímsey was exception and developed holistically. The other schools were governed by the norms and the values (Scott, 2014) controlled by the subject departments. The school directors of Brokey, Drangey, Eldey, and Heimaey promoted setups of smaller organisational units by striving to work down the hierarchical structure of subject departments, instead of making a holistic change across departmental borders in the school. It must, however, be remembered that these four school have a longer history than the schools working on change holistically. Based on the emphasis school leaders made in this study, it is questionable if a bottom-up approach is actually a controlling force in subject departments. This is one of Eiríksdóttir and Jóhannesson's (2016) concerns when describing how the older teachers in mathematics tend to control and reject change proposed by other teachers. Similar trends were seen by Bascia and Maton (2016) when identifying how, in larger, mainstream schools with extensive academic faculties, teachers within the department worked more closely together than in schools with weaker subject boundaries. Within such structures, teachers had greater autonomy and the gap was larger between administration, department heads, and teachers.

Trust is also highlighted as an important facilitating element in the literature (Frost, 2012; Fullan, 2007; Hallinger, 2003), yet only two of the school leaders focused on trusting their employees for effective action. Jones and Harris (2014) studied the international literature on principals leading to successful change. They state that principals create a culture of trust by trusting the professionals to collectively make the right decisions to improve their own pedagogical practices and create the right conditions for professional learning. By so doing, they are more successful in leading change than others. Their conclusion corresponds with the judgment of one school director in this study when trusting the teachers to make the change collectively. In this school, personnel had made significant advances in change at the time of the interview took place.

In relation to implementation methods and leadership, horizontal influences played a significant role in facilitating change (see Section 9.2.1). School leaders gave several examples when themselves, other school leaders, or subject teachers met as a group to for professional development and discussed how empowering it was. School representatives visiting other schools to introduce their innovative practices is another example. The names of same school directors or their representatives were frequently referred to as change actors in this relation. This indicates that these innovative people travelled between schools and disseminated their visions, ideas, and experiences. An important

question is raised as to ownership and bottom-up approaches when school leaders take on the role of disseminating new ideas among schools. It is possible that teachers would better relate to innovations if the dissemination were carried out by teachers since they are at the same level and hold similar power positions.

The impact from the international level was also important and clustered as a horizontal influence. Most of the school directors described a considerable amount of international cooperation in their schools. This included having all employees travel abroad to visit schools, having individual or groups of employees participate in international projects, or having several teachers or students take part in international projects. In turn, participating schools received international visitors. School leaders considered these visits to be extremely important and empowering for the school community. Such cooperation clearly plays a significant role in motivating change at the upper secondary school level, hence reinforcing the schools as instrumental within the framework of organisations and promote ongoing change.

Based on this analysis, it is possible to conclude that school leaders use various methods in their everyday practices when implementing change. They emphasise active participation of themselves as school leaders and teachers in their schools, mixture of top-down and bottom-up approaches, ownership, empowerment, and horizontal influences to mention few.

9.2.4.2 Conservatism and teaching experience

Many school leaders described the conservative nature of the teaching profession at the micro level. In the context of conservatism, school leaders reported that it seemed that the older teachers resisted change by protecting the norms, existing values, and the school's history. Conversely, several teachers, especially the younger generation, emphasised ongoing change.

The leaders in this study experienced increasing resistance as the teachers become older and more experienced. Most of them blamed the older profile of the teaching profession for the resistance and the tension within the schools. This conclusion indicates that teachers with many years of experience increase their power within the schools. This conclusion agrees with Ball et al. (2011b) when describing how teachers' social networks are infused by power relations. The school leaders in this study reported how they saw the older teachers strive to control the power network in their school by constraining the processes of change. These teachers tend to protect the history of the school in which they teach. Ball et al. (2012) and Braun et al. (2011) concur and highlight that the school's history matters when enacting policy. They point out how teachers in

secondary education in England tend to protect the origin of the school and its history when enacting policy and sometimes resisting it.

The age phenomena in this study was considered to be one of the most hindering factors in school development. The age challenge was labelled as the "forty-seven problem" referring to the fact that a disproportionate number of teachers were born in 1947 and are due to retire soon. These teachers saw themselves to be "on hold" and refused to participate in school development. Such older group was considered to maintain stagnation in the schools by protecting the existing norms, traditions, and values. The relationship between being an "old teacher" and being resistant to change were described as being proportionate in terms of cause and effect – as a teachers ages, that teacher becomes increasingly more resistant to change. The perception of the school leaders on the older teachers shows how the normative pillar of institutions is reinforced through the actions of the older teachers. In this case, Scott's (2014) normative rules and professional roles prevail.

The older group of teachers resisting change were often described in terms of metaphors, including "dinosaurs", "bulldogs", "old dogs", or "placed in a hostage situation" on certain issues. Even the physical space in the schools was described as being the "old teachers' room".

In a similar vein, one school leader pointed out how difficult it was when one powerful person, placed at the higher end of the school hierarchical ladder, blocks change. They stress that nothing happens then. The ad hoc individual leader shows, by his or her actions, characteristics of institutional leadership (Kraatz, 2009; Raffaelli and Glynn, 2015; Selznick, 1949; 1957; Washington et al. 2008) by protecting the existing values and resisting change. This conclusion is in line with Ball and associates (2012) stating how power relations and social networks, in this case, the hierarchical ladder in the school, impact policy enactment. As shown in this example, school leaders, plays a crucial role in facilitating or constraining change.

Some school leaders discussed the privilege of hiring young teachers when they were able to do so and many of them described the positive effect of new and young teachers entering the profession. One school leader claimed that these teachers influence others in the schools horizontally, and in the process, the state of mind of the teachers' group changes and everything becomes much easier. Nonetheless, sometimes these innovative young teachers face intense resistance from the older teachers, and in time they embraced the existing institutionalised culture (Scott, 2014) in the schools as conformed by some leaders in the study.

Two school leaders recounted an incident when they solicited support from young teachers. One of them worked in a school with a long history and decided

to implement change with the support of younger teachers with a different pedagogical vision than the older faculty members. The older teachers of the department were systematically left behind and did not participate in the change. Likewise, school leaders in one of the newer school focused on attracting young teachers to cultivate them as change agents vis-à-vis the school philosophy. These school leaders said they wanted to hire fresh teachers, with no history of teaching directly following their formal education. These young teachers were considered by the school leaders to have a different vision of education and a desire to change. At the same time that the issue of younger teachers can facilitate change, it could become problematic for school leaders to prefer younger teachers.

It was quite noticeable in the interviews how consistently the leadership attributed inertia to the age of the teachers. There is nothing in the data elsewhere in the study to independently verify these conceptions.

9.2.4.3 Competition

Competition between individual teachers at the micro level and groups of subject teachers was discussed by the school leaders along two different dimensions: when teachers were writing the school curriculums bas ed on the Upper Secondary Education Act No. 92/2008 and the national curriculum guide (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012), and during the student selection process in the middle of the term.

The first dimension is connected to competition exhibited when the teachers were writing the school curriculum. Ball and associates (2012) indicated that competition in secondary education works against policy implementation with the consequence that policy is not enacted. The same corresponds to the findings of this study. Almost all the school leaders reflected on the competition and disagreements that arose during the writing process of the school curriculum. The competition revolved around issues of what should be taught, what should be dropped, and what new ideas should be introduced. Similarly, Holm and Lundström (2011) showed that school principals in Sweden emphasised contradictions accompanying increased competition that, on one hand, facilitated change in their schools, but on the other, causing increased stress and insecurity among the school personnel.

The competition in this study was between teachers of different subjects when they were promoting and protecting their subjects. It is possible to explain the competition between the subject teachers through the distribution of teaching hours that impact their salaries, on one hand, and the institutional characteristics incorporated in each subject field on the other. Both Deng (2007) and Thurlings et al. (2015) concurred with the institutionalisation in subject areas. Both described how customs within faculties generally constrained

change. In addition to their perspective, Jónasson (2016) explained institutional characteristics by means of the vested interest of teachers when making changes and how it is linked to job security and the livelihood of experts. The same applies to this study.

The second dimension is related to the selection process in the middle of the term, when students select courses for the upcoming term. The number of subjects usually depends on the number of students selecting the courses offered in the schools. This kind of competition applies mainly to large comprehensive schools. Some of the school leaders reflected on how teachers start to compete for students during the middle of each term when the selection period starts. Therefore, teachers focus on attracting students to their courses and competing for a certain distribution of teaching hours that affect their salaries. This completion supports how market forces is also indirectly reinforced by teachers at the meso level when they start to fight about their own livelihood.

The competition and resistance apparent in both examples tend to affect teachers' emotions and cause increased stress within the schools as noted by the school leaders. Many scholars (Ball et al., 2011b; Domitrovich et al., 2008; Fullan, 2007; Holm & Lundström, 2011; Ragnarsdóttir & Jóhannesson, 2014) also state how feelings, emotions, and stress accompany change and impact educators by putting extra demand and uncertainty on employees. School leaders indicated that human communication, conflicts, and competition tended to curb change. Ragnarsdóttir and Jóhannesson (2014) and Hallinger (2003) recognise these issues and report that excessive stress and workload during periods of change hinder the innovative processes.

In line with this study, Ball et al. (2012) state how secondary schools enact policy differently. This study adds to their viewpoint, highlighting how vested interest and working experiences impact change. Furthermore, in similar vein and Ball and associates (2012), this study highlights how power is not equally distributed between groups, subjects, and teachers of subjects. Distribution is controlled by various sets of human relations and social structures. This conclusion draws attention to whether it really is possible to change older schools holistically while retaining the old teachers' room mentality with its institutionalised legacies.

As shown throughout the discussion chapter, the predominant governing form of upper secondary schooling is highly institutionalised and controlled by various macro-level actors and institutionalised social structures. Most of the meso-level actors protected the school's history and honoured the customs. They also protected the schools existing values, norms, and traditions. This form of institutional operation was the main reason for reluctance to change, thus,

leading to slow processes and, in some cases, reinforcing the existing segregation of school types, types of programmes, and subjects incorporated in the system.

9.3 Conceptual challenges

Several challenges arose when designing the conceptual framework, writing the research overview, and analysing and discussing the data. Here the emphasis is on four challenges that I had to grapple with in the thesis. The first challenge was related to the lack of theoretical guidance in the beginning of the research journey. The second challenge centred on the distinction between some of the principal concepts. The third challenge occurred in the process of defining some of the underlying key terms, and the fourth challenge arose in selecting the relevant literature.

When the overall research project, Upper Secondary School Practices, was planned, no single theoretical framework had been selected although a number of research questions had been put forward (Óskarsdóttir, 2016; see also Appendix A). Hence, relevant theories were introduced as they were seen to be helpful in analysing the data and the conceptual framework was developed after the interviews took place. This fact has its pros and cons. The cons include a lack of consistent theoretical underpinnings when interviewing the school leaders, but the pros include the fact that the interviews were allowed to develop, and new theoretical perspectives were generated from scrutinising the data.

Further, as the writing of the thesis progressed relevant theories were introduced as they were seen to be helpful in analysing the data and ultimately five sets of theoretical perspectives guided the analysis. Early in the process institutional and organisational theories (Scott, 2014; Thornton et al. 2012) enabled to deal with some of tensions that the data exhibited. Then the ideas of fundamental educational change and fundamental organisational change (Waks, 2007) entered. Waks's (2007) ideas addressed directly and clarified the distinction between organizational and institutional aspects emerging in the data and related these clearly to educational change. At this point the five categories of different school responses to macro-level demands for change (Coburn, 2004) were added to the theoretical landscape and turned out to be a good continuation of Waks's (2007) ideas on fundamental educational change. Then the theories of institutional and organisational leadership (Kraatz, 2009; Raffaelli & Glynn, 2015; Washington et al., 2008) entered the scope and provided an important theoretical insight. The theory was well matched with the existing organisational and institutional theories and Coburns' (2004) ideas of different responses to macro-level demands for change, since some of Coburn´s concepts explained the institutional context of schools, while others were more

organisational. In the end, Ball et al.'s (2012) ideas on policy enactment were included. Policy enactment explains how schools and school staff enact policy differently and it helps to better understand why school personnel endorse some policies and drop others. Combining these interrelated lenses was certainly a challenging task, but it also paved an interesting way to describe and understand the operational intricacies within the upper secondary system in Iceland and perhaps in other systems as well.

The second challenge discussed here, relates to the distinction between some of the principal concepts. Sometimes it turned out to be difficult to clarify the distinction between actors and social structures, mainly regarding the MoESC, also when dealing with the university level and the cultural structures present in individual schools, and when dealing with the labour market. As an example, the MoESC creates social structures to control the schools, but they also interact with the schools in order to impress on them these structures. Hence, it was difficult to determine if the MoESC is an actor or if the focus should be on the operating social structures. Similar challenges emerged regarding the universities, primarily when distinguishing between university actors and academic subjects. The same applies to the labour market. It is possible to classify these influences as actors, but it can also be recognised as a social structure.

The most challenging task in relation to actors and social structures occurred when distinguishing between meso-level actors and the corresponding social structure within the schools. Ordinarily, social structures do not include the actor who communicates the relevant messages, such as the time-honoured importance of certain subjects that originate from the university level or the tradition inherent in subjects taught at the school level. However, some subjects have strong advocates who are clearly actors and are very vocal in curricular debates. Similarly, school cultures are developed by actors within each school. Therefore, it was difficult to classify school staff and students as actors, separate from the school culture, which is regarded as a social structure. When the uncertainty of classification was greatest, the way in which school leaders discussed the theme was used as a guideline.

It was also difficult to determine if an actor operates at the macro-, meso-, and micro levels. The same actor can even have influence at all levels. For example, teachers generally belong to the micro level while operating at the level of their teaching. However, when working with professionals in their own or other schools with similar identities, they work and act at the meso level. The findings clearly show the complexity of interactions and influences and the

effects of the diverse actors and social structures. Hence, their inferred influence was placed under the best fitting category each time.

It also took serious consideration to decide where to place students and parents when looking at where they appear in the data. Most of the school leaders described the influence of students and parents as exerting external control. When discussing the admission processes in upper secondary schools in general, they talked about competition and the educational market of students selecting a school or a study path. In this way, students controlled what schools and programmes are popular and what programmes survive. Thus, they were not solely operating at the micro level when studying in individual schools, but also as external actors when selecting a school or a programme. Ultimately, they were placed at the meso level when operating as a group and micro level when acting as individuals. This was done since most learning takes place in schools and schools can be seen as their workplaces. The same applies to parents, who generally do not work in schools but act on behalf of their child in schools and at the micro level when it involves the child's learning and welfare.

The third challenge was to define some of the underlying key terms. The definitions of institutions and organisations was particularly challenging. In the beginning I encountered more difficulties with the definition of the term organisation. This was even true when reading Scott's book (2014) entitled *Institutions and Organizations*, in which the institutional concept was more clearly constructed than the organisational concept. This was also true when looking at the terms institutionalisation and deinstitutionalisation. These terms related to institutions dominated the organisational aspects. The definition of the term institution varied between scholars and thus lacks common understanding, transparency and consistency. Some scholars understand it as bases of the background of organisations, other scholars see them as being units at the macro level and still others that way that organisations can turn into institutions over time.

The explanation for this mismatch, may be due to the fact that the recent theories of institutions and organisations emerged in the 1980s under the umbrella of neo-institutionalism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). The conceptual framework became more coherent, convincing, holistic, and relevant to my data, when I read the work of Kraatz and associates (Kraatz, 2009; Kraatz & Moore, 2002;), Raffaelli and Glynn (2015), and Washington et al. (2008) who all focussed on bringing life to Selznicks' (1949; 1957) earlier work.

Finally, the fourth challenge arose when selecting relevant literature. When exploring different levels, diverse actors, and various social structures, it was challenging to select the relevant scholars using the selected theories and thus

narrowing the theoretical perspective adopted. There are, for example, quite a number of scholars who have written about leadership and change, but their focus is often normative, perhaps moralising, and sometimes lacking in conceptual, critical, or holistic standpoints. Therefore, it took some time to select the relevant research literature and select theoretical approaches that would invite relevant and hopefully new perspectives. Also, the focus on actors and social structures at three levels implies a wide perspective but also makes the picture rather complex. It took some exploration to decide what parts to use and where to narrow the analytical scope.

9.4 Implications and future perspectives

This study delivers several messages for most of the identified actors across system boundaries of upper secondary education in Iceland and inspires some suggestions for future steps for both school leaders, MoESC, and academics. The possibilities include calling upon several scholars to suggest theoretical implications and indicate areas of further research, practical considerations, and future perspectives.

There are three main messages regarding the theories and research. The study acknowledges several scholars who claim that researchers, mainly in the field of education, neglect some of the type of theoretical lenses that are used in this thesis. By using the lenses of both institutions and organisations, the study concurs with Brunch's (2007) criticism that educational researchers are not fully exploring these theories. While exploring actors across system boundaries in upper secondary education in Iceland, an attempt has been made to fill the gap identified by Chen and Ke (2014) by gauging the impact from the macro level on educational change. Kraatz (2009), Raffaelli and Glynn (2015), and Washington et al. (2008) claim that scholars neglect the theories of institutional and organisational leadership. These theories are used in this study when interviewing school leaders; hence, their call is also met. Since scholars in the field of education seem to neglect these theories, it is essential to better contextualise the concepts of organisations and institutions in the field of education, particularly the hybrid phenomena between these two concepts, particularly the interactive processes taking place between them. The concurrent notions of organisational and institutional leadership are also essential, since leaders are expected to direct change and develop schools as organisations, while the institutional context that permeates them is usually not considered at the same time.

Some theoretical notions have also matured during the present discussion and can be added to the already existing theoretical arsenal: These are the

concepts of vertical and horizontal influences and the "pioneering" category. The vertical and horizontal influences can be considered as an addition or a support to Waks's (2007) ideas of fundamental educational and organisational change (as discussed in Section 9.2.1) and the category of "pioneering" can be seen as an additional mechanism to Coburn's (2004) five clusters of different responses to macro-level demand for change (as discussed in Section 9.2.3.2).

This thesis also indicates the importance for the academia of exploring in the further most of the social structures emerging from the study to gain a deeper and more holistic understanding of what facilitates and constrains change at the upper secondary school level. It is also important to understand the themes that emerged from the study, from the perspectives of other actors, to create a fuller picture of the phenomena. Based on this thesis, the actors can be the MoESC, Teachers' Union representatives, the stakeholders from the labour market, universities, compulsory schools, the local community of schools, parents, and, of course, students, teachers, and other staff. It is quite possible that by adopting a different frame of reference, other than the school leaders, e.g., that of the teachers, would give a somewhat different picture. Furthermore, now is the time to study the impact of the recently enacted shorter study time at the school level and map the subjects and content that survived the cut and the subjects and content that have lost their status. Are these the same subjects that lead the national curriculum guide and are maintained by university actors, upper secondary school teachers, and the Teachers' Union or are these the subjects with a shorter history, or less support?

Nonetheless, when exploring the practical implications, an important message primarily revolves around the MoESC, the Teachers' Union, universities, school leaders, and teachers in the following way. The implications for the government, in particular MoESC, mainly revolve around the regulative social structures the government creates. It is important to bear in mind that the Teachers' Union also impacts some of the same social structures, either by counterbalancing the demand made by MoESC or by reinforcing the existing institutional trends incorporated into the social structures. Therefore, the Teachers' Union also needs to reconsider its standpoint. The main messages are primarily about acts and regulations, including issues related to school leadership and financial considerations. Also, suggestions towards more professional external and internal evaluation systems, the collective bargaining agreements and professional development. Then related to students' admission processes, and finally, a takeover of the internship system for vocational students.

School leaders complained about the institutional barriers of the Administrative Procedures Act No. 37/1993 and its protection regarding state

employees. Several concerns also arose regarding the Upper Secondary Education Act No. 92/2008 and the related regulative documents. Firstly, the act protects only three powerful academic subjects. Secondly, from the perspective of the formal weight and appearance of the universities, the labour market, and teachers and other school employees, legislative actions do not reflect enough the reality of the control these actors have on the school level. Thirdly, there are contradictions (see Section 9.2.2.1) between the acts and the national curriculum guide (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012). This is because school directors are alone responsible for implementing the intended changes in the current legislation. However, the national curriculum guide gives teachers responsibilities and key roles in school development. Placing the onus and responsibility for the change on the school director raises questions regarding teacher-driven change, their actual authority and ownership and, in fact, contradicts the suggestions made by several scholars (Fullan, 2007; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012) emphasising school leaders and teachers together in cooperation responsible for educational change. Fourthly, school directors call for time for increased educational leadership instead of spending most of their time on finances. The financial burden they have to shoulder is not in line with the ideology of the Upper Secondary Education Act No. 92/2008, which requires school directors to have a formal educational degree in upper secondary education, not in finance and business administration.

Taken together these results, there are contradictions between the message given by the Upper Secondary Education Act No. 92/2008, the related documents, and the realities in schools. Therefore, the study suggests for critically analysing the act and related documents, coordinating the messages they give and the reality in school and then reconstruct them accordingly. The changes could inter alia evolve around working against the subject hierarchy by de-emphasising discussion on individual subjects and being more conscious of the influence of several actors, such as the universities, the labour market, teachers, and students. It is also important to ensure that the school directors have more time and space to work on educational considerations and to develop their school in cooperation with teachers and students. Thus, it might be wise to enable school directors in all school sizes to hire more administrative and financial assistance to be able to spend their working time on educational leadership and school development.

Moreover, it may be important to widen the accreditation criteria for upper secondary teachers in the Rules on Evaluation Committee for Pre-Schools, Compulsory Schools and Upper Secondary Schools No. 241/2009 by welcoming other subjects than those that already exist in upper secondary education today. Hence, may be considered to loosen up the vested interest of upper secondary

school teachers, Teachers' Union, and the university actors when determining the accreditation criteria.

The study also suggests an overhaul of the formula funding and the regulations behind the system (Regulation on Formula Funding to Calculate the Teaching Cost at the Upper Secondary School Level No. 335/1999) towards a more just and modern system. Despite the principle of school autonomy, the institutional character of formula funding seriously restrains the leadership's possibility to move towards change.

Evidence from this study suggests using external and internal evaluation systems in schools to spur and monitor change. In that respect, it would make sense to change the evaluation procedure and focus on classroom practices, where the core of the intended change usually takes place. School leaders should actively use the outcome of the evaluation reports to develop their school in cooperation with school personnel and students and possible university experts as well. The study also supports that the democratic evaluation system to work professionally on change and include all actors.

The collective bargaining agreements were crucial to the feasibility of change, according to school leaders. Throughout the power struggle between the MoESC and the Teachers' Union in relation to the collective bargaining agreements, the school leaders fall somewhere in between. They felt it was impossible for them to act in accordance with the given framework, their own vision, or that of their colleagues. It seems wise to overcome these challenges in the future by working in parallel on policy change and collective bargaining agreements to enable smoother cooperation among stakeholders when designing and implementing the envisaged change.

The fact that the system of professional development is a part of the collective bargaining agreements is to some extent problematic. The agreements state that both upper secondary school teachers and middle managers hold almost full autonomy over their own professional development. This raises questions about the system created around it, and whether there is, from an organisational perspective, a need to provide time for school directors, other school leaders, and groups of teachers to organise professional development as an integral part of everyday practices in their schools. It may also be wise to loosen up or release the system of professional development from the shackles of collective bargaining agreements to enable the schools to develop more holistically. The study suggests, however, keeping part of the autonomy for teachers but also to giving the school more opportunity to foster professional development holistically.

As noted in the thesis, both parents and students uphold the traditional elite system by reinforcing the institutional legacy of academic subjects, programmes, and schools when students select a school and a study programme. One school leader referred to this challenge as dealing with an “education market”. This fact raises the following question for the MoESC: Who has the right to study in certain academic programmes in an elite, protected grammar system? The students in the homogeneous grammar system are losing the opportunities that accompany a diverse group of students and teachers. According to this view there is a definite need to challenge and reconstruct the admission processes towards a more equitable system, and it is also time to open the grammar system to a more diverse student population as suggested by one of the school leader leading traditional grammar school. The same was emphasised by many of the other school leaders in the comprehensive schools.

The labour market’s grip on the vocational section of upper secondary schools was seen to be problematic and was desired needs to be loosened. This might happen with interactive cooperation when making change, but, in particular, when providing internships for vocational students. The current situation is unacceptable to many school leaders. Accordingly, the MoESC, or the schools themselves, may need to take over the system of internships to provide and ensure equal opportunities for all.

The study also suggests three different messages for the university level, which are all related to the normative impact and vested interest they have on subjects, the influx of students, and professional development and formal education for educators.

The university level sets the baseline for upper secondary education by implicitly deciding the content that should be taught in academic subjects and by controlling the influx of students. At the same time, they educate upper secondary school teachers and offer part of their professional development. This current grip and vested interest is problematic as seen by some of the school leaders. It may facilitate change to free the upper secondary schools from this grip and give them space to develop on the bases of students’ needs and the school specialities. Some of the challenges accompanying the institutional characteristics of subjects should also be brought within the purview of teacher education. To counterbalance the institutional hold of subjects, it may be wise to restructure the system of professional development and formal education, placing an increased focus on interdisciplinary work, school development, and teamwork.

As a concluding comment, in this section, it is suggested that school leaders and teachers would be well advised to give priority consideration to four points

under the following headings: 1) the complexity of available responses to macro-level demands for change, 2) the institutionalised characteristics of subjects, 3) the potentially beneficial effects of active participation of students in educational change, and finally, 4) the freedom given to education personnel.

Understanding the inherent complexity of responses to the macro-level demand to change may enable stakeholders to overcome resistance by finding appropriate, or fruitful, channels to successfully implement change in schools. It is vital for them to face the different status of subjects to find the right channels to lead change based on the school culture, subject structure, and the needs of employees and students.

School leaders and teachers also need to be aware of their own roles in potentially institutionalising the schools they lead when they steer what remains the same and what should change. The institutional characteristics of each subject explains why school leaders have limited and, in some cases, no agency when attempting to lead change in the content of certain subjects, despite having strong views on how outdated it may be.

School leaders were silent when it came to students and their involvement in change. This goes against the legal framework on democratic emphasis in schools. The study suggests there is considerable scope for giving students voice and access when it comes to their own education and the potential changes in their schools. This also applies to students' involvement at the governmental level. The existing formal channels for democratic participation apparently need to be taken seriously and be activated.

It is clear that upper secondary school personnel have not fully harnessed the power transferred to them with the decentralisation of school curricula. Despite having considerable formal organisational freedom to change the education settings in their schools, this freedom does not always extend to existing institutional frames or the institutional influences of various actors monitoring and influencing change at the school level.

In summary, the findings raise several questions about the effectiveness of the existing system and cooperation between the main actors in the field of education. In order to strengthen the cooperation between the main actors and their initiative, it is important to increase understanding of this complex edifice, of teamwork, and fruitful interaction and to find a more positive path for sustained and dynamic change.

10 Conclusions

This study was undertaken during a period of intense developments within Icelandic society and the upper secondary school system. Iceland has been slowly but steadily recovering from an economic crisis and regaining its financial status. The upper secondary schools were implementing the Upper Secondary Education Act No. 92/2008, and in the process of writing, implementing, and enacting the new school curricula based on the national curriculum guide (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012). At the same time, the Teachers' Union and the Ministry of Finance in cooperation with MoESC were negotiating, accepting, and implementing new collective bargaining agreements with different working time definitions for educators. This thesis, therefore, potentially provides a valuable insight into the complexity of educational change at the school level.

The aim of the study was to explore how school leaders perceive their roles, power, and agency when leading change at the upper secondary school level in Iceland. School leaders' perceptions of the interaction of actors and social structures that may facilitate or constrain change were also elucidated. In addition, the thesis explored what the school leaders considered to be significant challenges regarding educational change.

The school leaders described complex patterns of interaction between numerous actors and diverse social structures influencing change in upper secondary education in Iceland. The most powerful macro-level actors were judged to be the MoESC, the Teachers' Union, and the universities, mainly the University of Iceland. Society at large and the labour market were also found to be influential mainly related to the vocational sector of the upper secondary system. The actors with the weakest influence were the compulsory schools, i.e., the school level immediately below the upper secondary schools. The school leaders themselves and teachers were perceived to have the most power at the meso and micro levels. Parents were also seen to have indirect control, and surprisingly, the students were seen to have the weakest influence as they are not actively involved or participating in school development.

The most significant challenge faced by school leaders when leading change in their schools were set to be related to the academic subjects. Hence, the academic subjects turned out to be the most significant social structure generated from the data. It is clear that school leaders have only partial agency and thus limited power to promote subject content change even when they felt

strongly that a change was needed. This is not because of restrictive curricular guides, but due to institutional characteristics incorporated into the social structure of subjects.

School leaders indicated that most subjects have a legacy that is very difficult or impossible to influence and they made it explicit that the strongest institutionalisation is in place in the academic subjects. Hence, a tentative ranking of the subjects was made based on school leaders' comments, starting with the most conservative subjects and ending with the least conservative subject. The ranking reads in the following order (see Section 9.2.3.4): mathematics, physics, Icelandic, natural sciences (other than physics), some vocational subject (protected by certified industrial trades), foreign languages, social sciences, and other vocational subjects (supported by the labour market). This ranking is in line with similar rankings made by Bleazby (2015). School leaders acknowledged, however, that they had recently assumed some pedagogical agency. It was now considered acceptable for them to promote change in teaching methods and assessment practices, which is a topic that is becoming increasingly prevalent within the school discourse.

Based on the above, it is possible to argue that subjects are independent, powerful institutionalised social structures. They are governed by traditions and monitored and controlled by powerful actors from many levels. In a larger context, the subjects' power is heavily rooted in an institutionalised education system and it clearly originates from longstanding curricular and university traditions. Therefore, the university actors tend to resist change in upper secondary schools that might weaken the status of the subjects they teach and affect their operational space. At the same time, various other actors impact and protect the same academic subjects.

As implied above, an institutionalised chain reaction originating from the university level moves to the micro level in upper secondary education, where it interacts with the content and pedagogy of the academic subjects at the school level. For example, the universities control what takes place in upper secondary schools with the influx of students. Most university faculties are quite open to any kind of matriculation examination, while other faculties, such as the faculties of medicine and law, are more directive when using entrance examinations to control the inflow. Faculties within the School of Engineering, Natural Sciences, and the School of Health Sciences also use strict admission requirements based on students' academic performance, primarily in Icelandic, English, mathematics, and the natural sciences. This indicates that the subject hierarchy is most explicit in faculties designed around mathematics and natural sciences. Several school leaders in this study voiced their concern in this respect and described how the

control held by the universities is an impasse and constrains upper secondary schools from becoming instrumental in promoting change. The universities also control the formal education of upper secondary school teachers that are again controlled by the same academic subjects discussed previously. Therefore, both university teachers and upper secondary school teachers share a common enthusiasm and a vested interest in promoting and protecting the same powerful academic subjects at both school levels.

The MoESC, the Teachers' Union, and the university actors also make it difficult for new subjects from enter the existing subject spectrum at the school level through rules on the admission of new teachers to the profession. Similar trends are visible in the messages from the MoESC. The same subjects, Icelandic, English, and mathematics, are the subjects that are promoted and protected in the national curriculum guide across study programmes (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012), thereby, creating a subject hierarchy in the national curriculum guide that is again mirrored at the university level, and protected by the Teachers' Union.

Parents and students are also influential with the respect to the subjects, programmes, and school hierarchies. They value the academic programmes and regard the natural science programmes, in the elitist tradition of grammar schools, as the best and most important preparation for the university level. All these diverse actors and their vested interests lead to a chain reaction that influences and constrains change at the upper secondary school education in one way or another.

Similar trends in the subject hierarchy are evident when studying the different responses to macro-demands for change in each school. Since most of the schools have parallel structures, it is evident that many self-sustained subunits operate in upper secondary education in Iceland, primarily in the departments centred around academic subjects. The most explicit resistance to any change was reported to be in faculties of mathematics. This fact challenges the idea of upper secondary schools as unitary, homogeneous entities and invites the question as to whether it is possible to change an existent school holistically unless the school is relatively new, as is evident in the "pioneering" schools.

Based on this conclusion, a tentative ranking was also made of the different types of institutionalised responses. The responses, from the most institutional response to the most organisational were: rejection, decoupling, parallel structures, assimilation, accommodation, and "pioneering". As shown, the different responses varied according to the degree of institutionalisation, while others were more directed to educational change and closer to the organisational characteristics of the schools.

As the difference to the responses to the macro-level demands to change started to emerge it became particularly useful to understand the difference between organisational and institutional leadership (Kraatz, 2009; Raffaelli & Glynn, 2015; Washington et al., 2008). The school leaders explained that they responded differently when working in this complex setting and according to the different combinations of responses in their schools. They described more instrumental processes and expressed themselves more rationally when supporting an innovative group of teachers and were, therefore, classified as organisational leaders when moving part of the school forward towards new aims and challenges. However, they were silent and even constrained when working with a group of teachers who resisted change or exhibited decoupling characteristics. In this context, they operated as institutional leaders by reconnecting the faculties to their original values promoted by somewhat conservative subjects and subject teachers.

Therefore, in most cases, the leaders could adapt to two different roles according to the atmosphere, different faculty dynamics, and issues involved, by responding either as institutional or organisational leaders. The school leaders also shifted between the two different types of leadership by the pressure and ideas from the macro level, their personal beliefs, the power struggle between the Teachers' Union and the MoESC, and the dynamics within their schools and subject faculties. Hence, the school directors adopted many different roles when they and faced the various challenges.

Finally, the predominant governing culture of upper secondary schools falls within the institutional characteristics of education. Most of the actors discussed by school leaders tended to protect the legacy of their schools and the school system in general. In doing so, they resist change. This includes honouring customs and older predominant values, norms, and traditions. This form of institutional governance leads to slow development in upper secondary education in Iceland.

Nevertheless, several actors identified by school leaders promoted change. From the macro level, MoESC turned out to encourage the schools to design and implement their own school curricula in the social structures they created in the Upper Secondary Education Act No. 92/2008 and the national curriculum guide (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012). The evaluation system was also one of the social structures promoting change and controlled by the MoESC. The universities enabled change in upper secondary education through knowledge construction incorporated in the social structures of educational research, professional development, and formal education of school personnel. However, some of the school leaders also discussed the constraining aspects of

the same social structures. The challenges they discussed mainly matched the regulative and normative pillars of institutions.

More importantly, some change started within the schools and was triggered by innovative individuals or groups of experts. The school leaders mainly discussed the younger generations of teachers in this respect and used them intensively as change actors. The impact and change culture operating in each school reached other faculties and even other schools within the organisational field of upper secondary education at the national level, or other educational units at the international level or vice versa. These phenomena were described as horizontal influences and exhibited different patterns and a more complex picture than the ones presented by vertical influences. Horizontal influences are most likely the most important dynamics exhibited by the data.

It has been argued above that most upper secondary schools operate as many different units which vary substantially regarding the extent to which they should be characterised as organisations or institutions. All of them are saturated with strong, rather independent institutions (especially the subjects) even though their grip varies. The school leaders are generally tacitly aware of this and flexibly adapt to the situation, while most of them attempt to promote change, at least to some extent. This must be understood in order to grasp the successes and failures of change at this level of education.

References

Åberg-Bengtsson, L. (2009). The smaller the better? A review of research on small rural schools in Sweden. *International Journal of Educational Research, 48*(2), 100–108.

Act on Comprehensive Schools No. 14/1973.

Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women and Men No. 10/2008.

Act on Grammar Schools No. 12/1970.

Act on the Education and Recruitment of Teachers and Administrators of Preschools, Compulsory Schools and Upper Secondary Schools No. 87/2008.

Act on the School System and Educational Duties No. 22/1946.

Act on Upper Secondary Schools No. 57/1988.

Act on Upper Secondary Schools No. 80/1996.

Act on Vocational Education No. 68/1966.

Administrative Procedures Act No. 37/1993.

Advertisement on the Ratio of Units, Taught Lesson-Group Sizes and Changeable Norms in Upper Secondary Schools No. 4/2001.

Akkerman, S. F., Bronkhorst, L. H., & Zitter, I. (2013). The complexity of educational design research. *Quality and Quantity, 47*(1), 421–439. doi:10.1007/s11135-011-9527-9

Akureyri Junior College. (2015). Um Menntaskólann á Akureyri [About Akureyri Junior College]. Retrieved from http://www.ma.is/is/skolinn/um-menntaskolann-a-akureyri

Alderson, P., & Morrow, V. (2004). *Ethics, social research and consulting with children and young people* (Vol. 2). Barkingside: Barnardo's.

Alexiadou, N., Fink-Hafner, D., & Lange, B. (2010). Education policy convergence through the Open Method of Coordination: theoretical reflections and implementation in ‘old’ and ‘new’ national contexts. *European Educational Research Journal, 9*(3), 345–358.

Althing. (2014). *Nefndarálit um frumvarp til fjárlaga fyrir árið 2015. 144. löggjafarþing 2014–2015. Þingskjal 653 — 1. mál. 2. umræða [Committee report on the budget proposal for 2015. 144. congress from 2014 to 2015. Congress document no. 653 –Item 1. Discussion 2].* Retrieved from http://www.althingi.is/altext/144/s/0653.html

Althing. (2015). *Frumvarp til fjárlaga [The budget proposal]*. Parliament Retrieved from http://www.althingi.is/altext/pdf/144/s/0001.pdf

Amendment No. 71/2010 to the Upper Secondary School Act No. 92/2008.

Ansell, C., Boin, A., & Farjoun, M. (2015). Dynamic conservatism: How institutions change to remain the same. In M. S. Kraatz.), *Institutions and ideals: Philip Selznick's legacy for organizational studies* (pp. 89–119). Bingley: Emerald.

Association of Teachers in Upper Secondary Schools. (n.d.). Stytting náms til stúdentsprófs [Reduction of the length of studies leading to matriculation examination]. Retrieved from http://ff.ki.is/?PageID=855

Autti, O., & Hyry-Beihammer, E. K. (2014). School closures in rural Finnish communities. *Journal of Research in Rural Education (Online), 29*(1), 1–17.

Ball, S. J. (1987). *The micro-politics of the school: Towards a theory of school organization.* London: Methuen.

Ball, S. J., Maguire, M., & Braun, A. (2012). *How schools do policy: Policy enactments in secondary schools*. London: Routledge.

Ball, S. J., Maguire, M., Braun, A., & Hoskins, K. (2011a). Policy actors: Doing policy work in schools. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education, 32*(4), 625–639.

Ball, S. J., Maguire, M., Braun, A., & Hoskins, K. (2011b). Policy subjects and policy actors in schools: Some necessary but insufficient analyses. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education, 32*(4), 611–624.

Ball, S. J., & Youdell, D. (2007). *Hidden privatisation in public education. Report to Education International.* Brussels: Education International.

Barrow, R., & Milburn, G. (1990). *A critical dictionary of educational concepts. An appraisal of selected ideas and issues in educational theory and practice* (2nd Ed.). New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Barsh, J., Capozzi, M. M., & Davidson, J. (2008). Leadership and innovation. *MacKinsey Quality 2008 Number 1,* 37–47. Retrieved from http://fcollege.nankai.edu.cn/_upload/article/16/b8/df9c1562464086198aace3a57543/ffa06968-12af-4a4f-a312-71da0774e8bd.pdf

Bascia, N., & Maton, R. (2016). Teachers' work and innovation in alternative schools. *Critical Studies in Education, 57*(1), 131–141.

Besharov, M., & Khurana, R. (2015). Leading amidst competing technical and institutional demands: revisiting Selznick's conception of leadership. In M. S. Kraatz (Ed.), *Institutions and ideals: Philip Selznick's legacy for organizational studies* (pp. 53–88). Bingley: Emerald.

Binkley, M., Erstad, O., Herman, J., Raizen, S., Ripley, M., Miller-Ricci, M., & Rumble, M. (2012). Defining twenty-first century skills. In P. Griffin, B. McGaw, & E. Care (Eds.), *Assessment and teaching of 21st century skills* (pp. 17–66). Heidelberg: Springer.

Blau, P. M., & Scott, W. R. (1962). *Formal organizations: A comparative approach.* San Francisco: Stanford University Press.

Bleazby, J. (2015). Why some school subjects have a higher status than others: The epistemology of the traditional curriculum hierarchy. *Oxford Review of Education, 41*(5), 671–689. doi:10.1080/03054985.2015.1090966

Bolam, R., McMahon, A., Stoll, L., Thomas, S., Wallace, M., Greenwood, A., . . . Smith, M. (2005). *Creating and sustaining effective professional learning communities*. Nottingham: Department for Education and Skills.

Braun, A., Ball, S. J., Maguire, M., & Hoskins, K. (2011). Taking context seriously: Towards explaining policy enactments in the secondary school. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education, 32*(4), 585–596.

Braun, A., Maguire, M., & Ball, S. J. (2010). Policy enactments in the UK secondary school: Examining policy, practice and school positioning. *Journal of Education Policy, 25*(4), 547–560.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(4), 77–101.

Buchanan, D., & Huczynski, A. (2010). *Organizational behaviour* (7th ed.). Edinburgh: Pearson.

Burch, P. (2007). Educational policy and practice from the perspective of institutional theory: Crafting a wider lens. *Educational Researcher, 36*(2), 84–95.

Business Iceland. (n.d.). Mikilvægt að stytta nám [Important to reduce the length of education]. Retrieved from http://www.sa.is/frettatengt/eldri-frettir/mikilvaegt-ad-stytta-nam/

Çakıcı, D. (2015). Autonomy in language teaching and learning process. *İnönü Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi, 16*(1), 31–42. doi: 10.17679/iuefd.16168538

Chen, S., & Ke, Z. (2014). Why the leadership of change is especially difficult for Chinese principals: A macro-institutional explanation. *Journal of Organizational Change Management, 27*(3), 486–498.

Coburn, C. E. (2001). Collective sense making about reading: How teachers mediate reading policy in their professional communities. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 23*(2), 145–170.

Coburn, C. E. (2004). Beyond decoupling: Rethinking the relationship between the institutional environment and the classroom. *Sociology of Education, 77*(3), 211–244.

Coburn, C. E. (2005). Shaping teacher sensemaking: School leaders and the enactment of reading policy. *Educational Policy*, *19*(3), 476–509.

Conley, D. T. (1993). *Roadmap to restructuring: Policies, practices and the emerging visions of schooling.* Eugene: ERIC Clearinghouse.

Compulsory School Act No. 91/2008.

Cooper, A., Levin, B., & Campbell, C. (2009). The growing (but still limited) importance of evidence in education policy and practice. *Journal of Educational Change, 10*(2–3), 159–171. doi:10.1007/s10833-009-9107-0

Copland, M. A. (2003). Leadership of inquiry: Building and sustaining capacity for school improvement. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 4*(25), 375–395.

Cuban, L. (1988). *The managerial imperative and the paractice of leadership in schools*. New York: Sunny Press. Alabany: State University of New York Press

Cuban, L. (1992). *Curriculum stability and change*. New York: Macmillan.

Daun, H. (2007). Globalization and the governance of national education systems. In H. Daun (Ed.), *School decentralization in the context of globalizing governance* (pp. 5–26). Dordrecht: Springer.

Davíðsdóttir, S., Guðbjörnsdóttir, G., Sigurðardóttir, A. K., Jónsdóttir, A. H., Hansen, B., Jóhannsson, Ó. H., & Lárusdóttir, S. H. (2012). Efnahagshrunið og skólastarf í tveimur íslenskum sveitarfélögum: skólakreppa? [Economic meltdown and schooling in two Icelandic communities: A school crisis?]. *Netla – Online Journal on Pedagogy and Education*. Retrieved from http://netla.hi.is/menntakvika2012/014.pdf

Deng, Z. (2013). School subjects and academic disciplines. The differences. In A. Luke, A. Woods, & K. Weir (Eds.), *Curriculum syllabus design and equity. A primer and model* (pp. 40–53). New York: Routledge.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2005). *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Dewey, J. (1997). *Experience and education*. New York: Kappa Delta Pi.

Dickson, M. W., Castaño, N., Magomaeva, A., & Den Hartog, D. N. (2012). Conceptualizing leadership across cultures. *Journal of World Business, 47*(4), 483–492.

DiMaggio, P., & Powell, W. W. (1983). The iron cage revisited: Collective rationality and institutional isomorphism in organizational fields. *American Sociological Review, 48*(2), 147–160.

Domitrovich, C. E., Bradshaw, C. P., Poduska, J. M., Hoagwood, K., Buckley, J. A., Olin, S., . . . Ialongo, N. S. (2008). Maximizing the implementation quality of evidence-based preventive interventions in schools: A conceptual framework. *Advances in School Mental Health Promotion, 1*(3), 6–28.

DV. (2017). Verzló vinsælastur hjá nemendum sem ljúka grunnskóla í vor. 88 prósent 10. bekkinga sóttu um nám í framhaldsskóla í haust [Verzló is the most popular school for freshmen this spring. 88% 10th graders applied for upper secondary education]. Retrieved from https://www.dv.is/frettir/2017/4/19/verzlo-vinsaelastur-hja-nemendum-sem-ljuka-grunnskola-i-vor/

Eiríksdóttir, E. (2018). Variations in implementing the dual VET system: Perspectives of students, teachers and trainers in the certified trades in Iceland. In S. Choy, G. Wärvik, V. Lindberg & I. Berglund (Eds.), *Integration of vocational education and training experiences: Purposes, practices and principles*. Springer.

Eiríksdóttir, E., & Jóhannesson, I. Á. (2016). Sjónarmið stærðfræði- og verkgreinakennara í framhaldsskólum um hvaða öfl hafa áhrif á starfshætti: Námsmat og upplýsingatækni [Views of mathematics and vocational teachers in upper secondary schools about which forces impact assessment practices and the use of information technology]. *Icelandic Journal of Education, 25*(2), 197–218.

Erss, M., Kalmus, V., & Autio, T. H. (2016). 'Walking a fine line': teachers' perception of curricular autonomy in Estonia, Finland and Germany. *Journal of Curriculum Studies, 48*(5), 589–609.

Erez, M., & Gati, E. (2004). A dynamic, multi-level model of culture: from the micro level of the individual to the macro level of a global culture. *Applied Psychology*, *53*(4), 583–598.

European Commission. (2008). *The European qualifications framework for lifelong learning*. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-eqf/files/leaflet_en.pdf

Flaspohler, P., Duffy, J., Wandersman, A., Stillman, L., & Maras, M. A. (2008). Unpacking prevention capacity: An intersection of research-to-practice models and community-centred models. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 43*(3–4), 182–196.

Fraser, E. D., Dougill, A. J., Mabee, W. E., Reed, M., & McAlpine, P. (2006). Bottom up and top down: Analysis of participatory processes for sustainability indicator identification as a pathway to community empowerment and sustainable environmental management. *Journal of Environmental Management, 78*(2), 114–127.

Frost, D. (2012). From professional development to system change: teacher leadership and innovation. *Professional Development in Education, 38*(2), 205–227. doi:10.1080/19415257.2012.657861

Fullan, M. (2007). *The new meaning of educational change* (4th ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.

Fullan, M. (2009). *The challenge of change: Start school improvement now!* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Fullan, M. (2011). *Change leader: Learning to do what matters most*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Giddens, A. (1979). *Central problems in social theory: Action, structure, and contradiction in social analysis*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Giddens, A. (1984). *Constitution of society*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Gollifer, S., & Tran, A.-D. (2012). Exploring the rhetoric how does Iceland's curriculum reform address students diversity at the upper secondary school level? *Netla – Online Journal on Pedagogy and Education*.

Goodson, I. F. (2003). *Professional knowledge, professional lives: Studies in education and change*. Philadelphia: Open University Press.

Green, J., & Thorogood, N. (2004). *Qualitative methods for health research*. London: Sage.

Green, A., Leney, T., & Wolf, A. (1999). *Convergences and divergences in European education and training systems: a research project commissioned by the European Commission Directorate-General XXII (9282856771).* Luxembourg: Office for Official Publication of the European Communities. Retrieved from http://www.voced.edu.au/content/ngv:13800

Greenwood, R., Oliver, C., Suddaby, R., & Sahlin-Andersson, K. (2008). *The Sage handbook of organizational institutionalism*. London: Sage.

Guðmundsson, G. (1993). Sögulegt samhengi starfsmenntunar – helstu umbætur og umræður síðustu áratuga [Historical perspective of vocational education – Main reforms and discussions over the last decades]. In G. Guðmundsson (Ed.), *Þróun starfsmenntunar á framhaldsskólastigi* (p. 11). Reykjavík: Menntamálaráðuneytið.

Guðmundsson, G. Þ. (2010). Sameiginlegur fundur stjórnenda og trúnaðarmanna í framhaldsskólum [Joint meeting of school leaders and union representatives in upper secondary schools]. Retrieved from http://www.fjarmalaraduneyti.is/media/PPT-kynningar/Sameiginlegur_fundur.pdf

Guðmundsson, B. & Þorsteinsson, T. (2016). *Menntaskólinn á Egilsstöðum. Úttekt á starfsemi unnin fyrir mennta- og menningamálaráðuneyti [Egilsstaðir Upper Secondary School. External evaluation].* Retrieved from https://www.stjornarradid.is/lisalib/getfile.aspx?itemid=fab001c9-8cd2-11e7-941b-005056bc4d74

Gunnulfsen, A. E., & Møller, J. (2017). National testing. Gains or Strains? School leaders responses to policy demands. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, *16*(3), 455–474. doi:10.1080/15700763.2016.1205200

Guttormsson, L. (2008). *Alþýðufræðsla á Íslandi 1880–2007, fyrra bindi [Public Education in Iceland 1880–2007, first part]*. Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan.

Hallinger, P. (2003). Leading educational change: Reflections on the practice of instructional and transformational leadership. *Cambridge Journal of Education, 33*(3), 329–352.

Hammersley, M. (2005). Is the evidence-based practice movement doing more good than harm? Reflections on Iain Chalmers' case for research-based policy making and practice. *Evidence & Policy: A Journal of Research, Debate and Practice*, *1*(1), 85–100.

Hansen, F. B. (1987). *Secondary school reorganisation in Iceland: A policy analysis.* (Doctoral dissertation), University of Alberta, Edmonton.

Hansen, B., Jóhannsson, Ó. H., & Lárusdóttir, S. H. (2004). Yfirfærsla grunnskólans til sveitarfélaga. Valddreifing eða miðstýring [The transfer of compulsory schools to municipalities–centralization or decentralization?]. *Netla – Online Journal on Pedagogy and Education.* Retrieved from http://netla.hi.is/greinar/2004/007/prent/index.htm

Hansen, D. R., Bøje, J., & Beck, S. (2014). What are they talking about? The construction of good teaching among students, teachers and management in the reformed Danish upper secondary school. *Education Inquiry, 5*(4), 583–601.

Harðarson, A. (2010a). Hvaða áhrif hafði Aðalnámskráin frá 1999 á bóknámsbrautir framhaldsskóla? [What effects did the National Curriculum Guide from 1999 have on academic study lines in Icelandic secondary schools?]. *Netla – Online Journal on Pedagogy and Education*.Retrived from http://netla.hi.is/greinar/2010/014/index.htm

Harðarson, A. (2010b). Skilningur framhaldsskólakennara á almennum námsmarkmiðum [How teachers in secondary schools understand the general aims of education]. *Journal of Educational Research (Iceland*), *7*, 93–107.

Harðarson, A. (2011). Húmanisminn, upplýsingin og íslenska stúdentsprófið [Humanism, Enlightenment, and University Preparatory Education in Iceland]. *Skírnir, 185*(1), 123–144.

Hargreaves, A., & Fullan, M. (2012). *Professional capital: Transforming teaching in every school*. London: Routledge.

Hargreaves, A., & Goodson, I. (2006). Educational change over time? The sustainability and nonsustainability of three decades of secondary school change and continuity. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 42*(1), 3–41.

Hargreaves, A., & Shirley, D. (2012). *The global fourth way: The quest for educational excellence*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Harris, A. (2011). Distributed leadership: Implications for the role of the principal. *Journal of Management Development, 31*(1), 7–17.

Harris, A., Leithwood, K., Day, C., Sammons, P., & Hopkins, D. (2007). Distributed leadership and organizational change: Reviewing the evidence. *Journal of Educational Change, 8*(4), 337–347.

Hálfdanarson, G., Matthíasdóttir, S., Guðmundsson, M., & Karlsson, G. (2011). *Aldarsaga Háskóla Íslands 1911–2011 [A century's history of the University of Iceland 1911–2011].* Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan.

Hemsley-Brown, J., & Sharp, C. (2003). The use of research to improve professional practice: A systematic review of the literature. *Oxford Review of Education, 29*(4), 449–471.

Hodkinson, P., Biesta, G., & James, D. (2008). Understanding learning culturally: Overcoming the dualism between social and individual views of learning. *Vocations and Learning, 1*(1), 27–47.

Holm, A.-S., & Lundström, U. (2011). "Living with market forces". Principals' perceptions of market competition in Swedish upper secondary school education. *Education Inquiry, 2*(4), 601–617.

Hopkins, D., & Levin, B. (2000). Educational reform and school improvement. *NIRA review, 7*(3), 21–26.

Hord, S. M. (2008). Evolution of the professional learning community: Revolutionary concept is based on intentional collegial learning. *Journal of Staff Development, 29*(3), 10–13.

Horn, I. S., & Little, J. W. (2010). Attending to problems of practice: Routines and resources for professional learning in teachers' workplace interactions. *American Educational Research Journal, 47*(1), 181–217.

Hoy, W. K., & Miskel, C. G. (2013). *Educational administration: Theory, research, and practice* (9th Ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.

Huber, J., Mompoint-Gaillard, P., Degésys, L., Loizidou, P. H., Harris, R. J., Ivatts, A. R., & Lenz, C. (2011). *Teacher education for change*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

Hult, A., Lundström, U., & Edström, C. (2016). Balancing managerial and professional demands: school principals as evaluation brokers. *Education Inquiry, 7*(3), 283–304.

Industrial Vocational Act No. 45/1955.

Information Act No. 50/1996.

Ingólfsson, M. (2014). *The development of Icelandic secondary school policy: The contribution of school administrators between 1790 and 2004.* (Doctoral dissertation), University of Nottingham, Nottingham.

Ingvarsdóttir, H. (2006). ". . . eins og þver geit í girðingu". Viðhorf kennara til breytinga á kennsluháttum [". . . like a stubborn goat in a fence". Teachers perceptions on changed teaching methods]. In Ú. Hauksson (Ed.), *Rannsóknir í félagsvísindum VII, Félagsvísindadeild* (pp. 351–363). Reykjavík: Félagsvísindastofnun Háskóla Íslands.

Ingvarsdóttir, H. (2011). Teaching English in a new age. Challenges and opportunities. In B. Hudson & M. A. M. (Eds.), *Beyond fragmentation: Didactics, learning and teaching in Europe* (pp. 93–106). Opladen & Farmington Hills: Barbara Budrich.

Ingvarsson, M. (2008). Stjórnvald eða silkihúfa. Um hlutverk skólanefnda í íslenskum framhaldsskólum [Authority or silk cap. About the role of the school committees in Icelandic upper secondary schools]. *Icelandic Review of Politics & Administration, 4*(2), 13–34.

Johansson, O., Nihlfors, E., Steen, L. J., & Karlsson, S. (2016). Superintendents in Sweden: Structures, cultural relations and leadership. In L. Moss, E. Nihlfors, & J. M. Paulsen (Eds.), *Nordic superintendents: Agents in a broken chain* (pp. 139–173). Heidelberg: Springer.

Jones, M., & Harris, A. (2014). Principals leading successful organisational change: Building social capital through disciplined professional collaboration. *Journal of Organizational Change Management, 27*(3), 473–485.

Jóhannesson, I. Á. (2016). Teachers or technique? Some thoughts for Sverker Lindblad on contradictions in educational policy in Iceland. In G.-B. Wärvik, C. Runesdotter, E. Forsberg, B. Hasselgren, & F. Sahlström (Eds.), *Skola, lärare, samhälle – en vänbok till Sverker Lindblad* (pp. 259–274). Gothenburg: Institutionen för pedagogik och specialpedagogik.

Jóhannesson, I. Á., & Bjarnadóttir, V. S. (2016). Meaningful education for returning-to-school students in a comprehensive upper secondary school in Iceland. *Critical Studies in Education, 47*(1), 70–83.

Jóhannesson, I. Á., Geirsdóttir, G., & Finnbogason, G. E. (2002). Modern educational sagas: Legitimation of ideas and practices in Icelandic education. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research* (46), 265–282.

Jónasson, J. T. (1992). Þróun framhaldsskólans: Frá starfsmenntun til almenns bóknáms [The development of the upper secondary education: From vocational education to academic education]. *Icelandic Journal of Education, 1*(1), 173–189.

Jónasson. J. T. (1997). Students passing the Icelandic University Entrance Examination (UEE) 1911-94. *European Journal of Education*, *32*(2), 209–220.

Jónasson, J. T. (1998a). Upphaf nútímamenntakerfis á Íslandi [The beginning of today's education system] In G. J. Guðmundsson & E. K. Björnsson (Eds.), *Ráðstefnurit II* (pp. 355–358). Reykjavík: Sagnfræðistofnun Háskóla Íslands and Sagnfræðingafélag Íslands.

Jónasson, J. T. (1998b). The foes of Icelandic vocational education at the upper secondary level. In A.Tjeldvoll (Ed.), *Education and the Scandinavian welfare state in the year 2000: Equality, policy, and reform* (pp. 267–302). New York: Garland.

Jónasson, J. T. (2003). Does the state expand schooling? A a study based on five Nordic countries. *Comparative Education Review, 47*(2), 160–183.

Jónasson, J. T. (2008). *Samræmdur framhaldsskóli í mótun [The development of the upper secondary school]* (Vol. 1). Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan.

Jónasson, J. T. (2016). Educational change, inertia and potential futures. Why is it difficult to change the content of education? *European Journal of Futures Research, 4*(7), 1–14. doi:10.1007/s40309-016-0087-z

Jónasson, J. T., & Óskarsdóttir, G. (2016). Iceland: Educational structure and development. In T. Sprague (Ed.), *Education in Non-EU countries in Western and Southern Europe* (pp. 11–36). London: Bloomsbbury.

Jónsdóttir, A. H., Briem, E., Hreinsdóttir, F., Þórarinsson, F., Magnússon, J. I., & Möller, R. G. (2014). *Úttekt á stærðfræðikennslu í framhaldsskólum [Evaluation on math teaching in upper secondary schools]*. Reykjavík: Ministry of Education, Science and Culture.

Jónsdóttir, H. (2003). Viðtöl sem gagnasöfnunaraðferð [Interviews as a method for data collection]. In S. Halldórsdóttir & K. Kristjánsson (Eds.), *Handbók í aðferðafræði og rannsóknum í heilbrigðisvísindum [Handbook in methodology and research in health sciences]*. Akureyri: University of Akureyri.

Jónsson, A., & Pálsson, A. (2007). Er enn stefnt að nýskipan í opinberum rekstri? [Do we still aim for new public management in public institutions?]. *Icelandic Review of Politics and Administration, 3*(2), 265–272.

Justice Through Education. (2016). Nordic centre of excellence, justice through education in the Nordic countries. Retrieved from http://www.justed.org/

Kauko, J., Simola, H., Varjo, J., & Kalalahti, M. (2012). What could a dynamics perspective contribute to comparative research? In J. Kivirauma, A. Jauhianen, S. P., & K. T. (Eds.), *Koulutuksen yhteiskunnallinen ymmärrys. Social perspectives on education. Research in educational sciences* (pp. 219–233). Turku: Finnish Educational Research Association.

Keith, K. M. (2008). *The case for servant leadership.* Westfield, IN: Greenleaf Centre for Servant Leadership.

Kotter, J. P. (1996). *Leading change*. Boston: Harvard Business Press.

Kraatz, M. S. (2009). Leadership as institutional work: A bridge to the other side. In T. B. Lawrence, R. Suddaby, & B. Leca (Eds.), *Institutional work: Actors and agency in institutional studies of organizations* (pp. 59–91). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Kraatz, M., & Block, E. (2008). Organizational implications of institutional pluralism. In R. Greenwood, C. Oliver, R. Suddaby, & K. Sahlin-Andersson (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of organizational institutionalism,* (pp. 243–275). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Kraatz, M. S., & Moore, J. H. (2002). Executive migration and institutional change. *Academy of Management Journal, 45*(1), 120–143.

Kristinsson, G. H. (2006). *Íslenska stjórnkerfið [The Icelandic government]*. Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan.

Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2009). *Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Lambert, D. (2014). Subject teachers in knowledge-led schools. In M. Young & D. Lambert (Eds.), *Knowledge and the future school. Curriculum and social justice* (pp. 159–187). London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Lawrence, T. B., Leca, B., & Zilber, T. B. (2013). Institutional work: Current research, new directions and overlooked issues. *Organization Studies, 34*(8), 1023–1033.

Leithwood, K., Day, C., Sammons, P., Harris, A., & Hopkins, D. (2006). *Successful school leadership: What it is and how it influences pupil learning*. Nottingham: University of Nottingham. Retrieved from http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130401151715/http://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/RR800.pdf

Leithwood, K., Louis, K. S., Anderson, S., & Wahlstrom, K. (2004). *Review of research: How leadership influences student learning*. New York: The Wallace Foundation.

Leithwood, K., Mascall, B., & Strauss, T. (2009). *Distributed leadership according to the evidence*. London: Routledge.

Levin, B. (2004). Making research matter more. *Education Policy Analysis Archives, 12*(56), 1–20.

Levin, B. (2013). Improving secondary schools. In A. Luke, A. Woods, & K. Weir (Eds.), *Curriculum syllabus design and equity. A primer and model* (pp. 129–143). New York: Routledge.

Li, Y. (2011). Translating interviews, translating lives: Ethical considerations in cross-language narrative inquiry. *TESL Canada Journal, 28*(5), 16–30.

Liljenberg, M. (2015). School leaders as coupling agents: Mediating between external demands and internal values. *Education Inquiry, 6*(4), 457–479.

Lingard, B., & Gale, T. (2010). Presidential address as pedagogy. Representing and constituting the field of educational research (7th ed.). Rotterdam: Sense.

Little, D. (1991). *Learner autonomy: Definitions, issues and problems.* Dublin: Authentik.

Luke, A., Woods, A., & Weir, K. (2013). Curriculum design, equity and the technical form of the curriculum. In A. Luke, A. Woods, & K. Weir (Eds.), *Curriculum syllabus design and equity. A primer and model* (pp. 6–39). New York: Routledge.

Malone, H. J. (2013). *Leading educational change: global issues, challenges, and lessons on whole-system reform*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Markúsdóttir, E. M. (2015, November 19th). Stórfækkun eldri framhaldsskólanema milli ára [Large decrease of older upper secondary school students between 2014–2015]. *Fréttatíminn*. Retrieved from http://www.frettatiminn.is/storfaekkun-eldri-framhaldsskolanema-milli-ara/

Matthews, L. J., & Crow, G. M. (2009). *The principalship: New roles in a professional learning community*. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall.

McLaughlin, M. W. (1990). The Rand change agent study revisited: Macro perspectives and micro realities. *Educational Researcher, 19*(9), 11–16.

McLaughlin, M. W., & Talbert, J. E. (2001). *Professional community and the work of high school teaching*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

McLaughlin, M. W., & Talbert, J. E. (2006). *Building school-based teacher learning communities: Professional strategies to improve student achievement*. New York: Teachers College Press.

McMillan, J. H. (2012). *Educational research: Fundamentals for the consumer* (6th ed.). Boston: Pearson.

McQueen, R., & Knussen, C. (2002). Qualitative research. *Research methods for social sciences. An introduction*. Edinburgh: Prentice Hall.

Hamrahlíð College. (2016). Brot úr sögu skólans [Parts from the school history]. Retrieved from http://www.mh.is/skolinn/um-skolann

Meyer, J. W., & Rowan, B. (1977). Institutionalized organizations: Formal structure as myth and ceremony. *American Journal of Sociology, 83*(2), 340–363.

Ministry for Foreign Affairs. (n.d.). *Evrópuráðið [Council of Europe]*. Retrieved from http://www.utanrikisraduneyti.is/verkefni/althjoda-og-oryggissvid/evropuradid/

Ministry for the Environment and Natural Resources. (n.d.). *Velferð til framtíðar. Sjálfbær þróun í íslensku samfélagi. Stefnumörkun til 2020 [Well-being for the future. Sustainability in the Icelandic community. Policy until 2020]*. Reykjavík: Author Retrieved from http://www.umhverfisraduneyti.is/media/PDF_skrar/Velferd_til_framtidar_2002.pdf

Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. (2003). *Stytting náms til stúdentsprófs [Shorter matriculation examination programmes]*. Reykjavík: Author.

Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. (2004). *Breytt nám til stúdentsprófs – aukin samfella í skólastarfi [Changed education for matriculation examination programmes – Increased continuity in educational* practices*]*. Retrieved from http://rafhladan.is/bitstream/handle/10802/7572/namsskipan.pdf?sequence=1

Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. (1999). *The Icelandic national curriculum guide. General section 1999*. Reykjavík: Author.

Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. (2010a). *Mat á skólastarfi. Áætlun um ytra mat í framhaldsskólum, grunnskólum og leikskólum 2010–2012 [Evaluations in schools: A plan for external evaluations in upper secondary schools, compulsory schools, and pre-schools 2010–2012]*. Retrieved from http://www.menntamalaraduneyti.is/mat_a_skolastarfi_2010_2012.pdf

Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. (2010b). *Grunnþættir í menntun [Fundamental pillars in education]*. Retrieved from http://www.menntamalaraduneyti.is/media/MRN-pdf-namskrar/Grunntattir_i_menntun_juli2010.pdf

Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. (2012). *The Icelandic national curriculum guide for upper secondary schools. General section*. Reykjavík: Author.

Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. (2014a). *Framhaldsskólastig [The upper secondary school level].* Retrieved from http://www.menntamalaraduneyti.is/menntamal/framhaldsskolar/

Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. (2016). *Nemendum fækkar á framhalds- og háskólastigi [Fewer students in upper secondary schools and universities]*. Retrieved from https://www.menntamalaraduneyti.is/frettir/forsidugreinar/nemendum-faekkar-a-framhalds-og-haskolastigi

Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. (n.d.a). *Staðfestar námsbrautarlýsingar [Certified study programmes].* Retrieved from https://www.menntamalaraduneyti.is/utgefid-efni/namskrar/adalnamskra-framhaldsskola/nr/8157

Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. (n.d.b) *Skólasamningar [School contracts]. Retrieved from* https://www.stjornarradid.is/verkefni/menntamal/framhaldsskolar/skolasamningar/

Ministry of Finance. (2005). *Kjarasamningur KÍ og fjármálaráðherra [Salary contract between the Icelandic Teachers' Union and the State Treasury]*. Retrieved from http://www.fjarmalaraduneyti.is/starfsmenn-rikisins/kjarasamningar/2004-2008/KI04/

Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs. (2014). *Samkomulag um breytingar og framlengingu á kjarasamningi [Agreement on changes and extension of salary contract].* Retrieved from http://issuu.com/kennarasamband/docs/kjarasamningur_ki-ff_040414?e=10593660/7652687

Mitra, D., Serriere, S., & Stoicovy, D. (2012). The role of leaders in enabling student voice. *Management in Education, 26*(3), 104–112. doi:10.1177/0892020612445678

Moos, L., Kofod, K. K., & Brinkkjær, U. (2016). Danish superintendents as players in multiple networks. In L. Moos, E. Nihlfors, & J. M. Paulsen (Eds.), *Nordic superintendents: Agents in a broken chain* (pp. 25–63). Heidelberg: Springer.

Morgunblaðið. (1963, May 1st). *Er stúdentsmenntun á Íslandi orðin úrelt? [Is matriculation examination in Iceland outdated?]*, pp. 8–13. Retrieved from http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=112216&pageId=1350264&lang=is&q=J%F3hann%20Hannesson

Morrison, M. (2007). *What do we mean by educational research?* (2nd ed.). London: Sage.

Muijs, D. (2011). Leadership and organisational performance: from research to prescription? *International Journal of Educational Management, 25*(1), 45–60.

Mýrdal, S., Jóhannesson, I. Á., Geirsdóttir, G., & Finnbogason, G. E. (2001). Icelandic educators interviewed about governance and integration/exclusion. In S. Lindblad & T. S. Popkewitz (Eds.), *Listening to education actors on governance and social integration and exclusion* (pp. 207–238). Uppsala: Uppsala University.

National Audit Office. (2014). *Rekstrarstaða og reiknilíkan framhaldsskóla [Operational status and upper secondary schools' formula funding].* Retrieved from http://www.rikisendurskodun.is/fileadmin/media/skyrslur/Rekstrarstada_framhaldsskola.pdf

National Research Council. (2013). *Adapting to a changing world: challenges and opportunities in undergraduate physics education*. Washington: National academies press.

Nelson, S. R., Leffler, J. C., & Hansen, B. A. (2009). Toward a research agenda for understanding and improving the use of research evidence. *Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL)*, 1–69.

Nylund, M., Rosvall, P.-Å., Eiríksdóttir, E., Holm, A.-S., Isopahkala-Bouret, U., Niemi A.-M., and Ragnarsdóttir, G. (2018). The academic-vocational divide in three Nordic countries: Implications for social class and gender. *Education Inquiry*, *9*(1), 97–121. doi: 10.1080/20004508.2018.1424490

O'Reilly, K. (2008). *Key concepts in ethnography*. London: Sage.

Oliver, C. (1992). The antecedents of deinstitutionalization. *Organization Studies, 13*(4), 563–588.

Oterkiil, C., & Ertesvåg, S. K. (2012). Schools' readiness and capacity to improve matter. *Education Inquiry, 3*(1), 71–92.

Ólafsdóttir, B. (2016). Tilurð og þróun ytra mats á Íslandi frá 1991 til 2016 [The origin and development of external evaluation in Iceland from 1990-2016]. *Netla – Online Journal on Pedagogy and Education*. Retrieved from http://netla.hi.is/greinar/2016/ryn/14_ryn_arsrit_2016.pdf

Óskarsdóttir, G. G. (2012). *Skil skólastiga. Frá leikskóla til grunnskóla og grunnskóla til framhaldsskóla [Demarcation between school levels. From pre-schools to compulsory schools and from compulsory schools to upper secondary schools].* Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan.

Óskarsdóttir, G. G. (2016). *Upper secondary school practices in Iceland. Aims and methods. Research project 2012–2018.* Retrieved from http://menntavisindastofnun.hi.is/sites/menntavisindastofnun.hi.is/files/starfsh_frhsk_skyrsla_19.2.2016.pdf

Paulsen, J. M., & Høyer, H. C. (2016). Norwegian superintendents are mediators in the governance chain. In L. Moos, E. Nihlfors, & J. M. Paulsen (Eds.), *Nordic superintendents: agents in a broken chain* (pp. 99–138). Heidelberg: Springer.

Paulsen, J. M., Nihlfors, E., Brinkkjær, U., & Risku, M. (2016). Superintendent leadership in hierarchy and network. In L. moss, E. Nihlfors, & J. M. paulsen (Eds.), *Nordic superintendents: Agents in a broken chain* (pp. 207–231). Heidelberg: Springer.

Pétursson, H. M. (2014, October 15th). Aldurstakmörk sett á nemendur í framhaldsskólum [Age restriction on upper secondary school students]. *Vísir*. Retrieved from http://www.visir.is/aldurstakmork-sett-a-nemendur-i-framhaldsskolum/article/2014141019235

Pre School (Nursery Schools) Act No. 90/2008.

Prime Minister's Office. (n.d.). *Sóknaráætlun 20/20 [Iceland 2020 – Governmental Policy Statement for the Economy and Community]*. Retrieved from http://www.forsaetisraduneyti.is/verkefni/soknaraaetlun-2020/

Public Administration Act No. 37/1993.

Raffaelli, R. (2013). Identity and institutional change in a mature field: The re-emergence of the Swiss watchmaking industry, 1970–2008. Chestnut Hill, MA: Boston College.

Raffaelli, R., & Glynn, M. A. (2015). What's so institutional about leadership? Leadership mechanisms of value infusion. In M. Lounsbury (Ed.), *Institutions and ideals: Philip Selznick's legacy for organizational studies* (Vol. 44, pp. 283–316). Bingley: Emerald.

Ragnarsdóttir, G. (2012a). Stóraukið starfsálag í framahaldsskólum landsins! Fyrri hluti. [Increased workload in upper secondary schools in Iceland! First part]. *Skólavarðan, 1*(12), 32–35.

Ragnarsdóttir, G. (2012b). Stóraukið starfsálag í framhaldsskólum lansins! Seinni hluti [Increased workload in upper secondary schools in Iceland! Second part]. *Skólavarðan, 12*(2), 38–43.

Ragnarsdóttir, G. (2012c). Fjöldi í námshópum og þjónustan í kennslustofunni. [Number of students in student groups and classroom services] Retrieved from http://ff.ki.is/?PageID=3267

Ragnarsdóttir, G., & Jóhannesson, I. Á. (2014). Curriculum, crisis and the work and well-being of Icelandic upper secondary school teachers. *Education Inquiry, 5*(1), 43–67.

Ragnarsdóttir, G., Jóhannesson, I. Á., Jónasson, J. T., Halldórsdóttir, B. E., & Macdonald, A. (n.d.). *The availability and nature of publications targeted at upper secondary school level in Iceland from 2003 to 2012*. [Manuscript in review].

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist, 55*(1), 68–78.

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2008). Hedonia, eudaimonia, and well-being: An introduction. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 9*(1), 1–11. doi: 10.1007/s10902-006-9018-1

Research Ethics Committee. (2014). *Vísindasiðareglur Háskóla Íslands [University of Iceland research ethical codes].* Retrieved from https://www.hi.is/sites/default/files/atli/pdf/log_og_reglur/vshi_sidareglur_16_1_2014.pdf

Regulation on Formula Funding to Calculate the Teaching Cost at the Upper Secondary School Level No. 335/1999.

Reimers, F. M., & Chung, C. K. (2016). *Teaching and learning for the twenty-first century*. Harvard: Harvard Educational Publishing Group.

Reykjavík Junior College. (n.d.). Skólinn fyrr og nú [The school: Past and present]. Retrieved from http://www.mr.is/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=46&Itemid=1

Reykjavík School Inspectorate. (1971). *Sameinaður framhaldsskóli. Tillögur og greinargerð fræðsluráðs Reykjavíkur um stofnun tilraunaskóla á gagnfræða- og mennaskólastigi [United upper secondary education. Recommendations and analytics by the Reykjavik Education Council on the establishment of experimental school at the secondary level and grammar school level].* Reykjavík: Fræðsluskrifstofa Reykjavíkur.

Reynisdóttir, Á. H. (2012). *Skóli á tímamótum? Viðhorf reyndra framhaldsskólakennara til breytinga í skólastarfi [School at a crossroads? 25 years of school development in the eyes of experienced upper secondary school teachers in Iceland].* (Master thesis), University of Iceland, Reykjavík.

Reynisdóttir, Á. H., & Jóhannesson, I. Á. (2013). Fleiri vindar blása: viðhorf reyndra framhaldsskólakennara til breytinga í skólastarfi 1986–2012 [Increasing changes and challenges: school development 1986–2012 in the eyes of experienced upper secondary school teachers]. *Netla – Online Journal on Pedagogy and Education*. Retrieved from http://netla.hi.is/greinar/2013/ryn/006.pdf

Robinson, V. M., Lloyd, C. A., & Rowe, K. J. (2008). The impact of leadership on student outcomes: An analysis of the differential effects of leadership types. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 44*(5), 635–674. doi:10.1177/0013161X08321509

Rules on Evaluation Committee for Pre-schools, Compulsory Schools and Upper Secondary Schools No. 241/2009.

Samuelsson, K., & Lindblad, S. (2015). School management, cultures of teaching and student outcomes: Comparing the cases of Finland and Sweden. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 49*, 168–177.

Schimmelfennig, F., & Scholtz, H. (2008). EU democracy promotion in the European neighbourhood: political conditionality, economic development and transnational exchange. *European Union Politics*, *9*(2), 187–215.

Schwartz, S. H. (1999). A theory of cultural values and some implications for work. *Applied Psychology, 48*(1), 23–47.

Scott, W. R. (2014). *Institutions and organizations. Ideas, interests and identities* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Selznick, P. (1949). *TVA and the Grass roots. A study of politics and organization* (Vol. 3). London: University of California Press.

Selznick, P. (1957). *Leadership in administration: A sociological interpretation*. New York: Harper and Row.

Selznick, P. (1996). Institutionalism "old" and "new". *Administrative Science Quarterly, 42*(2), 270–277.

Sigurðardóttir, A. K. (2006). *Studying and enhancing the professional learning community for school effectiveness in Iceland* (Doctoral dissertation). University of Exeter, Exeter.

Sigurðardóttir, A. K. (2010). Professional learning community in relation to school effectiveness. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research, 54*(5), 395–412.

Sigurjónsdóttir, B. (2010). Heildarmat í grunnskólum Reykjavíkur 2007–2010 [Comprehensive external evaluation in compulsory schools in Reykjavík 2007–2010]. *Netla – Online Journal on Pedagogy and Education*. Retrieved from http://netla.hi.is/greinar/2010/016/index.htm

Sigurjónsdóttir, B., & Hansen, B. (2014). Gildi og áherslur skólastjóra í grunnskólum í Reykjavík [Values and emphases of principals in Reykjavik compulsory schools]. *Netla – Online Journal on Pedagogy and Education*.

Sleeter, C. (2014). Toward teacher education research that informs policy. *Educational Researcher, 43*(3), 146–153. doi: 10.3102/0013189X14528752.

Smeds, R., Haho, P., & Alvesalo, J. (2003). Bottom-up or top-down? Evolutionary change management in NPD processes. *International Journal of Technology Management, 26*(8), 887–902.

Smith, L. (2008). The dynamics of change. In L. Smith (Ed.), *Schools that change: Evidence-based improvement and effective change leadership* (pp. 11–52). Thousand Oaks, CA: Crown Press.

Smith, R. C. (2000) Starting with ourselves: Teacher-learner autonomy in language learning. In B. Sinclair, I. McGrath, and T. Lamb (Eds.) *Learner autonomy, teacher autonomy: Future directions* (pp. 89–99). London: Longman.

Snow, D. A., Rochford Jr, E. B., Worden, S. K., & Benford, R. D. (1986). Frame alignment processes, micromobilization, and movement participation. *American Sociological Review, 51*(4), 464–481.

Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Statistics Iceland. (2013a). *Students by level, type of education, field of study, broad field of study and gender 1997–2011. Education.* Retrieved from http://www.statice.is/Statistics/Education/Upper-secondary-schools

Statistics Iceland. (2013b). *Educational personnel in schools at upper secondary level by gender, occupation, type and location of school 1999–2012. Education.* Retrieved from http://www.statice.is/Statistics/Education/Upper-secondary-schools

Statistics Iceland. (2018a). Educational personnel in schools at upper secondary level by gender, teaching licence, age, teaching licence and education 1999–2012. Education. Retrieved from http://px.hagstofa.is/pxis/pxweb/is/Samfelag/Samfelag__skolamal__3_framhaldsskolastig__2_fsStarfsfolk/SKO03302.px/table/tableViewLayout1/?rxid=f283335c-0805-4cbf-838c-14c8c94470c4

Statistics Iceland. (2018b). Educational personnel in schools at upper secondary level by gender, work positions, school type and school location 1999–2012. Education. Retrieved from http://px.hagstofa.is/pxis/pxweb/is/Samfelag/Samfelag__skolamal__3_framhaldsskolastig__2_fsStarfsfolk/SKO03303.px/

Stefánsdóttir, D. (2001). *Vocational education and training in Iceland. Short description.* Thessaloniki: CEDEFOP.

Stein, M. K., & Coburn, C. E. (2008). Architectures for learning: A comparative analysis of two urban school districts. *American Journal of Education, 114*(4), 583–626.

Sverrisdóttir, H. R. (2013, August 15th). Stytting náms til stúdentsprófs [Reduction of the length of studies leading to matriculation examination]. *Vísir*. Retrieved from http://www.visir.is/stytting-nams-til-studentsprofs/article/2013130819482

Sverrisdóttir, S. K. (2014). *Ef að er gáð. Afdrif aðalnámskrár í íslensku á unglingastigi grunnskóla og í framhaldsskóla [On closer inspection. The realization of the national curriculum in the teaching of Icelandic in lower and upper secondary schools].* (Doctoral dissertation), University of Iceland, Reykjavík.

Technical College of Reykjavík. (n.d.). *Saga Tækniskólans – skóla atvinnulífsins [The history of Technical College of Reykjavík – School of trade].* Retrieved from http://www.tskoli.is/taekniskolinn/sagan/

Teachers' Union. (n.d.a). *Nýtt vinnumat fyrir framhaldsskólakennar [New working agreements for upper secondary school teachers].* Retrieved from http://verkefnisstjorn.is/kjarasamningur/

Teachers' Union (n.d.b). *Um Félag stjórnenda í framhaldsskólum [About the ssociation of deputy headteachers in upper secondary schools].* Retrieved from http://www.ki.is/adildarfelog/felag-stjornenda-i-framhaldsskolum/um-felagid-fs/um-felagid

The Althing Ombudsman. (2010). *Menntamál. Framhaldsskólar. Forgangsregla við innritun í framhaldsskóla. Lagaheimild stjórnvaldsfyrirmæla. Birting stjórnvaldsfyrirmæla. Réttmætar væntingar. (Mál nr. 5994/2010 og 6009/2010) [Education. Upper secondary schools. Rule of registration priority in upper secondary schools. Statutory authority administrative regulation. Publication administrative. Legitimate expectations. (Case No. 5994/2010 and 6009/2010)]*. Retrieved from http://www.umbodsmaduralthingis.is/ViewCase.aspx?Key=1682&skoda=mal

The Commercial College of Iceland. (2016). *Innritun vor 2016 [Enrollment spring 2016]*. Retrieved from http://www.verslo.is/thjonusta/innritun-2016/

The National Wage Council. (n.d.). *About the Wage Council [Um kjararáð].* Retrieved from http://www.kjararad.is/

Thorarensen, J. G., Vilmundarson, L. I., & Hilmarsson, H. (2008). *Skil á milli skólastiga, skýrsla unnin fyrir Menntaskólann við Sund veturinn 2007–2008. [The transition between school levels, a report for Sund Upper Secondary School the school year 2007–2008]*. Reykjavík: Menntaskólinn við Sund.

Thornton, P. H., & Ocasio, W. (2008). Institutional logics. In R. Greenwood, C. Oliver, K. Sahlin, & R. Suddaby (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of organizational institutionalism* (pp. 99–128). London: Sage.

Thornton, P. H., Ocasio, W., & Lounsbury, M. (2012). *The institutional logics perspective. A new approach to culture, structure, and process*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Thurlings, M., Evers, A. T., & Vermeulen, M. (2015). Toward a model of explaining teachers' innovative behavior: A literature review. *Review of Educational Research*, *85*(3), 430-471.

Tyack, D. & Cuban, L., (1995). *Tinkering toward utopia: A century of public school reform*. London: Harvard University Press.

University of Iceland. (2015). *Ítarefni fyrir stærðfræðihluta inntökuprófs í hagfræð [Related material for the mathematic part for the admission examination in economics].* Retrieved from http://www.hi.is/hagfraedideild/itarefni_fyrir_staerdfraedihluta_inntokuprofs_i_hagfraedi

University of Iceland. (2016a). *Inntökupróf – A-próf [Admission examination – A-test].* Retrieved from http://www.hi.is/lagadeild/inntokuprof_a_prof

University of Iceland. (2016b). *Inntökupróf [Admission examination].* Retrieved from http://www.hi.is/laeknadeild/inntokuprof

Upper Secondary Education Act No. 80/1996.

Upper Secondary Education Act No. 92/2008.

Vocational Education Act No. 46/1949.

Waks, L. J. (2007). The concept of fundamental educational change. *Educational Theory, 57*(3), 277–295.

Washington, M., Boal, K. B., & Davis, J. N. (2008). Institutional leadership: Past, present, and future. In R. Greenwood, C. Oliver, R. Suddaby, & K. Sahlin (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of organization institutionalism* (pp. 719–733). London: Sage.

Watzlawick, W., Weakland, J. H., & Fisch, R. (1974). *Change, principles of problem formation & problem resolution*. New York: Norton.

Weber, M. (1947). *The theory of social and economic organizations* (A. M. Henderson and T. Parsons, trans.). New York: Oxford University Press.

Webster, P. J., & John, T. A. (2010). Preserving a space for cross-cultural collaborations: an account of insider/outsider issues. *Ethnography and Education, 5*(2), 175–191.

Wheelahan, L. (2007). How competency-based training locks the working class out of powerful knowledge: a modified Bernsteinian analysis. *Review of British Journal of Sociology of Education, 28*(5), 637–650.

Yates, L. (2004). *What does good education research look like? Situating a field and its practices.* Berkshire: Open University Press.

Yow, V. R. (2005). *Recording oral history: A guide for the humanities and social sciences* (2nd ed.). Walnut Creek: Altamira.

Zilber, T. B. (2016). How institutional logics matter: A bottom-up exploration. In M. Lounsbury (Ed.), *Research in the Sociology of Organisations,* Vol 48A, (pp. 137–155). Bingley: Emerald.

Þorgeirsdóttir, H. (2016). *Investigating the use of action research and activity theory to promote the professional development of teachers in Iceland.* (Doctoral dissertation), University of Exeter, Exeter, and University of Iceland, Reykjavík.

Appendix A: Upper secondary school practices in Iceland

Teaching and learning – Student engagement and initiative

The main aim of the research was to provide an understanding of teaching and learning practices in upper secondary schools in Iceland and the moulding forces of their evolution. The research questions are: What is the spectrum of current practices in teaching and learning in Icelandic upper secondary schools and what do these practices indicate about the evolvement of the schools, with reference to educational structures, administration, physical learning environment and curriculum? How are the views of educators and students related to school practices and development? How do school practices succeed in engaging students and fostering their initiative as well as ensuring students' educational performance and progress towards their educational aims?

The study was designed around five interrelated strands that appear in the columns in Table 12 and themes, seen as rows in the table, that are interwoven in the strands. The strands formed the ground of the designed research tools.

In total 13 researchers, including graduate students, cooperated in the research design and the data collection. The data collection of the research project comprises interviews with school leaders and teachers and students in focus groups. The researchers interviewing students used pictures to evaluate their optimal physical learning environment. We also collected study plans and photos to evaluate the physical working environment in classrooms. In addition, we did classroom observation, and we used questionnaire for the researchers to use after observations.

Table 12. The overall research project

Strand	A	B	C	D	E
Focus	Structure initiatives and reforms	Views on teaching and learning	Physical learning environment	Teaching and learning – Classroom observation	Students' engagement
Coordinator	Jón Torfi Jónasson	Ingólfur Ásgeir Jóhannesson	Anna Kristín Sigurðardóttir	Hafdís Ingvarsdóttir	Kristjana Stella Blöndal
Research method and source	Interviews with school leaders	Interviews with teachers, and with students in focus groups	Pictures, classroom observations, interviews with students in focus groups	Classroom observations, interviews with students in focus groups, study plans	Interviews with school leaders, teachers, and students in focus groups
School	x		x		x
School culture	x	x		x	x
Teachers, methods, management, materials, tools	x	x	x	x	x
Students, attitude, learning, assessments, homework	x	x	x	x	x
Individualisation, participation and autonomy, creativity, initiative	x	x		x	x
Internal and external cooperation.	x	x			x
Professional development, educational change, educational research	x	x			x
Conjunction of academic and vocational studies and training	x	x		x	x
Background	x	x		x	x

Appendix B: The interview framework

Research: Upper secondary school practices in Iceland: Teaching and learning — Students' engagement and initiative 2013–2015. Translated by the author.

	The interview framework — school leaders (around 30–40 min.)
Introduction	Discuss the confidentiality, treatment of this interview, and the possibility to add comments and thoughts at the end.
Themes	The content, research questions, and theoretical background.
The school	What is your vision of educational practices? What characterises the school? What is the school policy (website) on education and human resources? How is the policy used? What is the strength of the school? What are the school's challenges (distinguish between the most difficult and the most common)? How would you describe the school culture? What ideas do you have on education for democratic citizenship (students- staff-working methods) and how have you combined the ideology of EDC into the school practices?
Students	The student groups? Diversity? Why do students quit the school? How does the school accommodate ideas on social justice? (I.e. Teaching and learning – special needs – study close to their home – disability and non-disability – student admission and the justice to learn). Is the school competing for students? What is the school's aim in this manner? Disposition of students? Do the school charter students drop out? Does the school accept dropout students? Commitment, efficiency, initiative and role of students? The school in everyday life of students? And support (motivation, supervision)?
Teachers: Teaching methods	Your job with teachers, how do you distribute tasks and motivate teachers in their work? What characterises teaching methods in your school? Is the focus on teaching or students learning? What development in teaching and learning takes place in the school? How is it progressing?
Assessment	Tell us about the assessment in the school? Its role? The rate of the total school time? Development of the assessment? Is there

	an assessment policy in the school? Is there a difference between departments/subjects?
Cooperation	What characterises teachers' cooperation in the school? Wow does competition, conflicts or tension appear between subjects and departments within the school? I.e. competition for students or supply of courses – Is the status of courses, subjects or departments equal within the school? Regarding leadership? Cross curricular work? Development in this manner? Cooperation with occupations or the labour market? How do school leaders proceed in professional decision making on learning and teaching within the school, i.e. on the curriculum of individual subjects, teaching methods?
Professional development and educational change	What forces constrain or facilitate change? What about renewal of content, decommissioning, status, competition, rural vs urban, sizes, supply and demand etc. What methods do you promote when implementing the curriculum? What are your ideas on teacher professional development? How does the school support teachers' professional development? What methods do you use to support professional development of employees? What is lacking in this manner? How much can you control (or do you have control over) in this development? Do you (school leadership) think that you should control more in this manner? How do the school practices respond to change? Teachers in general? Their initiative? What about ownership in relation to change? Or ownership in professional development? How do teachers use educational research for professional development? What is the role of teachers in changes in the school? What feelings do you have for ownership of teachers/students in the change? How have the grassroots been activated in the change? (Bottom-up vs top-town). What about ownership of change that is governed from the top? Do you see teachers somehow as leaders in the implementation? Do teachers feel ownership in the change? How does the change consolidate in the school? Do you think that change should play more of a part in everyday practices of schools? Participation and role of students in school development? What impact do the fundamental pillars have in the school?
Educational research	How much do you use educational research as a basis for change in the school? What about decisions based on research? What about teachers in this manner? What about influence of research on schools? Or how do you think research should be made accessible for educational staff?

	What about a) your time, b) teachers' time to work with educational research? What is the most useful way to make change: a) research, b) introduction on what is done in other places, c) cooperation with the universities? What are your ideas on the connection of research and school development? How does the school monitor the change that is implemented each time? Tell us about the internal and external evaluation in the school and how you use it.
External influences	The working environment of the school (i.e. running finance, politics, human resources, national curriculum guide, teacher education and housing and other facilities)? Changes in last decades? Main influences, facilitating or constraining? Which forces are at front? The ministry, labour market . . . . The development of the upper secondary school? The role of the upper secondary school? The upper secondary schools' strength and weaknesses? And the system the school level works after? How do you work around existing knowledge on research and innovation? How do you feel about the university level in the field of education? Tell us about your future vision in this manner.
The leader: Leadership style and background	Beginning of teaching/career? Leadership career? How would you describe your own leadership style? How does it fit with other leadership styles in the school? But school policy? What is your leadership role in the school? Do you think of yourself as a leader or an administrator first and foremost? Preparation (formal education) for your role as a leader? What do you do for your own professional development?
In the end	Ask if there is something missing from our conversation and if there is a reason to discuss it further.