



# **BECOMING AT HOME IN A GLOBALISED WORLD**

Citizenship and inclusion in relation to cultural diversity within  
the context of Icelandic education

**Eva Harðardóttir**

Thesis for the degree of Philosophiae Doctor

November 2023

**School of Education**

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## Abstract

The Icelandic education system has developed largely in line with the Nordic social welfare model emphasising principles of democratic citizenship and inclusion. In the past two decades, Iceland has moved from marginal immigration to being one of the highest immigrant intake countries in Europe. Based on three separate studies and subsequent peer-reviewed articles, this PhD project seeks to understand how citizenship and inclusion are presented and perceived in relation to cultural diversity within the context of Icelandic education. The research draws on critical scholarly work on global citizenship education (GCE) and inclusion in conjunction with selected conceptual ideas from Hannah Arendt; in particular her metaphor of visiting as a way to engage with diversity.

The research includes an analysis of policy documents, unstructured group interviews with teachers and semi-structured individual interviews with parents with immigrant and refugee status. It also includes a theoretical inquiry into the role of GCE as an inclusive way of engaging with cultural diversity within national educational settings. The research thus contributes to the broad range of studies pertaining to educational inclusion of immigrants and refugees. It is unique in the way it makes use of diverse data and analysis as pertaining to the education of migrant students and the significance of GCE.

Findings from the analysis of policy documents and the teachers' narratives indicate overlapping discursive orientations of citizenship and inclusion as assimilative *being* on the one hand and as competitive *performance* on the other. The analysis of the parents' interviews suggests that parents with diverse sociocultural background, education and migration trajectories, experience various forms of internal exclusion within Icelandic schools. That is where their perspectives and experiences are either invalidated or disregarded completely. Such notions risks maintaining and recreating binary and unequal power positions between Icelandic parties on the one hand and immigrants and refugees on the other.

The doctoral project points out the importance of approaching citizenship and inclusion in a critical and decentered manner. It is encouraged that in order for "the young and new" citizens to be able to develop and share their unique perspectives within the space of Icelandic schools, dominant actors within the field of education must put themselves in the role of the 'visitor' who seeks to engage with the perspectives of immigrants and refugees with the aim to develop and revise a vision of what it means to be a citizen and to belong in a globalised world.

# Ágrip

Íslenskt menntakerfi hefur að mestu leyti þróast í samræmi við norræna velferðarhefð þar sem áhersla er lögð á lýðræði, jafnrétti og inngilding. Á unfanförnum tveimur áratugum hefur innflytjendum og flóttafólki fjölgað jafnt og þétt á Íslandi. Doktorsverkefnið byggir á þremur aðskildum en tengdum rannsóknum þar sem meginmarkmiðið er að skilja hvernig borgarvitund og inngilding birtast í tengslum við menningarlegan margbreytileika á íslenskum menntavettvangi. Fræðilegur bakgrunnur verkefnisins byggir á gagnrýnum kenningum um hnattræna borgaramenntun (e. global citizenship education) auk þess sem leitað var til klassískra kenninga Hönnu Arendt og þá sérstaklega myndlíkingar hennar um mikilvægi þess að taka mið af og *heimsækja* (e. visiting) mismunandi sjónarmið ólíkra aðila.

Rannsóknin byggir á greiningu á íslenskum stefnuskjölum, hópviðtölum við kennara og einstaklingsviðtölum við foreldra með stöðu innflytjenda og flóttafólks. Þá fór einnig fram fræðileg greinig á þýðingu hnattrænnar borgaramenntunar sem inngildandi leiðar til að mæta menningarlegum margbreytileika í skólastarfi. Rannsóknin er því mikilvægt framlag til þeirra fjölmörgu og ólíku menntarannsókna sem láta sig inngildinguna innflytjenda og flóttafólks varða. Sérstaða rannsóknarinnar felst einnig í fjölbreyttri gagnaöflun og greiningu sem snýr að menntun barna og ungmenna af erlendum uppruna og þýðingu hnattrænnar borgaramenntunar í því sambandi.

Niðurstöður á greiningu stefnumótunarskjala og orðræðu kennara varpa ljósi á viðteknar og samvirkandi hugmyndir um borgaravitund og inngildinguna sem byggja ýmist á orðræðu um samlögun eða samkeppni og frammistöðu einstaklinga. Þá benda frásagnir foreldra af ólíkum uppruna og með mismunandi bakgrunn til þess að þau upplifi öll innri útilokun á vettvangi menntunar þar sem sjónarhorn þeirra og reynsla er ekki tekin gild. Slíkt skapar hættu á að viðhalda ójafnri valdastöðu á milli íslenskra aðila annars vegar og innflytjenda og flóttafólks hins vegar.

Í doktorsritgerðinni er bent á mikilvægi þess að nálgast hugmyndir um borgaravitund og inngildinguna á gagnrýnin og afmiðjaðan hátt. Hvatt er til þess að „hinir ungu og nýju“ borgarar fái tækifæri til að móta og deila viðhorfum sínum og reynslu á sameiginlegum vettvangi skólasamfélagsins. Þetta þýðir að ráðandi aðilar á íslenskum menntavettvangi þurfa að geta sett sig í hlutverk 'gestsins' sem sækist eftir því að hlusta á raddir innflytjenda og flóttafólks og nýta þau viðhorf til að endurskoða og þróa sýn á hvað það þýðir að vera borgari og að tilheyra í hnattvæddum heimi.



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## List of papers comprising this thesis

### Article I

Harðardóttir, Magnúsdóttir & Dillabough. (2019). Understanding the politics of inclusion, the 'refugee' and the nation: Analysis of public policies and teachers' narratives in Iceland. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 25(2), 239 - 258. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2019.1707306>

### Article II

Harðardóttir, Lay & Magnúsdóttir. (2023). Performing the norm in the Global North: Migrant parents' positions and participation within Icelandic schools. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 44(6), 1051-1066. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2023.2237198>

### Article III

Harðardóttir & Jónsson. (2021). Visiting the forced visitors: Critical and decentered approach to Global Citizenship Education as an inclusive educational response to forced youth migration. *Journal of Social Science Education*, 20(2), 26-46. <https://doi.org/10.11576/jsse-3970>

### Peer-reviewed articles in Icelandic written in relation to the PhD project:

Harðardóttir, E. (2022). Að varðveita heiminn: Hannah Arendt og menntakrísan. [Preserving the world. Hannah Arendt and the education crisis]. *Netla, Online Journal on Pedagogy and Education*. <https://ojs.hi.is/netla/article/view/3623>

Harðardóttir, E. & Magnúsdóttir, B. R. (2018). Að þreifa sig áfram í myrkrinu: Ríkjandi stefnur og straumar um ungt flóttafólk í grunn- og framhaldsskólakerfi. [Finding your way in the dark: Policy discourse and directions in the compulsory and upper-secondary education system in Iceland]. *Icelandic Review of Politics and Administration*, 14(3), 183-204. <http://www.irpa.is/article/view/a.2018.14.3.2>

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# 1 Introduction

Global migration in the form of the movement of people between geographical borders, either free or forced, is not a new phenomenon. Yet, scholars generally recognise its unique impact on education today in relation to citizenship, inclusion, and diversity (Banks, 2009; Tarozzi & Torres, 2016). This PhD project, entitled “Becoming at home in a globalised world: Citizenship and inclusion in relation to cultural diversity within the context of Icelandic education,” is a contribution to the broad range of studies pertaining to the inclusion of immigrants and refugees within national educational settings and to the expanding scholarship on global citizenship education (GCE).

Previous research in Iceland has offered critical accounts of inclusive education (Bjarnason et al., 2016; Jónsson; 2016; Magnúsdóttir, 2016), citizenship education (Aðalbjarnardóttir, 2011), and multicultural education, focusing on policy and practice (Guðjónsdóttir et al., 2016; Gunnþórsdóttir & Ragnarsdóttir, 2020; Huilla et al., 2022; Jóhannesson, 2007; Ragnarsdóttir & Jónsdóttir, 2010; Ragnarsdóttir & Kulbrandstad, 2018), including the perspective of parents (Gunnþórsdóttir et al., 2018; Peskova & Ragnarsdóttir, 2018; Ragnarsdóttir, 2020). Still, few, if any, studies have made constructive links between these topics the way I attempt to do in this thesis.

Global and relational aspects of citizenship and inclusion have gained increasing prevalence in recent years within education research, policy, and practice. Torres (2017) traces the rise of GCE to the Global Education First Initiative (UNESCO, 2015), where “fostering global citizenship” was introduced as one of the key pillars of education, given equal importance as providing access to education and ensuring the quality of education. More recently, the link between citizenship, inclusion, and cultural diversity was highlighted as part of the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) framework. In particular within target 4.7 where fostering global citizenship and the appreciation of cultural diversity are considered essential for achieving inclusive and equitable education for all (UN, 2015).

Iceland’s long-standing social democratic history, comparatively equitable education system (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2017; Sigurðardóttir et al., 2014), and fast-growing cultural diversity, combine for

interesting case to explore the ways citizenship and inclusion are presented and perceived within the context of education. A homogenous country until recently, Iceland is now a multicultural society. From 1996 to 2008, immigration increased from 2% to 9% of the population. The increase reached 13% in 2018, with the immigrant population standing at 16.3% of Iceland's approximately 380,000 micro-population by 2022 (Statistics Iceland, 2022). Although Iceland accepts substantially fewer refugees than its neighbouring countries, the number of people seeking and receiving international protection has grown significantly since 2015 in line with global migration trends (Directorate of Immigration, 2021; UNHCR, UNICEF, & IMO, 2019).

The idea for this PhD project arose as early as 2007, when Sigrún Aðalbjarnardóttir, Professor at the University of Iceland, offered me, as an undergraduate student, the opportunity to assist in her research on young people's civic awareness and citizenship education. The collaboration resulted in research focused on democratic discussions and human rights (Aðalbjarnardóttir & Harðardóttir, 2012, 2018). I knew immediately upon beginning of this assistantship that I had found a topic that I could continue to explore from various perspectives for the foreseeable future. A year later, when I enrolled into a joint MA programme on Education Policy and Management, based in Denmark and Spain, I chose to examine citizenship from the perspectives of global and national education policies.

The MA programme opened my eyes to some of the key theoretical concepts I make use of in this thesis—for example, the educational work of Hannah Arendt and her notion of visiting as a way to engage with diversity (Arendt, 2006; Biesta, 2006). But perhaps more importantly, the programme offered me an invaluable opportunity to position myself anew within a close group of students who came mostly from countries outside of Europe, some with immigrant and refugee backgrounds. Through their stories, perspectives, and experiences, I was able to reflect more critically than ever before on my own position as a privileged, white, middle-class citizen, holding a passport from a peaceful and high-income country in the Global North.

Finally, this PhD project is influenced by the experiences I gained as an education officer working for UNICEF in Malawi from 2013-2016. These three years taught me a great deal about the essence of education. I asked myself every day, what does it take for a school to be the safe place we expect it to be and for meaningful educational moments to emerge? Does it need a roof? Access to water and electricity? Trained teachers or more books? For a while I struggled with the idea that I had spent too much time and effort on trivial topics like democratic



participation and global citizenship while millions of children were being left without access to any education at all.

To an extent, I was right. The bare essentials of citizenship in the form of the economic, political, and social rights of people can never be left untended to when considering the role of democratic and global citizenship within education (Torres, 2017). However, it was also in some of the most constrained contexts that I witnessed teachers facilitate a truly inclusive space for their students to become meaningfully engaged with the collective—themselves, each other, and the world at large.

In this thesis, I try to capture and discuss these often-elusive elements of citizenship and inclusion within education through the findings of three independent yet interrelated qualitative studies that underpin the three peer-reviewed articles that comprise this thesis. The first study approaches citizenship and inclusion from the standpoint of policy discourse, including the narratives of Icelandic teachers experienced in working with culturally diverse students. The second considers experiences of immigrant and refugee parents in relation to their positions and participation in their children's education. The third study theoretically outlines a critical and decentered approach to global citizenship education (GCE) as one way for teachers to engage more inclusively with cultural diversity within national educational contexts.

## **1.1 Purpose, relevance, and novelty**

The main purpose of this research is to understand the way citizenship and inclusion are presented and perceived in relation to increased cultural diversity within the context of Icelandic compulsory and upper-secondary education. As noted, this is an important question to ask when considering Iceland's increasingly multicultural landscape, long-standing social and democratic history, and seemingly inclusive education system. While an extensive body of Icelandic research is concerned with inclusive and multicultural education, global and relational dimensions of citizenship remain underexplored (Halldórsdóttir et al., 2016). The present research thus makes an important contribution to scholarship that brings attention to global citizenship within the context of Icelandic education and its possible role in engaging more inclusively with cultural diversity.

The project is theoretically and methodologically driven by an urge to understand the topic at hand from different perspectives, which is why I chose to make use of diverse qualitative methods when collecting and analysing the data. In Studies 1 and 2, I used public policy documents, non-structured group interviews with teachers, and semi-structured individual interviews with immigrant and refugee

parents. Study 3 was a theoretical inquiry conducted in collaboration with my second supervisor wherein we explored and reformulated existing GCE typologies in relation to selected theoretical concepts offered by Arendt and Dewey. The inquiry was also an attempt to link critical GCE to pedagogical practices. Together, the findings of these studies can offer an empirical, theoretical, and practical understanding of how citizenship and inclusion are understood in relation to cultural diversity within the context of Icelandic education.

More specifically, Studies 1 and 2 offer a consideration of the way policy discourse, underpinned by different ideological overlaps and tensions, has the potential to shape educational practices, which in turn work to strengthen rather than interrupt existing frameworks, including binary and unequal power positions within the space of Icelandic schools. As such the findings raise critical questions around prevailing notions of citizenship and inclusion as a linear process achieved through assimilative modes of being or competitive performance. Partially as a response to the findings of Studies 1 and 2, study 3 aimed at understanding how critical GCE, read in relation to Arendt's ideas on education and the concept of visiting, can work to support more inclusive responses to cultural diversity within the scope of Icelandic education policy and practice.

The theoretical objective of the research is unique in the way it draws on the classical work of Arendt in conjunction with more recent scholarly work on GCE, aiming to gain a new perspective on how to engage with growing cultural diversity within national education contexts. An issue often framed as a crisis to which education must respond (Tarozzi & Torres, 2016). Icelandic scholars within the field of education have yet to explore the potential of Arendt's work as a way to think anew about the role of education in today's globalised world. My wish is for the present thesis to spark interesting discussions in this regard. Finally, I hope for this thesis to serve as a valuable and timely contribution to education policy discussions and practical developments, wherein questions of citizenship and inclusion are considered from a global perspective and schools are understood as places where diversity can grow, and new ideas can emerge about what it means to be a citizen and to be included.

## 1.2 Thesis structure

This thesis consists of seven chapters. In the first chapter, I present the importance of exploring citizenship and inclusion in relation to growing cultural diversity within the field of education in Iceland and beyond. The chapter also states the purpose and particular relevance of the research. The second chapter presents the Icelandic context, offering a brief reflection on key historical and current education policy

developments contributing to the topic of this research. Here, I also clarify my use of the concepts of immigrant and refugee in this thesis. In Chapter 3, I discuss the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of the thesis, which is followed by a discussion of previous research in Chapter 4. In Chapter 5, I present the research methodology and design, data collection, analysis, and ethical considerations. Chapter 6 contains a summary of the three articles comprising this thesis, while Chapter 7 presents a discussion of the overall findings in relation to the conceptual background. In this chapter, I attempt to build a bridge between the overall findings from the three articles by pointing out similar tensions and challenges among them while also reflecting on the possibility of viewing citizenship and inclusion from a critical and decentered perspective.



## **2 Icelandic context**

In this chapter, I offer a brief account of historical and current education policy developments in Iceland relating specifically to democratic citizenship, inclusion, and cultural diversity. I also address the situation of immigrants and refugees in Iceland and clarify my use of related concepts.

### **2.1 Reflections on democracy and inclusion within the national education policy**

Public education in Iceland has developed largely in line with the Nordic social welfare model, emphasising principles of democracy, equality, and inclusion (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2017; Sigurðardóttir et al., 2014). These values are reflected in a comparatively integrated education system (Wolff et al., 2021) where only 1% of students are enrolled in special schools or classes (Marínósson & Bjarnason, 2014).

The idea of free public education being accessible to all children, regardless of their background, can be traced back to a piece of 1907 legislation on education, although it was not formalised until 1974 with the establishment of the Compulsory School Act (Act on Compulsory Schools No 63/1974). The Act explicitly mandated equal access to education for all children, regardless of background or abilities. It also established the strong social and democratic role of Icelandic schools today, which is to prepare all children, in cooperation with the home, for participation in a continuously changing democratic society (Compulsory School Act No 91/2008; Upper Secondary Education Act No 92/2008). Interestingly, this outward-looking policy was developed at a time during which Iceland was still largely considered a monocultural society, with extremely few people representing different socio-cultural backgrounds or experiences.

The Compulsory School Act (91/2008) and the Upper Secondary Education Act (92/2008) clearly formalised the inclusive role of basic education in Iceland by declaring that schools should serve as “schools for all” without any exclusion. Nevertheless, as noted by Óskarsdóttir et al. (2019), the act also portrayed an individualised understanding of inclusion—for example, by depicting students whose native language is not Icelandic as in need of special training to compete with the Icelandic norm.

The paradox between the widespread will for inclusion at all levels of education in Iceland and the emerging impact of individualised policy discourse based on competition has been discussed for many decades. In 2002, Jónasson wrote:

[...] there are a host of areas of potential conflict between these two sides and in practice they don't add up very well. The goals that will most likely survive are the ones which are transparent, such as standards, benchmarks, tests and curricula and goals with stakes attached, such as ranking of some sort. The rest [inclusion and democratic practices] will continue to be pushed aside. (Jónasson, 2002, p. 669)

Today, scholars continue to reiterate this particular paradox in relation to the way education policy documents in Iceland are largely developed through a process of replicating global instrumental policy ideals deriving mostly from OECD, without significant localisation or critique (Magnúsdóttir & Jónasson, 2022; Jónasson et al., 2021).

Indicators of non-inclusive policy influences within the field of education in Iceland are perhaps most evident within the upper-secondary level, which has developed to reflect a divided landscape wherein some schools are permitted to select high-achieving students who tend to come from privileged social backgrounds and have access to more resources, while other schools are required to respond to a growing and shifting spectrum of diversity among student populations (Eiríksdóttir et al., 2021; Magnúsdóttir & Kosunen, 2022). While a free school choice policy has not been mandated at the compulsory education level, developments nevertheless indicate a gradual divide between school neighbourhoods based on socio-cultural background and economic capital (Magnúsdóttir et al., 2021).

Parallel to the above-mentioned developments, the government has also initiated more critical policies. Of particular importance to this project are the fundamental pillars of education, introduced in the wake of the economic collapse in 2008 which fuelled a public quest for education to be more directed at ensuring an equitable and just society (Jónsson, 2018). The pillars are comprised of six thematic areas that should underpin curricula and practices from preschool through upper-secondary education (Directorate of Education, 2013). Of specific importance to the work of this thesis are the following three pillars: equality, democracy and human rights, and sustainability.

Within the pillar of equality, an inclusive school is defined on the basis of the recognition of diversity and difference and the rejection of uniformity (Dýrfjörð et al., 2013). Similarly, the pillar of democracy and human rights indicates that

striving for inclusion and participation demands moving away from assimilative notions of being and acting towards coexistence and cooperation based on human dignity and diversity (Jónsson & Sigurðardóttir, 2012). Finally, reflecting the ideals above where inclusion is based on respect for human plurality, the pillar of sustainability stresses how equality for every new generation is a vital part of sustainability. Meaning that if people are denied meaningful participation and inclusion within public spaces such as schools, on the grounds of cultural diversity, sustainability will not be achieved (Helgadóttir, 2013). The content and focus of the fundamental pillars bear remarkable resemblance to SDG 4.7, reflecting an inclusive vision of education based on democratic and global citizenship, cultural diversity, and difference. Yet, the fundamental pillars have received little attention as part of recent education policy and practice in Iceland in comparison to other more instrumental priorities that tend to be based on competition and rank (Jónsson et al., 2021).

## **2.2 Immigrants and refugees in Iceland**

As discussed in the introduction, Iceland has generally been considered a country of emigration rather than immigration. Over the past two decades, however, the number of immigrants, and more recently refugees, has grown significantly. The immigrant population in Iceland increased from 2% in 1996 to 9% in 2008. After the economic crash of that year, immigration dropped slightly but quickly increased again, currently standing at 16.3% of Iceland's total population (Statistics Iceland, 2022). This has shifted Iceland from being one of the European countries with the lowest immigrant intake to being one of the most multicultural countries in the region. The largest groups of immigrants come from other European countries, most commonly from Poland and Lithuania; the number of immigrants from other areas, including Asian and African countries, has grown notably over the past few years (Statistics Iceland, 2022).

Although Iceland does not accept large numbers of refugees in proportion to its neighbouring countries, more people than ever before have now received a refugee status in the country, either via the UNHCR resettlement programme or after being granted international protection. Currently, people arriving from Syria, Ukraine, Venezuela, and Palestine represent the largest groups of refugees in Iceland (Directorate of Immigration, 2021). The immigrant and refugee population in Iceland is relatively young, comprised of young individuals or families with children. This is reflected, for example, in the fact that currently, 14% of all compulsory school children in Iceland report speaking a first language other than Icelandic (Statistics Iceland, 2023).

Both immigrants and refugees are generally well perceived in Iceland, especially amongst young people (Aðalbjarnardóttir & Harðardóttir, 2018; Markúsdóttir & Aðalbjarnardóttir, 2013). Studies have tended to report comparatively stable and positive attitudes towards immigrants (Ministry of Social Affairs, 2019; Önnudóttir, 2009), with recent research noting that more than 75% of Icelanders agree or strongly agree with the statement that immigrants bring positive change to society (Sölvason et al., 2021). Similarly, attitudes towards refugees measure relatively positive overall, with 40% of the Icelandic population stating that Iceland should accept more refugees (Prósent, 2022).

However, studies have also noted how such positive attitudes tend to be influenced by peoples' backgrounds, with immigrants from Africa and the Middle East receiving the least amount of public support (Maskína, 2015). What this indicates is how culture is often used to divide people into homogenous groups (Skaptadóttir & Loftsdóttir, 2009) resulting in marginalisation or exclusion. Students with immigrant and refugee backgrounds in Iceland seem to face similar challenges as young immigrants and refugees in other national education systems (Dryden-Petersson, 2018; UNHCR, 2016). This includes academic challenges, lower levels of educational attainment (Garðarsdóttir et al., 2022) as well as challenges in building and maintaining friendship with Icelandic peers (Rúnarsdóttir & Vilhjálmsón, 2019; Tran, 2015).

## 2.3 Conceptual clarifications

In this thesis, I focus both on immigrants and refugees. As discussed in more detail in the methodology chapter, the initial research focus was on refugees but developed to include immigrants as well. The changes were made in response to concerns raised by the participating teachers in Study 1 and to better reflect the demographic landscape of the majority of Icelandic schools, in which immigrant and refugee students are enrolled together as part of mainstream classes.

As explained in Article 2, I do not consider immigrants and refugees to be a homogenous group with fully compatible perspectives and experiences. I do, however, believe that analysing citizenship and inclusion in relation to, and from the perspective of, those who are generally regarded as newcomers, is key in developing more just and inclusive education policies and practices. I tend to struggle with labels such as first- and second-generation immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, as I often find them unhelpful in defining the challenges and opportunities of people with diverse socio-cultural backgrounds and migration experiences. Nevertheless, such terms are important, for example, with regard to



structural elements of inclusion and exclusion, making it necessary to clarify their meanings as used within this thesis.

In this context, a first-generation *immigrant* is a person born outside Iceland, with parents and grandparents who were also born outside the country. A second-generation immigrant is a person born in Iceland whose parents were both born outside Iceland (Statistics Iceland, 2009). The immigrant parents interviewed for this thesis were all first-generation immigrants although their length of stay in Iceland varied.

A *refugee* is a person who has fled war, violence, conflict, or persecution and has crossed international borders to find safety in another country (UNHCR, 1951). In Iceland, people who seek asylum and people who are offered resettlement via the UNHCR programme are all, by law, considered refugees (Foreign Nationals Act 80/2016); however, in practice, different rules continue to be applied in terms of social and educational services (Government of Iceland, 2022; Harðardóttir & Magnúsdóttir, 2018). The refugee parents interviewed for this thesis obtained their refugee status either via the UNHCR programme or after being granted international protection.



## **3 Theoretical background**

This chapter presents the theoretical background of the project. I start by discussing the significance of global citizenship education (GCE) by drawing on the work of scholars writing from a critical and pedagogical point of view. The following section addresses the paradox of inclusion and exclusion, as well as how it plays out in relation to cultural diversity. The final section (with two sub-sections) is devoted largely to the educational writings of Hannah Arendt and her notion of visiting. The discussion is a way to bring her conceptual ideas into the current educational debate and to think anew about citizenship and inclusion in relation to increased cultural diversity within national educational settings.

### **3.1 Global citizenship education (GCE): Critical and pedagogical approaches**

Scholarship on GCE has grown considerably over the past few decades in response to demands for post-national forms of citizenship (Andreotti, 2006) and to support an educational framework that engages with global challenges, including increased migration and resulting cultural diversity (Banks, 2009; Tarozzi & Torres, 2016). While the notion of global citizenship is bound to raise questions in relation to more conventional, national and legal forms of citizenship, authors writing within the field of education have pointed to how the concept has proven its importance in offering a nuanced understanding of what it means to be an included member of a given society—something to which people with or without formal citizenship status can relate (Sant et al., 2018; Torres, 2017).

A similar understanding has been applied to the concept of cosmopolitan citizenship within education (e.g. Osler & Starkey, 2003, 2018), emphasising equality and inclusion on the basis of common humanity and cultural diversity. While I do find that cosmopolitan citizenship education is relevant to this thesis, I have chosen to use the terminology of global citizenship due to its increased prevalence as a global education policy priority (Tarozzi & Torres, 2016; Torres, 2017)—for example as part of the SDGs. As noted, SDG 4.7 corresponds in part to the fundamental pillars of education established in Iceland in 2011 (Directorate of Education, 2013; UN, 2015) offering an important possibility to make meaningful connections between local and global policy priorities. However, GCE is far from being a concept that is universally defined across different educational initiatives

and cultural contexts (Goren & Yemini, 2017; Tarozzi & Torres, 2016), which makes it both important and interesting to investigate within the context of Icelandic education.

One of the most prominent typologies of global citizenship frequently applied as part of current education literature was introduced by Oxley and Morris (2013). The authors set out to distinguish between different yet interrelated areas of global citizenship by outlining eight conceptual fields within two general forms of citizenship. The first four conceptual fields are political, moral, economic, and cultural, which are generally considered to reflect a cosmopolitan form of citizenship. These conceptual areas are most often featured within academic fields and as part of policy initiatives related to human rights, cultural diversity, and social cohesion. The latter four conceptual fields are social, critical, environmental, and spiritual, associated with an advocacy-based form of citizenship that tends to be positioned against more normative versions of citizenship, including those falling within the cosmopolitan form.

Yet, as Oxley and Morris (2013) assert, there are no clear lines to be drawn between the ideological approaches considered to underpin different forms of citizenship. For example, many scholars writing within a critical framework also tend to express explicit support for human rights and cultural diversity, pointing to the potential association between certain conceptions of critical, moral, and political areas of GCE. Such overlaps and interconnections have also been noted by scholars who have pointed out how cosmopolitan forms of citizenship can be mapped onto both liberal and neo-liberal ideologies and how most critical approaches to GCE actually tend to contain a clear interface with liberal or neoliberal orientations and practices (Pashby et al., 2020).

The conceptual ambiguity of GCE explains the distinct criticism it has received from various sources. A key criticism of GCE is that it lacks criticality. Representing instead an empty global utopian idea of a Global North privilege, lacking critical reflexivity (Pashby & Andreotti, 2015; Torres & Bosio, 2020). At the same time, critical versions of GCE have also been critiqued for not moving beyond an abstract theoretical ideology that is often out of touch with contemporary pedagogical practices and challenges (Torres, 2017; Yemini, 2021). Offering a more positive outlook Pashby and Costa (2021) reported a noticeable turn towards critically reflexive GCE practices within secondary education in the Global North while still noting how much of the analytical work on GCE speaks to the limits of a modern-colonial imaginary entangled within a range of liberal, neo-liberal and critical discursive configurations.

The complexity of these discursive configurations; how they overlap and relate to the discussion on GCE, is considered more widely in the work of Pashby et al. (2020). Of particular use, however, to this project is their 'supplementary analysis' offering a practical and pedagogical turn when highlighting how teachers can choose to engage with complex global issues at different levels. According to the authors, most teachers approach their work predominantly at a methodological level, largely dominated by liberal and/or neoliberal discursive notions, focused on achieving a predefined outcome or result. An alternative to this approach would be for teachers to work from an epistemological level which would include a critical consideration of different outcomes based on diverse perspectives. This could include asking questions concerning how and why we come to understand notions of citizenship and inclusion differently. Pashby et al. (2020) maintain that while epistemological engagements, specifically those that move from a critical point of view, have proven important to interrupt instrumental neoliberal orientations to GCE, they also note how critical approaches are not free from the risk of strengthening normative notions of what is understood to be good or valid in the world.

Pashby et al. (2020) thus push their analysis even further to consider the possibility of taking up GCE at an ontological level. This would include asking questions about the way modern-colonial ideas shape and restrict our possibilities of seeing the world differently. Building on the seminal work of Andreotti (2006) on soft vs. critical GCE, Stein and Andreotti (2021) introduce an approach to educating for global citizenship which they refer to as 'global citizenship otherwise'. They emphasise the importance of non-normative pedagogical approaches to transform existing frameworks calling for deeper ontological engagements with the way we have come to live in the world. At the same time, they also acknowledge their doubts when it comes to the possibilities of realising global citizenship otherwise as part of the current system.

When considering the Icelandic context introduced earlier in this thesis, I find the above pedagogical approaches to GCE important to reflect upon the possibilities of engaging with cultural diversity within a context where historically democratic and inclusive education ideals have been marginalized at the cost of neoliberal priorities. But also, where signs of critical education policy initiatives (i.e., the fundamental pillars of education) have been introduced in the wake of, and as a response to, a socio-economic collapse (Jónsson, 2018). I want to conclude this chapter with the words of Andreotti (2006) when she asserts that there is "no universal recipe or approach to GCE that will serve all contexts" (p. 8). What is important is that we become more aware of the different approaches that exist, their underlying ideologies, and their possible impacts on the inclusion and

exclusion of individuals and groups within different educational settings at different times.

### 3.2 The paradox of inclusion

In this thesis, I understand inclusion as an element of democratic education, where democracy is defined on the basis of meaningful participation, cooperation, and communication (Dewey, 1938, 1939; Jónsson & Garces Rodriguez, 2021). As discussed earlier, the democratic foundation of the Icelandic education system is one that also regards inclusion as a critical part of its policies and practices. Such emphasis is in line with the way inclusion has gradually emerged as a global educational priority, alongside notions of human rights and varying ideas about global competencies, and democratic citizenship (Council of Europe, 2010, 2016; OECD, 2018; UNESCO, 2015). An important area of investigation is thus understanding how the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion pose a challenge to education ideals such as fostering global citizenship, particularly when set within increasingly culturally diverse national contexts (Pashby, 2013; Tarozzi & Torres, 2016).

According to Magnússon (2019), the fundamental paradox of inclusive education lies in the way it is often intended to eliminate exclusion while at the same time creating a specific “kind” of people. What he means by this is that education is generally concerned with the social role of developing responsible citizens according to certain standards of what is considered “good” or “right”. Young (2006) has explained how such standards within educational institutions are almost always made up of “what is ‘normal’ in the sense of typical of a majority of persons, or typical of a dominant group” (p. 97) while other perspectives are deemed lesser or inferior.

This is particularly visible within the space of schools, which, according to Slee and Allan (2011), continue to be places where exclusion exists through structural and cultural mechanisms striving to control a shifting spectrum of diversity. The continuous push to ensure particular educational outcomes through standardisation has unfortunately resulted largely in increased division between individuals and groups at both school and national levels (Dillabough, 2016; Magnúsdóttir, 2016; Slee & Allan, 2011), ultimately undermining democracy and acceptance of diversity (Jónsson, 2011; Slee, 2011).

Biesta (2009), also understanding inclusion to be the point and purpose of democracy, has criticised the linear process that often governs democracy and inclusion within education, whereby individuals or groups are included into an existing order by those who control that order themselves. By drawing on the work

of Young (2000), Biesta offers a helpful distinction between external and internal exclusion to illuminate the way people are often excluded from meaningful participation, even after being included into seemingly democratic spaces and places. When applied within the context of education, external exclusion could reflect a situation wherein people are officially excluded from accessing educational institutions, while internal exclusion represents a process whereby people are formally included in educational settings, only to then find that their perspectives and points of view are deemed irrelevant as they differ from the normative framework.

The result is a binary understanding of inclusion, where some individuals or groups hold the power to define the norm according to their own centralised perspectives, while others are left with an “outsider” position – even from within. According to Naraian (2016) such binary notions of inclusion are underpinned by the idea that a school is a place in which knowledge is generated and recreated from the inside, that is by those who hold insiders’ positions. Subsequently those who are regarded as outsiders can be considered to carry unpredictable views that might interrupt or compromise the dominant knowledge realm. Interestingly, Naraian’s analysis depicts how teachers, who usually hold an insider position within the school, are also subjected to the constrains of such instrumental ideas about education and inclusion as they struggle to engage with increased diversity.

Inspired by the work of Arendt, Korsgaard (2019) has written about how such instrumental notions of inclusion are destructive for the process of education and schooling, as they generally result in the reproduction of dominant hegemonic ideas rather than supporting students to engage with each other and what they have in common. Korsgaard further suggests that we move beyond researching inclusive education from a pregiven standpoint about what it means and rather start by asking ourselves what education in itself is about. In an attempt to do so and to think anew about the above-mentioned constraining elements, I now turn to some of Arendt’s ideas concerning education and its role in preserving the unique diversity of people as a way to preserve the world at large.

### **3.3 Arendt’s ideas about education and the metaphor of visiting**

In these following sections I introduce selected aspects of Arendt’s work, supported by pedagogical notes by Dewey as well as more current scholars who draw on Arendt’s work. The first section presents her ideas concerning the purpose of education, while the second section discusses her metaphor of visiting as a way to engage with diversity.

### 3.3.1 The purpose of education: preserving diversity and the world

In 1954, Arendt (2006) wrote an essay about the role and responsibility of education in relation to some of the socio-cultural challenges in the United States at the time. With reference to the country's immigration history, she emphasised the unique role of schools in bringing culturally and linguistically diverse groups together. A role education in other more homogeneous countries did not have to worry about as she said. Yet, she nevertheless claimed that any changes in one country must be expected in other places as well, offering a kind of prophecy for the globalising times we currently live and their impact on education (Banks, 2009; Torres & Bosio, 2020):

[...] there is always a temptation to believe that we are dealing with specific problems confined within historical and national boundaries and of importance only to those immediately affected. It is precisely this belief that in our time has consistently proved false. One can take it as a general rule in this century that whatever is possible in one country may in the foreseeable future be equally possible in almost any other. (Arendt, 2006, p. 171)

The way Arendt drew attention to the interrelations existing between the local, the national, and the global nearly seventy years ago makes her work even more interesting to consider in relation to current educational challenges. Especially those that concern global migration and cultural diversity, which are issues that continue to be regarded as isolated or temporary problems within national educational settings (Tarozzi & Torres, 2016).

Arendt's emphasis on schools playing a socialising role should not be taken in terms of assimilation, where one group is expected to fit into or adjust to the existing order (Biesta, 2006). On the contrary, Arendt highlights how education must always concern itself with diversity in the form of constant renewal and newness.<sup>1</sup> She emphasises that we are all born into a common world, each with our own viewpoint, enabling us to bring something new and unique to the table. While Arendt clearly states that she does not write about education from a pedagogical point of view, and in fact seems to reject both conservative and progressive educational ideas of her time, some of her writings still resemble key

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<sup>1</sup> Arendt speaks of *natality* as the essence of education— “the fact that human beings are born into the world” (p. 171)—, which I refer to as the unique newness each person is able to bring into the world through their perspectives and experiences.



pedagogical points made by Dewey (1938) who also understood education in relation to the way people come together in a shared world but from many different stand points.

Whilst there are certain tensions inherent in the way Dewey and Arendt configure the political role of education, their commonalities and critical understanding of education as a platform for new and unexpected beginnings to emerge, and subsequently transform the world, has been noted as of particular importance to interrupt current educational developments which tend to be tightly connected to excluding economic and instrumental ideas (see for example d'Agnese, 2020; Biesta, 2006).

Arendt's belief in the role of diversity in shaping the world forms her idea of education having a dual purpose. The purpose revolves around a seemingly conservative idea—to preserve the unique newness of every person; child and newcomer, and to then to preserve the world at large. As discussed at length in the essay, Arendt's notion of preservation is far from being conservative in the manner of wanting to safeguard the status quo. On the contrary, Arendt's ideas reflect a critical and transformative educational vision: "Exactly for the sake of what is new and revolutionary in every child, education must be conservative; it must preserve this newness and introduce it as a new thing into an old world" (Arendt, 2006, p. 189). The renewal and advancement of the world lies fundamentally in the hands of newcomers, or in the words of Arendt: "the coming of the new and the young" (p. 193). In the present work, I interpret both young people and newcomers as including or corresponding to immigrants and refugees.

The role of education is then to make sure that these newcomers are provided a safe space in which to develop and share their unique perspectives in the hope of setting the world right. Arendt's emphasis on the important role newcomers play in transforming the world reflects much of the current global education agenda aimed at empowering young people to actively engage with the world and its global challenges (OECD, 2018; UNESCO, 2015). However, unlike many current educational models concerning citizenship and inclusion that tend to originate from an instrumental point of view with a predefined outcome or end in mind (Andreotti, 2006; Korsgaard, 2019; Pashby et al., 2020), Arendt states that we can never be sure whether or not the world can be improved, leaving the question of what kind of world is a better world open to interpretation. Similarly, Dewey (1938) clearly warned against education focusing on preparing students for a pre-given future – for such preparation would risk ruining the possibilities of the presence.

When noting that “these newcomers [...] are not finished but in a state of becoming”, Arendt (2006, p. 182) further highlights how both newcomers and the educational task they engage in, comprise a constant process of *becoming* rather than a demand for a predefined being or outcome. An open-ended educational process of becoming requires a space wherein people are able to develop and share their unique perspectives and experiences. The importance of interactive communication based on diverse interests and associations was also highlighted by Dewey (1939, p. 342) who emphasised how students should be able to form their opinions through experimental learning and “amicable cooperation [...] in which both parties learn by giving each other a chance to express itself” rather than on conventional power-positions often associated with formal education.

Neither Dewey nor Arendt highlighted the importance of diversity for the sake of diversity alone. Rather the emphasis is on education enabling students to understand themselves in relation to others and the wider social context. This requires careful consideration of how we come to interact and engage with others around us, especially those who might not be like us. In the following section, I will discuss this in relation to Arendt’s notion of visiting.

### **3.3.2 Visiting as a multi-perspective approach**

Arendt developed the concept of *visiting* when expanding on Kant’s work in *Critique of Judgment*, connecting judgement to the fact that people are in essence bound together by the plurality of their unique experiences and perspectives. This is why she claimed that how we think about others, especially those who are not like us, is the most important activity we engage in when sharing the world with others. This places the issue of citizenship and inclusion, understood in terms of diversity, at the core of education.

Arendt considered the task of engaging with other people’s perspectives in terms of changing one’s standpoint, required more than objectively recognising different ideas and opinions from afar. Such a position, of superficially noting but not engaging with diversity, has been referred to as ‘tourism’, indicating a short-term and static approach (Andreotti et al., 2014; Biesta, 2006). Visiting, on the other hand, is an interactive and relational approach in which we use our imagination to uproot ourselves from our dominant ways of thinking and being. It is a way of figuratively relocating ourselves to a new standpoint, offered by those around us, from where we are able to see things differently.

Biesta (2006) has noted that what this process entails for Arendt is the notion of expanding diversity rather than simply accepting or tolerating it. This is why she emphasises that visiting is not an empathic act whereby one tries to be or feel like

someone else—rather, it is an act of “being and thinking in my own identity where actually I am not” (Arendt, 2006, p. 237). While I do consider empathy, in terms of feeling deeply for other people, to be an important part of citizenship (i.e., Guðjohnsen, 2016), I also agree with those who point out that promoting empathy as key in facilitating social cohesion and cultural understanding runs the risk of foreclosing the opportunity for diversity to grow (Biesta, 2006, 2010; Dillabough, 2016; Korsgaard, 2019). Especially when placed within a framework of hegemonic power-positions (e.g., north-south, native-newcomers) where normative viewpoints are likely to prevail.

Visiting on the other hand encourages a multi-perspective or decentered approach, where one is able to abstract from one’s self-interest and consider the interests of others (Korsgaard, 2019). And thus, it could potentially, when placed within the context of education, interrupt the kind of normative power positions and monocultural approaches many national education systems continue to rely on (Andreotti et al., 2014; Tarozzi & Torres, 2016).

However, it is clear that obtaining a new perspective is no easy task, especially for those in dominant power positions, who may find it hard to figuratively relocate as a way to move away from their centralised positions. As noted by Arendt (2006): “Nothing indeed is more common, even among highly sophisticated people [...] refuse to do this and form an opinion that takes only my own interests, or the interests of the group to which I belong, into account” (p. 237). This is why visiting cannot be taken as a simple task or a skill to be developed but rather as noted by Andreotti et al. (2014), as a disposition underpinning a pattern of possible actions that can be expressed in different and unpredictable ways.

Thus, rather than trying to ensure a linear shift from one approach to another, the educational task must be to support educators in facilitating a safe space wherein visiting ‘moments’ are encouraged through a range of open-ended and inclusive actions and interactions between and across cultural differences.



## 4 Previous research

In this chapter, I present previous research related to my project as a whole highlighting how my own study contributes to the research field of global citizenship education, inclusion, and cultural diversity. The chapter is divided into three sections that relate to the different empirical and theoretical aspects of my research. The first section presents research on policy discourse and directions, the second is devoted to the perspectives of teachers, while the third is directed at the experiences of immigrant and refugee parents within national education systems.

### 4.1 Policy discourse and directions

Much of the scholarly work on the way citizenship, inclusion, and cultural diversity are presented within policy at the global, regional, and national levels deals with various ideological underpinnings. For example, Vaccari and Gardinier (2019) note in their analysis of key policy documents from UNESCO and OECD that both organisations concern themselves with what it means to be a citizen in a globalised world by connecting their goals to SDG 4. Yet, there are important differences to be found in terms of their approaches and possible impacts. UNESCO has highlighted its global citizenship agenda from a human rights-based approach, while the discourse on global competencies offered by OECD has tended to relate to theories concerning human capital. As discussed by Bjarnadóttir (2022) tensions between economic and social objectives, as displayed within recent OECD policies, are likely to obstruct inclusive opportunities for those in vulnerable positions.

Differences among the European Union and the Council of Europe have been analysed in a similar manner with regards to their approach towards citizenship, cultural diversity, and youth. While both organisations highlight the importance of active participation and education, differences appear in the way the Council of Europe relies on human rights-based principles, while the European Union has adopted an economic perspective, depicting young migrants “more often than not as a problem to be fixed or as a potential trouble to be prevented” (Huang & Hólmarsdóttir, 2015, p. 13). Contradicting discourses around citizenship, inclusion, and cultural diversity are also evident within the Nordic education context (Biseth et al., 2021). Research drawing on the International Civic and

Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) has indicated that while school principals from Denmark, Sweden, Finland, and Norway highlight critical thinking as a key feature of citizenship education in their schools, Nordic education policies place increased emphasis on predefined qualifications, such as equipping students with specific knowledge and skills at the expense of inclusion through democratic participation (Seland et al., 2021).

As previously addressed in the section concerning policy development in Iceland, the contradictions between seemingly competing policy ideals are also evident within national education policies. Majority of recent national education policies in Iceland are developed on the basis of OECD policy documents, highlighting the economic purpose of education rather than its democratic and inclusive role (Magnúsdóttir & Jónasson, 2022). Similar trends appear in other European countries and the United States where policies continue to rely on individualised and often monocultural ideals when engaging with cultural diversity and difference (Tarozzi & Torres, 2016; Osler, 2017). Even in countries such as Canada, often considered to be a champion of multiculturalism, Pashby (2013) has noted how discourse around citizenship and cultural diversity is entangled with tensions between a neoliberal agenda, emphasising choice and accountability, and a liberal human rights-based agenda, emphasising tolerance and empathy. As noted by the author, neither approach reflects a critical or reflexive account of GCE, resulting in weak recognition of cultural diversity.

## 4.2 Teachers' perspectives

Conflicting policy directions and ideals affect education not only at the national or regional level but are also evident from the way teachers inject different meaning into their own work and the educational context within which they operate (Ball et al., 2012). While there are studies within Iceland and elsewhere that have reported on the positive influence teachers with a high level of commitment are able to have on immigrant and refugee students (Guðjónsdóttir et al., 2018; Hama, 2020; Osler, 2017), other studies have suggested that teachers generally find it difficult to manage competing discourses related to inclusion (Gunnþórsdóttir & Bjarnason, 2014), especially when it concerns immigrants and refugees (Dryden-Peterson et al., 2018; Harðardóttir & Magnúsdóttir, 2018; Karousiou et al., 2019).

A study on the language of inclusion as reflected by Norwegian and Finnish teachers working within culturally diverse contexts indicated how teachers are often caught between different overriding policy discourses—for example, one that assigns equal rights to all students regardless of background and abilities and other that emphasise the need for students to develop specific kind of knowledge

and competence. The result is a language of inclusion highlighting the right to belong, but only to a predefined and often highly competitive education community (Arnesen et al., 2007). A recent comparative study in Iceland, Finland, and the Netherlands indicated how inclusive policy frameworks do not prevent teachers from favouring normative ideals. This is reflected, for example, in the way national language skills are made central in students' inclusion or exclusion while leaving other important aspects of inclusion aside (Huilla et al., 2022).

Similar challenges arise regarding the way teachers understand and discuss the concepts of citizenship and citizenship education, which tends to be defined and implemented mainly from a national perspective, as opposed to being situated within a wider, relational and global context (Goren et al., 2018). Interestingly, even teachers who express particular will to support notions of human rights and cultural diversity seem to find it difficult to establish a critical and concrete connection between the local and the global, resulting in them "stressing national values and so-called proper functioning within society" (Veugelers, 2011, p. 481).

Drawing on recent Icelandic studies pertaining to cultural diversity, Ragnarsdóttir (2019) discusses best practices in Iceland where teachers with experience and expertise in the area of multicultural education were able to facilitate learning spaces reflecting democratic participation and respect for cultural diversity. This included examples where different language skills of students were understood as an asset and where teachers were able to offer social and emotional support to their students. Gunnþórsdóttir et al. (2018) however also described how Icelandic teachers find themselves inadequately prepared to manage culturally diverse classrooms, pointing to lack of professional opportunities and cooperation within and between schools. As noted in the introduction of this thesis, few if any studies in Iceland have looked specifically into the way teachers understand or engage with conceptions of global citizenship as part of education or in relation to teaching and learning within increasingly culturally diverse school communities.

The above overview of studies concerning global and national policy discourse and practices on citizenship and inclusion as they relate to cultural diversity presents a complicated picture. It reveals paradoxical and often instrumental conceptions of education, citizenship, and inclusion. It also depicts how global and regional policy directions can impact national education policies which subsequently influence pedagogical practices and communication at the school level. In the following chapter, I focus on the way immigrant and refugee parents experience their positions and participation within national educational settings.

### 4.3 Parent involvement and inclusion within schools

Studies across different countries have pointed to wide-ranging benefits of parents being able to participate in their children's education in relation to students' academic outcomes (Fan & Chen, 2001), as well as in terms of developing and sustaining an inclusive and democratic school community (UNESCO, 1994, 2017). However, some parents, particularly parents with immigrant and refugee backgrounds, struggle with the 'one size fits all' (Crozier, 2001) idea that generally shapes policy and practice concerning parent involvement and inclusion within national educational contexts (Antony-Newman, 2018).

Normative definitions of parental involvement usually include overt behavioural practices (Jeynes, 2011) such as attending a parent meeting, regulating homework, and volunteering at the school (Epstein, 2010; Jónsdóttir, 2018). In the Global North they are often based on values and norms belonging to white middle-class parents who are likely to possess a dominant status within the field of education (Auðardóttir & Magnúsdóttir, 2019; Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Reay et al., 2011; Vincent et al., 2012). The most rigorous study conducted on the concept of parent involvement in Iceland defines involvement in terms of communication, cooperation, and participation (Jónsdóttir, 2018) reflecting the inclusive notion of democratic education as expressed earlier (Dewey, 1938). Yet, as noted by Jónsdóttir and Björnsdóttir (2020, p. 43) the home-school relationship in Iceland is largely based on the initiative of supervisory teachers rather than parents, who report being satisfied with their minimal involvement. While these studies do not include the perspectives of immigrant parents in Iceland, they provide important information about the dominant norms and values associated with parental practices in Icelandic schools.

International studies have shown that normative definitions of "good parenting" are likely to exclude a broad range of parental practices and parents, in particular immigrants and refugees, who often do not possess the necessary resources (i.e., time and money) to adhere to the normative expectations (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Lareau & Weininger, 2003). Some parents might also define their parental involvement differently from the norm (Doucet, 2011) for a variety of other reasons, resulting in teachers and parents finding it difficult to understand each other's intentions and expectations (Bendixsen & Danielsen, 2020). Such dividing notions have been reported in Iceland between immigrant and refugee parents and Icelandic teachers who have been found to express competing ideas about what constitutes good education and schooling (Gunnþórsdóttir et al., 2018; Ragnarsdóttir, 2020).



While language barriers and a lack of translation services are likely to exacerbate the inequalities experienced by parents, studies have also noted that social and cultural resources, including language proficiency, do not always mitigate marginalisation or exclusion (Bendixsen & Danielsen, 2020; Gillborn et al., 2012; Peskova & Ragnarsdóttir, 2018). Noting a gap in the international literature, Goren and Yemini (2017) have called for research that critically explores the way immigrant and refugee parents understand and negotiate ideas of citizenship and inclusion. Such studies are scarce in Iceland, despite the overarching emphasis on inclusion as the remedy to marginalisation for immigrant students and parents (Guðjónsdóttir et al., 2016).

#### **4.4 Research questions**

The research questions for this thesis were designed with reference to the theoretical background and earlier studies presented in the previous sections. The main research question that guided this thesis is as follows: *How are citizenship and inclusion presented and perceived in relation to cultural diversity within the Icelandic compulsory and upper-secondary education context?*

More specific questions were developed in relation to the three articles that comprise this thesis, offering an empirical, theoretical, and practical insight into the topic at hand. Article 1 investigates policy discourse in relation to citizenship and inclusive educational opportunities for immigrant and refugee youth in Iceland from the perspectives of public policies and teachers' narratives. Article 2 explores the positions and participation of immigrant and refugee parents in relation to their children's education and schooling in Iceland. Article 3 discusses the possibilities of critical and decentered conceptual approach to GCE as a way to engage more inclusively with cultural diversity within national educational settings. Moreover, it attempts to place the suggested approach in relation to selected pedagogical practices deriving from an existing research project regarding citizenship and inclusion of migrant youth.



## 5 Methodology and research design

In this chapter, I discuss the purpose and quality of the research in relation to its qualitative design and the methods applied in each of the three studies presented within the three earlier mentioned articles. This includes a discussion on the empirical data collected and analysed in Studies 1 and 2 and the theoretical inquiry applied in Study 3. Here I also present the ethical procedures applied in relation to the research, including a discussion on reflexivity and ethics.

### 5.1 The purpose of understanding

Biesta (2020) has suggested that one can divide educational and social research into the following three purposes: explanation, understanding, and emancipation. Explanation as a purpose has its roots in the natural sciences, designed to generate an ideal explanation or a clear connection between cause and effect, preferably with the goal of predicting the future based on quantitative approaches. Understanding however, can be seen as a central purpose to qualitative research (Creswell, 2015), as it is based on the epistemological belief that knowledge is socially constructed and relative to context (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This is why education research derived from such a purpose should not seek an ultimate truth or generalisation but rather aim to understand the perspectives, experiences, and actions of actors involved (Biesta, 2020). A step beyond the purpose of understanding, according to Biesta (2020), would be the purpose of emancipation. This is where researchers seek to make visible to social actors how their experiences might be influenced by underlying power structures in an effort to move towards liberation or the transformation of their circumstances.

As previously noted, the main objective of this thesis was to *understand* the way citizenship and inclusion are presented and perceived in relation to cultural diversity within the context of Icelandic education. I approached the topic at hand from different directions in an effort to capture how diverse perspectives and experiences are shaped by and in turn continuously shape the world we share. While I do not see my thesis having a direct emancipatory role for immigrants and refugees the aim was nevertheless that the particular understanding generated as part of this thesis might be of use to those working with education – ultimately benefitting young immigrants and refugees.

The fact that this research makes use of different forms of data collected through various means and from different directions calls for careful consideration of how to ensure the quality of the research (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 282). The following sections offer a detailed discussion on the data collection procedures and the analytical approaches applied within each of the three contributing studies.

## **5.2 Study 1: Policy discourse and teachers' narratives**

As noted, the initial focus of this PhD project was aimed at refugee youth rather than immigrants and refugees combined. This influenced the choice of data collected for Study 1, in particular the selection of the policy documents chosen for the analysis.

The policy documents used in the study were identified through a search of policy documents issued by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture and the Ministry of Social Welfare, which mentioned refugee youth and education. The two key documents used for the analysis were chosen as they were the only public policy documents at the time of the study which discussed education for refugee youth specifically, albeit focusing generally on the provision of social services rather than education itself. The analysis also drew on six supporting education policy documents (acts, regulations, and curricula), as they were frequently referred to within the two key documents. All eight documents were familiar to the teachers that participated in Study 1.

Policy and policy discourse is not confined to official documents but includes the discourse among different actors, including teachers (Ball, 2015; Ball et al., 2012). This is why I included interviews with 14 teachers who were considered experienced in working with refugee and immigrant youth. Despite the overall seemingly inclusive nature of the Icelandic education system, there are nevertheless particular schools and school areas that have, over the course of time, become more culturally diverse than others (Magnúsdóttir et al., 2020). Information about municipalities accepting quota refugees via the UNHCR resettlement programme were also used to identify a set of schools in which I expected to find teachers experienced in working with both immigrant and refugee students.

Eventually, in 2018, I contacted the principals of five schools via email—three upper-secondary and two compulsory schools. I explained the purpose of my study and asked to speak with teachers experienced in working with immigrant and refugee students. I received positive feedback from all the schools, providing me with the contact information of 14 teachers in total. While I did not ask to speak with teachers with specific subject expertise, most of them were associated with

language teaching (either Icelandic or foreign languages). All expressed particular interest in areas related to multicultural education, having many years of experience working with immigrant and refugee students.

I interviewed the teachers in groups of two to four, pairing together teachers from the same school. The interviews took place inside the school buildings right after or during teaching hours and lasted from 60 to 90 minutes each. Group interviews were chosen because I was interested in the dominant ideas and discourse that emerge within the field of education in relation to matters concerning citizenship, inclusion, and cultural diversity.

I chose to keep the interviews unstructured (Patton, 2002) in the sense that I did not use an interview guide. However, I ensured that I kept the study's purpose and scope in mind throughout the interview. I began all the interviews by asking the teachers to consider and discuss the challenges and opportunities they experienced in relation to their work with immigrant and refugee students. I encouraged discussions amongst the teachers themselves, for example, by asking if they agreed with each other's statements. This allowed me to identify elements of discussion that were given more or less space and truthfulness (Braun & Clarke, 2013) in relation to matters of citizenship and inclusion. The tables below offer a detailed overview of the data collected and used in Study 1.

**Table 1** Policy documents used in Study 1

<b>Key policy documents</b>			
<b>Type</b>	<b>Policy document</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Publisher</b>
<b>Guidelines</b>	Refugee Committee Guidelines on Reception and Assistance to Refugee Groups	2013	The Icelandic refugee committee appointed by Minister of Social Welfare
	Guidelines for Municipalities on Reception Services and Assistance for Social Participation of Refugees	2014	Ministry of Social Welfare
<b>Supportive documents</b>			
<b>Act</b>	Act on compulsory schools	2008	Ministry of Education
	Act on upper-secondary schools	2008	Ministry of Education
<b>Regulation</b>	Regulation for students with special needs in compulsory schools	2010 with changes in 2015	Ministry of Education
	Regulation for students with another language than Icelandic in upper-secondary schools	2009	Ministry of Education
<b>Regulation equivalent</b>	Curriculum guidelines for compulsory schools	2011 and 2013	Ministry of Education
	Curriculum guideline for upper-secondary schools	2011	Ministry of Education

**Table 2** Interviews with teachers for Study 1

School	Teachers	Number
<b>White Valley Compulsory School</b>	Sigurdur and Marín	2
<b>Blue River Compulsory School</b>	Kolbrún, Sólveig, and Eyja	3
<b>Pine Hill Upper-secondary School</b>	Unnar and Sandra	2
<b>Skyline Upper-secondary School</b>	Gudrun, Ingunn, Jóhanna, and Rakei	4
<b>Snow Creek Upper-secondary School</b>	Svava, Bjarni, and Lára	3
<b>Total</b>		<b>14</b>

### 5.2.1 Document and interview analysis

The first stage of the analysis included coding the policy documents and teachers' narratives separately by using open coding inspired by Braun and Clarke (2006), while the later stages of the analysis included more focused coding in relation to the theoretical background of the study. This included re-reading the discursive data together in order to recognise convergent and divergent patterns and interconnected themes or repetition in narrative forms in the spirit of critical policy analysis (Ball et al., 2012).

The interview data was recorded and immediately transcribed by me after each meeting. I consider the transcription process extremely valuable as it marks the first steps of the analysis. I transcribed the recordings verbatim, also noting the paralinguistic features of the discussions (laughter, change of tone, hesitations, silences, etc.), as they offer insight into the kind of atmosphere (i.e., negativity or positivity) governing the overall discourse and discussion concerning immigrants and refugees, as reflected amongst the teachers. At this stage, I worked on the analysis together with Professor Berglind Rós Magnúsdóttir, my supervisor, and Professor Jo-Anne Dillabough, a committee member, as they co-authored Article 1. Berglind and I worked on the analysis together in person, while the three of us met regularly online to discuss the directions of the article. These discussions helped me to deepen the analysis and develop stronger theoretical connections.

When analysing the narratives of the teachers, we used a contextual and interpretative approach, relying on hermeneutics of both empathy and questioning (suspicion) (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Smith et al., 2009) to understand how teachers made sense of inclusion while also connecting their discussions to wider global policy discourse and reforms on education and forced migration. The analysis was

also driven by Arendt's (2005) vision for the "promise of politics" as means of depicting the important role that policy, based on a plurality of perspectives, could play in offering inclusive opportunities for immigrant and refugee youth.

### **5.3 Study 2: Immigrant and refugee parents' positions and participation**

Study 2 included 14 semi-structured interviews with immigrant and refugee parents; mothers and fathers to one or more children (13–18 years old) enrolled for at least two years in Icelandic lower- or upper-secondary schools at the time of the study. Parents with immigrant status were contacted either by a snowball sampling method (Braun & Clarke, 2013) or by answering an advertisement placed in English and Icelandic on social media networks for international parents in Iceland. Parents with refugee status were identified with support from the Department of Social Welfare in Reykjavík by sending out an email invitation to a larger group of people holding refugee status.

The self-selection process applied in both cases, underscores that the objective was not to achieve a representative sample but rather to collect diverse accounts of immigrant and refugee parents' experiences and perspectives on Icelandic schools. The parents self-identified as having Arabic, Asian, or African backgrounds, seven of whom (Asian and African) had an immigrant status and seven of whom (Arabic) had a refugee status.

The interviews were all conducted in the year 2018. I conducted and transcribed interviews with refugee parents, while interviews with immigrant parents were conducted and transcribed by two researchers involved in the research project *Parent Practices, Choices, and Responsibilities in the Icelandic Education Field* (PAPIS) (RannMennt, 2023a), to which this study contributed. One was Elizabeth Lay, a fellow doctoral candidate at the School of Education, University of Iceland, who co-authored Article 2, along with Professor Berglind Rós. The table below shows the participants' pseudonyms, cultural identifications, migration, and educational experiences, as well as their year of arrival in Iceland.



**Table 3** Interviews with parents for Study 2

<b>Pseudonyms</b>	<b>Cultural background</b>	<b>Migration status</b>	<b>Educational experience</b>	<b>Year of arrival in Iceland</b>
Farah, mother	Arabic	Refugee	University degree	2016
Jamila, mother	Arabic	Refugee	Basic education	2016
Khalid, father	Arabic	Refugee	Incomplete basic education	2015
Milad, father	Arabic	Refugee	University degree	2016
Salama, mother	Arabic	Refugee	Basic education	2016
Amina, mother	Arabic	Refugee	Vocational education	2015
Kadin, father	Arabic	Refugee	Basic education	2015
Joshua, father	Southeast Asian	Immigrant	University degree	2002
Jasmine, mother	Southeast Asian	Immigrant	University degree	2000
Iris, mother	Southeast Asian	Immigrant	Basic education	2004
Lillian, mother	Southeast Asian	Immigrant	Basic education	1999
Amanda, mother	African	Immigrant	University degree	2005
Hannah, mother	African	Immigrant	Basic education	2002
Ola, mother	African	Immigrant	Basic education	2007

An interview guide designed for the PAPIS project was used in all the interviews, which lasted between 60 and 120 minutes each. The interviews focused on various topics related to parental practices and participation within the space of Icelandic schools. These included questions concerning their perspectives and expectations towards the Icelandic education system and their participation in various school-related activities such as parent-teacher meetings and communication with class teachers and other parents, including Icelandic parents.

### **5.3.1 Combining two sets of interview data**

As noted above, this PhD project was initially considered in relation to refugee youth within Icelandic schools. However, it became clear to me, especially when I began to analyse the narratives of the teachers in Study 1, how many of the challenges raised were related to growing cultural diversity in general rather than to one specific group of students or parents.

At the early stages of my research, I listened to Elizabeth Lay discuss her initial findings from interviews she had conducted with immigrant parents in Iceland. During her presentation, I realised how both groups of parents (immigrants with many years of residency in the country and newly arrived refugees) seemed to share significant perspectives. After the presentation, I approached Elizabeth and told her how my data, representing newly arrived refugee parents, seemed to reflect many of the issues she had presented. We agreed to explore these commonalities further by engaging in constructive discussions about our two datasets and our initial findings.

Elizabeth and I eventually decided that analysing our datasets together would benefit the aims of both of our studies. We considered that juxtaposing the experiences of parents with different cultural backgrounds, shorter and longer residencies and diverse migration experiences would provide an interesting opportunity to examine understandings of belonging and experiences of inclusion across time and place. We were also informed by previous Icelandic studies indicating that neither length of stay nor dwelling in particular neighbourhoods seemed to correlate with increased levels of inclusion (Rúnarsdóttir & Vilhjálmsón, 2019).

Importantly, as noted earlier, discussing immigrants and refugees together does not imply that I consider them to be a homogenous group or that their full range of experiences within Icelandic schools are compatible. In Article 2, we address how converging perspectives often cut across variables such as gender, cultural background, and educational and migration experiences, while also noting the complexities embedded in the individual and structural experiences of both immigrants and refugees when considering these very same factors.

### **5.3.2 Interview analysis**

The interviews were conducted and transcribed by me (refugee parents), Elizabeth (parents with Asian background), and a third researcher from the PAPIS project (parents with African background). To merge the data sets as well as reorganise and reaffirm our initial coding, we used the Atlas.it software. This allowed us to

become familiar with the interviews we had not participated in ourselves and provided us with a better overview of the entire dataset. A more structured analysis was then applied by constructing themes around specific codes in relation to the critical theoretical background on parental practices and inclusion within education. Joint reflective discussions on themes and theoretical connections took place throughout the analytical process between me, Elizabeth, and our supervisor Berglind Rós, who co-authored Article 2.

The analysis of the interviews followed the same fundamental approach as the analysis of the interview data in Study 1 (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The aim was to analyse parents' individual perspectives and experiences, while also interpreting their positions and meaning making in relation to the wider social and political context of education and migration. For this study, we were also guided by Arendt's (2006) metaphor of *visiting* as a way to think anew about parent involvement and inclusion within the context of Icelandic education and to challenge binary power positions within the school as those observed in the study.

#### **5.4 Study 3: Philosophical and theoretical perspectives**

Study 3 was a theoretical inquiry conducted in collaboration with my second supervisor, Ólafur Páll Jónsson. In this work, we operated within a framework of defining and understanding the multiple conceptions of global citizenship as well as different ideological approaches (liberal, neoliberal, and critical) to global citizenship education and their possible impact on the inclusion of immigrants and refugees within national educational settings in the Global North. We considered this inquiry to be important in light of increasing prevalence of educational initiatives that link inclusion with concepts such as democratic and global citizenship (Council of Europe, 2010, 2016; UNESCO, 2015) and global competencies (OECD, 2018) while immigrants and refugees continue to endure inequalities and exclusion within and across national educational contexts (Dryden-Peterson et al., 2018; UNHCR, UNICEF, & IMO, 2019; Rúnarsdóttir & Vilhjálmsón, 2019).

Drawing largely on the global citizenship typology offered by Oxley and Morris (2013) as well as the work of Andreotti (2006), and Pashby et al. (2020) on GCE, we proposed a critical and decentered approach to GCE—one that addresses different overlapping fields of citizenship while also considering their relational aspects (personal, local, national, global). Moreover, by applying selected concepts and ideas from Arendt (2006) and Dewey (1938, 1939) we offered a deeper analysis of how GCE can be understood as an inclusive response to the challenges faced in relation to increased cultural diversity and in particular for

migrant youth. The concept of visiting is introduced as a key concept to the process of engaging more inclusively with cultural diversity within the space of schools. Hence, the model presented and proposed in the article was considered to have both analytical and practical potential for teachers in their work when considering the various aspects of what it means to be a citizen in today's globalised world.

Attending to the often-mentioned critique that critical approaches to GCE seem to more prominently materialise as abstract notions than as actual pedagogical practices (Goren & Yemini, 2017; Torres, 2017), the inquiry also included a section of pedagogical examples reflecting the aforementioned idea of the teacher as a visitor. References were made in relation to photovoice-based teaching practices from the teacher's guide *Picture-Power* (Harðardóttir & Ottesen, 2021) developed as part of an ongoing research project concerning citizenship and inclusion of migrant youth in Iceland, Norway, and the UK<sup>2</sup>.

## 5.5 Validity, transferability, and triangulation

Braun and Clarke (2013) maintain that while the use of a quality criterion specific to qualitative studies is not without controversy, it is indeed important in being able to enact and demonstrate quality in terms of methods and approaches. This includes the ability to discuss and provide examples of the study's validity, transferability, and triangulation. It has also been increasingly recognised that researchers should make their own position clear through critical reflexivity as a way of demonstrating credibility.

One important way to ensure the quality of research is to establish its validity through transferability. While not referring to the quantitative notion of generalisation, Patton (2002) argued that qualitative research should aim for transferability in the sense of exploring how findings from one study can be situated within similar contexts. For example, by discussing how the analysis and interpretation of data can be applied to a broader audience (Braun & Clarke, 2013). I consider this especially important for anyone conducting research today within national settings that happen to be intrinsically linked to the broader global

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<sup>2</sup> The guide is called *Myndamáttur* in Icelandic and was developed by me in cooperation with Tinna Ottesen, a visual designer, in relation to the research project *Irregular Processes of Inclusion and Citizenship* (I-PIC) (RannMennt, 2023b), to which this study contributed. The guide was endorsed and published in 2021 by the Icelandic Directorate of Education as teaching material available to all teachers: <https://vefir.mms.is/flettibaekur/namsefni/myndamattur/>

context as noted by Arendt decades ago (2006) and increasingly acknowledged as a fundamental part of education policy and practice today (Banks, 2009; Tarozzi & Torres, 2016). The analytical approach in the first two studies aimed to place the perspectives of both teachers and parents in wider social and political context, while the third aimed at presenting a theoretical approach to GCE applicable within and across increasingly culturally diverse national educational contexts in the Global North.

Another commonly used technique to ensure the quality of qualitative research is the process of data triangulation (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 286), referring to a process whereby two or more methods of data collection or sources of data are used to examine the phenomenon in question. I understand this to be important from the point of multiperspectivity. From the beginning, I set out to gather diverse perspectives from different sources (policy, teachers, parents)—not to produce or develop one ultimate truth or conclusion but as a way to deepen and expand my own way of thinking (Arendt, 2006) through the multiple standpoints offered by different participants and sources of data.

Braun and Clarke (2013) pointed out the idea that triangulation does not only apply to different sources of data but could also involve the use of different methods in data collection and the incorporation of different researchers in the research process. For the present research, data was collected using different methods chosen in relation to the purpose of the research (Biesta, 2020). By analysing the language of public policy documents, I wanted to capture the broader political discourse governing the work of teachers and its possible impact on the educational opportunities of immigrant and refugee youth in Iceland. The non-structured group interviews with teachers, however, were a way to reflect how teachers depict the challenges and opportunities immigrant and refugee students face within the context of Icelandic schools. Furthermore, the semi-structured individual interviews with parents were used to explore how immigrant and refugee parents experience their own positions and participation in relation to their children's education and schooling.

Regarding the process of incorporating different people into the data collection and analysis, I was fortunate to be given a range of different opportunities to share, discuss, and validate various steps of the research process. In particular with the four people who make up my team of supervisors and doctoral committee members. Berglind Rós, Ólafur Páll and Jo-Anne, all generously guided me through the process of analysing and writing the three articles that make up this thesis while Halla Björk provided me with invaluable support during the final steps of the project and in writing the kappa at Oslo Metropolitan University. Finally, as

noted above, working with Elizabeth, a fellow doctoral student on Study 2 was an expansive experience, which undoubtedly contributed to the depth and breadth of the results.

## 5.6 Ethical considerations

According to Guillemin and Gillam (2004), ethical considerations can be divided into *procedural ethics*, which include formalities such as permissions and informed consent, and *personal ethics*, which attend to the day-to-day ethical issues arising in relation to the communication between the people involved in the research. An extended process of ethical considerations focusing on reciprocity, including the responsibility and reflexivity of the researcher in trying to understand different perspectives and experiences of those involved, should always be the case when attending to issues concerning immigrants and refugees (Mackenzie, et al., 2007). Below, I discuss these ethical considerations in relation to my research.

### 5.6.1 Procedural ethics: Permissions, informed consent, and translation

The studies comprising this PhD project followed the ethical guidelines set by the University of Iceland (Research Ethics Committee, 2014). Studies 1 and 2, which include empirical data collection, were registered with the Icelandic Data Protection Authority, and received a positive review from the University of Iceland Research Ethics Committee. Study 2, pertaining specifically to immigrant and refugee parents, was also presented to the head of Quality and Research, at the Department of Social Welfare in Reykjavík, with positive reviews and support in identifying participants. Both teachers and parents signed letters of informed consent after being informed about the aim of the study, their roles, rights, and responsibilities. In the case of parents, they were all provided with a translation of the consent letter in English or their preferred language. All parents were given the option to decide when and where the interviews would take place, and parents who requested to have an interpreter were provided with a professional interpreter of their own choice.

Asking parents to choose where the interviews would take place and who would interpret their perspectives was important for establishing trust and confidentiality and aiming to minimise the power imbalance between me as a researcher and the parents as interviewees (Edwards, 2010). I experienced the benefits of this choice in particular when interviewing refugee parents in their respective homes. Many of the parents verbally expressed being pleased with inviting me to their house, indicating that they felt safe and secure with their preferred location. Second, in at

least two cases, a trustworthy relationship between the parents and the interpreters seemed to facilitate more meaningful conversations between me and the parents. When sharing sensitive details about their lives, the parents would say things like “Oh this is ok, she (the interpreter) knows us so well by now” or “We can talk about everything here.” These incidents indicated to me a high level of trust between the interviewees and the interpreters, which they graciously extended to me as well during the interviews.

### **5.6.2 Personal ethics: Positionality, reflexivity, and reciprocity**

At the beginning of this PhD project, I was concerned about my “outsider” position, as I do not share the same background and experiences as my participants. However, I quickly realised that one’s positionality within the research is by no means simple or static (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Over the course of five years, I have found myself differently engaged at different times with the research, including the different groups of participants, influencing my own positionality and perspectives.

My experience as a teacher provided me with important insight from the start. I knew the Icelandic education system itself, its main policy developments, challenges, and opportunities. Yet, the main bulk of my teaching experience has been teaching mostly native Icelandic adults at the university level. Hence, while my professional status allowed me to connect easily with the participating teachers, I was also aware of the fact that they were all more experienced than me when it comes to engaging with cultural diversity within the space of Icelandic compulsory and upper-secondary schools. A year into the study, I began working at an upper-secondary school as a teacher, equality officer, and pedagogical adviser. This allowed me to observe and explore the work of other teachers working with culturally diverse groups, while I also engaged more directly with students and parents with immigrant and refugee backgrounds.

I am a mother of two school-aged children who have moved with me between different countries and cities, attending several different schools. This experience enabled me to relate to the feeling of being a newcomer within a society, including the anxious feeling of starting anew in a system unfamiliar to your own and sending your child to a new school where you hope they will be greeted with kindness and care. However, I am critically aware that my position as a white, middle-class, highly educated person has always granted me enormous privilege in relation to my own social and educational opportunities as well as my children’s—a privilege rarely, if ever, experienced by the parents participating in this research.

In an effort to expand my own positionality and point of view through the plurality of others—whose stories are not like mine (Biesta, 2010)—I sought out a number of opportunities to engage with and listen to people with immigrant and refugee backgrounds, at different ages and stages of their lives. Throughout the project, I attended conferences and venues considering the various aspects of immigration and matters concerning refugees. Between 2018 and 2020, I worked as a Red Cross volunteer in a project for immigrants and refugees. Apart from reading the academic work my thesis relies on, I also dove into a range of literature reflecting different migration experiences. The semi-autobiographical book *The Ungrateful Refugee: What Immigrants Never Tell You*, written by Dina Nayeri, became particularly valuable to me, as it highlights how important it is to consider different stories and how they are constructed, when we make judgements and engage in practices that impact upon the inclusion and exclusion of people within national contexts.

Guillemin and Gillam (2004) explain how personal ethics can also be viewed in terms of the way researchers reflect upon procedural ethical processes that might “seem out of place in the everyday practice of social research” (p. 273). In such cases, it is important that the researcher is able to reflect upon the process, not only in terms of the data but also with regards to their own role and responsibility in the research. I experienced such moments during the parents’ interviews when two of the participants shared sensitive information about their personal migration experiences.

The experiences referred to difficult encounters during their migration journeys before arriving in Iceland and were thus, strictly speaking, not related to the topic of the research. Their descriptions were significantly emotional and grave. In one case, I was visibly taken aback for a short moment. In both instances, I admitted being affected by their words and allowed for extensive time for the parents to conclude their stories, before gradually moving the interview forward. I did not try to pretend as if I could place myself in their shoes. I did, however, try to place myself, in my own identity, as asserted by Arendt (2006), within the story being told. By doing so, I sought to acknowledge their experiences as valid and important to the space we were sharing. I decided not to include these sections of the recordings in the transcripts and subsequently omitted them from the analysis. I did so as a way of respecting the participants’ confidentiality and to protect their identities, which might be easily revealed in light of the small population in Iceland and specifically the small numbers of refugees. However, their stories sat with me and undoubtedly offered me a deeper understanding of the struggles one goes through when searching for a secure home in the world.



Other moments requiring reflexivity in terms of personal ethics occurred when some of the newly arrived participating parents asked for my support with personal matters during or after the interviews—for example, writing online applications for their children to attend school or access extracurricular activities. I had considered before the interviews that parents might ask for this kind of support, as I realise that these are some of the challenges they are struggling with. I also completely agree with Mackenzie et al. (2007) that it seems quite unethical for researchers “merely to document the difficulties of refugees and their causes without, whenever possible, offering in return some kind of reciprocal benefit that may assist them in dealing with these difficulties” (p. 310). I was thus both willing and able to extend my time to the parents after several of the interviews to support them with online applications and communications related to their children’s educational and social opportunities in Iceland.

## **5.7 Strengths and limitations**

The overall strength of the PhD project is its broad scope, attending to the concepts of citizenship and inclusion in relation to cultural diversity within national educational settings, focusing on the Icelandic context. The research deals with the way citizenship and inclusion are perceived and experienced differently, from different perspectives, by looking into public policy documents and interviewing different groups of people. The work highlights the challenges and tensions that emerge when citizenship and inclusion are understood from a national and normative perspective while also suggesting that educators can engage more inclusively with cultural diversity by considering a critical and decentered approach to global citizenship education.

The thesis offers a novel theoretical approach for understanding citizenship and inclusion in relation to cultural diversity. I consider it to be an asset that I rely on classical theoretical discussion from Arendt, and in some parts Dewey, in conjunction with more recent scholarship relating to global citizenship education and inclusion within the space of schooling. When I first read Arendt, I was already working with ideas of democratic citizenship education and cultural diversity, which I later positioned within scholarship on global citizenship education. Arendt’s educational work and her concept of visiting resonated with me as having important potential for thinking anew about the current “crisis” in education often positioned as related to growing numbers of immigrants and refugees within national educational settings.

As described earlier, the research was initially focused on refugee youth, which influenced, for example, what kind of policy documents were chosen for the first

study. Eventually, the focus was broadened to include immigrants as well. This was done in response to concerns raised by the participating teachers in Study 1 and in an effort to better reflect the actual demographics of Icelandic schools, which include both immigrant and refugee students in mainstream classes. A broader focus further opened up the possibility of including a new set of interviews with immigrant parents in the analysis underpinning Article 2.

Such changes and “add ons” can be considered a limitation to the research, watering down its original goals and possibly diffusing the possibility of gaining a deep understanding of one particular problem (i.e., educational inclusion of refugee youth). However, it is also possible to view such developments as a sign of flexibility and strength, particularly when considering that they were made in response to initial findings derived from the first study and after careful consideration between me, Elizabeth, who brought in the immigrant data, and our supervisor, Berglind Rós. I believe that this broadened scope offered the research much greater applicability and opened up opportunities for new knowledge production, in addition to raising important questions and considerations that otherwise would have been left untouched.

The research was conducted over a long period of time (from late-2017 to mid-2023) which evidently influenced its focus. This is perhaps most evident in the way the three articles might each introduce a particular concept or idea which is then not fully explored or sustained in the rest of the articles or the thesis itself. Two of the articles were also written in relation to individual research projects partially influencing their scope. I do, however, not see these irregularities and unfinished strings as lost opportunities. Rather I see them as an important part of the organic process I offered to this research (sometimes by choice and sometimes not) which also opened my eyes to new possibilities and pathways.

## **6 Summary of findings from the three articles**

In this chapter, I outline the main conclusions from the three articles that underpin the thesis. The articles have all been published in peer-reviewed journals. They provide insight into the way citizenship and inclusion are presented and perceived from diverse perspectives. Article 1 draws on public policy documents and teachers' narratives, Article 2 highlights the experiences of immigrant and refugee parents, and Article 3, partially in response to findings from articles 1 and 2, offers a theoretical discussion of critical and decentered GCE as one way to engage more inclusively with cultural diversity. While this chapter only provides a short overview of the articles, a detailed account of the results can be found in the full text of each article in the Appendix of this thesis.

### **6.1 Article 1: "Understanding the Politics of Inclusion, the 'Refugee,' and the Nation: Analysis of Public Policies and Teacher Narratives in Iceland"**

The first article was published online in December 2019 in *The International Journal of Inclusive Education*. The article was co-authored with Berglind Rós Magnúsdóttir, my supervisor, and Jo-Anne Dillabough, a member of my doctoral committee. It focused on how immigrant and refugee youth are represented within public policy documents and teachers' narratives in Iceland by considering conflicting ideological perspectives related to competitive and individualised educational discourse and normative multicultural approaches to inclusion. We set out to explore this by critically analysing two key policy documents and six supporting documents concerned with education for immigrants and refugees, as well as by interviewing 14 teachers experienced in working with immigrant and refugee students from three upper-secondary schools and two compulsory schools. A critical interpretative analysis was conducted to make connections between policy discourse, the teacher interviews, and the wider socio-political context.

The main findings indicate that aside from social policy directly aimed at the provision of basic services to refugees, there is a general legislative and regulatory silence on refugee youth, inclusion, and education in Iceland. Normative multicultural frameworks are drawn upon as integration and inclusion practices in the case of immigrant and refugee students, emphasising equality as sameness in contrast to diversity and equity. While all the teachers expressed how they were

working above and beyond their expected teaching workload and job descriptions to address the challenges met by their students with immigrant and refugee backgrounds, most, nevertheless, found it difficult to challenge or move beyond national and normative notions of citizenship. Inclusion and participation were thus premised on students being able to speak Icelandic or having in-depth understanding and knowledge of the Icelandic context. At the same time, teachers from the upper-secondary schools noted how relatively few schools in Iceland accept students with culturally diverse backgrounds, resulting in advanced pressure and a feeling of being involuntarily burdened with the responsibility of “taking care of immigrant and refugee students.” Selective upper-secondary system undermines ideas of the possibility of global citizenship within Icelandic education and what Arendt speaks of as the promise of politics, including the collective role and responsibility of policy in facilitating inclusive educational experiences for immigrants and refugees within Icelandic schools.

## **6.2 Article 2: “Performing the Norm in the Global North: Migrant Parents’ Positions and Participation within Icelandic Schools”**

The second article was written in collaboration with Elizabeth Lay, a fellow doctoral student, and our supervisor, Berglind Rós Magnúsdóttir. The article was published in the *British Journal of Sociology of Education* in July 2023. The article focuses on the positions and participation of 14 immigrant and refugee parents within Icelandic schools. In this article, we drew on critical literature and concepts concerning parent involvement, inclusion, and citizenship within education. This included paying attention to the way unequal power structures within the space of schools work to create different forms of barriers and exclusion for immigrant and refugee parents. We were also informed by Arendt’s concept of *visiting* as a potential way to understand anew how we can engage with diversity within the shared spaces and places we occupy and as a way to interrupt the binary power dynamics of parenting practices and inclusion reflected in our study. Findings indicated that immigrant and refugee parents clearly prioritised education in their children’s lives and considered Icelandic schools important places for their children to experience social and educational inclusion and belonging. Their hopes reflected the democratic and inclusive citizenship ideals frequently presented as part of Icelandic education context but were unfortunately not realised within the space of Icelandic schools, as indicated by the parents’ experiences of marginalisation and exclusion.

All the parents, regardless of their socio-cultural backgrounds and educational or migration trajectories, experienced various forms of internal exclusion within the space of Icelandic schools. That is, by being formally accepted into a shared decision-making space, only to find their perspectives and experiences invalidated or excluded completely as they did not fit the normative framework. Such positional barriers worked against the parents' efforts to become meaningfully engaged with their children's education and reinforced unequal power dynamics. National notions of citizenship including the implicit requirement of all parents speaking Icelandic, in addition to normative ideas concerning participation and practices according to an Icelandic model of parental involvement, frequently placed the immigrant and refugee parents as outsiders within the context of Icelandic schools while reinforcing the dominant position of native Icelandic parents and teachers as insiders. While many of the parents seemed to be moving from a notion of visiting by figuratively repositioning themselves and considering different ideas with regards to the point and purpose of education, they were hardly, if ever, able to bring these perspectives into being within the space of Icelandic schools. Something that should be regarded as a serious concern for a seemingly democratic and inclusive education system such as the Icelandic one.

### **6.3 Article 3: "Visiting the Forced Visitors—Critical and Decentered Approach to Global Citizenship Education as an Inclusive Educational Response to Forced Youth Migration"**

The third article was written alongside Ólafur Páll Jónsson, my supervisor, and published in the *Journal of Social Science Education* in June 2021. The article was based on a theoretical inquiry into the role and possibilities of global citizenship education (GCE) in responding more inclusively to immigrant and refugee students within national education settings in the Global North. It outlines different and overlapping theoretical concepts of global citizenship while also exploring more nuanced analysis of liberal, neoliberal, and critical discursive orientations and their possible impact on the social and educational inclusion of immigrant and refugee youth. Drawing on these discussions the article proposes a critical and decentered approach to GCE in the form of a model highlighting the importance of taking epistemological questions into account as well as depicting a relational aspect of GCE in terms of how different theoretical fields influence the lives of immigrants and refugees differently at personal, local, national, or global scale. The model presented in the article is thus understood to have both analytical and practical purpose for educators in their work.

Adding to the analysis the article goes on to discuss selected concepts and ideas from Arendt and Dewey focused on the way education serves a purpose to advance the world by continuously bringing something new into it. The concept of *visiting* is introduced as a key concept to the process of engaging more inclusively with cultural diversity within the space of schools. In particular for teachers who are encouraged to engage with diversity by visiting their students. That is to move from their centralised positions and make way for new and unexpected learning to take place. This is considered to be particularly important with regards to students with immigrant and refugee backgrounds, whose perspectives and experiences are often silenced or marginalised within national educational settings. In attending to the widely noted gap between critical GCE theories and the practical work of teachers, we further discuss the suggested approach in relation to visual and participatory pedagogical practices by offering examples deriving from a teacher's guide, developed in relation to the I-PIC research project on young migrants' citizenship and inclusion (RannMennt, 2023b) to which the study contributed.

## 7 Discussion

In 2018, shortly after being accepted into the PhD programme, I came across a book that I bought for the mere superficial reason that it had a nice-looking cover. The book is called *The Order of Time* and is written by Carlo Rovelli (2018). Rovelli is a theoretical physicist, and much of the book—for example, its mathematical formulations—is well beyond my zone of proximal development. However, it is also a book that offers the reader a unique standpoint for looking at the concept of time by weaving together physics, philosophy, and poetry. Intrigued by this holistic approach, I took special note of a sentence regarding the way Rovelli understands the world:

The entire evolution of science would suggest that the best grammar for thinking about the world is that of change, not of permanence, not of being, but of becoming. (Rovelli, 2018, p. 68)

The sentence immediately resonated with me in terms of my own field of research, education policies and practices. I kept it in mind when working on my thesis and brought it to the conversation of my colleagues and students at the School of Education. In 2020, I gave a presentation to a group of international and Icelandic policy makers, which I called: “Educating for Global Futures”. I opened the presentation with a statement that derived almost directly from the Rovelli quotation but with some adjustments:

The entire evolution of science would suggest that the best grammar for thinking about *education* is that of change, not of *performance*, not of being, but of becoming.

Swapping the “world” for “education” came naturally to me when considering the purpose of education in light of Arendt (2006)—to preserve the world by ensuring its constant renewal through the diverse perspectives and experiences of the young and the new. Initially I had misread the word “permanence” for “performance” but later also realised how the substitution of the words captures, in my view, how education emphasises static or permanent forms of being by narrowly defining what kind of knowledge or skills one has to be able to perform within a given time and place, as opposed to supporting diverse and ever-changing notions of becoming.

When considering the overall research question and findings of this thesis the elements of the sentence above lined up once again and offered me a way to discuss how citizenship and inclusion are presented and perceived within the Icelandic education context and beyond. Firstly, I discuss how citizenship and inclusion are understood in terms of assimilative *being*, wherein national and normative ideals govern education policy and practice. And secondly, in line with individualised *performance* framed within a model of competition and rank. I also discuss how these two understandings can be analysed together by considering some of the elements related to the metaphor of visiting. In the final section I discuss how citizenship and inclusion within the context of education can also be considered as a continuous and unpredictable process of *becoming* based on a critical and decentered GCE approach and why this is important with regards to the educational inclusion of immigrants and refugees.

## 7.1 Citizenship and inclusion as assimilative being

The overall findings of this thesis reflect how citizenship and inclusion within the context of Icelandic education are largely understood in relation to national and normative ideals. This is contrary to the widespread call for education to consider the roles of citizens beyond given national or geographical borders (Banks, 2009; Dillabough, 2016; Torres, 2017).

Article 1 discusses how the policy documents analysed for this research reflect citizenship and inclusion mainly from the perspective of assimilative notions of being. The aim is set on immigrants and refugees adapting to the Icelandic context (i.e., language and norms) without critically considering the mutual benefits of interactions between and across cultural diversity (Arendt, 2006). The narratives of the teachers reflect similar ideas when they described their roles and responsibilities to students with immigrant and refugee backgrounds. They did so mainly in terms of teaching them how to speak Icelandic and adapting to Icelandic norms. Previous studies have addressed the way national education policies in multicultural countries still continue to rely on monocultural notions of citizenship (Tarozzi & Torres, 2016; Osler, 2017; Pashby, 2013) and how teachers generally find it difficult to consider inclusion beyond normative and national structures (Gunnþórsdóttir et al., 2018; Huilla et al., 2022; Veugelers, 2011).

Whilst there is no question that learning a new language is a valuable resource for immigrants and refugees, the dominant emphasis placed on the Icelandic language as a prerequisite for inclusion overrides other more critical forms of engagement with cultural diversity. For example, the kind of multi-layered and decentered approach to GCE discussed in Article 3 which encourages teachers to



explore the various and often overlapping dimensions of global citizenship (Oxley & Morris, 2013) in a critical and decentered manner (Andreotti, 2006; Pashby et al., 2020) as way to explore what it means to be included and to belong in a globalised world. On the contrary, Icelandic language skills and norms were highlighted throughout the policy documents and as part of teachers' narratives, gradually shifting into a normative standard (Young, 2006) to which immigrants and refugees must adapt as a basis for inclusion and belonging.

As noted at length in Article 1, several teachers referred to their students in a deficit manner (Slee & Allan, 2011) as "complete beginners" in terms of Icelandic language skills and knowledge of culturally appropriate practices (i.e., gender equality or national holiday traditions). Cultural norms, language, and behaviour were thus used to dissect students into groups (Skaptadóttir & Loftsdóttir, 2009), drawing clear lines between Icelandic culture and foreign cultures, which reinforced a binary notion of insiders and outsiders within the school (Biesta, 2009; Naraian, 2016). In this sense, students who were quick to learn Icelandic and willing to engage in culturally recognised practices were praised by their teachers, who made linear assumptions between students' abilities to adapt to the national framework and their possibilities for inclusive futures.

Such assimilative assumptions are particularly interesting when juxtaposed with the experiences of the immigrant and refugee parents discussed in Article 2. The parents, who possessed diverse cultural and educational backgrounds and migration experiences, all felt the pressure of conforming to a normative and national model of citizenship. They were frequently expected to understand, speak, and write Icelandic when engaging with their children's school and to adapt to an Icelandic model of parental involvement (Jónsdóttir & Björnsdóttir, 2020) which sometimes contradicted their own parental practices and priorities.

While previous studies have indicated that schools rely primarily on the majority language when communicating with foreign parents and offer limited support to overcome structural barriers (Bendixsen & Danielsen, 2020; Gunnþórsdóttir, et al., 2018; Ragnarsdóttir, 2020), the findings of this study also offer unique insight into the way internal exclusion (Biesta, 2009; Young, 2000) plays out against parents' opportunities to become meaningfully involved. As concluded in Article 2, all the parents, even those who had been living in the country for more than two decades, considered Iceland their home, and those who spoke the language fluently, commonly described how their perspectives and opinions were either invalidated or disregarded altogether by native Icelandic parents or teachers, contributing to their outsider position within the space of Icelandic schools.

I believe it is important to note that national and assimilative approaches to citizenship and inclusion as reflected in the teachers' narratives and those experienced by the parents, are not, to my interpretation, a sign of disengagement or negativity towards immigrants and refugees. In fact, all the teachers in this research described how they went beyond their teaching obligations to support their students with educational and social activities. Their interest and will for their students to experience equality and inclusion came from a place of empathy and care, which I certainly consider important to the project of citizenship education (Aðalbjarnardóttir, 2007; Guðjohnsen, 2016). However, it is clear that this perspective also made it difficult for them to move beyond the soft approach to GCE as described by Andreotti (2006), generally lacking criticality and reflexivity and thus resulting, even if inadvertently, in the reinforcement of binary and unequal power positions.

## **7.2 Citizenship and inclusion as competitive performance**

Parallel to increasing cultural diversity, education in Iceland has also been responding to the way competitive and excluding ideologies have impacted education policy and practice on a global scale (Dovemark, 2018; Jónasson, 2002; Magnúsdóttir, 2016). One example relates to the development of a selective and increasingly stratified upper-secondary education system in which students are separated into groups according to their backgrounds and abilities (Eiríksdóttir et al., 2021; Garðarsdóttir et al., 2022; Magnúsdóttir & Kosunen, 2022).

These developments were particularly well reflected in the narratives of the upper-secondary teachers in this research. As discussed in Article 1, some of them represented schools that do not apply strict selection policies and thus accept larger groups of students with immigrant and refugee backgrounds than other schools. The lack of collective responsibility in responding to and engaging with growing numbers of immigrants and refugees within the country was clearly felt by these teachers, who called for "more schools to take part" in the task of bringing culturally diverse groups together. The importance of this educational task was mentioned by Arendt (2006) more than 70 years ago, in relation to America's multicultural society—a landscape that has certainly taken shape across the globe today, not least in Iceland. Collective responsibility in this regard seemed farfetched in an emerging landscape of free school choice based on competitive ranks.

The feeling of immigrants and refugees being the most unwanted group of all (Arendt, 1943) within the upper-secondary education system in Iceland was well noted by some of the parents who gradually realised that their children were not

able to choose the school they wanted to attend due to external barriers. As discussed in Article 2, some of the parents were acutely aware of the contradictions between the global and national promise of inclusion and a competitive selection system in place, undermining equality, democracy, and recognition of diversity (Jónsson, 2002; Jónsson & Garces Rodriguez, 2021; Magnúsdóttir, 2016).

In agreement with previous studies (Arnesen, et al., 2007; Goren et al., 2018; Gunnþórsdóttir & Bjarnason, 2014), Article 1 reflects how difficult it is for teachers to negotiate contradicting policy discourses such as those mentioned above. To provide an example, teachers explicitly expressed how students with immigrant and refugee backgrounds should have equal rights to education, sometimes referring to the social and democratic objectives of Icelandic education (Act 91/2008; Act 92/2008) or more broadly to universal rights such as the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989). Yet, teachers also made use of exclusionary language based on standardisation and performance by emphasising the importance of not diverting from predefined benchmarks (i.e., PISA or national standards), even in the case of newly arrived immigrants and refugees upholding notions of equality based on standardization and sameness (Dillabough, 2016).

These narratives reflect the contradictory education policy discourse that exists at global and national levels indicating shifts between liberal democratic and human rights-based notions on the one hand and neoliberally driven ideas on individual performance on the other (Jónsson, 2016; Vaccari & Gardinier, 2019). Of particular concern is how competitive notions of education are likely to supersede more inclusive and democratic goals when it comes to the level of educational practice (Jónsson, 2002; Magnúsdóttir, 2016; Seland et al., 2021), which in turn can have negative implications for students in vulnerable situations such as immigrants and refugees (Bjarnadóttir, 2022; Huang & Hólmarsdóttir, 2019).

The teachers in this research clearly felt the stress of negotiating contradicting policy discourses and ideas, which often led them to fall back on normative and predefined ideals as opposed to thinking anew about diverse perspectives and their place within the school. Naraian (2016) has suggested that static ideas of the school as a place where knowledge is predefined and maintained from the inside (by insiders themselves) makes it difficult for teachers to be flexible and open towards new perspectives originating from the outside, for example from migrant parents. Article 2 reflects how some of the immigrant and refugee parents felt as if they had to compete for their insider position (Biesta, 2009) while also noting how they stood little chance of making it to “the Icelandic side,” despite much effort. The individualized and competitive landscape met by the parents in terms of their

involvement thus underscored the aforementioned binary understanding of the school as fixed place with clear positional boundaries.

In the case of the findings from Article 1, it became clear that teachers generally felt unsupported and unprepared to work with immigrant and refugee students. While this has been noted by previous studies (Gunnþórsdóttir et al., 2018; Ragnarsdóttir, 2020), less attention has been paid to how such difficulties derive not only from structural factors such as a lack of preparation or qualified professionals but can also be understood in terms of how teachers are set up to manage contradictory discourses relating to matters of citizenship and inclusion without proper consideration of their underlying ideas and possible impacts on vulnerable groups such as immigrants and refugees.

### 7.3 Summary with a note on visiting

The sections above highlight how citizenship and the inclusion of immigrants and refugees within the Icelandic educational context are either perceived from the perspective of *being*, defined by national and assimilative ideals, or in light of *performance*, based on ideas that connect educational inclusion with competition and rank. Clearly, these are interrelated perspectives that do not exist in isolation from each other. Rather, in accordance with other studies focused on citizenship and cultural diversity in the Global North (Biseth et al., 2021; Pashby, 2013; Pashby & Costa, 2021), they overlap and tend to be simultaneously present throughout different layers of policy and practice.

Taken together, these perspectives can be understood to reflect a primarily soft and methodological approach to GCE (Andreotti, 2006; Pashby et al., 2020), wherein the outcomes of citizenship and inclusion are predetermined rather than open to new perspectives and possibilities. Another way of looking at the two perspectives together is to consider how they might or might not represent notions associated with the metaphor of visiting as presented by Arendt (2006).

In Article 2, the internal exclusion experienced by the participating parents, and how it contributes to their fixed outsider position within the space of Icelandic schools, is compared to being looked upon as a visitor with little or nothing to offer within the Icelandic educational context. Or as framed by Ahmed (2021) as *guests* within someone else's home, who are welcomed only on assimilative conditions and yet never fully included. As noted, before, none of the parents found the Icelandic school to be a place wherein they were able to share their own perspectives and experiences on equal ground. This was true even for parents who had been living in the country for decades and spoke the language fluently. Also,

for those parents who made considerable efforts to perform the normative parental practices expected of them.

Although Article 1 was not theorised from the perspective of visiting, the analysis of the teachers interviews reflects how most of them placed themselves and the group they belonged to within a centralised position in terms of knowledge and norms, while expecting immigrant and refugee students, as well as their parents, to adjust their own frame of mind or to the normative centre (Huilla et al., 2022). As noted by Arendt (2006) when explaining the notion of visiting, it can be difficult for dominant actors to actively relocate their own thoughts and perspectives and place them within a new standpoint. The way immigrant and refugee parents in this research talked about the school as a particularly exclusive place in comparison with other social settings in Iceland further indicates how it might be even more problematic for teachers as dominant actors within a place such as the school – where knowledge is understood to be created from the inside by insiders themselves – (Narayan, 2018) to respond to cultural diversity from a visiting perspective. Rather, as noted by all the parents in this research, their perspectives, and experiences, were met with suspicion and doubt, resulting in a feeling of not belonging to the school.

The idea of the guest and the notion of visiting is particularly interesting within the Icelandic context when considering the old yet still common Icelandic saying: “glöggð er gests augað,” which roughly translates into “the guest (or the visitor) has a clearer eye.” In other words, those who are new to already occupied spaces and places are considered to be able to offer those who have been there longer an important and valuable perspective. Yet, against the insightful wisdom offered by this old saying, immigrants and refugees are rarely considered as the kind of guests that have something valuable to offer to the table of education within the Icelandic context.

#### **7.4 Citizenship and inclusion as becoming**

In Article 3, which was written partially as a response to the initial findings of studies 1 and 2, my co-author and I outline a critical and decentred approach to GCE as one possible way to engage more inclusively with cultural diversity within national educational contexts in the Global North. The model presented can be considered as a slight reformulation of existing typologies of GCE emphasising different and overlapping fields (Oxley & Morris, 2013) to which the idea of global citizenship is connected. We also highlighted how these different fields might impact the lives of immigrant and refugee youth differently on a personal, local, national, and global scale. Finally, in the spirit of Andreotti (2006) and Phasby et

al. (2020) we wanted to depict the importance of approaching these matters in a critical and decentered manner. The model was thus understood to serve not only an analytical purpose but also to offer an idea of how educators could practically start working with GCE in part through the metaphor of visiting.

The article was also an inquiry into how selected concepts and ideas from Arendt (2006) and Dewey (1938, 1939) could be seen to support more recent critical and pedagogical notions of GCE (Andreotti, 2006; Pashby et al., 2020; Torres, 2017). Both Arendt and Dewey emphasise the fact that we are all the same in terms of being born into a common world, while at the same time we are all unique because of the way each one of us stands and looks upon the world from different perspectives. This inclusive notion of diversity also underpins their ideas about education where the school is understood as an important place in which the “young and the new” (Arendt, 2006) should be safe to develop and bring their unique perspectives into the presence (Biesta, 2006). Arendt refers to this process as a constant state of *becoming* and thus highlights the open-ended and unpredictable role of education in making a better world and how diverse perspectives play a critical part in beginning and maintaining such a process.

To understand citizenship and inclusion from the perspective of becoming is to regard every new and unique perspective as important to the world we share. The idea of becoming does thus not only apply to the constant change of the physical world, as noted at the beginning of this concluding chapter (Rovelli, 2018), but also to the fact that the world of ideas is constantly changing through the movement of people who carry with them unique perspectives and experiences. For example, about what it means to be a citizen and to be included.

I believe that there is reasonable and important opportunity for Icelandic schools to work towards the idea of becoming rather than relying restrictively on pre-given notions of being or competitive performance as a prerequisite for people to feel included. This is particularly so given the socio-democratic history of education in Iceland and the stated role of Icelandic compulsory and upper-secondary schools in supporting students to participate in a democratic society. Also, when considering the unique connection between critically oriented national education policies such as the fundamental pillars and global policies such as the SDG 4.7 underpinning important connection between global citizenship, cultural diversity, and inclusion. The findings of this thesis however also suggest that there is a need to engage more strategically with how overlapping and often-contradictory discourses shape and support instrumental priorities and excluding practices – particularly at the upper-secondary level.

A school in which citizenship, and inclusion can be considered from the point of diverse representations as opposed to being confined to national assimilation or unjust competition could be a school in which immigrants and refugees are able to take up various positions and roles as opposed to being labelled in a deficit manner as outsiders or as guests with little or nothing to offer within the context of their new home.

The notion of home is crucial to immigrants and refugees who have, for various reasons, relocated from their original homes in search for a new one. Drawing on her own experience as a refugee, Arendt (1943) explains how losing a home is about much more than leaving one's house or moving from one place to another. It is about losing the familiarity of daily life; it is about losing a language, which also means losing the naturalness of reactions, gestures, and feelings towards the people and places around you. Her words illuminate the importance of the school being a safe place for immigrants and refugees to re-establish this lost familiarity and to have a chance of feeling at home through meaningful and inclusive communication, cooperation, and participation.

What can be learned from the findings of this thesis is that an inclusive feeling of home will not be developed as part of education which forces people to adapt to national culture and norms, nor by pushing them into competing for rank and privilege. Rather I believe there is a need to consider education more broadly in relation to the multiple and overlapping fields connected to global citizenship and more importantly to approach such teaching and learning from a critical and decentered perspective. I believe that teachers are in a unique position to do so through their everyday pedagogical choices and practices. As discussed in article 3 a notion of visiting could support them in their task of critically reflecting upon their own, and often preconceived, ideas and to consider the multiple perspectives offered by those around them. Be it their students, parents, or other teachers. A visiting disposition (Andreotti et al., 2014) taken up by teachers would potentially support an educational space wherein students are also supported to go visit each other in an effort to explore different stories; perspectives, and experiences about what it means to be a citizen and to belong in today's globalised world.

While this thesis highlights the role of teachers in facilitating a critical and decentered approach to GCE as a way to engage more inclusively with cultural diversity I am also aware of the important role policy and policy makers play in supporting transformative changes within the field of education. There is need to critically take up existing policy tensions evident within the Icelandic context. Including the growing prevalence of individualised and instrumental policy discourse and its impact on inclusive and democratic practices (Jónasson, 2002;

Magnúsdóttir & Jónasson, 2022). It is important also to connect such interrogations more specifically with questions concerning the purpose of education in preserving the world by preserving the unique newness of every person. While I remain realistic in terms of how far we can move the discussion of education, citizenship, and inclusion within a global culture of competing nations, I still feel confident that a notion of visiting can serve as an important analytical and practical concept to understand and embark on a critical and decentered GCE journey. I also think that such a journey could be particularly important to the inclusion of immigrants and refugees within national educational contexts. For if we can all be, even if only momentarily, visitors in the lives of those who are not like us and consider the wise words “glöggst er gests augað”, we can all become more at home in the world we share.

## 7.5 Future research and concluding remarks

The scope and findings of this PhD project provide numerous opportunities for further research and considerations. Due to the way the research gradually developed young immigrants and refugees do not have a direct voice within this thesis. They were, however and will continue to be, the driving force for my engagement with citizenship and inclusion as part of education. I thus consider it a logical step to take, to reach out to this group in my future work. As noted, this PhD project has contributed to larger research projects: the PAPIS research project on parental practices and the I-PIC research project on the irregular processes of citizenship and inclusion of migrant youth in Iceland, Norway, and the UK. The I-PIC research is ongoing, offering a unique platform from which I foresee collecting visual data to capture ideas and experiences of citizenship and inclusion from young people situated within different local and national contexts. I am also extremely interested in continuing with the valuable researcher-teacher collaboration that has developed within the I-PIC project in Iceland and Norway. This work could include for example an opportunity to further explore the analytical and practical opportunities offered by the GCE model presented in Article 3.

I believe that there is still considerable room for studies looking into the ideological underpinnings of education in Iceland with regards to issues of cultural diversity, citizenship, democracy, human rights, and sustainability. I am also interested in the ways these different yet overlapping areas of educational priorities and interventions can be explored further—for example, in relation to the growing numbers of schools in Iceland that engage in various school programmes such as the UNICEF child rights school programme, the UNESCO school programme, and the Eco school programme. How such programmes and related practices might



reflect different and possibly contradictory understanding of citizenship is for example an interesting question to pose.

As an adjunct lecturer at the School of Education, University of Iceland, I have been very fortunate to be able to present the matters and findings of this thesis to my colleagues as well as to the students who attend the courses I teach. The students are most often pre- or in-service teachers with diverse backgrounds and experiences. They are thus, by far, the most important group with which I can discuss the possible implications of my work in terms of transformative pedagogical practices. Hearing that they have been able to view their own practices or the ones of their schools in a different light after reading and discussing particular findings of my work has been immensely encouraging. Their feedback and inputs have also enabled me to continuously relocate myself in an effort to gain a deeper understanding of how educators could and should be responding to increased cultural diversity and difference.

This thesis began by noting the impact global migration and its resulting cultural diversity have had on education worldwide. By some, growing cultural diversity within national contexts has been described as a crisis or even as a danger to society. However, as Arendt asserts (2006, p. 171) a “crisis becomes a disaster only when we respond to it with preformed judgments, that is with prejudices”. By drawing on Arendt this thesis makes the implication that it is essential for education to respect and preserve the diversity of perspectives and experiences immigrants and refugees bring into national educational contexts, as a way of preserving the world at large. While I am sure that I will continue to think about education, citizenship, and inclusion with the help of Arendt I also hope that this research can be taken as encouragement for other Icelandic researchers to make more use of Arendt’s work when studying education.

Clearly, cultural diversity in itself, or even the challenges we face as a result of it, is not the crisis—rather, how we choose to engage with it may be. We cannot simply continue to repeat the same things and we cannot go backwards, which means that we must reconsider the current situation. This thesis has been an attempt to do so—to pause for a moment and gather diverse information from different directions and perspectives in order to reflect upon the situation and the way forward. But just as this thesis has been full of winding roads, unexpected moments, mistakes and monumental learnings, there is no straightforward direction in terms of how education should engage with citizenship and inclusion in the future. Most importantly, we need to pay attention to the purpose of education and ask ourselves critical questions concerning how we are able to come together in a continuously changing and diverse world.



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# Paper I



## Paper II



## Paper III