The Transition from Preschool to Primary School

Views of Parents of Children from Diverse Backgrounds in Iceland

Björn Rúnar Egilsson

Thesis for the degree of Philosophiae Doctor

October 2022

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Abstract

The transition to primary school has been identified as a critical event in the lives of children that can have long term implications for their learning and development. The transition to primary school is also widely regarded as an emotional period of multifaceted transformations and adoptions of different strategies for parents, yet relatively little is known about the lived transition experiences of parents of children from diverse (linguistic, cultural, socio-economic) backgrounds. The aim of the research project is to examine the transitions from preschool to primary school from the perspectives of parents of children from diverse backgrounds in Iceland. Fourteen participants were recruited at two partner preschools in Reykjavík and invited to four rounds of semi-structured interviews over the course of twelve months, beginning at the end of their children's stay at preschool and continuing throughout their first year of primary school. Photo-elicitation was employed during interview sessions and the data was interpreted through eclectic analytical frameworks and theoretical lenses.

The findings of this study, which have been published in four articles, suggest both overlap and divergence in parental experiences and attitudes towards the transition to primary school. Preschools were generally regarded as positive places for the children but attitudes towards parental belonging in the preschool community were nuanced, with some participants preferring to stay on the 'outside'. The start of primary school was characterized by the families' acquaintance with parallel communities of practice: the primary school, after-school care centers, organized sports and leisure activities, and heritage language learning. Parents leveled criticism towards the former two and seemed more actively engaged in the latter two. At the individual level, narratives of taking action when the child's wellbeing was considered at stake and of re-evaluation of the participants' own cultural backgrounds and values of their upbringing were present in the data. So too were narratives of vulnerability, lack of opportunities of education and work, and disenfranchisement. At the methodological level, an interpreter's overinfluence was uncovered and a new dimension opened in data from an interpreter-facilitated interview. The study highlights the importance of gaining understanding of diverse parental perspectives and the need for further research to support positive transitions for all children.

Keywords: Transition, parents, preschool, primary school, diverse background.

Ágrip

Þáttaskil leik- og grunnskóla eru talin einn af lykilviðburðum lífsins og líkleg til að hafa áhrif á námsárangur, þroska og vellíðan langt fram eftir ævi. Þáttaskil þessi eru jafnframt talin vera tilfinningaþrunginn tími í lífi foreldra, sem sjálfir ganga í gegn um margvíslegar breytingar og tileinka sér ólík bjargráð. Lítið hefur verið vitað um viðhorf foreldra barna með fjölbreyttan tungumála- og menningarbakgrunn til þeirra þáttaskila þegar börn fara úr leikskóla í grunnskóla á Íslandi. Markmið rannsóknarinnar var að kanna reynslu foreldra barna sem hafa slíkan tungumála- og menningarbakgrunn af flutningi barnanna úr leikskóla í grunnskóla. Fjórtán þátttakendum sem áttu börn við tvo samstarfsleikskóla í Reykjavík var boðið í fjögur hálfstöðluð viðtöl á 12 mánaða tímabili, frá því að börn þeirra voru að ljúka leikskólagöngu sinni og allt til loka fyrsta árs grunnskólagöngunnar. Stuðst var við ljósmyndir foreldra í viðtalslotum og gögnin voru greind með margvíslegum aðferðum og frá ólíkum fræðilegum sjónarhornum.

Niðurstöður rannsóknarinnar, sem birtar hafa verið í fjórum ritrýndum greinum, gefa bæði til kynna skörun og sundurleitni í reynslu og viðhorfum foreldra til þáttaskila leik- og grunnskóla. Leikskólinn var almennt álitinn góður staður fyrir börnin en viðhorf foreldra til eigin hlutdeildar í leikskólasamfélaginu voru blæbrigðarík, þar sem sumir þátttakendur kusu frekar að standa „fyrir utan“. Upphaf grunnskólagöngunnar einkenndist af kynnum fjölskyldnanna af samhliða lærdómssamfélögum: grunnskólanum, frístundaheimilum, skipulögðu íþrótta- og tómstundastarfi og móðurmálsnámi. Foreldrar höfðu uppi gagnrýni á grunnskólann og frístundaheimilin og virtust virkari þegar kom að skipulögðu íþrótta- og tómstundastarfi og móðurmálsnámi. Frásagnir einstakra þátttakenda af því að grípa til eigin ráða þegar velferð barnsins var talið ógnað, af gagnrýnu endurmati og uppgjöri við eigin menningarbakgrunn og uppeldi, af berskjöldun, réttindaleysi og af skorti á náms- og starfstækifærum var einnig að finna í gögnunum. Aðferðafræðileg eftirgrennslan leiddi enn fremur í ljós ráðandi tilhneigingar túlks, sem opnaði á nýja vídd í gögnum úr túlkuðu viðtali. Við rannsóknina kom í ljós mikilvægi þess að öðlast skilning á ólíkum sjónarhornum foreldra og þörfin fyrir frekari rannsóknir til að styðja við jákvæð þáttaskil fyrir öll börn.

Lykilorð: Þáttaskil, foreldrar, leikskóli, grunnskóli, fjölbreyttur bakgrunnur.

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Finally, to the participants of this study: thank you for taking the time from your busy lives to share your experiences and perspectives with me. This thesis is dedicated to you.

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Egilsson, B. R., Einarsdóttir, J., & Dockett, S. (2021). Parental experiences of belonging within the preschool community. *International Journal of Early Childhood*, 53, 31–47. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13158-021-00281-z

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Egilsson, B. R., & Vandenbroeck, M. (2022). Narratives of maternal action and cultural re-evaluation in relation to the transition to school. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*. https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2021.2021983

Egilsson, B. R., Dockett, S., & Einarsdóttir, J. (2021). Methodological and ethical challenges in cross- language qualitative research: The role of interpreters. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*. https://doi.org/10.1080/1350293X.2021.1992463

1 Introduction

1.1 Aims and Objectives of the Study

The experiences of children and parents from diverse backgrounds (culturally, linguistically, socio-economically) and their educators at the time of transition from preschool to primary school in Iceland are not well known or understood. Existing transition research in Iceland has hitherto either not targeted children and parents from diverse backgrounds or been unsuccessful in recruiting participants. Education research in Iceland has on the other hand indicated that children from diverse backgrounds are more likely to face social and educational challenges in schools; that their parents find educational practices in schools problematic in many ways; and that educators regard themselves as ill-equipped to adjust their practices to meet these challenges. The study presented in this thesis, *The Transition from Preschool to Primary School: Views of Parents of Children from Diverse Backgrounds in Iceland*, is part of a larger research project bearing the title *Educational Continuity: Supporting Positive Transitions for Children from Diverse Backgrounds*. The aim of the overall research project is to examine children's transitions from preschool to primary school in Iceland and the connection between those school levels, particularly for children from diverse backgrounds (culturally, linguistically, socio-economically); provide evidence of what fosters positive transitions to school for those children; clarify why some children do well in school and why other struggle; and find ways to increase their overall success and well-being. For the purposes of this study, the term *diverse background* denotes families with one or both parents born in a country other than Iceland and where children have a home language other than Icelandic, or who are emergent bi- or multilingual. A home language refers to a language learned in the home environment during childhood (UNESCO, 2022). The term *diverse backgrounds* utilized in this study builds on a policy draft published by the Ministry of Education (2020) on the education of children from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds. In the draft, the term *linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds* refers to children in the Icelandic education system who have previously been defined by their origins, parental nationality, or Icelandic language fluency. In previous policy documents, these groups have been referred to as *children of foreign origin*, *children with foreign backgrounds*, *children with another mother language than Icelandic*, *children with Icelandic as a second language*, and *bi- or multilingual children*.

The research team working on *Educational Continuity* aims to shed light on the subject by generating data among the main stakeholders of the transition to school: children, their families, and preschool and primary school educators. The overall research project is thus divided into three sub-studies focusing on the three main areas of investigation: A research project investigating children's perspectives on transition (data comprised of observations and interviews based on drawings and photographs); a research project investigating parental perspectives on transition (data comprised of serial interviews and photo-elicitation); and a praxeology research project among preschool and primary school educators (data comprised of individual and focus-group interviews). The overarching objective is to contribute to the creation of knowledge on the impact of transition and continuity on children's educational success. In turn, this greater understanding will provide a platform for action among educators and policymakers in the field as well as contributing to understandings of transitions and transition experiences in the international research community. In doing so, it seeks to meet the first goal of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) *Education for All Strategy* that describes the importance of expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for vulnerable groups (UNESCO, 2015).

The research project *Educational Continuity* was a part of a large-scale joint enterprise of universities and researchers from five countries (four Nordic countries and the Netherlands) bearing the title *Politics of belonging: Promoting children's inclusion in educational settings across borders*. The participating universities were the University of Oulu, Finland; the University of Iceland; the University of Stavanger, Norway; Linnaeus University, Sweden; and Zuyd University of Applied Sciences, the Netherlands. The aim of the transnational project was to inform policy and practice in the participating countries by advancing theoretical and empirical understanding of commonalities and variations in the politics of belonging both at the macro and micro level: how belonging is realized among children, parents, and educators in everyday settings and how belonging is articulated in educational policies and embodied in educational practices. While research on children's inclusion and exclusion in early education and care settings and their participation in democratic societies is ever important, its relevance becomes even greater in an era of increasing migration and population diversity. Every child has the right to be valued equally and treated with respect, but the realization of this right may be challenged if early education and care systems fail to adapt during rapid social changes characterized by increasing levels of cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic diversity. A more comprehensive understanding on how belonging is materialized or fails to materialize among children, parents, and educators in

everyday educational settings is a dimension worth exploring in transition research as both children and parents enter new contexts at the start of primary school and engage in relationship building with peers, other families, and educators. One measure of the effectiveness of transition experiences is linked to the perceptions of belongingness among those involved (Dockett & Perry, 2021).

The study presented in this thesis, *The Transition from Preschool to Primary School: Views of Parents of Children from Diverse Backgrounds in Iceland*, aims to elicit the views of participating parents on this important milestone in their children's lives by giving them the opportunity to express their thoughts, hopes, and concerns about their children's transition to primary school as a means to gain a deeper understanding of what they experience at the time of educational transition. Aside from contributing to the overarching research projects and generating knowledge for domestic and international academic audiences in the field of early childhood education and care and transition research, the study provides valuable insights for educational practitioners and policymakers with the potential to promote improved educational conditions for all children in Iceland. To achieve these aims, the study involved prolonged engagement with the participants, generating data through semi-structured serial interviews and photo-elicitation over the course of twelve months, during their children's transition from preschool and throughout their first year of primary school.

1.2 Researcher Reflexivity

Critical reflection upon my own background as a researcher and upon experiences of the transition from preschool to primary school have been an integral part of the practice of ethical and methodological reflexivity, as I am in many ways conducting research in my home field (Egilson, 2006). I come from a family of educators, have worked in the preschool and primary school systems for a combination of five years and was a project manager for the National Parent Association of Iceland for four years. During that time, I travelled frequently around Iceland visiting schools and giving talks for children, parents, and educators. These professional experiences made me aware of schools as social nexuses, which becomes more pronounced in small towns and villages where the school may be the largest (or even the only official) building: A meeting place where social relations and communities of educators and families are formed among people who would otherwise cross paths less often or not at all. I have experienced the transition between preschool and primary school as a child, parent, and as an educator and my overall involvement with the Icelandic education system has been multifaceted. Both of my parents worked at the primary school I attended as a child, and we lived in the vicinity of the school. I could see the school grounds through the window of our living room and

used to observe the older children play outside during recess. By the time I had become a father of a girl who was about to make her own transition to primary school, I had worked both at her preschool and prospective primary school, where she had visited me on numerous occasions, was familiar with some of the staff and was later accompanied by almost all of her friends from preschool. That level of familiarization with the early childhood education system endowed me with an insider's point of view, as it comes with social capital and knowledge of unwritten rules and expectations that smoothed my transition process as a child and as a parent and rendered it more or less *unproblematic* to my mind.

My education and professional experience have provided me with varied and helpful insights for conducting this type of research. Conversely, my advantageous transition position can obscure the change and challenges some families encounter at the start of school. My participation in the research project has thus in many ways consisted of learning to view the transition from preschool to primary school from multiple perspectives and as potentially challenging. However, my background does not entrench me further as an insider, as I do not come from what this study defines as a diverse background and neither do my children. I was born to parents of Icelandic ancestry on both sides and spent my childhood, adolescence, and adult years in the capital region of Iceland, apart from studying in Portugal and England for a year in each country. My spouse and children were born in Iceland and have grown up immersed in the Icelandic language and culture. These dissimilarities of background and life experiences warrant reflection on my positionality vis-à-vis the participants. Coming from a background that by most metrics is considered as bestowing a dominant social position with regard to language, cultural background, gender, and ethnicity, I do not have lived experiences of many of the challenges reported by the participants in this study: I have not been impeded in making social connections within preschool and primary school communities in Iceland, nor have I felt a lack of recognition as a parent and had my concerns fallen on deaf ears within the education system. I have neither had to contend with the language barrier nor been dependent upon others to communicate in the official language in Iceland. I have not experienced prejudice or discrimination based on my ethnicity, language, or cultural background in Iceland. I have not had to face the challenges of being a single parent, nor have I had to deal with the economic burden of supporting family members living in other countries. To engage effectively with the participants, it was important to examine the emerging rapport through reflexivity. This was done through journaling, listening intently to the audio recordings from the interviews to identify if and how questions and prompts could have been framed differently, and by discussing researcher-participant relations during meetings of the research team

working on *Educational Continuity* and (in much more general terms) with students in a qualitative methodology course in which I taught at the School of Education.

Embarking on this PhD journey has been a heuristic process of coming-of-age as a qualitative researcher. It has offered valuable insights into the transition process from diverse perspectives and rewarded me with increased self-understanding. Interacting with the participants over an extended period, and sharing their experiences, concerns, joys, and sorrows – people with vastly (and not so) different cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic backgrounds from my own – has been a humbling experience, in the most positive sense of the word.

1.3 Thesis Overview

The thesis consists of seven main chapters. The first chapter introduces the aims and objectives of the study. The second chapter provides the context in which the research was conducted and the third outlines the study's theoretical foundations. The fourth chapter contains a literature review and ends in presenting gaps in the literature and posing the research questions. The fifth chapter describes the study methodology in detail: participant recruitment; data generation; analysis and ethical considerations. In the sixth chapter, the findings are presented. The findings are then discussed in chapter seven.

2 Research Context

2.1 Diversity in Icelandic Educational Settings

The Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) system in Iceland has been confronted with multifaceted changes, challenges, and opportunities in recent years, due to a substantial increase in the numbers of children and families from diverse backgrounds (culturally, linguistically, socio-economically) attending its educational institutions. Preschools in Iceland have witnessed a considerable increase in the numbers of children from diverse backgrounds. In the year 2015, close to 19% of preschool children in Reykjavík had one or both parents with an immigrant background (Leskopf et al., 2015) and 15.6% of all children in Icelandic preschools did not have Icelandic as their home language by the end of 2020 (Statistics Iceland, 2022a). At the compulsory school level (grades 1–10, ages 6–16), 12% of all children did not have Icelandic as their home language by the end of 2020 (Statistics Iceland, 2022b). These developments correspond with the growth of the immigrant population from 4.6% in 2006 to 15.2% in the beginning of 2020 (Statistics Iceland, 2020), which represents a major demographic shift for Iceland.

2.2 The Transition from Preschool to Primary School in Iceland

Preschools and primary schools receive funding from and are administered at the municipal level in Iceland. Costs are heavily subsidized for parents and attendance is nearly universal for children from 2–6 years of age. By the end of 2018, 95–97% of children aged 2–5 and 48% of one-year-old children were enrolled in preschool on the national level (Statistics Iceland, 2018). Educational policies at the preschool level are mainly centered on care, well-being, play and social development (Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, 2011b), whereas children begin formal learning in literacy, numeracy, and other subjects such as music, visual arts, physical education, swimming, and home education when they start primary school (Ministry of Education Science and Culture, 2011a). Schools on both levels have established transition practices and channels for cooperation. These include preschool teachers organizing *school groups* for the oldest children of the preschool where they are introduced to letters and numbers, preschool children visiting the local primary school before they start school, and introductory meetings for parents (Einarsdóttir et al., 2008). However, these practices are neither standardized nor universal. The transition to primary school takes place in the end of August of the year when

children turn six years old. All children are guaranteed a place at their neighborhood public school and begin in what is known as first class of compulsory education. Compulsory school encompasses grades 1 to 10 (from ages 6–16) and children move between grades irrespective of their academic achievement. Attendance at compulsory education is mandatory by law and free of charge but there are some options for private education at the primary school level in the municipality of Reykjavík. Parents and guardians can opt into paying for school lunch subscriptions and a spot for their children at after school care centers.

Attendance at after-school care centers is high among children of primary school age, as full employment of both parents is prevalent. The after-school care centers are operated at all public schools on the primary school level in Reykjavík. Children aged 6–9 years can attend from the time school is over until 5 p.m., when parents pick their children up after work. Participation in organized sports, extracurricular music education, and leisure activities is widespread among young children in Iceland. Many municipalities subsidize recreational activities. Amounts vary among municipalities, but parents and guardians of children from 6–18 years of age who have legal residence in Reykjavík could apply for a grant of 50,000 ISK (approximately €367) per child each year at the time of the study. The grant, usually referred to as the *leisure card*, is designed to encourage recreational activities among children and teenagers irrespective of socio-economic circumstances and is managed by the Municipal Department of Sports and Leisure.

2.3 Official Policy Concerning Parents and Education in Diverse Settings

The legal framework around parental rights and responsibilities in early childhood education and care is comprised of five main documents: the Preschool Act (2008), the Compulsory School Act (2008), the Directive on the Responsibilities and Obligations of Members of the School Community in Compulsory Schools (2011), and the General Curriculum Guidelines (Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, 2011a, b) for both education levels. According to these documents, parents are expected to be actively involved in their children's education, both at the individual and communal level. Parents have the right to receive and are required to share information on the child's well-being with educators (Preschool Act, 2008). Parents and educators are expected to cooperate to further the child's academic advancement and these relationships are to be built on respect for diversity in family makeup. Primary schools are required to have reception plans in place for students with other home languages than Icelandic in which children and their parents are provided with counseling and access to the relevant information (Compulsory School Act, 2008). Parents bear joint responsibility with the child as regards its

behavior at school and conformity to the school's regulations (Directive on the Responsibilities and Obligations of Members of the School Community in Compulsory Schools, 2011).

Parents are guaranteed the right to communicate their ideas, perspectives, and concerns with regard to preschool and primary school operations through participatory representation in parent and school councils and parents' associations. At the preschool level, administrators are obliged to hold elections for and cooperate with a three-member parent council. Parent councils are tasked with observing the implementation of the preschool's curriculum and its introduction to parents and reviewing major changes to the preschool's operations. Preschool administrators are supposed to help with establishing parents' associations if requested (Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, 2011b; Preschool Act, 2008). Parents' associations traditionally organize events which children, educators and other family members can attend together. These can include family mornings in the preschool or field trips and summer or Christmas festivals. Compulsory schools are required to operate a nine-member school council, three of whom are from the parents' community. The school council is tasked with the school's policymaking; its annual operational and financial plans; observing safety regulations; and reviewing major changes to school operations. Compulsory schools are required to establish and operate a parents' association, which is supposed to support school operations, advance student well-being, and cement ties between home and school (Compulsory School Act, 2008). Traditionally, parents' associations at the compulsory school level are involved with organizing events, engaging in fundraising, and providing parent support, often in the form of information meetings for parents on issues pertinent to education, upbringing, and prevention (such as substance abuse, bullying, and online safety).

The Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture published the National Curriculum Guides for the preschool and compulsory school levels in 2011. This educational policy is based on six fundamental pillars: *Literacy*, *Sustainability*, *Health and welfare*, *Democracy and human rights*, *Equality*, *and Creativity*. The pillars are meant to provide continuity by permeating educational content, practices, and the school environment and equipping children with social, cultural, environmental, and ecological literacy that will allow them to cooperate with others and thrive in society. The *Equality* pillar is especially pertinent to education in diverse settings as the objective of education for equality is to allow all children to develop on their own terms and nurture their talents in a school society characterized by equality and justice. Equality education is regarded as referring (among other things) to culture, descent, language, nationality, outlook on life, race, and religion. It emphasizes

educational content and practices concerning these facets of equality (Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, 2011a; b).

To facilitate the materialization of the educational values present in the legal framework and the curriculum guidelines, the Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture published a draft policy concerning the education of children and youth from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds (2020). The draft policy stipulates that children's cultural and linguistic backgrounds be regarded as valuable resources that benefit Icelandic society. Detailed information on Icelandic education policies, schools, afterschool care centers, and organized sports and leisure is to be made available in foreign languages. Parents of children from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds are to be regarded as important partners who possess invaluable knowledge which can be utilized for the children's advancement. The Municipal Department of Education and Youth in Reykjavík, where this study was conducted, has formed a policy on education and leisure in diverse settings called The World is Here (Department of Education and Youth, 2014). In the document, diversity of background is related to culture, skin color, origin, language, and religion. All preschools, compulsory schools, and after school care centers in Reykjavík fall under the policy domain and are expected to operate in accordance with its main emphases: *Diverse teaching methods and practices*, *Icelandic as a second language,* and *Active bilingualism and parent cooperation*. The policy objectives stipulate the importance of developing school practices that foster participation of all children and meet every child in respectful and interactive communication, strengthening the children's linguistic abilities (Icelandic as well as heritage languages) and initiating cooperative relationships with parents that are flexible, responsive, and solution oriented.

2.4 Icelandic Research on Education in Diverse Settings

Education researchers in Iceland have paid closer attention to children and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in light of recent shifts in the population profile. Increased effort has gone into researching with children and families from diverse backgrounds, where participants are often defined as being of foreign or mixed background or having other home languages or heritage languages than Icelandic. The findings have given cause for concern, as many studies highlight the shortcomings of the education system in accommodating children from diverse backgrounds (Magnúsdóttir, 2010; Tran, 2007).

There are indications that these children are more likely to be excluded and access fewer opportunities for play in the preschool than children born to families from the dominant background, characterized by Icelandic heritage and language

(Einarsdóttir & Ólafsdóttir, 2019; Rúnarsdóttir & Valgeirsdóttir, 2019). At the compulsory school level, research suggests that this segment of the school populations is at risk of being socially marginalized (Chen & Ragnarsdóttir, 2014) and more likely to encounter troubles at school than their peers who have both parents born in Iceland (Bjarnason, 2006). Compulsory school students (aged 10–13) who have other home languages than Icelandic spend less time with children from their same age group, have fewer friends than their Icelandic-speaking peers (Guðmundsdóttir & Ragnarsdóttir, 2012), report less life satisfaction, and receive less support from family, friends, and classmates (Rúnarsdóttir & Vilhjálmsson, 2015). They are more likely to report being unhappy and lonely at school, and less likely to take part in organized sports and leisure activities (Þórisdóttir, 2018). Many have experienced prejudice and bullying due to their appearance and origin (Tran & Lefever, 2018), attain lower standardized test results in comparison to other children, and are more likely to drop out of upper-secondary education (Garðarsdóttir & Hauksson, 2011; Ragnarsdóttir & Lefever, 2018). In addition to this, there are indications that teachers at the lower secondary level regard themselves as ill-equipped to adapt their teaching practices for students with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Ólafsson, 2019).

Research touching upon views and experiences of parents of children from diverse backgrounds in Iceland indicates that they find many features of the Icelandic education system to be problematic and that there is ample room for improvement. Recent research has indicated that information dissemination to parents of children from diverse backgrounds needs to improve at the preschool level (Einarsdóttir & Rúnarsdóttir, 2020). Parents have called for increased Icelandic language support for bi- and multilingual children and acknowledgement and utilization of the children's cultural backgrounds and home language competencies (Einarsdóttir & Pesková, 2019). They have reported low academic expectations towards their children and examples of negative attitudes towards linguistic diversity within the education system (Pesková & Ragnarsdóttir, 2017). Parents of children from diverse backgrounds have talked about the lack of mutual communication and cooperation between parents and educators and complained about a perceived general lack of discipline, organization, and homework at the compulsory school level (Gunnþórsdóttir et al., 2017). These parents regard their children's participation in after-school care, sports, and organized leisure activities to be important for language acquisition and fostering social connections and peer relationships, with the financial cost posing challenges for many families (Ragnarsdóttir & Hama, 2018).

However, recent research has also provided examples of educators and administrators taking steps to foster inclusion and social justice in an active manner

through democratic leadership (Svavarsson et al., 2018) and succeeding in developing educational practices which are culturally responsive and creating welcoming communities for children and families (Ragnarsdóttir et al., 2016). These practices include but are not limited to educators investing time in daily interaction with parents and familiarizing themselves with the cultural backgrounds of the attending families; building upon the children's strengths and interests; and initiatives to make diverse languages visible at school and encourage their cultivation at home, and to build bridges between them and the Icelandic language (Ragnarsdóttir, 2018; Simoen, 2018).

3 Theoretical Background

The theoretical foundation of this study draws on multiple complementary perspectives to encompass the nuanced nature of the data, to help expand the foci of the research and to situate it in a scholarly conversation (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012; Mertz & Anfara, 2006; Mills & Bettis, 2015). These theoretical perspectives were not determined beforehand, as the research project was data-driven from its conception. This was done in an effort to avoid confirmation of belief (Trowler, 2012) and to select the appropriate perspective in light of the data, using it to notice novel aspects and understandings (Einarsdóttir, 2014).

Four articles were produced through an emergent analytic process. Two articles focus on common aspects and thematic patterns discerned across the dataset, while the other two highlight research encounters and narratives at the individual level. This eclectic approach offers the flexibility to apply frameworks in a creative way that inform particular parts of the study (East & Peters, 2019): parental belonging in the preschool community; the families' introduction to parallel communities of practice during the transition to primary school; and parental action and reevaluation of cultural background. The perspectives drawn upon in the study consist of theoretical works on *belonging* and the *politics of belonging*, *horizontal transitions to school and communities of practice*, and Freire's work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. A further delineation of these perspectives is provided below.

3.1 Belonging and the Politics of Belonging

Belonging is considered to be important for young children's agency, development, learning, identity, and well-being. While belonging has been identified as a key factor determining the effectiveness of transition to school programs (Dockett & Perry, 2021) and educational institutions are thought to have a crucial role to play in providing opportunities for children experiencing belonging (Johansson & Puroila, 2021; Kyrönlampi et al., 2021), the topic remains under researched in relation to parents in early childhood education and care communities and the transition to primary school (Mitchell et al., 2017; Mitchell & Bateman 2018). Recent research has emphasized the fluidity, flexibility, and dynamic nature of the concept of belonging, which is constantly being negotiated and re-negotiated (Lähdesmäki et al., 2016; Yuval-Davis, 2006). Belonging is conceived as being multilayered or multifaceted. Yuval-Davis (2006) has argued that belonging can be identified at

three fundamental analytical levels: social locations; identifications and emotional attachments to various collectivities; and groupings and ethical and political value systems. Lähdesmäki et al. (2016) classify five motifs (topoi) of conceptualizing belonging (spatiality, intersectionality, multiplicity, materiality, and non-belonging) cutting across three dimensions (political, emotional, and affective), while Sumsion & Wong (2011) note ten overlapping dimensions (emotional, social, cultural, spatial, temporal, physical, moral/ethical, spiritual, and legal). While the different categorizations denote the multiple ways in which attachments of belonging are manifested, for Yuval-Davis et al. (2019) belonging centers around emotional attachments: feeling at home and feeling safe. However, belonging is a contested and power-loaded phenomenon.

The *Politics of Belonging* shift the focus from subjective perceptions of belonging to the processes of belonging (Stratigos et al., 2014) and the ways in which it is enacted in the social world. It denotes political projects designed to construct ideas of belonging around certain collectivities, which are deeply connected to people's social locations, self-identification, and values (Yuval-Davis, 2006). The collectivities are then in turn formed through these projects and placed within specified boundaries (Yuval-Davis et al., 2019). While Yuval-Davis' focus is mainly on participatory politics of citizenship, the politics of belonging are also acted out in people's daily lives. The three *Axes of Belonging* (Sumsion & Wong, 2011) provide analytical tools to examine how individuals position themselves and make sense of their own belonging in everyday settings. The axes are conceived as being fundamental to and cutting across a range of categorizations of belonging and reflect their provisional and dynamic nature. The axis of *Categorization* pertains to judgments about who belongs where (or to what) and the terms on which they do so. *Performativity* relates to how belonging is performed or repeatedly enacted, for example, through identity narratives. The axis of *Resistance and desire* is at play when people determine themselves where, to what, or with whom they belong. Resistance can involve challenging or overthrowing pre-given or externally imposed categories of belonging, whereas desire can instigate new possibilities of relations (Sumsion & Wong, 2011).

3.2 Horizontal Transitions to School and Communities of Practice

Theoretical work on transition as movement has been characterized both by vertical and horizontal movement (Dockett et al., 2017c). The movement is vertical in the sense of having a distinct one-way progression: occurring only once during a person's lifetime and being associated with changes in the roles, identities, and status of the individuals in question. From this perspective, educational transitions

represent a one-way progression from one level to the next: moving from preschool to primary school and from primary school to secondary school and so on (including movement between classes within each level). Horizontal movement, on the other hand, is characterized by daily movement between different spheres (between home and school, school and after-school care, or organized sports and leisure) and occurs when people are simultaneously members of multiple communities of practice. The terms are not mutually exclusive, as movement of the transition to school can be vertical and horizontal at the same time.

Wenger (1998) defined a community of practice as a group of people who share an interest or goal, engage in communal activity, deepen their knowledge through regular interaction, and construct a shared identity. Members of a community of practice interact, take part in joint enterprises, and develop a shared repertoire of routines, practices and resources that contribute to the maintenance of the community (such as meetings, conversations, and information dissemination). From this perspective, a school can be considered as a community of practice; as too a class within the school and the after-school care center as well as individual families (Pálsdóttir, 2012). A school can thus be conceived as a collective of smaller, overlapping communities of practice. Communities of practice are seldom characterized by complete harmony, but can be rife with disagreement, struggles and power imbalances. A community's traditions and practices can both facilitate and hinder entrance for new or prospective community members. Wenger's work has been utilized in Icelandic education research to some extent, but families have not been the focus of such studies. The Icelandic term *lærdómssamfélag* (translated directly as *community of learning*) has been used for Wenger's term of a community of practice along with the terms *starfssamfélag* and *iðjusamfélag* (translated directly as *professional community* or *community of practice*). These terms are mainly understood as referring to a field of professional development for educators and administrators in Icelandic academic discourse on early childhood education (Mörk & Sigþórsson, 2011; Sigurðardóttir, 2013; Gísladóttir et al., 2019; Björnsdóttir et al., 2021). Employing the term in the context of this study and recognizing different family contexts as communities of practice expands its use within education discourse and research in Iceland.

3.3 Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed

The start of primary school has been described as a time of internal and external transformation for parents as old contexts are replaced by new, and roles, responsibilities, and relationships change (Dockett et al., 2017c; Dockett & Perry, 2013). How these experiences may coincide with deeper and more radical transformative change in parents which prompt critical reflection and action, is less

documented and not as well understood. Freire's work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2014) in general, and his concepts of *conscientização* (concientization or critical consciousness) and the *culture circle*, in particular, were stimulated by and cultivated through his activism for illiterate and impoverished people in rural Brazil and the educational initiatives he pioneered for their betterment. The Freirean corpus examines and advocates for the relationship between education and social change (Vandenbroeck, 2020), as he sought to find ways to help the poor fight oppression in the form of injustice and exploitation by enabling them to realize the truth of their situation and recognize the causes of their oppression and dehumanization. Dialogue and trust between a teacher and learners were integral in Freire's mind and he cautioned against attempts to liberate the oppressed without their reflective and active participation. Any such endeavors would ultimately lead to their objectification and leaving them at the mercy of populist manipulation.

Conscientização refers to a personal process of developing a critical awareness of social reality through contemplation and action: "learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (Freire, 2014, p. 38). This process is one of inner change in a social context, where social action – the "radical denunciation of dehumanizing structures" (Freire, 1998, p. 514) – is an integral part. This process of cultivation of critical consciousness, which Freire understood as a collective process where individual reflection is shared and private concerns are molded into collective needs, is closely related to the concept of the *culture circle*. The culture circle represents a forum for dialogue which is characterized by equality and mutual respect. The circle's purpose is to raise the participants' awareness of their reality and promote actions to transform it for the better (Homer, 2011). The starting points of a dialogue within a culture circle are issues and common experiences related to the participants' everyday lives. The basis for this was Freire's conviction that educational experiences do not take place in a vacuum but in specific historical, economic, and political contexts; and that education's value lies in its utility in overcoming social oppression. Through dialogue, participants utilize their knowledge of the contexts in which they live to pose problems, consider multiple perspectives, engage in problem solving, and explore courses of action at the personal and social levels. Thus, a culture circle's aim is to promote critical consciousness (Souto-Manning, 2010).

4 Previous Research on the Transition from Preschool to Primary School

4.1 The Importance of Positive Transitions to School

Children's transition to primary school has increasingly become the focus of early education researchers and policymakers (Ballam et al., 2017). A report of the *Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development* [OECD] (2017) on early years education advocates for greater attention to be given to transitional challenges faced by children as they enter school. Starting school has been identified as a "key life event" (Turunen, 2014, p. 145) that often has implications for children's learning and development, both during the transition phase and in the long term (Eckert et al., 2008; Einarsdóttir et al., 2019; Entwisle & Alexander, 1998; Margetts, 2009). A positive start to primary school has been linked to improved academic achievement and social competence, as student's identities and positions as learners are being affirmed – thus heavily influencing both their experiences with and expectations of school. Claims have been made that unfavorable classroom practices can "begin moving some children into the track of school failure" (Skinner et al. (1998) as cited in Peters, 2014, p. 109) and that failure at the earlier years of schooling may set children on unfavorable learning trajectories that affect their entire academic careers (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2001). As a result, children who encounter academic difficulties and social adversity early in their school years are more likely to continue facing difficulties throughout their school careers and even into their adult lives. It is therefore maintained that the continuity of children's learning and their experiences with transitions to school are central to their overall life experiences and well-being (Vogler et al., 2008).

Children whose home environments, family expectations, and educational ideas are similar to those at school are less likely to run into difficulties during the process of transitioning (Dockett & Perry, 2007, 2014). Research has also indicated that children from backgrounds described as complex or disadvantaged may experience more problems than their more advantaged peers (Dockett & Perry, 2007, 2014; Hair et al., 2006; Halle et al., 2009). These findings indicate an alignment of home and school expectations, practices, and values may be taken for granted by educators and school administrators. A review of the literature addressing the transition to school reveals that collaboration and good relationships are among the

most commonly cited success factors (Dockett, 2014; Mashburn & Pianta, 2006; Perry et al., 2014; Peters, 2010). Friendships and other positive peer relationships and interaction with teachers are considered pivotal for children during the transition period, as are respectful relationships among professionals and families. In addition, notions of belonging, recognition, acknowledgement of culture, and respectful, reciprocal relationships (Peters, 2014) are regarded as key ingredients in promoting effective transitions.

4.2 Theorizing Transition

Researchers working in the field of educational transitions have examined the transition to primary school through various theoretical lenses. Many of these lenses emphasize movement, continuity, and change. Continuity has been a dominant term within academic discourse on education for decades and was one of the key concepts of John Dewey's philosophy of education. Dewey argued that since all genuine education emerges through experience, teachers should build upon the experiences that children bring with them to school. Dewey thus introduced the *principle of continuity of experience*, meaning that every experience involves taking prior knowledge and modifying it in some way. He maintained that educational institutions have to consider and build upon the experiences children have already as they (and the capacities or skills developed alongside them) set the stage for further learning (Dewey, 1938). Dewey's idea remains influential to this day and has had part in shaping academic discourse on early childhood education, research on the transition between school levels, and educational policymaking in Iceland (Einarsdóttir, 2007; Einarsdóttir & Jónsson, 2010; Haraldsdóttir, 2012; Óskarsdóttir, 2012). The idea of the beneficial nature of educational continuity has also raised awareness of the discontinuity that children can experience at the start of primary school. The use of concepts such as *borderlands* and *chasms* to describe it and the *bridges* or *scaffolding* needed to alleviate its potentially negative effects on children is plentiful within recent early education literature (Peters & Sandberg, 2017; Sandberg et al., 2017).

However, continuity is thought to go hand in hand with change when it comes to educational transitions. The process is marked by movements from known and familiar contexts and systems (early childhood settings such as the home or preschool) to ones more unfamiliar or less known (primary school) and internal (identity, expectations) and relational (social roles, relationships) changes. Educational transitions are therefore also thought of as "dual" (Dockett & Einarsdóttir, 2017, p. 146) or "dynamic" (Dockett et al., 2017a, p. 277) processes of continuity and change as children may experience changes in their identity, status, and role (Ecclestone et al., 2009). Transition points, especially the one to

primary school, are often portrayed as precarious junctures, capable of impeding continuous development – reflected in dips in learning or loss of confidence in learning (Broström, 2003) – and serving at the same time as prompts for new learning and overcoming challenges (Dockett & Einarsdóttir, 2017).

The term rite of passage, introduced by the ethnographer van Gennep (2004) is regularly invoked in the literature (e.g. Garpelin, 2014; Vogler et al., 2008) – to account for the start of primary school – a significant transitional life event in three phases: preliminal (one's separation from a previous world – e.g. leaving home or preschool), liminal (transition stage, e.g. summer between schools) and postliminal (one's incorporation into a new world or endowment of new status, e.g. entry into primary school). In the context of transitioning to primary school, special rites can include visits to and a tour of the new school, purchasing a school uniform or a school bag and school supplies and meetings with the classroom teacher and principal (Dockett et al., 2017c). However, starting school is not always such a clear-cut event. As children separate from familiar preschool settings and move to a new school, they must adapt to their new environment and social context (Ackesjö, 2019). The transition period can therefore be a time marked by instability where "synchronous exit and entry processes in different school forms are drifting into each other" (Ackesjö, 2017, p. 149).

Rather than being a short-lived event marked by the start of the academic year, the transition to school is seen as a lengthy process stretching weeks or months before and after the commencement of school; marked by preparatory events and activities with the aim of supporting children's understanding and familiarity of the new school context (Margetts, 2014). Movement during the transition to primary school has been conceptualized as being both vertical and horizontal (Dockett et al., 2017c). The movement is vertical in the sense that it occurs only once and constitutes a one-way transfer from one setting to another in accordance with expected standards of progression of life events (e.g. from home or preschool to primary school or from one grade to the next), accompanied with changes in roles, status and identities (Elder, 1998). Horizontal movement constitutes daily movement between different contexts or spheres (such as between home and school and school and after-school care) and occurs when an individual is a member of different communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) at the same time. The transition to school can be characterized by concurrent vertical and horizontal movement (Dockett et al., 2017c).

The transition to school is seen as a social event, in which the child affects and is affected by the environment and the interlocking contexts of family, local community, and institutions. Bronfenbrenner's *Bioecological Theory* and *Process-*

Person-Context-Time (PPCT) model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) is widely thought to provide a suitable framework for understanding multiple levels of influence on children's learning and development (Hellblom-Thibblin & Marwick, 2017) as they go through various educational transitions and marks a popular starting point for theorizing transition (Dockett et al., 2014). In his earlier *ecological systems theory*, Bronfenbrenner maintained that ecological transitions happen as a person's position is altered or transformed due to a change in role or setting and pays attention to the various contexts in which people live and the interactions among them. The more refined *Bioecological Theory* introduced the *Process-Person-Context-Time* model which gives a more comprehensive outline of the various influences on development. Key components of the PPCT model include proximal processes that are complex reciprocal interactions between an individual and the environment; i.e. a person's individual characteristics (experiences, resources, motivation, temperament, and agency) and their immediate context of interaction with other individuals (microsystem), overlapping contexts (mesosystem) that influence their actions whether they are direct participants in them or not (exosystem), the wider societal or cultural context (macrosystem) and time (chronosystem), including the time that spans the events in question and the historical context that encompasses the social actors and processes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

The theories above have much to offer researchers in the field of early childhood education and care as they underline multifaceted aspects of the transition from preschool to primary school: framing it as movement characterized by a dynamic mix of continuity, discontinuity, and change; highlighting important rites of passage, complex exit and entry processes, and the influences of overlapping social systems. However, all theoretical frameworks have gaps, silences, and assumptions and it is important to consider what they may mask as well as what they highlight (Dockett, 2014). While these theoretical works offer guidance and important insights, they were not deemed suitable for interpreting the data generated in this study. Drawing on different yet complementary theories was necessary to frame parental experiences of their children's educational institutions during the transition to primary school; to interpret nuanced parental attitudes towards the early childhood education communities; to account for the internal and external transformations parents experience during the transition phase; and how the language barrier may contribute to parents' marginalization in diverse settings.

4.3 Diversity, Families, and Transition to School

Critical theory and concerns for social justice have influenced recent early education research, notably when considering the issues of diverse children and families, their

transition to primary school, and pertinent social, economic, and political factors (Ballam et al., 2017). Addressing diversity in children's transition to school includes recognizing differences between children's social, cultural, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds, as well as contrasts in learning and behavioral development. Recognizing and valuing diversity in the student population is increasingly thought to be instrumental in promoting and achieving equity of educational opportunity and foster positive relations in the school environment (Hellblom-Thibblin & Marwick, 2017). Belonging in the context of education has increasingly come to the attention of researchers in recent years, as questions about who belongs or does not belong in educational settings have become more pressing in an era of increased globalization, mobility, and diversity (Johansson & Puroila, 2021). Belonging, in general, has been associated with both psychological and physical benefits and *school belonging* – being accepted, respected, valued, and supported within the school community – has been framed as an important component of the wellbeing of children and youth at school (Allen & Boyle, 2018; Slaten et al., 2018). However, critical research from the United States. has highlighted the emotional and psychological harm of denying belonging to immigrant children of color and challenged majoritarian conceptualization of belonging in ECEC, which are centered around the white monolingual and monocultural child's ways of being and communicating (Souto-Manning, 2021; Souto-Manning et al., 2021). These issues are directly related to the harm, devaluing, and denial of belonging unresponsive educational practices may cause parents in ECEC, a topic which has hitherto been under-researched in studies of transition to school.

Early childhood researchers have hitherto mainly focused on the experiences and understandings of educators and children of preschool age regarding belonging. Research among early childhood educators in Australia has shown that they were more aware of some dimensions of belonging (Sumsion & Wong, 2011) than others. For example, the emotional and social dimensions of belonging were much more prominent in their minds than the cultural, as they strongly associated belonging with feeling accepted and being part of a group but were less concerned with ideas about heritage, shared knowledge, traditional practices, and history (Tillet & Wong, 2018). In Iceland, preschool educators have regarded social interactions and opportunities for play to be integral for promoting belonging but worried that the language barrier could lead to children's exclusion among their peers (Einarsdóttir & Ólafsdóttir, 2020; Einarsdóttir & Rúnarsdóttir, 2021). Research among children has shown that various aspects of preschool practice are related to children's experiences of participation and belonging, which are reflected in relationships with other children, places within the preschool, activities, institutional and cultural practices, and play materials (Kyrönlampi et al., 2021). Play within the

peer group provides opportunities for belonging but play situations can be scenes of power struggles where boundaries are placed and playmates chosen (Eidsvåg & Rosell, 2021) and participatory opportunities can be limited for children who have short enrollment histories and are less fluent in the dominant language (Ólafsdóttir & Einarsdóttir, 2021). A recent study on parental perspectives on children's belonging in preschool in Iceland indicates that most parents regard their children as enjoying good social relations, having friends, and being part of their peer groups. However, parents of children from diverse backgrounds were more likely to worry about their children being excluded because of their cultural and linguistic backgrounds. These parents were also less likely to regard themselves as being consulted on ECEC operations and being in a position to share their views (Einarsdóttir & Rúnarsdóttir, in press). While belonging has been suggested as being critical for the effective engagement of children and families with ECEC services (Tillet & Wong, 2018), belonging has neither been widely used as a framework for research on the transition from preschool to primary school nor on parental experiences of early childhood education and care communities (Mitchell et al., 2017; Mitchell & Bateman 2018).

4.3.1 Critical Aspects, Social Justice, and Strength-Based Approaches

Critical perspectives in early childhood education and care have had theoretical implications on transition research (Dockett et al., 2014). In general, critical researchers are concerned with addressing histories of alienation and domination; the critique of social institutions; empowering people against social constraints (such as those associated with race, culture, language, gender, sexual orientation, and class); and the envisioning of new possibilities (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Previous theories have increasingly been re-evaluated in light of these theoretical developments. Despite their appeal among researchers and their theoretical elegance, Bronfenbrenner's ecological and bioecological theories have been the subject of criticism on the grounds of masking or oversimplifying differences in individual and cultural experience (Petriwskyj, 2014) and running the risk of framing children as a-historical or a-cultural individuals (Dealtry et al., 2017). Assuming that microsystems operate in the same way for all children or failing to contemplate that locating the child at the center of the microsystem may not reflect the real priorities of the systems, has further shortcomings (Dockett et al., 2014).

Academic writers have increasingly endorsed terms thought to be respectful towards children's diverse cultural backgrounds and identities (Mitchell et al., 2017), such as children's *transition capital* and *transition ease* (Dunlop, 2014). This emphasis stems in part from a critical constructivist approach that regards notions

such as *school readiness* (which commonly entails children being either ready or unready for starting school) as products of historical, political, social, and cultural processes which result in "one child [being] ready on one side of town and not ready on the other" (Graue & Reineke, 2014, p. 160). While any child may be at risk of having lesser transition experiences if their individual characteristics are incompatible with the school environment (Peters, 2014), the emphasis on school readiness may place the responsibility for attaining it on the shoulders of individual families and further espouse views of parenting as investment. In a cultural climate of individuality, which is more prevalent in white middle class communities than in communities of color and poverty in the United States, the focus is placed on setting the individual child up for success. As individual parents try to secure their children's success in a competitive environment, they may have little regard for the experiences of other children and be unreceptive to concerns about equity in transition (Graue & Reineke, 2014). Diversity-oriented and strength-based approaches which emphasize the development of pre-existing strengths and values of children, families, and educators have been called for – promoting the view of diversity as an asset (Dealtry et al., 2017; Hohepa & McIntosh, 2017). Acknowledging that all children and families have strengths as well as needs, researchers are increasingly becoming aware of the importance of addressing culture, identity, cultural values, and culturally lived experiences (Hohepa & Paki, 2017). By listening more intently to members of families of children from diverse backgrounds they have learned important lessons, such as that a good early childhood education center is a place where "families belong [...] and in which language and culture are understood and reinforced" (Mitchell et al., 2017, p. 30), and where academics and professionals can capitalize on families' deep cultural knowledge and resources (Graue & Reineke, 2014, p. 171). Underlying this inclusive and collaborative approach are notions such as the *Funds of Knowledge* (González et al., 2005) and participation, implying that "people are competent, they have knowledge and their life experiences have given them knowledge" (Mitchell et al., 2017, p. 31).

Responding to different needs and promoting the strengths and abilities of children and families from diverse backgrounds presents educators and school administrators with a variety of challenges which have alerted researchers to the importance of exploring and developing responsive forms of school management. Among these emerging approaches to management styles is what Brown et al. (2019) have described as *distributed culturally responsive leadership*. It is an eclectic construct, drawn from various sources within the field of education and organization leadership studies. The DCRL approach is distributed in the sense that it does not espouse a view of the principals as a complete leaders whose role it is to create a

school culture by the power of their skills and knowledge alone. Rather, it envisages a form of leadership that utilizes the actions of other actors within the school community to realize organizational goals: empowering administrators, educators, along with parents, and children to acquire and maintain a sense of agency within and ownership of the school community. This is accomplished through shared activity and interaction, and by offering the different actors a genuine role in decision-making. This approach requires educational leaders, among other things, to adopt strategies for sharing power through establishing productive relationships with families and to solve problems through teamwork (Leithwood et al., 2006).

These emphases are not possible without respect, fairness, and equality for each person, which in contexts of diverse children and families call for concern for social justice and responsiveness to and respect for diverse cultural traditions. Fostering culturally responsive education leadership practices includes being able to acquire knowledge of the diverse cultural values and symbols within the school community and utilize them to motivate people and achieve organizational goals; sensitizing educators to possible structural inequalities and diverging academic, personal, and social needs within diverse classrooms; and cultivating respectful and reciprocal relations. Furthermore, assessment frameworks within culturally responsive school communities are developed to take students' cultural backgrounds and ways of communicating into consideration. This is done in order to better provide students from diverse backgrounds with helpful feedback, opportunities to demonstrate their competencies, and assistance with future learning and academic development (Herzog-Punzenberger et al., 2020; Nayir et al., 2019; Nortvedt et al., 2020).

4.3.2 Families and Transition to School

Familial aspects of the transition to school have increasingly come to the attention of researchers, as the family is regarded as providing a consistent context for children during that time (Dockett et al., 2017c) and being a "fundamental contributor" (Goff, 2017, p. 221) to their learning and development. Relationships with significant others underpin children's feelings towards school, personal school success, and available support networks (Murray, 2014). Although no two families experience the transition to primary school in the same way due to differences in socio-economic circumstances, cultural background, personal history, and expectations (Dockett & Perry, 2014; Rogers et al., 2017), research has shown that parental concerns at the outset of school often have common denominators. These concerns are centered around their children's safety (Ackesjö, 2017), their socioemotional competence and behavioral skills, and overall adjustment to the school environment (Dockett & Perry, 2007; Einarsdóttir, 2010; Griebel & Niesel, 2002; McIntyre et al., 2007). The end of preschool and start of primary school mark

a period of mixed and strong emotions for many parents, who experience optimism, joy, and pride on the one hand and bittersweet feelings of loss paired with concern on the other (Griebel & Niesel, 2002; Einarsdóttir, 2007).

Families go through their own transition when their children start school. Parents' roles and agency are altered by becoming parents of a school child and they are introduced to, and have to make sense of, new school contexts (Dockett et al., 2017c). The transition to school has been associated with changes in daily practices such as morning, evening, and bedtime routines and children's increased participation in extracurricular activities and social interaction with friends, while communication between home and school often becomes less frequent and more formal (Sturludóttir & Einarsdóttir, 2008). Challenges faced by parents in educational transitions have been identified on three principal levels: the *individual*, *interpersonal*, and *contextual* (Griebel & Niesel, 2013). The individual level denotes internal developments such as the construction of a new identity, increased responsibility, and the sense of losing control. The interpersonal level encompasses new relationships with educators and other parents, while the contextual level stands for changes in daily and weekly routines of the family and how holidays are spent. Even when children experience a positive transition to primary school, their parents may encounter difficulties in adjusting to the new school context. Comparatively little effort has gone into researching how schools can support parents during this time (Webb et al., 2017). The transition to school has therefore been framed as an ambivalent time of "vulnerability and opportunity" (Ackesjö, 2017, p. 149) for parents as they take on a dual role of supporting their children while navigating their own transition.

Although empirical research on the experiences of parents and family members at the time of their children's transition to school is considered limited (Ackesjö, 2017; Dockett et al., 2017c), the literature views parents as having great potential for a beneficial influence on educational transitions. The nature and quality of interactions among the main stakeholders influence the children's educational trajectories. In this sense parents are thought of acting as important links in successful transitions both to preschool and primary school and as critical partners in providing continuity (Bohan-Baker & Little, 2002; Clarke, 2007; Dockett, 2014; Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2000; McIntyre et al., 2007). Parental engagement has been seen as offering educators opportunities to gain a better understanding of individual children's lives and backgrounds (Baum & McMurray-Schwarz, 2004; Eldridge, 2001) and has been associated with children's later academic success, completion of high school, socio-emotional development, and adaptation in society (Galindo & Sheldon, 2012; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; OECD, 2012; Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2008). However, this association generates the argument that parents who do not

engage with their children's education in ways the system views as beneficial, can be positioned as 'absent', 'disinterested', or 'bad' parents. This raises questions about what parental engagement in diverse settings entails, for whom it is beneficial, who is in a position to judge its value and impact, and why dominant paradigms may discourage or put some parents at a disadvantage (Dockett et al., 2017c).

4.3.3 Families from Culturally, Linguistically, and Socio-Economically Diverse Backgrounds and the Transition to School

Parent and family involvement in education is not viewed as an unproblematic subject. Parental socioeconomic status has been related to involvement in their children's education (Liu et al., 2020) and families with greater socio-economic challenges have been reported to be less frequently involved with their children's education than families with more resources (McIntyre et al., 2007). This dimension has often been explored within a Bourdieusian framework, where early childhood education and care settings are viewed as *fields*. A field in this sense is a micro-world within the macro-world (of the entire social space), structured by positions which are determined by an uneven distribution of *capital:* the economic, cultural, and social resources available to individuals through their networks of relationships. To each field, there is a corresponding *habitus,* a system of embodied dispositions of thinking and acting (Bourdieu, 1997; Brooker, 2015). From this perspective, all fields are structured by relations of dominance (Alanen & Siisiänen, 2011) where the accumulation of various forms of capital divides individuals into domineering and dominated groups. Empirical research has indicated that cultural and economic capital is significant for the generation of social capital (Alanen, 2011) and that capital-rich individuals are more engaged in voluntary-based associational activities (Siisiäinen et al., 2011). Not surprisingly, research has indicated that parents from working- or lower-class backgrounds have generally weaker relations with other parents and are more distant towards school. The reasons may include difficulties in being physically present at school due to inflexible work schedules and transportation issues, fear of being deported (for undocumented immigrants) or reported to child welfare services, lack of familiarity with the school culture and holding beliefs that their best course of action is to turn over educational responsibility to the educators (Calzada et al., 2015; Lareau & Shumar, 1996). Although becoming a school parent is associated with challenges on multiple levels (Griebel & Niesel, 2013) and can be a shocking experience for the first time (Ackesjö, 2017), having a child transition to school can be particularly complicated for parents from immigrant or refugee backgrounds. This is further confounded by encountering language barriers and cultural differences (De Gioia, 2017; Norheim

& Moser, 2020), as these parents often encounter paradigms of family involvement and home–school relations that are unresponsive to their needs (Goff, 2017; Rogers et al., 2017).

Teachers' beliefs, hidden assumptions and generalizations can contribute to the rift often felt between families and educators. Traditional paradigms of family-involvement can exclude valuable forms of interaction patterns and culturally rich habits of families that are not recognized by the school culture (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). Differences between local and official culture – what is valued at home and what is valued at school – can be considerable for families from cultural and linguistic minorities (Brooker, 2002). Predominant paradigms of family involvement and home–school relations tend to privilege dominant social groups (Dockett et al, 2017c). In turn, predominant paradigms have been reported to fuel feelings of failure, inferiority, and anxiety among minoritized immigrant families by placing demands (around homework, pickups, communications) that cannot be met by the parents and framing the children as problem students from the outset of school (Souto-Manning, 2018). Parental involvement at school is generally more frequent among parents whose culture and lifestyle are most compatible with the school culture (Lee & Bowen, 2006), while parents from immigrant backgrounds are generally less involved and face more obstacles in establishing partnerships with educators (Norheim & Moser, 2020). Families from culturally, linguistically, socially, and economically diverse backgrounds are often those who are regarded as uninvolved or disinterested (Heng, 2014) in their children's education and school affairs. The reasons for the perceived indifference may be due to lack of opportunities to communicate with educators (Norheim & Moser, 2020) and difference in cultural norms; such as not asking questions about the child's appetite and rest in the preschool because parents simply expect the child to eat when hungry and sleep when tired (Mantovani & Bove, 2016). Furthermore, parents from migrant backgrounds have been found to identify themselves as powerless in the education system, refraining from interaction with educators. Adopting a strategy of silence and compliance to the norms of the educators may be done out of fear of exclusion and in order to further their children's learning opportunities (Van Laere et al., 2018; Van Laere & Vandenbroeck, 2017).

Although parents generally try to support their children when they start school (Dockett et al., 2012), not all of them are after the kind of partnerships of shared responsibilities with educators that fit dominant paradigms (Goff, 2017; Rogers et al., 2017). Rather, they may be seeking the kind of relationship that is marked by mutual respect and is "responsive to them and their families" (Dockett, 2017, p. 264). Parental support does not hinge on being noticeable at school (Kienig, 2017). Families of children from diverse backgrounds may support their children's

transition and subsequent learning in ways that are not visible to the school. When this "hidden support" (Kaplun et al., 2017, p. 71) is not recognized and valued, it may result in further withdrawal on part of the parents and lost opportunities for educators to gain important and culturally sensitive insights. Mistrust of education policies can be deep-rooted because of colonial exclusion or assimilation strategies in the past (Hohepa & McIntosh, 2017). However, educators, administrators, and policymakers can draw upon extensive research on the pitfalls of approaching all families and children from perspectives shaped by the norms and ideals of majority society. These include educators having little understanding of the families and children attending their schools and family engagement or intervention programs that and do not engage parents cooperatively (Valdés, 1996); and how the rich resources and practices of children and their families may not be recognized or even devalued at school (Compton-Lilly, 2007). There are positive and inspirational examples to draw on as well that touch upon the fundamental subjects of literacy and numeracy: getting to know families and learning about children's literary practices to enable them at school (González et al., 2005) and of teachers finding ways to practice inclusive family engagement and developing equitable teaching methods (Karsli-Calamak et al., 2020).

4.3.4 Gaps in the Literature

While empirical research on parental experiences and views on early education and care in diverse settings has become more prevalent in recent years (Draghici, 2019; Garnier & Brougère, 2017; Tobin, 2016; Van Laere, 2017), research aimed at exploring the experiences and perspectives of parents of children from diverse backgrounds (linguistic, cultural, socio-economic) during the transition to school is still limited (Devlieghere et al., 2020). Although diversity of abilities and backgrounds among children has been gaining increasing recognition within the field of education research in recent years (Hellblom-Thibblin & Marwick, 2017; Peters, 2010), this trend has yet to explore fully the reality of different familial needs and ways of life. For example, families have different sets of economic, social, and cultural capital which are not always deemed equally compatible with the school. Family structures, norms of interaction, and home routines vary and so do parental education, expectations towards home–school relations, and resources for assisting their children (Dockett et al., 2017c). A study addressing the views and experiences of parents of children from diverse backgrounds on their transition from preschool to primary school in Iceland is therefore relevant for international research audiences in general, and more specifically for domestic researchers, educators, and policymakers.

Icelandic society has witnessed changes to its population profile characterized by increased cultural and linguistic diversity. These changes have presented numerous challenges and opportunities for educators and school administrators in communicating effectively with families from diverse backgrounds and under–standing and responding to their experiences, concerns, and needs (Einarsdóttir & Rúnarsdóttir, 2020; Ragnarsdóttir, 2021). Although Icelandic education researchers and policymakers are not unaware of recent developments and the present state of affairs, much work remains to be done to advance empirical knowledge on the subject and implement appropriate improvements to policy and practice. The international research literature recognizes the importance of a positive transition to primary school for all children and has framed it as a period of strong emotions that herald manifold changes for parents as well as children. Yet, much of the transition research conducted in Iceland has hitherto not involved families from diverse backgrounds and little is known about the preschool experiences of these children and their families, or their experiences of the transition to school (Einarsdóttir, 2010, 2019). The voices of parents who are neither fluent in Icelandic nor English are less frequently heard in research with parents of young children from diverse backgrounds in Iceland (Pesková & Ragnarsdóttir, 2017; Ragnarsdóttir et al., 2016), as language barriers in qualitative research come with increased costs and methodological challenges or require researchers from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Last but not least, the study has theoretical relevance for domestic and international academic audiences as little is known about parental experiences of belonging (Sumsion & Wong, 2011; Yuval-Davis, 2006) in early childhood settings and Wenger's (1998) theory on the communities of practice and Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed (2014) have not been prominent in research on parental perspectives on the transition from preschool to primary school.

4.4 Contribution of the Study and Research Questions

To address the gaps identified above, the present study was designed to elicit the views of parents of children with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds about the transition from preschool to primary school in Iceland. This study consists of a sustained effort to understand better how parents of children from diverse backgrounds experience the preschool and the transition to primary school in Iceland. The methodological approach as described below, of serial in-depth interviews where participants could speak their home language and engage in photo-elicitation as they interacted with the researcher, was deemed to be suited to addressing existing gaps in the Icelandic research literature. It would present the researcher with opportunities of following participants during a whole year of their child's educational transition, establishing rapport with participants through

extended engagement, and make it possible for participants to be interviewed and share photographs from their daily lives in their home languages. While not suggesting that this study is generalizable to other national contexts, it contributes to a growing literature on parental experiences of the transition to primary school in settings characterized by cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic diversity. In addition, the study presents an opportunity to explore parental experiences of and attitudes towards the transition to primary school through theoretical lenses not typically associated with transition research. These considerations provide the backdrop for the following research questions.

Research Questions

1. How do parents of children from diverse backgrounds in Iceland experience and interpret belonging in the preschool community?

2. What characterizes the experience of having a child transition from preschool to primary school for parents of children from diverse backgrounds in Iceland?

    2.2 What kind of changes do parents of children from diverse backgrounds associate with having a child transitioning from preschool to primary school in Iceland?

3. What are the implications of using interpreters in research with parents of children from diverse backgrounds in Iceland?

The participants in this study were drawn from families with one or both parents born in a country other than Iceland and where children have a home language other than Icelandic, or who are emergent bi- or multilingual. The term "parents of children from diverse backgrounds in Iceland" used in the research questions above refers to the participants in this study.

5 Methodology and Methods

5.1 Methodological Orientation

The study was conducted using qualitative methods to gather rich data to gain an understanding of the transition process from the viewpoints of parents of children from diverse backgrounds and to explore together with participants how they experienced the transition to school. Parents of children from diverse backgrounds were recruited and participated in four rounds of interviews during a twelve-month period. Photographs taken by participants were utilized in the last three rounds of interviews. Qualitative approaches and a social constructionist theoretical perspective are well suited to building understanding of the varied meanings the participants negotiated through interaction with the researcher and attached to transition: an understanding of a complex and multifaceted process that does not reside within participants. Rather, they are constructed by being teased out, defined, and articulated in an interactive process between researchers and participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This methodological standpoint is espoused to acknowledging that the researcher is active and influential in the data generation process; that researcher and participants are "acting, embodied and social creatures" (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 56), engaged in knowledge construction rather than isolated knowers pursuing knowledge collection.

5.2 Participants

Two preschools from different neighborhoods in the City of Reykjavík were approached in March 2018 and both accepted the invitation to become partner preschools in the research project *Educational Continuity: Supporting Positive Transitions for Children from Diverse Backgrounds*. The student profile of both preschools was quite diverse at the time of the study. Among the oldest children (born in 2012 and turning six years old that year) who were to transition to primary school in the fall of 2018, 13 out of 22 in one partner preschool and 9 out of 15 in the other (59% and 60%, respectively) came from backgrounds that fitted the definition of diversity adopted in the study. Aiming to be non-discriminatory in the identification of potential participants (Bertram et al., 2015), preschool educators were informed that the participant selection process did not exclusively target biological parents. The children's siblings, grandparents or other relatives would also be most welcome to take part if they were the ones managing drop-offs and

pickups and were in daily contact with the preschool instead of or as well as the child's biological parents. All families in both partner preschools were informed about the overall study in a parent–teacher interview in April and May 2018. Families with one or both parents born in a country other than Iceland and where children had a home language other than Icelandic, or who were emergent bi- or multilingual, were furthermore invited to take part in the parental part of the study during the same parent–teacher interview. The participants in the study came from socio-economically diverse backgrounds but their initial recruitment was not directly linked to their level of income, current profession, or previous educational attainment. The researchers expected a range of socio-economic situations in the neighborhoods in which the study took place and concrete information on families' socio-economic situation was not readily available before the commencement of data generation. Due to language diversity, introductory letters and consent forms were made available in eight home languages and the participants were introduced to the study with the help of an interpreter if needed.

Out of a pool of 37 families in both preschools, ten mothers and two fathers (all of whom were biological parents of the child) from 11 families decided to participate at the time of initial recruitment. Two further participants decided to take part at later stages, turning the final number of familial participants up to 14: a child's older brother was interviewed with his mother in the first round of interviews, and a (biological) father who had not participated up until the third round decided to come with his spouse to be interviewed together. Three participants were born and raised in Iceland and had children with partners who originated from other countries. All other participants had been born overseas. Demographic information gathered during the interviews indicated that participants were a culturally, linguistically, and socio-economically diverse group. One participant was looking for employment at the start of the study and another received a disability pension. All other participants were employed in Iceland and described a range of occupations; from low-paid positions as care workers and caterers to teachers, small business owners and postgraduate level professionals. For those who had immigrated, time living in Iceland ranged from eight months to 18 years and their connections to the preschools over periods of two months to four and a half years. These participants hailed from various countries in Europe, North and South America, Africa, and Southeast Asia. Due to the small size of the preschool communities in which the study was conducted, further information on participants' countries of origin, home language(s), level of education, occupation, and time spent living in Iceland is neither provided nor linked to particular pseudonyms. These precautions are taken to lessen the chances of participants being identified in the study. For instance, some participants were the only native speakers of a particular language, both

among the participants in the study and their group of families at each preschool. Providing this information would facilitate any possible attempts of identification.

5.3 Semi-Structured Serial Interviews

The interviews conducted with the participants were semi-structured (Esterberg, 2002). The interview guides opened with "grand tour" (Crang & Cook, 2007, p. 70) questions – open questions that gave the interviewees the opportunity both to shape their responses and change the direction of the interview (Fife, 2005). Prompts and follow-up questions ensued to explore the answers in depth while avoiding leading questions and dichotomies. A rigid interview guide was deemed to run the risk of making the interviewees feel constrained and could have resulted in missed opportunities to explore issues important to the participants. Rather, an attempt was made to gain access to the perspectives of the people being interviewed (Davies, 2007) while keeping in mind that interview data is co-constructed intersubjectively. Conducting semi-structured serial interviews was seen as a viable way for exploring participants' experiences during an extended period of educational transition. The approach offers the researcher opportunities to explore the transition process with participants in rich detail and follow up on topics and developments raised in previous interviews. By revisiting issues from previous interviews, following their development and offering opportunities for participants to clarify and elaborate on specific topics, a form of member validation was observed.

5.4 Photo-Elicitation

During the first round of interviews, while the children were still at the preschool level, participants were invited to take photographs of their children during their first day and first week of school and bring to the subsequent interview to discuss with the researcher. The request of bringing photographs related to their children's school lives was repeated for the third and fourth rounds of interviews. The participants had the option of using their own equipment (digital cameras, smartphones) or be given access to a camera if they did not possess such a device. All participants opted for using their own device. These photographs were intended to stimulate the interview sessions and were neither collected by the researcher nor shown to third parties. Participants were not prompted by messages in between interview sessions to take photographs.

The use of visual methods of various kinds has increased within the field of early childhood education research in recent years. Researchers have made use of drawings and photographs made by children (Clark, 2011; Miller, 2016) and studies have been conducted utilizing parental photographs of children's activities

in their natural settings (Given et al., 2016). Photo-elicitation is based on the idea of including visual material in an interview to stimulate discussions and "prompt talk in different registers" (Rose, 2007, p. 240) by teasing out further information as well as evoking reflection from participants and researchers (Dockett et al., 2017b). The use of visual stimulants such as photographs in interviews has many benefits because they accomplish more than methods relying only on speech (Rose, 2007). Photographs can change researcher–participant dynamics (e.g. by easing pressure of eye-contact) and offer easily accessible points of reference for the discussion and enhance the overall sensory dimension of the interview (Pink, 2013). Participant-produced footage has been found to have the potential of unlocking detailed memories associated with the topic at hand and prompting investigation of topics that the researcher might have otherwise missed or not thought about exploring beforehand. Where traditional interview-based studies rely on retrospective self-reporting, participant photographs count as data collected at the moment of engagement (Given et al., 2016) and can thus ground the interview more thoroughly in the participants' lived experiences.

5.5 Cross-Language Research

Nine participants were interviewed in Icelandic or English (or a mix of both) but five participants opted for the interview being facilitated by an interpreter, for a total of ten interviews (one participant participated in four interviews, another in three interviews, the third in two interviews and the fourth in one interview). While interpreters allow for the recruitment of participants who would otherwise be excluded due to the language barrier, their employment has far-reaching methodological and epistemological ramifications for the conduct of qualitative research and its findings (Squires, 2008; Temple, 1997). Questions about data validity arise when interpreters are actively involved in the data generation process, as they do not convey meaning between interlocutors and languages passively (Squires, 2009; Temple & Edwards, 2002). Squires (2009) emphasizes the importance of maintaining conceptual equivalence for a successful and coherent interpretation, which requires an interpreter to facilitate technically and conceptually sound communication between researcher and participant and be able to provide the necessary context if certain words, terms, or phrases are difficult to translate. Among the challenges facing researchers conducting cross-language qualitative research is not knowing if questions and responses have been altered by the interpreter and having limited opportunities to follow up or build upon clarifications and elaborations that go untranslated (Kapborg & Berterö, 2002; Murray & Wynne, 2001; Squires, 2009). At their worst, inappropriate or inconsistent interpretations can undermine the trustworthiness and applicability of findings. These challenges

highlight the importance of reflexivity about the data generation process, as how researchers may try to navigate these issues depends in large part on their underlying methodological and theoretical viewpoints.

The language diversity encountered among the participants during the data generation period presented various practical and theoretical challenges and opportunities. While extending the possibility of participation to parents of various linguistic backgrounds, the language barrier could complicate communications with participants. Interpreters needed to be recruited and interview sessions organized around their availability. Due to the small size of some of the local language communities, finding and recruiting qualified interpreters proved to be difficult at times. Interpreted interviews tended to be less fluid and offer more limited opportunities to explore complex concepts (Egilsson et al., 2021b). Having participants' voices mediated across the language divide made the relevant transcripts less suitable for certain types of analyses (Egilsson & Vandenbroeck, 2022). One interpreter-facilitated encounter raised pressing questions around interpreter influence and data validity. However, after exploring discrepancies between the interpreter's interpretation and a follow-up translation of all utterances of the interpreted language, new dimensions in the data were identified (Egilsson et al., 2021a).

5.6 Ethical Considerations

The study was approved by the partner preschools, the Municipality of Reykjavík, and the Science Ethics Committee of the University of Iceland and notified to the Data Protection Authority. The study was informed by Perry's (2014) perspective of 'socially just' transition to school. For Perry, social justice includes valuing families for what they bring to the new setting during the time of transition and establishing partnerships based on "respect, personal regard, perceived competence and perceived integrity" (Perry, 2014, p. 176). The interview guides reflected this by exploring pre-existing strengths and interests of the children and values of the participants. The participants were regarded as subjects with rights to participate directly and actively in the research project (Bertram et al., 2015) by inviting them to take photographs in their daily lives and share with the researcher. The participants were regarded as "creative and innovative individuals, with unique biographies and skills" (Pink, 2013, p. 44) with opportunities to decide what was important for their families at this juncture. The study was performed in the spirit of doing research with, instead of on, the participants (Rose, 2007). The employment of interpreters in cross-language qualitative research poses ethical as well as methodological challenges. Their active involvement and mediation between researcher and participant evoke issues of trust and interpersonal power dynamics. Interpreters act

as gatekeepers, as well as facilitators, and can influence the interpersonal dynamics of a research interview in multiple ways that the researcher may not be aware of. Hence, issues of professionalism, trust, and reciprocity are critical when researchers and potentially marginalized or vulnerable participants need to rely on the linguistic interpretation and/or cultural brokerage of interpreters (Edwards, 2013; Liamputtong, 2007).

At the start of the data generation process, each interview began with explaining the purpose of the study and reviewing consent forms with the participants. Their level of commitment (four rounds of interviews over twelve months) was explained as was their right not to answer particular questions, or to withdraw at any stage without consequences. These issues were briefly reiterated at the beginning of subsequent rounds of interviews. Participants were informed that sharing photographs with the researcher was optional and assured that they would neither be collected nor shown to third parties. Issues concerning anonymity and confidentiality took center stage during field relations to maintain respect for the person, ensure informed consent, and minimize the risk of harm to participants (Hennink et al., 2011). All participants were given pseudonyms during transcription, data analysis and publication. Other features that could potentially identify participants, such as names of third parties, place names, and other distinctive features (home language(s), profession, cultural or religious affiliation) were sometimes altered or omitted. This constituted an "ongoing working compromise" (Saunders et al., 2015, p. 627), meaning that maintaining the integrity of the data and maximizing the anonymity of participants did not always go hand in hand. When striking a balance between the two proved to be difficult, participants' anonymity was given precedence. The participants were not compensated (financially or otherwise) for their time and effort.

5.7 Interview Schedule

After expressing their willingness to participate in the study during the teacher–parent interviews, the participants were contacted and invited to the first out of four rounds of semi-structured interviews at a time and a place of their liking. The interview rounds were conducted over the course of a whole year (May/June 2018, October 2018, February 2019, May/June 2019). The interview rounds began at the end of the children's stay at the preschool and continued throughout their first year of primary school. A 12-month timeline was chosen as the research team regarded the transition to school as an extended process (Margetts, 2014) rather than as being marked by a single event (such as the first day of primary school). The extended timeframe provided opportunities for the researcher and participants to build connections with the participants well in advance of the start of primary school

and discuss the child's time at the preschool level, their ideas about and expectations towards the primary school, and experiences during the child's first year of primary school.

Table 1: Interview Schedule

Round	Time	Broad Themes	Method	Number of Interviews and Participants
1	May/June 2018	Family's Experience of Preschool Belonging in the Preschool Community	Semi-Structured	11Interviews 13 Participants
2	October 2018	Start of Primary School Characteristics of Transition	Semi-Structured Photo-Elicitation	10 Interviews 11 Participants
3	February 2019	Family's Experience of Primary School	Semi-Structured Photo-Elicitation	8 Interviews 10 Participants
4	May/June 2019	Overall Transition Process	Semi-Structured Photo-Elicitation	6 Interviews 6 Participants

Table 1 indicates the month and year when each round of interview was conducted, the broad themes touched upon in the interview guides, the methods used in each round (semi-structured interviews in all rounds, photo-elicitation in addition in rounds 2, 3 and 4), the number of participants interviewed, and the number of interviews conducted in each round. Most interviews were conducted with one participant at a time, apart from four interviews where both parents decided to be interviewed together and one interview where a mother and an older brother were interviewed together. The interviews took place in a variety of settings: at participants' homes, at their children's preschools, at cafés, and at the University of Iceland. Participant retention was good between the first and second rounds but began to weaken after that and was down to half the initial number in the fourth and last round. The final number of conducted interviews was 35. Themes touched upon in the interview guides included topics such as the children's preschool education and the family's ties to the preschool community, the experience of having a child

starting primary school, changes and challenges associated with the transition, and reflections on the overall transition process. The interview guides went through continual revision throughout the research project as the interview design was dynamic and responsive (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015) to the participants' concerns and interests.

5.8 Data Analysis

The interview sessions were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim with help of the software *oTranscribe,* and analyzed in *Atlas.ti*. After the final round of interviews was concluded, the overall data set included 1439 minutes of audio recordings and 360 pages of interview transcripts. The overall analysis of research data was conducted using Thematic Research Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2013). Thematic analysis is characterized by its theoretical flexibility and involves a recursive and fluid process of searching across data sets to discern and report patterns of meaning. Braun and Clarke have identified six practical steps or phases in Thematic Analysis: familiarization with material; generation of initial codes; searching for themes; reviewing themes; definition and naming of themes; and production of the report.

The first phase consisted of immersing oneself in the data by critically reading and rereading each data item and writing familiarization notes. Engaging in collecting and transcribing the data put the researcher at an advantage in the initial phase. In the second phase the initial production of codes took place where relevant segments of data were identified and named, and the third phase involved sorting these codes into potential themes and collecting candidate themes, which included overarching themes as well as subthemes. Codes and themes can be generated at the semantic and latent levels; the former remaining at the surface of what participants have reported and the latter delving beneath the surface to examine underlying ideas and assumptions that shape the "semantic content" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84) of the data. Generating codes and themes is however not always clear-cut as semantic and latent levels can overlap and bleed into each other. Phase four consisted of reviewing and refining candidate themes, making sure they were coherent with coded data extracts and producing a candidate thematic map. In phase five the researcher further defined and refined the themes by identifying the theme's "central organizing concept" (V. Braun, personal communication, October 5, 2017). The sixth and final phase consisted of the final analysis and writing of the report. Articles I (Egilsson et al., 2021b) and II (Egilsson & Einarsdóttir, 2022) were the results of using thematic analysis. In Article I, instances of belonging identified during thematic analysis were further scrutinized through Sumsion and Wong's (2011) Cartography of Belonging. The *dimensions* and *axes of belonging* were used

to refine and deepen the examination of individual positioning in the data. These theoretical tools informed the researcher in reviewing and refining the candidate themes and identifying each theme's central organizing concept. The thematic analysis conducted in Article II was data driven. The findings were later examined through the lens of entry into parallel Communities of Practice (Wenger, 1998) at the start of school: first by framing the primary school, after school care, organized sports and leisure, and heritage language learning as communities of practice, and secondly by examining how each community's practices and traditions may hinder or facilitate access.

The data in Articles III (Egilsson & Vandenbroeck, 2022) and IV (Egilsson et al., 2021a) were thematically analyzed but were ultimately examined through different analytical lenses. This was done to attain a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the relevant data. Article III utilized structural narrative analysis (Riessman, 2008) to examine maternal accounts of taking action and cultural re-evaluation in relation to the transition to primary school. The structural narrative analysis combined an analysis of the function of particular clauses in the overall narrative (Labov, 1972) and how sequences of utterances are spoken in units (Gee, 1991). The narrative analysis conducted in Article III was data driven. The findings were examined through Freire's conception of *Conscientização,* the developing a critical awareness of one's circumstance in society through contemplation and action. Article IV is based on a comparison of two interview transcripts of the same interpreted interview; the former being the original interview transcript and the second containing a follow-up translation (Ingvarsdotter et al., 2012) of all utterances in the source language by an independent translator. The comparison conducted between the two transcripts contains elements of data driven thematic analysis, searching for and describing patterns of meaning.

5.9 Strategies of Validation

Validity in qualitative research has to do with describing and explaining the data and "whether or not a given explanation fits a given description" (Janesick, 1998). Creswell and Poth (2018) consider validation in qualitative research to be an attempt to evaluate the accuracy of the findings. They maintain that prolonged engagement in the field, detailed thick description and closeness to the participants strengthen the accuracy of a study. Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) argue for integrating the notion of validation into the craftsmanship of qualitative research and extending it to include communication about and pragmatic effects of research findings. That involves questioning each step of the research process to see if they are "reasonable, defensible, and supportive of what the researcher concludes" (p. 284); examining knowledge claims in conversation and a commitment to act on

interpretations. Cultivating a sensitivity to the researcher's subjectivity – reflect on biases and preconceptions through writing – is therefore of great importance (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

Participants were followed for an extensive period of time and given opportunities to be involved in the research process by taking and discussing photographs related to their children's first year of primary school. Researcher reflexivity was an ever-present factor throughout the study period; from evaluating the researcher's own experiences of educational transition as a child and as a parent during the preparation stage, to contemplating researcher-participant interactions during interview sessions and while producing and analyzing interview transcripts and questioning possible interpretations while writing the results. The richness and nuances of the data set were maintained by describing it through various theoretical and analytical lenses across the studies. Member validation was observed with participants during the data generation period. The main topics of each interview were reiterated, clarified, and reflected upon with participants in the following interview session to establish continuity and follow their developments closely. In each of the studies presented in this thesis, the findings and interpretation of relevant data extracts were discussed and reflected upon with co-authors and the doctoral committee, members of the research team working on the research project *Educational Continuity: Supporting Positive Transitions for Children from Diverse Backgrounds,* and colleagues from the international research project *Politics of Belonging: Promoting Children's Inclusion in Educational Settings Across Borders*.

6 Findings

Four articles were written to explore and discuss experiences and perspectives of parents of children from diverse backgrounds on the transition from preschool to primary school. Here, an overview of the main findings is presented, and the results of each article are discussed. The findings are organized into four brief sections, in the order of the papers that comprise this doctoral thesis. Research Question 1 is addressed in Article I. Research Question 2 is addressed in Article II and Research Question 2.2 is addressed in Article III. Research Question 3 is addressed in Article IV.

Parental attitudes towards belonging in the preschool community are described in Article I. While the participants were generally positively disposed to their children's preschools as educational institutions, data analysis indicated that their views towards their own ties to the preschool community were much more varied and nuanced. These attitudes spanned a spectrum of reporting benefits of belonging and willingness to connect with the community to minimizing or refraining from involvement.

Article II presents parental experiences of their children's transition to primary school and the families' concurrent entry into parallel communities of practice, as themes regarding the participants' children attending after-school care centers and taking part in organized sports and leisure activities at the start of primary school were very prominent in the data. The data indicates that the practices of the primary schools and after-school care centers in question have marginalizing effects for some of these parents.

Although parents often associate their children's transition to school with changes to their own roles, schedules, responsibilities, and relationships and having to make sense of new contexts, their actions and critical reflection during this time of change is less explored. Article III focuses on the narratives of two mothers of taking action in relation to their children transitioning to primary school, when they felt their concerns were not taken seriously by educators. These experiences brought about critical reevaluation of their own cultural backgrounds.

Article IV highlights the ethical and methodological challenges of working with vulnerable participants and interpreters. Linguistic diversity among the participants called for the employment of interpreters, which expanded recruitment possibilities

considerably but came with a set of practical and theoretical challenges. One interpreter-facilitated interview left the researcher with pressing methodological and ethical questions. Despite the challenges for ethical research conduct and data validity, the value of follow-up translation as a way of further data exploration is emphasized.

6.1 Article I: Parental Belonging in the Preschool Community

How supportive relationships and parent communities materialize, or fail to materialize, in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) settings characterized by family diversity is not well understood. However, the potential of ECEC services generating widespread and long-lasting benefits in diverse societies have been highlighted. Increased social cohesion is one of the benefits identified, as ECEC services are seen as providing platforms where families from different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds can come together in familiar settings (Vandenbroeck et al., 2018). The first article, *Parental Experiences of Belonging within the Preschool Community*, was published in the International Journal of Early Childhood, and co-authored with Professors Jóhanna Einarsdóttir and Sue Dockett. Thirteen parents of children from diverse backgrounds from two partner preschools in different neighborhoods in Reykjavík participated in a semi-structured interview. The aim of this article was to explore parents' lived experiences of belonging and non-belonging and explore how they operationalized the notion of social cohesion. The data were interrogated through thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013) and informed by Sumsion and Wong's (2011) 'Cartography of Belonging'.

The findings suggested a wide variety of parental attitudes. While some reported benefits from belonging to a preschool community, such as cooperation and relationship-building between families, others described a slow and tentative process of emerging community ties. Still others described a preference for keeping their distance or actively retaining the boundaries of the home and school spheres. For parents not keen on making connections in the preschool community, belonging was framed as a matter of choice, influenced by factors such as time and language. A nuanced understanding of time emerged from the study. Time was framed as both facilitating belonging and as a limited resource to be managed. Time spent within the community was seen as both a necessary investment for making social connections and as a limited resource reserved for family life. These perspectives have implications for how policymakers and educators might facilitate belonging and serve as a reminder of the importance of respecting those parents who choose to remain 'outside' the preschool community, reiterating the notion that parental distance does not necessarily constitute a measure of disinterest in their children's education.

6.2 Article II: The Transition from Preschool to Primary School from the Perspectives of Parents of Children from Diverse Backgrounds

Education research in Iceland has increasingly focused on the academic achievement and wellbeing of children and youth from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, as the numbers of children with home languages other than Icelandic have increased considerably in recent years. The results have indicated that their educational situation is in many ways precarious and one of the ways proposed to mitigate this is to view their parents as important collaborators whose knowledge is to be utilized for the benefit of the children (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2020). However, little is known about the experiences and perspectives of parents from diverse backgrounds as their children make the transition from preschool to primary school in Iceland. The second article, a book chapter, *The Transition from Preschool to Primary School from the Perspectives of Parents of Children from Diverse Backgrounds*, is featured in the book *Leikandinn: Greinar um menntun ungra barna* [The Playing Child: New Research on the Education of Young Children], published by University of Iceland Press. The chapter was co-authored by Professor Jóhanna Einarsdóttir. Thirteen parents of children from diverse backgrounds from two partner preschools in different neighborhoods were invited to take part in four rounds of semi-structured interviews during a twelve-month long period, from the time their children were finishing preschool and throughout their first year of primary school. The aim was to explore the participants experiences of and perspectives on their children's transition to primary school. The data were interrogated through thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013) and informed by the concept of horizontal transitions (Dockett et al., 2017c) and Wenger's (1998) theoretical work on the Communities of Practice (CoP).

The vertical movement of the transition to school was clearly discerned in the data and the starting of school coincided with the families' horizontal transitions to parallel communities of practice: the primary school, after-school care, organized sports and leisure and heritage language learning. The findings suggest that certain elements in the practices of the preschools and after-school care centers in question do not help parents of children from diverse backgrounds to gain entry to the communities of practice; rather, some practices contribute to their marginalization. Among these are ineffective electronic communications and information dissemination; parental suspicion that educators in Iceland are too positive when discussing the abilities of their children, do not report their standard of academic achievement accurately, and that their children do not always get equitable opportunities of learning; and a perceived lack of organization and oversight at

after-school care centers. The participants reported being more active within the CoPs concerning their children's organized sports and leisure and heritage language learning, despite the financial and logistical strain their participation entailed. The findings are interpreted as signs of the parents' ambition and willingness for their children to participate in Icelandic society.

6.3 Article III: Narratives of Maternal Action and Cultural Reevaluation in Relation to the Transition to School

The start of primary school has been framed as a time of change, challenges, and concerns but also of possibilities and opportunities for parents in international academic literature. Roles, responsibilities, relationships, and identities are altered by becoming parents of a schoolchild and old contexts are replaced with new ones which need to be explored and understood (Dockett et al., 2017c; Dockett & Perry, 2013). These internal and external transformations call for families to adopt new strategies, routines, and skills (Dockett, 2017), which can be especially complicated for parents from immigrant or refugee backgrounds (De Gioia, 2017; Goff, 2017; Rogers et al., 2017). How the experiences of having a child starting school may coincide with a wider and more radical transformative change in parents is less explored. The third article, *Narratives of Maternal Action and Cultural Reevaluation in Relation to the Transition to School*, has been published in the Scandinavian Journal of Education Research and was co-authored with Professor Michel Vandenbroeck. The aim of this paper was to examine narratives from two mothers (generated in four rounds of semi-structured interviews over a twelve-month long period) of taking action and re-evaluation of cultural backgrounds in the context of having children of diverse backgrounds transition to school. The authors employ structural narrative analysis (Riessman, 2011) and draw on Paolo Freire's work, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, to shed light on these narratives.

The narratives indicate that for these mothers, engagement with the ECEC system in Iceland before and during the transition to school triggered them to take action when they felt their concerns about the child's well-being were not taken seriously by educators and school administrators. The two mothers talked of how these experiences, along with being confronted with different views on childhood and education, had opened up opportunities for reflection and re-evaluation of prevalent views and values of their own culture and upbringing. Despite their experiences being comparable in many ways, these similarities intersect with very different sets of social capital. Hence, the mothers' contrasting socio-economic and family circumstances influence different possibilities of action. The findings suggest that the educational institutions in question were perceived to be unresponsive to the needs of these mothers, and although familial circumstances within ECEC will

always be family-specific, that school administrators need to become sensitized to the challenges of parents of children from diverse backgrounds as they build strategies for their mitigation.

6.4 Article IV: Methodological and Ethical Challenges in Cross-Language Qualitative Research

Interpretation in cross-language qualitative research presents a range of methodological and ethical challenges. Issues of power and trust are important in any interview situation involving interpreters, especially when participants who feel marginalized or vulnerable are involved. Power and trust are best understood in the context of relationships (Edwards, 2013) as they are negotiated and re-negotiated among interview participants (Liamputtong 2007). Dialogue interpretation involves spontaneous choices regarding how to render meaning and non-literal translation (Williamson et al., 2011) and has been linked to several potential threats to data validity (Kapborg & Berterö, 2002; Squires, 2008, 2009; Temple & Young, 2004; Wallin & Ahlström, 2006). Having translators review and/or produce an independent translation of recorded interview material for comparative purposes is regarded as one of the ways researchers can control for these challenges. The fourth article, *Methodological and Ethical Challenges in Cross-Language Qualitative Research*, was published in the European Early Childhood Research Journal, and was co-authored with Professors Sue Dockett and Jóhanna Einarsdóttir. The aim of this paper was to explore the abovementioned challenges by examining and comparing a transcript from an interpreted interview encounter with a non-Icelandic– speaking family with a follow-up translation (Ingvarsdotter et al., 2012).

The findings suggest that the interview encounter was heavily influenced by the interpreter's propensity for altering and summarizing questions and answers, reaching far beyond spontaneous non-literal translation choices the dialogue may have required, to the extent of overshadowing the participants' voices. However, controlling for data validity was not the only reason the follow-up translation of interpreted materials was valuable in this instance, as it offered the researcher a chance to take a step back and examine the power-dynamics and meaning-making that took place during the interview session more closely. The follow-up translation opened up a new dimension in the data and recalibrated the analysis, as it became clear that these participants experienced vulnerability and multi-layered disenfranchisement in Icelandic society. It became apparent that the participants had previous experiences with the interpreter when dealing unsuccessfully with the authorities, which may have permeated the interview. The interpreter appeared to broker and offer them misguided advice given their overall situation. These challenges highlight the importance of researcher reflexivity, and how the data generation process can also constitute data in the broadest sense.

6.5 Summary of the Findings

The findings of this study suggest both conformity and overlap and divergence and nuance in parental experiences and attitudes towards preschools and primary schools in Iceland and the transition process between the two levels. Preschools were generally viewed in a positive light: as welcoming and responsive institutions which offered appropriate pedagogical environments and educational practices; where their children were taken care of, belonged, and played with friends. However, sentiments towards the parents' own place within the preschool community were more varied, ranging from strong belonging and actively seeking interaction and cooperation with other families to choosing to stay "on the outside" and actively retaining the boundaries between the home and school spheres. The start of primary school was characterized by the families' acquaintance with parallel communities of practice: the primary school, after-school care centers, organized sports and leisure activities, and heritage language learning. Parents leveled criticism towards the former two and seemed more actively engaged in the latter two. They reported less communication with primary school educators, less familiarity with educational practices, overloaded avenues of information dissemination and suspicion towards educators' reports and the equity of educational opportunities. After-school care centers were generally regarded as offering opportunities for having fun and playing with friends but were often perceived as disorganized and lacking in oversight. Participation in organized sports and leisure activities was high among the children and most families were engaged in some form of heritage language learning. At the individual level, narratives of taking action when the child's well-being was considered at stake, of re-evaluation of the participants' own cultural backgrounds and values of their upbringing in light of their experiences of being parents in the Icelandic education system, and of vulnerability, lack of opportunities of education and for work, and disenfranchisement were present in the data. At the methodological level, an interpreter's overinfluence was uncovered and a new dimension opened in a data from an interpreter-facilitated interview.

7 Discussion

The study reported in these articles and presented in this thesis aimed to shed light on the transition from preschool to primary school of children from diverse (culturally, linguistically, socio-economically) backgrounds from the perspectives of parents. The objective was to elicit parental views and experiences through prolonged engagement in the field to generate knowledge for domestic and international academic audiences, provide valuable insights for researchers, educators, and policymakers and improve the experiences of families with young children in Iceland. This section discusses the findings from the four articles published from the study in the context of previous research and how these studies may offer insights for educators, researchers, and policymakers. The term "diverse backgrounds" (Ministry of Education, 2020) is meant to cover or replace a multitude of terms previously used in the Icelandic research context and was adopted (and adapted) for this study. However, the term has the potential of being perceived negatively by the people whom it is meant to designate or taking on an essentialized meaning (such as *non-Icelandic*). During the recruitment phase, when the preschool educators introduced parents to the study, one family (both parents were born in another country and had lived in Iceland for some time) reportedly declined participation on the grounds that they did not think that the term or the topic of study applied to them. Unfortunately, the researcher did not get a chance to explore their perspectives on the matter. While raising questions about the applicability and viability of the term, the anecdote also draws attention to the benefits and drawbacks of involving the preschool educators with the initial introduction of the study to the participants. The benefits to this approach are many, as the educators already had an established relationship with the parents and had interpreters at their disposal during the parent–teacher interview in which the study was introduced. This approach was deemed more likely to facilitate recruitment (and in all likelihood did) than having the researcher making first contact with the parents, many of whom are in and out of the preschool dressing room in a heartbeat during drop-off and pickup. Although the educators received information about presenting the study it is not clear how they performed this task in each instance (as one participant claimed to never have heard about the photo-elicitation part of the study during the first interview).

Before discussing the research findings, however, it is important to note that they are based on the experiences of 14 participants tied to specific contexts and periods

in time. The language barrier introduced practical and theoretical challenges, impacted the fluidity of the interviews and presented threats to data validity. Therefore, this thesis does not aspire to generalizations about parental views and experiences of the transition from preschool to primary school in contexts of linguistic, cultural, and socio-economic diversity in Iceland or about the educational practices of the preschools, primary schools, after-school care centers, sports clubs, or heritage language learning programs referred to by the participants. These caveats aside, the study rather aims for the transferability of methodology, methods, and insights gained from the study (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2018). This was to be achieved through prolonged engagement in the field and through the depth and nuance the researcher reached with some of the participants (Egilsson & Vandenbroeck, 2022). The amount of data generated throughout the study period works towards mitigating the "low" number of participants. The challenges relating to the language barrier offered unforeseen research opportunities which opened new dimensions in the data (Egilsson et al., 2021a). Moreover, the study explores different and novel ways of theorizing parental transition experiences by examining them through the theoretical lenses of belonging (Sumsion & Wong, 2011; Yuval-Davis, 2006), Communities of Practice (Wenger, 1998) and Freire's (2014) seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

7.1 Parental Views towards Preschools and Primary Schools in Iceland

Despite the participants coming from a variety of linguistic, cultural, and socio-economic backgrounds, their attitudes towards the educational practices of the preschool level were generally positive. The preschool was predominantly regarded as invoking positive feelings and was described with adjectives such as *fun*, *safe*, *good*, *warm*, *happy*, *relaxed*, *peaceful*, *open*, and *beautiful*. It was regarded as a friendly place, where the children had ample opportunities to play with their peers and were well looked after by the preschool educators. The preschool educators were usually described as open-minded and accessible and sometimes even as problem-solvers: offering advice proactively; taking notice of complaints and acting accordingly; and referring parents to professionals such as psychologists if the need arose. These findings are reminiscent of other examples of preschool educators in positive, caring, and problem-solving roles vis-à-vis parents of children from diverse backgrounds (Ragnarsdóttir et al., 2016; Simoen, 2018; Svavarsson et al., 2018). Issues that the participants thought of as needing improvement (e.g. understaffing) and differences in school culture and practices were also discussed. When compared with preschools in their countries of origin, the participants often perceived preschools in Iceland as relaxed or laid back, less rigid, or less formal.

Notions of the preschool's duty to offer more formalized ways of learning, not uncommon among immigrant parents (Tobin, 2016), were limited to one participant, Mercy, as seen in Article III (Egilsson & Vandenbroeck, 2022). The generally positive dispositions towards the Icelandic preschools, however, did not translate into eagerness for heavy involvement and relationship building within the preschool community for all participants (Vandenbroeck et al., 2018).

All the participants highlighted the importance of friendships and social status of the children once they had started attending primary school, which was a strong indicator of how successful or unsuccessful the participants regarded the transition. Some parents reported their children having difficulties finding their place within the new social context, especially if they had not been accompanied by friends from the preschool. This is in line with previous research, which has consistently indicated the importance of friendships for children during the transition to school (Dockett & Perry, 2007; Margetts, 2014; Turunen, 2014). Compared with the preschool, parents reported less contact with teachers (Sturludóttir & Einarsdóttir, 2008) and less familiarity with the educational practices of the primary school. Parents who had been able to recite the preschool schedule by heart were not as sure what their children were doing during the day in primary school. One participant, Ewka, responded when asked if the primary school had done something positive to accommodate her daughter: "I don't know, I'm not there during class, I don't know how it works." As seen in Article II (Egilsson & Einarsdóttir, 2022), the findings suggest that certain aspects of the primary schools and after-school care centers were perceived to be disorienting, foster distrust or cause alarm.

Less personal contact with the educators was concurrent with a significant increase in electronic communications. Many participants found it difficult to keep track of (often monolingual) emails, messages, and posts on social media from teachers, secretaries, after-school care center workers, and school administrators. These parents reminisced about simpler forms of communications in the preschool: more personal contact with the educators and a monthly email. The participants who were interviewed through interpreters never mentioned electronic communications with the school, which can be interpreted as indicating its small relevance for them. Some parents were suspicious of the teachers' educational practices and assessments and wondered if they offered equitable opportunities for learning and reflected their children's academic abilities accurately. Kristena commented that she might not become aware of an educational downturn or a negative development concerning her son: "I just believe also that in Iceland the teachers say only very nice things about the kids and praise them all the time." The after-school care centers were often regarded by parents as forums for children to have fun and play with friends and to counteract the often-perceived rigidity of the classroom, but at

the same time lacking in organization and oversight. Six participants reported encountering difficulties with finding their children when picking them up, their children exiting the school grounds, and even making themselves disappear without the after-school care staff noticing (Egilsson & Einarsdóttir, 2022). While all parents can find themselves in these discomforting situations regardless of their background, parents of children from diverse backgrounds can find them more challenging. Different ideas about school culture, for example regarding the boundaries of the school grounds and the importance of children respecting them, do play their part judging from the participants' reports of their interactions with staff. However, being new to a neighborhood and less familiar with the school grounds and having more limited channels for communication due to the language barrier can aggravate these challenges. In summary and utilizing Wenger's (1998) terminology related to membership to a community of practice, several parents felt marginalized in subtle yet multifaceted ways.

A superficial reading of the findings from Articles I and II, which both touch upon the communal aspects of being a parent, could lead to the conclusion that they are contradictory: that the participants regard their involvement and engagement with their children's educational institution as optional on the one hand, and complain over their inaccessibility on the other. As stipulated in Article I, parents of children from diverse backgrounds should not be thought of as a homogenous group, whose members unanimously endorse or benefit from the same form of family involvement and home–school relations. The participants who were categorized as displaying emergent belonging or non-belonging to the preschool community in Article I (compiled from data from the first round of interviews) and showed preference for staying on the "outside" should not be discounted as unreliable or disinterested. They were among those participants who showed the highest rate of retention throughout the study period. They were observant and engaged in their children's upbringing and education and willing to share their views and experiences of the transition to school. Educators and school administrators should be advised that outward displays of parental engagement do not tell the whole story.

A parent who is perceived as "distant" and refrains from being actively involved in social activities or events with other families and educators may still want to receive reliable and comprehensible information from the child's school, to understand the school's academic requirements and trust educators' evaluations, progress reports, and test results. That same parent may also expect the primary school and after–school care centers to be sufficiently organized and provide a safe environment where the adults have oversight. Whether early childhood education communities are examined through the lens of belonging (Sumsion & Wong, 2011;

Yuval-Davis, 2006) or of practice (Wenger, 1998), or both, they need to be accessible and flexible in the sense of being open to varying degrees and forms of parental engagement. The preschools were generally regarded as less rigid and more responsive institutions than the schools, and the preschool communities seem in many ways to have been more accessible for the participants. The implications for the primary school level in Iceland do not solely consist of looking towards the preschool level for inspiration of open and responsive communities for all families, but also suggest that avenues of information dissemination could be strengthened and streamlined.

7.2 Parental Experiences of the Transitions to School

Eight of the participants in this study were not becoming primary school parents for the first time, as the child's older sibling (or siblings) had already made the transition. The child's transition to school nevertheless came with its set of changes, challenges, and concerns (Dockett & Perry, 2013) for the parents and evoked conflicting feelings of joy, excitement, pride, and anxiety (Dockett & Perry, 2007; Sturludóttir & Einarsdóttir, 2008; Webb, 2019). One mother commented when reviewing footage from her son's first day of school: "You are overwhelmed by this feeling: *Have I given my child what it takes to handle this environment?*" Changes to the family routine brought about by the starting of school were most often associated with the "insane amount of work" participation in organized sports requires: covering the costs of participation, driving and pickups, watching games and tournaments, and participating in fund raising activities. This bustle required sustained effort and planning and can be interpreted as signs of parental ambition and recognition of the benefits (social, linguistic, cultural) of engaging in activities with peers outside the classroom (Egilsson & Einarsdóttir, 2022). Mixed sentiments and increased organizational burdens aside, the children's transition to primary school intersected with a myriad of other concerns for the participants. These parents discussed issues such as covering high costs of living and facing financial hardships, taking care of their own health, managing relationships with current and former spouses, returning to school to complete upper secondary education, navigating divorces and rekindled relationships, and dealing with a death of a family member. Some participants also had to contend with social and geographical isolation and brave the long, cold, and dark winters in a new country. Discussing these and associated challenges prompted some participants to reflect on their own past and upbringing. Critical reflections among parents on the experiences of becoming a school parent, parenting styles, and their own upbringing in relation to the transition to school have been observed before (Webb, 2019). However, the experience of having a child transition to primary school did not solely prompt

discussions on retrospective inward reflection among the participants. They were also looking ahead, envisioning possible futures in different countries, pondering where their children would have the best educational possibilities.

Reminiscent of the different preferences, capabilities, and resources for home–school engagement in contexts of diversity in Article I (Egilsson et al., 2021b), any challenges faced by parents of children from diverse backgrounds before, during, and after the transition to primary school will always be family-specific. So, too, must any proposed mitigations, solutions, and interventions at the family, school, and municipal level. However, drawing inspiration from Freire (2014) and Brown et al. (2019), they will have to include some common denominators, such as openness and recognition, as well as possessing sensitivity towards different needs and strengths. The Freirean emphasis of inclusive, reflective, and active participation is important to note here. This requires engagement in dialogue and establishment of trust. That gives food for thought for the educational administrative bodies to which parents have access (parents' councils and parents' associations on the preschool level and school councils and parents' associations on the compulsory school level). These bodies could work towards providing opportunities for parents of children from diverse backgrounds to share their experiences of the education system to better recognize organizational flaws and fractures and alerting school administrators to them. However, the mothers whose experiences are reported in Article III did not find empowerment with school authorities or any parental administrative entities (Brown et al., 2019). Rather, their narratives indicated that educators either did not recognize or claim ownership of the problems and the wider school community was never framed as a source of help. The possibilities of parental action in adverse situations were also highlighted: who has the means to part ways with a dysfunctional school and who has almost no choice but to stay and attend "meeting upon meeting" and keep campaigning for recognition and better educational outcomes. These issues lead to broader questions about the locus and burdens of change during the transition to school. By definition, transition involves change. Ideally, the challenges of change would be shared among the stakeholders of transition. While policy documents postulate that schools in Iceland should approach parents with reciprocity, respect, and cooperation, children and parents are the groups most expected to change and adapt at the start of school. One of the ways a study such as this becomes useful is by highlighting the immense challenges faced by some parents of children from diverse backgrounds and forming a basis on which to work with educators, administrators, and policymakers to lessen these as they increase their willingness to change and evolve their practices as well.

7.3 Methodological Considerations: Semi-Structured Serial Interviews, Photo-Elicitation, and Linguistic Interpretation

The study was conducted over the course of a year and yielded a total of 35 interviews. The semi-structured interview guides provided opportunities for the participants to share their views and experiences and explore these with the researcher. Serial interviews were good for building rapport, establishing continuity, and following developments closely over long periods of time. The commitment of time and energy entailed in participating in the study made some degree of dropout unavoidable. Participant retention declined over time as the number of interviewees dropped from 13 to 11 between the first and second rounds, from 11 to ten between the second and third, and from ten to six between the third and fourth. The drop between the third and fourth round is partly explained by a participant who had been accompanied by her spouse in the third round being interviewed by herself in the fourth round, but does not follow any discernible linguistic, cultural, or socio-economic lines. None of the parents in the study openly decided to cease participation, apart from one mother who declined an interview invitation in the fourth round because of the recent death of her father. Other participants who ceased participation did not respond to the researcher's further invitations. One possible explanation for the drop in retention could be related to the participants' declining need to talk and reflect on transition with someone outside the family. Perhaps some participants were unsure about the transition process in the beginning but became more comfortable with it as it gradually became more familiar and the need for talking about it decreased. However, this is difficult to determine and must remain at the speculative level.

While the participants were not compensated materially for their time and effort, the interview sessions provided them with a chance to reflect on their transition experiences: to share their everyday joys and challenges, to be heard, ask for opinion and information, and in some cases vent their frustrations. How eagerly they seized opportunities to share their personal thoughts varied. The participants were generally open and amiable from the first interview sessions, while some researcher–participant relationships needed more time to materialize fully. Two of the six participants who completed all four rounds of interviews remarked that their participation had been "therapeutic", one of them stating that the process had "been fabulous, somewhere to pour some of the anger. Sometimes I'm upset and you still, you know, you are able to handle me so … [laughs]. No, this is free therapy, this is free." While the researcher entered the homes of many participants and got the chance to follow some of them throughout their children's first year of primary school, the interview data could have been corroborated and the findings extended by a deeper level of engagement. This could have included an exploration

of participants' daily lives and communities by accompanying them to school and back home and to extracurricular activities; through participant observations, or by conducting a full case study (Yin, 2017; Creswell & Poth, 2018). While the logistics of the overall study and available resources for this specific study did not support these forms of deeper engagement, they provide avenues for further investigation of the experiences of families as they and their children make the transition to school.

During the first round of interviews, participants were invited to bring photographs of their children during their first day and first week of school to the subsequent interview to discuss with the researcher. The invitation was renewed in the second and third rounds. Given the prevalence of smartphones, no participant needed to be given access to a camera to perform this task. One participant voiced concern during the first interview that the task of taking photographs would require too much effort and be a strain on her time. The participant was given the choice of opting out of the photo-elicitation part of the study but decided to take part after some deliberation.

During the second, third, and fourth rounds, the participants were asked if they had photographs that they were ready to share with the researcher. Due to the long period between the interview rounds, some participants asked to be reminded of the purpose of the photo-elicitation part of the study at the beginning of the second round. The researcher then viewed the visual material together with the participants and discussed the events they depicted. The participants had full control of what they shared, and their devices were not handled by the researcher. Having a visual aid stimulated the discussions, often in unexpected ways. When going through the photographs on their devices, many of the participants also showed video recordings of their children taken at school, at play at home, and during family outings. In one instance for example, the footage helped to mitigate the distance felt between researcher and participant due to the language barrier, when the participant, beaming with pride, showed the researcher a video of her daughter reading in Icelandic. However, the photo-elicitation sessions did not all result in deep or unanticipated reflection. Some participants had or chose to show few or no photographs during interview sessions. Family resources in terms of time may have been a factor in those cases, as the constraints of being a single parent and/or long hours of work or irregular shifts may have provided less opportunities to take photographs of their children during certain time periods. One participant who had shared many photographs in the first and second rounds had few to share in the third, reporting the lack of time to take them during that period as the explanation. In the case of the only participant who did not participate in photo-elicitation at all, this may have been a strategy to refrain from showing photographs without explicitly refusing to do so, but this is hard to determine. In any case, paucity of visual

materials had no repercussions for participants. In some cases, the researcher got only small glances as participants scrolled quickly through their photo stream without much reflection before quickly tucking their phones away. Being mindful of the wealth of personal information contained within smartphones, the participants were always given full control of what they shared during each interview session and for how long they did so. At its best, the photo-elicitation component of the study provided two kinds of clear advantages during interviews. It presented the participants with opportunities for elaborating on (Given et al., 2016) and clearly justifying their interpretation of how the events they depicted unfolded:

> **Hannah**: But I just talked to her over the phone, and she naturally had no idea about what was about to happen or what she was getting into. Maybe the grown-ups were more excited and, well, making a fuss about it. I can see here that she even has her swimming gear with her. They have had swimming on the first day. But then I got this photo sent from the classroom and then I saw … oh, you know, I clearly felt that she had been a little shy and reserved and introverted. **Researcher**: How come? **Hannah**: Like the way she is composed in the photo.

Furthermore, the photographs provided insights into aspects of the transition process the researcher would not have thought of exploring beforehand (Rose, 2007), such as intergenerational tension over conflicting ideas about proper appearance at the beginning of school:

> **Sandy**: This is a photo of when he had his haircut. I don't remember if it was a couple of days before he began but I was making sure that he would have a fresh haircut when he would go to school because he has a mullet and at that time his hair almost reached down to the middle of his back. Err … and, well … and my dad, his grandfather, that is, was worried about him getting picked on for it. So, well … look, my boy didn't heed that, he just overlooked it somehow and I scolded my dad for mentioning it like that at the dinner table and well … but, just, like, to be, what shall I say… safe, I took him and had it trimmed so that it would at least be smart despite being long.

Although managing researcher–participant relations and prompting the parents to continue their participation in the study came with all kinds of complications, the language barrier presented the most significant practical and methodological challenges by far. The organization leading up to the interpreted interviews was more complicated as miscommunication and misunderstandings were more likely. Recruiting interpreters was difficult at times, as the participants often hailed from

small language communities. Interpreted interviews tended to be less fluid and offer fewer opportunities for follow-up questions and deeper exploration, thus giving some of them, particularly one interview in the first round, the air of a structured interview. However, the recurring rounds of interviews and the ensuing photo-elicitation helped to mitigate these challenges to some extent and improve the quality of the interview encounters by giving the researcher an opportunity to get to know the participants better and explore their transition experiences.

The linguistic diversity encountered among the participants drew out challenges that represent weaknesses of the study: increased chances of miscommunication and missed opportunities for prompting and further questioning during interviews; interpreters' overinfluence and increased likelihood of misinterpretation of interview data by the researcher. Such a case is presented in Article IV (Egilsson et al., 2021a) where an interview was heavily influenced by an interpreter who tended to overshadow the participants and modified questions and responses up to the point of presenting serious threats to data validity (Squires, 2009; Temple & Young; Kapborg & Beretrö, 2002). The issues addressed in Article IV raise questions about employing interpreters in qualitative research and the implications of their influence on interview dynamics and the data generated. The benefits of researchers and participants sharing languages and cultural understandings in the type of qualitative research conducted in this study are various. They pertain to recruitment possibilities, logistics and cost, building rapport and establishing trust with participants, insights into cultural contexts, interview dynamics, and maintaining data validity. The present study could thus have been suitable for a team of multilingual researchers. However, similar challenges may be faced by a research team in a small community such as Iceland. Multi-lingual researchers may well know and be known in the different language communities and play similar roles to interpreters. Issues regarding recruitment, confidentiality, power-dynamics, rapport, and trust could be addressed by the research team through reflexivity, but the challenges would not dissipate.

The challenges presented by the employment of interpreters should not preclude cross-language qualitative research in diverse settings. Such research remains important in Iceland despite limitations: the size of Reykjavík where neighborhoods are small by international standards; where some families may be the only speakers of certain languages at their children's preschool; and where the language repertoire of academics engaged in education research does not match the language diversity encountered among potential participants. Without cross-language qualitative research, families who have been under-represented in transition research in Iceland so far would continue to be excluded. In retrospect, while allowing the researcher to expand recruitment possibilities and include a

broader variety of voices and perspectives to be included in the study, the overall employment of interpreters could have been approached differently. Long-term partnerships with individual interpreters could have been established during the data-generation period without the involvement of agencies. For instance, these interpreters would have been briefed on the study in more detail, followed the same participants throughout the study period, and reflected on the interview sessions with the researcher. Some elements of this type of researcher–interpreter relationship were present in the employment of one interpreter, the only one who was not recruited through an agency. The interpreter in question is what Chiumento et al. (2017) call a "lay interpreter", without interpreting qualifications or prior experience. This person was a native language speaker who was pointed out to the researcher by a fellow graduate student at the School of Education. This interpreter accompanied the researcher to all rounds of interviews in which the participant took part and was good at building rapport. These conversations generally had a better flow than in other interpreted interviews and presented more opportunities to ask follow-up questions and explore issues in more depth. This interpreter had a university degree and was familiar with the preschool system in Iceland as a former member of staff. The interpreter sometimes offered insights and cultural context for the researcher after the interview was concluded, briefly assuming a hybrid role of a cultural broker and an analyst (Temple, 2002; Temple & Young, 2004). Cultivating such relationships between researcher and interpreter would be more fruitful than having interpreters going in cold to the interviews and not communicating with the researcher before or after.

7.4 Contribution of the Study and Recommendations for Further Research

This study contributes to the research field of educational transition. The transition to primary school is a turning point in the lives of young children and their families, when an understanding of parental perspectives is an important component of supporting positive transitions for all children. Parental views and experiences were both characterized by commonalities and overlap on the one hand and variations and nuance on the other. The complexity and multi-faceted nature of the data set encouraged the use of multiple theoretical frameworks and methods of analysis, rather than relying on a single theory. The research project was data driven and the choice of theoretical lenses was determined by their matching with, and usefulness in, exploring the data. In this way, data analyses introduced a range of theoretical perspectives to the study of transition, building upon, but also extending the theoretical repertoire on which much transitions research is based. All the theories employed in the study touch upon parents' place within society: how they

experience belonging in the preschool community; their experiences of parallel communities of practice at the start of primary school; how they take action and critically reflect on their background across different social contexts; and being dependent on others to communicate in a new society while being in a vulnerable and marginalized position. Issues of social justice are drawn out in the findings and less focus is placed on themes commonly reported in existing parental transition research, such as parental concerns leading up to the start of primary school, changes in family routines that occur during and after the start of school, and changes to home–school communications. This, however, does not indicate that educational transitions are only a lens through which social justice may be studied, but that the two are interlinked. According to Perry (2014), social justice in ECEC centers around treating all people with dignity and respect which is based on positive relationships and strengths-based approaches. He maintains that in diverse societies such as Australia, the potential for breaches in social justice is high, due to stereotypical views of children and families. The findings from this study indicate that the potential for breaches also presents itself during the transition to primary school in Iceland, where the early childhood education system still has much to learn about the interplay of cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic diversity and social justice.

7.4.1 Theoretical Contribution

The theoretical contribution of the study is multifold, and the findings suggest fertile grounds for further research with various possible methodological routes. This applies both to the findings from each article and ways in which the different theoretical perspectives could build on each other and influence further research. When measuring the strengths and limitations of the theories employed in Articles I and II, the most immediate question to present itself is whether theories on belonging can be utilized to deepen research guided by Wenger's theory on communities of practice. According to Wenger (1998), members of a community of practice are engaged in communal activity, deepen their knowledge through regular interaction, and develop a repertoire of routines, practices, and resources. Here, concepts such as the axes of belonging (Sumsion & Wong, 2011) become helpful analytical tools to examine how a community's traditions and practices facilitate or hinder entrance for new or prospective community members. The axes of *Resistance and desire* (self-identification, desire for connections and new relationships) and *Categorization* (judgments about who belongs where and to what) could be used to shed light on the experiences and views of prospective and established members of a given community of practice. The construction of a shared identity is an aspect where Wenger's theory could be challenged regarding its applicability to educational institutions, at least in the Icelandic context. It remains to be seen if and

how educators, administrators, and support staff, along with children, and parents, would share an identity as members of a community of practice in educational settings in Iceland. Here, the axis of *Performativity* (which consists among other things of identity narratives) could be relevant for exploring perceived community memberships. As mentioned above, in the Icelandic research context, concepts such as communities of practice/communities of learning (*lærdómssamfélag*) and school culture (*skólamenning*) are almost exclusively understood as referring to the professional development communities of educators (Mörk & Sigþórsson, 2011; Sigurðardóttir, 2013; Gísladóttir et al., 2019; Björnsdóttir et al., 2021). If schools are thought of as being or containing communities of practice in Wenger's sense (Pálsdóttir, 2012), does anyone beside the educators see themselves as members of such a community? And if such communities are reserved for educators and administrators, are they likely to adapt ideas such as those proposed by Brown et al. (2019) on distributed leadership and cultural responsiveness? The axes and dimensions of belonging could furthermore enhance our understanding of narrative research in general and, more specifically, the kind of narratives of taking action in face of adversity and critical reflection reported in Article III. These narratives show the mothers as still evolving agents, not as passively accepting their situation or unchanging in their beliefs or outlook on life. Transformational narratives could be examined through the lens of the dimensions of belonging (Sumsion & Wong, 2011; Yuval-Davis, 2006): Do Freirean transformations such as those reported by Mercy alter her experiences of belonging in the society of her country of origin (which she left and returned to) by becoming more vocal and assertive in adverse circumstances? The literature drawn upon in Article IV is not without relevance when considering the narratives of Article III and Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, when considering the possibilities of critical reflection and action of people who may be the only speakers of a particular language and are dependent upon others to communicate within their child's ECEC community.

7.4.2 Empirical Contribution

The findings of Article I suggest opportunities for further research into parental belonging in ECEC settings. Future studies could examine if and/or how parental belonging in ECEC communities is altered by the transition from preschool to primary school and whether parental ideas about time as a limited resource differ between urban and rural settings. Possible correlations between children's and parents' experiences of belonging could be explored: for example, if belonging or non-belonging among children promotes belonging or non-belonging among parents and vice versa, by generating data among children and parents from the same families. The added nuance to our understanding of the temporal dimension of belonging can be kept in mind more generally in relation to other frameworks on

home–school relations. Article II prompts recognition that families are part of various communities of practice and that they are important contributors to the transition to school. It also acts as a reminder for researchers and educators within the Icelandic context to include parents better when employing Wenger's (1998) theoretical model and to put increased effort into providing the foundations of accessible communities for all families. For example, further research could help in this effort by examining effective ways of information dissemination for families from diverse linguistic backgrounds; investigating ways to promote equity in learning opportunities for all children at the beginning of primary school; acknowledging the observations of parents; making assessment criteria transparent and accessible for parents; and promoting participation of children in organized sports and leisure, especially for families in challenging socio-economic circumstances.

Article III suggests that for the participants in question, parental changes associated with the transition to school extended farther than previous frameworks have indicated. Researchers studying parental experiences of and attitudes towards the transition to primary school in diverse settings can draw further inspiration from Freire's work, as it positions parents as critically reflective actors: human beings who are not only affected by events and changes in their environment but who also influence events and enact change in light of their experiences. Articles III and IV touch upon lack of recognition, marginalization, and vulnerability. These are topics that are important to study further with parents of children from diverse backgrounds, especially considering the recent policy draft by the Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture (2020) on the education of children and youth with linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds. The policy draft emphasizes partnership with parents of children from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds and the utilization of their knowledge for the children's advancement.

Contemplating the study in light of the present author's professional experience, the findings have both confirmed old suspicions and opened my eyes to the massive challenges confronted by some parents in ECEC in Iceland. The findings give important insights into why the communal and relational aspects of having a child in ECEC can be perceived as inaccessible and unappealing from the parental perspective. During my time as a project manager for the National Parents' Association in Iceland, a good portion of the association's efforts centered around encouraging and supporting parents to take part in formalized parental activities; coordinate conferences, giving lectures, offering advice, and providing guidelines; and helping with the organization of parents' councils and associations. Many of these activities require parents to invest time and effort and the lack of these were sometimes met with deficit-oriented discourse: how some parents needed to make more effort to show up and take part. The preference of keeping a separation

between the home and school sphere and staying on the 'outside' encountered in the data is in some ways incompatible with formal and associative parental activities and the kind of "maximum overlap" between family, school, and community spheres and "frequent cooperative efforts" advocated by Epstein's (2011, p. 29) model for family involvement in schools. Adding cultural differences, language barriers, the feeling of a lack of social integration along with long working hours, the onus of keeping track of electronic communication, and, in some cases, suspicion and distrust towards educators and school authorities, it is possible to see why parents of children from diverse backgrounds may adopt a guarded or a withdrawn attitude in ECEC settings. This parental 'distance' or 'fatigue' can then easily give rise to the perception of parental disinterest among educators – a topic regularly brought up in my discussions with teacher trainees as an adjunct lecturer at the School of Education. Such discussions can become strengths-based by highlighting the attentiveness parents show towards their children's social and educational development, their eagerness for their children's participation in organized sports and leisure activities, and the varied forms of support provided for the children that may remain hidden from educators.

Further research projects building directly on the study's findings could be instigated. Researchers, policymakers at the municipal and national level, school administrators, educators, and pre-service teachers have much to learn from diverse parental perspectives on the transition to primary school in the Icelandic education system. One way to raise awareness among these stakeholders about parental experiences, challenges, and concerns presented in this study would be to invite them to discuss the findings in focus groups. Such a study would aim to elicit their reflections on the situations and challenges described by parents (e.g. from Articles II and III) and get them to imagine possible courses of action educators and school administrators could take to support families from diverse backgrounds at the time of educational transition. In turn, the findings from such a study could be weaved into further research projects with families of children from diverse backgrounds. Such a project could invest considerable time among families in their spaces to gain further understandings about their lived experiences and elicit their perspectives (Valdés, 1996; Compton-Lilly, 2007). Researchers could meet regularly with parents in familiar settings and seek ongoing input on their daily lives and education-related experiences. Under such circumstances their perspectives on educators', administrators', and policymakers' attitudes could be elicited to help determine the viability of proposed courses of action or improvement. Considering the linguistic diversity inherently associated with this research field and the challenges and opportunities explored in Article IV, further studies could be conducted by a research team that includes researchers with culturally and linguistically diverse

backgrounds. Such a team would ideally contain members who have ties to different language communities and knowledge of, and training in, qualitative and/or quantitative research methodology. A combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches, such as individual and focus group interviews mixed with targeted surveys available in various languages, could be applied.

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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Parental Experiences of Belonging within the Preschool Community

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Abstract

Little is known about how supportive relationships and parent communities materialize, or fail to materialize, in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) settings characterized by family diversity. This paper explores parents' lived experiences of belonging and non-belonging through semi-structured interviews with 12 parents of children from diverse backgrounds in two preschools in Reykjavík, Iceland. The children of these parents were 5–6 years old and would make the transition to primary school in the next school year. Interviews focused on parents' experiences of their child's time at the preschool, relationships with peers, educators and other families and the forthcoming transition to primary school. Findings suggested varied parental attitudes. While some reported benefits from belonging to a preschool community, others preferred to keep their distance or actively retained boundaries between home and school spheres. For these latter parents, belonging was framed as a matter of choice, influenced by factors such as time and language. A nuanced understanding of time as both facilitating belonging and a limited resource to be managed emerged from the study. These perspectives have implications for how policymakers and educators might facilitate belonging but also the importance of respecting those parents who choose to remain 'outside' the preschool community.

Keywords Bridging and Bonding · Belonging · Diversity · Parents · Preschool · Nordic

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Résumé
On sait peu de choses sur la façon dont les relations de soutien et les communautés de parents se matérialisent, ou ne parviennent pas à se matérialiser, dans des contextes d'éducation et de soins de la petite enfance se caractérisant par la diversité des familles. Cet article explore les expériences vécues par les parents en matière d'appartenance et de non-appartenance par des entretiens semi-structurés dans deux établissements préscolaires de Reykjavík en Islande avec 12 parents d'enfants de diverses origines. Ces enfants avaient de 5 à 6 ans et devaient faire leur transition vers l'école primaire l'année scolaire suivante. Les entretiens portaient sur les expériences des parents du temps passé par leur enfant à l'école maternelle, aux relations avec les pairs, les éducateurs et les autres familles, ainsi qu'à la transition prochaine vers l'école primaire. Les résultats suggèrent diverses attitudes parentales. Certains parents font état d'avantages de l'appartenance à une communauté préscolaire, mais d'autres préfèrent garder leurs distances ou maintenir activement des limites entre les sphères familiale et scolaire. Pour ces derniers, l'appartenance est une question de choix influencé par des facteurs comme le temps et la langue. L'étude fait ressortir une compréhension nuancée du temps tant comme facilitant l'appartenance que comme une ressource limitée qu'il faut gérer. Ces perspectives ont des implications sur la manière dont les décideurs politiques et les éducateurs pourraient faciliter l'appartenance, mais aussi sur l'importance de respecter les parents qui choisissent de rester « en dehors» de la communauté préscolaire.

Resumen
Poco se conoce acerca de la forma en que se materializan, o no, las relaciones solidarias y las comunidades de padres en grupos de Educación y Cuidado Preescolar caracterizados por diversidad familiar. Este artículo explora las experiencias de pertenencia o falta de pertenencia de los padres por medio de entrevistas semiestructuradas con 12 padres de niños provenientes de ambientes culturalmente diversos en dos instituciones de preescolar de Reikiavik, Islandia. Los niños tenían entre 5 y 6 años e iniciarían la educación primaria en el siguiente año escolar. Las entrevistas se enfocaron en experiencias de los padres durante el tiempo de educación preescolar de sus hijos, las relaciones con sus semejantes, educadores y otras familias, y la transición subsiguiente a la educación primaria. Los hallazgos sugirieron diversas actitudes de los padres. Mientras algunos de ellos reportaron beneficios al pertenecer a una comunidad de preescolar, otros prefirieron mantener la distancia o activamente establecieron límites entre la vida en casa y el ambiente escolar. Para estos padres, la pertenencia se enmarcó en un contexto de libre escogencia, influenciado por factores tales como tiempo e idioma. El estudio arrojó una percepción de tiempo como facilitador del sentido de pertenencia y a su vez como recurso limitado que necesita ser administrado. Estas perspectivas afectarían la forma en que los diseñadores de políticas y los educadores podrían facilitar el sentido de pertenencia, y a su vez traen implicaciones sobre la importancia de respetar a aquellos padres que deciden permanecer por fuera de la comunidad preescolar.

Introduction

In this article, we explore how the axes of belonging (Sumsion & Wong, 2011) can be used to operationalize the notion of social cohesion, which encompasses feelings of belonging within a community. We consider the encounters that parents of young children have with each other and with the preschool and investigate how supportive relationships and parent communities emerge or fail to emerge. ECEC settings in Iceland are increasingly characterized by greater family diversity, because of changing demographics, while research into such changes remain limited. In this study, we draw on the perspectives of parents of children from diverse backgrounds about their experiences of belonging and/or non-belonging in ECEC settings in Reykjavík, Iceland. Data from these explorations provide a basis for discussion on the implications for theoretical understandings of belonging and for future policy work on the role of ECEC in promoting social cohesion.

Increasing levels of cultural and linguistic diversity have contributed to changes in the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) landscape in Iceland in recent years. Preschools in Iceland have witnessed a considerable increase in the numbers of children from diverse backgrounds. Almost 19% of preschool children in Reykjavík had one or both parents with an immigrant background in 2015 (Leskopf et al., 2015) and 13.7% of all children in Icelandic preschools did not have Icelandic as their first language by the end of 2018 (Statistics Iceland, 2019a). These developments follow significant shifts in the country's demographic profile as the immigrant population has grown from 4.6% in 2006 to 14.1% in 2019 (Statistics Iceland, 2019b). These population shifts, while not high by international standards, represent a major demographic change for Iceland. They are often seen as posing challenges for ECEC institutions and educators who in many cases have had to adapt their practices to meet the needs of more diverse groups of children and their families. However, at the same time and drawing from international research, these challenges can also be reframed as possibilities for making diverse societies more cohesive.

One such possibility is noted in a recent European analytical report by Vandenbroeck et al. (2018), which highlighted the potential widespread and long-lasting societal benefits of ECEC services. Increased social cohesion is listed among the multifold societal boons of ECEC, as services provide a platform for bringing together families from different cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds in familiar settings. The families of young children attending ECEC services can benefit from opportunities to build the social (material, emotional or informational) support provided by informal networks of parents which can, in turn facilitate decision making and mitigate parental stress. These meeting places for young children and parents are thought of as being able to "contribute to social cohesion and social inclusion" (p. 39), through the dual functions of *bonding*—meeting parents in similar situations; and *bridging*—meeting parents from different cultural or socioeconomic backgrounds. The distinction between bonding and bridging stems from the wider notion of social capital (Putnam, 2000), where

bonding social capital is generally conceived of as residing within community groups characterized by similarity, whereas bridging social capital is thought of existing across sociodemographic lines and as having a potential to foster tolerance and acceptance through encounters of people from diverse backgrounds. It is worth noting that this distinction is not a dichotomy; social relationships can have characteristics of both bonding and bridging capital (Claridge, 2018).

Given expectations of ECEC services to bring about increased social cohesion in the societies in which ECEC services operate have been longstanding (OECD, 2006, 2012). However, the ways in which social cohesion is envisaged remain notably vague and little is known about how this can be achieved in real-life ECEC settings. Although this lack of understanding presents a challenge for researchers and policymakers, as the enrolment of children into ECEC programs marks a common starting point of cultural contact for parents who have recently settled in a new country (Mantovani & Tobin, 2016), it also represents new possibilities for empirical and theoretical exploration. If one of the clues to understanding the promotion of social cohesion and social inclusion in diverse societies lies in instances of bonding and bridging between parents of young children, then it becomes important to further our empirical and theoretical knowledge of how these parental encounters transpire. As encounters of bonding and bridging revolve around making social connections and cementing community ties, belonging becomes a useful concept to explore the potential for these to facilitate substantial attachments.

Research Context: Iceland

The preschool system in Iceland forms the bedrock of ECEC in this country along with the youngest stage (Classes 1–4) of the primary school. As in the other Nordic countries, educational policies at the preschool level in Iceland are centered on care, wellbeing, play and social development (Ministry of Education Science & Culture, 2011). While the national government is responsible for legislation and curriculum for the preschool level, the municipal governments are responsible for their funding and operation. Cost of attendance is heavily subsidized for families and attendance at preschool institutions is nearly universal for children from 2 to 6 years of age in Iceland. The preschools are thus a natural part of the daily lives of most families with young children in Iceland. Research reporting views of the culturally dominant parent population of Icelandic origin towards the preschool has indicated that parents regard the preschool as a natural right of children and families and support preschool policies which emphasize care, safety, play, and social development (Einarsdóttir, 2019).

According to the *National Curriculum Guidelines* (Ministry of Education Science & Culture, 2011) and the *Preschool Act* from 2008, parents are expected to be actively involved in their children's preschool education. Parents are guaranteed the right to have their say on the education of individual children and on preschool operations in general. The *Preschool Act* stipulates that educators and individual parents should share information pertinent to the children's education and wellbeing and that their relationship is built on respect for diversity in family makeup and

culture. Preschool administrators are required to hold elections for a parent council and (if requested) to help with establishing a parent association at their institutions. Parent councils in each preschool are tasked with observing the implementation of the preschool's curriculum and its introduction to parents. They also have the role of reviewing any major changes to the preschool's operations. Parent associations traditionally organize events such as field trips and Summer or Christmas festivals which children, educators and other family members can attend together.

Conceptual Theorizing on Belonging

The study is informed by conceptual theorizing on *Belonging* (Lähdesmäki et al., 2016; Sumsion & Wong, 2011) and the work of Yuval-Davis (2006) on the *Politics of Belonging*. Although belonging to a collectivity is sometimes spoken of in naturalist or nativist terms, recent research has emphasized the fluidity, flexibility and processual nature of the concept, as belonging is "always a dynamic process, not a reified fixity" (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 199) and "constantly being negotiated" (Lähdesmäki et al., 2016, p. 237). Belonging is also seen as multifaceted. Lähdesmäki et al. (2016) identify five motifs (*topoi)* of conceptualizing belonging (spatiality, intersectionality, multiplicity, materiality, and non-belonging) which cut across three dimensions (political, emotional and affective) while Sumsion and Wong (2011) list ten overlapping dimensions (emotional, social, cultural, spatial, temporal, physical, moral/ethical, spiritual and legal) and three axes to analyse how belonging operates (categorization, performativity, and resistance and desire) in their 'Cartography of Belonging'.

Belonging is furthermore seen as a contested and power-loaded phenomenon. What has been called the *Politics of Belonging* moves the focus from subjective perceptions of belonging to the processes of belonging (Stratigos et al., 2014) and denotes political projects designed to construct ideas of belonging around certain collectivities, which are themselves concurrently constructed and reinforced by these projects, creating "imaginary boundary line[s] of the nation and/or other communities of belonging" (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 205). The politics of belonging are also acted out in the daily lives of individuals and represent one of the ways in which people can make sense of themselves and their surroundings. With this in mind, the three Axes of Belonging (Sumsion & Wong, 2011) provide an analytical tool to examine how people position themselves and make sense of their own belonging in everyday settings.

As axes, they are thought to be fundamental to, and cut across, a range of conceptions of belonging and reflect its provisional and dynamic nature. The axis of *Categorization* relates to ascribing belongingness and judgments about who belongs where, or to what, and the terms on which they do so. *Performativity* focuses on how belonging is performed or repeatedly enacted, for example, through identity narratives. Turning to the axis of *Resistance and desire*, *resistance* can involve challenging or overthrowing externally imposed categories of belonging, whereas *desire* can instigate new possibilities of relations. One way to describe this axis is to point out that *resistance and desire* are at play in cases of self-identification, "where people

endeavour to choose, themselves" (Sumsion & Wong, 2011, p. 33) where and to what they belong, often overlooking pre-given frameworks of belonging.

Research on Parental Belonging in ECEC Programs

Research exploring on parental ideas of belonging in the context of ECEC remains relatively scarce on the international stage. However, studies from New Zealand hold important insights for further research. Witten et al. (2007) indicated that parents from both Māori and European backgrounds have found schools and preschools to be important sites of interaction, familiarity and community belonging. Mitchell et al. (2017) argue that early childhood education institutions can take steps to promote belonging across cultural divides in the context of refugee families by honoring values and practices of social justice and listening to families. Furthermore, Mitchell and Bateman (2018) maintain that early childhood educational practices embracing global human values such as *welcoming*, *kindness*, *respect*, *taking care of others*, *responsibility for others* and *hospitality* have the potential to foster connectedness and a sense of belonging for children and families from refugee backgrounds. To be effective in promoting social cohesion, these values need to be visible and reinforced on a daily and multimodal basis and educators need to be willing to incorporate "key cultural constructs" (p. 389) of refugee families into routine practices. This may include, for example, greeting families in their home languages, providing opportunities to engage in practices from their homeland (such as dancing), and honoring culture-specific special occasions or fusing them with pre-existing ones (e.g., renaming birthday parties 'celebrations of life'). Such efforts recognize each family's "funds of knowledge" (Gonzales et al., 2007) and appreciate these as strengths that contribute to ECEC experiences, rather than deficits to be overcome.

Emphasis on reciprocal communication between educators and families finds common ground among researchers with critical perspectives on multiculturalism in ECEC settings, who have stressed the importance of preschool institutions and educators engaging in dialogue with diverse groups of parents and opening up spaces for inclusive partnerships (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006) and negotiation across cultural, linguistic and class divides (Mantovani & Tobin, 2016; Van Laere & Vandenbroeck, 2017). Recent research among parents of foreign origin in preschools in Iceland indicates that there are examples of preschools successfully establishing cooperation with parents built on interactive communication, trust, cultural sensitivity and care. In these instances, preschools can be pivotal to promoting the active participation of families in local communities and wider society (Ragnarsdóttir et al., 2016; Simoen, 2018; Svavarsson et al., 2018).

Methodology

The research reported in this article is part of a trans-national research project called *Politics of belonging: Promoting children's inclusion in educational settings across borders,* which is designed to enhance theoretical and empirical

knowledge formation on the politics of belonging. The research is furthermore a sub-study of a larger project investigating the transition of children from diverse backgrounds from preschool to primary school in Reykjavík, Iceland. The aim of the sub-study was to gain an understanding of how parents of children from diverse backgrounds regarded themselves as belonging, or not belonging, to their child's preschool and its community through the lens of Sumsion and Wong's (2011) Cartography of Belonging.

The article aims to answer two specific questions:

(1) What dynamics are at play when encounters of *bonding* and *bridging* create belonging or fail to do so?
(2) How do parents from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds experience and interpret *belonging* in the context of their children's preschool?

Participants

For the purposes of this study, the term *diverse background* denotes families where children have one or both parents born in a country other than Iceland, have a mother language other than Icelandic, or are emergent bi- or multilingual. Parents of children from diverse backgrounds were recruited in April and May 2018 through parent–teacher interviews at two partner preschools from different neighborhoods in the municipality of Reykjavík. Diverse groups of children attend both preschools; among the oldest children, 59% and 60%, respectively, came from backgrounds that fit the definition of diversity adopted in the study.

Introductory letters and consent forms were translated to all mother languages of parents of the oldest children (being or turning 6 years old that year) who were to make the transition to primary school the subsequent Fall. Out of an initial pool of 37 families in both preschools, 10 mothers and 2 fathers from 11 families decided to take part. Three participants were born and raised in Iceland but had children with partners who were foreign nationals; all other participants had been born overseas. Demographic information indicated that participants were a culturally, linguistically, and socioeconomically diverse group. Participants described a range of occupations (from low-paid care workers and caterers to teachers, small business owners and postgraduate level experts), for those who had immigrated, varied time living in Iceland ranged from 8 months to 18 years; and their connections to the preschools over periods of 2 months to 4.5 years.

Participants were subsequently invited to a semi-structured interview at a time and place of their choosing during the summer months of 2018. The interview guide was formulated with the participants' overall experience of having their child attending the preschool in mind: focusing on the child's time at the preschool, relationships with peers, educators, and other families and the forthcoming transition to primary school. Specific questions on the present topic included *Do you consider your child as belonging to the preschool community*? and *Do you consider yourself, as a parent, as belonging to the preschool community?*

Ethical Considerations

The study was approved by the partner preschools, the Municipality of Reykjavík and the Science Ethics Committee of the University of Iceland. Each interview began with reiterating the purpose of the study to the participants, seeking informed consent and stipulating their right not to answer particular questions or to withdraw at any stage without consequences. All names presented in the paper are pseudonyms.

Data Generation and Analysis

Most of the interviews were conducted individually with the exception of one interview involving both parents. Seven interviews were conducted in Icelandic or English (or a mix of both) and four were aided by interpreters. With permission, the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim with help of the software *oTranscribe* before being interrogated through thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013) in *Atlas.ti*. Thematic analysis is a recursive and fluid process which involves searching across a data set to identify, analyse and report patterns of meaning. As thematic analysis is characterized by theoretical and analytical flexibility, it is important to indicate the epistemological perspective which underpins its use. This study is built around researcher reflexivity, which requires both the questioning of epistemological assumptions and recognition of the researcher's perspective/s.

The lead author began the analysis with multiple, thorough readings of all transcripts and writing familiarization notes. The initial production of codes started with complete and inductive coding of the dataset and was followed by sorting the codes into potential themes. The main focus of the analysis moved gradually towards the positioning of individuals through identification of indicators of 'belonging' that were evident in the data, through regular discussions between the authors and other scholars indicated in the acknowledgements. Sumsion and Wong's (2011) *Cartography of Belonging* was applied to the relevant data extracts as it was deemed to be a comprehensive framework well suited to analyze the dynamic ways in which belonging "operates" (p. 33). The cartography was used to identify the dimensions of belonging touched upon by participants and the axes of belonging at work: how participants either sought out participation in preschool communities or took steps to remain outside these communities and how their surroundings or circumstances either facilitated or restricted community access. The final thematic revision generated three themes: *Belonging through Bonding and Bridging in the Preschool Community*; *Emergent Forms of Belonging;* and *Retaining Boundaries on Belonging.*

Findings

All parents shared some data that was relevant to the overall theme of belonging. In this paper we draw on the voices of five parents to provide some depth to the examples. On *Belonging through Bonding and Bridging in the Preschool Community*, Mark is heard. In this theme we get a glimpse of how a foreign-born parent got introduced to and actively involved with a supportive parent community and the benefits reaped, indicated by strong ties of cooperation and willingness to maintain relationships beyond the child's time at the preschool. On *Emergent forms of Belonging*, the voices of Elisa and Zoe are heard. Highlighted in this theme are weaker forms of belonging; parental relationships commonly described as casual and friendly yet superficial, slow to materialize and only occasionally amounting to any shared experiences, beyond greetings at the entrance. For *Retaining Boundaries on Belonging*, we hear from Kristena and Anna. This theme represents the views of those who chose to remain 'outside' the preschool community, being on guard and viewing engagement as a reminder of their lack of integration or as an infringement on their time and energy.

It should be noted however that not all participants discussed their own belonging and non-belonging in relation to encounters of bonding and/or bridging in the wider community of attending families, but rather in terms of the locale or relationships with the child's educators. For example, discussing the difference between the local education institutions, Jovita remarked that she, being a foreigner and a mother of a child of color, sometimes felt as an outsider at the neighborhood primary school as opposed to the preschool. She noted that how the preschool educators greeted her made all the difference:

> They [the preschool educators] are all nice, yeah. They always talk to you, talk to you in the eye, not just… I think you know what I mean, but I can't explain, you know?

Belonging through Bonding and Bridging in the Preschool Community

Although most parents regarded their children as belonging to the preschool, accounts of parental bonding and/or bridging were rare within the data set. There was however a notable exemption. Mark described his interaction with other families at his daughter's preschool in terms of bonding (getting together with other non-Icelandic families) and bridging (getting together with families from different backgrounds) and saw it as one of the keys to early social integration. He felt that the preschool had been inviting and supportive towards his newly arrived family; hosting a variety of events and trips for families and fostering inclusion by celebrating language diversity through its *mother language of the week* program where educators and children learned words, sang songs or recited poems in mother languages of all children and educators. Mark said his daughter had been quick to pick up on the Icelandic language and made friends during the first weeks. He described the preschool as a cohesive institution where "everybody is together and where we know

all children, all parents and all teachers." He noted that the preschool's tacit rules on birthday parties had been especially helpful in making new social connections. These rules, common (with some variants) across many preschools and primary schools in Iceland are intended to prevent bullying and social isolation. They dictate that parents are expected to invite either all the girls, all the boys, the whole class/group or everybody born in the same year to their children's birthday parties. As preschool-aged children are accompanied by their parents to these events, the birthday parties offer an opportunity for the adults to socialize. The arrangement of being invited to the homes of others had been particularly useful for Mark when his family first arrived, sowing the seeds of friendship and cooperation between the families outside of the preschool:

> It's just…it's just natural, it really works like a really close friend circle…So, with many parents and children we are like…like relatives, so… like cousins or something. We are working many programs outside of preschool as well… it's exceptionally good, I think… how it works for example when it is *starfsdagur* [teachers' conference day] in the preschool and then it's just 5 or 10 minutes to organize between the parents, like now I will take care of this group, I will take care of this group and so… it just works extremely good.

Mark's self-identification as a member of a family-like preschool community represents the element of choice to belong within the axis of *resistance and desire* (Sumsion & Wong, 2011). He described an ECEC environment and traditions that facilitates relationship building and cooperation and expressed a strong wish to remain (and continue to belong) within the community of families, even beyond the point his formal relations with the preschool would end. Talking about the prospective transition to primary school the following fall, Mark made it clear that the family's school choice was influenced by where the child's preschool friends and families were going, expressing his desire that "we want to continue to stay around these people" and resisting the expectation that belonging to the preschool community ceased when the children left preschool.

Emergent Forms of Belonging

Other instances within the data set described emergent or weaker forms of belonging. These examples do not express the unequivocal sense of belonging described by Mark. Rather, they indicate a willingness to belong, or at least no aversion to belonging. These instances reinforce notions of belonging as fluid, flexible, and non-fixed (Yuval-Davis, 2006). For example, Elisa considered herself belonging "a little bit" to a preschool community and explained that her interaction with other families consisted mostly of talking to parents of the child's friends and the occasional shared pickup but had otherwise consisted of superficial relationships:

> …if we could say this is a kind of community, definitely yeah. Not too much because we don't do too much together but sometimes, they really do things together and then we get to be together with these parents too so … it is the

> first time that I really have a kind of relationship to parents here. Otherwise it would only be like hello and goodbye.

For Elisa, the performativity of belonging involved more than greetings, highlighting the importance of social events involving parents.

Zoe, who lived with her Icelandic spouse, described her situation in similar terms. Discussing how her son was doing socially, Zoe's observation was that although the preschool hosted events and offered venues for familial interaction, it had taken a long time to make the kind of connections with other parents that allowed for playdates outside of school, which to her mind was a big part of friendship:

> There is in his…. they do like activities, they have like parent breakfasts and… the other parents of the kids that are there like… I've gotten to know some of them and… and it just takes time though. I think time is key with that community and we've only been there eight months but even then, I feel like, yeah there is like… friends and people are nice to each other and… respectful both ways.

Unlike Mark's rapid entry into the preschool community and high level of cooperation, Elisa and Zoe described slower processes of connecting to other families and occasionally reaping the benefits of cooperation. In terms of the axis of performativity, they indicated that their enactment of belonging developed gradually as opportunities for connection moved beyond everyday greetings. The element of desire for connection and new relationships in the axis *resistance and desire* (Sumsion & Wong, 2011) also is present here, but in much weaker form than in Mark's case. The instances of bonding and bridging are fewer and both mothers characterize the connections as passing, rather than permanent. While neither displays active resistance to connecting with the preschool community, there is a sense of ambivalence about these relationships.

The emergence of belonging acts as a reminder of the importance of breaking up static or binary categories of *either/or*, as belonging is not fixed but processual and fluid (Lähdesmäki et al., 2016; Yuval-Davis, 2006). Being new to the community, it had taken Zoe some months to break through the *nice* and *respectful* surface to make more substantial contacts with other families and, reflecting on educational and cultural differences between the two countries, she wondered if that was "American or Icelandic or just human?".

Retaining Boundaries on Belonging

Not everyone was as keen on making the kind of connections Mark talked so fondly about and Zoe was striving for. Kristena described how happy she was with her son's time at the preschool, the good relations he had with peers and educators, her own positive teacher–parent relations which had been without "any kind of misunderstanding or some kind of a conflict" during all that time and stated that it had been a "really good choice" of the preschool. However, on the issue of being part of a preschool community Kristena, who talks here through her interpreter, preferred to keep her distance:

> Yeah, she thinks that… it's [preschool community] definitely existing, definitely possible if she would want it, you know, but she chooses more to be in like a sort of outside and kind of observe things but it is definitely like it's all just open and you can come and participate in all sorts of ways but it's like it's really, it's her own personal choice, you know, what she chooses to do about it.

The extract shows that although entry into a preschool community was regarded as possible by Kristena, it is also framed as optional. It is possible to frame her choice of remaining outside the preschool community—non-belonging—as a form of *resistance* and to reflect on the axes of *Categorization* and *Performativity* through the expected actions and interactions that are associated with belonging to a preschool community (Sumsion & Wong, 2011). Her preference was to stay on the periphery and watch, even though she described feeling "peaceful" when she entered the preschool grounds, the primary indicator of belonging she had identified earlier in the interview. When this issue was brought up again in a later interview and the factors influencing her choice of outside observation discussed, Kristena at first contributed her lack of engagement to a personal attribute before alluding to wider social issues beyond her control and preference:

> Basically I think it's laziness but well, in some sense maybe I think that in some way I am not quite integrated in Icelandic society and like… and… it's hard to find the… really the description, right description but it's maybe it's language barrier or something, you know, but like… well, if I have a choice to participate or not, like I would rather not.

Here, the axis of *Categorization* (Sumsion & Wong, 2011) can be used to interpret Kristena's reluctant step from the notion of a personal choice towards her position in wider society and the barrier posed by the dominant language. It indicates a judgment about her own non-belonging in terms of limited of language proficiency: she positions herself as an outsider not only in ECEC settings but also in wider Icelandic society as well.

Anna displayed strong *resistance* (Sumsion & Wong, 2011) to the idea of being a part of a preschool community. Although she talked fondly of the educators and the preschool (describing it among other things as "homely" and "warm") and regarding her son as having friends and belonging to the preschool, the same feeling did not extend to herself as a member of the preschool community. Anna called for a clearer separation of the home and school spheres, not being "in the least fond of parent cooperation whether it is in preschool or primary school." Reflecting on her own schooling and that of her children, Anna described what she perceived as *a clash of epochs*: The past of her own childhood as characterized by a rigid school setting and unchallenged teacher authority versus the educational "disintegration" of the present where she maintained that too many people were interfering with the school, leaving the teachers without the means to maintain discipline. Further, she argued that the closer proximity of spheres had negative consequences on home life as it posed an intrusion on her time and energy:

> Personally, I often think there is just endless vexation precisely from this home and school thing and I'm not in favor of it, it both puts pressure on the homes and to mix it all together, having too many people with too many opinions… just let the professionals take care of what they are educated for and trust them to manage it. Like, the parent association has now organized a trip to the countryside on Saturday and it is supposed to be… everybody drives there at ten o'clock and I just think this is… an unnecessary hassle. If I'm going to take my kids to the countryside and show up somewhere, I will just do it in my own time. What many people don't realize is that here are others who… where there are more people at home, and this creates pressure and inconvenience.

Here the axes *Categorization* and *Resistance and desire* are both at play. According to Anna's judgment, it is not her (or any other parents') rightful place to interfere with the school. For Anna the separation of spheres was a question of retaining control over her home life and keeping the professionalism of the school intact. She explained that occasional interaction with the teachers, individual parent–teacher interviews and biannual events where "you see the kids do something" sufficed. Anna's positioning is distinct from Kristena's observational stance as she was also dismissive of the use of social media and information overload in the form of emails when educational institutions were concerned. She felt that these produced a "glamorized image" of educators' work with the children which she mused was designed to "show how busy everybody was all the time." Her *resistance* therefore took the form of guarding against infringement in the form of too much interaction and information. The plentiful (and too many to her mind) opportunities for bonding and bridging were therefore not utilized.

The Temporal Dimension of Belonging

Across each of the themes, participants referred to the importance of time. Mark referred to the benefits of spending time with other families, while Elisa and Zoe mentioned the time factor involved in making connections. For Zoe and Anna, time was a crucial aspect of belonging but not in the way it is portrayed in the literature. Sumsion and Wong (2011) describe the temporal dimension of belonging retrospectively, in terms of personal histories (life experiences laden with memories) or generational roots where the present and the future are considered in relation to the past and have close relations to specific localities. Lähdesmäki et al. (2016) list temporality under the *topos* of spatiality of belonging, as belonging to a place is often linked to past experiences, notions of the present and expectations to the future. However, time was represented in the data as both a resource that facilitates belonging as well as something that needs to be managed carefully. For Zoe, time spent within the preschool community was a prerequisite for making social connections and a necessary investment (a "key") for building more substantial relationships. For Anna (a single mother of six), time was a precious and limited resource reserved for her family and home life. While this does not exclude the previous definitions of temporality, it does add nuance to this dimension and reinforces the notion of belonging as multifaceted and fluid.

Discussion

The findings are based on the experiences of 12 parents tied to specific contexts and points in time. The low number of participants and limited size of the dataset allows for a modest interpretation and limited generalization. Furthermore, the language barrier was felt when interviews were facilitated by interpreters, sometimes giving limited opportunity for exploring complex concepts. To place the study in context, Iceland itself has a relatively small population and, while the numbers of culturally and linguistically diverse inhabitants is growing, these numbers also remain small when compared with more populous contexts. The participants in this study had direct experience of connecting with the preschool and their perspectives on relationship-building offer valuable insights into contemporary Icelandic ECEC. We look forward to further investigations to build a more comprehensive understanding of the topic.

The first research question focused on the dynamics of bonding and bridging. Using the lens of Sumsion and Wong's (2011) *Cartography of Belonging*, an intricate interplay between axes and dimensions is discerned. Tension exists between different dimensions for those participants who were categorized as enacting emergent or non-belonging during the analysis. Yuval-Davis (2006) claims that in the first instance, belonging is about feeling at home and feeling safe. Lähdesmäki et al. (2016) note that belonging is generally regarded positively and something to be attained. Yet paradoxically, the participants who showed resistance towards belonging used a vocabulary of belonging when describing the preschool (*homely*, *safe*) while declaring their non-belonging to the preschool community. These data suggest that among these participants, the emotional (feeling of comfort and security) and the spatial (connection with a place) dimensions are overridden by the temporal (sensitivity to the level of commitment in time) and social (feeling of insufficient fluency in the local language and lack of wider group membership) dimensions of belonging. As illustrated by the examples presented, variable axes and dimensions are at play for different people.

The second research question addressed experiences of belonging among parents from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The parents who participated in the research had widely different experiences and interpretations of belonging in the context of their children's preschools. This variety of experiences and interpretations suggests that the participants' different social locations (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 205) and their diverse cultural and language backgrounds influence the diverging interests in and aptitude for forming and maintaining group memberships beyond the emotional attachments of family and friends (Sumsion & Wong, 2011). This reinforces the view that parents cannot be conceived of as a homogenous group (whose members all endorse or benefit from the same form of family interaction and home-school engagement) and gives policymakers cause for adopting modest expectations with regard to relationship building within ECEC. In particular, it cautions against assuming a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to engaging with and supporting parents. The diversity of abilities and background among children has been gaining increasing recognition in recent

years (Hellblom-Thibblin & Marwick, 2017; Peters, 2010) but this trend has yet to catch up with the reality of different needs and ways of life of families (Dockett, Griebel, & Perry, 2017).

Conclusion

While confirming the relevance of the *Cartography of Belonging* (Sumsion & Wong, 2011) when analyzing the experiences of parents accessing preschools in Reykjavík, this study also identified two elements that contributed to a more nuanced understanding of the phenomenon of belonging.

The first of these relates to parental agency and questions whether all parents, regardless of their circumstances and preferences, can be expected to utilize opportunities for bonding and/or bridging (Vandenbroeck et al., 2018). This is evident in the ambivalence of some parents to the idea of belonging to a preschool community. The participants in question were either not in a position to invest time and effort or felt too marginalized by factors outside of their control to engage in the kind of relationship building that policymakers expect from parents in ECEC settings. For some parents, belonging was as an optional aspect of engaging with the preschool, rather than a requirement. These parents did not regard their choice of 'non-belonging' as negative or impacting on their children's experience of preschool. However, it is not clear how educators, other parents or policymakers would view such choices, given the specific expectations of the *National Curriculum Guidelines* (Ministry of Education Science & Culture, 2011) and the *Preschool Act* (2008) about parental engagement. Challenges to the taken-for-granted positioning of parents as seeking to belong to the preschool community also open avenues to consider how parents are viewed: If policy and practice expectations are that all parents will belong, how are those who choose to be on the 'outside' regarded? Are they regarded as 'disinterested' parents? As noted in previous research (Dockett et al., 2017) parental distance from the preschool community does not constitute a measure of interest in their children's education.

The second element highlighted in this study is that of time. Complementing previous discussions of temporality and belonging, some parents in this study identified time as a requisite for engaging in the processes of belonging. For these parents, time was considered both as a resource to facilitate belonging and as something that was limited and needed to be managed carefully. This contrasted to the experiences of one parent who quickly and openly embraced the opportunities provided and immersed himself in the new social group. As well as adding a nuanced understanding of time to the broader conceptualization of belonging, these instances serve as a reminder that social location and positionings also influence the ways in which parents seek to engage with their preschool communities. Recognition of the importance of time in promoting—or obstructing—experiences and expressions of belonging also points to areas for future investigation.

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Paper II

Þáttaskil leik- og grunnskóla frá sjónarhóli foreldra barna með fjölbreyttan tungumála- og menningarbakgrunn

Björn Rúnar Egilsson og Jóhanna Einarsdóttir

Inngangur

Eftir því sem nemendum með fjölbreyttan tungumála- og menningarbakgrunn hefur fjölgað í íslensku skólakerfi, einkum í leik- og grunnskólum frá síðustu aldamótum (Hagstofan, 2019a, 2019b), hafa innlendar menntarannsóknir í auknum mæli beinst að gengi og vellíðan þessara barna. Í stuttu máli benda niðurstöðurnar til þess að staða þeirra sé á margan hátt áhyggjuefni: til að mynda virðast þau fá færri tækifæri til þátttöku í leik og eru frekar skilin út undan í leikskólanum (Eyrún María Rúnarsdóttir og Svava Rán Valgeirsdóttir, 2019; Jóhanna Einarsdóttir og Sara Margrét Ólafsdóttir, 2019), þau eru líklegri til að segja að þeim líði illa í grunnskólanum, standa verr að vígi félagslega og eru ólíklegri til þess að taka þátt í skipulögðu íþrótta- og tómstundastarfi (Ingibjörg Eva Þórisdóttir, 2018). Mörg þeirra hafa upplifað fordóma og stríðni vegna útlits og uppruna (Anh-Dao Tran og Samúel Lefever, 2018), námsárangur þeirra á samræmdum prófum er lakari og þau flosna frekar upp úr námi á framhaldsskólastigi (Hanna Ragnarsdóttir og Samúel Lefever, 2018). Undanfarin ár hefur aukinn kraftur verið settur í stefnumótunarvinnu í málefnum barna með fjölbreyttan tungumála- og menningarbakgrunn á vegum sveitarfélaga (sjá skóla- og frístundasvið Reykjavíkur, 2014) og mennta- og menningarmálaráðuneytisins (2020). Við þá vinnu hefur verið tekið mið af breyttum samfélagsaðstæðum og þörfum fjölbreyttra hópa barna og ungmenna í skólakerfinu. Í nýlegum drögum ráðuneytisins að stefnu um

menntun barna og ungmenna sem hafa fjölbreyttan tungumála- og menningarbakgrunn (2020) er meðal annars kveðið á um að bjóða eigi upp á fjölmenningarlegt skólastarf sem byggist á styrkleikum nemenda, að samfella einkenni skil milli skólastiga til þess að nemendur geti reitt sig á fyrri reynslu sína og þekkingu og að litið verði á móðurmál barnanna og menningu þeirra sem auðlind og á foreldra þeirra sem mikilvæga samstarfsaðila sem búi yfir þekkingu sem nýta þurfi í þágu barnanna.

Í þessum kafla verður sjónum beint að þáttaskilum í lífi barna og fjölskyldna með fjölbreyttan tungumála- og menningarbakgrunn þegar börnin fara úr leikskóla í grunnskóla. Með hugtakinu „fjölbreyttur bakgrunnur“ er vísað til barna sem eiga annað foreldri eða báða af erlendum uppruna, eiga sér annað móðurmál en íslensku eða eru tví- eða fjöltyngd. Rannsóknin sem hér er til umfjöllunar er hluti af rannsóknarverkefninu „Fararheill: Stuðningur við jákvæðan flutning barna með fjölbreyttan bakgrunn úr leikskóla í grunnskóla“. Verkefnið er styrkt af Rannís, Rannsóknasjóði Háskóla Íslands og Nordforsk og er tilgangur þess að rannsaka flutning barna með fjölbreyttan tungumála- og menningarbakgrunn úr leikskóla í grunnskóla frá sjónarhóli barna, foreldra þeirra og kennara á báðum skólastigum.

Markmiðið með verkefninu er að kanna þáttaskil leik- og grunnskóla frá margvíslegum sjónarhornum. Niðurstöðurnar verða framlag til áframhaldandi umræðu í skóla- og fræðasamfélaginu um stuðning við fjölbreytta hópa nemenda. Í þessari rannsókn er leitast við að svara eftirfarandi rannsóknarspurningu: Hvað einkennir reynslu foreldra barna með fjölbreyttan tungumála- og menningarbakgrunn af þáttaskilum leik- og grunnskóla?

Fræðilegur bakgrunnur

Þáttaskilin á mótum leik- og grunnskóla hafa verið skoðuð frá margvíslegum fræðilegum sjónarhornum á undanförnum áratugum. Dockett, Griebel og Perry (2017) segja að í þessum þáttaskilum geti í senn falist lóðrétt og lárétt hreyfing. Hreyfingin er lóðrétt í þeim skilningi að skilin hafa skýrt upphaf og endi, eiga sér stað aðeins einu sinni og endurspegla línulega þróun í takt við æviskeið einstaklinga. Með æviskeiðakenningu sinni lítur Glen H. Elder, Jr. (1998) á slík þáttaskil sem mikilvæga atburði sem tengjast náið breytingum á hlutverkum, stöðu og sjálfsmynd einstaklingsins. Frá þessu sjónarhorni eru þáttaskil í menntakerfinu einstefna milli stiga, til dæmis skil milli leik- og

grunnskóla og grunn- og framhaldsskóla, eða þegar nemendur færast upp um bekk á hverju skólastigi. Á hinn bóginn felur lárétt hreyfing þáttaskilanna í sér daglegan flutning milli heimilis og skóla, eða milli skóla, frístundaheimilis og skipulagðs íþrótta- og tómstundastarfs, sem tengir saman ólík samskipta- og áhrifasvið. Lárétt hreyfing á sér stað þegar fólk á samtímis hlutdeild í fleiru en einu lærdómssamfélagi (Wenger, 1998). Rétt er að taka fram að lóðrétt og lárétt þáttaskil geta átt sér stað samhliða.

Lærdómssamfélög

Wenger (1998) skilgreindi lærdómssamfélag (e. *community of practice*) sem hóp fólks sem deilir áhugamáli og dýpkar þekkingu sína á því með reglubundnum samskiptum. Í lærdómssamfélagi eru því einstaklingar sem að einhverju leyti hafa sameiginlegt áhugasvið, eiga í gagnkvæmum samskiptum, taka þátt í sameiginlegum verkefnum og þróa sameiginleg úrræði sem nýtast meðlimum þess og viðhalda samfélaginu. Slík úrræði gætu verið fundir, samtöl og upplýsingagjöf. Þannig gæti skólastofnun talist lærdómssamfélag, en einnig bekkur innan hennar, frístundamiðstöðin í skólanum sem og einstakar fjölskyldur (Kolbrún Pálsdóttir, 2012). Hugsa mætti um skólann sem samansafn smærri samofinna lærdómssamfélaga (Wenger, 1998). Þó að í fyrirmyndarlærdómssamfélögum séu ofantaldir þættir til staðar eru þau gjarnan vettvangur ágreinings, valdaójafnvægis og átaka af einhverju tagi. Í samhengi menntunar og skólastarfs hefur kenning Wengers oftast verið notuð í rannsóknum þar sem skoðuð eru lærdómssamfélög kennara og nemenda án aðkomu foreldra. Sá þáttur kenningarinnar sem snýst um mörk eða jaðar lærdómssamfélaga sem frjóan jarðveg breytinga og nýrra hugmynda kemur að notum í þessari rannsókn. Nýlegar íslenskar rannsóknir hafa bent til þess að ef tekið er mið af kenningu Wengers um þátttöku og innbyrðis tengsl komi í ljós að erlendir foreldrar séu á margvíslegan hátt á jaðri lærdómssamfélaga grunnskólastigsins: samskipti milli heimilis og skóla séu oft og tíðum lítil og ópersónuleg, skortur sé á samvinnu og samræðu milli foreldra og kennara og þátttaka foreldra í viðburðum takmörkuð vegna tungumálaörðugleika og árekstra við vinnu (Hermína Gunnþórsdóttir o.fl., 2017; Elizabeth Lay, 2016; Renata Emilsson Pesková og Hanna Ragnarsdóttir, 2017).

Wenger (1998) segir að félagsleg tengsl séu órjúfanlegur hluti alls lærdóms. Þeir sem eru á jaðri lærdómssamfélaga séu að hluta innherjar og að hluta utanaðkomandi. Þeir séu undir áhrifum annarra samfélaga og hafi nýjar hugmynd-

ir í farteskinu en þurfi að vera viðurkenndir sem mögulegir þátttakendur áður en þeir verði meðlimir. Við þáttaskil í menntakerfinu eigi breytingar sér því ekki aðeins stað hjá nýjum meðlimum sem þurfi að læra inn á lærdómssamfélögin heldur einnig innan samfélaganna sjálfra vegna áhrifa frá nýjum meðlimum (Dockett o.fl., 2017a). Á jaðri lærdómssamfélaga er að finna ýmsar venjur og starfshætti (e. *practices*) sem geta ýmist hamlað eða greitt fyrir aðgengi nýliða. Valdahlutföll og traust milli einstaklinga móta félagsleg samskipti að miklu leyti, sem og kunnugleiki og sameiginlegur skilningur sem taka breytingum í félagslegu og menningarlegu samhengi (Laluvein, 2010).

Wenger heldur því fram að til þess að opna lærdómssamfélög fyrir nýliðum þurfi að tryggja gagnkvæma þátttöku, veita hlutdeild í athöfnum samfélagsins og þeim úrræðum sem það ræður yfir, og tryggja að sameiginlegur skilningur ríki á tilgangi þess (1998, bls. 100). Miklu varðar fyrir foreldra sem tala ekki ríkjandi tungumál og eiga litla hlutdeild í menningu samfélagsins að stofna til sambanda sem byggjast á gagnkvæmri þátttöku í skólakerfinu. Quintos og Civil (2008) lýsa opnu lærdómssamfélagi þar sem meðlimum úr spænskumælandi fjölskyldum var boðið að taka þátt í kennslustund barna og samræðum um námsefnið, sem fóru bæði fram á hinu ráðandi tungumáli í samfélaginu (ensku) og móðurmáli þeirra (spænsku). Þannig tókst að virkja aðstandendur barnanna svo að menningarleg þekking þeirra varð að auðlind í skólastarfinu. Skyld dæmi er að finna í íslensku leikskólastarfi þar sem markvisst hefur verið unnið með bakgrunn barna og fjölskyldna og starfsfólk lagt sig fram við að vera opið fyrir ólíkum tungumálum og menningarstraumum og ryðja hindrunum í samskiptum úr vegi (Hanna Ragnarsdóttir o.fl., 2016; Lieselot Michèle Maria Simoen, 2018). Rannsóknin sem hér verður greint frá byggist á kenningu Wengers en þar er henni beitt í nýstárlegu samhengi, bæði hvað varðar þáttaskil leik- og grunnskólastigsins í íslensku skólakerfi og kynni foreldra ungra barna af samhliða lærdómssamfélögum.

Fyrri rannsóknir

Rannsóknum á þáttaskilum við upphaf grunnskólagöngunnar hefur vaxið fiskur um hrygg á alþjóðavísu á undanförnum áratugum, en grunnskólabyrjun er talin einn af lykilviðburðum lífsins og líkleg til að hafa áhrif á námsárangur, þroska og vellíðan langt fram eftir ævi (Eckert o.fl., 2008; Margetts, 2009; Turunen, 2014; Vogler o.fl., 2008). Jákvæð skólabyrjun hefur

verið tengd við aukinn námsárangur og félagsfærni en börn sem verða fyrir mótlæti í námi og félagslífi á þessum tímamótum eru líklegri til þess að eiga í áframhaldandi erfiðleikum meðan á skólagöngunni stendur og eftir að henni lýkur (Rimm-Kaufman og Pianta, 2000). Rannsóknir benda til þess að börn úr fjölskyldum sem geri sér svipaðar væntingar og hafi áþekkar hugmyndir um menntun og skólastarf og þær sem eru við lýði í skólanum eigi síður á hættu að lenda í vandræðum við upphaf skólagöngunnar. Hið gagnstæða á við um börn sem búa við óhagstæðar heimilisaðstæður eða hafa bakgrunn sem lýsa mætti sem flóknum (Dockett og Perry, 2007, 2014; Hair o.fl., 2006; Halle o.fl., 2009). Nýlega hefur ríkari áhersla verið lögð á að rannsaka skólabyrjun í samhengi fjölskyldulífsins, þar sem góð samskipti og samvinna milli heimilis og skóla eru gjarnan talin meðal þeirra þátta sem stuðla að jákvæðum flutningi milli skólastiga ásamt vináttusambandi barna og góðum tengslum þeirra við kennara (Dockett, 2014; Peters, 2010). Auk þess er álitið að fjölskyldan leggi mikið til náms og þroska barnsins og að hún sé föst umgjörð um líf barna meðan á þáttaskilunum stendur (Dockett o.fl., 2017a; Goff, 2017).

Í íslenskum lagaramma um skólastarf á leik- og grunnskólastigi hefur um nokkurt skeið verið kveðið á um rétt foreldra til upplýsinga um skólastarfið, líðan og námsframvindu barna sinna, aðkomu þeirra að stefnumörkun skólans í foreldra- og skólaráði og að þeir skuli hafa samráð við skólann og styðja við skólagöngu barna sinna (lög um leikskóla, nr. 90/2008; lög um grunnskóla, nr. 91/2008). Rannsóknir á viðhorfum foreldra barna með fjölbreyttan tungumála- og menningarbakgrunn til íslenska skólakerfisins hafa gefið til kynna að ýmislegt varðandi starfshætti grunnskóla komi erlendum foreldrum spánskt fyrir sjónir og að þeir telji talsvert rými til umbóta. Þeir segja þátttöku barna sinna í frístundastarfi mikilvæga fyrir íslenskunám og myndun félagslegra tengsla en að kostnaður reynist mörgum fjölskyldum erfiður (Hanna Ragnarsdóttir og Susan Rafik Hama, 2018). Auka þurfi stuðning við íslenskunám tví- og fjöltyngdra barna, gera móðurmáli þeirra hærra undir höfði og bregðast við aga- og skipulagsleysi í skólastarfi (Sigríður Björk Einarsdóttir og Renata Emilsson Pesková, 2019). Lítið sem ekkert sé unnið með menningarlegan bakgrunn barnanna, námslegar kröfur séu of litlar og neikvæð viðhorf gagnvart fjöltyngi séu til staðar innan skólakerfisins (Renata Emilsson Pesková og Hanna Ragnarsdóttir, 2017). Auk þess sé gagnkvæm samvinna og samskipti milli kennara og foreldra af skornum skammti (Hermína Gunnþórs-

dóttir o. fl., 2017). Þátttaka foreldra barna með fjölbreyttan bakgrunn hefur hingað til verið afar takmörkuð í íslenskum rannsóknum á þáttaskilum leik- og grunnskóla (Jóhanna Einarsdóttir, 2010, 2019; Sigurborg Sturludóttir og Jóhanna Einarsdóttir, 2008).

Í þessari rannsókn verður leitað eftir sjónarmiðum og reynslu foreldra á þessum tímamótum og því hvernig þeir upplifa íslenskt skólakerfi, frístundaheimili, skipulagt íþrótta- og tómstundastarf og móðurmálsnám út frá kenningu Wengers (1998) um lærdómssamfélög.

Aðferðafræði

Eigindlegum rannsóknaraðferðum var beitt til þess að afla ríkulegra gagna með foreldrum barna með fjölbreyttan tungumála- og menningarbakgrunn og kanna reynslu þeirra af þáttaskilum leik- og grunnskóla í lífi barna sinna. Eigindlegar rannsóknarðaferðir eru vel til þess fallnar að kanna margvíslega upplifun þátttakenda af skólabyrjun barna sinna og þann skilning sem þeir leggja í tímamótin; þó býr sá skilningur ekki innra með þeim heldur verður til í gagnvirku ferli með rannsakanda (Brinkmann og Kvale, 2015; Creswell og Poth, 2018).

Þátttakendur

Foreldrum barna með bakgrunn sem telst „fjölbreyttur“ samkvæmt skilgreiningu rannsóknarinnar var boðið að taka þátt í foreldraviðtölum í tveimur samstarfsleikskólum í ólíkum hverfum í Reykjavík í apríl og maí árið 2018. Börnin sem um ræðir voru öll á lokaári leikskólans (orðin sex ára eða að verða það) og í þann mund að hefja grunnskólagöngu um haustið. Barnahóparnir í báðum leikskólum einkenndust af menningarlegum og mállegum fjölbreytileika en bakgrunnur um 60% barna í báðum útskriftarárgöngum telst fjölbreyttur samkvæmt skilgreiningu sem rakin var að framan. Kynnisefni og eyðublöð fyrir upplýst samþykki voru þýdd á öll móðurmál hugsanlegra þátttakenda. Af 37 fjölskyldum elstu barnanna í báðum leikskólum ákváðu tíu mæður og þrír feður úr 11 fjölskyldum að taka þátt. Þátttakendur komu frá ýmsum löndum í Norður- og Suður-Ameríku, Afríku, Evrópu og Suðaustur-Asíu, en þrír þeirra voru fæddir og aldir upp á Íslandi og áttu barn með erlendu foreldri. Dvalartími erlendra þátttakenda á Íslandi var misjafnlega langur, frá sjö mán-

uðum og upp í 18 ár. Sumir þeirra áttu einnig eldri börn og höfðu því reynslu af grunnskólastiginu.

Gagnaöflun og greining

Eftir að hafa lýst áhuga á því að taka þátt í rannsókninni í foreldraviðtali í leikskólanum var haft samband við tilvonandi þátttakendur og þeim boðið í fyrsta hálfstaðlaða viðtalið af fjórum á stað að eigin vali. Viðtölin fóru fram á 12 mánaða tímabili: í júní 2018, í október 2018, í febrúar 2019 og í júní 2019. Var það frá því að börnin voru að ljúka leikskólagöngu sinni og allt til loka fyrsta árs þeirra í grunnskóla. Flest viðtölin voru einstaklingsviðtöl, fyrir utan fjögur viðtöl þar sem báðir foreldrar mættu saman. Átta þátttakendur kusu að ræða við rannsakanda á ensku eða íslensku, eða blöndu af báðum málum, en fimm studdust við túlk. Í fyrsta viðtalinu var þátttakendum boðið að velja ljósmyndir af börnum sínum fyrstu daga og vikur grunnskólagöngunnar og mæta með þær í aðra viðtalslotu til að ræða þær við rannsakanda. Var þátttakendum einnig boðið að endurtaka leikinn fyrir þriðja og fjórða viðtal og mæta með ljósmyndir úr daglegu lífi. Tilgangur þessa var að örva samræðurnar með myndefni, laða fram minningar og hugleiðingar á skýrari hátt og gefa þátttakendum tækifæri til þess að ræða mikilvæg málefni sem rannsakandi hefði að öðrum kosti mögulega ekki tekið eftir eða tekið fyrir í viðtalsramma (Dockett o.fl., 2017b; Given o.fl., 2016; Pink, 2013; Rose, 2007). Alls voru 35 viðtöl tekin á hinu 12 mánaða tímabili. Viðtölin voru hljóðrituð, skrifuð upp orðrétt með hjálp forritsins *oTranscribe* og greind með hugbúnaðinum *ATLAS.ti*. Stuðst var við þemagreiningu (Braun og Clarke, 2013) en hún einkennist af fræðilegum sveigjanleika og snýst um að leita að og greina frá merkingarmynstrum í gagnasöfnum. Greiningin hófst á ítarlegum lestri afritaðra viðtala og ritun athugasemda, því næst tók við umfangsmikil kóðun, flokkun kóða í þemu og gerð fyrstu þemakorta. Þemun voru endurskoðuð reglulega áður en lokaútgáfa þeirra leit dagsins ljós, enda verður greiningarferlinu best lýst sem fljótandi og endurkvæmu.

Siðferðileg álitamál

Rannsóknin var samþykkt af samstarfsleikskólunum og skóla- og frístundasviði Reykjavíkur og fékk jákvæða umsögn vísindasiðanefndar Háskóla Ís-

lands. Í rannsókninni var tekið mið af hugmyndum Perry (2014) um félagslega réttlátan flutning milli skólastiga. Að mati Perry felst félagslegt réttlæti í því að horfa ekki fram hjá bakgrunni ólíkra fjölskyldna meðan á flutningnum stendur. Viðtalsrammar endurspegluðu þessar hugmyndir því að þar var lögð áhersla á að kynnast styrkleikum og áhugamálum barnanna, gildismati þátttakenda og hugmyndum þeirra um foreldrahlutverkið. Með því að biðja þátttakendur um að velja ljósmyndir úr daglegu lífi og ræða þær í viðtölum fengu þátttakendur auk þess tækifæri til að taka virkan og beinan þátt í rannsókninni (Bertram o.fl., 2015). Litið var á þá sem „skapandi einstaklinga með einstaka persónusögu og hæfileika“ (Pink, 2013, bls. 44) sem fengu tækifæri til þess að ákveða sjálfir hvað skipti máli fyrir fjölskyldu sína á þessum tímamótum. Í upphafi gagnaöflunarferlisins hófst hvert viðtal á því að útskýra fyrir þátttakendum tilgang rannsóknarinnar, nafnleynd og notkun dulnefna og á því að afla upplýsts samþykkis. Farið var yfir tímaskuldbindingu (fjögur viðtöl á 12 mánaða tímabili) og ítrekaður var réttur þátttakenda til að svara ekki einstökum spurningum og hætta þátttöku fyrirvaralaust án neinna afleiðinga. Ljósmyndum þátttakenda var hvorki safnað né þær hafðar til sýnis. Öll nöfn sem birtast hér að aftan eru dulnefni.

Niðurstöður

Í þessum hluta verður sjónum beint að láréttri hreyfingu þáttaskilanna á mótum leik- og grunnskóla og kynnum þátttakenda af fjórum mismunandi en samofnum lærdómssamfélögum: grunnskólanum, frístundaheimilum, skipulögðu íþrótta- og tómstundastarfi og móðurmálsnámi. Niðurstöðurnar sem greint verður frá byggjast á gagnasafninu í heild, en þó að mestu leyti á annarri viðtalslotu (sem fór fram þegar börnin höfðu verið í grunnskólanum í rúman mánuð) þar sem þátttakendum tók að fækka á milli annarrar og þriðju og þriðju og fjórðu viðtalslotu. Þeir hlutar gagnasafnsins sem tengdust rannsóknarspurningunni sem var sett fram hér að ofan voru flokkaðir í fimm þemu:

- *félagsleg tengsl og vináttusambönd;*
- *grunnskólinn – ofhleðsla upplýsinga*, *tortryggni og skortur á námstækifærum*;
- *frístund – leikgleði og óreiða*;

- *þátttaka í íþrótta- og tómstundastarfi;*
- *móðurmálsnám*.

Félagsleg tengsl og vináttusambönd

Félagslegar hliðar skólagöngunnar voru þátttakendum ofarlega í huga og höfðu mikið að segja um hvort skólabyrjun barna þeirra hefði hafist vel eða illa að þeirra mati. Með hliðsjón af þeirri áherslu Perry (2014) að kynnast styrkleikum og getu þátttakenda og barna þeirra voru foreldrarnir spurðir sérstaklega í fyrstu viðtalslotu hvaða kostum þeir teldu börnin sín helst búa yfir. Ýmis lýsingarorð voru notuð en orðið sem oftast varð fyrir valinu var „opinn“. Vísaði það til hæfni barnanna til að mynda ný tengsl við aðra og getu til þess að tjá sig, jafnvel þvert á tungumál, eins og fram kom í máli mæðranna Agötu, Veronicu og Stephanie:

> Agata: Hún er mjög opin og segir mér alltaf frá öllu. Hún er félagslynd og hún er hugrökk og er í góðum samskiptum við aðra krakka.
>
> Veronica: Hann er rosalega lífsglaður og kátur krakki, alveg svakalega og hérna ... er alltaf til í ... vill prófa allt og reyna allt og hann ... ekki inn í sig eða til baka. Rosalega opinn og vill læra og gera og græja.
>
> Stephanie: Aaa ... [brosir breitt] sem foreldri kann ég að meta hvað hún er opin og hún er ekki hrædd við að segja sína skoðun. Hún lætur vita ef hún er ekki ánægð með eitthvað á hvaða tungumáli sem hún getur tjáð sig.

Hjónin Tom og Sonia, sem mættu saman í viðtal til rannsakanda, tóku í sama streng:

> Tom: Já, og hún er kannski ... hún er mjög opin.
>
> Sonia: Já, mjög.
>
> Rannsakandi: Hvernig opin?
>
> Tom: Bara, þú veist, ræðir gjarnan við fólk og er ekki ... þannig að hún er dálítið skemmtileg fyrir vikið að ... hún talar við fólk alveg.
>
> Sonia: Já, hún talar við fólk. Það fer bara eftir því hvaða ... hvaða mál það talar, sko.
>
> Sonia: Já, já.

> Tom: Hún getur alveg haldið uppi samræðum á þremur málum.
>
> Sonia: Hún talar líka við túrista og svona á ensku, á götunni og svona [hlær], já: „Can I help you?“

Félagsleg staða barnanna og vináttutengsl voru foreldrunum hugleikin og þau höfðu margt um það að segja hvaða augum þeir litu upphaf skólagöngunnar. Foreldrar sem töldu skólabyrjun barns síns farsæla voru fljótir að benda á að það hefði eignast vini, eins og Fiona lýsir hér:

> Fiona: Já ... honum gengur vel. Ég held að honum gangi vel í skólanum, hann er að eignast vini og ég fór í foreldraviðtal og hún sagði að hann væri mjög opinn og vingjarnlegur og hlusti vel og skemmti sér vel í skólanum.
>
> Rannsakandi: En flestir vina hans fóru í annan skóla?
>
> Fiona: Já, en hann hafði kynnst þessum strák á leikvellinum í sumar og bara það að þekkja einn krakka hjálpaði honum.

Flestir þeirra foreldra sem töldu skólabyrjunina hafa verið erfiða eða krefjandi nefndu sérstaklega félagslega þáttinn. Foreldrar þeirra barna sem voru ekki altalandi á íslensku nefndu gjarnan tungumálaörðugleika sem hindrun við myndun nýrra vináttutengsla. Óvæntar breytingar, eins og að besta vinkonan úr leikskóla fylgdi barninu ekki í grunnskólann, gætu sett strik í reikninginn eins og Agata minntist á:

> Agata: Hún var aðeins niðurbrotin til að byrja með af því að það kom í ljós að hún færi ekki í skólann sem hún átti að fara í.
>
> Rannsakandi: Já?
>
> Agata: Hún fór sem sagt í annan grunnskóla og var aðeins vonsvikin að hún hefði ekki farið með vinkonu sinni úr leikskólanum [...]
>
> Rannsakandi: Hvernig hefur henni þá gengið að eignast vini í bekknum?
>
> Agata: Það, hérna ... hafa verið smá erfiðleikar, tungumálaörðugleikar ... nær ekki alveg að brjótast í gegnum þá.

Í huga foreldra voru börnin opin, bjuggu yfir félagsfærni og voru fær um að tjá sig í fjölbreyttu tungumálaumhverfi við lok leikskólans. Þó var ekki á vísan

að róa með að sú færni fengi að njóta sín í sama mæli við komuna í grunnskólann. Foreldrar þeirra barna sem voru ekki altalandi á íslensku nefndu gjarnan tungumálaörðugleika sem hindrun við myndun nýrra vináttutengsla.

Grunnskólinn – ofhleðsla upplýsinga, tortryggni og skortur á námstækifærum

Dagleg tengsl milli foreldra og kennara virtust minnka og verða formlegri við komuna í grunnskólann. Þátttakendur minntust á viðtöl við umsjónarkennara barnsins í upphafi annar en greina mátti á foreldrunum að tengslin væru öðruvísi og að þeir væru ekki jafn vel að sér um daglegt starf barnsins og þeir höfðu verið í leikskólanum. Samhliða dvínandi persónulegum tengslum hefði rafræn upplýsingagjöf aukist til muna og áttu sumir erfitt með að ná utan um magn upplýsinganna, eins og fram kemur hjá Jessicu:

> Jessica: Samskiptin fara fram eftir mörgum leiðum þannig að við fáum upplýsingar frá skólastjóranum, frá kennaranum, frístundaheimilinu og frá skólaritaranum, að ég held. Þannig að þetta kemur úr fjórum áttum og þetta fólk tjáir sig á mismunandi hátt, sumir nota tölvupóst, sumir Facebook. Oftast er þetta á íslensku og ensku en stundum er það bara á íslensku. Í fyrstu var ég ekkert að þýða þetta og hugsaði bara: „Ó, hann Gunnar [maki hennar] mun lesa þetta, hann mun ná því ef við þurfum að vita hvað þetta er.“ Ég ræddi þetta í raun ekki við hann þannig að við misstum af ýmsu.
>
> Rannsakandi: Viðburðum, eða?
>
> Jessica: Já, foreldrafundum og einhverju. Eins og í dag var bangsadagur og hvorugt okkar fékk þann póst.

Jessica minntist á fleiri viðburði sem tengdust skólanum og fjölskyldan hafði farið á mis við en hefði gjarnan viljað sækja. Magn skilaboða gat að sama skapi rokið upp úr öllu valdi hjá þeim fjölskyldum sem áttu fleiri börn. Því lýsti Veronica, sem á þessum tíma var einstæð og með sex börn á heimilinu:

> Veronica: Það má alveg fækka öllum tölvupóstum, þú veist, alveg bara fækka þessu niður í einn á mánuði eða einu sinni í viku, frá einum kennara. Það eru nefnilega sumir sem ætla að vinna starfið sitt, eða maður upplifir það, ætla að vinna starfið sitt svo rosalega vel, ætla að

> segja manni bara frá hverjum einasta degi. Ég er ekkert að segja að mér sé sama, en það er bara ... Kannski eftir daginn með alla þessa daga með 15–20 tölvupósta, maður er ekkert að fara yfir það, sko.

Þeir foreldrar sem töluðu takmarkaða eða enga íslensku og studdust við túlk í viðtölunum voru mun ólíklegri til að minnast á rafræna upplýsingagjöf, en greindu frekar frá persónulegum samskiptum við umsjónarkennara eða skólastjórnendur. Meðal þessara foreldra gætti þó nokkurrar tortryggni í garð endurgjafar kennara um stöðu barnsins, eins og kom fram í máli Ivetu:

> Iveta: Þetta hefur gengið mjög vel en ég trúi því einnig að kennarar á Íslandi segi bara fallega hluti um krakkana og hrósi þeim í tíma og ótíma.
>
> Rannsakandi: Af hverju heldurðu það?
>
> Iveta: Ég veit það ekki en miðað við reynslu mína af leikskólanum og skólanum hef ég bara fengið að heyra mjög góða hluti um hann [son hennar]. Það er gott, þú veist, ég hef ekki heyrt neina gagnrýni eða neitt neikvætt. Ég hef verið að ræða við aðra foreldra um að kennararnir noti oft þetta orð, „duglegur“, sem þýðir eiginlega allt og ekkert og ég er dálítið hrædd um að allt gangi vel þangað til eitthvað breytist, og að ég gæti misst af því eða ekki fengið að vita af því.

Grunsemdir Ivetu sneru að því að lof íslenskra kennara í garð barnsins væri svo víðtækt að það jaðraði við að vera merkingarlaust og að þeir myndu jafnvel veigra sér við því að láta vita ef eitthvað bjátaði á. Þessar grunsemdir áttu sér annars konar birtingarmynd hjá fleiri mæðrum, eins og til dæmis hjá Ewku, og lutu þær að námstækifærum og raunverulegri námsframvindu barna þeirra:

> Ewka: Íslensk börn skrifa sjálf en það er skrifað fyrir pólsk börn.
>
> Rannsakandi: Hvað áttu við?
>
> Ewka: Já, til dæmis þegar þau hengja blöð upp á vegg með íslenskri skrift og það er augljóst að íslensku börnin skrifuðu sjálf en það er augljóst að dóttir mín ... kennarinn hefur greinilega skrifað fyrir hana, þetta er ekki rithöndin hennar.
>
> Rannsakandi: Af hverju heldurðu að þau geri þetta fyrir hana?
>
> Ewka: Ég veit það ekki, kannski hafa þau ekki trú á því að hún geti þetta sjálf, en þetta er hlutverk skólans – að læra, ekki láta einhvern annan skrifa fyrir hana.

Rannsakandi: Einmitt. Gerðist þetta líka hjá pólska vini hennar?

Ewka: Já, við mamma hans vorum einmitt að ræða þetta mál.

Áhyggjur þessa hóps foreldra fólust í því að skólinn drægi upp of bjarta mynd af stöðu og getu barnanna í stað þess að láta reyna á þau og leyfa þeim að takast á við verkefni á eigin forsendum. Ewka var þeirrar skoðunar að þannig sinnti skólinn ekki hlutverki sínu gagnvart dóttur hennar þar sem hún væri snuðuð um námstækifæri. Eins komu fram efasemdir hjá Stephanie um að námsmatið lýsti raunverulegri stöðu barnsins. Hún sagði: „Þau segja að hún hafi klárað prófin og náð þeim. Ég trúi því ekki vegna þess að ég held að hún skilji ekki allt sem fer fram í skólanum.“

Frístund – leikgleði og óreiða

Skólabyrjun barnanna markaði einnig upphafið að inngöngu þeirra í frístundaheimilin. Foreldrarnir litu á þau sem vettvang fyrir vináttu og leik; staði þar sem börnin væru glöð og skemmtu sér saman með vinum úr öðrum bekkjum, hefðu aðgang að leikföngum og nytu meira frelsis:

Tom: Ég spurði hana á hverjum degi: „Hvernig var í skólanum í dag?“ Og oftast var það ágætt. Stundum ekki. En frístundin er alltaf …

Sonia: Alltaf skemmtileg.

Tom: Alltaf skemmtileg.

Fiona taldi starfshætti frístundaheimilisins minna að mörgu leyti á leikskólann sem sonur hennar hafði kvatt sumarið áður:

Fiona: Frá mínum bæjardyrum séð er þetta klárlega framhald af leikskólanum. Það sem ég sé þegar ég kem [í frístundina] er í raun framlenging á því sem ég myndi sjá í leikskólanum. Þar eru alls konar leikmöguleikar í boði, þau geta valið það sem þau gera. Þau geta farið út ef þau vilja leika sér á leikvellinum eða farið í fótbolta. Þannig að það er meira frelsi vegna þess að þau geta valið hvort þau eru úti eða inni, sem ég held að sé mjög gott upp á þáttaskilin, ég held að þetta sé nokkuð hnökralaust fyrir börnin. Þau vita hvernig þau eiga að vera í slíku umhverfi og hann [sonur hennar] getur enn þá gert allt þetta sem honum finnst skemmtilegt að gera.

Nánast allir þátttakendur höfðu skráð börnin sín í frístund í upphafi skólaársins. Þrátt fyrir mikla aðsókn og jákvætt viðhorf í garð þeirra leiktækifæra sem frístundaheimilin buðu upp á höfðu nokkrir foreldrar orð á því hversu óreiðukennd þeim þættu heimilin, eins og Veronica lýsir hér:

> Veronica: Stundum kemur maður og bara: „Hvar er þessi krakki?“ Og þá er bara bent í ... Ég veit ekki, ég hef aldrei starfað við þetta sjálf þannig að ég veit ekki hversu erfitt er að halda utan um þetta. En ég upplifði þetta aldrei þannig með stóru strákana, þá var þetta bara einhvern veginn: „Já, hann er hérna!“ Það var alltaf einhver fullorðinn þar. Jafnvel með alla þessa tækni, nú eru þeir með iPada og eitt og annað til þess að fylgja þessu eftir en það virðist ... einhvern veginn ekki ganga eftir.

Margir þátttakendur greindu frá skorti á yfirsýn og að eftirliti með börnunum væri ábótavant; oft væri erfitt að finna börnin þegar þau væru sótt og að foreldrarnir hefðu komið að börnum sínum þar sem þau voru að leika sér fyrir utan skólalóðina í lok dags. Einnig komu fram nokkrar sögur þar sem því var lýst hvernig skortur á eftirliti hefði valdið vandræðum og ráðaleysi foreldra þegar börnin höfðu látið sig hverfa, eins og þegar Agata þurfti að kalla á hjálp fjölskyldumeðlima við að leita að dóttur sinni í hverfinu:

> Agata: Sko, ég kom að sækja hana í frístundaheimilið og hún var ekki á staðnum. Þau byrjuðu að leita að henni og það tók enginn eftir því að hún hefði horfið. Klukkutíma seinna kom hún aftur og sagði einmitt að enginn hefði viljað leika við hana.
>
> Rannsakandi: Hvert fór hún?
>
> Agata: Hún tók strætó og fór niður í miðbæ og kom svo til baka.
>
> Rannsakandi: Já, sjálfstæð!
>
> Agata: Já!
>
> Rannsakandi: Þannig að hún tók málin í eigin hendur?
>
> Agata: Já.
>
> Rannsakandi: En hefur hún viljað vera í frístundinni eftir þetta?
>
> Agata: Ég þurfti að skrá hana af frístundaheimilinu.

Foreldrarnir voru á því að frístundaheimilin byðu upp á áþekkan vettvang til leiks og samvista við vini og þann sem börnin þekktu svo vel í leikskólanum;

frístundin væri „alltaf skemmtileg“ í huga barnanna, sem sum hver spurðu af hverju þau væru sótt „svona snemma“ í lok dags. Hins vegar gerðu sumir þeirra alvarlegar athugasemdir við umgjörð frístundastarfsins og höfðu orð á því að það væri ekki eðlilegt að börnin gætu farið út fyrir eða yfirgefið skólalóðina þegar þau áttu að vera í öruggri umsjón starfsfólksins.

Þátttaka í skipulögðu íþrótta- og tómstundastarfi

Hjá mörgum fjölskyldum markaði upphaf grunnskólagöngunnar einnig inngöngu barnanna í heim skipulagðs íþróttastarfs, en sum þeirra höfðu farið á íþróttanámskeið sumarið áður eða jafnvel á meðan þau voru enn í leikskóla. Íþróttatengt myndefni úr daglegu lífi var oft til umræðu í viðtalslotunum: þátttakendur ræddu útbúnað, útskýrðu hvernig ætti að safna strípum og beltum í blönduðum bardagaíþróttum og sýndu myndskeið af æfingum og íþróttamótum. Í síðustu viðtalslotunni valdi Veronica mynd af fótboltaliði sonar síns þegar hún var beðin um að sýna mynd sem henni fyndist lýsa fyrsta ári sonar síns í grunnskóla best:

> Veronica: Þú sérð hvað hann er stoltur. Þarna voru þeir búnir að vinna leikinn. Þetta var ekki núna á mótinu, þetta var bara í venjulegum leik núna fyrr í sumar. Það er einmitt þetta, eins og þetta bara skín svo í gegn hjá honum, finnst manni, staðfestan [...] Hann var svona allan tímann: „Nú er verið að taka mynd af mér, ég er nýbúinn að vinna leik.“ Þú sérð það svona á öllum myndunum, hann er bara ... Hann var alveg yfir sig ánægður.

Í öðru viðtali bað Carolina dóttur sína, sem var gjarnan viðstödd viðtalslotur móður sinnar, að koma og segja okkur hvaða íþróttir hana langaði til að æfa:

> Carolina: Já, hún sagðist vilja fara í fimleika. Soraya! Viltu fara í fimleika? Ha? Ekki?
>
> Soraya: Nei.
>
> Carolina: Hvað viltu? Fótbolta? Körfubolta? Viltu fara í sund?
>
> Soraya: Nei.
>
> Carolina: Nei? Í hvað ætlarðu að nota íþróttagreiðslurnar ef þú ætlar ekki í neinar íþróttir?
>
> Soraya: Allt í lagi þá, ég skal fara í íþróttir.

> Carolina: Ókei. Hvað viltu gera þegar þú ferð í íþróttir?
>
> Soraya: Hmm ... körfubolta.

Af samtalinu hér að ofan að dæma var móðirin meðvituð um ólíkar íþróttagreinar sem stóðu börnum til boða og áleit notkun frístundastyrksins sjálfsagðan hlut, nánast eins og þeim bæri skylda til að nýta hann. Á hinn bóginn var umstangið sem fylgdi íþróttaiðkun barnanna helst tengt við breytingar á daglegu lífi fjölskyldunnar við skólabyrjun. Ein mæðranna sagði að það væri „geðveik vinna“ að eiga börn í íþróttum: skutla, sækja, mæta og fylgjast með leikjum og mótum og aðstoða við fjáröflun. Sum barnanna æfðu fleiri en eina grein og mættu allt að fimm sinnum í viku á æfingar. Umfang æfinga krefðist einbeittrar viðleitni og skipulagningar og gæti verið krefjandi fyrir foreldra, sérstaklega á heimilum þar sem einnig þyrfti að taka tillit til æfingatöflu systkina, eins og Tom og Sonia greindu frá:

> Tom: Fimmtudagar og þriðjudagar eru mjög stífir dagar. Þá er tónlistarskóli og ballett þannig að við erum komin heim ... Svo erum við að sækja systur hennar í annan skóla kannski um hálfsjö og keyra hana í tónlistarskólann, þannig að dagurinn er mjög langur.
>
> Sonia: Já, það eru langir dagar og það er alltaf erfitt að vekja hana á morgnana.

Börnunum var nánast alltaf lýst á þá vegu að þau nytu sín í skipulögðu íþrótta- og tómstundastarfi, þótt margir foreldrar greindu frá því að þau væru oft og tíðum örþreytt. Diana tók upp á því að útbúa spennandi nesti fyrir son sinn til að hafa með á æfingu eftir langan skóladag:

> Diana: Hann var svakalega þreyttur, hann byrjaði á að sofna bara í bílnum á leiðinni þannig að þetta tekur alveg á. Hann fer í skólann, svo fer hann í frístund. Og svo fer hann þrisvar í viku í MMA [blandaðar bardagaíþróttir]. Þannig að hann var alveg fyrstu ... [hlær] fyrstu vikuna alveg útkeyrður. En hann er búinn að ná ... Það er svo mikil orka í þessum strák.

Kostnaðarhlið frístundar og íþróttaiðkunar

Eins og dæmin hér að ofan sýna voru viðhorf þátttakenda almennt jákvæð í garð skipulagðs íþrótta- og tómstundastarfs og flest börnin skráð á frístunda-

heimili. Foreldrarnir voru meðvitaðir um hvað stæði börnum þeirra til boða og þeim var umhugað um að þau tækju þátt. Í viðtali við Luciu barst talið að því að vegna manneklu væri sonur hennar á biðlista eftir frístundaplássi, en nánari eftirgrennslan varpaði ljósi á fjárhagslegar hliðar þess að koma barninu að í frístundastarfi:

> Lucia: Við erum enn að bíða eftir því að hann fari á frístundaheimili, við erum á biðlista vegna þess að það vantar starfsfólk.
>
> Rannsakandi: Veistu hvenær hann kemst að?
>
> Lucia: Nei, vegna þess að ég skulda leikskólanum svolítið. Já. En þau eru að reyna að borga það. Ég sagði: „Ég bý ein með börnin." Ég þurfti að borga fyrir mjög margt, kannski meira en ég get borgað. Þá get ég það ekki. Þá er betra að ég sendi hann ekki þangað. Ég reyndi að nota frístundakortið. Þannig að ég er að fara á fund vegna þess að þau sögðu mér: „Þú getur notað þetta." Vegna þess að hann hefur aldrei notað það [frístundakortið].

Lucia vísar hér til komandi fundar í þjónustumiðstöð hverfisins vegna vangoldinna leikskólagjalda frá vetrinum áður. Að sama skapi vakti íþróttaiðkun barnanna stolt foreldra í bland við streitu og áhyggjur, sem í sumum tilfellum voru af fjárhagslegum toga eins og fram kom í máli Stephanie. Líkt og Lucia var Stephanie eina fyrirvinnan á heimilinu og fann vel fyrir kostnaðinum við skólamáltíðir og íþrótta- og tómstundastarf:

> Stephanie: Þær [dæturnar] eru báðar í frístund og ég borga 19 þúsund fyrir þær báðar auk þess sem ég borga [fyrir skólamáltíðir] í skólanum í hverjum mánuði. Þarf að borga fimmtíu og eitthvað þúsund fyrir þessa fimleika, þannig að ef Reykjavíkurborg gefur þér fimmtíu þúsund króna inneign, þá er það samt ekki nóg.

Íþrótta- og tómstundaiðkun barnanna var fyrirferðarmikið umræðuefni í viðtölum foreldra og rannsakanda og ljóst var að hún tengdist skólabyrjun með beinum hætti, eins og ein móðirin komst að orði: „Þegar skólinn byrjar, þá byrja æfingarnar." Ljóst var að foreldrunum var umhugað um að börnin tækju þátt í skipulögðu íþrótta- og tómstundastarfi en á hinn bóginn greindu þeir frá álagi á fjölskylduna og kostnaði sem sumum reyndist erfitt að standa straum af.

Móðurmálsnám

Margir þátttakenda ræddu um tengsl barnanna við upprunalönd foreldranna og þátttöku í formlegu og óformlegu móðurmálsnámi. Flestir greindu frá því að þeir legðu áherslu á að halda eigin móðurmáli að börnunum með einhverjum hætti, til dæmis með því að lesa fyrir þau og kenna þeim stafrófið. Sumir, eins og Iveta, mættu með börnum sínum í skipulagða móðurmálsskóla um helgar þar sem börnin fengju tungumálakennslu og tækju þátt í margvíslegum verkefnum:

> Iveta [lítur á ljósmynd]: Hérna er hann í lettneska skólanum í Reykjavík og það er fyrsti dagurinn.
>
> Rannsakandi: Hvar fer hann fram?
>
> Iveta: Í skólanum, tvisvar sinnum í mánuði.
>
> Rannsakandi: Er þetta námskeið sem lettneskar fjölskyldur geta sótt saman?
>
> Iveta: Já, ekki beint fyrir fjölskyldurnar en mömmurnar eða einhverjir geta komið og skilið þau eftir í skólanum. Krökkunum er skipt upp í skólastofur og þau fást við ólík verkefni á lettnesku, nota lettnesku, lesa bækur og syngja lög.

Af lýsingum foreldra að dæma var greinilegt að málsamfélögin lögðu metnað í skipulagningu starfsins og stóðu fyrir margs konar kynningu á þjóðmenningu sinni, jafnvel leiksýningum. Sándor minntist meira að segja á að til stæði að fá gestakennara að utan:

> Sándor: Þetta er einu sinni í mánuði þegar það eru fjölskyldur frá Ungverjalandi. Við erum yfirleitt með kannski tíu krakka og það er einn sem er sex ára og nokkrir átta ára og tíu ára.
>
> Rannsakandi: Ekki sami aldur.
>
> Sándor: Nei, vegna þess að við erum ekki að læra að lesa og skrifa, heldur frekar ... Við dönsum til dæmis þjóðdansa og lærum ljóð, lög og svona hefðbundna þjóðdansa og leiki. Núna eru tveir sem eru að koma í ágúst. Það eru strákar sem eru sögukennarar og ætla að kenna „baranta“. Það er bardagaíþrótt og er mjög týpískt ungverskt. En allir kenna barninu sínu heima að lesa og skrifa á ungversku.

Ígrundun á móðurmáli og menningu upprunalandsins fól einnig í sér að sjá ólíka framtíðarmöguleika fyrir sér og vega og meta kosti og galla menntunarmöguleika í ólíkum löndum, eins og Lísa gerði þegar hún hugsaði um framtíð fjölskyldunnar:

> Lísa: Enskan er eitthvað sem þeir [sonur hennar og bræður hans] koma alltaf til með að öðlast. Íslenskan er bara hér, eða þú getur bara öðlast hana hérna. Þú færð hana hvergi annars staðar. Skiptir svolitlu máli að þeir fái þetta fyrsta … æ, hvað á ég að segja? Þegar kemur að lestrinum og lesskilningnum, að þeir fái það svolítið strax.

Í viðtölunum sýndu þátttakendur myndefni af börnum sínum á ferðalögum til upprunalanda foreldranna þar sem þau heimsóttu ættingja og þar sem þau stunduðu móðurmálsnám á heimilinu, lásu bækur og gerðu skriftaræfingar. Enda þótt flestir töluðu hlýlega um þessa vídd í sambandi barna og foreldra gat hún einnig verið vandkvæðum bundin, eins og raunin var í tilfelli Soniu:

> Sonia: Hún vill ekki að ég fari með sér [inn í grunnskólann]. Hún vill að ég kveðji sig við dyrnar en Tom má það [fara með henni inn]. Ég á brasilíska vinkonu sem hjálpar okkur stundum að sækja hana eða fara með hana í skólann og hún [dóttirin] sagði að hún þyrfti að bíða úti. Hún má ekki fara inn í skólann. Hún skammast sín fyrir okkur. Hér er eitthvað að, ég veit ekki, í höfðinu á henni. Í huga sínum skammast hún sín fyrir okkur. Og við veltum fyrir okkur af hverju það gæti stafað. Ég sagði: „Ég lofa að ég skal ekki tala við þig. Ég vil bara kveðja þig.“ Og hún sagði: „Þú ættir ekki að tala.“ Þannig að það er eitthvað á seyði með tungumálið, kannski er hún hrædd við að sýna að hún sé frábrugðin, að við séum frábrugðin. En ég spurði mig: „Af hverju?“ Það eru svo mörg erlend börn þarna.

Móðurmálsnám barnanna tók á sig ýmsar myndir, allt frá því að foreldrar læsu fyrir börnin og kenndu þeim stafrófið heima fyrir yfir í skipulagða móðurmálshópa þar sem foreldrar og börn hittu aðrar fjölskyldur úr sama málsamfélagi reglulega. Þó kom á daginn að sumum foreldrum reyndist erfitt að viðhalda áhuga og vilja barna sinna til að rækta kunnáttu á öllum tungumálum sem töluð voru í fjölskyldunni.

Umræður og lokaorð

Markmið rannsóknarinnar „Fararheill: Stuðningur við jákvæðan flutning barna með fjölbreyttan bakgrunn úr leikskóla í grunnskóla“ er að kanna þáttaskil leik- og grunnskóla frá sjónarhóli barna, foreldra þeirra og kennara á báðum skólastigum. Hér er sjónum beint að reynslu foreldra barna með fjölbreyttan tungumála- og menningarbakgrunn af þáttaskilunum og byggjast niðurstöðurnar á fjórum lotum af hálfstöðluðum viðtölum með þátttakendum sem fóru fram á tólf mánaða tímabili. Í samtölum við þátttakendur kom í ljós að lárétt hreyfing þáttaskilanna (Dockett o.fl., 2017a) var greinileg í skólabyrjun og hélst í hendur við kynni fjölskyldunnar af mismunandi samhliða lærdómssamfélögum: grunnskóla, frístundaheimili, íþrótta- og tómstundastarfi og móðurmálsnámi. Niðurstöðurnar má túlka þannig að ýmislegt varðandi starfshætti lærdómssamfélaga grunnskólans og frístundaheimilanna torveldi foreldrum barna með fjölbreyttan bakgrunn inngöngu í samfélögin og haldi þeim jafnvel á jaðri þeirra. Wenger (1998) segir að veita þurfi nýjum meðlimum hlutdeild í þeim úrræðum sem lærdómssamfélagið hefur yfir að ráða og fellur rafræn upplýsingagjöf þar undir. Sá hluti þátttakenda sem ræddi rafræna upplýsingagjöf á annað borð þótti hún hvorki skilvirk né hnitmiðuð og misjafnt hvort textinn væri aðgengilegur á ensku. Fjöldi tölvupósta og tilkynninga á samfélagsmiðlum var að þeirra mati yfirþyrmandi þannig að mikilvæg skilaboð týndust í flóðinu. Hluta þátttakenda grunaði jafnvel að kennarar drægju upp of jákvæða mynd af stöðu barnanna í stað þess að haga kennsluháttum sínum þannig að öll börn fengju raunveruleg námstækifæri. Þessi tortryggni á sér samhljóm í fyrri rannsóknum hérlendis, þar sem erlendir foreldrar kvarta undan því að ekki séu gerðar nægar kröfur til nemenda og kalla eftir heiðarlegu námsmati (Hanna Ragnarsdóttir og Susan Rafik Hama, 2018; Hermína Gunnþórsdóttir o.fl., 2017; Sigríður Björk Einarsdóttir og Renata Emilsson Pesková, 2019). Óskilvirk upplýsingagjöf og skortur á trausti gagnvart námsmatinu torveldar foreldrum að styðja við skólagöngu barna sinna (lög um grunnskóla, nr. 91/2008) og grefur undan sameiginlegum skilningi á tilgangi lærdómssamfélagsins (Wenger, 1998).

Félagsleg tengsl barnanna voru þátttakendum ofarlega í huga; foreldrarnir nefndu helst félagsfærni sem kost í fari barns síns og var hún talin nátengd upplifun þess af góðri eða erfiðri skólabyrjun. Það ætti að vera skólasam-

félaginu áminning um mikilvægi þess að hlúa að vináttutengslum barna með fjölbreyttan bakgrunn strax í fyrsta bekk og um stuðninginn sem hlýst af því að hefja grunnskólagöngu með vinum sínum. Fyrri rannsóknir gefa enda til kynna að grunnskólanemendur sem búa á heimilum þar sem erlent tungumál er talað standi verr að vígi félagslega (Ingibjörg Eva Þórisdóttir, 2018). Þessi þáttur skiptir foreldrana miklu máli en vináttusambönd og leiktækifæri voru oftast rædd í samhengi við skóladaginn og dvöl barnanna á frístundaheimilum. Mikilvægi frístundastarfs í félagslegri þátttöku og íslenskunámi barna með fjölbreyttan bakgrunn hefur verið áréttað í fyrri rannsóknum (Hanna Ragnarsdóttir og Susan Rafik Hama, 2018) en einnig hefur komið fram að erlendir foreldrar kvarti undan aga- og skipulagsleysi í íslensku skólastarfi (Sigríður Björk Einarsdóttir og Renata Emilsson Pesková, 2019). Í samræðum við foreldrana bar á því að mörgum þeirra þótti sem frístundaheimilin skorti skipulag og yfirsýn og að þau væru á mörkum þess að geta haldið utan um barnahópinn. Einn þátttakandi ákvað að yfirgefa lærdómssamfélag frístundaheimilisins sökum þessa. Þess ber þó að geta að þessar frásagnir voru gjarnan settar í samhengi við ólíka skólamenningu í heimalöndum þátttakenda, sem þeir töldu einkennast af meiri aga og skýrari reglum um hvar börnin mættu vera hverju sinni. Gera má því skóna að í sumum tilfellum liti menningarmunur og ólíkar hugmyndir um aga og skipulag upplifun foreldra sterkum litum.

Þátttakendur virtust mun virkari í lærdómssamfélögum á sviði íþróttastarfs og móðurmálsnáms og ræddu síður atriði sem orkuðu tvímælis og hindruðu þátttöku eða hlutdeild þeirra þar (Wenger, 1998). Foreldrarnir voru almennt meðvitaðir um að ýmis tækifæri til íþróttaiðkunar stæðu börnum þeirra til boða og að hægt væri að nýta frístundastyrk Reykjavíkurborgar til að greiða hluta kostnaðar. Frásagnir foreldranna endurspegluðu að þeir væru reiðubúnir að leggja mikið á sig til að geta fylgt börnum sínum á æfingar, mæta á leiki og í keppni og taka þátt í fjáröflun. Efnaminni foreldrar reyndu jafnframt að finna leiðir til að koma börnum sínum að í frístundastarfi og íþróttum þrátt fyrir lítil peningaráð. Niðurstöðurnar má túlka á þá vegu að metnaður foreldranna fyrir samfélagsþátttöku barna sinna komi hér fram, þar sem fyrri rannsóknir hafa annars vegar gefið vísbendingu um að kostnaður við frístund, íþróttir og tómstundastarf reynist einstæðum og tekjulágum foreldrum erfiður hjalli (Hanna Ragnarsdóttir og Susan Rafik Hama, 2018; Sigríður Björk Einarsdóttir og Renata Emilsson Pesková, 2019) og hins vegar að þátttaka

nemenda á miðstigi og elsta stigi grunnskóla, sem hafa annað móðurmál en íslensku, sé almennt minni í skipulögðu íþrótta- og tómstundastarfi (Ingibjörg Eva Þórisdóttir, 2018). Margir foreldranna sinntu móðurmálsnámi barna sinna, hvort sem það fór einungis fram í formi samræðna, lestrar eða beinnar kennslu heima fyrir eða í móðurmálshópi utan skólans. Þeir leituðu þannig fjölbreyttra leiða til að rækta virkt fjöltyngi barna sinna, eins og áður hefur komið fram (Renata Emilsson Pesková og Hanna Ragnarsdóttir, 2017), þótt sumum fyndist þeir eiga á brattann að sækja gagnvart meirihlutamálinu (Katarzyna Wozniewska, 2018).

Hvorki er hægt að alhæfa um starfsemi þeirra grunnskóla og frístundaheimila sem um ræðir né um foreldra barna með fjölbreyttan bakgrunn út frá þeim gögnum sem safnað var. Þau geta samt sem áður gefið ákveðnar vísbendingar sem skoða mætti nánar og gætu nýst starfsfólki á vettvangi og stefnumótunaraðilum. Eflaust mætti í mörgum tilfellum endurskoða rafræna upplýsingagjöf til foreldra, gera hana hnitmiðaðri og aðgengilega á fleiri tungumálum. Í drögum mennta- og menningarmálaráðuneytisins að stefnu um menntun barna og ungmenna með fjölbreyttan tungumála- og menningarbakgrunn (2020) er lagt til að ítarlegar upplýsingar á erlendum tungumálum um skóla-, frístunda-, íþrótta- og æskulýðsstarf skuli gerðar aðgengilegar á netinu. Í ljósi þessa þarf skólasamfélagið að ígrunda hvernig heppilegt sé að haga hversdagslegum skilaboðum og tilkynningum sem skipta þessar fjölskyldur miklu máli og þurfa að vera skýrar. Sömuleiðis mætti hugleiða vel hvernig endurgjöf og námsmati skuli háttað og það kynnt fyrir foreldrum. Frá sjónarhóli Wengers má túlka stefnu stjórnvalda sem svo að þau vilji byggja upp sterk lærdómssamfélög með aðkomu foreldra barna með fjölbreyttan tungumála- og menningarbakgrunn. Í drögunum (2020) er litið á foreldra sem mikilvæga samstarfsaðila sem búi yfir ómetanlegri þekkingu og kveðið á um að leitað skuli leiða til þess að sem flest börn á yngsta stigi með fjölbreyttan bakgrunn sæki frístundaheimilin. Slíka bandamenn þarf hins vegar að taka alvarlega með því að miðla upplýsingum með skilvirkum hætti, sýna hreinskilni um námsframvindu og stöðu barna þeirra og með því að bjóða upp á jöfn námstækifæri í daglegu skólastarfi. Þá þarf að búa frístundastarfi umgjörð og yfirbragð þar sem börnum og foreldrum með fjölbreyttan bakgrunn líður vel og þar sem þeim finnst þau vera örugg.

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ÁGRIP

Lítið hefur verið vitað um viðhorf foreldra barna með fjölbreyttan tungumála- og menningarbakgrunn til þeirra þáttaskila þegar börn fara úr leikskóla í grunnskóla á Íslandi. Í þessum kafla verður reynsla foreldra barna sem hafa slíkan tungumála- og menningarbakgrunn af flutningi barna þeirra úr leikskóla í grunnskóla könnuð. Þrettán foreldrar tóku þátt í rannsókninni í samstarfi við tvo leikskóla í Reykjavík. Þátttakendum var boðið í fjögur hálfstöðluð viðtöl á 12 mánaða tímabili, frá því að börn þeirra voru að ljúka leikskólagöngu sinni og allt til loka fyrsta árs grunnskólagöngunnar. Niðurstöðurnar benda til þess að skólabyrjun barnanna haldist í hendur við kynni fjölskyldunnar af samhliða lærdómssamfélögum: grunnskólanum, frístundaheimilum, skipulögðu íþrótta- og tómstundastarfi og móðurmálsnámi. Í gögnunum er að finna vísbendingar um að ákveðin atriði sem varða starfshætti grunnskólanna og frístundaheimilanna sem um ræðir haldi þessum foreldrum frekar á jaðri lærdómssamfélaganna.

ABSTRACT

The transition from preschool to primary school from the perspectives of parents of children from diverse backgrounds

Little is known about the perspectives of parents of children from diverse backgrounds on the transition from preschool to primary school in Iceland. This chapter reports on a study on the transition from preschool to primary school in which thirteen parents of children from diverse backgrounds from two partner preschools in different neighbourhoods in Reykjavík took part. The participants met with the researcher in four rounds of semi-structured interviews over a twelve-month period, from the time their children were finishing preschool through their first year of primary school. The findings suggest that starting school coincided with the families' transitions to parallel communities of practice: the primary school, after-school care, organized sports and leisure, and heritage language learning. There are clues within the data that certain elements in the practices of the preschools and after-school care centres in question do not help the parents of children from diverse backgrounds gain entry to the communities of practice; on the contrary, some practices contribute to their marginalization.

Paper III

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Narratives of Maternal Action and Cultural Re-evaluation in Relation to the Transition to School

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ABSTRACT

The transition to primary school is widely seen as a period of multifaceted transformations and adoptions of different strategies for parents, yet relatively little is known about the lived transition experiences of parents from diverse (linguistic, cultural, socio-economic) backgrounds. This article explores the issue by examining maternal narratives in the context of having a child starting school in settings defined by family diversity through the lens of Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Four rounds of semi-structured interviews were conducted with two mothers of children from diverse backgrounds during their first year of primary school in two neighborhoods in Reykjavík, Iceland. The findings show that, for these mothers, engagement with the Icelandic ECEC system before and during the transition to school triggered them to take action when they felt that their concerns about their child's wellbeing were not taken seriously. The mothers' experiences furthermore brought about critical re-evaluation of their cultural background.

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Introduction

The start of primary school has been framed as a time of change, challenges, and concerns for parents in international academic literature. When children transition to primary school their parents undergo their own transition; roles, responsibilities, relationships, and identities are altered by becoming parents of a school child and old contexts are replaced with new, which need to be explored and made sense of (Dockett & Perry, 2013; Dockett et al., 2017b). These internal and external transformations call for families to adopt new strategies, routines, and skills (Dockett, 2017). Although the transition to school is a unique experience for each family due to differences in circumstances, cultural background, personal history, and expectations (Dockett & Perry, 2014; Rogers et al., 2017), research on parental experiences has shown that many parents are concerned about their children's safety, adjustment to the school environment, socio-emotional competence, and behavioral skills at the outset of school (Dockett & Perry, 2007; Einarsdóttir, 2010; Griebel & Niesel, 2002; McIntyre et al., 2007). Challenges faced by parents in transition have been identified on the *individual* (construction of a new identity, increased sense of responsibility, and sense of losing control), *interpersonal* (new relationships with educators and other parents), and *contextual* (change in routines of the week and holidays, combining the spheres of home, work, and school) levels (Griebel & Niesel, 2013). The transition to school is therefore an ambivalent time of vulnerability and opportunity (Ackesjö, 2017) for parents as they adapt to their dual role of supporting their children's transition and navigating their own (Griebel & Niesel, 2009; Hanke et al., 2017).

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Although becoming a school parent can be a shocking experience (Ackesjö, 2017) for anyone, undergoing the transition can be especially complicated for parents from immigrant or refugee backgrounds. These parents, in addition to encountering language barriers and cultural differences (De Gioia, 2017), have often to adapt to paradigms of family involvement and home–school relations that tend to privilege dominant social groups (Dockett et al., 2017b) or be otherwise unresponsive to their needs (Goff, 2017; Rogers et al., 2017). Responding to the needs of students and families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds presents a variety of challenges for educators and school administrators, which have led researchers to explore strategies of mitigation and culturally responsive management. Among these is what Brown et al. (2019) have coined *distributed culturally responsive leadership*. This approach to school management envisages a form of leadership that empowers educators, administrators, parents, and students to acquire a sense of agency within and ownership of the school community by offering them a genuine role in decision-making, which in turn enables the school to react more rapidly to changing circumstances and implement policies and practices accordingly. It furthermore entails concern for social justice and responsiveness to and respect for diverse cultural traditions. Culturally responsive education aims for inclusive school communities where assessment frameworks take students' cultural backgrounds and ways of communicating into consideration; where educators become sensitized to possible structural inequalities and diverging academic, personal, and social needs within diverse classrooms, and cultivate respectful and reciprocal relations with children and their parents (Herzog-Punzenberger et al., 2020; Nayir et al., 2019; Nortvedt et al., 2020). Granting that empirical research on parental experiences and views on early education and care in diverse settings has become more prevalent (Draghici, 2019; Garnier & Brougère, 2017; Tobin, 2016; Van Laere, 2017), research focusing on lived experiences of parents from diverse (linguistic, cultural, socio-economic) backgrounds during the transition to school is rare (Devlieghere et al., 2020). Furthermore, research on parental transition to school generally places a relatively narrow focus on parental experiences of becoming school parents as such; on parents positioning themselves and being positioned as parents of school students, making sense of the new school context and their place within it (Dockett et al., 2017b). How the experiences of having a child starting school may coincide with a wider and more radical transformative change in parents, e.g., one that triggers critical reflection on and/or subversion of prevalent ideas and values within their own cultural background and prompts action against social structures perceived as unjust, is less explored. Although many researchers have been moving away from and challenging deficit assumptions about families from diverse backgrounds, viewing them as having strengths, knowledge, and capital worthy of recognition—even reporting on them countering dominant narratives on school readiness (Lehrer, 2017)—parents are rarely portrayed as taking action in transition research. This article aims to contribute to the field by examining parental narratives of taking action and re-evaluation of cultural backgrounds in the context of having children of diverse backgrounds transition to school. The authors draw on Paolo Freire's work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in general, and his concepts of *conscientização* (concientization) and the *culture circle* in particular, to shed light on these narratives. Freire's work, which was inspired by his leading role in educational programs and activism for the betterment of illiterate and poor people in rural Brazil and Chile, examines and advocates for the relationship between education and social change (Vandenbroeck, 2020). Freire sought to help the have-nots fight oppression in the form of injustice and exploitation by enabling them to realize the structural conditions of their situation and recognize the causes of their oppression/dehumanization. To Freire, that involved dialogue and trust between a teacher and his learners, as he warned that attempts to liberate the oppressed without their reflective and active participation would lead to objectification, as if they were things to be carried out of a burning building. *Conscientização* refers to a process of developing a critical awareness of social reality through reflection and action: "learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (Freire, 1968/2014, p. 38). It is a process of inner change in a social context, one in which social action—the "radical denunciation of dehumanizing structures"

(Freire, 1998, p. 514) —is a constitutive element. The closely connected concept of a *culture circle* represents a forum for dialogue where individual experiences are examined through a collective lens in a way that is defined by equality and mutual respect. The circle's purpose is to raise the participants' awareness of their reality and promote actions to transform it for the better (Homer, 2011).

Research Context

Investigating parental narratives of children from diverse backgrounds transitioning to school in contemporary Iceland provides a good opportunity to further our understanding of this under-researched topic, as attendance at preschool is almost universal among all children in Iceland, including children from families who have recently immigrated to the country. Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) institutions in Iceland have witnessed a substantial increase in the number of children from diverse backgrounds (culturally, linguistically, socio-economically) in recent years (Leskopf et al., 2015; Statistics Iceland, 2019a, 2020). These developments have coincided with the growth of the immigrant population from 4.6% in 2006 to 14.1% in 2019 (Statistics Iceland, 2019b). Both preschools and primary schools are administered and funded at the municipal level in Reykjavík, as is the case for the rest of Iceland. Attendance at preschool is nearly universal for children between 2–5 years of age and costs of attendance are heavily subsidized. On the national level, 95–97% of children aged 2–5 and 48% of 1-year-old children were enrolled in preschool by the end of 2018 (Statistics Iceland, 2019a). Although preschool educational policies in Iceland are centered on care, wellbeing, social development, and play (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2011), it is not uncommon for preschool graduation classes to be exposed to basic literacy and numeracy. However, the execution of these academic activities varies from one preschool to another and they are not universally practiced. Children transition to primary school in August of the year they turn 6 years old. All children are guaranteed a place at their public neighborhood school, but some private school options are available for families in Reykjavík. They begin in what is known as *first class* of compulsory education in schools which normally house classes 1–10 (ages 6–16) on the same premises. Attending compulsory education is mandatory by law and free of charge but parents can opt into paying for lunch subscriptions and after-school care. Policymakers envisage fairly high levels of parental involvement at both preschool and compulsory school levels in Iceland. According to the Preschool Act (90/2008) and the Compulsory School Act (91/2008) parents are guaranteed the right to have their say on school operations in general through parent and school councils and take part in the school community through parent associations. Individual parents are furthermore required to monitor their child's educational development and to share information and cooperate with teachers to the benefit of the child's education and wellbeing.

Methodology

Participants

For the purposes of this study, the term *diverse background* denotes families in which one or both parents of children were born in another country and the children have a mother language other than Icelandic or are emergent bilingual or multilingual. Parents of children who were born in 2012 (about to transition to primary school in the fall of 2018) were recruited in the spring of 2018 through parent–teacher interviews at two partner preschools from different neighborhoods in the municipality of Reykjavík, Iceland. Children from diverse backgrounds made up around 60% of the graduation classes in both preschools at the time of recruitment. Introductory letters were translated to all mother languages and parents were introduced to the study with the help of interpreters, if required. Out of an initial pool of 37 families, 10 mothers and 3 fathers from 11 families of various nationalities decided to

take part. Three were born and raised in Iceland and had children with foreign nationals. Four rounds of semi-structured interviews were conducted over the course of a whole year (June 2018, October 2018, February 2019, June 2019), beginning at the end of the children's stay at the preschool and continuing throughout their first year of primary school. As foreign-born parents have been underrepresented in Icelandic transition research (Einarsdóttir, 2010, 2019) and the majority of the participants were mothers, a decision was made to analyze narratives of foreign-born mothers having a child transitioning from preschool to primary school in Reykjavík. Two mothers (pseudonyms Mercy and Claire) were selected for narrative analysis of lived experiences due to their extended engagement with the researcher (completing all four rounds of interviews) and their contrasting cultural backgrounds and socio-economic and family circumstances. Interview transcripts from the remaining four participants who were engaged throughout the study period were considered less suitable for this kind of analysis, as they came from Icelandic backgrounds, were interviewed through interpreters, or refrained from having their stories highlighted. Mercy, mother of daughters Lisa (6) and Sophie (9), had lived in Iceland for 11 years. She was born in a rural setting in West Africa and was halfway through secondary education in a boarding school when she entered the labor market. She first came to Iceland as an au pair, where she met Taylor, her future husband and compatriot. Lisa and Sophie were born and raised in Reykjavík. Mercy had mainly done low paid shift work since arriving in Iceland, while Taylor was receiving a disability pension whilst battling illness. The family predominantly spoke English at home, mixed with Icelandic and the occasional use of dialects prevalent in their country of origin. Claire, mother of Simon (6) and Eve (2), had lived in Iceland for 8 months with her Icelandic husband, Elmar, at the beginning of the study period. Claire had first moved to Iceland in 2008 after meeting Elmar while studying abroad for a semester. A job opportunity spurred the couple to move to the US, where their children were born. Both were university educated and employed. Simon spent the first five years of his life living in the US before the family moved back to Iceland in late 2017. The family spoke English and Icelandic at home.

Data Generation and Analysis

Participants were contacted after expressing their willingness to participate in the study and given a choice of time and place to their liking to meet with the researcher. Elmar, Claire's Icelandic husband, joined his wife for the third round of interviews. During the first interview, participants were kindly asked to take photographs of their children during the first days and weeks of school and to bring them to the next round of interviews to discuss with the researcher. They were then asked to continue to take photographs related to their children's school lives and to bring them to the subsequent interview rounds. The purpose of these photographs was to engage in photo-elicitation (Dockett et al., 2017a; Given et al., 2016; Pink, 2013; Rose, 2007) during the interview sessions; to stimulate discussions with visual material, evoke reflection, unlock memories in greater detail, and give the participants an opportunity to discuss important aspects that might otherwise have gone unnoticed by the researcher. The interview sessions were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Multiple thorough readings and the writing of familiarization notes were followed by an analysis of participants' narratives of navigating the transition in Icelandic school settings, which was gradually narrowed down to stories of taking action and re-evaluation of cultural background. These narratives underwent structural narrative analysis, combining analysis of the function of particular clauses and how sequences of utterances are said (Riessman, 2011), which required paying close attention to audio-recordings and dividing the narratives into stanzas. Member validation was observed with the two mothers during the data-generation period. The main topics of each interview were reiterated with the participants in the following interview session to establish continuity and follow their developments closely.

Ethical Considerations

The research project was approved by the partner preschools, the Municipality of Reykjavík and the Science Ethics Committee of the University of Iceland and the Icelandic Data Protection Authority was notified. The study was informed by Perry's (2014) perspective on a "socially just" transition to school. For Perry, social justice includes valuing families for what they bring to the new setting during the time of transition and establishing partnerships based on respect and perceived competence and integrity. The interview guides reflected this emphasis and prioritized getting to know the pre-existing strengths, interests, and values of the participants and their children. Thus, the study aimed to offer participants opportunities to present their strengths while acknowledging their needs and the challenges they face. Furthermore, asking the participants to take and select photographs from their daily lives and to bring them to discuss during interview sessions meant they were viewed as subjects with the right to participate directly and actively (Bertram et al., 2015) in the research project. The participating parents were thus regarded as creative and unique individuals (Pink, 2013) and provided with an opportunity to decide what was important for their families at this juncture. The first encounter began with explaining the purpose of the study to the participants and obtaining informed consent. Their level of commitment (4 encounters over 12 months) was explained, together with the purpose of photo-elicitation, pursuance of anonymity, and their right to not answer questions or to withdraw at any stage without consequences. These issues were briefly reiterated during subsequent rounds of interviews. Participants' photographs were neither collected nor shown to third parties. Mercy and Claire were asked to provide further permission to have their stories highlighted in this article during the data-generation period. Due to the small size of the local communities in which the study took place and to protect the identities of the participants, their origins are linked only to the large geographical areas of the Midwestern United States (Claire) and West Africa (Mercy). Pseudonyms are used for everyone mentioned by the participants.

Findings

An overview of the mothers' backgrounds, circumstances, and transition year will be presented, followed by a discussion of the structural analysis focused on narratives of taking action and re-evaluation of cultural background.

Mercy: A Year in Transition

At the beginning of the study, Lisa (6) was enrolled in the neighborhood public preschool while Sophie (9) had attended the neighborhood public primary school for three years. Mercy's narratives centered on fighting for her daughters' education and her deep concern for their future. Mercy explained how, throughout her time at school, Sophie had been struggling with learning the Icelandic language, with dire educational consequences. She estimated that her older daughter was well behind her peers in reading as she did not fully know the Icelandic alphabet, was still bringing first grade reading material home, and had difficulty understanding what was going on in class. At the beginning of fourth grade, she had been sent to the second grade as a "helper" while her classmates took the national standardized test. Mercy said that she was frequently assured by the teachers that Sophie was still young and "would pick up" in her Icelandic skills at a later stage, without them planning for or qualifying how that might happen. Mercy had been told that Sophie had passed her exams at the end of third grade but she was suspicious of such reports as she did not believe that her daughter comprehended everything she was doing at school. Furthermore, the lack of language proficiency resulted in social isolation as Sophie felt that she was forced to give up practicing gymnastics because she did not understand her trainers' instructions. Mercy's concerns were growing as she also feared that Lisa would follow her older sister down the same path after learning

from the teacher that she too experienced difficulties with reading comprehension and following instructions in class. Mercy described with vexation how she had gone to "meeting upon meeting with" the teachers, school authorities, social workers, and psychologists without getting the help she believed her daughter needed to master the language. Initiatives of the local municipal service center designed to help Sophie with reading and homework, foster her Icelandic language proficiency, and become socially active had either been abruptly discontinued or failed to start. The Icelandic-speaking personal assistants tasked with attending Sophie had reportedly quit or failed to show up, without Mercy getting the chance to provide feedback on the family's experience or anyone from the center following up on their progress. The blame for her family's predicament was in part placed on the preschool for not heeding Mercy's requests in terms of teaching her daughters the Icelandic alphabet, at least enough to write their own names. Mercy placed the lion's share of the blame on the primary school and the municipality for not coming up with suitable solutions to her older daughter's language-learning difficulties. She recounted sharing her troubles with coworkers and remarked that "only we foreigners are in stress about our kids and it is difficult to get the help." Not only did Mercy feel that the school had responded to Sophie's language-learning difficulties with a lack of urgency, she also responded angrily to the school's slow and limited reactions to incidents of racial prejudice. Sophie had been bullied in the first grade because of the color of her skin and Taylor had been subjected to racist comments by students when picking his children up from school. The family was therefore concerned, frustrated, and on guard, as was evident during Lisa's transition to school:

> **Researcher**: [H]ow has it been for Lisa? The first few weeks of school? **Mercy**: Ah … not easy [laughs] but it is supposed to be expected, so … we are just trying to go along with it and see how … [shows a photo on her smartphone] this was … her first day at school. **Researcher**: Is she in her classroom? **Mercy**: Yes. They were on *sýningu* [exhibition]. **Researcher**: Ah, and how did she feel on the first day? **Mercy**: Ah, I think strange and you can see from her face … not too excited to be there … .

Claire: A Year in Transition

Claire's son, Simon (6), had attended one of the partner preschools for 8 months at the beginning of the study, after having transferred from another preschool in Reykjavík which she considered to be unsafe for her son. Claire's narratives centered in large part on the differences between American and Icelandic parental and school culture. When Simon's transition to primary school drew closer, she noticed how parents' conversations differed from those commonly had in the US, where parental discussions centered around finding the best schools, best teachers, schools with high test score averages, low numbers of students per teacher, extracurricular activities on offer, and the like. In Iceland, by contrast, parents seemed to be content with sending their children to the neighborhood public school without considering other options. Claire decided to tour a private school and the neighborhood public school before making a final decision "because we have to do this … [it's] in our culture … you have to root out, like, the good schools." Claire's hopes for a good school start materialized thanks to what she considered to be good transition practices and also her son's convivial and "extrovert" personality traits. As a parent, Claire found herself navigating the transition to school as a parent in a foreign culture with different social norms and expectations of education and parenting, which she regarded as liberal or casual in comparison to what she was accustomed to in the US. Simon enjoyed a good social life at school and in the new neighborhood. Claire wondered whether she should contact other parents when she got wind of the fact that some of the girls were kissing her son. She was equally perplexed when she caught her son off school grounds when picking him up from after-school care. She complained to a member of staff, who replied unapologetically that she simply *could not keep her eyes on everyone all the time*. Claire was initially shocked that this could have happened and by the lax reaction from the staff; such an incident "would fall really hard on the school" in the US. Her situation was, however, mitigated by the fact that she could turn to her spouse for reference and to vent her frustration regarding these

situations. Claire also felt keenly what she referred to as "language intimidation," which was part of the "reality of any foreign person" in Iceland and stood in the way of her getting more involved with the parent association; that is, insecurities about situations in which she would find herself in a group of native Icelandic speakers and be neither able to understand everything nor willing to interrupt to ask people to repeat what they had said. Nonetheless, Claire regarded the first year of primary school to have been a positive experience overall. She thought her son had grown during the period and was by now "fully transitioned." Simon's Icelandic reading and writing were reportedly coming along excellently, although he was still catching up on correct conjugations and pronunciations in everyday speech. Asked to identify a single photograph most definitive of the transition period, Claire chose one of her son in front of the afterschool care center:

> Oh, I think this one is super sweet. This is him in … yeah, this is after school; I picked him up. He's just a happy kid; that's like the entrance at school. Yeah, I think that is it; I think it's sweet. He's happy there, he loves it, he wants to be there. Yeah, that's sweet, isn't it? [Laughs]

Narratives of Taking Action

Mercy and Claire both told stories of taking action when they believed their children's educational institution to be failing them. Both narratives contain the element of their child's wellbeing at stake and of them being ignored or not taken seriously by school administrators. Before attending one of the partner preschools, Simon was enrolled in another preschool for a short period, which was not deemed to be up to the task of providing safe conditions:

> **Claire**: Yeah, we actually went to one preschool first and for two weeks he was there, but he was extremely bullied, so we took him out of there really fast. We just saw that right away and saw that the administration's non-reaction to it and non-acknowledgement of it and we just thought: *I'm not even wasting my time*, and so we moved, which was the best thing we could have done. So there was a moment of him … being an outsider and being bullied … and I think that is why we were nervous that it wouldn't occur but at his new school it was much more international and … he just picked right up so … **Researcher**: So, in what way was he bullied or left out? **Claire**: Well, they would fight like … they would go outside for recess time and they would have one adult for, like, 30 kids and there are areas where the kids cannot be seen and, I mean, he just told us stories like, they would literally just push each other down these hills and like, he would get shoved and he got like, pushed into a bookshelf and had a huge bruise on his ear and he … he just had bruises on his body that were not okay and … and then he came home with a black eye, a kid had thrown a cup at his face and they just kept saying *oh, it's an accident*, it's like, no, that's not …

Highlighted in this story is the preschool's denial and inaction and the ease and unilaterality with which Simon is removed. Time was not wasted as the situation was not seen as requiring further collaboration or confrontation with the preschool administration. Claire positions her son as an outsider in this situation, echoing anxieties about the child not getting along or fitting in. The decisive action is evaluated positively as the family's tribulations were momentary and ameliorated. The remark about the new preschool being "much more international" implies that the first preschool's less diverse settings were perceived as less tolerant or accommodating for a child of Simon's background. The cultural resources drawn upon include prevalent discourses on safety, adult supervision, and staff per child ratio in the US (Tobin et al., 2009) and school choice (Dockett & Perry, 2017). Mercy's interviews also contained narratives of parental action when school authorities were considered to be failing to respond to events that were threatening her child's wellbeing at school:

> **Mercy**: … she [Sophie] almost thought in the first grade … because some kid was calling her brownskin, teasing her all the time and she was not comfortable with that and she's not, you know, … a loud person, so it has to take me, I have to go there and be angry. I called them on the phone. They didn't react. Then I went there very angry and was like: *if you don't talk to this boy and my kid's stop school … first grade. Then he want to see brownskin, I am going to come to this school naked* before they took me serious. So, there are some things that maybe can … because couple of kids were talking about if they have seen this boy bullying Sophie but it seems nobody was doing anything about it. And since she is already … you know, not feeling very comfortable and

> … you know, she has this low self-esteem and you compare … and this thing goes on for a long time, then it is like putting the child off because first, she cannot speak the language and someone is teasing her so she there is going to be so many problems for her. It has to take me to stop going to work and walk her to school and talk to her before she was able to feel better again and start going to school with her father.

Mercy's course of action was confrontation and issuing an ultimatum to the school administration to take her seriously. In stark contrast with Claire's story, these tribulations have been going on for a long time with no obvious solutions in sight. Here, too, the child is seen by the parent as being victimized, but through racial bullying which exacerbates the child's underlying marginalization. The child as an outsider is a recurring theme in Mercy's narratives, where confrontational encounters with educators, school administrators, and service center workers are numerous. In one of these narratives, she confronted the preschool principal over her daughter's poor Icelandic language fluency. Given the fact that the child was in the educators' care for most of her waking hours, she thought they should have used that time for language learning, echoing calls for more focus on direct teaching in preschools among immigrant parents (Tobin et al., 2016). However, Mercy recognized more than once that she needed to be "sensible" and not to "overdo it" in her dealings with the school system:

> **Mercy**: I have very good relationship with all of them [preschool educators], I just … I make fun of them when it is bad weather and I am like *we are going to move back to Africa* and [laughs] yeah, so I just talk to them and … for me, I feel they are doing what I cannot do so I don't have to be angry even though it is something wrong, I have to be in the best mood that I can to, to attend to that issue.

Mercy's confrontational approach is balanced with tact and charm as anger alone is thought of as getting her only so far. As moving her children elsewhere would require overcoming considerable obstacles with regard to cost and transportation, she is left with having to continue to engage with the educators and administrators through conversation and confrontation.

Narratives of Re-evaluation of Cultural Background

The two mothers talked of how their experiences of being a foreign parent in Iceland had opened them up to reflection and re-evaluation of their own views and cultural background. When talking about the difference in prevalent American and Icelandic attitudes towards school choice, Claire remarked that it was an "extreme privilege" for those parents who had the means to place their children in a school of their choosing. Although she said it was hard for her to simply trust the neighborhood public school without looking into other options, she remarked that a competitive school system where "people are fighting to get the best thing" was both "sad" and "not working for everyone." Critical views of widely held attitudes towards childhood, parenting, and sexuality in her home country were also taking hold, which were brought center stage when she and her husband talked about the fact that her son Simon was popular among the girls:

> **Claire**: I do think that the kissing thing is a big cultural difference [Elmar laughs] because for me, where I grew up, like … children are like extremely sheltered sexually like, they just … it's just like *no kissing, kissing is bad* … which is sad I think … and like here it's just interesting because Elmar's parents were like: *Yes, he's got a chance!* And I'm like: *Wow!* [laughs] like, what are you even going to say? I mean it's good, I think it's, you know … but that is definitely … this is going to be … and you know, another friend was like … I was saying like: *Oh, yeah they wanted to go to this room and they had the door shut and I kind of have a no closed door policy and I kind of* … . **Elmar**: You said that? **Claire**: Yeah, Adam was like: *It's not like they are going to get pregnant*. [Elmar laughs] And I was like: *Oh my God*! [both laugh] See? He's laughing at the whole thing [laughs]; yeah, this is a cultural … this is a huge cultural difference. Yeah, I mean like, if you think of like … puritan American like, *clothe thyself*. … I think like navigating that, like the boundaries of what … privacy privacy is what it is. Privacy for children, like what is okay privacy because culturally my privacy is much more constricted and yours is a lot more freedom. Like children have so much more freedom. **Elmar**: We just never talked about this growing up [laughs] … my parents never talked about it. **Claire**: They did more than you realize, like for them to say *oh, he's got a chance*–like, that's talking about it even if it's not … . **Researcher**: It's implicit? **Claire**: Yes, exactly. There's an implicit acceptance of it as opposed to be like *no, no, no!* Like, *you don't do that!*

The narrative suggests that Claire is undergoing a gradual re-evaluation of ideas and practices relating to childhood, parenting, and education through her contact with Icelandic schooling and parental culture. She has the opportunity to engage in dialogue with her husband whereby they navigate contentious issues and negotiate appropriate responses and strategies. Mercy, whose navigation of Icelandic school culture had been more taxing, described how fighting for herself and her children in a foreign land away from the support of her family had made her re-evaluate and challenge the values of her upbringing. The following narrative follows a description of a scene at the airport in her country of origin upon her arrival with the family on vacation, where she complained forcefully to airport officials about long queues in the sweltering heat and not giving any assistance to people travelling with young children:

> I was screaming, everybody was like … there is like … we are trained not to … they think I'm being rude, yeah. **Researcher**: So, you are trained to … ? **Mercy**: To, to, to be respectful. Even when it's hurting you, you don't have to say anything. **Researcher**: So, how did the airport authorities react to this? **Mercy**: Oh, they were like surprised and were like: *Were you an actress when you were in [country of origin]*? I was like: *No, I'm just saying my mind.* Before maybe I was scared to say it but here [Iceland] has opened me up not to be quiet. I have to fight for my right. So, I felt that is what I should do there. And … as soon as I finished, and I didn't even finish they were calling me *please come through* and they started calling those with kids.

Mercy's subversion of a societal expectation to show unquestioning respect, even in disadvantageous circumstances, was placed within the context of her having had to learn to fight for herself and her family. She was critical of her cultural upbringing and the reported reactions of members of her extended family in Africa suggest that her change in attitude is fundamental:

> **Mercy**: I'm no, no going to retrain to be polite. You cannot speak back when an elder, elderly person talks … you just have to, you know, not too much eye contact … we are like okay … this … that kind of respect but now is a bit, you know … so my family, they are like: *You are going crazy. You talk too much your mind. You have to be careful aaa.* No, no, no. **Researcher**: How did you open up to this in Iceland? **Mercy**: You know, when … of course, sometimes they say [claps hands] literacy make you dumb … and I can read a little bit, I, I can … I know … I … can think for myself, you know? When you are … you are … think basic education … that is why I'm fighting for my kids to get the basic … when you have the basic you know … what is right for you. I'm not overdoing it but at the same time I don't want somebody to step on my toes. If it is going to hurt me, I'm going to tell you: *You are hurting me.* I don't have to say it because of my culture I have to shut up. I'm going to tell you as it is.

Discussion

The findings presented above are limited by the number of participants and the study does not aspire to any sort of generalizability regarding the transition experiences of parents of children from diverse backgrounds. However, the narratives of the two mothers suggest that, for them, engagement with the Icelandic ECEC system before and during the transition to school heralded complex external and internal transformations and called for the adoption of certain strategies (Dockett, 2017), including taking action when the child's wellbeing was considered to be at stake. Their experiences are in many ways similar—being immigrant mothers who have to overcome problems with the (pre)school on their own (i.e., without outside help)—but these similarities intersect with very different sets of social capital. As seen above, the mothers' contrasting socioeconomic and family circumstances set the stage for their possibilities of action. Claire had the resources to "not waste time" and take decisive action whereas Mercy had little choice but to engage in what she described as a drawn-out uphill battle. That both mothers repeatedly experienced not being taken seriously by ECEC administrators and feeling as though they had no choice but to act, suggests that they did not have access to proper avenues for dialogue regarding the modus operandi and pedagogical values of the respective institutions. Yet, paradoxically, Mercy's narratives involved numerous references to meetings with teachers, school administrators, and social workers to address Sophie's difficulties. Mercy's strong sense of the futility of these meetings and her resentment regarding not being given the chance to provide feedback on the proposed (and, to her

mind, failed) solutions, indicates minimal or no reflective and active participation (Freire, 2014) on her part in the initiatives proposed by representatives of the ECEC system. The narrative pathos of describing the pain of not being recognized also suggests that, in the Freirean sense, she is positioned as a "marginal person" who, in the eyes of the ECEC system, needs to adjust to its patterns by changing her mentality (Freire, 2014, p. 68). The examples of critical reflection on and re-evaluation of dominant ideas from their cultural backgrounds show, however, that these developments were not entirely solitary affairs for the mothers but were shared with their families and, in Mercy's case, impacted how she interacted with others. Although Claire developed a critical attitude to parental messages to children regarding not displaying any forms of sexuality (regarding them as "constricted" and "puritan"), Mercy's critical reflection on and active subversion of the social expectations of respect and remaining silent in adverse situations are closer to Freire's concept of *conscientização*—which Freire understood as a collective process where individual reflection is shared and private concerns are molded into collective needs. As seen above, Mercy mentioned sharing her problems with a group of coworkers where only the foreign parents had reportedly encountered similar obstacles. This raises the question of whether parents who find themselves in these kinds of situation should have to deal with educational authorities on an individual level. Nominally, at least, representatives of the parent bodies (councils and associations) could have acted as intermediaries or provided a platform for a dialogue among equals, but neither mother mentioned these as a potential source of support. Here, the Freirean idea of the *culture circle*–concrete empirical examples in the contexts of education and family are not wanting (Akinyela, 2006; Hickling-Hudson, 2014; Torres, 2010)—could provide inspiration for providing opportunities for foreign parents to share their experiences of the education system to better recognize and understand structural injustices and find ways to rectify them. The challenges faced by parents of children from diverse backgrounds within ECEC will, to some degree, always be family-specific, but educators and school administrators have examples to follow to ensure they become sensitized to them and work towards their reduction and mitigation. The narratives indicate that the educational institutions in question are, or at the very least are perceived to be, lacking in most of the practices distributed culturally responsive leadership (Brown et al., 2019) model strives to promote, which, if enacted, would have the potential for more appropriate reactions on behalf of the schools.

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Paper IV

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Methodological and ethical challenges in cross-language qualitative research: the role of interpreters

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ABSTRACT

Interpretation in cross-language qualitative research presents a range of methodological and ethical challenges. Among these are the interpreters' influence on data generation and interview power dynamics. Having translators review and/or produce an independent translation of recorded interview material for comparative purposes is regarded as one of the ways researchers can control for these challenges. However, there are other reasons why translations of interpreted materials are valuable. This paper explores these issues by reporting an interview focused on investigating the experiences of a non-Icelandic family as their child made the transition to an Icelandic preschool. In this case, the interpreter influenced data generation in a semi-structured interview; a situation that was only fully revealed in follow-up translation. The findings suggest that while the follow-up translation demonstrates discrepancies and the interpreter's tendency to modify both questions and responses during the interview, comparative analysis of the oral interpretation and translation of the interview text opens up new dimensions in the data that would otherwise have gone unnoticed by the researcher.

KEYWORDS

Interpretation; Translation; Qualitative methodology; Diversity; Vulnerability; Parents; ECEC

Introduction

The transition to primary school has been identified as a key life event that is likely to have implications for children's learning, development, well-being, identity and overall life trajectory (Turunen 2014; Vogler, Crivello, and Woodhead 2008; Margetts 2009; Eckert et al. 2008; Rimm-Kaufmann and Pianta 2001). Increased attention has recently been given to familial aspects, as the family is viewed as a fundamental contributor to children's learning and development and providing a consistent context during the transition to school. Further, children's transition to school has been recognized as a time of transition for families as they adjust to new roles, identities and expectations (Goff 2017; Dockett, Griebel, and Perry 2017).

Preschools in Iceland have witnessed a considerable increase in the numbers of children from diverse backgrounds (culturally, linguistically, socio-economically) in recent years (Statistics Iceland 2020, 2019a; Leskopf et al. 2015), concurrent with the growth of the immigrant population from 4.6% in 2006 to 14.1% in 2019 (Statistics Iceland

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2019b). Although these developments have by no means gone unnoticed by Icelandic education researchers and policymakers in recent years, there remain challenges for early childhood educators and school administrators in understanding and responding to the experiences and needs of children and families from diverse backgrounds (Ragnarsdóttir 2021). For example, much of the existing Icelandic-based transition research has not involved families from diverse backgrounds and little is known about the preschool experiences of these children and their families, or their experiences of the transition to school (Einarsdóttir 2010, 2019). To address this gap, the present study was designed to elicit the views of parents of children with diverse backgrounds about the transition from preschool to primary school and, from this, to inform future policy and practice.

In the course of conducting the study, interpreters played a significant role by enabling the researchers to include participants who were fluent in neither Icelandic nor English. However, their involvement presented an extra layer of methodological and ethical challenges and considerations. This paper reports a case of one interpreter-aided interview and subsequent follow-up translation – a research encounter involving the knowledge construction of five people: two participants, the researcher, interpreter, and translator.

Interpretation in cross-language qualitative research

The employment of interpreters in cross-language qualitative research poses a range of methodological and ethical challenges, as well as practical considerations (Squires 2008). On the one hand, interpreters make it possible to include people from diverse backgrounds in research. When there is a strong sense of trust established between interpreters and participants, it is possible for people who feel marginalized or vulnerable to share their perspectives in respectful and valued ways (Edwards 2013).

On the other hand, having another person actively involved in the data generation process, mediating between the researcher and participant, possibly acting as a gatekeeper as well as a facilitator, can have a manifold influence on the interpersonal dynamics of a research interview. Issues of power and trust are important in any interview situation (Brinkmann and Kvale 2015), but are particularly pertinent when interpreters are involved. Power and trust are negotiated and re-negotiated among interview participants (Liamputtong 2007), as power is exercised, rather than possessed (Foucault 1991). When considering issues of the power and trust of interpreters, Edwards (2013), argues that these can only be understood in the context of relationships – in this case between interpreter and participant – and that these relations 'can mimic and reveal wider power relations experienced by socially excluded research participants' (Edwards 2013, 507).

Recognizing the relational nature of power and trust is a reminder that interpreters are not passive conveyers of meaning between interlocutors and languages (Squires 2009; Temple and Edwards 2002). Dialogue interpretation involves spontaneous choices regarding how to render meaning and non-literal translation, making some degree of difference between participants' responses and interpreters' summaries of the responses inevitable (Williamson et al. 2011). In other words, the use of interpreters has epistemological ramifications for research findings (Squires 2008; Temple 1997).

Several potential threats to data validity have been associated with the use of interpreters in qualitative research (Squires 2008, 2009; Temple and Young 2004; Kapborg and Berterö 2002; Wallin and Ahlstrom 2006; Ingvarsdotter, Johnsdotter, and Ostman 2012). The challenges researchers face include, but are not limited to, not knowing whether the interpreter has simplified, summarized or otherwise modified questions and responses; not being able to follow or build upon clarifications and elaborations that go untranslated; and not knowing whether responses have been fully comprehended in their cultural context (Squires 2009; Murray and Wynne 2001; Inhetveen 2012). Further points of potential loss of meaning present themselves if the researcher, participants and interpreter do not communicate in their first languages (Kapborg and Berterö 2002). For example, in the case reported here, interactions between the researcher and interpreter occurred in Icelandic – their first and second languages respectively – and interactions between the participants and the interpreter occurred in an Eastern European language – possibly their second and first languages respectively. Concerns about the potential loss of meaning challenge the reliability of the interpretation in question and raise questions as to whether the data collected accurately represent participants' sentiments or lived experiences. For a successful and coherent interpretation, Squires (2009) stresses the importance of maintaining conceptual equivalence during the interview, meaning that the interpreter is able to render the communication between researcher and participant technically and conceptually sound, providing context if certain words, terms or phrases do not exist in the language of the participant.

How researchers navigate these issues depends in large part on their underlying methodological and theoretical viewpoints, which determine if and/or how the effects of the interpreter should be controlled or reported in context of the research project. A positivist researcher might expect a technically accurate service from interpreters and so seek to render the impact of the interpreter invisible in the research process (Temple and Young 2004; Squires 2009). In contrast, researchers adopting an interpretivist paradigm might choose to account for their effects on the data (Temple 2002), make them visible in the research process (Temple and Edwards 2002), or reconceptualize them as co-constructors of data (Chiumento et al. 2017) or research partners (Berman and Tyyskä 2011; Larkin, Dierckx de Casterle, and Schotsmans 2007) who can contribute to a study's cross-language strategies (Bergen 2018). Positioning the role of the interpreter in research somewhere between the two extremes, while leaning more towards one or the other and maintaining nuance, is the most common practice among qualitative researchers (Ingvarsdotter, Johnsdotter, and Ostman 2012).

Methodology

The research project that generated this paper had social constructionist epistemological underpinnings. Interview sessions were viewed as encounters of *knowledge generation* instead of *knowledge collection*; with data being teased out, defined and articulated in a reciprocal process between researcher and participant, rather than being nested within and extracted from the participants (Creswell and Poth 2018). The interpreters aiding the project were regarded as active contributors to the intersubjective and social construction of knowledge (Brinkmann and Kvale 2015), without whom data generation would, in certain cases, be impossible.

Participants

For the purposes of this study, the term *diverse background* denotes families with one or both parents born in a country other than Iceland and where children have a home language other than Icelandic, or who are emergent bi- or multilingual. Parents of children born in 2012 (about to transition to primary school in the coming fall) and from backgrounds fitting the definition of diversity adopted in the study, were recruited in the spring of 2018 through parent-teacher interviews at two partner preschools from different neighborhoods in the municipality of Reykjavík, Iceland. Out of an initial pool of 37 families, 10 mothers and 3 fathers from 11 families of various nationalities agreed to take part and were invited to four rounds of semi-structured interviews over the course of a whole year (June 2018, October 2018, February 2019, June 2019), beginning at the end of the children's stay at the preschool and continuing throughout their first year of primary school. The overall dataset was subjected to thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2013), in which the authors were involved in a recursive process of searching across the dataset to identify, analyze and report patterns of meaning. After becoming familiar with the data, initial codes were generated and aligned with supporting data. Further analysis and grouping of codes generated themes, which were constantly reviewed and revised against the data. High levels of familiarity with the data were important not only in the identification of themes, but also in identifying possible anomalies.

The case reported in this paper involves an interpreter-facilitated interview from the first round with Leda and her son Andrik (age 16) about their younger son and brother David's (age 6) experiences at a local preschool and prospective transition to primary school. After expressing her willingness to participate in the study, Leda opted for the encounter to take place at her home, where her older son Andrik was also present. As the research design was open to involving family members who also had contact with the preschool, the researcher invited Andrik to participate in the interview. Leda was also keen to have Andrik involved. All names presented are pseudonyms.

Interpreter recruitment options were very limited for the source language and the researcher was wary of approaching the language community due to possible prior relations and issues of privacy and confidentiality. The interpreter who was eventually recruited was listed at a professional agency. Agency protocols for allocating interpreters required the researcher to place a request nominating the language required and the time and place for the interview. In this case, the agency confirmed the availability of an interpreter but, in keeping with agency policy, did not disclose any information about the interpreter. Following this procedure, the interpreter contacted the researcher by phone shortly before the interview and then met the researcher before entering Leda's home. This process precluded matching participants with interpreters (Shimpuku and Norr 2012; Ingvarsdotter, Johnsdotter, and Ostman 2012) and limited the potential for informing and debriefing the interpreters (Murray and Wynne 2001; Squires 2009; Adamson and Donovan 2002) about the research project and building rapport between researcher and interpreter (Bergen 2018), estimating their familiarity with qualitative research methods (Chiumento et al. 2017) and checking their qualifications (Squires 2009).

Ethical considerations

The research project was approved by the partner preschools, the Municipality of Reykjavík and the Science Ethics Committee of the University of Iceland and notified to the Icelandic Data Protection Authority. The study was informed by Perry's (2014) perspective of 'socially just' transition to school, which emphasizes getting to know and appreciate pre-existing strengths, as well as the interests and values of children and their families during the time of transition to school. The interview guides reflected these priorities and aimed to provide participants with opportunities to present their and their children's strengths, while also acknowledging their needs and challenges.

Due to the small size of the local communities in which the study took place and the foreign language communities within them and to lessen the probability of either the participants or interpreter being recognized during follow-up translation, a decision was made to source a translator who was not living in Iceland. The source language is spoken in Eastern Europe but is not identified in this publication for the same privacy reasons. Distinctive features of the country of origin (place names, currency etc.) are omitted as well. While we recognize that this may devalue the source language in relation to the other languages mentioned at the surface level, protecting participants' anonymity was deemed to be of greater importance.

Data generation

The researcher and interpreter attended the interview in Leda's home. Through the interpreter, the researcher explained the purpose of the study and reiterated their right to refrain from answering or withdraw at any stage. Once these issues had been reviewed, informed consent was obtained. With permission, the interview was audio-recorded. The interview was interpreted from Icelandic (researcher's first and interpreter's second language) to the source language (interpreter's first language) and vice versa. During the course of the interview with Leda and Andrik and when viewing verbatim transcription of the interview, a suspicion arose from the researcher that interview segments were being paraphrased and it was not clear whether this served to clarify or distort the questions and/or responses. A clue was provided by time discrepancies between how questions and answers were rendered by the researcher and participants on one hand and by the interpreter on the other. The interview was therefore marked for a blind translation.

The prevailing procedure in this situation is back-translation, which involves translating from the target language of the interpretation or translation back to the source language to evaluate the word equivalence between the two versions (Chen and Boore 2010; Larkin, Dierckx de Casterle, and Schotsmans 2007; Williamson et al. 2011). The ethical concerns listed above made it difficult to locate a local translator competent in Icelandic and the source language. Due to the prospect of going far beyond the research budget by employing international translator agencies, a foreign-based post-graduate student and competent native speaker of the source language was recruited to do a follow-up translation (Ingvarsdotter, Johnsdotter, and Ostman 2012) of all utterances on the audio recording in the source language into English, as the translator did not speak Icelandic. The translator opted for including literal translation in brackets when

deemed suitable and offered observations based on accent, language use and context, sharpening her role as a hybrid translator, cultural broker and analyst (Temple 2002; Temple and Young 2004). The transcript from the interview involving the interpreter (which was in Icelandic) was then translated by the researcher into English for comparative purposes, to shed light on what happened during oral translation (Inhetveen 2012). Cognizant of the issues associated with engaging interpreters in this project, the aim of this paper is to explore methodological and ethical issues challenges associated with involving interpreters and translators in cross-language translation.

Findings

After carefully comparing the translation of the original interpreted transcript with the follow-up translation, it appeared that the interpreter had dominated the interview (Shimpuku and Norr 2012). Sometimes, participants' responses were summarized in a way that left much uninterpreted; other times answers were elaborated by the interpreter. In addition, the interpreter modified some open questions by introducing concepts and issues not mentioned in the interview schedule, and used approaches which seemed to lead responses, such as presenting a choice between options. The interpreter also tended to steer the conversation down a positive path. Examples of these practices are demonstrated below under the thematic headings *Changing the Question* and *Imposing Happiness*. Further, the follow-up translation shed light on the difficulties that the family was facing at that point in time, which were not highlighted by the interpreter and hence were largely unnoticed by the researcher during the interview. The participants' predicaments, concerns and hopes are covered under the heading *Vulnerability*.

Changing the question

Inspired by Perry (2014), the interview opened with questions about the child's strengths and interests. Across the overall study, this question worked well as an icebreaker. However, in this interview, the tendency of the interpreter to change phrasing, lead the participants on and turn open-ended questions into dichotomies or multiple-choice questions was prevalent throughout the interview as illustrated in Table 1. The words researcher and interpreter are represented by R and I respectively.

The translator observed from the recording that David's family did not always seem to fully grasp the meaning of the questions presented. She speculated that the source language might be the family's second language, their first language perhaps being one of many Roma languages spoken in the country where the source language is the official language. If that were the case, the translator continued, their ability to elaborate on open questions without an ice-breaking discussion might be limited. The translator's observation is plausible, as the follow-up translation shows the interpreter interjecting the following question at one point: 'Did you understand what I am telling you, what I'm asking you?' The interpreter's power (Edwards 2013) was felt from the very start of the interview. Even if the interpreter was aiming for a warm-up to a meaningful conversation, the questions presented to the participants were heavily leading. The answers were not solicited openly when the interpreter offered options for the participants to latch on and then presented them as their own. Even though conceptual equivalence

Table 1. Changing the Question.

Interpreter's Translation	Follow-up Translation
R: I wanted to begin by asking about David, which are like his main qualities … what do you love about him? **I**: Yes, he loves to draw, he just wants to be a fire chief … **R**: Pardon? **I**: To be a fire chief. **R**: Ok (laughs). **I**: He's just saying, he wants to be all kinds of things in life you know, a mayor or just a cop and it is just difficult to say now how all these things will last you know. **R**: But is there anything he is especially good at or likes to do? **I**: He is just … he doesn't understand Icelandic well enough to express himself you know and this impedes him in saying what he is thinking and he just says that he is more into sports and so … that is what is often evident in conversations with him. **R**: But is he interested in something in particular within … some particular sports which … ? **I**: Eh, yes just gymnastics. Especially gymnastics, he is interested in gymnastics.	**I**: David, how does he act as a child, what's special about him? Does he have something, like is he better inclined towards gymnastics, learning, music, what are David's good things? **Leda**: There are several? (lit. He has several) **I**: Yes, list them. (lit. say them) **Leda**: He likes to draw, he says he wants to be a fireman, several things. You can't be sure what he means, since he says either 'I want to be a cop' or … 'mayor', he's not sure either, because he doesn't … **I**: Does he stand out in any way (lit. in doing something), for instance sports or music? Does he maybe have a better talent for sport, for maths, for foreign languages? What do you think? **Andrik**: For sports or so. **Leda**: He just started school now, because he also changed the school [in country of origin] and here he … He doesn't really understand, he told me that. **I**: During sports class … you said he likes sports. What exactly does he like about it? Football, gymnastics? **Andrik**: Gymnastics.

(Squires 2009) per se is maintained in the interview section about David's strengths, the answer 'especially gymnastics' can hardly be regarded as faithful representation of participants' sentiments (Murray and Wynne 2001; Kapborg and Berterö 2002), but a case of the participants accepting the interpreter's dichotomy (Brinkmann and Kvale 2015), as Leda's initial reaction made no mention of or showed any indication of moving in that direction.

Imposing happiness

Several interview questions focused on how the family experienced the preschool as a place and their connections to the preschool community. Examination of the follow-up translation indicated that these questions were interpreted in ways that could be considered to be leading and steered the conversation in specific ways (Table 2). As one example, before Leda and Andrik had time to contemplate their answer to a question about their emotional connection to the preschool, the interpreter suggested 'happiness' as an appropriate response. Further, he elaborated Andrik's response that the preschool was beautiful and inferred from this that Leda wanted to stay there to see how David was doing.

While the interpreter's motivation is unknown, previous research has identified tendencies to portray interviewees positively (Williamson et al. 2011; Murray and Wynne 2001). In this case, it is possible that the interpreter sought to portray Leda and Andrik as happy and grateful new arrivals to Iceland's education system, a 'decent' family capable of being part of the preschool community. Subsequently, the participants were asked about the family's ties with other children and their families. The following examples are from the follow-up translation:

I : David feels like home there, is it true? **Leda** & **Andrik**: Yes, yes! **I**: Would you listen to that, it's true!

Table 2. I**m**posing happiness.

Interpreter's Translation	Follow-up Translation
R: Ok, here is a question they might find a little peculiar … but could you describe your emotions when you enter the preschool, like when you come there in the morning, are there any special emotions or thoughts you associate with the place? **I**: She is going you know, just wants to stay to see how he's doing and usually just so happy to come to the (pre)school and to think about the child's future. **R**: So, mostly happy emotions? **I**: Yes, she is just immensely happy. They are just happy because he is learning and he would educate himself in the future. **R**: In relation to that, could you describe the preschool in three words, find three words that fit the preschool? **I**: The preschool is just immensely beautiful you know, just the building itself and she would very much like to be in the same shoes and go to school as the kids … this is missing in [country of origin] to have … like open doors … to want something for herself in the future and then there was when … just immensely positive to meet the teachers … just mmm who want to help the kids trying their hand at life.	**I**: Now comes a question that might seem unusual (lit. curious), but he will still ask you. When you go to kindergarten or school, do you have when you get there … do you experience a special feeling or what passes through your mind first when you get there? Are you happy that you're there, do you want to stay there and see how … what the child is doing? **Leda**: I did stay there (in the past). **I**: Are you happy in general because he is going to this school and is at this school? **Leda**: Of course, I'm happy, because he has what [*sic*] to learn. **I**: If you need to choose three words in order to say something positive or negative about school, what would these words be? **Andrik**: So, school is very beautiful, I'd attend it with immense pleasure (lit. I'd stay there and look at it in sweet awe). **I**: Another word? **Andrik**: Another word … **Leda**: I would also like to go to school … Because I didn't … while living in [country of origin] we couldn't do such a thing … to do something because you want to become somebody and … kinda I'd want to. **I**: And the third … the third word? **Leda**: The third word is … **I**: … happiness … **Andrik**: … the teachers. The teachers are very smart (lit. with mind) and they teach us very … They open their minds.

I : You, as parents are … you belong to this school group, do you feel like you belong to this … you have this feeling, right? **Leda**: [inaudible] **I**: Would you listen to that, congratulations …

The interpreter's maneuvering towards happiness persisted throughout the interview. The notion that Leda came from a background with limited educational opportunities was the first indication of the family's vulnerability (Liamputtong 2007). The follow-up translation indicates that Andrik saw his brother's preschool as a symbol of education and hope, yet the interpreter shifted the emphasis of the preschool's beauty to the building itself.

Vulnerability

At one point, Andrik interrupted the conversation to ask the researcher an unexpected question. The follow-up translation indicated the following:

Andrik : May I ask a question? Beg your pardon? **I**: I told him [the researcher] that you have a question to ask. **Andrik**: I would like to go to school here as well, but the problem is that I don't have a [Personal Identification Number] I can't get hired for work nor can I go to school (lit. neither do I go to school). What could I do?

The researcher did not immediately comprehend the intention of the question and admitted shortly after to not knowing what was required. The researcher suggested going to Registers Iceland, the national bureau tasked with record keeping of names, addresses, certificates, and the like. A conversation followed between the participants and the interpreter that was only lightly summarized during the remainder of the interview session. Details only became clear when reviewing the follow-up translation:

I : He [the researcher] doesn't know how this thing [acquiring a Personal Identification Number] is done. From my own experience I tell you that you need to go, it's called [Statistics Iceland], which is … **Leda**: We went there and they rejected us because of the boy … it's not his father who … where I live with my husband now is not his father and that person's name is on the birth certificate and I don't know anything about him anymore, and (so) they don't approve, they don't approve (it). **I**: There are a few things that you need to solve there where we … at the social office, where we met … **Leda**: Yes … **I**: … because they are the only ones who can help him. […] You go there and tell them that you want to talk to her and then they'll fix an appointment and maybe they'll call me as well to translate for you …

Although the follow-up translation indicates that Leda regarded Iceland as a 'country where you can advance', the above and following sections from the follow-up translation show that the participants find themselves living a life of 'multi-faceted vulnerability' (Radley, Hodgetts, and Cullen 2005); being recent immigrants who do not speak the dominant language, experiencing financial difficulties; lacking opportunities for education and employment; and finding it hard to deal with the authorities. As well, Andrik finds himself outside of the Personal Identification Numbers system, which results in a multi-layered disenfranchisement. This number is issued nationally and used extensively for official interactions and transactions. As Andrik attests, a person cannot enter an education program or apply for official employment without one. Other activities made impossible by not having an ID number include (but are not limited to) opening a bank account, applying for social benefits, and accessing the state subsidized health service. Many commercial services also require this number. Judging from the follow-up translation, the family's predicament was causing them much distress:

Leda : Well, the boy [Andrik] drove me insane, 'mother, what do I do, what do I do'. Well, I don't know, "what do I do", "where should I go, because I don't know." **I**: The only thing I can tell you, go there at [address]. It's the only one that can help you, there is nobody else. **Leda**: I don't even know what do to since we haven't paid the rent for three months, we don't have a place to work, she's asking but I would never run away from work. **I**: Yes, yes … **Leda**: … But I can't find, they're not calling me at the places I applied for, they're not calling me (lit. inviting me). **I**: Yes … **Leda**: It's as if everything's … upside down.

The follow-up translation revealed that the interpreter and participants had met before 'at the social office' under different circumstances. Having some background information – such as knowing the family's circumstances and that the language fluency of family members was limited – could explain how quickly the interpreter started to influence the interview. Being dependent on those who can speak the dominant language for them (Temple and Young 2004), Leda and Andrik were in need of professional representation to access services: it was their only way of having their concerns conveyed and seeking sound advice. This interview interaction may also suggest that part of the reason for agreeing to take part in the study was to access information or get assistance, having exhausted other avenues. Towards the end of the interview, Andrik put forth another question:

Andrik : I would have another question. Which school is the best here? **I**: This is called MR and it is very … it is a school … **Andrik**: And … how could I sign up for

> football here? Because this is my wish ever since … Because I played football in [country of origin]. My dad would pay, he would pay [approx. 10 Euro] a month … for football. **I**: You go here, this is called … a club which is called KR, and you go there, it's in the western part of town and there you go and talk to the coach and the coach … you don't need to sign up, you probably don't need to pay anything as far as I know, you'll just … maybe … he will shout that you need to train and play for the junior team. **Andrik**: But do you know the address? **I**: I don't know, but KR.

This advice seems skewed, given the difficult position the family finds itself in and that Andrik has very limited Icelandic language fluency and no personal identification number. MR is a junior college traditionally (especially in the twentieth century) associated with prestige and alumni who are as doctors, lawyers, politicians, administrators, and the like. KR is a reputable football club in an expensive neighborhood with a loyal base of supporters. Junior players would need a personal identification number to register and to pay training fees. The interpreter seems to offer institutions perceived as prestigious or successful:

> I [addressing **R**]: He just wants to go to the club KR to … and is asking … he has played football in [country of origin] and maybe possibly through them just to go and get an education and play in … Do you know the address of KR?

While the aspiration is positive, the interpreter presents the idea of playing for KR, as opposed to playing football per se, as Andrik's own. Further, the accuracy of the statements is questionable, as there is no tradition of sports clubs providing for or enrolling young people in schools in Iceland. The translator observed that the conversation between Andrik and the interpreter echoed widely spread narratives of success linking emigration from their country of origin with sporting success.

Discussions

As in all effective interviews, eliciting the views of research participants in culturally, linguistically, and socio-economically diverse settings is an undertaking that must be conducted in a way that allows their experiences, concerns, and points of view to be brought to the fore. To achieve so while meaning and nuance is mediated across the language divide through a third party is no mean feat.

Retrospective analysis of the interview reported in this paper, utilizing follow-up translation, has highlighted some of the methodological and ethical challenges involved. Methodologically, the introduction of another person in the interactions between researcher and participant presented challenges to the validity and reliability of the data generated. Ethically, challenges were identified in relation to the exercise of power by the interpreter, potential cultural brokerage, and issues of confidentiality.

The follow-up translation identified the interpreter's influence on the data generated across multiple instances, reaching beyond spontaneous non-literal translation choices (Squires 2009; Temple and Edwards 2002; Williamson et al. 2011) the dialogue may have required and overshadowing Leda's and Andrik's voices. Although interpreter independence need not go against the interests of the research (Wallin and Ahlstrom 2006; Edwards 1998) the threats to internal validity – the faithful representation of participants'

sentiments and experiences (Murray and Wynne 2001; Kapborg and Berterö 2002) – posed by the altered questions, summarizing, imposed ideas and maneuvering towards the positive present genuine challenges to be addressed.

The interview and the follow-up translation had other potential points of loss of meaning (Kapborg and Berterö 2002): the researcher and the interpreter did not communicate in the interpreter's first language; the interpreter and participants were (most likely) not speaking in the participants' first language and the follow-up translation was not in the target language (Icelandic). However, the value of the follow-up translation is not limited to the examination of data validity (Murray and Wynne 2001); it offered the researcher leeway to take a step back and examine the meaning making that took place during the interview session more closely. It presented the researcher with much appreciated cultural context and insight into the interview dynamics at play. As successful qualitative research is 'fundamentally dependent upon' (Chiumento et al. 2017, 13) and 'embodied' (Croot, Lees, and Grant 2011, 1011) in social relationships, the follow-up translation provoked attention to issues of power and trust within interview situations, particularly when participants are considered vulnerable in some way.

It is not unique to suggest that issues of power and trust influence interviews involving interpreters, particularly when participants are marginalized or experience vulnerability (Edwards 2013). Limited proficiency in the majority language, socio-economic distress, and inability to access resources and services clearly establish Leda and Andrik as both marginalized and vulnerable. The lack of contact between the researcher and interpreter before the interview does provide some safeguards around anonymity and confidentiality. However, it also raises issues about being unfamiliar with the interpreter's positionality (Chiumento et al. 2017): his background and ideas about the research topic and conduct towards and views of the participants. In this instance, the lack of familiarization time also prevented disclosure about the previous contact between the interviewer and the family. Ethically, this presented challenges not only in recognizing the potential impact of previous interactions, but also in considering the nature of those interactions – which took place around a government services center.

While it is anticipated that interpreters mediate between interviewers and interviewees, and that they make choices about non-literal translation, what was not anticipated in the case we report was that the power of the interpreter – as gatekeeper – contributed to feelings of powerlessness among the participants. Adding to this situation may well have been the previous encounter between Leda and the interpreter 'at the social office', where it seems that difficulties had not been resolved. It is quite possible that assumptions derived from this earlier interaction permeated the interview.

The earlier interaction between Leda and the interpreter illustrates a challenge in conducting research in Iceland with families form diverse linguistic backgrounds. The limited number of speakers of diverse languages may mean that the same interpreter is called upon multiple times across different contexts to interact with the same family, yet multiple interactions are not sufficient to build trust. Analysis of this one interview also provided a strong reminder that trust involves much more than being able to speak the same language. While the full interview indicates that both Leda and Andrik were keen for David to experience positive transition experiences, it is possible – given their marginalized and vulnerable position – that they agreed to participate in

this interview in the hope of accessing someone who would be able to exercise power on their behalf – such as providing information or advice about how to navigate the Icelandic systems. In noting that this is far from an uncommon experience, Edwards (2013) aims to establish at the outset of interviews – with interpreters and interviewees – that she has no power to influence their situations.

It is reasonable to assume that cultural brokerage was being sought by the participants in this instance given their overall situation, but that it could not be delivered by the researcher, partly because it was difficult to establish the nature of their circumstances during the interview. Reflecting on this situation involves questioning the nature of the interview context and issues of power and agency. When researching with vulnerable or marginalized people, Liamputtong (2007) highlights issues of trust and reciprocity. In this interview, opportunities to build trust between the researcher and participant were limited and the prior interactions between the interpreter and participants seemingly influenced their interactions. Liamputtong suggests that giving something back to participants in exchange for their involvement may be one strategy to address power imbalances, with the aim of 'making a positive difference' (Warr 2004, 586) for participants. In this case, the cultural brokerage sought by participants was not available. However, by focusing on their concerns and issues, it may be that the research project can contribute to broader social change. Reflecting on the interview process and framing it as a space for reciprocity where information exchange drives the generation of meaning serves as a reminder that the purpose of interviews in qualitative research is not necessarily limited to a one-way flow of information. It is possible to conclude that the challenges associated with employing interpreters outweigh the benefits. However, this is not the conclusion we draw from this investigation. Rather, the example reported here emphasizes the importance of many forms of communication and the necessity for researchers to be alert to the multifaceted and fluid nature of relationships – particularly the elements of trust and power – and the behavioral nuances, as well as the verbal interactions, that constitute interviews. Researcher reflexivity is critical tool to examine the ways in which 'social structures like gender, ethnicity, social class, and sexual orientation as well as larger social, economic and political conditions of the researchers [and we add, interpreters] may impact on the research process' (Liamputtong 2007, 14).

Despite the interpreter's influence and the potential obscuring of the aim and intent of the interview, interrogation of the interview and follow-up translation has helped to recalibrate the analysis. This has highlighted the interaction of vulnerability and research involvement and the challenges faced by Leda, Andrik and others in similar positions, as they try to navigate rigid systems and make a new life for themselves. This dimension was made explicit only when there appeared to be a mismatch between the researcher's close observation of the interview interactions and the interpretation offered. In this instance, the follow-up translation proved invaluable.

Conclusions

Qualitative researchers can gain much from working with interpreters. The present study was enriched through expanding recruitment and data generation activities and enabling the researchers to obtain access (however tentative) to a broader variety of perspectives on the Icelandic early childhood education system. This paper has highlighted some of

the methodological and ethical challenges faced in one interpreter-supported interview and the value of conducting a follow-up translation. Despite the challenges involved, the interview session and its aftermath ultimately offered important insights. Follow-up translations should therefore not only be thought of as a means to control for data validity, but also as a means for potential further data exploration. A further implication of the study is a reminder of the importance of reflexivity. Hence, the notion that qualitative researchers need not only to critically reflect on the data generated (e.g. in the form of transcripts) but also on the data generation process, analysis and methods of interpretation – and that these can also constitute as data in the broadest sense.

Disclosure statement

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Appendix A

Reykjavík, 28. mars, 2018

Kæru foreldrar.

Rannsóknarteymi við Menntavísindasvið Háskóla Íslands leitar að fjölskyldum sem eiga börn á (nafn leikskóla) til þess að taka þátt í rannsókninni *Fararheill: Stuðningur við jákvæðan flutning barna með ólíkan bakgrunn úr leikskóla í grunnskóla.* Æskilegast er að annað eða báðir foreldrarnir í fjölskyldunni séu af erlendum uppruna, en gert er ráð fyrir að ræða bæði við foreldra og börn þeirra. Tveir doktorsnemar koma að rannsókninni en hún hefur fengið styrk frá Rannís og Rannsóknarsjóði Háskóla Íslands og er einnig hluti af alþjóðlegu rannsóknarverkefni sem unnið verður í leikskólum á Norðurlöndunum og í Hollandi í samvinnu við fræðimenn í hverju landi.

Það skiptir miklu máli fyrir framtíðarskólagöngu barna að þeim gangi vel að flytjast úr leikskólanum í grunnskólann. Markmið rannsóknarinnar er að afla þekkingar á því hvað ýtir undir jákvæðan flutning úr leikskóla í grunnskóla og finna leiðir til að stuðla að betri árangri allra barna. Rannsóknin er hin fyrsta sinnar tegundar á Íslandi og með þátttöku sinni geta foreldrar og börn veitt ómetanlegan stuðning við að auka skilning á flutningi barna með ólíkan bakgrunn úr leikskóla í grunnskóla. Starfsfólk mun kynna rannsóknina á næstunni en ef þið hafið einhverjar spurningar varðandi verkefnið hafið endilega samband við umsjónarmann rannsóknarinnar, Jóhönnu Einarsdóttur, forseta Menntavísindasviðs (joein@hi.is). Fyllsta trúnaðar verður gætt og í úrvinnslu munu nöfn foreldra eða barna hvergi koma fram. Leikskólinn (nafn leikskóla) og skóla- og frístundasvið Reykjavíkurborgar hafa veitt leyfi fyrir rannsókninni og hefur hún einnig verið tilkynnt til Persónuverndar.

Bestu kveðjur,
Jóhanna Einarsdóttir,
forseti Menntavísindasviðs Háskóla Íslands
joein@hi.is
Sími: 861-3261

Reykjavík, March 28th, 2018

Dear parents.

A team of researchers at the School of Education at the University of Iceland is looking for families of children at the (name of preschool) to participate in a research project called *Educational Continuity: Supporting Positive Transitions for Children from Diverse Backgrounds.* The participating families will preferably have one or both parents of foreign origin, as the team plans to interview both parents and their children. Two PhD students will work on the research project, which is funded by the *Icelandic Center for Research* and the *University of Iceland Research Fund* and is also a part of an international research project conducted in preschools in the Nordic countries and the Netherlands in cooperation with academics from each country.

A successful transition from preschool to primary school is highly important for children's future success in school. The purpose of the project is to elicit what fosters positive transitions to school for children and find ways to increase the success of all children in school. The research project is the first of its kind in Iceland and parents and children can lend it invaluable support in enhancing the understanding of the transition of children from diverse backgrounds from preschool to primary school by taking part. Members of staff will soon introduce the project but if you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact the project supervisor, Jóhanna Einarsdóttir, Dean of the School of Education (joein@hi.is). Strict confidentiality will be maintained throughout the study and the names of participants will not be disclosed. The research project has been approved by (name of preschool) and the Reykjavík City Division of Education and Youth. The Data Protection Authority has been notified.

Best regards,

Jóhanna Einarsdóttir,
Dean of the School of Education, University of Iceland
joein@hi.is
Telephone: 861-3261

Appendix B

Reykjavík, 10. apríl, 2018

Ég undirrituð/aður samþykki þátttöku barnsins míns í rannsókninni „Fararheill: Stuðningur við jákvæðan flutning barna með ólíkan bakgrunn úr leikskóla í grunnskóla“. Rannsóknin hefur fengið styrk frá Rannís og Rannsóknarsjóði Háskóla Íslands. Tveir doktorsnemar taka þátt í verkefninu. Rannsóknin er einnig hluti af rannsóknarverkefni sem unnið verður í leikskólum á Norðurlöndunum og í Hollandi í samvinnu við fræðimenn í háskólum í hverju landi.

Það skiptir miklu máli fyrir framtíðarskólagöngu barna að þeim gangi vel að flytjast úr leikskóla í grunnskóla. Markmið rannsóknarinnar er að afla þekkingar á því hvað ýtir undir jákvæðan flutning úr leikskóla í grunnskóla og finna leiðir til að stuðla að betri árangri allra barna. Flutningur barna úr leikskóla í grunnskóla verður skoðaður frá sjónarhóli barna með ólíkan bakgrunn. Rætt verður við börnin nú í vor áður en þau ljúka leikskóladvölinni og aftur í haust. Notaðar verða fjölbreyttar rannsóknaraðferðir. Áformað er að ræða við foreldrana fjórum sinnum á tólf mánaða tímabili (maí 2018, október 2018, febrúar 2019 og maí 2019). Stuðst verður við ljósmyndir foreldra í seinni þremur viðtölunum, en þær eru eign foreldranna og verða hvergi til sýnis.

Fyllsta trúnaðar verður gætt og í úrvinnslu munu nöfn þátttakenda hvergi koma fram. Leikskólinn (nafn leikskóla) og skóla- og frístundasvið Reykjavíkurborgar hafa veitt leyfi fyrir rannsókninni. Farið verður með öll gögn sem trúnaðarmál og í úrvinnslu mun nafn leikskóla, grunnskóla og barna sem taka þátt eða aðrar persónuupplýsingar hvergi koma fram í samræmi við 8. og 9. gr. laga um persónuvernd og meðferð persónuupplýsinga, nr. 77/2000. Rannsóknin hefur verið tilkynnt til Persónuverndar.

Ég samþykki eigin þátttöku í rannsókninni „Fararheill: Stuðningur við jákvæðan flutning barna með ólíkan bakgrunn úr leikskóla í grunnskóla“.

_____

(Undirskrift foreldris)

Ég samþykki þátttöku barnsins míns í rannsókninni „Fararheill: Stuðningur við jákvæðan flutning barna með ólíkan bakgrunn úr leikskóla í grunnskóla“, að því gefnu að barnið vilji sjálft taka þátt.

_____

(Nafn barns)

_____

(Undirskrift foreldris)

Reykjavík, April 10th, 2018

The signatory of this document consents to participate in the research project "Educational Continuity: Supporting Positive Transitions for Children from Diverse Backgrounds from Preschool to Primary School". Two PhD students will work on the research project, which is funded by the *Icelandic Center for Research* and the *University of Iceland Research Fund* and is also a part of an international research project conducted in preschools in the Nordic countries and the Netherlands in cooperation with academics from each country.

A successful transition from preschool to primary school is highly important for children's future success in school. The purpose of the project is to elicit what fosters positive transitions to school for children and find ways to increase the success of all children in school. The transition from preschool to primary school will be examined from the point of view of children and parents from diverse backgrounds. The children will be interviewed in the spring before they complete their stay in preschool and again in the coming fall. Diverse research methods will be employed with the children. Participating parents will be interviewed four times during a twelve-month period (May 2018, October 2018, February 2019, and May 2019). Parents' photographs will be used in the later three interviews, but they will remain the property of the parents and will not be put on display in any manner.

Strict confidentiality will be maintained throughout the study and the names of participants will not be disclosed. The research project has been approved by (name of preschool) and the Reykjavík City Division of Education and Youth. The Data Protection Authority has been notified. All data gathered during the project will be handled with confidentiality and the names of the preschool, primary school, and the participants along with other kinds of personal information will not be disclosed during its analysis in accordance with Articles 8 and 9 of the *Protection of Privacy and the Processing of Personal Data Act*, No. 77/2000.

I consent to my own participation in "Educational Continuity: Supporting Positive Transitions for Children from Diverse Backgrounds from Preschool to Primary School".

_____

(Parent signature)

I consent to my child participating in "Educational Continuity: Supporting Positive Transitions for Children from Diverse Backgrounds from Preschool to Primary School", provided that my child wants to participate.

_____

(Name of child)

_____

(Parent signature)