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Case-based studies: a critical pedagogy of place in international education in Iceland

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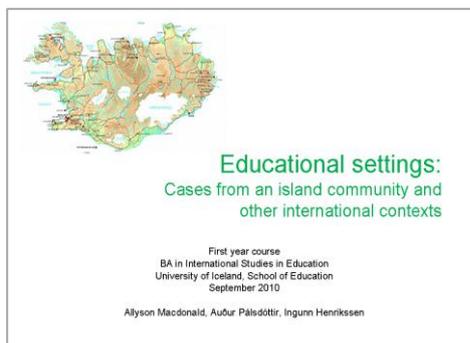
This paper examines the pedagogy of a first-year university course, *Educational settings*, in the International Studies in Education Programme at the University of Iceland. The formal purpose of the course was to introduce students resident in Iceland to development and diversity in educational settings. The course was designed around case studies using elements from place-based education and a case-based pedagogy was selected. The chosen cases were deemed to offer opportunities to challenge students to learn from places in their past, present and future, and offered a range of formal and informal settings.

The experiences of three students, one each from 2008, 2009 and 2010, are analysed. They were selected as representatives of globalisation and international education. The data on the student experience were generated through an analysis of student reports, on-line discussions, a final written and oral examination and interviews with some of the students.

Interrogations of the case settings by students enabled them to engage in 'shared spaces', building their consciousness through reflecting on their own experiences as a context of learning, reinterpreting them, and developing their own personal vision. Through the case-based strategy of readings, discussion, on-site investigations of the cases and on-line and face-to-face interaction diversity and depth of experience in the group was revealed. Also a critical pedagogy of place students enabled students to engage in decolonisation and question traditional positions of knowledge.

Keywords: *Critical pedagogy; Place based education; Iceland; Design; International education*

Introduction



The first-year course described in this paper forms part of a programme on international studies in education (ISEP) offered at the University of Iceland. The founder of the programme wanted to open up possibilities for university study to new immigrants (Books, Ragnarsdóttir, Jónsson, and Macdonald, 2011). Learners would '... be challenged to reflect on their own concrete situationality in a way that explores the complex interrelationships between cultural and ecological environments' (Gruenewald, 2003a, p. 6).

The course *Educational Settings* (hereafter EdSet) was one of three courses in the first semester of the B.A. degree in the ISEP programme and was designed specifically to create

a 'shared space' for students (Macdonald and Pálsdóttir, 2011). The other courses in the first semester were Educational research methods and Academic skills and they were all offered in English. The course was taught in autumn 2008, 2009 and 2010 but not offered in 2011 or 2012 because of budgetary constraints within the university. It will be offered again in autumn 2013. In all about 40 students have taken the course, about 12-15 per year. The course coordinator was joined by six teachers, four of whom were doctoral students, one with a teaching position. One teacher was a Fulbright scholar working in Iceland for one semester. The first author of this paper was the course coordinator and the second author co-taught the course in 2010.

The main target group for the programme was students from other countries who have settled in Iceland. EdSet was not designed to be a 'third country' experience or 'study abroad'; it was offered in Iceland for residents, although by the second and third year some exchange students had discovered the course. The stated goals were to give students an opportunity to experience the diversity and development of educational settings and that they would understand that different cultural values lie behind different versions of good practice and would be able to form judgements about what might constitute good practice in a variety of settings.

We selected and developed a case-based strategy to work towards the goals, using the affordances of case-studies such as real life context, multiple sources of evidence, investigators (students) with the same role and the blurred boundary between phenomenon and context (Robson, 2002). We suggest that using a case-based strategy blurred the pedagogy and content for the students (Segall, 2004), facilitating student understanding of educational places and the interpretation of their experiences.

We begin the article with a brief review of issues in place-based education, critical pedagogy, and critical pedagogy of place to indicate a relationship between them and a case-based strategy that the course design relied on. We then assess the pedagogy of the EdSet course through analysis of documents and interviews to gauge the impact of individual cases and the experiences of three students. We conclude with a short discussion on the use of a 'critical pedagogy of place' (CPP) in higher education.

A case-based strategy

This paper explores how a case-based strategy can lead to a change in the understanding of students to educational settings. What was of particular interest to us in designing the course and working with students was to find ways to use 'place' where students' origins and experiences are recognised, then add key features of case-study to facilitate learning about 'development and diversity' and quoting Gruenewald (2003b, p. 620) 'to enlist [university] teachers and students in the first hand experience of local life and in the political process of understanding and shaping what happens there'.

The course design drew on principles from place-based education, critical pedagogy, and critical pedagogy of place to inform the case-based strategy. The case visits to educational settings were fundamental to the course as students interrogated these 'places' in their adopted country through observations and analysis as well as reflecting on the places they had come from and exploring educational places of their own choice, taking themselves and others to their own past, present and future (Gruenewald, 2003a, Morgan, 2011). We felt that an effective way to learn about education was to have a chance to investigate varied settings. We needed 'to be there', as material from one of the settings shows (Box 1). We hoped that the hybrid approach of a university course and a case-based strategy would become for the EdSet students a political experience grounded in the places of local action and would lead them to an understanding both of place and self-in-place.

Developing a sense of place is based on each person's experience, perception, opportunities and interests seen from different angles and viewpoints (Scoffham, 2010). Each place and each system have a special form of knowledge, environment and production, including for example formal schooling (Roth, 2010a). Even more important is that each system has a motive which has meaning for participants or inhabitants. Roth (2010b) emphasises the use of places as a context of learning where students can find meaning in a motive that is other than a grade. Knowing something abstractly is not enough but being able to concretely and knowledgeably bring knowing to the problem at hand has meaning. Through experience, students get opportunities for engagement and collateral learning (Roth, 2009). Places should be considered emotionally as well as analytically for students to experience them. The pedagogic value of 'place' is understood to be problematic since 'places are seen to have agentic properties in their own right both 'at a place' and across spatial scales' (Morgan, 2011, p. 85). Rohwedder (2004) thinks along the same lines but adds that places have intrinsic pedagogical power communicating through their structure and site, and through this dynamic relationship places shape mind and mind shapes places (pp. 293-294).

Place-based education (PBE) organises learning so that it is situated firmly in the learner's current 'place' or home locality and is oriented towards the good of the local community and/or environment. Further, PBE 'foregrounds a narrative of where people actually live' (Gruenewald, 2003a) in our case where people actually study. We chose cases that could reflect diversity and development and offer opportunities for new residents to visit educational spaces of their past and present. The cases encourage students and teachers to 'reinhabit their places', learning to live in and adapt to places both socially and ecologically (Table 1). Woodhouse and Knapp (in Gruenewald, 2003b) suggest that PBE emerges from attributes of place, is multidisciplinary, experiential and connects place with self and community. PBE may however ignore cultural conflicts in an educational setting but, in this university course cultural diversity was a resource to be explored. To do this we needed to incorporate some aspects of critical pedagogy (Table 1).

Critical pedagogy (CP) builds on the well established discourse of critical theory that largely grew out of the efforts of Paulo Freire who argued that education is always political, raising questions of power, and that learners exist in a cultural context (Gruenewald, 2003a, p. 49). Freire emphasised the importance of praxis being an action linked to reflection with the aim of engaging the individual (Freire, 1970/1996). CP thus calls for reflection on the space one inhabits, leading to 'decolonisation', recognising disruption and its causes, and decoding one's own experiences perhaps by perceiving contradictions (Gruenewald, 2003a). Smith (2007) argues for the integration of educational experiences that allow for decolonisation and reinhabitation giving students opportunities for meaningful involvement within topics that address, question and call for change. The human view is important as the pedagogy allows causes of oppressive aspects of reality to be addressed in order to transform them (e.g. in Case 1, see later).

CP and PBE share concepts that are fundamental to both, such as CP's focus on cultural context and PBE's emphasis on the learner's own 'placé. These concepts interlink PBE's

BOX 1
CHAPTER 1
Being there

As the sun breaks over the furthest rim of hills at Bizana [South Africa], it illuminates a world apart, an idyll in the city dweller's mind of quietude, of lowing cattle, smoke rising in the still morning air, vivid bird calls in the waking bush, a river, gleaming and silent.

Being there is different. Being there is not romantic. To be there is to be engaged in a struggle to live, and to hope. Money and jobs are scarce, the land itself harsh and demanding, and the schools, which straddle the old rural routines and the glittering prospect of a different life heralded by political and economic change in the faraway cities, are often ill-equipped, under-resourced and poorly staffed. Rural people know this.

... This, then, is what being there is like.
From *Emerging Voices*, HSRC and EPC (2006).

call for localized social action and CP's recognition that experience has a geographical dimension (Gruenewald, 2003a; Furman and Gruenewald, 2004) grounding a critical pedagogy of place (CPP). CPP acknowledges experience as a context of learning, embracing the link between the classroom and cultural politics and makes each educational setting problematic. In that way CPP "insists that students and teachers actually experience and interrogate the places outside of school – as part of the school curriculum – that are the local context of shared cultural politics" (Gruenewald, 2003a, p. 9). In sum, critical pedagogy of place aims to contribute to the production of educational discourses and practices that explicitly examine the place-specific nexus of environment, culture and education (p. 10).

Accepting the cultural ways of knowing of indigenous or 'place-based' groups and valuing intergenerational knowledge is part of understanding what is possible in an educational setting. Bowers, who has written extensively on eco-justice, feels strongly about environmental degradation and for him social justice and ecological well-being are inextricably linked, and maintaining cultural diversity is as important as preserving biodiversity (Bowers, 2005). He argues that Critical Pedagogy (CP) requires a more balanced understanding of the role of critical reflection and states that the promises of freedom and democracy upon which critical pedagogues as well as constructivist educators rely on gives only vague legitimacy to the emphasis in the West on a process approach to learning (Bowers, 2007, p. 53) and which does not take into account the knowledge systems of different cultures nor the roots of Western problems. He questions the emphasis on constructionist approaches and transformative learning as responses to an increasing rate of change and says this is "ironic because these theories are based on many of the cultural assumptions that underlie transformative capitalism" (Bowers, 2007, p. 50). Techno-scientific-industrial culture approaches undermine other forms of knowledge and "do not recognize the importance of the culturally diverse approaches to sustaining ... natural systems and cultural traditions of mutual aid and community self-sufficiency" (Bowers, 2005, p. 119).

Greenwood (2008) discusses Bowers' arguments and thinks Bowers is oversimplifying by not taking into account that CP is not a 'single' theory, rather it is a field of plural and diverse ideas (p. 338). In order to understand where we are and how to move on the question of what needs to be conserved should be approached in relation to questions asking what needs to be transformed, restored or created (p. 341). In Lange's (2012) response to Bowers' critique she says that one must enter into a dialogue with people about their present, concrete situation to be able to reflect on one's aspirations (p. 15). One of the points of difference between Bowers on the one hand and Lange on the other is the point of consciousness, whether a community can be part of the resistance to globalisation if it is not conscious of its situation. Being in a community is an unconscious act and by becoming conscious of it we make the bonds more tenuous and ultimately dissolvable, says Lange (p. 16) – and thus the boundaries between the phenomena and experience become blurred giving opportunity to use experience as a context for learning.

With the notion of Place based Education (PBE), Critical Pedagogy (CP) and Critical Pedagogy of Place (CPP) in mind as well as the critique CP has encountered, a case-based strategy was defined for the course offering an opportunity to address how we read the world and to examine relations between education and other factors, such as politics, economics, society, the environment and culture. With PBE and a case strategy we could focus attention on the importance of place in educational development and reinhabitation of spaces. Extending this to CP offered a way of questioning power relationships in educational settings invoking decolonisation where dominant ideas, assumptions and ideologies are discussed and questioned. When students create their curriculum through their experiences in the cases that are specific to particular locales, the lines between content and pedagogy become blurred and CPP's focus with experience as a context for learning is acknowledged. In that way, place is not viewed as a particular 'content' waiting for a teacher, but as an

opportunity or invitation to learning (Segall, 2004; van Eijck, 2010) and the boundary between school and community becomes permeable. With the case-based strategy we could call for a multi-voiced response as students discussed their observations and interpretations giving ground for further discussions of what to transform and what to conserve.

Table 1 Relations between place-based education, critical pedagogy, a critical pedagogy of place, and a case-based strategy, based on Robson (2002), Gruenewald (2003a, 2003b), Yin (2003) and van Eijck (2010) with adaptations by the authors.

Place-based education	Critical pedagogy	Critical pedagogy of place	Case-based strategy
Ecological approach Human culture is nested in ecological systems	Sociological approach	Interdisciplinary approach; deals with natural science, social, cultural and political constructs; blurring of disciplinary boundaries	The study of a setting Multiple sources of evidence Transdisciplinary approach; an integrated problem All investigators have the same role
Localised social action, in the real world; 'inhabitant' not 'resident'; beneficial for the community at large	Experience has a contextual and geographical dimension; it occurs in time and space	Local experience can be a catalyst for social action; allows for linking a local environment with a global theme e.g. urbanisation	Real life context; single case studies, looking at the whole; simultaneous experiences in the present; the past is addressed through experience
Looks at 'where people actually live', looking at themselves and the past in which they lived	Questions power relationships. Culture and place are interrelated.	A critical pedagogy of place would look at the interactions between cultures and ecosystems.	Involves 'evaluation', study of the particular; provokes questions about the existing situation; nothing is taken for granted
Learning to restore disrupted places; emphasis on participation	Learning to recognise disruption and recognise its cause; becoming consciousness	Recognise the need for disruption and its causes, and at the same time assess calls for restoration	Focus on a particular case or site, which is often delimited
Rooted in place, empathetic Focuses on conservation	Revolutionary change Aims at transformation	The human experience is cyclical moving between continuity and change, each finding itself in the other	Rooted in a social and physical setting. The case itself has value; it can open up knowledge and build 'competence for action'
Reinhabitation	Decolonisation	Being human is a political experience, moving between decolonisation and reinhabitation	Blurs boundary between phenomenon and context

Design of the course

In the EdSet course we wanted students to learn about educating themselves through participating in educational places, through intertwining the actual contexts of their lives, past and present (Gruenewald, 2003a). We designed so-called cases to attract their attention in a critical way to the complexity of educational ‘place’ and ‘time’ and create shared experiences and spaces for reflections on their past and future involvement in education. We hoped to nurture a sense of ‘belonging’ to the enterprise of education as the students brought their (global) selves and experiences to the challenge of self and of university study (Roxå and Mårtensson, 2009). They could not only find out what had happened and what could be restored but also *‘what could/should happen in this place and what role could/should I or my community play in deciding what happens in this place?’* (Martin, 2010, p. 265, italics in the original). The aim was to invite the students to a dialogue, using their diverse cultural background to reflect on what they had experienced in each place in order to better understand the place, themselves and the reciprocal influence there between.

In Iceland it is relatively easy to gain access to educational sites. All case visits were arranged by phone and in some cases prepared in more detail by instructors visiting the site themselves. It is the school principal who decides whether or not a group can visit, but red-tape is minimal. Photographs were only used by some students during their presentations of their projects and not in the research itself.

The course was designed with the following principles which were introduced to students in the course material. It had to recognise where students were coming from – and where they were going – and give them a shared place to be while on their way from past to future.

- Knowledge would be constructed collaboratively.
- Students would be placed immediately (on the first day of class) and regularly in actual situations where they had to observe, question, describe, discuss, reflect, create, evaluate and write about the settings observed.
- A range of factors that influence educational settings, including legal, social, economic, political, technological and environmental factors, would be observable in the settings.
- Case studies would be a viable approach in order to meet the course objectives (Yin, 2003).

Cases could provide ‘shared places’ with no apparent division between theory and practice or privileged knowledge. The course gives 10 ECTS which means that students should expect to spend 250-300 hours on the course. It uses a blended learning approach with

BOX 2

Case 1 The Clamp preschool

Observations

During the observations make sure you do the following:

1. Sketch and describe one department in detail.
2. Sketch the other three departments, the common area and the open air area.
3. Follow/watch one child in each department for at least five minutes and record carefully what happens – you might find the overview of ‘development areas’ useful.
4. Follow/watch one member of staff in each department for at least five minutes and record carefully what happens.
5. Record carefully 3-5 examples of child-staff interactions in each department lasting maybe a few seconds to a minute.

Report

Consider Article 2 in The Preschool Act, Nr. 90, June 2008 (provided)

Choose 2-3 objectives in Article 2, either from the general sentences in the first paragraph or from objectives marked a-f. Discuss the ways in which the preschool is meeting these objectives. Explain why you focused on these objectives. Make one or two suggestions for other ways to meet the objectives. Explain. Suggest one or two additional objectives that you would like to see in preschools. Explain.

about 40 hours of contact time and a web-based management system for other communication, storage of materials, submission of assignments and feedback. Further details on course organisation are found in Table 2 including the choices made by the three students we discuss later, whose names have been given as Anna, Christa and José (pseudonyms). The background to Case 1 is found in Box 2.

Table 2 The cases, tasks and products undertaken by Anna, Christa and José in 2008, 2009 and 2010

Cases	Topics	Task and product	Anna	Christa	José
	Introduction	Open the course: discuss who learns where and when	Potato planting – three generations (photo sequence)	Potato planting – three generations (photo sequence)	Wavin' flags – World Cup (music): whose world is it?
1	Early childhood - the Icelandic way (Case 1)	Visit: observe, discuss, write report (draft, get feedback, resubmit)	Clamp preschool (age 2-6)	Younger school (age 5-8)	Clamp preschool (age 2-6)
2	Cultural (choice) thematic; not formal (Case 2)	Visit: observe, write short report	Swimming class (own choice of venue)	Swimming class (own choice of venue)	Knitting class (own choice of venue)
	Mini case: Starting school	Reflect and share	The line between home and school as the preschool day begins	Starting the school day and starting school	
3	Resources (all) curriculum, compulsory school settings (Case 3)	Visit: observe, write short report	Compulsory school An international school (Grade 1-7)	Compulsory school An international school (Grades 1-7). Schooling in South Africa (Christa missed the class visit)	An international school (Grades 1-8+)
	Mini case: Emerging voices in rural South Africa (virtual trip)	Group-work according to the 'jigsaw' methods and using published materials	-	Poverty, resources and education in US and South Africa	Viewpoints of different stakeholders
4	Independent project (choice) (Case 4)	Visit Longer report Oral presentation	Teaching Icelandic to Polish immigrants Mini-conference Review of report	<i>The Freedom Writers</i> Mini-conference Review of report	The Summer Work School Mini-conference Review of report
	Mini case: Where does your education come from?	Video and discussion	-	-	Music in life and in a concentration camp
5	Vocational education; and multicultural programme (Case 5)	Visit Report	Technical College Multicultural Programme Choice of trade	Unable to make the visit, but heard about it from other students	Technical College Multicultural Programme Choice of trade
6	Exam case: Materials a week ahead of time (Case 6)	Report (2 hours) Oral exam (20 minutes)	Rural education in South Africa; short video clip; excerpts from report	United Nations University Fisheries Training Programme, 10 year report; interviews with UNU fellows; web-site	Summer camps: Examples from Iceland and the USA Web-sites

Method

This study addresses one main research question: How does a case-based strategy enable university students to change their relationship to 'places'? A qualitative approach was used involving interviews and document analysis.

In spring 2011, when we decided to carry out this study, we could only contact students who still had an active University of Iceland e-mail address. Eleven students responded affirmatively to our request for an interview, but we do not know how many received the mail. We decided to take interviews with seven individuals representative of the diversity in the course and who were available in summer 2011. Both authors were present in the interviews which lasted for about one hour and were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis (Macdonald and Pálsdóttir, 2011).

In the end we decided to focus on only three students for this study on pedagogy of place, Anna, Christa and José. These particular participants were selected for several reasons. They come from three different parts of the world (Eastern Europe, South East Asia and Central America). They all had international and/or prior university experience, had lived in Iceland for several years prior to their enrolment in the course and varied in age. Also important was that they had very different personalities and that there was one from each year under study. We elected not to have the two representatives from the Nordic countries, though we took interviews with two, mainly because there was a danger of making some assumptions about a shared background. We also do not include here two interviews with students with African backgrounds since one interviewer knew them both well and wanted to be able to keep 'professional' distance in the study.

This article refers to the data collected around the three selected students unless otherwise stated. We looked at their data 'longitudinally' tracing each student's experience of the course and 'latitudinally' conducting a narrative analysis of each case, reading all the reports written by the three students, the contributions they had made to on-line discussion and notes from the oral exam.

The documentary material was extensive. The eleven students who responded to our e-mail were asked whether we could access and use their case discussions and assignments which had been saved automatically on the Blackboard system (a virtual learning environment) as well as their hand-written examination scripts. All gave their permission. There were six formal cases (Table 2) and all materials related to a case from these eleven students were examined. We also used notes taken by the teachers during the oral exam. Finally we had transcripts of interviews from 2011, where we asked students what they had learnt from individual cases and the setting itself. The discussions were semi-structured, and the students were given a page at the outset with four questions which we used to guide the process, such as what they had learnt from the course and what had they learnt from others in the course. We also had copies of their assignments with us in the interviews and other course materials.

Results

This section is in two parts; first we trace the individual experiences of three students in the course, and then we consider the impact of the cases on the students as part of a group.

*Impact on three students***Anna**

Anna (Table 3) was twenty-five years old when she took the EdSet course and was working in a playschool at the same time. She moved to Iceland in 2006 to be with her Icelandic boyfriend. It was clear from her first assignment that she was insightful and careful, with good control of both descriptive and analytical skills, and was highly competent in her use of the English language. She finished her master's degree in education in spring 2011.

Table 3 Anna's experience (2008)

At entry	Learning as task	Learning outcomes
<p>Anna said that at the outset she believed that knowledge in a university is gained by learning what teachers provide, and one learns to do <i>what</i> one is told to do and <i>how</i> one is told to do it.</p> <p>Anna had a master's degree in International relations and good skills in writing and English when she joined the course.</p> <p>She was competent in three languages other than her mother tongue, including Spanish and English.</p>	<p>The site visits were for Anna surprising, even shocking, as she comes to reflect on her experiences.</p> <p>She did not lose sight of what matters to her. In the first visits she pays attention to manners and discipline.</p> <p>Later, at the Technical College, she mentioned that she was surprised by the choices of learning available. She was not used at first to the idea that teachers of the course were also learning from the students but had recognised that by the end of the course.</p> <p>She relocated her understanding of education and realised that learning is not just rote-learning by the book – one can gain and use experience to learn.</p>	<p>Anna started to change the ways she worked and learned to choose, analyze, reflect and think critically.</p> <p>She thought carefully about the teaching of her mother tongue, visited sites of language learning and considered how to do it best.</p> <p>Her consciousness of experience changed as well as her understanding of the rules of access to knowledge.</p> <p>Anna said that had learnt that education can take place anywhere, that knowledge can be produced by anyone and that educational settings are places where decisions are made.</p>

Anna turned out to be very practical in many ways. She identified hindrances and limitations in her assignments and was able to analyse problems. For Anna the critical pedagogy of place began to work when she realised that the hierarchical relations between the teacher and students (the sequence, pace and criteria) were blurred and she got more control of what she learned. She said in the interview:

“We learned who we are and that where we are coming from does matter, and we can use our experience and all our ideas in how we perceive things.”

Through the case visits Anna decolonised her knowledge, unlearning much of what she had experienced as learning/education. In the course she started to change the ways she worked and learned that she could make choices, analyze, reflect and think critically. She recognised the disruption and injury visible in educational settings in rural South African schools that occurs when people fail to consider places as products of human decisions (Gruenewald, 2003a). This case led her to suggest that parents should have a voice in decision-making concerning their children and the school. She never lost sight of the fact that education has always a ‘serious’ aspect in it, like the security factor in the swimming lessons. Anna had though come to understand that teachers do not have to be ‘gurus’ that know everything; she had recognised that the instructors were willing to learn from the students: ‘I learned that I am allowed to think on my own, discuss and share opinions’. Anna realised that using connections to one’s local place and daily life motivates learning, which she has experienced in the case visits and is applying in her new insights for her own teaching of her mother tongue.

Christa

Christa (Table 4) was twenty-one years old and had a tiny baby at the start of the EdSet class. Her husband (from Spain) was also in the class and the baby came with them to several of the class meetings but not on the case visits, one of which Christa missed. She had come to Iceland with her family at the age of fifteen, taking one year in an Icelandic 10th grade class and then completing an International Baccalaureate (IB) at a local high school, the only school in Iceland to offer this option. In autumn 2008, she entered business studies at the University of Iceland but switched to the ISEP in spring 2009. Thus Christa was unusual in that she had taken the introductory disciplinary-based courses (sociology, psychology, philosophy, multicultural studies) before the EdSet courses in autumn 2009.

Table 4 Christa's experience (2009)

At entry	Learning as task	Learning outcomes
<p>Christa said that education is important and university is a place to change one's view and broaden horizons.</p> <p>Before the ISEP she had one term of experience of university in Iceland (business studies) after completing an International Baccalaureate, a school-leaving certificate with an emphasis on academic skills.</p> <p>In the ISEP she did the 'second' term before the 'first'. She said that her earlier experience of the IB had been very positive as she began to form her own identity.</p> <p>Christa stated that she could play the role of learner easily and did so with enthusiasm.</p> <p>She was young and had just had a baby as the course started but young mothers are a part of academia in Iceland.</p>	<p>Christa identified humanistic issues in the visits and assignments and identified with those whom she is visiting.</p> <p>In her own project on <i>The Freedom Writers</i> she concluded that 'education can provide a sanctuary for students'.</p> <p>Christa used theories, for example, from philosophy, to interpret some of what she experiences in the cases.</p> <p>She said that she thought the teachers were flexible and treated the students as human, maximising learning.</p> <p>In her assignments she focused on the personal sides of educational experiences and individual development.</p> <p>Experience with families was important and valuable according to Christa and the engagement seen among teacher, parents and infants in the swimming class for infants was a critical experience for her.</p>	<p>Christa's felt that her educational space had opened up with the case approach. It was a 'liberating' experience for her to move out of her own classroom. The case approach was 'profound'.</p> <p>She felt that she had learnt to develop further as an international citizen continuing on from her IB experience.</p> <p>She felt that learning happens from 'within' as long as the circumstances are conducive, such as strict rules of silence and tidiness, making children aware of others and their common responsibilities.</p> <p>Christa felt that the approach confirmed that it is important to recognise both the emotional and cultural challenges one faces.</p> <p>Christa felt strongly that learning should be a 'positive' experience.</p>

Christa is the youngest of the three selected students and one of the youngest students in the course and seemed to be experiencing things she did not expect in university studies. She thought it was amazing to get the chance to move out of the classroom and experience that anything can be an educational setting and used the word 'liberating'. Christa reinhabited her previous educational experience through some of the cases, particularly so through her choice of project case. She did not feel free to visit a site on her own with her newborn baby so she hunted the Internet for a 'place' or setting. When she introduced the story about the *Freedom Writers* she said that the place which the teacher had provided for a class of 'losers' had been a sanctuary for them. This is similar to her own description of her own IB studies, which she said gave her a chance to be what she wanted – an international citizen – in a place where she did not have to take on roles selected by others. Christa wanted to work with international youth:

"It's my passion to help them, to support them, to push them upwards, to do something about it, to be creative about what their background is ... we can be perfectly

integrated into the culture, but still carry on living who we are ... These things, educational settings, really helped me to not just be one thing”.

In general Christa focused on personal aspects within the case assignments and pointed out how important it was to not forget the importance of emotional and cultural challenges when organising learning experiences. Yet despite her passion and ability, she thought some of the places and experiences ‘challenging’ or ‘intimidating’. She made this point when talking about the exam case (Case 6) when they met older graduate students from developing countries.

José

José (Table 5) was thirty-two years old when he took part in the EdSet class. He had come to Iceland a few years earlier with his Icelandic girlfriend. He had been an excellent student in secondary school and had started university studies in engineering at age 16 but through lack of interest did not complete the programme. He had worked in the summer Work School for teenagers run by the city of Reykjavik, supported himself with part-time jobs like being a bar tender and participated in local politics when elected as a representative in the multicultural board in Reykjavik, from November 2010. José has an outgoing personality and took an active if not passionate part in all course sessions.

Table 5 José’s experience (2010)

At entry	Learning as task	Learning outcomes
<p>José had former experience of university education in engineering straight after school at age 16 but said that he did not like the teaching methods and did not complete the course.</p> <p>He had made a major change in his life, with a new choice of education and living in the country of his partner.</p> <p>He stated that he was also being practical as he realised that he needed some sort of formal qualification so he felt he had to complete a degree.</p>	<p>José paid his first-ever visit to a playschool in this course, but was quick to analyse his own values and position and what he thought was important or negative.</p> <p>He could recognise and appreciate his values in what he noticed on the case visits.</p> <p>He liked handing in a draft assignment on the case visit and getting feedback and felt in general that constructive criticism is important and helpful.</p> <p>He said that he would have liked more opportunities for interaction.</p> <p>He praised the discussions and dialogue as having been a valuable way to construct knowledge.</p>	<p>José said that ideally the course should have had more opportunities for feedback and discussion, but he recognised the time limitations.</p> <p>José said that for a long time he has had a vision of working with young people in ‘good life’ projects and that the tools he gained in the class will help him undertake analysis and development of such projects.</p> <p>He saw a way to positively influence others and was developing his skills in writing, making arguments and presenting them.</p>

José showed a strong vision for education based on an ideology of work and respect, and finding a balance in society. He said that the most valuable experiences of the course were opportunities to perceive the different places, being given the opportunity to produce knowledge not only by using intellectual capacities but also ‘using perception, to sense, to feel and to share’.

José got ideas from each setting to build up tools to use as a ‘hidden curriculum’ later (his words). He said in the interview that education is about developing awareness and consciousness both of places and of self, thus he liked getting feedback and repeatedly mentioned that he needs criticism to develop. José pointed out that people in each place need to reach goals that are their own and not those of others, reflecting perhaps his own experience as he made a U-turn in his own life. In his summer camp report (Case 6) he addresses people’s *consciousness* of places where adults recognise children’s contribution to knowledge. *Decolonisation* takes place as José recognises *disruptions in values and settings* and he says:

“The terminology of ‘development’, ‘progress’, ‘education’ and so on, need to be recontextualised in order to really contribute to the auto-sustainability of a local community, because otherwise the communities will be trying to reach goals that are not theirs, and this misunderstanding could become a source of misery and hatred (from a short assignment by José on rural education in South Africa).”

The impact of the cases

Three common cases were designed for the group (Cases 1, 3 and 5, Table 2) i.e. everyone in the group visited the same site at the same time. All the students worked well together in the settings, collecting their own data, and evaluating their own reactions at the same time. They quickly saw that culture came in many guises and that place and motive had many meanings.

The guidelines or case instructions were most structured for the common cases to ensure that all students did, for example, sketch the facilities and watch and record interactions among children and between teachers and children (see earlier, Box 2). The cases were to have an impact and were not any kind of add-on activity. The visit to a playschool (Case 1, 2008, 2010) occurred only one hour into their studies. José had never been in a playschool, but Anna worked in one. The guidelines for the report asked for them to make choices about what to discuss and carried with them the message that knowledge would have to be produced by the students, not received from the teachers. Clear insights and descriptions were found in all three reports, with Anna showing the good writing skills with which she entered the course. The feedback given by the teachers on a draft of their first report (Case 1) before final submission was much appreciated by them, especially José, who loved any chance of a dialogue.

A study of compulsory education involved a collective case with a visit to two schools (Case 3). The *larger* school is a public school in the capital area of Iceland, designed and built with large open spaces and access to an indoor gym and swimming pool. The school promotes integrated teaching and learning organising all students’ work in themes and projects. The *smaller* private school of about 45-55 students is an international school, which is physically housed in the larger school renting teaching space from it. The two schools share some classrooms in practical subjects, but academic subjects are taught separately, with some instruction in the international school in Icelandic, though the main language is English. The main focus in this collective case was on the availability of the resources and the nature of curriculum. These case-visits promoted some thinking on the nature of a curriculum, how it is taught, and characteristics of compulsory schooling and an ‘international’ school. It also went deeper as they considered the socio-economic context of the students in the two schools.

An appraisal of vocational education for young adults offered by the Technical College was the core of the third common case (Case 5), with the added dimension of an introduction to the multicultural (or international) programme offered by the college. In the college students can choose between technical/vocational lines of study with workplace training in many fields, such as carpentry and house building, hairdressing, design and crafts, graphic design, jewellery making, or becoming a pilot, navigator, marine engineer or electrician. Students noticed that they have choices and that a practical/technical education in Iceland has status, facilities, curriculum and a wide age range of students. In the interview José likened the visit to Alice in Wonderland with new doors opening up all the time.

The themes emerging from the analysis of the work of the three selected students for the common cases (1, 3 and 5) are *surprise, collaboration, values and evaluation, culture and place or site*.

An example of education outside the formal system involved observing a swimming or knitting lessons (Case 2). The guidelines were relatively unstructured and this visit to an unfamiliar setting but of their own choice made a big impact on the three students. The reports were a joy to read with Anna relating what she saw in an infant swimming class case to the history of Iceland and Christa responding at a personal level with her new responsibilities as a mother. One could almost smell the coffee in the description of the multi-age knitting group José visited at the Red Cross. In these examples of non-formal learning *phenomenon* was inextricable from *context*.

Projects of their own choice (Case 4) drew attention to *localised social actions* and the instructors were overwhelmed by the *empathy* shown towards the people involved in students' own cases. The *choices* reflected the wide understanding being given to education and the diverse backgrounds and interests of the group. Some projects focussed on out-of-school settings, such as a weekend library session for immigrant children, afterschool centre for disabled children, teaching of an expert pianist and out-of-school sports, while others drew attention to a multi-cultural or international issues, such as learning Spanish or Polish in different settings, a comparison of schools in Ghana and Iceland or the UNU Geothermal Training Programme. Each year one or two students did their projects on sites outside Iceland using the Internet for their 'case visit'.

The so-called 'exam case' (Case 6) where students received materials a week ahead of the due date was our final formal contact with them. We found here that concepts such as *culture and place, politics, and creating knowledge* described the challenges being met and mastered. None of the students had experienced this type of exam before but all enjoyed the challenge of using their knowledge to designing solutions to the education problems we proposed. José said of the summer camp project:

"I really like it very much, the exam, this kind of examination – okay, use your intelligence, use what you learned, create something ... we need to design something ... I am still waiting for the feedback ... without critique you can't make anything worthy."

In addition to the course plan (Table 2) the teachers were always on the lookout for opportunities. The opening slides on three generations planting potatoes in 2008 and 2009 brought forth physical memories of learning to swim or ride a bike. The opening visual in 2010 was the theme song from the 2010 World Cup in Football and the lyrics. Themes such as *change and continuity, community and competence* as well as *opportunity* characterise the responses to these 'mini cases' which were related to the interests of the teachers and interpreted from the political to the personal by the students.

There were memorable experiences when students were prompted to remember their own early days of school (Box 2, from a web contribution from a quiet student), took part in a decision-making simulation in rural South Africa (Anna, Case 6, José, extra case, Table 2) and pondered the question of where one's education comes from (José).

Discussion

In this course, students used a case-based strategy to *interrogate* local educational settings in order to engage in a 'shared space' by reflecting on their own experience, reinterpreting it and developing their own personal vision. We wanted to 'organize someone's experience as well as organize that someone to experience' (Segall, 2004). José summed it up as follows;

"But I think ... this course as it was organised ... we had also to meet and to talk about our experiences, and as we were doing visits, so we were perceiving. And not only just studying on the intellectual level, but as well the perceptual, and feelings, and sensations, and we were talking about that as well and sharing that. I think this was great. Yes, because somehow we have overestimated the intellectual knowledge over the other knowledge that we have. That's why it's so important, as you did, to permit us, to allow us, or to invite us to visit, to perceive." (José, interview)

We chose a case strategy which blended place-based education with critical pedagogy as we tried to move towards a 'critical pedagogy of place' (Table 1). We felt that through shared cases, discussion and reflection, students would learn to reconsider their earlier knowledge and find new understandings of place and self (Table 6).

When Anna began the course, her experience had told her that university and therefore education was a place for knowledge to be received. She learnt through cases as place-based approaches that knowledge is *recontextualised* and that the teachers in a course also learn something new and valuable from the students. Through the *decolonisation* of her ideas on her former university education and in starting to transform herself into a creative agent who acts in social spaces she *reinhabited* her educational space, she changed it and realised that education can take place anywhere and involves decision-making, actions and choices. Globalisation and migration were not new to her, with her studies in international relations and her language expertise, but she found a way to take social action, making the language difficulties of her fellow countrymen living in Iceland *her* problem, thinking of ways to teach so that language could be *connected with daily life* and was not some body of knowledge to be transmitted by teachers and reproduced by language learners.

BOX 3 Mini-case

I don't like walking in the rain so it was not the best feeling to go out. If I think like a child, I would like that my parents drive me as close to the school as possible. ... I tried to remember how it was many years ago. Strange, but it was a similar smell, fresh air, wet, a little bit dark. I noticed one difference, today I didn't worry, but when I was a child I worried every day on the way to school I could not eat breakfast in the morning at home. Thank you for this short travel to childhood.

Experience at start of Case 3, 2009, 'Starting school', a student from 2009

For Christa, the EdSet course was a place in which she needed to be *safe*. As a young learner and young mother with a new baby, and after several years of disruptions, she had been moved rather than choosing to move from one country to another. In a short space of time she had experienced several demanding educational settings – learning a new language, entering the formal education system as a 15 year old, as an immigrant and as a mother. This last *most human experience* gave her a chance in the EdSet course to delocate her knowledge and fears and relocate them as she had space to safely explore and connect with further settings. In this safety, she learned that she could change her views and broaden her horizons. Some cases helped her clarify her views on roles that people take on, by choice or not, and she was increasingly happy with her own development as a 'citizen of the world'. She repeatedly said that learning happens from within, but at the same time she recognised that the guided participation and the course organisation helped her achieve this

'*learning from within*'. The settings channelled her attention in a critical way to the complexity of 'place' and 'time', allowing her to make her own curriculum from the visits and to organise her own experience.

Table 6 Course design

Learn from place-based education	
The discourse Education as a field of study in the university Creates access to places where knowledge can be produced Creates access to student experience to create and distribute knowledge	The students at entry Knowledge is produced by specialists I am going to undertake university study I am going to study education I will be in contact with knowledge providers I will learn things in <i>Educational settings</i>
Develop a case-based strategy	
Recontextualisation through the choice of a case-based pedagogy Choice of sites for study, relevant materials and procedural guidelines An interrogative approach (non-disciplinary) facilitates the transformation of knowledge	Learning as task Delocating an understanding of education through case-studies, interpretations and reflections Relocation – organisation of knowledge to prepare, experience and reflect on case-visits; Make judgements and selections
Invoke critical pedagogy	
The enacted course Participation in a dual setting: meeting the demands of a university course and exploring educational settings Go out, go back and go forward, in order to become conscious of what education involves	Learning outcomes I can study how and where my experience fits into my space for action and my consciousness I value self-reflection I have altered my expectations of education, of 'places' explored in 'time' and 'space'
Work with a critical pedagogy of place through cases	

For José his early university life had been an engineer's dream but for him personally a nightmare. Now he had a new dream with an ambitious search for the production of meaning, the good life. There was the *mental challenge to construct knowledge* through experience and dialogue, in a shared space, with 'different doors to walk through'. Then there was the practical challenge of his own degree and his honest wish for feedback and discussion and ultimately working on projects with young people. For José this course only brought incremental change, accustomed as he was to making his own choices. He took a *political view* of the settings and thrived on critical discussion and debate, wanting more than we could offer. He could articulate his ideas on 'decolonisation' more clearly than the less experienced members of the class who were experiencing change more at an *individual* than *systemic* level.

In this retrospective study of the EdSet course we have investigated the links between place-based education (PBE) and a case-based strategy and how they supported the use of critical pedagogy (CP) and a critical pedagogy of place as introduced by Gruenewald (2003a) (Table 1, Table 6). We found that the case-based strategy facilitated the use of PBE and CP and offered students the opportunity to examine relations between education and political and economic situations. The pedagogy invited them to become conscious of experience as a context for learning. There was a curriculum in the choice of settings and

experiences, an image of self and society that slowly became visible through the course. Students were asked to use individual background and experiences to interpret new ones; they produced new knowledge but became more adept at decolonising their earlier knowledge to relocate their skills in new educational practice. José thought it is important to change the system, Christa was in the middle of a storm where globalisation meets individual and Anna worked within the economic and cultural system, wanting to address some effects of the system more constructively.

What we believe, desire and intend determines what we do (Dretske, 1988), therefore we need to focus on what is done and try to figure out what is taken for granted (Gruenewald, 2003b). The course of Educational Settings was structured by promoting low-key conflict between invisible and visible forms of practice. The cases were designed to provoke new meaning and interpretation of former educational experience as being political. The point was to give students an opportunity to make visible some of the issues emerging in each place, give them a chance to develop their own views by relating them to former experiences and by having to justify their own opinions. The point was also to engage in decolonisation and question the traditional hierarchical position of control of knowledge production by deploying an emotion of 'place', past and present, and of future dreams, to understand and reinhabit the adventure in which they had been involved in ever since they were small children, living their lives in different parts of the world.

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