Understanding the needs and life experiences of adult students
– A qualitative study of adult students in Preliminary Studies at Keilir

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Abstract

Adult learners bring different experiences and perspectives to their education. It is important they get opportunities to learn at their own speed, through different situations and activities. Consequently, the teaching methods and learning environment are very important to the learner. Therefore the school and its teachers play a big role in making the learner feel comfortable and gain new experiences which could help them develop themselves as adult learners and find the right learning path.

This thesis explores how the individuals needs and life experience is utilised through the learning process in the learning environment of the Preliminary studies program at Keilir. The focus is on student’s experiences of the learning environment at Keilir in order to see if they meet the needs of adult students. That being said, interviews with former and current participants in the program will show what the students experienced during their time in the program and how they felt their needs were met.

Furthermore Lave and Wenger’s (1991) concept of a community of practice will be used to explore the education at Keilir and how learning in collaboration with other students and others that impact the learner’s journey can affect the learner’s education and their learning experience.
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Introduction

*The central dynamic of the learning process is perceived to be the experience of the learners; experience being defined as the interaction between individuals and their environment* (Knowles, 1970, p. 57).

Learning is an active process that is usually volitional, where a person constructs meaning from new knowledge and experience (Galbraith, 2004, p. 142). Adult learners bring different experiences and perspectives to their education. It is important they get opportunities to learn at their own speed, through different situations and activities. Adults that have had bad experiences from earlier educations can often be afraid to come back to the classroom. In most individuals there is an urge to learn but there can also be some fear of learning. However, the fear of knowing could be the result of social experiences rather than being basic to the person (Jarvis, 2004, p. 34). It’s often a very difficult task for people to decide whether or not they are ready to go back to school. Studying demands that people are organised and ready to learn so it comes as no surprise that people can be afraid of taking the step of going back to school. Consequently, the teaching methods and learning environment are very important to the learner. Therefore it is a big role for the school and teachers to make the learner feel comfortable and gain new experiences which could help them develop themselves as adult learners and find the right learning path. As an adult teacher it is critical to prompt students’ motivation and propensity, despite their social background, to be competent in issues that they believe to be meaningful (Galbraith, 2004).

In Iceland like in many other countries, people that have not finished upper secondary education have not had many opportunities to take part in adult education. The difference from other countries is that poverty in Iceland is very small compared to other countries and there are many people that do not even realise they have opportunities to participate in adult education.

In 2007 there was a new school founded in Iceland, it was called Keilir and it has been growing fast every year since. Keilir has taken a very good step to help people seek adult education and change their lives on the way. The school has a policy that offers elaborated education that focuses on novel teaching methods. The school offers four fields of study, they are a Preliminary Studies, Flight academia, Sports academia and Technical field (“Deildir Keilis,” n.d., para. 1). Preliminary Studies is the one that will be focused on in this research. It is
a path for people that have not finished college education (upper secondary education) to get their education. Graduating from the program will give people the qualifications to get admitted to universities both in Iceland and abroad.

This research will examine how people experienced the learning environment in the program of Preliminary Studies and show if people’s needs and life experiences were met.

**Aims and questions**

The aim of this research is to examine how the individuals needs and life experience is utilised through the learning process in the learning environment of the Preliminary studies program. The research will focus on student’s experiences of the learning environment at Keilir in order to see if they meet the needs of adult students. That being said it is important to look closely at what the students experienced during their time in the program and how they feel their needs have been met. Therefore interviews with former and current participants in the program will hopefully shed some light on the following questions.

- *How did the students experience the learning environment and structure of the program?*
- *What kept the students motivated throughout their education?*
- *In what way did the students feel their needs and life experiences were met at Keilir?*
Background

Iceland’s educational system

The educational system in Iceland is constructed of compulsory education, upper secondary education and higher education. After compulsory school, at the age of sixteen, people have the right to choose whether they want to go to an upper secondary school or not. The education is primarily structured as a four-year course that leads to a matriculation examination. Students are mostly at the age of sixteen to twenty but it is not compulsory so the age can vary. People that want to enrol in a university have to have finished an upper secondary education or comparable education. There are seven Universities in Iceland that are accredited of the Ministry of Education (“Menntamál,” n.d., para. 3).

Preliminary Studies

Kelir is a limited liability company and major stakeholders are The University of Iceland, Islandsbanki, Icelandair Group, HS Geothermal Power, Reykjavík Energy, Icelandic GeoSurvey and others. “The purpose of Keilir is to create and disseminate knowledge in an active partnership with domestic and international schools, companies and other economic partners (“Um Keili”, n.d., para. 3). People that want to enrol in Preliminary Studies at Keilir have to be over 25 years old and have finished at least 70 credits from a upper secondary education. Under those 70 credits the student enrolling has to have finished at least 6 credits in Icelandic, Math and English. Those that want to enrol have the opportunity to get their work experience evaluated for credits to some extent for the minimum credits required to enrol (“ Háskólabrú staðnám,” n.d., para. 2). Therefore the Preliminary Studies program at Keilir is not available for students that are coming right out of compulsory schools. There are four faculties to choose from: Law and Social Sciences, Humanities, Economics, Engineering/Science. The length of the program depends on the department selected. Thus duration is two semesters for students who intend to study in one of all the departments except Engineering and Science which is three semesters. The Curriculum of the Preliminary Studies has been designed to the demands of the faculties at The University of Iceland. (“ Háskólabrú samsetning náms,” n.d).

In every faculty the students have to finish two courses of Icelandic, English and three courses in Mathematics. However in the Humanities faculty there are only two mathematics courses and in the Economics there are 4 mathematics courses.
In all of the faculties the students have to finish one social science course, an information technology course and a course called “education and profession” that is always in the start of the first semester.

The four faculties offer different courses that are relevant to their aims. For example in the Law and Social Sciences- and Humanities faculties students have to finish a course in Danish and History. However in the Humanities department the students also have to add three courses in German. In the Economics faculty the students take an extra course called “Introduction to Economics”. In the Engineering and Science faculty students have to finish two courses in physics and one course in chemistry (“Háskólabrú samsetning náms,” n.d).

The Preliminary Studies program has made a reputation over the last few years of offering students individualized service and support. Keilir describe their teaching methods to be based on the needs of the adult learner and there are demands that students work independently. Furthermore they argue that they offer students personal service that will strengthen their confidence and independence (“Háskólabrú Keilís”, n.d., para. 3).

In addition Keilir state that they make effort to introduce students to their fellow students and the primary factors at the school. Therefore in the first week of the program the students take part in group therapy, group work and presentation of their work in the program (“Háskólabrú Keilís”, n.d., para. 4).

The teaching at Keilir is primary done through a so called flip classroom. That means that the usual teaching, where the teacher stands before the class and has a lecture, is reversed. The lectures and presentations are saved online and are accessible to the students. Then the students can watch them where and whenever they can and as often as they want. The students then work on their homework at the school, often through assignments and under guidance of the teacher. Correspondingly the learning in the classroom will be different from the more normal and usual teaching. This form of teaching and learning has been positive and through it the education will be a lively process that encourages students in an enjoyable way. The education is always the responsibility of the students and preparing before class is essential so the schools-work is exploited in an effective way (“Háskólabrú Keilís”, n.d., para. 5).

Keilir also offers Preliminary Studies through distance learning. These students will get all of their assignments and work done through the internet. In the beginning of every period of the program the students have to attend classes. These classes are usually on a Friday and
Saturday so people that are working can make it to class. In distance learning the students also get the lectures and presentations through the internet. But the discussions and assignments are all worked on through the internet and on discussion forums. In the first period when the students have to attend class there is always group therapy so the students can get to know one and another. There is also a class in information technology to help students learn on the forums and platforms they have to work on in the program ("Háskólabrú fjarnám," n.d., para. 3).
Previous research

Why do adults seek education?

It is intriguing to know why people seek education in this program rather than taking part in a college education. What is Keilir offering that the other colleges do not? The research will focus on how the students experience the learning environment in the Preliminary Studies program and how they feel it meets their needs as adult students. It could be a good start to look into why adult seek education. Ergo it is helpful to look at some previous researches that emphasise factors that influence adult student’s decisions to educate themselves.

All adults want to make sense of their world, find meaning, and being effective at what they value. This is what fuels their motivation to learn (Galbraith, 2004, p. 141).

Ceryl O. Houle (1961) presents his findings of why people seek adult education in three ways. Firstly there are students who want to fulfil a goal they have created. Secondly adults seek education and the social company that follows. Finally people seek education to expand their knowledge. He suggests that one way is usually primary in adults learning activity. Although often two or three of them may interact. Or like Galbraith explains “the individual who is primarily goal orientated may reflect an activity or learning for learning sake’s orientation also (2004, p. 27). In 1971 Roger Boshier developed Houles work and produced a scale for these orientations. By using Boshiers scale in 1974 Morstain and Smart presented six reasons why adults seek education (Merriam and Caffarella, 1999).

1. **Social bonds;** people seek education to find friends or meet people of the opposite sex.
2. **External expectations;** people seek education to comply wishes or orders.
3. **Social welfare;** people seek education altruistically, they want to serve somebody or the community.
4. **Professional improvement;** people seek education to develop professionally or to get work.
5. **Elopement/excitation;** people want to escape something negative, get away from home or get away from their old work.
6. **Intellectual interest;** people seek education for the education and to gain knowledge.
These reasons show the many factors that can impact people that are seeking adult education. Consequently it is very important that the schools and teachers have these reasons in mind and understand the different and often complex needs of the students. Adults that are seeking education after dropping out of previous education, may often carry their own perception that they are not intelligent enough for academic work (Barer-Stein & Draper, 1993). More so Cross (1981) argues that obstacles for adult students can be classified into three headings. Situational, institutional and dispositional barriers. Situational barriers are the obstacles that appear in peoples situations in life at a given time, f. ex. a shortage of time or money. Institutional barriers are all of the practices or procedures that seclude or discourage adult workers from engaging in an educational activity, f. ex. impractical schedules or locations, inappropriate courses of study. Finally dispositional barriers are related to attitudes and self-perceptions about oneself as a student or a learner. For example older people feel they are too old to learn or people with bad educational background lack the confidence or ability to learn.

Negative emotions can often serve as blocks from learning. Emotions like fear, guilt, rejection, anger and confusion can all have bad effect on the learner. And if the student or more importantly the teacher don’t recognise these emotions, they will affect the learner. Students that for example fear courses will eventually avoid those courses. They can also find lectures or classes confusing and consequently stop attending them (Barer-Stein & Draper, 1993). The school environment or classroom can trigger a remembrance of a place where you are not treated with respect or you are a failure. Events that have occurred previously are of interest to the extent that they can modify present conditions. These earlier events are not decisive in themselves but they have left imprints in the current life situation in the shape of attitudes, values and preparedness for action (Bergsten, 1977, p. 125). That remembrance can impact their motivation to seek education in the first place. This is a big obstacle but it can be reduced by making adult learning activities different and enjoyable. A small boost of experiencing success in the early parts of the education can build a positive self-esteem (Knowles, 1970).

Even more importantly, the psychological climate should be one which causes adults to feel accepted, respected, and supported; in which there exists a spirit of mutuality between teachers and students as joint inquirers; in which there is freedom of expression without fear of punishment or ridicule. People tend to feel more "adult" to an atmosphere that is friendly and informal, in which they are known by name and valued as unique individuals, than in the
traditional school atmosphere of formality, semi-anonymity, and status differentiation between teacher and student (Knowles, 1970, p. 47).

It is now clear that it is important for the teachers and schools to understand what obstacles and barriers face adults that are looking to educate themselves and use that knowledge to help people take the step to an educational journey. However at this point it is ideal to look at how these adult students can stay motivated in an educational program like the Preliminary Studies at Keilir.

Motivation is a strong human capability which can be a driving force for students and used for further advantage. Motivation is dependent on each individual, their desire to reach their goals, face challenges and complete tasks. Motivation is an experience that a person only holds for himself and can be attained when combined with will and endurance (Aðalsteinsdóttir. 2013, p. 105). On the other hand, motivation can easily go away as well when people face obstacles they think are impossible to overcome. The power behind motivation surfaces when people find a purpose or a reason to head towards a particular goal or project (Aðalsteinsdóttir. 2013, p 105).

Motivation is a natural capacity of humans in the quest of attaining their goal. We are purposeful. We constantly learn. When we do so, especially at challenging tasks, we are usually motivated to learn. The processes of attention, concentration, effort and imagination are motivational processes necessary for learning and sustained with human energy. These operate in concert and are constant dynamic as we make sense of the world (Galbraith, 2004, p. 142).

Every person has the capacity for motivation. They can vary and are different from person to person. Alan Rogers defined motivation in learning to be that “compulsion which keeps a person within the learning situation and encourages them to learn” (Rogers, 2002, p. 95). It can help people in different situations, but there are also negative aspects of it. People often have big mountains to climb to finish their goals and many give up on their way. To put it into perspective, people seeking education at schools can be motivated and willing to go all the way to the end. But examples like bad grades, failing on tests or bad reviews can take peoples spirit down and it depends on that person and their motivation if they see a purpose to keep going. Ergo it is easy to see how a teachers or schools role is important to understand the core of the motivation and what keeps people’s minds interested and motivated throughout their education (Aðalsteinsdóttir. 2013, p. 107).
School learning community

It is important at this point to try to understand what a school learning community is. What factors lie behind it? Who are the participants? What makes a learning community? Learning can take place anywhere from a classroom to a workplace and people learn in different situations at various places. They use their knowledge to do the things that have to be done. People engage in all kinds of things together and help each other along the way. If problems occur, they will find solutions together, combining their knowledge to get to their goals. When people engage in a process where they share their knowledge and learn from one another they are engaging in a learning community (Marton & Trigwell, 2000). Roland Barth (1990) describes a learning community to be a place where adults are active learners in problems or situations that are very important to them and where everybody is therefore encouraging and influencing everyone else’s learning. Although this brings out the important factor of the school learning community it does not make it clear who are the participants and what makes the community as a whole. Myers and Simpson (1998) address the topic furthermore, they describe learning communities as “cultural settings in which everyone learns, in which every individual is an integral part, and in which every participant is responsible for both the learning and the overall well-being of everyone else” (p.2.). This clearly shows that a learning community has adult learners that participate together and everyone takes part in it. But the definition just mentions adult learners as participants. It is not just the learners that make the school learning communities but other people that contribute can be part of the community. That being said, it is important to look at Speck’s definition of a learning community.

A school learning community is one that promotes and values learning as an ongoing, active collaborative process with dynamic dialogue by teachers, students, staff, principal, parents and the school community to improve the quality of learning and life within the school. Developing schools where every aspect of the community nourishes learning and helping everyone who comes into contact with the school to contribute to that learning community are important concepts (Speck, 1999, p. 8).

A school learning community is not only the adult learners seeking education but also the people that come in touch with the learner’s education. Principal, teachers and other members of the faculty have a big role in a person’s education and it’s intriguing to take a closer look at Keilir’s learning environment.
Keilir´s Learning environment

The term learning environment connotes learning resources and technology, teaching methods, modes of learning and is associated to societal and global contexts (Warger, 2009). The term also includes human behavioural and cultural dimensions, including the vital role of emotion in learning, and it requires people to examine and sometimes rethink the roles of teachers and students because the ways in which they make use of spaces and bring wider societal influences into play animates the educational enterprise (Warger, 2009, p. 3). The learning environment can be for example the physical room students learn in, the social context they take part in or a discussion forum online. However these kinds of environments can be found in many places. What stands out are the ones that make students enjoy the learning and feel comfortable at the same time.

Walberg (1984) points out that sitting in a little classroom on a little desk listening to the teacher talk in front of everybody is not very exciting. People could start to get uncomfortable and lose focus. Under less desirable conditions, people grow resentments and ill will, their productivity decreases, and their alienation prevents their energies from flowing into their work. Further, Osbourne´s research shows that the social environment of the classroom is one of the main psychological determinants of academic learning. Making the environment comfortable for the student should be a priority. However it is a difficult task and there are a few factors that should be considered. Working in an open, flexible learning environment where inquiries are shared, interventions devised collaboratively and reflections based on both self and peer observations, leads to a more robust, continuously improving community of practice (Osbourne, 2013, p. 4). So there are a lot of factors that can effect students in their education. A good learning environment can help students feel comfortable and happy. When people have learned something successfully or understood they are on the right path in an assignment they often feel positive emotions. Barer-Stein & Draper (1993) show that at this time a student should reflect what made him feel this accomplishment, what he learned in the process and try to understand how he wants to learn. Thus the teacher needs to help students recognise their emotions and use it to build an effective learning environment. Teachers have to invent ways to create an open climate where students are not constantly in fear of the learning environment (Barer-Stein & Draper, 1993).
“If a student comes freely, feels free enough to share experience, and believes that that experience is not only welcome but important, then that individual will offer his or her attention, will and imagination to whatever is the developing objective of that particular educational enterprise. That is the essence of adult education”. (Barer-Stein & Draper, 1993, p. 37)

Adults obtain their self-identity from their experience. They explain who they are through their own unique sets of experience. In addition people that have been asked who they are will identify themselves by explaining their profession, where they have travelled and what they have achieved. Basically their own set of experience as human beings. Adults are therefore what they have done, because they identify themselves usually by their experience, they have a strong feeling to its value. So when they see themselves in circumstances where their experience is not being used they feel both rejected as a person and that their experience is not good enough (Knowles, 1970). These experiences can be both positive and negative. Hence peoples experience in adult learning is that people approach any learning situation with a preconceived assumption about what they are about to learn. So every adult learner brings their own ideas towards their education and not with a blank mind (Huddleston & Unwin, 2003).

**Learning cooperatively**

People often don’t realise that student’s teachers, class-mates or learning partners deserve credit for some learning that is achieved. A lot of student’s time is spent in relationships, and they often take that for granted. There is support for the position that learning and learning-directed behaviour is a basic or fundamental human characteristic (Long, 1985). Therefore the learning behaviour of adults could be genetic. Learning, on the other hand is frequently based on some external circumstances or social contexts to which the individual responds (Galbraith, 2004, p. 26 ). Interacting with others and learning by oneself in a rhythmic pulsation is how learning is best achieved (Barer-Stein & Draper, 1993). But meeting people and getting introduced doesn’t necessary happen per se. So often the schools have introductions and group therapy to get the students together. Usually it takes time but after a while students start to trust one and another. When it does and starts to develop, the learners start to discover important things together. Co-learners can encourage and support each other. They often have similar feelings in situations so they feel they are not alone, they can do something about any problem together. Talking together
can help people sort out their emotions and find ways to deal with them. Finding people that think similarly about a certain topic and learn in the same way can be very affirming.

Furthermore, Barer-Stein & Draper (1993) argue that finding someone that can be trusted and respected but think and learn differently can help people alter their perspectives or enlarge their learning style. Together co-learners can help each other find the personal meaning in an idea that at first doesn’t seem to fit. By talking together people sometimes discover what they think and by helping their co-learners understand what they are trying to say could clarify it for themselves. On top of that, co-learners can give each other personal feedback that is either confirming or leads them to explore aspects of their thinking that they have not seen before (Barer-Stein & Draper, 1993. 112).

These learning relationships can clearly make a difference in the learning process for the students. Today, the use of computers have increased communication with other students or teachers. They can talk to a teacher through the touch of a button in seconds and it doesn’t even matter how far away you are. This kind of technology is growing stronger and is very much used in distance learning (Barer-Stein & Draper, 1993).

People have their own image of what they want and hope to be. This image is often the origin of the perception of expectations from others to oneself. These expectations can come from important individuals like family or the school, principal and teachers as well. It becomes an internalised vision of oneself which the person feels it ought to be (Lovell, 1980). It is therefore important that the school and teachers understand that adults rely much on them. Guiding people on the right path and making students understand there are things people can accomplish even though they seem impossible. Adults are often to dependant on teachers and have too much faith in the teachers’ wisdom and to little faith in their own knowledge and experience. Adults often need more guidance and encouragement making decisions regarding their education and learning. Everybody have times they have to be dependant and also independent. “The more of our learning we can take in an interdependent or mutually cooperative way, the more satisfying our learning will be” (Barer-Stein & Draper, 1993, p.111).

It is different to teach adults rather than for example children in terms of their extensive life experiences, communication, relationships, their accountability and their intendment to make choices. To help adults, people cannot ignore any of these factors (Barer-Stein & Draper, 1993). Therefore it is very important for the teacher to be aware of all these factors when teaching
adults. Jarvis (2004) puts forward a view of teachers that teach adults. The teachers not only have to behold the knowledge of the material but have to be able to facilitate the learning for the learner. They have to behold proper attitude and life views and also understand how learning happens and to use appropriate teaching methods for adults. Personal communication between teacher and an adult learner are very important. Furthermore the teacher has to create an environment where the student feels he matters which is as important in the learning process as well. Because at the same time the teacher has to criticise students work and guide them in a friendly and a constructive way.
Theory

These last paragraphs have shown how learning in collaboration with other students and others that impact the learner’s journey can affect the learner’s education and their learning experience. Lave and Wenger (1991) introduced the concept of a community of practice and this theoretical concept will be used to explore the education at Keilir. First it is important to take a look at what a community of practice is and what kind of work takes place inside it.

Communities of practice

When we learn in a community of practice we learn to take part in activities, help each other out, and identify each other’s skills, weaknesses and what is the best way everybody contributes to the process. We evolve our repertoire, learn to understand activities that help the practice, recognize routines and skills and develop them as well making new ones. Finally we learn to understand the enterprise, how it functions, what is there to be done, why it has to be done and understand the responsibility that the members of the group hold to the enterprise (Wenger, 1998). The following chapter will look into these factors and examine how they make a community of practice.

What makes a community of practice?

There are many groups or teams that people could misunderstand to be communities of practice. There are social groups that have some interest in common but do not engage in a shared practice. To explain this better Wenger established three factors that a group has to embrace to be called a community of practice. Those are a joint enterprise, mutual engagement and a shared repertoire (Wenger, 1998).

A joint enterprise is where members of the community have a shared enterprise in common. They understand it and work to renovate it all the time. It is a shared responsibility of the community that helps their practice (Wenger, 1998). Members of the enterprise do not always have to agree, disagreement can be helpful and it can be a big part of their practice (Wenger, 1998). Disagreement can make people think critically, argue to each other and that often leads to better work. Wenger explains a joint enterprise with a good example by comparing it with a musical rhythm. Music is a shared experience. There can be many musicians playing different instruments but the rhythm makes the music shareable and combines the music through the process of playing. Without playing it would be meaningless (Wenger, 1998). So a joint
enterprise combines the community of practice. The enterprise is shared with all the members of the practice, without the members the enterprise would be meaningless.

Mutual engagement is where the members of a group engage in actions and use their knowledge with each other (Wenger, 1998). Interaction is a key for a community of practice to exist. The community is not always at peace as the concept is usually thought of. A group of people working together can always get frustrated and jealous. In some communities the disagreement or harmony can be the thing that makes mutual engagement exist (Wenger, 1998). For example people that are taking part in a discussion can bring different views and arguments to the table irrespective they agree or not. But they can learn from each other through the interaction of the discussion.

A shared repertoire refers to everything the community has developed together or uses to pursue their enterprise. It could be some notes, lectures, different approaches, processes, words. It can literally be anything if it is shared and known in the community and helps it function (Wenger, 1998).

**Participation and reification**

Participation and reification are concepts Wenger introduces and explains how the coalition of the two make up the shared history of learning of a community of practice (Wenger, 1998). It could be argued that participation and reification work together, effect each other and shape each other in moments of negotiation of meaning. But participation and reification exist through different eras of time. For example in a community of practice there was a student who invented a routine of words that describe a certain activity used in the program. This routine is always used to describe that activity. That member graduated the program, but his routine kept helping other members. To summarize, although our participation is no longer at work in the community, our acts can still be used in the practice.

While people engage in a practice they conduce to make the practice exist (Wenger, 1998). When people take part in the process of learning in the community of practice they combine their knowledge and skills. At the same time people are making the community of practice exist. To take a closer look at the process on learning in a practice it is helpful to have the three factors of a community of a practice in mind (Wenger, 1998).

A community of practice is constantly in motion. It is always developing and as Wenger states the learning is at the centre of the practice and the practice would be the history of that
learning (Wenger, 1998). The community evolves all the time and their members with it. So the structure of the learning would be emergent. Therefore adaptability is a concept Wenger introduced to be a key factor for learning to take place (Wenger, 1998). The practice is never constant, it’s always in motion. Sometimes it is a good thing and sometimes it is not. For instance a disorder in the practice can help it get better. As Wenger states when we learn together in a community, order and chaos are always nearby (Wenger, 1998). The practice is never constant and it is crucial for members to adapt so learning can take place.

To summarise, there have to be three factors so a group can be called a community of practice. Firstly a joint enterprise is for example a program that students are participating in together at a school. It is an enterprise they have in common, that helps their own learning and is a shared experience of the learners. Secondly mutual engagement is where people of the community of practice interact together and use their experiences and skills to help each other attain their goals. Lastly a shared repertoire refers to everything the community has developed together or uses to pursue their enterprise. For example writings, notes, books and comments. These factors are all related to a social community where the learning is in the centre of the practice. The community is always developing and the members with it.
Method

Qualitative approach

The aim of this research is to examine how the individuals needs and life experience is utilised through the learning process in the learning environment of the Preliminary Studies program. In order to do so, the students experience of the learning environment was studied by discussing important factors like role of the teachers, learning methods, motivation and structure of the program. Based on the aims this thesis has a qualitative research approach and the choice of method fell on semi-structured interviews. Interviewer can depart from schedules or guides that are being used whenever it seems appropriate (Bryman, 2004). The interviewer can use follow-up questions to open the discussion and bring fresh ideas to the topic at hand. In context it was therefore perfect to use semi-structured interviews, which can provide insights on how research participants view the world and how they experience it (Bryman, 2012).

A semi-structured interview comes close to an everyday conversation, but as a professional interview it has a purpose and involves a specific approach and technique. Semi structured means that the interview is neither an open everyday conversation nor a closed questionnaire (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015, p. 31). The researcher has a list of questions or specific topic that has to be covered, often called an interview guide (see Appendix 1a and 1b). But the participant has a great leeway in how to reply. The researcher can also ask questions that are not in the guide if he works out different questions or thoughts through the interview (Bryman, 2012). Therefore the researcher can have control over the discussion by using follow-up questions to open it up or use the interview guide to keep the interviewee on topic. The interview is usually transcribed, the recordings and text constitute the information that is analysed further for the research (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015).

The questions in the interview-guide were constructed in order to represent the aims of the thesis. The aims are threefold. Firstly the interviewer is asking about the life experience of the students to find out what they have experienced in life and why they are seeking education. Furthermore, why they chose this particular education over any other education or college. These questions would hopefully show why the needs and life experience of the students are important factors in an educational program like the Preliminary Studies. The next set of questions would examine the learning environment of the program, how it is structured and if the structure meets the needs of the adult learners. The last set of questions examines the motivation of the students
and what factors helped them on their way. This would hopefully show how the program helps people keep motivated and what kind of motivation adult students need when they are taking part in an education like this one.

**Data collection**

Five participants were interviewed and three of them had finished the program while the other two were still participating in it at the time of the study. The interviewer was in contact with an employee at Keilir and these individuals were contacted through him. There were no requirements of age or gender. The only criteria for who would be chosen was not to have too many people from the same time period. The employee was informed that the goal was to get interviewers randomly. Making it random would hopefully show how people experienced the same factors from different perspectives. Bringing out the important factors of the program but through different experiences or perspectives. Interviewing students that had finished and also some that were still participating could give a different perspective of the program, it’s learning environment, teaching methods and structure. Because the program is not a long one, the decision was made to have only two people that are participating in the program. These two people are participating at the same time and having more people from this program could bring similar results between interviewees. Furthermore having three participants that have finished the program could give a range of experiences from different time periods of the program. And hopefully the information could show how the program has changed.

The interviews were all about 30 minutes long and they were taped with the consent of the interviewee. The location of the interviews varied, three of them were taped in closed offices that provided a nice and quiet atmosphere. The other two were in a cafe, where there was enough privacy from other people. Although it would have been best to have all of the interviews in closed offices, it is the interviewers belief that the location did not affect the results of the interviews.

Each interview began with some informal chatting before an introduction from the interviewer. The process of the interview was discussed before the interviewee was asked for his approval of taping the discussion. The interview was carried out with formal open-ended questions and at some points some follow-up questions were needed. The interviews went well
in general. All of the interviews were recorded and later transcribed for further analysis on the discussions.

Analysis
The data gained from the interviews was analyzed with the use of thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a method used in researches when the researcher examines the data to extract core themes that could be distinguished both between and within transcripts (Bryman, 2012). In the beginning of the process the data was examined and then reexamined with the objective of finding themes. When searching for themes Ryan and Bernard (2003) recommended looking for repetitions, some topics that occur often and similarities and differences, how interviewers would discuss topics in different ways. Although repetition is probably the most common method of finding themes, it has to be considered with the aims of the research. The data has to be relevant to the questions and focus of the research. Although some topics or information appear often they have to be relevant to the research itself (Bryman, 2012). After examining the data for themes the quotes that were relevant to the focus of the research were written up. These quotes showed variations of the themes associated with the research. Qualitative data analysis makes the researcher examine and reinterpret the data over the research process. This can help the researcher find themes and patterns in the data that he can use to compare to his theory and concepts.

Ethical considerations
The confidentiality of the participants was kept according to Bryman’s (2008, p. 124.) definition that “the anonymity and privacy of those who participate in the research process should be respected. Personal information concerning research participants should be kept confidential”. All of the participants were informed of the purpose of this research and everybody gave their consent of participating in the interview process. They also authorized to be recorded in the process as well. Before the interview started all of the participants were informed they could refuse to answer any question and could stop at any time. In order to Bryman’s confidentiality rules, all participants in the study were given fictional names in the thesis.

The anonymity in this thesis is crucial for the participants. The information about the participants has to be written thoroughly, because there is always a chance people can recognize the participants through the interviews. Iceland is a small country and the chances of people
recognizing the participants are likely if the information is not used with care. “If a study will publish information that is potentially recognizable to others, the participants should agree to the release of identifiable information” (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015, p. 94). Furthermore the school is young and the people that are or have participated could recognize the participants as well. It was my will to uphold the anonymity and confidentiality in this thesis but nonetheless I could not guarantee it.
Findings

At this point it is important to take a closer look at the participants. There were five people, four women and one man. The people’s age varied as Sandra the youngest was around 30 years old and Tom being the oldest closer to 50 years old. Jane, Lisa and Maria were closer to 40 years old. All of the people had some experience from former education although it had been longer since Tom, Lisa and Maria had participated in an education. Sandra and Jane had both tried different forms of education at this level but dropped out for different reasons.

All the interviewees have different experiences from their education at Keilir, but there are also many similarities. The analysis yielded themes that brought up the important factors of the interviews. First of all the theme going back to school presents information the participants expressed about their experience, how they wanted to take control of their lives and the support they got at the time. The next theme is Adult learners which shows how the program is structured and why the structure is important for adult students. Furthermore it examines how the participants experienced themselves of being responsible for their own learning. The third theme is Mutual learning which shows how Keilir helped people make learning relationships and the importance of those relationships through the program. The next theme is The Educators where the participants expressed the importance of the approaches the educators showed and what kind of role the people at Keilir played in the education of the participants. The next theme Beyond the program examines how the program prepared the participants for higher education and how they kept motivated through the process. In the last theme The Unity, the participants expressed what they thought was most valuable in the program.

Going back to school

All of the individuals decided to embark on the journey of the Preliminary Studies program. When people make these decisions there are always different things that affect them like the participants describe. But they all have it in common wanting to change their lives and educate themselves for their future.

Taking control

All of the interviews show how Keilir is a place that puts effort into helping adults take control of their education and reach their goals. Both Jane and Sandra saw an opportunity at Keilir because they didn´t want to go back to college. Sandra mentioned
Keilir is a very good option for adults to take the step and start their education. Colleges are not very exciting for adults, sitting in classrooms with younger people that often don´t have the interest to learn.

Keilir was an opportunity for Jane to enrol in an education that she could not find in college. She looked at the option to try distance learning but it is not possible with a house full of children and a husband. Her friend had finished the Preliminary Studies program at Keilir two years before. Her friend had been working in a kindergarten like she was and told her that being a unqualified worker brings even less pay than having a student loan. She decided to enrol after 11 years of thinking about it. It was a very big step to go back to school but she does not regret it. But she mentioned that people at Keilir showed her understanding, she had a big home and it was going to be hard.

*Structured for adult needs*

Tom said that

> Keilir is a very good place for people that don´t have the motivation or ability to learn in a college. There are older people there that see this as a second chance to learn but aren´t in a situation to go to a college for a longer time.

There were many younger people that came to him for help because of his life-experience. It is a good thing to have this kind of life-experience and people and teachers at Keilir understand that. Furthermore Lisa said this program was also shorter than the colleges which helped as well with the decision to enrol.

> The program was definitely structured for adults and I could feel it. There were always discussions going on and everything was just very personal. It is much more tactical approach than we find in colleges.

It looks like the learning environment at Keilir is structured for the needs of adults. Furthermore the interviews seem to be more comfortable in this kind of learning environment where they feel supported.

*The support*
Right away Sandra felt welcome and saw that people wanted to help. She got a student loan and her baby got a place in a kindergarten that was just next to her apartment.

Keilir helps people get apartments to rent, kindergarten for their children and pretty much try to help you with whatever you need to feel comfortable.

Tom had thought about it for a long time to go and educate himself. But he did not want to spend three years in a college. His wife supported him and pushed him forward to go and take part in the program at Keilir.

It was a very big ordeal for a man at my age to educate himself because there had been such a long time since I was in school. There were times I wanted to quit and found some things to difficult but the solidarity was so strong that people just stood side by side and didn’t allow anybody in the group to quit.

There are 24 years since Maria quit college and started working. She had been thinking of educating herself for a long time but never took the step. She talked to a social worker and looked at the program with social workers help. It was going to be hard because she had 2 daughters, one 12 and another one 17 years old. If she would go to a college she could be at the same school as her daughter.

The funny part is though that my daughter was sometimes learning the same material and often got to use my lectures and chose them rather than the material from her college.

After the talk with the social worker she decided to enrol and got a phone call from the principal that she felt was very nice and welcoming.

*Learning could be done anywhere*

All of the participants talked about learning together while at the facilities of Keilir. It gave them the opportunity to finish their schools work at Keilir and often did not need to learn anything at home. Working together helped them a lot and people supported each other. Although in the flip classroom students always had the opportunity to get the lectures to their computer and be prepared before the class. As adults with many other important things in their lives, being able to schedule their time and learn everywhere
gave them the leeway they needed to be able to finish their learning and doing every other thing adults do. For example Jane talked about the time her son got sick for three weeks.

During those weeks the teachers gave me the opportunity to submit assignments later and were just very helpful. I stayed at home and when my son was sleeping I got the opportunity to learn and I did. When my son was at the hospital I took my tablet with me and listened to lectures at the waiting room. Because of this and the chances the teachers gave me, I did not fall far behind and quickly came back after my son’s recovery.

It would seem that understanding the different contexts of adult students and creating leeway for them helps showing the students understanding of their situation and therefore they feel more comfortable and happy in their education.

**Learning as adults**

The findings show that the participants felt their needs as adult learners were being met in the program. The structure of the program helped the students take responsibility and feel comfortable in their own education and working in the way Keilir structured the program.

*The structure of the program*

As already mentioned before, teaching adults is not the same as teaching children and adolescents. Adults have different needs, their confidence is often not high and they often fear going back to school after a long time. Therefore the structure of the education can be a big factor on the adult learner. Maria mentioned how the program is specifically organised for adults and people which have a hard time learning in those usual learning environments that can be found in almost every college. She thinks the flip classroom is what makes the difference.

The flip classroom is very convenient for adult learners. You have time before classes to prepare yourself and look at the lectures. It’s a method that is reversed from the normal lectures we know so well. In a flip classroom you get the lectures beforehand in your computer. The lectures are not very long, usually about 15-20 minutes but sometimes longer if the teacher is talking a little too much. It happened a few times but we just talked to the teacher and he changed it right
away. The lectures go on the internet about 4 or 5 days before the class so you have plenty of time to prepare yourself and watch it. You can also watch it as often as you want and pause it if it is going too fast for you. Teachers expect you come prepared to class and there students get assignments, discuss in groups or have the opportunity to talk to the teacher about what they think of the lecture.

Lisa and Tom were part of the first group that graduated from the program. Lisa said;

The flip-classroom approach had not started so there were lectures people had to attend to and then some discussion classes were people had to work on assignments, almost always together. The program was structured with group work as a main goal both in classes and outside. The school wanted students to attend classes and learn at the schools accommodation. This helped people get closer and work together.

It looks like the structure of the program is built with the needs of adults in mind. In the beginning the program emphasized on group work and discussions. Later Keilir introduced the flip-classroom that seems to be working well for adult students.

*Taking responsibility*

Taking part in an education like the Preliminary Studies program is not an easy task and people really have to focus and concentrate throughout the course to be on top of the material. Although people get much needed support as mentioned above. They also need to take responsibility and show they are ready to learn. Tom had big expectations when he started but he knew it would be difficult. It surprised him even how difficult it was, with no room for tarrying, people just needed to focus and always be on top of their game. Some people didn´t realise that and dropped out.

The program is structured for you to take matters in your own hands. You have to be organised, listen to lectures and be prepared when you participate in classes. It sounds very overwhelming and it can be hard, but the support is very good both from your fellow students and staff at Keilir and that’s exactly what adults need to keep on going when things start to get hard.
In college Sandra was struggling to learn and those difficulties led to her eventually dropping out. After her time at Keilir the struggle changed, she realized she was understanding how to learn and she felt more prepared for higher education.

In college and at the start of the program I just wrote down what I thought was the most important into my notes, but now I know exactly how I should approach higher education.

Like Maria, Jane thinks the flip classroom is a very good option for adults. To have the lectures in front of you and being able to stop them, take notes and listen at your own pace is way better than having the teacher lecturing you and not being able to stay focused all the time.

The program offers a lot of material and it is not easy. But you learn to pick up the most important things and see what material is less valuable. It is just a very good preparation for higher education. You have to organise your timeframe and often put everything else on the side.

Making students feel responsible and help them at the same time is clearly an important factor for adult learners. It looks like people at Keilir do so by influencing their students to work together and therefore take responsibility and help each other out at the same time.

**Mutual learning**

Working through communication and interaction with others can as the research has argued help adult learners in their educational journey. Working together can bring different perspectives and views on the material and people can support each other along the way.

**Learning relationships**

Tom mentions how the school tried to help them make groups and work together.

The accommodations weren´t the best and the work started just in a small church. But it just brought the group closer together and you get introduced to people that will be friends with you for life. The staff pushed people a little to work together, there were many assignments with group work and that helped me a lot. If I was not sure about something there was someone else that could help or explain it to
me. For example I often worked with one woman, we helped each other out and after we finished the program we enrolled in the University of Iceland and finished our teacher’s education together. Our partnership helped me very much and shows how much working together can help people at what they are trying to accomplish.

It seems to help adults to work in cooperation with each other. Furthermore it looks like the interviewees were influenced to work together.

Organizing their time together

Adults often have many things to think about other than the education so it can be very important to organize their time right and in this case Keilir influenced the students to learn in the school like it was a normal work day. Maria talked about the school helping them to work in groups.

This is no magic school, it is very hard and you have to keep focus all of the time. But people there are making it as easy for you as they can. For example we were influenced by the staff to be at the accommodation like we were at work from 9 in the morning until 4 in the afternoon. Because if people go to class and back home they start washing clothes and do the chores that have to be done at home. But if we stayed there learning we would just come home at 4 and do what had to be done then. And staying there learning influenced students to work in groups and pairs. That was very helpful for me.

Jane was also always at the accommodation from 9 in the morning until 4 in the afternoon and after that she did not look into a book.

It was almost like a normal work day. The group met and studied together the whole day and after it everybody went back to their homes.

Supporting each other

As already mentioned, in the thesis adult students need to feel comfortable and get the support they need to take part in an educational program like the Preliminary Studis. At the start of the school year the students took part in some group therapy. After the group therapy Sandra and some other students started to meet up and learn together. There were times that she struggled
but having different views and perspectives in the group helped her and she is very grateful for her fellow students.

In the program you have to be on top of your game, take part in discussions and submit every assignment. And it can be really hard, especially for people that have not done assignments and been a part of any education for many years. But the approach of the staff and teachers are very good and helpful and if you are thinking about stopping or quitting they are there to help you and motivate you to finish. It is also very good to be a part of a group like I was, everybody there wanted to learn and finish their education. And if somebody had some trouble, people were behind their back and everybody wanted to help.

Jane also talked about working in groups and meeting outside the classroom to study.

Nobody told people they had to be at the facilities but the group was there to help each other out. The group started right in the beginning with three persons when we did a very creative assignment together. There after we just always met and studied together. Further long other people started joining and in the end we all just met at Keilir and studied together.

Maria also talked about people that are not ready to put all the effort necessary to the program.

The structure is very good for people that are conscientious and learn the way the program is built. But there are always people that want to go the easy way and this structure is no exception from that. But they are of course just making things worse for themselves. And at one point I asked a teacher if I could switch groups because I had experience of a person in my group that did not participate in the group work. And it was no problem just switching me to another group.

Taking part in an educational program can be very difficult like the interviewees have mentioned. Therefore it looks to be a very important factor for the people working with adult students to support them and be ready to help in every way possible.
The Educators

The role of the teachers and their approach to the students has a big impact on the adult learner. The findings show that most of the teachers and people at Keilir are well aware of the different needs adult learners have. The personal approach and communication with the teachers are clearly important factors for the students.

Personal approach

The teachers are responsible to help adult learners feel comfortable and help them on their journey. Teachers are different like every other people so of course there will be different approach from each of them. But like the research has shown, adults need to feel comfortable and understand they have the support they need to educate themselves. Therefore the teachers approach can be a big factor for the adult student. The interviewees talked about both the teachers and staff at Keilir and how everybody tried to make the learning environment the most comfortable for the learner.

Sandra said that her teachers were very helpful. Of course they were different from each other and some better than others, but they all wanted to help.

The teachers are also very different from those that teach in colleges. The atmosphere is different, you feel you are just one student of many that are participating in a college. But at Keilir the teachers want you to succeed on your own but are always ready to help if you need. The teachers approach is just much different and is very important in adult education.

Furthermore Lisa said that the most valuable thing in the program were the people.

The support both from the students and the teachers is very good. Everybody were helping each other out and when people broke down everybody was willing to help, not just the social workers but the students and teachers as well.

It looks like most of the teachers that the interviewees interacted with were well aware of the support the adult students need. It would be interesting to know how the teachers were able to support their students in this way.

Feeling equal
Like Maria mentioned before the learning environment at Keilir is different from the usual learning environment in colleges, but where does the difference lie? Adults that have a lot of life experience and in some cases are older than the teacher can feel uncomfortable in these situations where the teacher puts himself in a dominant position. Maria felt the personal approach from the teachers is exactly what adult learners need.

The teachers do not look down on students or put themselves on a higher place than them like we often see in colleges and universities as well. They talked to students as they were equal and not always showing their power in the classroom.

Tom thinks that the unity at Keilir is the most valuable in the program.

Teachers, social workers and others really want you to succeed and it is exactly what adults like me need when we are educating ourselves.

For example he talked about the principal, he came sometimes to the group and just chatted with them. Just asked how they were doing and wondered if everything was alright. It showed people that they were appreciated and the school was there to help them.

The communication

It is important for teachers to communicate with their students like the interviews seem to indicate that adults often rely a lot on the teachers. So it is important for the teachers to be available for the students when they need them. Maria talked about the importance of communicating with the teachers and how they approach the students.

The teachers often use social sites like Facebook and Twitter, posting pictures and videos of what is on the agenda or just to discuss with the students. It makes you feel better when you are very insecure.

For her the approach of the teachers is very important. For example When Maria was in college 24 years ago she was afraid of learning Danish and at Keilir she felt the same in the beginning. The teacher told her he was working always until 4 in the afternoon and she could come and talk to him whenever she liked. They got the lectures online and worked in groups in classes. In the end she got a very good grade, her confidence grew and she finished the program. To have full
access to a teacher who’s ready to help whenever the student wants is important for an adult”. Lisa had a nice story of a teacher that helped her.

I had always found math to be very hard. I failed the first test in math and was of course devastated because I had studied so much for the test. The teacher talked to me straight after the test and told me I should take the test again. It was not the same test but different on the same material. I ended up finishing the course with a good grade and my confidence grew. The best thing was that the teacher was almost more happy and proud than I was. This had a big impact on me and could maybe had an effect on my decision to be a teacher.

Jane talks about being capable of talking to their teachers when they need help.

Being able to talk to them whenever you want basically is really helpful.

For example she was writing an assignment in social studies but went to the teacher who was teaching Icelandic and asked for help. It was no problem and the teachers helped her as it was his assignment. Another time she was in a Facebook group and there students would discuss things and the teachers would answer questions if something was troubling them, did not matter if it was in the morning or afternoon, they just responded when they could.

**Challenging ways of learning**

It is important for the teachers to find new and different ways to help the students understand and use the material. People are often put out of their comfort zone in the beginning of the program to get acquainted through group therapy. But challenging students to use creative ways in their education and pushing them to do things they don’t feel comfortable doing can help with the communication and trust between students and teachers. Jane also talks about how the teachers approach the material.

They often go out of the box, making assignments where students have to make videos or plays. They push you to go out of your comfort zone and think outside the box, just like they are doing as well. You are doing things like performing a speech in front of the class. Usually people are afraid but you feel comfortable
with your group and in the environment of the teacher and you just do it and have fun.

Of course there were times she thought the methods weren’t the best. For example:

One teacher told us in the beginning of the course that we would have to submit 7 assignments before the course was finished. We could decide when we would submit them but these were the only instructions. There were many people that didn’t submit the assignments until in the end. But after thinking about it I thought that this could be a way the teacher was letting the students organize themselves and take their own responsibility. People can look at it that way, the teachers were helping the students prepare themselves for higher education where you have to organise yourself and be very responsible.

It looks like the role of the teacher is a very important factor for adult students in their education. Making students feel comfortable, supporting them during difficult times and finding different ways for them to learn are just an example of what the teacher has to be able to do for his students.

**Beyond the program**

The findings show that the participants had different incentives to seek further education. When the individuals talked about further education, different aspects become viable in how they interpret their future, own responsibility and view on further learning.

*Preparing for higher education*

It was interesting to see what motivated these individuals to seek further education. Every interviewee talked about higher education and those that have finished all went to a University or another educational program. Lisa went to a University to get her degree.

I felt the program was also focused to prepare you for higher education. You are not just finishing your credits like in so many colleges. You are being prepared for further education and people that work there know what they are doing and understand what you need as an adult learner.
Maria said the program pushed students to take control of their lives and be independent. Now she’s ready for more education because she has learnt to learn. No longer is she afraid of a higher education and has decided to learn to be a social worker after she finishes the program. Jane is also going to a university after she finishes, and that was her plan all along. She is going to get her pre-school education when she finishes the program.

*Keeping motivated*

The support both from Maria’s family and the people at Keilir helped her being motivated throughout the program.

When people appreciate your work and really show it to you, it’s the best motivation you get as an adult learner.

Sandra was always determined to finish upper secondary education in order to go to some higher education, which kept her motivated throughout the program.

I decided I wanted to learn nursing. It was a problem because I was the first from Keilir to go that way and the nursing school told me I did not have enough education behind me to enrol. Keilir helped me to show the school that I had finished some credits in college some years before and in the end I enrolled into nursing. It was very nice from the staff to help me and I am very grateful today.

When Tom was younger he was told that he would just be a normal worker and people did not think he could go and have a career or be educated. When he got older those words kept coming back to him and he wanted to show that they were wrong.

It was a very personal victory for me to finish a university education at the age of 49. The program did a very good job preparing me for higher education and for my occupation as a congressman today. I got more open-minded and humble.

The interviewees were in agreement that the program prepared them for a higher education. All of the participants either finished a University education or are going to take part in one when they are finished. Hence it looks like the program is doing what is necessary to prepare adults for higher education.
The Unity

The findings show that after being asked about the most valuable things that stood out of the program, the interviewers all talked about the unity, how the support of the people and standing together helped them along the way and kept them motivated. As adults people clearly need to work together and the findings show that is essential for adult students in their education.

Sandra, Tom and Lisa have all gone their separate ways with the knowledge and experience they acquired throughout their stay at Keilir. Maria and Jane both are motivated to finish and go further to educate themselves. All these people have gained important experiences from the program and in the interviews they mentioned what they felt was the most valuable thing through their time at Keilir. What stands out of their interviews is the approach and support people at Keilir show students. Jane talked about the social workers and how they help students keep focused.

What strikes me as the most valuable thing over the course of the program are the social workers. Students can always go and talk to them and if you are feeling down they help you straight away and bring your confident up. Although you are about to quit, they always find answers and push you through it. You learn to learn but keeping yourself focused is very difficult and the staff at Keilir make sure you get the help you need. I would like to take my social worker with me when I go to a university after I finish.

Maria mentioned the people that work at Keilir, teachers, social workers and even the principal know there are going to be hard times for people and they asked them to come see them right away when they felt giving up or were in a bad place.

They were really looking out for us and wanted to help us. The importance for a school like this is to give people that are afraid to study, have trouble with learning or have any other reasons the opportunity to feel comfortable as they decide what they want to do with their life. It is not just an institute but a home.

Sandra talked about the people as well.
The community at Keilir is like home for many people, they feel welcome everywhere and people are just very humble”. That is something that I have not experienced at any college or other school.

After Tom enrolled there was like a different world opened up to him.

I got more humble and respectful and I listen to other people’s views, something I was not good at before. That is very important at my job as a congressman today. I feel I want to build a good community and environment, just like Keilir is for example. Keilir was just a godsend for me.

Lisa talked about how Keilir is an opportunity for people that have a hard time studying. There are many people that have dropped out of their education for different reasons. Keilir looks to be a very good place for persons that want to educate themselves. Furthermore she said people have to be prepared to take the step and organise themselves to learn because it can be hard. But if people decide to take the step, it looks like everybody at Keilir are willing to support them and help them along their way.
Discussion

After working through themes in the data it is noticeable that Keilir is clearly trying to meet the needs of their adult students. It is important to look at the aims of the research before going any further. The aim of this research was to examine how the individual’s needs and life experience are utilised through the learning process in the learning environment in the Preliminary Studies program. The research focused on how the students experienced the learning environment Keilir created for them and how it met their needs as adult students.

All of the people that participated in the interviews had different experiences of learning before they enrolled in this program, but had it in common to take the step of going back to school. They all had the experience of college and had their own reasons why they did not want to participate in a college education. Compared to the ways Ceryl O. Houle (1961) put forward the participants all had similar goals on why they were seeking adult education. They were seeking the education and the social company that followed. But looking at the ideas Morstain and Smart (1974) presented the results can be categorised in a more effective way. For example the results show that professional improvement was the major incentive for enrolling in Keilir. Furthermore not wanting to participate in a longer college education and being there with younger students is also presented in the results.

All of the participants talked about the institution of Keilir helping them understand what they had to do and that they were capable of doing it. It is essential for adults to get as much support as they can in their own education. The learning environment has to make the learners feel comfortable. Osborne (2013) argued where the learning environment is open, flexible and gives the learners opportunities to share experiences and work collaboratively, will lead to a more improving community of practice. The students at Keilir have the opportunity to study the material and watch the lectures at home. The results show that the structure of the program is fitted for adult learners. They get to work in classes with the teachers around to guide and help them. Exemplifying Lave & Wenger (1991) the students would here be newcomers to the community and they are learning from the old timer who is the teacher. The newcomers get to participate in assignments or projects in the community with the guidance of the old timers. Having guidance is essential for newcomers to join the community and feel comfortable. The flip classroom clearly helped the participants, where they were able to learn at their own pace and feel comfortable. More so the ready access to the teachers is very important and how the teachers
approach the students. Communicating through social sites or just dropping by could make adults students feel they are equal to the teachers. Like Wenger (1998) argues that communication is essential for a community of practice to exist. People interact together, learn from one another and experience different views and methods from communicating with others. Therefore the personal approach and the communication with the teachers are definitely one of the most important factors of how Keilir meets the needs of their adult students. Like Barer-Stein & Draper (1993) wrote on how adults rely on their teachers to help and guide them in their education. Students can do things that they do not think they can do and the teachers have the opportunity to help them realise that. In any education students have responsible for their own learning. It is clear that adults have to be determined and organised to learn in an educational program, especially in a higher education. This is clearly represented in the results but at the same time in this program students can feel the support and unity from the people at Keilir. Furthermore the personal approach and the learning environment look to be what students in the program are satisfied with and are clearly meant to help adult learners.

Motivation is an essential factor in adult learning. Motivation is a compulsion which keeps a person within the learning situation and encourages them to learn (Rogers, 2002). It can go easily when people meet obstacles they think they cannot overcome. All of the participants had different motivations going into and during the program. The findings show that the participants had similar barriers before enrolling in the program. All three headings of Cross´s (1981) classified obstacles can be found in the interviews. Most of the participants related to situational barriers where they talked about lack of time or home responsibilities. As for institutional barriers the example of Maria´s speculations of having to move her family away from their home can be categorised as an institutional barrier. Sandra as well had to move her child to a different kindergarten. As for dispositional barriers most of the participants mentioned their age and the long educational absence being obstacles going back to school. On top of that sitting in college with much younger students was not interesting. It looks that although these people faced these obstacles in the beginning, they took the decision to enrol with the help of people at Keilir. Regarding the situational barriers the students organising their own time with the flip classroom helped with the home responsibilities and busy time schedule. For the institutional barriers Maria got a house at the facilities of Keilir and Sandra got a place for her child at a Kindergarten at the area of Keilir. Finally the dispositional barriers people faced were
met with understanding and support of the staff at Keilir. People were informed in the beginning they were not the only ones going back after a long time. With that being said, it seems like the people at Keilir are well aware of what adults require to go back to school.

But as already mentioned the teachers and staff at the school have an important role to help the students being motivated, especially at hard times. Looking at the results majority of the participants talked about hard times and how the support and unity at Keilir kept them motivated to finish the program. Therefore it is clear that teachers and staff can be important factors for adult students to keep motivated in their education. Furthermore the results show that keeping motivated in this program helped the participants prepare for further education. They are responsible for their learning, have to work creatively and keep themselves motivated through difficult times.

At this point, the discussion above does show similarities that support how adult students needs can be met in an educational program. Support and unity are the concepts that stand up. All of the participants talked about how Keilir made effort to help them work in association with other students. It is not easy making relationships with people and gaining their trust but it is essential and it can take time. The results show that Keilir helps students in the beginning of the program to get introduced through group therapy in the first week. The social workers made it clear for the students that there are other people in that same room that feel exactly like you feel. Seeing someone in the same situation can definitely help people and encourage them to interact with others. It is important to look at the technological aspect of Keilir. Much of the learning takes place online and over the computer. It can feel more personal than anything else, communicating with people at their home where they feel comfortable. The results show that Keilir clearly makes an effort to help students create learning communities. Furthermore the results show that students at Keilir do participate in a community of practice. Let’s review the three factors who are essential in making a community of practice. In line with Wenger (1998) it is possible to argue for a joint enterprise in the program. In this case the program could be the enterprise and all of the participants, students and teachers with the same goal in mind. They take part in the journey of the program together and want the students to succeed. The participants talked about the support and help they got to stay motivated. People were working together along the way to reach their goal which ties in the next factor of a community of practice, mutual engagement. People in the community interact together and through their interaction the
community’s culture emerges. In Keilir’s case all of the people that are taking part in the program interact through discussions and assignments either at the schools facility or over the computer. The participants talked about the personal approaches of the teachers, communication through social sites and most importantly the influence from Keilir to let the students work together. There is clearly mutual engagement between the students but also the teachers and people at Keilir (Wenger, 1998). It is important to note here that participation is an essential factor in mutual engagement. People have to participate in the work and collaborate in the things the community is doing for it to work. Lastly there has to be a shared repertoire (Wenger, 1998), where in this case everybody of the community take part in the program, share notes, lectures and discussions that are related to their community. As argued above, the students were influenced to work together and through that work the participants talked about learning from and with other students, communicating in classes and discussing the material. Furthermore the structure of the program is organised so that participation of the students is in balance with the reification. The students are influenced to communicate with each other and work together. But they also have to follow the curriculum and lesson plans for every course. Therefore it is quite clear that students and people that are associated with the Preliminary Studies program at Keilir are in fact a community of practice. The results show that Keilir is a community that makes an effort to create a learning environment that is fitting for adult students. The results show how all of the participants emphasised the interaction with other students and how it helped them along the way. Therefore it looks like learning in a community of practice is an essential option for adult students seeking higher education.

To summarise, it can be clearly seen in the findings that the Preliminary Studies program is offering an elaborated education that is clearly focusing on novel teaching methods. The education that is taking place is centred upon adults and their needs. Therefore adults that are seeking education at this level find this program satisfying. Furthermore, students need the access and guidance of the teachers, they need different approach to the material that allows them to learn at the speed they feel most comfortable. Students need motivation to keep them going and sometimes help to stay motivated, working in a group is significant for them both to build up learning relationship and to grow their confidence. But most importantly, students must feel welcome and comfortable. Creating a community of practice like the one Keilir has made is essential for the needs of adult students.
Conclusion

The aim of this research was to find out if the Preliminary Studies program at Keilir meets the needs and life experiences of adult students. In order to achieve these goals, this study looked into the educational journey of 5 people that took part in the program. The research examined how the students experienced the program's structure, what kept them motivated throughout their time in the program and how they felt their needs and life experiences as adults were being met.

The key conclusions are that adults can be very vulnerable coming back to school and are understandably afraid. It is important to address this problem from the beginning and make students feel welcome from day one and throughout their educational journey. The learning environment in the program looks to be very fitting for adults and the participants clearly felt comfortable studying there. The students are given the chance to work at their own speed. The flip classroom seems to be working very well and is therefore very fitting for adult students. They get the lectures sent days before class and can study at their own pace in a comfortable environment. Furthermore through the interviews it can be shown that teachers and staff have to realise how and when their adult students need to stay motivated. It is important for adults to realise they can accomplish things they think are unachievable.

The results show that it is important for students to get to know each other and the school should encourage them to work together. This helped the participants organise their learning and work together, where they all felt comfortable being in a learning community like the one in the program. Working in a community is a strong tool to help people learn and experience the education through different views.

A picture has started to unfold, where Keilir looks to be an organization genuinely trying to create a very good environment for adults seeking education. It seems to be working well as the students are happy with the program itself as well with the teachers’ contribution to their education.

The character of the organization can be described as a big family, where students feel unity and care both from educators and fellow scholars. Everybody makes an effort to meet the needs of each individual student in order to achieve optimal educational experience.
Implications for further research

This research interviewed five students that participated in the Preliminary Studies program at Keilir. Despite the few participants I got a valuable data that clearly helped me understand the learning environment at Keilir and how it meets the needs of adult students. Furthermore interviewing people that took part in the distance learning could show different aspects of the program when learning through the Internet. That ultimately raises the question whether a student working in a community of practice through the Internet could be as effective as traditional learning.

It could have been interesting to try to look up students that have dropped out of the program and examine in a critical way the reasons they quit. This could have brought a different view to the research and the research would have shown the cohort who would be the whole school, not just the people that graduated or are participating. Furthermore examining the reason why students dropped out of college could correspondingly reveal why Keilir is more convenient for the participants.

As this research argued it is important to emphasize the role of the teacher in the educational journey which adult students are participating in. The teachers communicate mostly with the students where they have to meet the needs and life experiences of the students. As a result, interviewing the teachers in the Preliminary Studies program at Keilir could give some different views and additional information on the context at hand.
References


Appendix 1 A

Interview guide

(People that have finished)

- Introduction to the research.
- You have graduated from the program, can you start by telling me about your time there?
- At the point when you enrolled in the program, did you have any other experience from another school or education? (Expand…was it different than the program and how?)
- Please tell me what was going on in your life before your time at Keilir and why you chose to enrol there. (Be ready to expand why you chose it instead of anything else)
- If you think back to when you started, how did you experience the program? Was it different from what you thought at the time? (Expand, in what way?)
- I am very interested to know how the program was structured, could you tell me your experience of the structure?
- Now when you look back over the program, what do you think was most valuable during that time? (Be ready to expand, people, teachers, teaching methods)
- Can you find anything less valuable that could be better?? (What could be done to prevent them or adjust them?)
- When taking part in an education like this one, people often find different things that motivate them. Can you recall something that motivated you throughout the program? (People like friends or family)
- Did the program prepare you for what you are or have been doing up to this day? (Be ready to expand, how or why?)
- What do you think is the importance of a program like the Preliminary Studies at Keilir? (Be ready to expand on this)
- Would you recommend the program to people that are seeking education at this stage?
- Is there something else that you would like to add to the discussion so far?

  o Follow up questions
  - What do you mean by that? Yes?
  - Could you elaborate more on that?
  - You said earlier that you prefer… Could you say what kinds of things exactly?
  - What did you do then? What effect did that have on you?
  - What do most people think of …. Is that the way you feel to?
  - Do you mean that….? Can we say than that you feel this way or that way?
Appendix 1 B

Interview guide

(People that are participating)

- Introduction to the research.
- Now that you have been a part of the program for some time, can you start by telling me about it?
- At the point when you enrolled in the program, did you have any other experience from another school or education? (Expand…was it different than the program and how?)
- Please tell me what was going on in your life before your time at Keilir and why you chose to enrol there. (Be ready to expand why you chose it instead of anything else)
- If you think back to when you started, how did you experience the program? Was it different from what you thought at the time? (Expand, in what way?)
- I am very interested to know how the program is structured, could you tell me your experience of the structure?
- Now when you look back over your time in the program, what do you think the most valuable during that time? (Be ready to expand, what and why?)
- Can you find anything less valuable that could be better? (What could be done to prevent them or adjust them?)
- When taking part in an education like this one, people often find different things that motivate them. Is there something that has motivated you throughout the program? (People like friends or family)
- Can you see now how the program is going to prepare you for higher education or professions after you finish? (Was that the plan in the beginning or have you realised it on the way?)
- What do you think is the importance of a program like the Preliminary Studies at Keilir? (Be ready to expand on this)
- Would you recommend the program to people that are seeking education at this stage?
- Is there something else that you would like to add to the discussion so far?

  - Follow up questions
    - What do you mean by that? Yes?
    - Could you elaborate more on that?
    - You said earlier that you prefer… Could you say what kinds of things exactly?
    - What did you do then? What effect did that have on you?
    - What do most people think of …. Is that the way you feel to?
    - Do you mean that….? Can we say than that you feel this way or that way?