Perspectives on equity and social justice in education in four Nordic countries

Hanna Ragnarsdóttir Professor
School of Education, University of Iceland
Overview of lecture

• Fundamental values in education in the Nordic countries.

• Inequity and marginalization of immigrant students in schools in the Nordic countries.

• Implementing policies – some challenges.

• *Learning Spaces for Inclusion and Social Justice: Success Stories from Immigrant Students and School Communities in Four Nordic Countries* – main findings.
The „Nordic model“

• “The Nordic countries: The next supermodel”
• “From Pippi Longstocking to private schools”
• “The American Way over the Nordic Model? Are we crazy?”
• “Farewell, Nordic Model: The end of another European dream”
Some fundamental values in education in the Nordic countries

• Democracy
• Equity
• Social justice
• Inclusion
• .....
Examples

• „The role of the compulsory school is to, in cooperation with the homes, is to contribute to the general development of all students and their participation in a democratic society that is evolving.” (Lög um grunnskóla, 91/2008)

• “The Norwegian school system is based on the principles of equality and adapted learning for everyone within an inclusive environment.”

  (Ministry of Education and Research, Norway)
Included, yet separated? Types of labels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bilingual or multilingual affiliation</th>
<th>Linguistic or cultural otherness</th>
<th>In-migration</th>
<th>Foreign origin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>«bilingual children»</td>
<td>«minority-language students»</td>
<td>«immigrants»</td>
<td>«students of foreign origin»</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>«multilingual students»</td>
<td>«foreign language students»</td>
<td>«immigrant students»</td>
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<td></td>
<td>«children with a mother tongue different from Swedish»</td>
<td>«children with immigrant background»</td>
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Inequity and marginalization of immigrant students

• „Gaps“ and vulnerabilities in our educational systems, such as:
  – Lack of understanding of main concepts in policy?
  – Focus on certain aspects or „otherness“.
  – Challenges in implementing policies.
  – Concentration of knowledge.
  – Changing political agendas.
  – Research – Practice.
Municipal Educational Policy

A recent study which explored

• educational policy at preschool and compulsory school levels in Iceland related to immigrant children and students and the implementation

• the views of key people in these educational central offices towards the policy and their experiences

Findings:

Obstacles for implementation
Towards integration and equity

- Municipal level: F.ex. The City of Reykjavik’s Human Rights Policy (2006); and Policy on multicultural education and leisure activities (2014) with a focus on
  - Diverse educational and teaching practices,
  - Icelandic as a second language and active bilingualism,
  - Active home-school cooperation.

- Increasing cooperation between government, municipalities, universities and interest groups on issues of immigration and education.
Learning Spaces for Inclusion and Social Justice: Success Stories from Immigrant Students and School Communities in Four Nordic Countries

Project website: http://skrif.hi.is/learningspaces/

Project leader: Hanna Ragnarsdóttir hannar@hi.is
University of Iceland, School of Education
Researchers

- 27 researchers and doctoral students in five universities:
  - University of Iceland, University of Helsinki, Finland; University of Gothenburg, Sweden; Hedmark University College, Hamar, and Nord Trøndelag University College, Norway.

- Steering group - Country leaders:
  - Hanna Ragnarsdóttir, Fred Dervin, Anette Hellman, Lars Anders Kulbrandstad.

- Multidisciplinary/research fields:
  - Multicultural and migration studies, multicultural and intercultural education, inclusive education, gender studies, language education, Nordic languages as second languages, literacy studies, pedagogy, educational policy, teacher professionalism.
The LSP team
Aims and objectives

• **Main objective:** To draw lessons from success stories of individual immigrant students and whole school communities at different levels that have succeeded in developing learning contexts that are equitable and socially just, contrary to expectations based on research findings.

• **Two main aims of the study are to**
  
  – understand and learn from the experiences of immigrant students who have succeeded academically and socially
  
  – explore and understand how social justice is implemented in equitable and successful diverse Nordic school contexts and other learning spaces.
Subthemes and research areas

- The project integrates four subthemes and main research areas that are explored in the project:

  - **A. Students**: Experiences and aspirations of immigrant students.

  - **B. Teachers professional development, pedagogy and teaching practices**: Teachers as agents and facilitators of inclusion.

  - **C. Leadership, collaboration and school cultures**: Promotion of democratic participation and collaboration of students, teachers, parents.

  - **D. Policies and curricula**: Main criteria relating to equity, inclusion and social justice in educational policy and national curriculum guidelines and school policy and curricula.
Theoretical background

• **Critical multiculturalism** (f.ex. May & Sleeter, 2010; Parekh, 2006).

• **Critical education and pedagogy** (f.ex. Freire, 2005; Giroux, 2009; McLaren, 2009).
Conceptual challenges

• Who are “the immigrants”?  
• What is success?  
• Learning spaces.
Methods

• Mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative) were applied in the proposed research project and each country research group collects data according to a similar research model.

Research model for each of the four countries:

• Case studies in schools at pre-, compulsory and upper secondary levels in urban and rural contexts in Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden (a total of 27 schools).

• Sampling was purposive in that all schools have succeeded in implementing social justice and creating inclusive learning spaces for all students.

• For selecting the schools, indicators such as average grades, test scores and drop-out rates were used, as well as evaluation and judgment of school authorities.
Findings from survey

(see report on main findings on conference website: http://lsp2015.hi.is/final_report )
<table>
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<th>Support from politicians and educational authorities</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>The national educational policy makes it possible for my preschool/school to give children/students of a foreign background the support they need</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The educational policy at the local or regional level makes it possible for my preschool/school to give children/students of a foreign background the support they need</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>My preschool/school gets sufficient funding to give children/students of a foreign background the support they need</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>My preschool /school gets sufficient pedagogical help or professional support from the educational authorities to give children/students of a foreign background the support they need</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36%</td>
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LSP conference, Reykjavik, 15-17 October, 2015
Overview of findings from case studies in the four countries
Policies and curricula

• Preschools:
  – Child centred policies.
  – Focus on care, play and active participation.
  – Active communication with parents and children across languages and cultures.

• Compulsory schools:
  – Diversity and inclusion, cooperation between teachers and with parents.
  – Structures differ slightly between the schools
    • Introductory divisions or reception units around the immigrant children.
    • Model of direct integration.

• Upper secondary schools:
  – Student acquire knowledge to be able to think independently and critically so they can actively participate in society.
  – A variety of programmes and support to facilitate the integration of immigrant students.
  – Understanding and empathy for immigrant students.
Leadership

• Preschools:
  – Leadership is democratic. Structure and organization does not differentiate immigrant children.
  – Supportive and participative leaders.
  – In some cases the leaders and teachers lack the initiatives of reaching out to the immigrant parents.

• Compulsory schools:
  – Leadership is generally democratic, participative and supportive.
  – Inclusive school culture, supporting diversity and social justice.
  – Respect for difference and thinking positively about diversity.

• Upper secondary schools:
  – Organizational structures have been created for teaching the majority languages.
  – Leaders are preoccupied with the social isolation of the students and have developed ways to counteract this.

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Teachers

• Preschools:
  – Teachers generally emphasize individually-based care and learning, diversity and equality.
  – Child-centred educational practices and based on diversity.
  – Some of the teachers have specialized in education for diversity.

• Compulsory schools:
  – Creating a welcoming and trusting learning environment for students.
  – Understanding importance of linguistic diversity as a resource.
  – Emphasis on cooperation with parents.

• Upper secondary schools:
  – Teachers’ varied experiences of living and studying abroad.
  – Strong vision for teaching immigrant students.
  – Practices vary.

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Students and children

• Preschools:
  – Immigrant children active and seemed to be included in play.
  – In some of the preschools, the majority language was the “proper” language to use, while other preschools encouraged the use of many languages.
  – Some missed learning opportunities.

• Compulsory schools:
  – Immigrant students emphasize their teachers and their schools as reasons for their success.
  – Generally, the students appear to be active in their schools and both academically and socially successful.
  – Challenges appear in both models, the reception model and the model of direct integration.

• Upper secondary schools:
  – Immigrant students appeared to be very positive about their schools and many of their teachers.
  – Importance of having a demanding school environment.
  – Friends from immigrant backgrounds, as well as friends from majority groups.
A preschool

• School ethos reflected in active communication with parents and children across languages and cultures.

• Transnational competence among staff, culturally responsive pedagogy and educational care.

• Parents and children are welcome and valuable members of the preschool community.

• Mother language support for children and Icelandic courses for the parents.

• Language and literacy policy focuses on active bilingualism.

• Scaffolding into school and society both for parents and children.
Preschool teacher

• “The partnership with parents is different when you have many immigrant children, it becomes closer, you need to speak to parents eye to eye, it is not enough to put some information up on the wall and that is all ... and this is now your responsibility like for all ... parents ... first of all, not all the parents are literate and you need to communicate with the parents and, you know, just to show this care, even if you do not understand each other... they need to feel that they are welcome.”

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Preschool Teacher

• „Then I would say ... first and foremost, children are children no matter what, then you have children that need something extra and then it is our responsibility to provide this extra, the children might think they are just playing but we as professionals know what we are teaching “
"I am overwhelmed by the role that the school can take in empowering and supporting parents ... so I thought, there is an opportunity to do something and reach out to parents ..."

"I want the parents to have agency and to know that ... we are real partners and ready to reach out."
A compulsory school

• Empowerment.
• Building on students’ resources.
• Co-operating with parents.
• Bridge-building.
• Creating inclusive learning spaces.
• Emphasizing student participation.
• Educational attainment for all students.

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Upper secondary school

• Knowledge of languages appreciated
• Strong sense of belonging
• Positive experiences of the immigrant units
• Peer support and mentoring
• Caring, supportive, helpful, empathetic and good teachers
• Academic support
• Safe environment
Academic support

“...the teachers are really good. When I don’t understand things I go to them and they explain it very well. Even in final exams they explain very well for me because they know I’m a foreigner; the only foreigner in the class ...”
Guidelines for school development

• Educating teachers for diversity:
  – Formal training and education on multilingualism and communication across linguistic and cultural differences.
  – Formal training and education in multicultural education.
  – Formal training and education in teaching (Finnish, Icelandic, Norwegian, Swedish) second languages.
Guidelines

• Immigrant students’ education should be the responsibility of *all teachers*, not only teachers in introductory or reception units. Therefore all teachers need to be involved in the education of newly-arrived students.

• Teachers and leaders need to be more ambitious in the education of minority language children.

• Importance of building on all languages and supporting multilingualism.
Guidelines

• Increase the number of mother tongue teachers for teaching mother languages and supporting immigrant children.

• Importance of a holistic approach where social as well as academic success is emphasized.

• Importance of sustainable leadership and measures for sustaining knowledge and good practices.
Guidelines

• Cooperation between schools (teachers and leaders) and sharing of experiences, practices and ideas.
• Partnerships with parents.
• Continued professional development of teachers, leaders and other staff.
• Improve access of immigrant students to upper secondary school.
Takk fyrir  
Kiitos  
Thank you  
Tack så mycket