



Building Empowering Multilingual Learning Communities in Icelandic preschools

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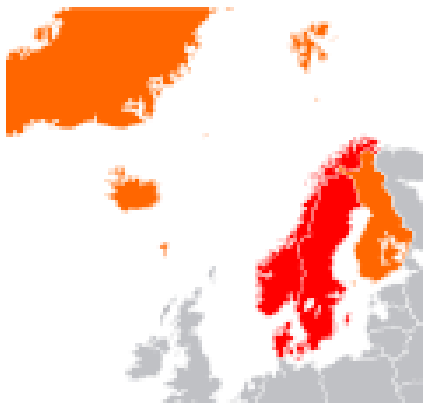
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Icelandic society: Facts and figures

- Population 2019: Around 357.000
- Majority and official language: Icelandic.
- Icelandic sign language (law since 2011).
- Population in Reykjavik, capital of Iceland: 129.000.
- Immigration increasing from around 1995.
- Around 11% of the population have a non-Icelandic citizenship.





Learning Spaces for Inclusion and Social Justice: Success Stories from Immigrant Students and School Communities in Four Nordic Countries

Project website: <http://lsp2015.hi.is/>



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Aims and objectives

- **Main objective of the LSP project:** 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.

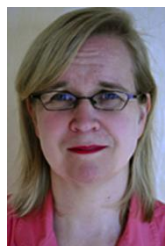


Researchers

- **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





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 evaluation and judgment of school authorities, average grades, test scores and drop-out rates were used.



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.

Summary of the findings in: <http://lsp2015.hi.is/>



Example from a case study in an Icelandic preschool





Aim of the study

- To explore how the staff and parents in preschools in Iceland experience inclusion, multilingualism and social justice in their preschools and what educational practices seem to be instrumental for the children's participation.



Method

- Semi-structured in-depth interview with the preschool principal.
- Focus group interviews with immigrant parents who have taken part in developing educational partnerships, including extracurricular courses.
- Observation of extracurricular courses.
- The research is supplementary to the Learning Spaces project conducted in 2013-2015 (conducted in one of the same preschools).



Theoretical framework: Critical approaches to education

- Main theoretical focus is **critical multiculturalism**, a field that has examined many challenges in modern societies, such as the cultural rights of minority groups (May & Sleeter, 2010; Parekh, 2006).
- Critical pedagogy and creating multicultural learning communities (Nieto, 2010).



Theoretical and conceptual framework: Multilingual education for social justice

- Linguistically appropriate practice and classroom language policy (Chumak-Horbatsch, 2012)
- Multiliteracies, dual language practices and linking curricular content to students' experiences and identities (Cummins & Early, 2011)
- Bilingual community education (García & Wei, 2014)
- Multilingualism and translanguaging (García & Wei, 2014; Skutnabb-Kangas, Phillipson, Mohanty & Panda, 2009).



The Preschool

- Located in a part of the capital area where languages and backgrounds of inhabitants are very diverse.
- Around 25% of families in the area are recent immigrants to Iceland.
- Around 80% of children in the preschool have other heritage languages than the majority language, Icelandic.
- High unemployment rate and poverty in the area.
- Recent various initiatives in the area:
 - Cooperation in projects between schools on different levels and parents.



Findings: Vision of principal

- Clear vision of creating a multilingual community in her school guided by values of equity and social justice and developing educational partnerships with the parents.
- Special focus on involving newly arrived immigrant parents in the school community.



Findings: The principal

- Building a multicultural learning community, involving children and parents:
 - Parents suggest preschool educational activities and cooperation activities.
 - Mother languages and Icelandic as a second language support for children and parents.
 - Extracurricular activities with parents and children.
 - Reaching out to the community: Open-door policy for parents and preschool facilities available for meetings and mother language learning after preschool hours.



First contact:

Communicating with parents during transition

- „... I am bilingual myself but it is **increasingly Icelandic we use** , I feel they do not have to speak Icelandic perfectly, and the staff is really emphasizing this, we have had a number of courses about prejudice and you know, how we meet people in the middle or half-way and **show patience** ... „
- „**We changed our transition/welcoming process completely**... When they are here we are very relaxed and we **cooperate in creating the settings for the children** ...“



Extracurricular activities

- Courses for parents and children in Icelandic as a second language in multilingual settings.
- Art-based activities are used to facilitate language use and acquisition.
- First after preschool hours, now on weekends.
- Parents active in developing the courses and suggesting activities.
- Staff provide support for children as needed.
- Funding from various agencies and organizations.



The principal: On extracurricular activities

„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.“

„The courses are developed from the needs of the parents ... like what do you want from this course?“

„ They were expected to give something back to the children ...“

„When the first term was over we discussed how we wanted to proceed the next term.“



Findings: The immigrant parents

- Very content with the courses.
- Great satisfaction with the principal:
 - „There has always been good communication ...
 - „We always know what is going on in the preschool“
 - „She made a course where we can bring the children and the staff help take care of them ... We were all learning and it was very nice.“
- Parents get to know each other, mutual trust.
- „We made a play for the kids for Christmas ... And it was great fun for the kids and ourselves to make this play and learn Icelandic at the same time ...“

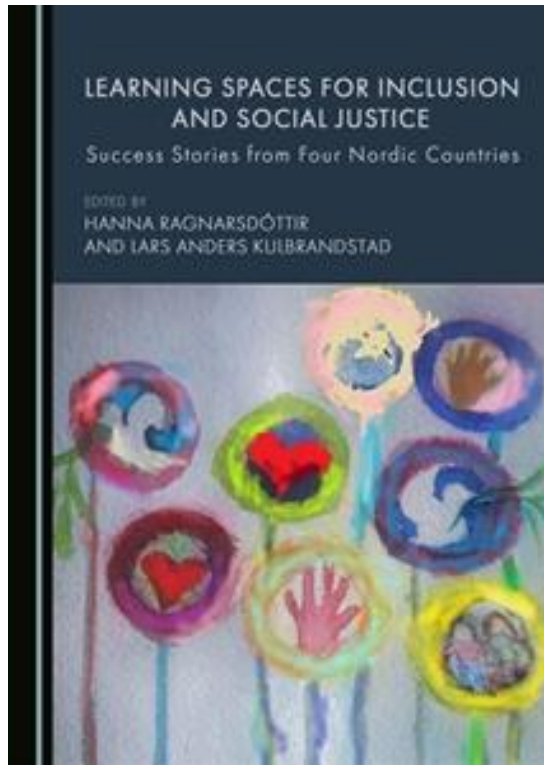


Concluding remarks

- Development of educational partnerships and a multilingual learning community in the preschool has been successful.
- Challenges:
 - Sustainability: Educating and including all staff and ensuring succession.
 - Funding of additional support and extracurricular activities.
 - Demanding working environment and pressure, danger of burn-out.



Final publication of the LSP project



- Available at:
<https://www.cambridgescholar.com/learning-spaces-for-inclusion-and-social-justice>



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