

Learning Spaces for Inclusion and Social Justice

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*Success Stories from Four
Nordic Countries*

Edited by

Hanna Ragnarsdóttir

and Lars Anders Kulbrandstad

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



Learning Spaces for Inclusion and Social Justice:
Success Stories from Four Nordic Countries
Series: Nordic Studies on Diversity in Education

Edited by Hanna Ragnarsdóttir and Lars Anders Kulbrandstad

This book was first published 2018

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-5275-1400-5

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-1400-3

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FOREWORD

FRED DERVIN

Three years ago, I noticed that large signs saying “Discrimination-free zone” in different languages had appeared in my faculty in Finland. A ceremony organised by the students had celebrated these new hints at “social justice”. At that time, I was curious to see what these signs meant to people and, especially, whether the institution and employees had understood what they entailed and how they could/should deal with *discrimination* to make the faculty “free of it”. Standing under these signs in different locations at the faculty, I stopped members of staff who passed me, declared that I had just been a victim of discrimination (*I lied*) and asked them if they knew what I should do about it and whether there was any specific procedure to deal with such cases. All my interlocutors were puzzled and had no idea what the “correct” procedure was. They asked me to explain what I had experienced, listened very carefully and often expressed their sympathy. But they were unaware of what to do and/or who to contact... In other words, they were aware that I had (supposedly) experienced *injustice*, but they did not know how to turn it into *justice*. Since the appearance of these signs, the words *social justice* and *inclusion* but also *equality-equity* and *belonging* have become part of the faculty jargon in relation to teaching-learning, research and pastoral care. Since then, I have not heard anyone define or position themselves clearly as to what these terms could mean to them, to “us” and to the broader context of Finnish society (and beyond!).

The ideas of *social justice* and *inclusion* have now become inevitable in many parts of the world. As such, *homo juridicus* (Supiot 2017) appears to be the main actor in education today (Li and Dervin 2018). Social justice and inclusion, which are often tainted politically, have also become so polysemic that they tend to instil too many contradictory and incoherent convictions into their promoters, or even their detractors, in different parts of the world. This often leads to some countries judging other systems of education by means of their own criteria (Li and Dervin 2018). These two terms can also be used as empty signifiers, to which everyone seems to

agree and which they psalmody or parrot to give an illusion of “us” (the majority, those who hold [tight] onto power) helping and caring for the “other”. Social justice and inclusion have thus become unconscious rather than having to do with consciousness (Althusser 1965/2005, 233). Finally, and to paraphrase Hannah Arendt (1970, 71) when she talks about the Third World, we could say that “social justice and inclusion are not realities but ideologies”.

Maybe these are some of the reasons why *social injustice* is much easier to pinpoint than *social justice*. Although our world is said to be more global (or glocal?), more open and more empowering than ever, social injustice is everywhere and is increasing all the time. Some individuals typically experience multifaceted injustice: certain kinds of migrants, certain sexual minorities, representatives of certain social classes, etc. Women also experience injustice systematically—even in the Nordic countries, the context of this volume, where a high level of gender equality is said to have been achieved.

Realities and nicely packaged discourses, flavoured with marketing gimmicks (e.g. nation or region branding), often contradict each other. Take Finland for example: Finnish nation branders insist on the country’s “superiority” in gender equality by reminding us constantly that Finland is the third most gender-equal country in the world (The Global Gender Gap 2017) and the second best country in the world to be a girl (Save the Children, Girl’s Opportunity Index 2016) and that mothers’ wellbeing is rated second best in the world (Save the Children 2016). In 2017, maybe to be even more convincing to the world, the Finnish Government took the initiative to create the International Gender Equality Prize (first recipient: Angela Merkel from Germany). However, we are reminded by Arendt (1972, 8) that “Half of politics is ‘image-making’, the other half is the art of making people believe the image”. In fact, behind this façade and marketing-like strategies lie clear signs of gender injustice in the Nordic country: domestic violence against women tops European rankings, the gender wage gap is about 20% (China: 21%) and women are underrepresented in business and politics. Many would argue that Finland’s position is still pioneering compared to many other parts of the world. Yet, instead of comparing to others, it would be important to accept that we all face such issues. In agreement with historian Eric Hobsbawm (2002, 418): “(...) let us not disarm, even in unsatisfactory times. Social injustice still needs to be denounced and fought. The world will not get better on its own”. But there are other options...

The title of this volume, *Learning spaces for inclusion and social justice: Success stories from immigrant students and school communities in four Nordic countries*, suggests a shift towards identifying what social justice in education is—rather than describe social injustice. The authors also note the gap between the naïvely positive discourse about Nordic societies as “doing” social justice mundanely and what is really happening in classrooms. In so doing they take stock of the fables about the Nordic countries. But they also go further: by concentrating on success stories, they propose narratives of “justice” which are inspiring and will, undoubtedly, pave the way for more studies to help combat the woes of social injustice and exclusion. This “cunning plan” allows them to “demythologise” and examine these problems from different angles—and angles which are more positive than the usual negative entry of *failure* and *under-performance*. This requires new forms of criticality and reflexivity, which the authors exercise skilfully in their case studies from preschool, basic education and upper secondary schools in four Nordic countries. What is more, they manage to get the voices of different actors’ (some from whom we never hear) “discourse” about the success of migrant students in Nordic education: principals, teachers, immigrant parents and students/children and municipality employees (amongst others).

The book covers different important areas, either for a single Nordic country or across the Nordic countries: policy analyses (Kulbrandstad, Layne, Paavola, Hellman and Ragnarsdóttir; Ragnarsdóttir and Tran), studies of teachers’ and school leaders’ practices (Hellman, Ragnarsdóttir, Jónsdóttir, Blöndal, Lauritsen and Paavola; Guðjónsdóttir, Wozniczka, Gísladóttir, Lunneblad, Odenbring, Janhonen-Abruquah, Layne and Skrefsrud; Svavarsson, Hansen and Ragnarsdóttir) and teachers’ and students’ perceptions of success (Lefever, Tran and Peskova). The book also presents original methodological discussions needed when working on inclusion and social justice in education (Skrefsrud, Gísladóttir, Guðjónsdóttir, Hellman, Layne, Lunneblad and Wozniczka) and a chapter on a spinoff project (Skrefsrud, Hellman, Lunneblad and Ragnarsdóttir).

The volume opens very interesting vistas for anyone interested in “reading” the experiences of migrant students, from alternative perspectives. I retain three important lessons from my reading of the different chapters as follows:

- When doing research on or talking about social justice and inclusion, it is important to know the meanings we give to the different words that we use and to contextualise them (e.g. migrants, democracy, culture, participation, social justice, citizenship, belonging).
- One should also reflect systematically on whose perspective(s), meaning(s) and voice(s) but also method(s) one makes assumptions, draws conclusions and makes recommendations when writing about research on the success of migrant students.
- How do we give back to the field and to our participants (or other people) during and after a research project is completed to make sure that we researchers and practitioners contribute actively to social justice and inclusion in education?

The reader will find this volume to be a fascinating and realistic adventure into the Nordic countries without falling into the usual trap of the propaganda of the “Nordic Dream”. The volume is also a great source of guidance on different facets of social justice/migrant/multicultural/intercultural education.

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LEARNING SPACES FOR INCLUSION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE: THE PROJECT AND THE BOOK¹

HANNA RAGNARSDÓTTIR
AND LARS ANDERS KULBRANDSTAD

This book presents the findings of a three-year (January 2013–December 2015) Nordic research project, *Learning Spaces for Inclusion and Social Justice: Success Stories from Immigrant Students and School Communities in Four Nordic Countries*. In this chapter, we first explain the main objective and justification of the project and describe its aims, subthemes and research areas. Then we introduce the conceptual and theoretical framework and the methodology. This is followed by a brief account of the recent demographic changes in each of the four countries due to immigration and the political responses to these changes, in particular with respect to education. In a section on the findings from the project, the results from a survey are first presented and discussed, and then the results from case studies are summarised and discussed under the headings “Policies and curricula”, “Leadership”, “Teachers” and “Students and children”. Based on these findings, we formulate a number of guidelines and recommendations for school development. At the end of the chapter, we present an overview of the structure and content of the book.

¹ Parts of this introduction are adapted from the final report of the Learning Spaces Project to which the whole research group contributed; see Ragnarsdóttir, Hanna (ed.). *Learning Spaces for Inclusion and Social Justice: Success Stories from Immigrant Students and School Communities in Four Nordic Countries. Report on Main Findings from Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden*, 2015.
http://lsp2015.hi.is/final_report

Objective and aims, subthemes and research areas

The main objective of the project was 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. The term “learning spaces” refers to school communities as well as learning environments and associated practices other than schools, which may be important for or instrumental to the young immigrants’ participation and success. In the project, students’ success is defined as social as well as academic. By identifying success stories and good practices our aim was to provide guidelines for teaching and school reform based on these strategies.

The justification for the Learning Spaces Project (LSP) can be found in the mismatch between shared fundamental values in the Nordic countries, such as democracy, social justice and inclusion, which are frequently stated in educational policy documents, and the reality in many schools in these countries. We might argue that the fundamental values are imaginaries only as educational research has revealed inequalities and the marginalisation of students in many schools. With this project, we wanted to pursue a new discourse regarding multiculturalism and inclusion and rethink the approach to schooling in our countries. By moving towards a more inclusive and holistic use of words such as social justice, democracy and the participation of all students, teachers and parents in school communities, the collaborative research project aimed to set a new tone for how to move forward towards more inclusive practices in schools, which we believe schooling in the twenty-first century must emphasise. The 48th session of the International Conference on Education (ICE) in 2008 identified inclusive education to be an ongoing process aimed at offering quality education for all while respecting diversity and the different needs and abilities, characteristics and learning expectations of students and communities, eliminating all forms of discrimination (UNESCO-IBE 2008, 3). By mapping the current situations in the four Nordic countries participating in the LSP project and focusing on the success of individual immigrant students contrary to expectations and good practices in schools, we are better equipped to lay down a roadmap for schooling in our societies in the twenty-first century. While the research findings from all our countries have revealed the marginalisation of students with an immigrant background (Ragnarsdóttir 2008; Holm and Londen 2010; Horst and Gitz-Johansen 2010; Jónsdóttir and Ragnarsdóttir 2010; von Brömssen and Rodell Olgaç 2010), the research has also shown that there are some examples of the opposite, that is, individual students and

particular schools have succeeded in spite of what could be expected (Ragnarsdóttir 2011; Engen 2014; Paavola et al. 2014; Ragnarsdóttir and Blöndal 2014; Ragnarsdóttir and Hansen 2014). In the LSP project we wanted to explore such success stories and, based on the findings, develop new guidelines for teaching and school reform.

Two main aims of the study were to 1) understand and learn from the experiences of immigrant students who have succeeded academically and socially and 2) explore and understand how social justice is implemented in equitable and successful diverse Nordic school contexts and other learning spaces. The project integrated the following four subthemes and main research areas, which are clearly interrelated:

A. Students: Experiences and aspirations of immigrant students

The main aims of this research area were to identify and describe the experiences and aspirations of children and young adults of immigrant background in each country who have been successful academically and socially. The key research questions are as follows:

What learning environments and practices (schools and other) seem to be instrumental for young immigrants' participation and success in their schools and society, and how do they describe their situation and motivations as well as obstacles? What are the young immigrants' expectations of teachers and curricula? How do students experience belonging to different groups, and what are their aspirations in these settings? What are the immigrant children's and young adults' language backgrounds, language learning environments and attitudes towards their culture of origin and their majority Nordic culture and society?

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

The main aim of this research area was to identify how schools engage with students and society to promote, develop and sustain inclusive teaching practices based on social justice. Furthermore, the aim was to explore how teachers create inclusive spaces within their classrooms that allow them to identify, respond to and build on the multiple experiences and linguistic and cultural backgrounds of their students, including the main obstacles the students face. The key research questions are as follows:

What particular roles and practices can be identified in teachers' work with diverse groups of children and parents? What sort of professional development do educational authorities offer teachers to help them to work with children of multiple backgrounds, and how effective is it? What are the common pedagogical characteristics of teachers who meet diverse students' expectations and actively promote social justice and equality? How do teachers of immigrant background identify their role in particular as facilitators in empowering immigrant students? How does student diversity influence teachers' work?

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

The main aim of this research area was to explore how leadership promotes and sustains democratic participation, inclusive practices and the collaboration of students, teachers and parents and to identify the main obstacles for forming a collaborative school culture. The key research questions are as follows:

How does democratic participation and the involvement of teachers, students and parents represent itself in the schools, and how is diversity reflected in the school communities? How do teachers, students and parents experience their school community in terms of chances for involvement and access to decision-making? How is diversity regarded in their school community, and how is it reflected in school policy, curricula and practices? How are the visions of leaders and the stated policies of the schools consistent with and reflected in the experiences of the teachers, parents and students? How do the schools ensure that adequate resources are available to students so that equal opportunities for learning are created?

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

The main aim of this research area was to identify the main criteria relating to equity, inclusion, democracy and social justice in the policy documents of the participating schools as well as in national educational policies and national curriculum guidelines. The key research question is: How are equity, inclusion, democracy and social justice reflected in policy documents and curricula on national and school levels?

Conceptual and theoretical framework

Migration, communication and collaboration across national borders bring important challenges and opportunities for school development, among them growing ethnic and linguistic diversity among teachers and students in different school contexts. In the Nordic countries, schools have increasing diversity in terms of ethnic origins, first languages and religions but also in regard to the social class of staff and students. Research in various multicultural societies and schools in past decades has repeatedly shown that many immigrants and immigrant children are marginalised and generally do not succeed well in schools at different levels of the education systems (Drew and Demack 1998; Gundara 2000; Rumbaut and Portes 2001; Brooker 2002; Hernandez 2004; Coard 2005; Nieto 2010). In other words, they are neither thriving socially as individuals nor are they academically successful. This has been an incentive for the extensive writing in recent decades on school development, curricula, pedagogy, leadership in schools, teacher training and other subjects related to multicultural school contexts and education. Recent research in the Nordic countries has indicated that equality in education is questioned and that the separation and marginalisation of immigrant students is manifested. A broad view of education as multicultural and inclusive has neither been officially established nor realised in these countries although schools are responsible for providing high-quality education for all their students according to law in the Nordic countries (Holm and Londen 2010; Horst and Gitz-Johansen 2010; Jónsdóttir and Ragnarsdóttir 2010; von Brömssen and Rodell Olgaç 2010).

In the LSP project, we applied critical pedagogy. This is an approach through which students and teachers engage in learning as a mutual encounter with the world. Critical pedagogy implies praxis, in other words, developing the important social action predispositions and attitudes that are the backbone of a democratic society and learning to use them to help alter patterns of domination and oppression. Critical pedagogy is a way of thinking more openly and critically about learning rather than being a mechanistic strategy or a technical process. Critical pedagogy is not a standard set of practices but rather a particular stance vis-à-vis knowledge, the process of learning and teaching and the educational environment in which these take place (Nieto 2010).

Critical multiculturalism has, over recent years, challenged liberal approaches to multicultural education. By combining and developing various critical theoretical threads, such as anti-racist education, critical race theory and critical pedagogy, critical multiculturalism has offered a more complete understanding of the oppression and institutionalisation of unequal power relations in education (May and Sleeter 2010). This field has examined many challenges in modern societies, such as the cultural rights of minority groups and, on the other hand, the educational development that serves largely the defined needs of a particular majority or majorities (Parekh 2006; May and Sleeter 2010).

Critical education and critical pedagogy more generally emphasise the importance of human intervention in transforming education and stimulating critical reflection (Freire 2007). Giroux (1997, 2001) argues that school practices need to involve ideas that address the question of how to construct ideological and institutional conditions in which the lived experience of empowerment for the vast majority of students becomes the defining feature of schooling. In a similar vein, empirical evidence clearly shows the positive correlation between the impact of education programmes that promote social justice and children's psychosocial competencies in their interpersonal and intrapersonal skills (Tibbits 2007).

To summarise, modern multicultural societies require that teachers be aware of the basic issues and development of multicultural societies and the important egalitarian values related to this; that teachers be familiar with and can apply socially just pedagogies in teaching diverse groups of students; and that they critically reflect on their everyday practices. Schools need to address the diversity of their staff and students and build their everyday practices on social justice.

Other main concepts in the LSP project are explained below.

Learning spaces

Learning spaces refer to school communities as well as learning environments and associated practices other than schools, which may be important for or instrumental to young immigrants' participation and success. Many learning spaces can be developed within the school, and, in each classroom, these spaces can be created or opened up by both teachers and students. These learning spaces include social contexts, networks and resources that encourage, develop and nurture learning, supporting students in becoming agents of their lifelong learning and active

participants in society. The concept of learning spaces allows us to explore how the issues of social justice and equity are embedded in the learning process (Gee 2004; Banks 2013).

Inclusion, social justice and equity

A broad definition of inclusion focuses on diversity and how schools respond to and value a diverse group of students as well as other members of the school community. Diversity is a natural characteristic of a school community, and it can be explained as the range of characteristics that may result in a perception of differences among people. This perception can elicit responses in others that may advantage or disadvantage individuals (Lumby and Coleman 2007). Inclusion is aimed at diverting attention towards inequalities present in exclusion and discrimination against diversities such as social and ethnic circumstances, religion, gender and the diverse ability of students and their families. Inclusion is seen as an ongoing process focusing on increased participation in education for everyone involved to work against inequality and increase people's sense of belonging in school and society (Booth 2010). Inclusive schools are intended to find ways to educate all their students successfully, thus working against discrimination and leading to an inclusive just society where everyone is a valid participant (UNESCO 1994; Slee 2011).

Inclusive practice is fundamentally grounded in the ideologies of social justice, democracy, human rights and the full participation of all (Ainscow 2005; Florian 2008; Jónsson 2011). These ideologies are connected and dependent on each other in various ways. A critical social justice perspective emphasises that people's different abilities, characteristics and backgrounds should be celebrated and valued (Ryan and Rottmann 2007). Equality, which is sameness, is often mistakenly associated with social justice in the way difference is treated. Critical social justice does not advocate treating everyone the same because that would simply prolong inequalities that are already in place. Rather, according to this perspective, individuals and groups should be treated according to need; that is, they should be treated equitably. Treating individuals equitably rather than equally provides the potential of counteracting existing unequal differences (ibid.). Those advocating for critical social justice seek a world that is fair and equitable, for everyone, not a world where everyone gets the same support to reach the same goals.

Success

In general, success is often described as achieving set personal, political or social goals and can as such be either subjective or objective. Subjective success is the student's own perspectives and perceptions; in other words, it is the self-fulfilling feeling of achievement based on personal goals, such as those relating to wellbeing, family or agency. Objective success relates to the political or societal success that has to do with education and employment, material goods and status and is based on a standardised or measurable view of what it takes to be successful as an individual, a school or a community (Layne, Dervin, and Longfor 2018).

Immigrant

A definition of immigrants can be derived from the OECD, referring to the foreign-born population, that is, all persons who have migrated from their country of birth to their current country of residence. The foreign population consists of persons who still have the nationality of their home country (OECD 2014). Given the different historical conditions in the four countries, in the present research participants also include second-generation immigrants, referring to children and youth born of immigrant parents.

Leadership

Today leadership is defined as a social interaction among a certain group that is working towards a common goal or purpose. The main objective of leadership is to create followership (Sergiovanni 2006; Gardner 2007). One or more persons providing leadership influence followers and lead them to focus on the organisation's mission and objectives. Effective and fruitful leadership inspires followers to enthusiastically use their energy to achieve the organisational mission and objectives (Winston and Patterson 2006). The main focus of leadership in recent times is to create consensus around organisational values (Spillane 2005; Sergiovanni 2006; Gardner 2007).

Diversity

Dictionaries define diversity as the state or quality of being different or varied. Today the term is commonly associated with the terms multicultural and immigrants (Hartmann 2015). In the school context,

diversity is a natural characteristic of a school community, mirroring the wider community, and it can be explained as the range of characteristics that result in a perception of difference among people. This perception of difference can elicit responses in others that can either be favourable or unfavourable to the individuals in question (Lumby and Coleman 2007). In this case, we refer to diversity in connection with ethnic, religious and/or linguistic background.

Wlodkowski and Ginsberg (1995) note that a motivational framework for culturally responsive teaching has to have enough breadth to accommodate the range of diversity found in most educational settings. Furthermore, they maintain that any educational system that ignores the history and perspective of its learners or does not attempt to adjust its teaching practices to benefit all its learners contributes to inequality of opportunity. A number of studies have been conducted in the Nordic countries in recent years among ethnic minority teachers and teacher assistants in preschools and primary schools as well as ethnic minority student teachers (Hauge 2004; Staunæs 2004; Gitz-Johansen 2006; Lassen 2007; Ragnarsdóttir and Blöndal 2007; Hvistendahl 2009; Kulbrandstad 2009; Ringen and Kjørven 2009; Paavola and Talib 2010; Ragnarsdóttir 2010; Ragnarsdóttir and Blöndal 2010; Talib and Hosoya 2010). The results of these studies have indicated that some of the ethnic minority teachers experience marginalisation and barriers to integration within the educational systems. Many writers consider a diverse group of teachers to have more understanding of the needs of a diverse group of students. This understanding is based on the presumed different experiences within a diverse group of teachers (Ladson-Billings 1994, 2001; Howard 2006; Lassen 2007; Lumby and Coleman 2007; Ragnarsdóttir and Blöndal 2007; Schmidt and Block 2010), pointing to the importance of extensive knowledge on the skills and attitudes related to multicultural issues and diversity among teachers and principals (Ryan 2003, 2006).

Methods

Mixed methods were applied in the project, and each country's research group collected data according to the following research model:

Case studies were conducted in schools on three levels (preschools, primary and secondary schools) in urban and rural contexts in each of the four Nordic countries. Sampling was purposive in that all the participating schools were judged to be successful in implementing social justice and creating inclusive learning spaces for all students. For school selection, indicators such as average grades, test scores and dropout rates were used as well as evaluations and the judgement of school authorities. Focus groups, semi-structured interviews, participant observation and questionnaires were employed for data collection in the schools, using a framework created by the research team. Document analysis included conversation and discourse analyses. To gain a deep understanding of inclusive practices, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with teachers from each of the schools. All the school principals were interviewed individually. The participating teachers were purposefully selected according to the main criterion that they teach students with immigrant backgrounds. Students' experiences of success were collected through in-depth interviews with students of immigrant origin in schools in all four countries. Participants were purposefully selected by asking school principals and teachers to identify and select students who were considered to be examples of success. The in-depth study included a variety of research methods, such as semi-structured in-depth interviews in a language of the students' choice, diaries (textual, pictorial or digital) and participant observation (including shadowing), all used to gain a deep understanding of the different factors involved in the success of each individual. Where relevant, the parents of the students and children were selected for semi-structured in-depth interviews in a language of their choice.

National curriculum guides, laws and regulations on education in each of the four countries were analysed in addition to school policies and curricula developed in each school. Analysis took place concurrently through the research period using qualitative procedures of content analysis, coding and constant comparison.

Finally, an electronic questionnaire was sent to all staff in all participating schools in the project. The survey covered issues of educational policy,

support from politicians and educational authorities, the school community, leadership, staff, organisation, students/children and parents.

Country contexts

Iceland

The languages, cultures and religions of Iceland's population have become increasingly diverse in recent decades as a result of immigration. According to Statistics Iceland (2018a), the immigrant population in Iceland grew considerably from 1996 to 2017. In 1996, 1.9% of the Icelandic population were foreign citizens, with an increase to 8.9% in 2017, and the numbers are still growing.

In 2013, at the beginning of the LSP project, 11.1% of all preschool children (Statistics Iceland 2018b) and 6.5% of all compulsory school children had mother languages other than Icelandic (Statistics Iceland 2018c). These numbers have been growing since.

The Republic of Iceland ratified the United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1992 and adopted the Education for All Declaration in 2000. The right to education for all persons is clearly stated in Icelandic policy. Icelandic law guarantees equal access to education for all children until they are 18 years old (Lög um framhaldsskóla 2008).

The Icelandic educational system is divided into four levels: preschool, compulsory (primary and lower secondary), upper secondary and tertiary. The local municipalities are responsible for operating schools and implementing the laws at the preschool and compulsory school levels. Education at the upper secondary school and university levels, on the other hand, is under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture 2008).

The three separate acts that were stipulated in 2008 acted as the guiding policies for the development and implementation of the national curricula at each school level: preschool, compulsory and upper secondary. In 2011, the National Curriculum Guides and the curricula for the three school levels were enacted (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture 2011). As specified in these documents, the role of schools is to facilitate the consistency and continuity of education for students as they progress through these levels in accordance with each individual's ability and needs. The curricula are based on six integral, fundamental pillars—

literacy, sustainability, health and welfare, democracy and human rights, equality and creativity—in school activities and studies.

In municipalities where there are high numbers of students of immigrant background, educational policies ensure an education that is equitable and inclusive for this student population. They emphasise open communication and working closely with parents (translating information into different languages and using interpreters), promoting and supporting the children's/students' heritage languages, using multiple forms of pedagogical practices, encouraging interactive communication and providing instruction in Icelandic as a second language.

Norway

With the economic upturn during the 1960s, Norway became a country with net immigration. The Halt of Immigration Act was passed by Parliament in 1975, but an influx of refugees and asylum seekers in the following decades, together with family reunifications, brought a steady increase in the immigrant population. Since Norway joined the European Economic Area in 1994, there has been considerable migration to the country, including from areas that were hit particularly hard by the financial crisis of 2007/2008. Over the past 10 years, the number of immigrants and children of immigrants has more than doubled. By 1 January 2015, 15.6% of the total population of approximately 5.2 million had either themselves immigrated (12.9%) or were born in Norway of immigrant parents (2.6%) (Statistics Norway 2015). Close to 10% had foreign citizenship. The largest group by country of origin comes from Poland (almost 100,000, 12.5% of the immigrant population). This group is followed by immigrants from Sweden and Lithuania, groups which are almost equal in size (39,000). The Somali (37,500), Pakistani (35,000) and Iraqi (30,000) communities are important groups with a non-European background. All together it is estimated that up to 300 different languages are spoken by immigrants, most of them admittedly having a small number of speakers (Wilhelmsen et al. 2013). There are people with an immigrant background in all Norwegian municipalities, but there is great variation in the percentage they constitute of the inhabitants, with Oslo, at 32%, being at the top. The average percentage is 14.3%, and the standard deviation is high, at 10.4.

The official policy adopted for the incorporation of immigrants into Norwegian society is integration, understood as giving the new citizens possibilities, rights and obligations equal to the rest of the population

while granting them the opportunity to preserve their language, culture and way of life to the extent they desire to do so (Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion 2012). In the education system, approximately 12% of the children attending kindergarten and preschool are considered to be language minority children by having a mother tongue different from Norwegian or Sámi. The Norwegian Kindergarten Act states that these children have the right to receive support for the use of their mother tongue in kindergarten and to develop competence in Norwegian. The section of the Act entitled “Kindergarten as a culture arena” states that children from minority cultures must get support in developing their dual cultural identity (Ministry of Education and Research 2005). For the school system, which comprises primary and lower secondary (grades 1 to 10; ages 6 to 16) and upper secondary (grades 11 to 13), there are no official statistics on language minority students, but a reasonable estimate is that some 15% and 12%, respectively, of students in these two parts of the system speak a language other than Norwegian or Sámi as their mother tongue. However, the Education Act does not afford any special treatment to students according to language background per se. To be eligible for special tuition, tests have to indicate that the student has insufficient Norwegian skills to follow normal teaching in school. In such case, he or she is entitled to adapted instruction in Norwegian and if needed mother tongue teaching and/or bilingual subject teaching. Students may also attend an introductory programme of up to two years before they are referred to an ordinary school or class.

The local communities and even the individual kindergartens and schools have considerable freedom in how they organise the teaching and learning activities for minority language children and students, accounting for why there is much variation in this area across the country.

Finland

Finnish students’ success in international comparisons of student assessments (such as PISA) in the last decade has been celebrated at the national level and remained a topic of interest internationally. Finnish students’ performance has been among the best in all the domains in each PISA cycle, albeit on the decline recently (OECD 2015). According to the Finnish National Board of Education (FNBE), education is seen as a key to the competitiveness and wellbeing of society. Education has long had a reputation as a basic right of all citizens and in this context is provided free of charge. The right to education and culture is also recorded in the

constitution. Quality, efficiency, equity and internalisation stand out as key terms in the Finnish education policy. In spite of all the acclaim that Finnish education has recently received, it does not mean that there is no room or need for development. According to recent studies by Finnish researchers Bernelius (2013), Riitaoja (2013) and Kalalahti and Varjo (2012), among others, educational equality in Finland has weakened due to increasingly neoliberal policies. Studies also show that Finland has been facing threats of youth marginalisation; a lower performance of boys, Swedish-speakers and immigrants (Kilpi-Jakonen 2011) and reduced wellbeing at comprehensive schools (Harinen and Halme 2012). Migration to Finland is constantly growing; as the immigrant population grows, we need more information for monitoring integration and success in the world's "best" education system. In 2013, the immigrant population stood at 17,000 people. At the end of 2012, a total of 195,511 foreign nationals were residing in Finland—3.6% of the whole population. In 2016, Finnish citizenship was granted to 9,375 foreign citizens (Official Statistics of Finland 2017). Elina Kilpi-Jakonen (2012) shows that, regardless of current policies and measures, children of immigrants tend to have lower levels of school achievement at the end of comprehensive school than the majority and that their lower parental resources are partly the reason. Refugees have the lowest levels of achievement overall. But there seem to be exceptions: Asian immigrants outperform the majority, while children of one Finnish-born and one foreign-born parent do not differ from the majority. Multiculturalism and discussion around diversities in education are fairly recent in Finland. This is particularly relevant in times like ours, when Finland is suffering, like most countries in Europe, from repeated economic crises that have led to anti-immigrant, xenophobic and racist discourses in the media and on the street. Dealing with diversities of any kind in schools often produces differentiation and hierarchisation in spite of teachers' professionalism and good intentions to treat students fairly and equally. Teachers seem to lack tools to analyse and detect discourses that create othering.

Sweden

Sweden is today considered a "multicultural Society". The trend started in the 1950s with labour market-related immigration and continued with the numerous groups of political refugees that have arrived in Sweden during the past three decades.

The Swedish educational policy has since the beginning of the 1970s been part of immigration politics and since the 1990s part of integration politics

in Sweden (Prop. 1975:26; Prop. 1997/98:16). In 1975, Sweden got its first official policy act directed at immigrants and ethnic minorities, an act that was based on multicultural principles. Resources and support were extended to ethnic groups to preserve their languages and cultures. In the 1990s this multicultural policy was strongly criticised. The argument was that a multicultural policy contributes to creating an atmosphere of “us, the Swedes, and the other, the immigrants” and hinders the integration of immigrants. This led to the formulation of a new integration policy in 1996. In the integration policy there is a greater focus on diversity and universal principles. In public discourse, media, debates, etc., diversity is still often associated with immigration from outside “Western Europe” (Lunneblad and Johansson 2012). However, in the official documents, diversity has a broad definition, as the aim of the Swedish integration policy is to give general support to the whole population rather than to specific groups. The educational act is in line with this policy. The one exception here is children with a mother tongue other than Swedish. Children in pre-school, students in compulsory school and students in upper secondary school are all entitled to mother tongue teaching—*if the language is used in the family*. In addition to this, students in upper secondary schools need to have *very good knowledge* of the mother tongue language in the family context to be entitled to support. In today’s educational policy acts, preschool and school are defined as an arena for social and cultural interactions, aimed at preparing the coming generations for a life in an increasingly internationalised society. However, since the 1990s, there has also been a growing awareness of the ethnic and cultural differences and racism in Swedish society. The past 10 years have seen a growing debate about the relation between immigration and internal national problems related to segregation and xenophobia (Lunneblad and Johansson 2012).

Findings

Survey

The survey was conducted in 2015. Response rates were low in all countries, so the outcomes must be interpreted with caution. Some of the interesting results were as follows:

The Finnish respondents are strikingly more satisfied with their national education policy than the respondents from the three other countries. Sweden is at the other end, with less than one-third of the respondents

being content. Iceland and Norway are placed fairly close to each other in the middle.

The Finnish respondents are just as happy with educational policy at the regional and local levels, while the Swedish respondents are even less satisfied with regional- and local-level policy than national policy. The Icelandic respondents have similar feelings regarding policy at all levels, while their Norwegian colleagues are clearly more content with the local and regional policies.

With regard to school funding, the Swedish respondents are massively dissatisfied; next comes Iceland, with a clear majority of unhappy respondents, while the Finnish respondents are equally split between the response options. If satisfied respondents and respondents who are neither discontent nor content are grouped together, Norway and Finland are the most satisfied—or perhaps the least dissatisfied—of the four countries.

Responses regarding the provision of pedagogical help or professional support to schools are similar to those regarding funding: Swedish respondents are highly dissatisfied, and the majority of Icelandic respondents are dissatisfied, while the responses from Finland and Norway are more evenly distributed and more positive.

Overall, Finnish school personnel give the most positive responses to items dealing with support from politicians and educational authorities, while the results for Sweden show a high degree of unease with the state of affairs. The Swedish responses seem to indicate a widespread consensus that the Swedish school system is in a state of crisis. In contrast, the figures from Finland are in harmony with the impression that education in Finland is, overall, a success story. The relative satisfaction of the Norwegian respondents does not come as a surprise as there is little controversy over the education policy at the moment, and the economy is strong.

A more uniform picture of the four countries is seen in the data regarding issues at the school level, but here, too, there are differences worth commenting on. Again the Swedish respondents often stand out as an exception. In all the countries, the majority of respondents agree that a policy for children or students of a foreign background exists in their schools (figures range from 74% in Sweden to 94% in Norway) and that to a large extent this policy is agreed upon by the personnel in the schools (from 63% in Sweden to 90% in Norway). In Finland, Iceland and Norway

the respondents report that there is a policy for multicultural education in their schools (Iceland 73%, Finland 84%, Norway 90%) and that there is agreement on this policy (Iceland 57%, Finland 67%, Norway 90%). The Swedish respondents tend to be quite uncertain as to whether there is such a policy (32% say there is one, 21% disagree and 47% are in doubt). When it comes to a policy for inclusion, respondents in all the four countries say that there is such a policy in their institutions (from 65% in Sweden to 90% in Norway) and that there is agreement on the policy (from 60% in Sweden to 92% in Norway). On the item concerning emphasis on continued professional development in the area of multicultural education, the countries form two quite distinct poles: In Finland and Norway, the respondents report that there is such an emphasis (Finland 71%, Norway 75%). In Iceland and Sweden less than 40% give a positive response, and in Sweden as many as 50% say that this area is not emphasised, while many Icelandic respondents are uncertain (44%).

In all four countries, the respondents indicate that school leaders are active participants in developing the learning environment for children and students of a foreign background (from 54% in Sweden to 88% in Norway), that they emphasise the wellbeing of all students (from 80% in Sweden to 98% in Norway) and that they support the teachers and other staff in their work (from 76% in Iceland to 98% in Norway).

On items dealing with the teachers' own work, the majority of respondents across the countries indicate that they plan learning opportunities for children and students with a foreign background (from 57% in Iceland to 97% in Finland), support educational and social partnership between children and students with a foreign background and other students (from 75% in Iceland to 94% in Finland) and emphasise equality and the participation of all students (from 91% in Finland to 96% in Norway). When it comes to using an adapted curriculum for children and students of a foreign background, there is a majority of affirmative responses in all countries but Iceland, and Iceland is also at the bottom concerning cooperation with parents of children and students of a foreign background although the majority of Icelandic respondents (57%) answered positively.

Case studies

Below we summarise the findings from the four research areas and provide guidelines and recommendations for school development.

Our research findings reveal a variety of interesting educational practices within and across the four countries although there are many similarities in policies, structures and organisation.

Policies and curricula

The policies of the preschools in all countries are child-centred and emphasise a holistic view of learning that focuses on care, play and active participation. They emphasise creating a community for all children. This is reflected in active communication with parents and children across languages and cultures.

The policies of the compulsory schools (elementary and lower secondary) emphasise diversity and inclusion and cooperation between teachers. Cooperation with parents is also an important part of the policies. Structures differ slightly between the schools although they generally organise introductory divisions or reception units around the immigrant children. There are, however, examples of schools that have a model of direct integration. In most of the schools, the students belong to a regular class and have a supervisory teacher, and their attendance in the units depends on their needs and pace of learning.

In the upper secondary schools, the policies emphasise that the student acquire knowledge to be able to think independently and critically so they can actively participate in society. The schools have a variety of programmes and support to facilitate the integration of immigrant students. Policies indicate understanding and empathy for immigrant students.

Leadership

Leadership in the preschools is democratic, and the structure and organisation does not differentiate immigrant children. Leaders are supportive and participative and strive to ensure the democratic participation of all children. The leaders in some of the schools work in very demanding conditions, for example with low staff retention and staff that do not have preschool teacher education. In some cases, the leaders and teachers lack the initiative to reach out to the immigrant parents.

Leadership in the compulsory schools generally has a democratic approach and can be characterised as participative and supportive. The leaders' aim is to create an inclusive school culture and support diversity and social

justice. They emphasise respecting difference and thinking positively about diversity.

In the upper secondary schools, organisational structures have been created for teaching the majority languages. These are independent units or departments led by heads of departments that have knowledge on and interest in the matters of immigrant students. The leaders are preoccupied with the social isolation of the students and have developed ways to counteract this.

Teachers

The teachers in the preschools generally emphasise individually based care and learning, diversity and equality. Educational practices are generally child-centred and based on diversity, with the aim of involving all children in active participation. Some of the teachers have specialised in education for diversity, but this does not apply to all teachers. Some missed learning opportunities were observed, where the teachers lacked the initiative to involve immigrant children in the activities. Scaffolding opportunities were not used to the full extent.

Teachers in the compulsory schools generally emphasise the importance of creating a welcoming and trusting learning environment for students. They understand the importance of linguistic diversity as a resource while also acknowledging the importance for the students' future in learning the majority language. The teachers also emphasise cooperation with parents.

The varied experiences of the teachers in the upper secondary schools of living and studying abroad provided them with an understanding and insight into multicultural issues. Some of the teachers had a strong vision for teaching immigrant students. However, their practices varied, and while some teachers emphasised the majority language acquisition, others had a more holistic view, emphasising the students' personal and social development as well as academic learning.

Students and children

Most of the immigrant children in the preschools were 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. There were some cases of missed learning

opportunities, where the teachers lacked the initiative to involve immigrant children in the activities, and the children seemed to be marginalised.

The students interviewed and observed in the compulsory schools emphasise their teachers and their schools as reasons for their success. Some describe their teachers as caring, kind and genuinely concerned with their wellbeing and success. Generally, the students appear to be active in their schools and both academically and socially successful. However, challenges appear in both of the models, the reception model and the model of direct integration. Some of the students in the reception model find it difficult to relate to and make friends with children in the regular class. And some of the students in the model of direct integration feel insecure and find it to be an overwhelming experience.

Overall, the students in the upper secondary schools appeared to be very positive about their schools and many of their teachers. They appreciated that their teachers showed personal interest in them and cared for their wellbeing. They also talked about the importance of having a demanding school environment. Most of these students had friends from immigrant backgrounds, while some also had friends from the majority population.

Guidelines and recommendations for school development

The findings from this comprehensive research project give good reason for pointing to measures that could be taken to make schools in the Nordic countries into even better learning spaces for students with an immigrant background.

Firstly, educating teachers in regard to diversity is seen as essential for creating better learning spaces, including formal training and education in multilingualism and communication across linguistic and cultural differences, formal training and education in multicultural education as well as formal training and education in teaching Finnish, Icelandic, Norwegian, Swedish as second languages.

Secondly, we emphasise that immigrant students' education should be the responsibility of all teachers, not only the teachers in introductory or reception units. Therefore, all teachers need to be involved in the education of newly arrived students. Furthermore, teachers and leaders need to be more ambitious in the education of minority language children.