

EDUCATION FOR TOMORROW – PHASE I. KEY FINDINGS



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Education for Tomorrow – Phase I.

Key Findings

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Education for Tomorrow

From research to policy and practice

The aim of the programme »Education for Tomorrow« is to generate new knowledge about the Nordic educational systems that will better equip them to meet the needs of society – today and in the future. This leaflet presents a number of key findings from the Nordic Centre of Excellence and six research projects that made up the first phase of the programme, 2013-2018. A second phase of the programme will follow in 2017-2023.

What kind of educational systems will be needed in the future?

The Nordic countries and their educational systems share important aims, roots and cultural characteristics. The countries all have a strong tradition of public education from preschool to universities and beyond, into life-long learning. The programme aims to enhance the understanding of education and educational systems and to explore their role as factors in tomorrow's society.

A programme that will shape the future

The programme seeks to shape the Nordic educational systems of the future by actively promoting the development of Nordic education. What are the challenges facing the Nordic educational systems and how can these challenges be met? How can the educational systems reformulate their aims, practices and structures in order to meet the needs of a rapidly-changing society?

Objectives

The programme's overall objectives are:

- to strengthen the Nordic region's position in educational research within and outside of Europe;
- to contribute to a knowledge-based policy and practice for the educational sector in the Nordic countries;
- to disseminate the results to a wide array of stakeholders in the Nordic region and internationally.

Phase I: 2013-2018

The first phase of the programme has financed six research projects and one Nordic Centre of Excellence. Results have been disseminated via conferences, publications, seminars and media.

In addition to the projects presented on the following pages, the first phase of the programme has launched three small-scale projects to develop important cross-



cutting themes and issues emerging from several projects and five spin-off projects aiming to enhance end user relevance of the research.

Phase II: 2017-2023

In order to bridge research with practice in the area of teaching and learning, the second phase of the programme focuses on:

- the application of research-based knowledge in practice in genuinely collaborative projects;
- the role of teacher education for research-based development of practice.

Phase II of the programme covers early childhood education and care, primary education and teacher education. Calls for applications are open in the spring of 2017.

Financing organisations:

- Academy of Finland
- The Swedish Research Council
- The Research Council of Norway
- The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, Iceland
- The Danish Council for Strategic Research (phase I) and the Danish Ministry of Higher Education and Science (phase II)
- Nordic Council of Ministers (phase I)
- NordForsk.

Budget:

Phase I: NOK 75 million

Phase II: NOK 50 million

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1. The Nordic Centre of Excellence Justice through education in the Nordic countries

JUSTED

How does education work to further justice in the Nordic states? The Nordic Centre of Excellence "Justice through Education in the Nordic Countries" (JustEd) carries out research on the challenges facing the Nordic educational systems in the 21st century. The Centre is multidisciplinary and cross-national with 14 partners and 130 researchers.

The Centre's research is focused around the question: How do systems, cultures and actors in education enable and constrain justice in the context of globalising Nordic welfare states?

More specifically, the Nordic Centre of Excellence JustEd studies the impact of policies, such as school choice and public accountability, on teaching and learning cultures as well as on the marginalisation and engagement of learners. The Centre contributes to the re-formulation of democratic, inclusive education for justice in the middle of current political, economic and cultural transformation.

The main activities of the Nordic Centre of Excellence JustEd are research, researcher education and researcher mobility. Other key activities are seminars, biennial conferences, extensive international publication and dissemination. Nordic Centre of Excellence JustEd also seeks to influence policies and practices through its research results.

The Centre is coordinated by the Faculty of Educational Sciences at the University of Helsinki. It started its activities in August 2013.

The Nordic Centre of Excellence JustEd conducts research in three thematic areas:

1. Governance, politics and marketisation changes in the Nordic understanding of justice through education.

Thematic area 1 critically examines policies and practices and how they shape politicians, teachers, students and the public understanding and action in the field of education. In addition, activities will deepen the understanding of how policies and practices are both embedded in national and local contexts and shaped at the European and global policy level.

2. Justice through educational practices? Analysing innovative cultures of teaching and learning in Nordic contexts.

How do policy changes affect the ability to promote equality in contemporary educational institutions in the Nordic countries? Thematic area 2 focuses on cultural practices of learning and teaching in educational institutions. Moreover, activities in this thematic area seek specifically to develop research methodology and ways to extend the life cycle of data.

3. Enabling and constraining justice in education: agency, marginalisation and diversity.

Marginalisation and exclusion from active participation and success in education are detrimental both for individuals and for society at large. The research focuses on how justice is supported and constrained in and by Nordic education from the actors' perspectives. The research studies agency, marginalisation and the central notion of diversity to analyse the place of justice in education.

The Nordic Centre of Excellence JustEd fosters extensive contacts and collaboration between all the Nordic countries and widely recognised international partners. The 14 collaborating partner institutions in 8 countries are:

- Aalborg University, Denmark
- Oslo and Akershus University College, Norway
- Sciences Po, France
- Umeå University, Sweden
- University of Copenhagen, Denmark

- University of Gothenburg, Sweden
- University of Helsinki, Finland
- University of Iceland, Iceland
- University of Melbourne, Australia
- University of Oslo, Norway
- University of Turin, Italy
- University of Turku, Finland
- Østfold University College, Norway
- The Finnish Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (FAIDD), Finland

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2. Values education in Nordic preschools: Basis of education for tomorrow (ValuEd)

What kind of future citizens do we need to foster in early childhood education in order to build cohesive pluralistic societies in the Nordic countries? In an increasingly diverse society, this question is highly relevant.

The research project "Values education in Nordic preschools – Basis of education for tomorrow" (ValuEd) has focused on issues such as how the national educational policies frame values education in preschools; the form, kind and gender patterns of values education in preschools; and the similarities and variations in values and values education between the Nordic countries. The results of the project are relevant for a broad spectrum of target groups across the fields of scientific research, teacher education, and educational policy and practice in the Nordic countries and beyond.

Below are some of the most important ideas drawn from the research project (2013–2016):

1. Pedagogical practices in early childhood education and care (ECEC) are essentially value-bound: Education is legitimated by the purpose of promoting a good life for children. The questions "What is good for children?" and "How can we promote children's best interests through education?" are related to values.

2. Values education is a significant but underrepresented area in ECEC, both in the Nordic countries and worldwide. Although a values perspective is embedded in the core curricula and legislation relating to ECEC in all of the Nordic countries, professional, political and scientific discussions tend to overlook values.

3. In a global framework, the shared cultural heritage and the common values base of the Nordic countries have been emphasised. The Nordic societies have been acknowledged as being among the world's most democratic and most equal from both an economic and a gender perspective. However, the study shows that, for instance, **the values of democracy are articulated differently in the Nordic ECEC core curricula.**

4. Our study reveals that ECEC **practitioners share some pedagogical ideas and values in the Nordic countries.**

There is a sub-study in which practitioners in all the Nordic countries interpreted the same dressing situation. The study shows that the practitioners paid attention to similar aspects, they criticised the dressing situation with similar arguments, and they suggested similar ways of making the dressing situation a more comfortable one for children and adults. Most of the differences occurred between individual

practitioners and preschools rather than between the countries.

5. Values education appears in a field of tension between the ideal and reality. Practitioners sometimes find themselves positioned in between demands from the organisation and their own value priorities. Efficiency values may intrude on the practice, which sometimes leads to teachers withdrawing from the values they yearn for.

6. A diversity of values is communicated in the daily lives of early childhood settings.

There are also conflicts between different values. The educators constantly encounter tensions between different values and priorities:

- Caring values (being available for children, listening to children, respecting children's initiatives, physical closeness, etc.)
- Democratic values (children's rights, participation, equality, justice)
- Competence values (supporting children's growth, development and learning)
- Efficiency values (working effectively)
- Individuality (individuals' interests, priorities, needs)
- Collectivity (sociality, belonging, inclusion, sharing)
- Disciplinary values (maintaining order, avoiding chaos, setting limits)
- Professional vs. personal values

7. In the daily lives of ECEC settings, values are communicated both explicitly and implicitly. Our studies show that values do not exist as a distinct element but rather as an entangled element in educational work.

8. It is often hard for the practitioners to verbalise and identify values on a conceptual level; **there is a lack of language for values.** Thus, there is a risk that values remain invisible, left within the domain of "the hidden curriculum".

9. Working with values is a crucial area of professional competence in ECEC. In a time of globalisation and increasing value pluralism, the ability to identify, reflect on, and discuss values is becoming even more important.

Questions posed by the study:

- How are values and values education addressed in national policies in the Nordic countries? How can this area be strengthened?
- How can practitioners' work with values be supported?
- Is the realisation of caring values possible in a time emphasising effectiveness?
- How can preschool be created as a cultural meeting place for collective relationships in a time of individuality?
- Is there a common values base for a "Nordic pedagogy"?

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3. Nordic fields of higher education – structures and transformations of organisation and recruitment (NFHE)

Higher education has been seen as one of the pillars of the welfare systems of the Nordic countries. Changes during the last three decades appear to have transformed the higher education systems in the Nordic countries into more diverse and complex national and international higher education landscapes.

What do these changes mean for the traditional Nordic model of education?

Recruitment patterns may offer a key to understanding these effects, as changes in recruitment patterns over time provide indicators of changing valorisations of higher education programmes, institutions, and fields and types of study. Analysing recruitment patterns also makes it possible to evaluate the function of higher education in relation to the welfare state, evidencing the role it plays in democratic goals related to equity. The project compares recruitment patterns at both an institutional and a discipline-related level across Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden.

Key findings:

- During the past three decades, the Nordic model of higher education that had developed from the mid-20th century has seen a number of challenges and developed in the direction of a more market-oriented system, although the pathways differ in the Nordic countries.

- Decentralisation, re-regulation and internationalisation have led to a more complex landscape of higher education.
- Similar overall expansion traits are exhibited in the four Nordic countries studied, including two major waves in the 1960s and the 1990s and a large increase in the social sciences, especially business studies.
- There is a fairly stable and similar social structure of higher education in the four Nordic countries studied, with significant differences in recruitment based on social group and gender.
- There are similar patterns in inequality reductions in access to higher education in all four countries. However, while students (especially daughters) from less-educated families have taken advantage of the opportunities that the expanding higher education system has offered them, the most prestigious professional university programmes continue to favour the more socially privileged children.

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4. The future of vocational education – learning from the Nordic countries (NordVET)

Education in the Nordic countries shares many similarities, but exhibits significant differences with regard to the systems of vocational education and training (VET). Some are mostly school-based, others mostly work-based, and they have different links to the labour market and to general and higher education.

This project examines how four Nordic VET systems manage the key dilemma of providing access to the skilled labour market and to higher education at the same time. In addition, the project examines how the VET systems manage social inclusion in relation to social background, ethnicity and gender, and at the same time maintain high esteem for vocational education. How do they manage the trade-offs between these different options?

“Our research has shown that it is difficult for the Nordic VET systems to achieve these two goals at the same time: to provide eligibility for higher education in VET and at the same time to provide access to skilled employment for disadvantaged students,” explains Helms Jørgensen.

The first stage of the project has examined the historical evolution of the four VET systems, in order to explain why they have given priority to different sides of the trade-offs. The examination shows that VET has been given little attention in public policy and that VET has been formed by a multitude of stakeholders with diverging interests.

In the second stage the project has examined reforms of the VET systems in each of the four countries to see how the trade-offs have been managed.

In Finland and Sweden, VET has been integrated into the unitary comprehensive school systems, which are better at offering access for all to higher education. However, these full-time, school-based systems have weak connections to the labour market, and offer few alternatives for youth who do not pursue the academic route. The Danish and Norwegian systems have maintained a separate track of apprenticeship, which is better at providing direct access to the labour market, also for disadvantaged youth. But these VET systems do not provide eligibility for higher education, and for that reason their esteem is decreasing.

In the third stage the project has looked for institutional innovation and new solutions to the trade-offs.

The dominant trend is that VET has tended to become more school-based and more separated from working life. The analyses show that two conditions are required to maintain a high quality of work-based training as part of VET:

1. The employers must be actively involved in the governance and certification of the training system.
2. The state must impose legally binding obligations on the training companies.

It has been difficult to balance these two requirements. Strong state intervention has weakened the employers' commitment to training and strengthened the development of school-based VET systems. Active employer involvement has weakened the links to general and higher education, and this has increasingly made VET appear as a "dead end" in the education system.

By studying the recent reforms of VET, the project has identified a number of promising examples of innovations to manage the trade-offs. "Among these are intermediary institutions to bridge the world of education and the world of work," says Helms Jørgensen, "such as Norwegian training offices, Swedish Yrkescolleges and Danish training centres." Another type of new scheme involves hybrid programmes that offer a journeyman's certificate and eligibility for higher education in an integrated form (Norwegian TAF, Danish EUX).

In the fourth stage the project has investigated two selected occupations, Health and Construction, to explore how the trade-offs are managed at different levels (local/national) in all four countries.

It has found many similarities between the countries in Construction, despite different VET systems, as well as many differences in e.g. the position of assistant nurses.

Results from the project are published in 12 research reports which are available on the website. In addition, the results have been presented at conferences and are published in educational journals and two books in English.

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5. Learning spaces for inclusion and social justice – success stories from immigrant students and school communities in four Nordic countries (LSP)

This research project draws lessons from success stories of individual immigrant students and entire Nordic school communities at the preschool, compulsory and upper secondary levels where learning spaces for inclusion and social justice have been created, thus facilitating academic and social success among immigrant students.

The main findings of this research indicate that the 27 schools in the project 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 of learning the majority language for the students' future. The teachers generally emphasise cooperation with parents.

However, there are challenges such as

- a lack of formal training and education of teachers on multilingualism and multicultural education
- immigrant students' education tends to be the responsibility of teachers in introductory or reception units, while it should be

the responsibility of all teachers; measures are needed for sustaining knowledge and good practices

- there is a need for cooperation between schools (teachers and leaders) and sharing of experiences, practices and ideas.

What does success in education mean?

Another highlight of the research is that the idea of success is not problematised enough in the context of education. The idea of success in education deserves to be considered from a critical perspective, and aspects other than assessment need to be taken into account (subjective side). It is important to consider social as well as academic aspects of success. This has an impact on how researchers can identify successful students: from whose perspective? If one relies on just one perspective, one can easily essentialise certain students with an immigrant background.

Working with inclusion and social justice is part of the obligations of all teachers. This knowledge should be incorporated into teachers' teams and the organisation, rather than seen as a "specific" task for certain teachers.

Not a very original result, but something which continuously needs to be pointed out, is the importance of the local "powerful" language and how essential it is to know this language in order to

achieve success (both objective and subjective). Adequate and revised pedagogy for the majority languages as second languages is needed. Instead of emphasising the study of heritage languages only (a contested notion), maybe one should put all the eggs in the same basket to ensure more success, that is, emphasise learning of both second and heritage language/social justice and interculturality.

The 27 schools in the research vary greatly, so it is difficult to provide overall findings at this point. However, some main findings from all countries include:

- **Well-educated, creative staff** that builds bridges in order to support the education of immigrant students and children create learning spaces for inclusion, social justice and empowerment. Many go out of their way to ensure that these students and children have the best available academic and social opportunities. Dedicated leadership is important in creating structures for language and other support.

- **The well-being of students and children is emphasised, and efforts are made** in all countries to cooperate actively with parents. The concept of care and safety is important in this respect, and in many schools this is visible in school-parent participation, language support for families etc.

Some challenges have also been identified, namely these:

- Regarding key concepts of the research, **success is rarely a topic in the school context and teaching, and it should be introduced more systematically** in discussions around social justice and inequality. Success is a very unstable notion that needs to be tackled carefully by researchers and practitioners.

- **The lack of sustainability of leadership and knowledge**, i.e. there is no system in place to ensure that the expertise possessed by key people who head up efforts with immigrant students and children will be transferred to the organisation, and expertise remains in the hands of a few people in some of the schools. As a result, expertise may disappear from these schools when those people leave. The risk of burn-out is high as well.

- Another critical issue at upper levels is the relatively low number of students with an immigrant background.

Key findings from all schools as well as guidelines for policy makers and practitioners are outlined in the LSP report on main findings:
http://lsp2015.hi.is/final_report

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6. Skill acquisition, skill loss, and age. A comparative study of cognitive foundation skills (SASLA)

This study has focused on the links between age, CFS and the factors that promote skill acquisition and prevent a depreciation of skills in the adult population age 16–65 in Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden.

Three domains of Cognitive Foundation Skills have been examined: literacy, numeracy, and problem solving with ICT. These skills are also called key information processing skills and basic cognitive skills. The study combined data from PIAAC (Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies) with population register data for the Nordic countries and with earlier survey data from IALS (International Adult Literacy Survey), ALL (Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey) and PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment).

Key findings:

- **Age is strongly associated with proficiency in literacy, numeracy and problem solving with ICT.** This association partly remains even after controlling for different background factors, education being the most important one.
- The average association between age and basic cognitive skills is similar to an inverted U. **Skills increase from age 16 to about 30–35 but at a decreasing**

rate and decrease from this age onwards.

Compulsory school is extremely important for literacy skills not only of young people but also of adults.

- Age-group performance differences are strongly related to the PISA achievement trends. **Quality of schooling has lasting impact** on adult literacy and numeracy performance levels.
- **The levels of achievement in compulsory school have long-term, perhaps even life-long, influence.** The significance of the length and scope of the initial education in developing literacy proficiency overall is difficult to compensate.
- **How recently a degree has been obtained is less important for literacy proficiency than age**, when other determinants are controlled for. Older adults with recent degrees do not show higher performance than younger adults with older degrees. Within age groups, there are no differences in literacy proficiency between adults with a recent degree and adults with an older degree.
- Reading activities at and outside work partly reduce age group differences in reading proficiency. **Engagement in reading outside work in various contexts is more important for reading proficiency than reading at work.**

- The results do not seem to give much support to the hypothesis that participation in non-formal adult education and training positively influences adults' key information processing skills, literacy, numeracy and problem solving with ICT, even when the length of participation is taken into account.

- **Key information processing skills decline from the age of 35 both for high- and low-skilled workers at about the same pace. The use of skills at work also declines from the age of 35** for both high-skilled workers and low-skilled workers at about the same pace, and at about the same rate as measured skills. The evidence does not support the 'use it or lose it' hypothesis as the primary explanation of the negative association between age and skills in the age interval 35-65.

- Reading skills seem to increase for a cohort of young people from age 15 to 27. **Participation in education, in particular higher education, has a positive impact** on development of young people's reading skills whereas more than one year with unemployment and/or sickness has a negative impact.

- There are similar patterns of **gender differences across the Nordic countries** in the survey data sets examined in the study. The differences are the largest in PISA and the smallest in PIAAC. The magnitude of the observed gender differences appears to be associated with certain assessment features such as, e.g., the reading aspect measured, text type and item type.

- **Key information processing skills of immigrants are below those of natives in almost all countries**, not least in the Nordic countries. Yet, the largest differences only correspond to 3-4 percent of the measured skills of a country's entire population. Moreover, excluding immigrants does not significantly affect country skill rankings.

- The results suggest that **poor literacy skills are associated with increased likelihood of experiencing poor health**, even after controlling for educational level.

The study has shown the importance of initial formal education in developing and maintaining basic cognitive skills during adulthood. The significance of the initial education is difficult to compensate for later in life. However, there is a need to develop forms of adult education and training which help adults to update their skills to keep up with new demands in working and everyday life. Especially, the challenge of enhancing and updating the education of older adults with low proficiency levels is especially crucial if countries aim to keep them in the workforce longer.

The project has shown that it is feasible to construct a Nordic database containing matched survey data, i.e. PIAAC, and population register data. Moreover, it has illustrated the usefulness of the Nordic context for purposes of policy analyses, exploiting the common institutional and cultural features in comparisons of the results of different education and training policies.

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7. ProMeal – prospects for promoting health and performance by school meals in Nordic countries

Schools are an important arena for public health actions which seek to prevent lifestyle-related diseases, promote good food habits, health and learning, and decrease differences in food habits and health related to socioeconomic and ethnic differences. This research project aims to determine whether school lunches improve the overall healthiness of children's diets and learning conditions and explores the children's main concerns regarding school lunches in a Nordic context.

In total, 840 pupils born in 2003 were recruited through municipal schools in Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden, which were evenly distributed among the countries and by gender. A total of 3 928 pictures of school meals were taken to capture pupils' school lunch intake. A mean of 85% of all parents responded to a questionnaire about socioeconomic background, dietary intake and physical activity habits at home. On one occasion the cognitive function of 93% of the pupils was measured under optimal conditions with Stroop and Child Operation Span tests. A mean of 169 pupils also took

an Integrated Visual and Auditory Continuous Performance Test after lunch during a three-day period. In total, 26 569 10-second observations of classroom learning behaviour were performed. In addition, 753 empathy-based stories were written.

Validation of a new photographic method for assessment of pupils' food choices and nutrient intake from meals provided in schools (submitted).

Assessing dietary intake – especially in children – presents many challenges. Using validated methods is important, and the photographic method developed for the ProMeal project makes the assessment of dietary intake in school canteens non-obtrusive, practical and feasible.

Nordic children's perspectives on the healthiness of school meals. More than 70 focus group discussions were held, and the healthiness of the meal was actively brought up by the children in all focus groups. It appears that Nordic children have internalised the socio-cultural ideal of healthy eating in the school context, which is also established in the dietary recommendations and core curricula. Although healthy eating was constructed as a rational, normative and acceptable way to eat at school, unhealthy eating was emphasised

as negotiable and acceptable under certain circumstances.

Vegetable and fruit intake through meals provided by schools or brought from home in a lunchbox – what is served and what is eaten. Analyses show that vegetable and fruit intake in the participating pupils from Sweden was far from the planned amounts, despite good accessibility in salad bars. Serving vegetarian meals, however, was popular and improved intake.

Impact of school lunch intake on cognitive function among boys and girls in a Nordic setting. Three different computer tests were used to measure working memory capacity, inhibition and processing speed as well as attention and self-control. This will be analysed in relation to energy intake and general eating pattern.

Nordic School Meal Meeting

A Nordic School Meal Meeting arranged together with the Swedish National Food Agency in February 2016 gathered national authorities responsible for issuing school meal guidelines and researchers from Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden.

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the current situation of Nordic school meals and strategies for improving young people's eating habits through school meals and to share experiences from school meal guideline development and implementation within a Nordic setting. The conclusion of the meeting was that:

- New research on school meals

provides important knowledge that can be used for further quality improvements and guideline development.

- The Nordic school meal systems and school meal guidelines share many similarities and challenges, but differ in some aspects.
- The meeting and discussions were very fruitful, and there is a great need for and interest in further collaboration and sharing of experiences at a Nordic level.

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