

Dear colleagues and guest

On behalf of the University of Iceland, and the School of Education in particular, I'm honored to welcome you to this conference, *Learning Spaces for Inclusion and Social Justice*.

First of all, I'd like to apologize for the last-minute change of venue. For the first two days, the conference will be held here at Saga Film and at the Icelandic Centre for Research which is 10 minutes away on foot. This is due to a strike that more or less locks all the university buildings both today and tomorrow (along with many other public buildings in Iceland). As much as we regret the inconvenience this causes for all of you I ask for your understanding and I assure you that as hosts, we here at the University of Iceland will do everything within our means to make the conference go as smoothly as possible.

This conference, which is the culmination of a NordForsk-funded project in the *Education for tomorrow* program, touches up on perhaps the two most important factors in society: Social justice and education. Perhaps these are two sides of the same coin and therefore cannot be separated. Although the Nordic Countries are known for much more equality in terms of education than say, for instance, the United States or the UK to some extent, it is of great importance to us to keep on enhancing education and creating educational opportunities for younger generations. Education might indeed well be the driving force behind social justice and social mobility and on no small way when we look specifically towards immigrants.

I for one strongly believe in fairness and find it fascinating to read, in the project's final report, about the lessons drawn from success stories of individual immigrant students and whole school communities at different levels and the success in developing learning contexts that are equitable and socially just.

Although the phrase “the world is getting smaller” has been around for decades it always tends to apply to current times but perhaps our understanding of it is quite wrong. One might even argue that globalization is indeed leading to a larger world in the meaning that we can now for instance travel further or do our shopping on the other side of the world from our living-room at home. But this has led to other changes, namely societal changes.

Decades ago some nations or even societies could stand alone and be self-sufficient, but today all nations and almost all people are part of an interdependent global order. This means more complex societies which of course calls for adjustments in almost every aspect of life, including the way we offer education.

To be able to tread the right path we need understanding of where we stand and recommendations on where to go and to this extent, this project has some valuable guidelines and recommendations. I'd like to mention diversity education of teachers, involving teachers in the education of newly-arrived students, and increasing the number of mother tongue teachers for teaching mother languages and supporting immigrant children as some of the most important issues raised in the project's final report.

Hundreds of thousands or millions are now either seeking better living conditions far away from their native homes or have been forced out due to war and aggression. To be able to right by these people and to include them to our societies we need to offer inclusion and social justice and your project is a stepping stone towards that aim.

Once again, I am delighted to welcome you to the conference and to Iceland for those of you who came from abroad, and I wish you great success in your conference and the exchanges I am confident it will produce.