



Hjörtur has been working in the field of international cooperation in youth work and education for 15 years. During that time he has managed several national and international project supporting educational development in pre-schools and primary schools in Reykjavik, Iceland. For the last 4 years Hjörtur has participated in the implementation of the Reykjavik education policy, creating and maintaining the education policy website and leading the creation of the current three year implementation plan. Hjörtur has been

leading the team from the City of Reykjavik in the Education is relationships project.

Hjortur, a lot is said about Icelandic education. What, in your opinion, is its greatest value? What could be considered your "educational export goods"? :-)

Icelandic education is like our geothermal hot springs - it's warm, welcoming, and has an inherent ability to invigorate and refresh those who dip into it! I believe its greatest value lies in the well-rounded approach we take, focusing not just on academics but also on social skills, creativity, health, and empowerment of the individual. It's like we're exporting well-prepared, globally-conscious individuals, ready to take on the world's challenges in the 21st century.

As a father of three, what do you personally like about Icelandic schools?

As a father of three, what I personally love about Icelandic schools is their commitment to creating an environment that nurtures the whole child. The curriculum is diverse and engaging, and the teachers are dedicated and supportive. Plus, the emphasis on leisure and extracurricular activities

ensures that my children aren't just learning, they're also having a great time doing it!

Do your children enjoy spending time at school?

As parents and teachers know, no two children are the same. One of my children had a hard time transitioning from pre-school to primary school and I think there is a valuable lesson to learn there in that it is important to maintain emphasis on learning through play in the first years of primary school. My other two children have fully enjoyed the dynamic learning environment, the focus on creativity, and the opportunity to interact with their peers.

You work in the Department of Education and Youth in the City of Reykjavik. Could you tell us about your major responsibilities?

As the Project Manager of International Relations and Grants at the Center for Educational Innovation, my role feels a bit like being a lighthouse keeper. I guide the way for international collaborations, ensuring the City of Reykjavik's educational pursuits are well-aligned with global standards. My work involves overseeing and managing grants that fund our innovative education projects. But what truly excites me about my role is the opportunity to forge international relations, much like the old Viking explorers, albeit in the realm of education rather than uncharted territories. Every day is an adventure, a chance to make a difference, and an opportunity to ensure our city's educational system continues to help the dreams of our young ones take flight.

While implementing the project, we've had a chance to learn about the Reykjavik Education Strategy 2030. Could you tell us more about its creation? Who was involved in the process, and why were the goals of social skills, self-empowerment, literacy, creativity, and health chosen?

The creation of the Reykjavik Education Strategy 2030 was a monumental task, much like composing a grand symphony, with different instruments contributing to a harmonious outcome. The City Council kick-started this initiative in 2017, but the real magic began when we started involving everyone. And by everyone, I really mean everyone! We had over 10,000 participants - children, parents, teachers, the general public, academics, NGOs, workforce, basically anyone who had a stake in the future of our education. It was like we were crowd-sourcing the future!

The goals of social skills, self-empowerment, literacy, creativity, and health emerged from this rich tapestry of diverse voices. Why these particular goals? Well, they represent what our community believed to be the fundamental competencies for our children to thrive in the 21st century. They are the chords that will enable our children to compose their own successful life symphonies.

**What actions does the City take to implement the Education Strategy?
How do you assess whether the Strategy is achieving its intended effects?**

Our approach to implementing the Reykjavik Education Strategy 2030 is indeed a harmonious blend of innovation, collaboration, and continuous learning. To orchestrate this, we have established the Centre of Innovation in Education, which plays a pivotal role, much like a conductor leading a grand symphony. This Centre is dedicated to cultivating a culture that encourages innovation and development within our educational community. We also have our online platform, menntastefna.is, acting as our virtual stage where this grand performance unfolds. This platform provides a collective space for all stakeholders to stay connected, engaged, and inspired throughout the journey of implementing our strategy. Implementation of the strategy is not a one-off concert but a continuous performance that evolves with time. We fund approximately 200 local

projects each year, allocating €1.435 million to this endeavour. The majority of these funds support smaller projects across all our educational institutions, while the remainder is allocated to larger cooperative projects.

This process is designed to encourage all participants to be innovative, take risks, make mistakes, and adopt a resilient growth mindset. Our collaboration with the University of Iceland: School of Education further strengthens our approach, with a focus on courses, research, and the co-construction of new knowledge. To verify the effects we have the results of innovative projects as well as and online self-evaluation tools where our schools can measure their progress with regards to the 5 core skills: social skills, self-empowerment, literacy, creativity, and health

What does it take to become a teacher in Iceland? Are there any special pedagogical courses required? Is teaching considered a well-paid and prestigious job in Iceland today?

Becoming a teacher in Iceland requires a completion of a Bachelor's degree, followed by a Master's degree in Education. The Master's degree is where prospective teachers are introduced to specialized pedagogical courses, which cover a wide range of topics from classroom management to inclusive education and teaching methods. The profession of teaching is not as highly respected in Iceland as we would want. Teachers should be recognized for their significant role in shaping the future of our society. Like many countries, teacher salaries can be a topic of discussion, and while they are generally competitive, there are ongoing conversations about further improvements.

How does the Department of Education support teachers in their teaching process? Are there regular workshops or trainings to enhance teachers qualifications?

The Department of Education in Reykjavik is deeply committed to supporting our teachers. We have a strong emphasis on continuous professional development, offering regular workshops and training programs to enhance teachers' qualifications and skills. These trainings cover a wide range of topics, from pedagogical strategies to technology integration, and are designed to keep our teachers at the forefront of educational innovation. Additionally, we encourage and facilitate teachers' participation in local, national, and international educational conferences and forums.

Could you tell us more about the resources available on your website, menntastefna? Is it primarily aimed at teachers?

Our online platform, menntastefna.is, is a robust resource hub designed to support the implementation of the Reykjavik Education Strategy 2030. While the platform is certainly a valuable resource for teachers, it is not exclusively aimed at them. It is designed to engage all stakeholders involved in the educational process – including students, parents, school administrators, and community members. The platform hosts a variety of resources, including policy documents, research, best practices, and a toolkit for self-evaluation.

Could you tell us about MIXTURA and why it holds a special place in your education system?

Certainly, Mixtúra, the Centre for Creativity and Educational Technology, is a pivotal component of our educational system in Reykjavik. It's a vivid embodiment of the Reykjavik Education Policy's commitment to leveraging digital technology to enrich learning, foster creativity, and prepare our students for the future. Mixtúra is unique in its comprehensive and innovative approach to integrating technology in education. It offers a wide array of services, from professional development to school innovation and

development projects, and maintains several resources like the EdTech Tool Library and a cutting-edge Makerspace.

Professional development is a key focus area for Mixtúra, with a robust schedule of seminars, workshops, and consultations tailored to meet the varying needs of educators. These events, along with other initiatives such as EdTech camps, open houses, school visits, and a coaching and mentoring program, provide educators with ample opportunities to learn, grow, and innovate.

Mixtúra holds a special place in our education system because it encapsulates our commitment to embracing digital technology, fostering creativity, and preparing our students for a future that will undoubtedly be shaped by technological advancements.

We've heard that your Department implements many international projects in the field of education. What sort of inspiration do you seek abroad?

In our international projects, we seek inspiration from a variety of sources. We are particularly interested in learning from educational systems that prioritize creativity, innovation, and holistic child development. We also look for good practices in integrating technology in education, fostering inclusivity and diversity, and implementing strategies for continuous improvement and development.

Are there good practices from other countries that you think would be beneficial to implement in your educational system?

Absolutely, we are always open to learning from others. Practices such as Finland's emphasis on teacher autonomy and trust, Singapore's rigorous teacher training, and Canada's approach to inclusive education are all sources of inspiration. However, it's important to remember that what

works in one context may not work in another, so any practices we consider would need to be adapted to fit our unique context.

What similarities and differences do you see between your education system and those of other Scandinavian countries like Finland, Norway, and Denmark?

There are many similarities between the education systems in Iceland and our Scandinavian neighbors such as Finland, Norway, and Denmark. All these countries place a strong emphasis on child-centered learning, inclusivity, teacher autonomy, and continuous development. However, there are also differences. For instance, Finland has a notably less prescriptive national curriculum compared to us and other Scandinavian countries, allowing for more flexibility at the local level.

You had the opportunity to visit a few schools in Lublin, and perhaps you have also had experiences with other Polish schools and teachers. What do you see as the major differences between our educational systems when you compare them?

After visiting schools in Lublin and interacting with Polish teachers, I have noticed several differences in our educational approaches. One of the main differences lies in our approach to homework. In Iceland, especially with younger students, we assign very minimal homework. The only regular task is reading with parents for 15-20 minutes five days a week. This approach is designed to encourage a love for reading from a young age, and to ensure that children have ample time for rest, play, and family activities after school. This is quite different from the Polish system, where homework seems to be more prevalent.

Another significant difference is in our approaches to student achievement and competition. During my visit, I noticed a distinct emphasis on individual student achievement and competition between schools in Lublin and Poland more broadly. In Iceland, our focus tends to be more on

empowering the group as a whole and improving the school system collectively rather than promoting competition between individual schools. We believe that every student and every school has unique strengths and areas for improvement, and our goal is to support all learners and educators in their growth and development.

Overall, while both the Icelandic and Polish education systems are committed to providing quality education and promoting student success, our methods and philosophies have distinct differences. Both systems, however, have valuable strengths and offer interesting insights that can enhance our understanding of effective education practices.

What good practices from Lublin schools will you be taking back to Reykjavik?

From the Lublin schools, we've been particularly inspired by the dedication and passion of the teachers. Their commitment to their students and to their profession is truly commendable. We've also been impressed by the emphasis on cultural education, and we are exploring how we might enhance this aspect in our schools.

Lastly, could you share your impressions from the "Education is a Relationship" project? Have you learned any valuable lessons from this partnership?

The "Education is a Relationship" project has been a great learning experience for us. We've learned so much about the importance of fostering strong relationships in education - between students and teachers, between schools and families, and between educational institutions and the wider community. This project has reminded us that education is not just about imparting knowledge, but about nurturing connections and fostering a sense of belonging. We're eager to bring these insights back to our work in Reykjavik.