A national initiative and national agreement to enhance literacy in Icelandic compulsory schools: A critical analysis

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Outline of the presentation

- The statement of the PISA problem 2012
- The reactions to the problem
- Short analysis of the proposed, and already taken actions
- Some wider issues of concern, and what we know about them
- An alternative to improvement strategy
The PISA alarm I

- 22 points
- 24 points
- 13 points

Gender difference in reading 2000–2012


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The minister of education and culture

http://godsamskipti.blog.is/users/9d/godsamskipti/img/illugi_gunnars.jpg
The reaction

- **White Paper on Education Reform 2014**
  - [https://eng.menntamalaraduneyti.is/media/frettir2015/Hvitbok_ENSKA_04.pdf](https://eng.menntamalaraduneyti.is/media/frettir2015/Hvitbok_ENSKA_04.pdf)
  - 90% of compulsory school pupils to meet minimum reading standards (=PISA level 2) by 2018 (from 79 currently)

- **A Task Force on the enhancement of literacy**
  - Established September 2014
  - Final action plan March 2015

- **National initiative and national agreement on literacy 2015**
  - Directorate of Education: [https://mms.is/directorate-education](https://mms.is/directorate-education)
The Directorate of Education recruited a team of eight consultants [plus a team leader] to implement the national initiative ... The team builds on evidence based strategies that other nations have used to effectively enhance reading ability. The team has emphasised to prepare its consultation to schools, municipalities and parents. At the core of the consultation there will be reliable measurements on the current state of reading and instructions how to use measurements to monitor the progress of the national initiative and make necessary amendments. In the future the team’s consultation will mainly be built on results from screening tests in literacy for years one to ten that will focus on fluency/accuracy, comprehension and writing. The tests will enable teachers to evaluate the ability levels of students and meet their diverse needs.
The proposed actions I

- The PISA results taken for granted – without reservations – as a judgement of the performance of Icelandic schools and pupils
- Unrealistic time scale (PISA 2018)
- Low aims of minimum proficiency for one fifth of students
- Predominant focus on primary years one to four
The proposed actions II

- Narrow perspective on reading and measurable reading skills
  - Measurable results of evidence-based teaching methods
  - Emphasis on (standardised) screening tests, followed by (evidence-based) special educational interventions
- Disharmony with inclusive schooling
- Targets of measurable outcomes but lack of pedagogical vision
- School improvement and professional development held up for show but ignored in action
- Ongoing improvement efforts made suspicious
Under the surface

1. A consensus of definitions of literacy?
2. What we know – and do not know – about literacy in compulsory schools
   ▸ The proficiency of the 20% of students who do poorly on PISA
3. The skewed (towards the bottom) distribution of students on the PISA performance levels
4. Gender difference
5. Difference between municipalities / urban-rural difference
   ▸ Or is it difference between social groups?
6. Diminishing book reading of children
Literacy - all the time and everywhere

- Inseparable from other aspects of schooling
- Inherent in studying all subjects
  - each subject has its own demands
- Aims for literacy inseparable from other aims of schooling and education
- Literacy skills are not acquired in a vacuum independent from other aspects of schooling
What we know

- A report to the *Ministry of Education, Culture and Science* by the *University of Iceland Social Science Research Institute* on the state of teaching of reading in Icelandic compulsory schools (2009)
  - [http://fel.hi.is/stada_lestrarkennslu_i_islenskum_grunnskolum](http://fel.hi.is/stada_lestrarkennslu_i_islenskum_grunnskolum)

- Beginning Literacy Research
  - [http://staff.unak.is/not/runar/Rannsoknir/BL_ECER_14_paper.pdf](http://staff.unak.is/not/runar/Rannsoknir/BL_ECER_14_paper.pdf)
Reactions to gender difference

Proportion of compulsory school students assigned to special education 2004–2015

Graph: Trausti Þorsteinsson
The position and needs of those who do not perform well on PISA

- The rate of dyslexia and reading difficulties
- Variables that predict performance in reading comprehension on PISA
  - Basic reading skills
  - Enjoyment of reading
  - Vocabulary
  - Diversity of reading
  - Awareness of reading comprehension and meta-cognitive strategies

http://rafhladan.is/bitstream/handle/10802/7971/FULLTEXT01.pdf?sequence=1
Distribution of students on performance levels of PISA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Below level 1</th>
<th>Level 1</th>
<th>Level 2</th>
<th>Level 3</th>
<th>Level 4</th>
<th>Level 5</th>
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<td>12</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>PISA 2012</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>19</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nordic countries & OECD

Difference between municipalities/social groups

PISA 2012: Performance of students in two municipalities

## Diminishing book reading

Number of read books last 30 days: 10–15 year olds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No book</th>
<th>1-9 books</th>
<th>10+ books</th>
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<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>1979</td>
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<td>63</td>
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<td>1985</td>
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<td>2003</td>
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<td>64</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


http://skemman.is/stream/get/1946/7600/20217/1/F%C3%A9lags-_og_mannv%C3%ADsindadeild_2009.pdf
Key actions

- Generate a common understanding of what we want to accomplish
- Analyse the aspects of the task and identify aims and goals
- Use available knowledge and generate more research knowledge to guide actions
- Use research knowledge of school improvement and professional development to guide actions
Key actions and key players

- Generate a common understanding
- Analyse the aspects of the task and identify aims and goals
- Use available knowledge and generate more
- Use knowledge of school improvement and professional development
Two distinct improvement models

**Global Educational Reform Movement - GERM**

- Competition
- Standardisation
- Test based accountability
- Fast-track teacher education

**The Nordic Model**

- Collaboration
- Creativity
- Trust based responsibility
- Professionalism & professional capital

Adapted from Sahlberg: http://starfsthrounkennara.is/future-teachers-a-profession-at-crossroads
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