PROMOTING AND ENABLING SUCCESS IN EDUCATION: THE CASE OF NORDIC EDUCATORS IN RELATION TO DIVERSITY

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Nordic countries are known worldwide for their emphasis on equality, equity and social justice, especially in terms of educational achievement (Sahlberg, 2010). Yet current research shows that many children are left aside and unsuccessful in the “Nordic model”. Diverse students, especially from an immigrant background, tend to be overrepresented in this category. This paper derives from a Nordic research project entitled Learning Spaces for Inclusion and Social Justice: Success Stories from Immigrant Students and School Communities in Four Nordic Countries (2013-2015). The main objective of the project is to draw lessons from success stories of individual immigrant students and whole school communities at different levels (preschool, compulsory school and upper secondary school) that have succeeded in developing learning contexts that are equitable and socially just, contrary to expectations based on research findings. In this paper we concentrate on the organization, policy and social practices in schools of the promoters of success and/or so-called visionaries, who are very active when it comes to helping diverse students to succeed in schools. We are also interested in the specific actions that contribute to inclusion. These people, who may be teachers, leaders, community workers, parents, etc. have been identified as keys to understand the polysemic and somewhat ambiguous notion of success in relation to education. We first wish to understand how these people position themselves in relation to this notion. This paper also discusses the identities of these actors, their roles, their long-term commitment to success as well as their impact on diverse students. Overall, our objective is to map out these promoters and visionaries for each of schools involved in our project and to compare the differences and similarities between them. Based on interviews and observation-participation in four Nordic countries at preschool and compulsory school levels, and upper secondary schools, using both discourse and narrative analyses (de Fina, 2014; Gillespie, 2009), we have identified a certain number of profiles and strategies that inform us of how success can be implemented in Nordic education. The study has also helped us to move beyond the often negative, miserabilistic and discouraging discourses of failure in relation to immigrant students in our context. We believe that this study can inform other contexts of the types of actors and actions that can contribute and enable success in education.