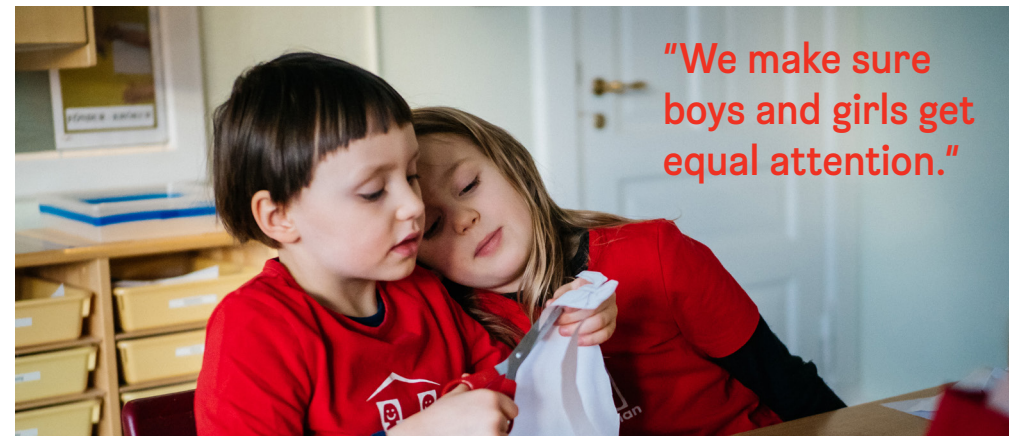


# The Hjalli Model

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The Hjalli Model



"We make sure boys and girls get equal attention."

## Iceland ranks first for gender equality worldwide

The past nine years Iceland has ranked first for gender equality worldwide regarding women's economic participation, educational attainment, health and political empowerment according to The Global Gender Gap Report published by The World Economic Forum. This global report ranks all countries on a 0-to-1 scale, and Iceland is "the front-runner" for the ninth year in a row. Ranking at the top is a confirmation of Iceland's successes achieved in recent decades and should inspire the world to continue to work towards complete equality of status, influence and power of men and women.



# Alternative and progressive pedagogy

## Single-sex settings in nursery and elementary schools in Iceland

Since 1989 an alternative, progressive pedagogy has been evolving in Iceland. At first, the concept was considered ultra-radical, but in recent years it has become more and more popular, and now 8% of all nursery children are in nursery schools run according to this particular pedagogy. This new model promotes a system where the children work in small single-sex groups for the most prominent part of the day. This serves to liberate them from traditional gender-roles and stereotypical behaviour and to make sure that girls and boys get equal attention and equal opportunities. The children receive training in all human qualities, and the focus is on empowering gender through compensation work, so they become independent and self-assertive individuals, but not least, so they gain a positive, tolerant and compassionate disposition towards themselves and others. Every day the children play in mixed settings where the focus is on mutual respect and positive collaboration.

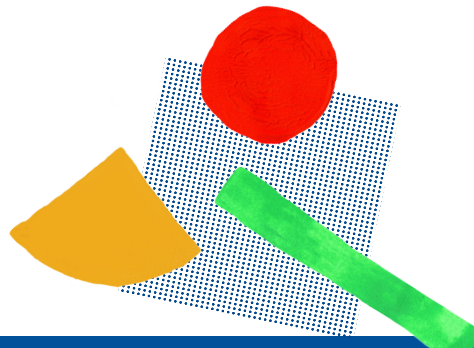


# How did it all start?

It all started with one woman who felt she needed to transform the school system, with new approaches and original ideas. During her time as a kindergarten teacher, she noticed how children were forced to conform to behaviours based upon their sex. "It takes so little to make a child happy. All one has to do is listen to them." A non-conformist, and some would say a bit of a trouble-maker, Margrét Pála Ólafsdóttir, opened her first nursery school in 1989 based on her vision of equality of the gender and how to meet each child's different needs. She called her new school model The Hjalli model, a unique approach with no other comparative pedagogy in the world. What started as one nursery school is now an independent scholarly organisation, Hjalli Ltd, which operates 14 kindergartens and three elementary schools around Iceland, with service contracts in 11 municipalities. The total number of children in our schools is over 2000 with around 450 employees.



Margrét Pála Ólafsdóttir  
**BARÁTTUFÓSTRÁ Á  
SÚPERLAUNUM**  
-hætti eftir deilur um yfirvinnu







"Our teachers emphasize original and unusual projects and new experiences to heighten the development of the brain at the child's important period of development."



"Children at Hjalli model schools receive training in all human qualities as we believe that all children should have all the possibilities in the world regardless of their gender."  
— Margrét Pála Ólafsdóttir



# The Founder — Margrét Pála Ólafsdóttir

Margrét Pála Ólafsdóttir is an Icelandic pioneer pedagogue, educator and philanthropist. She is a kindergarten and elementary teacher with further studies in school management, an M.Ed. in pedagogy and education and an MBA degree in business administration. Margrét Pála has written numerous books and articles on gender equality, pedagogy and education, both for parents and academics. She is also well known as a consultant, lecturer and analyst and has been granted numerous awards and recognition for her work, including The Knight's Cross of the Icelandic Order of the Falcon from the President of Iceland for innovation in education.





# The three pillars upon which all of Hjalli's pedagogy rests

## Equality in kindness and joy

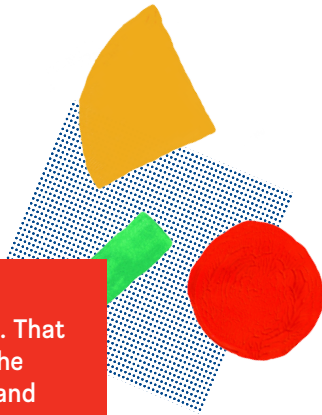
Our aim is equality for all people. That is what we desire. That is why our children work in small single-sex groups for the biggest part of their school day; to make sure that girls and boys get even attention and equal opportunities in the classroom. School uniforms ensure that all the children are part of the same team, which gives them a sense of belonging.

## Creativity in positivity and resilience

Our world needs new ideas and new approaches. To encourage imaginative and innovative thinking, we use open-ended materials such as homemade Play-Doh and plasticine, wooden blocks, paper and crafts materials, water and sand and blankets and pillows. Such materials enhance the children's creativity that prompts original problem solving, collaboration and resilience. Our teachers emphasise original and unusual projects and new experiences to heighten the development of the brain at the child's significant period of development.

## Democracy in respect and freedom

Our ethos and school society revolve around the human rights of children. That is why the children cultivate respectful communication through positive discipline, so all children enjoy equality. To establish this, there are daily choose-meetings for playtime and regular democracy conferences. All children must speak in front of a group and express their wishes, opinions and ideas positively.



# Hjalli - The meaning of this Icelandic word

*The word Hjalli is an old Icelandic word and has been used in different contexts throughout time. It is sometimes used metaphorically when getting around a difficult obstacle in life. In some circumstances it can mean to break taboos, sort of being a free spirit. Hjalli also is connected to the women's jobs of old times, when they used to dry the fish by hanging it up on wooden racks that were called fiskihjallar.*

## **TEDx**

Hjallastefnan founder Margrét Pála Ólafsdóttir presents at Reykjavík TEDx. Margrét Pála presents her ideas about educating young children, based on reinforcing each gender in specific areas. She asks: "Are we betraying both girls and boys when the school system is based on the average needs of children instead of meeting each sex as it is?"

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=bTamWDbqbQI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bTamWDbqbQI)







The Hjalli Model

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## "Alternative and progressive pedagogy in Iceland"

