



Learning for a New World

Report 2

THEME: Sustainable
development

Preface

THE INTERNATIONAL CONSULTATION on learning for sustainable development, “Learning to Change Our World”, which is being staged in Gothenburg, poses the question of how education and the school can help to promote the practice of sustainable development for people and the environment.

With this publication, the City of Gothenburg seeks both to stimulate interest in sustainable development as an approach in teaching and to help establish it in our schools. The concept of sustainable development implies a holistic view of the need for social development, economic growth and environmental adaptation, based on the assumption that these aspects are mutually dependent.

We wish also to use the book to present examples of the work being done in nursery, compulsory and upper secondary schools in the Gothenburg region, which can contribute to learning about and working for sustainable development.

There are examples here of work on the basis of values such as democracy and gender equality, as well as on energy use, consumption and lifestyle, outdoor education and conflict resolution.

The reader will also find hints on literature, methodological support, and an account of educational research in the field.

The book is intended to inspire teachers and others involved in education and give them the motivation to develop teaching in this area. It also gives the opportunity to pass on our experience to a wider audience in the English-language version which will be available to the delegates to “Learning to Change Our World”.

It is hoped that this glimpse of the work of Swedish schools may encourage educators elsewhere in the world to an exchange of experiences.

The report has been prepared in close collaboration with all the schools concerned, which have themselves contributed both text and illustrations. We are very happy and grateful for the enthusiasm with which the writers and photographers of the school development unit have been received in the schools. We hope you will enjoy this publication.

City of Gothenburg
School Development Unit
May 2004

Elsi-Brith Jodal

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Report 2
Theme: Sustainable development

Administrative Offices,
School Development Unit
City of Gothenburg

TEXT AND ILLUSTRATIONS
FOR THE SCHOOL REPORTS
Schools taking part

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Learning for a New World

Once We Lived in Sweden.

Now We Live in the World.

On Planet Earth.

THE DISTANCE BETWEEN countries and people has shrunk in recent decades. Nowadays this is quite striking in our everyday lives, not least in a city like Gothenburg. Today our neighbours and classmates come from Latin America, Asia and Africa. They used to be from Norrland and Finland.

In just a few decades Sweden, like so many other countries in the west, has changed from a culturally and ethnically homogeneous society to a multicultural meeting place. Diversity has enriched us, brought new cultural currents, ideas and thinking. But in the wake of this development come integration problems, ethnic tensions and social segregation.

Many of the immigrants who have found their way to Sweden have fled from poverty, unemployment and the absence of democracy in their native countries. They were following the dream of a safer and better life somewhere else, in a richer, more democratic, or perhaps less war-ravaged country. The fact that people are hungry, have no work and live under political repression also provides a breeding ground for conflict and war in many parts of the world. Desperate, frustrated young people searching for a meaning in their lives may form recruiting targets for extremist movements and terrorist organizations. The attack on the World Trade Center on 11 September 2001 showed that violence can also strike in industrialized western nations, which might perhaps once have thought that their populations were safe from political terror of this type.

Our national economy, too, depends on what happens globally. Sweden's growth is highly affected by the global economy and the fluctuations of world trade. Globalization has left individual nations more exposed to market forces. How much the Swedish state has to distribute to its citizens does not depend only on how hard we ourselves work, how inventive we are. Other countries'

investment in research and technical development, for example, affects jobs and growth in Sweden very directly, especially when companies move to where production costs are lowest.

In many poor countries, the low level of education of the population puts a brake on economic development. Ineffective governance and lack of democratic influence may do the same. But an equally important cause of poverty is the trade rules that apply globally. Tariffs, and subsidization of the agricultural production of industrial countries, mean that developing countries are today at a disadvantage in the world market.

The finite natural resources of energy also set limits to our prosperity and our economies. Many experts believe that in 40–50 years oil, the most important source of energy, will run out if we keep consuming it at the present level. In the long run we have to find new, renewable sources of energy in order to maintain production and economic growth.

At the same time the environmental problems provide clear evidence that our national boundaries cannot shut out the world outside. Pollution and emissions far beyond Sweden end up in the air that we breathe, in our forests, lakes and seas. How companies and individuals act in Asia and South America has consequences in our daily lives. Just as our consumption and energy-use patterns affect people in those continents.

Emissions of greenhouse gases are in the process of changing the world's climate. The rise in temperature affects many of the conditions for life, such as vegetation, animal life and the prevalence of various diseases. So far the consequences have been considerably more serious for poor countries than for rich ones. Climatic changes have caused natural disasters, such as flooding and drought, which in turn have given rise to famine and disease.

Globally environmental pollution is also an important cause of poverty in many developing countries. Shortage of pure water, soil erosion and deforestation make it impossible for people to support themselves. At the same time the desperate need for food and an income leads people to overexploit natural resources.

We cannot ignore the ecological effects of our lifestyle – in the last resort that will undermine our possibility of enjoying a good life. And trying to repair the damage done by environmental degradation costs a lot of money, and we are the ones who pay.

Our lifestyle contributes greatly to pollution and environmental destruction. For everybody on earth to enjoy the same level of prosperity as the average Swede we would need another three earths, according to calculations of countries' ecological footprints (Svenska naturskyddsföreningen, 2001).

It is absolutely essential that we realize our own responsibility for global problems if we are to be able to create a better future, with fewer crises and threats.

Sustainability – and sustainable development

Man has always pondered on sustainability. How good is the chance of survival in the long term if I do this? Should I try to support myself or cooperate with others? Should I fish until all the fish in the river have disappeared – or leave some of them? In the peasant society the land was used sparingly, so it would remain fertile and give food to coming generations. In order not to impoverish the soil, crops were rotated or fields were allowed to lie fallow for a few years.

Today ecological sustainability is a matter of what coffee we buy in the local shop. It means sorting domestic rubbish and choosing between taking the car and walking to work.

Sustainable development

But sustainable development is not merely about living in harmony with nature. Sustainable development must also take account of other aspects of people's quality of life, such as social security, participation, health and education. For society to have any resources to distribute, economic growth is also necessary, but this growth must be combined with social well-being, without destroying nature.

At a UN conference in Johannesburg in 2002 the countries of the world agreed that all development should be sustainable from these three integrated perspectives – the economic, the social and the environmental. Social development and security, like economic development, are thus just as important as environmental consideration.

This is how the Swedish government expresses its view of why the different perspectives are needed and how they depend on each other.

“Economic growth is necessary, but it is not enough for a just and sustainable development. Prosperity and progress cannot be measured in economic terms alone, and economic growth must be sustainable and combined with an investment in justice and welfare in order to lead to development.” (Regeringen proposition 2002/03:122)

The fact that global justice also favours peaceful development in the world is another assumption of Sweden's policy on global development, which was adopted by the riksdag in December 2003. The parliamentary committee which wrote its opinion expressed it as follows:

“A world of blatant injustice remains an unsafe world for all – not only for the poor, but also for wealthy individuals and states. Combating poverty and creating a fairer world is in everybody's interest. The vision must be a world where all people have their

fundamental political, economic and social rights met.” (SOU 2001:96)

Who is responsible?

It is stated in international agreements that responsibility for bringing about sustainable development rests first and foremost with the individual states in the world. All governments have to work to live up to the goals within their own country.

But many questions affecting sustainable development require general global collaboration.

The poorest countries, in particular, often need support in order to reduce poverty and produce economic growth.

In 2000 the UN's member states agreed in the Millennial Declaration on eight development goals which the countries of the world were to work together to achieve. One of the goals was to halve poverty in the world by 2015. Other targets are to develop an open, just and non-discriminating trade and finance system, to give all people a basic education and to stop the spread of HIV and AIDS.

The Millennial Declaration emphasizes more strongly than earlier declarations the shared responsibility for global development. The partial responsibility of industry for creating development and fighting poverty is given particular emphasis here. Industry has an important part to play in sustainable development, possessing much of the power and the tools for change. Of the world's 100 largest economies, 50 are corporations, and the 500 largest companies control 70 per cent of world trade. (Svenska naturskyddsföreningen, 2001)

Sweden's national policy

All UN countries have undertaken to draw up their own national plans for achieving sustainable development. Sweden's national policy states the priorities to be given domestically in the economic, social and



ecological field in order to achieve sustainable development in our country. (Today sustainable development is the general aim of government policy.) (Sammanfattning av regeringens skrivelse 2001/02:172)

It is pointed out in the national strategy that in many respects the Swedish welfare state is based on the same principles as sustainable development. Public health initiatives, gender equality policy, income distribution/resource equalization are examples of policy measures that favour sustainable development. In a society where all people have the possibility of influencing decisions and can create a good life for themselves, conflict is prevented and economic growth is encouraged. Investments in education and health have been successful tools in building Swedish society.

Some of the concrete national goals for social development and public health involve making use of the working capacity of all

Swedes. By investing in public health the state wishes to work against the tendency of people to leave the labour market early, by taking either disability pension or long-term sick leave. Other core areas are environment and “social solidarity, welfare and security”. Here equality between women and men has high priority, as does the influence of children and young people. Steps to reduce abuse and criminality, and work for greater integration and diversity, are also mentioned as priority areas.

Sweden's policy for global development

Sweden is also to make an active contribution to sustainable development. In December 2003 the riksdag adopted a new policy of global development. The general goal of “a fair and sustainable global development” is now to apply in all political areas – everything from trade policy, agricultural policy and migration policy to edu-

cation policy. (Regeringens proposition 2002/03:122)

Global sustainable development policy has to focus on poor people and countries, and be based on the reality of poor people. It includes many areas of initiative, such as questions of fair world trade, debt questions, investment and aid.

The draft bill emphasizes that human rights, democracy and good governance must be given more prominence in development work in the world. “Today we see these factors as basic preconditions for just and sustainable development. They should not therefore be seen only as targets to be attained, but also as means.”

The policy must at the same time include a rights perspective, by which it is meant that human rights must be the basis of the measures taken to promote a fair and sustainable development. International declarations on human rights must be the

foundation of the Swedish policy. These are supported almost universally and thus represent a joint global value basis.

The government's aim is for Sweden to be a model country internationally with regard to the changeover to a just and sustainable society. In particular, environmental questions, democratic development and gender equality are pointed out as areas where Sweden has experience and knowledge to share.

What can we do ourselves?

Perhaps it was easier in the past to live right and do right. The connection between our own actions and the possibility of influencing the future was clearer when we lived in isolated villages and subsisted on what the soil, the water and the forest gave. Today our future and that of our children is inextricably linked with the future of the earth and humanity. But the connections between our own daily routines and the future of humanity can sometimes be abstract and hard to comprehend. Does it really make any difference if I turn the light off when I leave the room? If I give a hundred kronor a month to Save the Children? If I go and vote at a general election?

Naturally there are many different ways of contributing to sustainable development. As individuals we can try to live in as environmentally friendly a manner as possible, for example by reducing car use and returning aluminium cans for recycling.

The possibility of exerting influence also concerns political involvement. Which parties we vote into power, how we use the chance to form opinion and make demands of politicians. We can also contribute by working actively in community and environmental organizations or by giving money to such organizations.

Making deliberate choices as a consumer is a way that has already been mentioned.

The choice of goods not only affects the environment, it may also imply active support for good working conditions and reasonable wages for people in developing countries. Today there are fair-trade-marked goods in our shops, which means that the employees who have produced the goods are guaranteed wages of a certain level and allowed to join unions.

Knowledge and solidarity

We have everything to gain by trying to understand what happens, and change it. But we need knowledge. Knowledge to understand the connections between quality of life, social development and ecology. Knowledge of how social welfare and security depend on economic growth and vice versa.

We also need to understand the way nature works and how our consumption and use patterns affect both the environment and the living space of other people.

We need knowledge of people's basic needs and what guides their actions – whether in Sweden or in South Africa. And we need to learn to work together with other countries to attain a sustainable development.

Education has an important role

Education is an important tool in the work for sustainable development – the world's politicians agree on that. And in particular education of children and young people, the growing generation who will gradually take over responsibility for the world's development.

In future more strong, enlightened individuals are needed who are willing and confident enough to take part in the dialogue on what the world needs and on strategies for development. Pupils need especially to learn to think critically. To many questions there are no ready answers

and solutions. What does sustainable development involve? And how do we get there? Both the definition of sustainable development and the strategies for attaining the goals are to a great extent coloured by values and political interests.

Will, motivation and hope

Facts and new insights alone are not enough. There must also be the will and the motivation to change. To move from insight to action a person needs to feel hope, see possibilities and have a personal commitment. This assumes that the person cares about what is happening both inside and outside his/her own country's borders – whether this concern comes from solidarity or from self-interest, or perhaps both.

The values and attitudes that young people take out into the world with them are therefore absolutely crucial. The basic values instilled by the school, such as democracy and solidarity with the vulnerable and weak, have an important role in both education and sustainable development.

At the moment work is being done internationally on finding and disseminating sound pedagogic methods of teaching about sustainable development. Just as the problems and priorities may look different in different cultures and differ between poorer and richer countries, the focus of education will also differ between different countries.

A major international consultation on learning for sustainable development ("Learning to Change our World") is taking place in Gothenburg in May 2004. More than three hundred delegates from 50 nations are gathering to share their experiences, tried-and-tested methods and ideas on how to teach democracy, conflict resolution, human rights, children's rights, health instruction, environmental studies and how to implant a general perspective with regard to sustainable development.

The UN has proclaimed the years 2005–2014 a decade for education in sustainable development.

The question is also on the national agenda. During the spring of 2004 the National Agency for School Improvement will be issuing a publication on sustainable development in order to draw attention to the task of the schools and encourage the integration of this perspective in their teaching. (Myndigheten för skolutveckling, 2004)

This book

The idea of this book is to give schools and teachers the inspiration and motivation to begin thinking about the concept of sustainable development in their teaching.

In this book we also present pedagogic examples of what is already being done in the classrooms of Gothenburg and other parts of Western Sweden with regard to the teaching of sustainable development. The examples involve everything from work on the basic values of equality and democracy to learning about sustainable consumption, outdoor teaching and conflict resolution. There are also hints on literature and teaching aids, and practical links to websites.

The book starts by giving a historical background to how the concept of sustainable development emerged. There is also a brief account of the discussion which is still continuing concerning the definition of the concept and how it may be used.

The next section concerns the role of education and the demands that may be made with regard to teaching on sustainable development. What are the findings of educational research? What do the Sweden's education policy documents say?

There is then a brief discussion of world trends – economic, social and environmental – in recent decades.

From acidification to holistic thinking

Until the 1980s, the concept of sustainability was primarily connected with ecological and environmental questions. The introduction of the perspective *sustainable development*, a perspective which includes a social, an economic, and an ecological dimension, was in part the result of pressure from developing countries. During the 1970s poor countries began to protest against a one-sided focus on the solving of environmental problems worldwide and instead drew attention to their need for economic growth and social development. The concept of sustainable development became an attempt to unite different kinds of development need in the world, and is therefore also a political vision.

Historical retrospect

As long ago as the middle of last century, an international debate was beginning on how nature is affected by human intervention. The first big international conference on environmental matters took place in 1949, when the newly constituted United Nations arranged a scientific conference on how natural resources can be used and preserved. In the same year UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) founded an environmental body named the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

The early 1960s saw the publication of the book *Silent Spring*, which became a clarion call to many people in different parts of the world. The book describes with frightening clarity how animal life and nature around us are affected by the poisons that we emit. During the 1960s people also began to wonder about the implications of a polluted environment for our welfare in the future.

In 1972 Sweden took the initiative in staging a UN Environmental Conference in Stockholm. One reason for this was that





Sweden was worried about the acidification of Swedish lakes and soil. Emissions which caused the acidification came largely from other countries, and air pollution therefore became a major international issue.

Now many people began also to realize that overconsumption of natural resources entailed a threat to welfare in future. How to secure the well-being of all the people on earth without the ecological system collapsing became a new question on the international agenda.

At the same time the gap between the view of the rich countries and the poor countries on environmental problems became ever more apparent in the 1970s. The rich nations considered that sustainable use of resources, cleaner technology, and a reduction of emissions were the most urgent issues for the future. But the poorer countries had other development needs. They wanted to enjoy the fruits of industrialization and growth, and saw industrial expansion as a solution to the problem of poverty. They wanted permission to exploit their natural resources, as the west had done when it had built up its own prosperity, and they could

not put the environmental aspect so high on the agenda. (Skolverket, 2002)

In 1983 the UN's General Assembly instructed what came to be known as the Brundtland Commission to examine the connection between environmental pollution and long-term development in the world.

The survey resulted in the 1987 Brundtland Report, which launches the concept of sustainable development. The document attempted to reconcile various interests such as the conservation of natural resources, better social and economic development and an attack on poverty. Sustainable development is defined in the Brundtland Report as a "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".

The fact that the people of today have responsibility for coming generations is an important starting point for ideas on sustainable development.

The concept of sustainable development has since come to function as a unifying theme of discussions on global growth.

Twenty years after the Stockholm Confe-

rence, a UN Conference on Development and the Environment was held in Rio de Janeiro in Brazil in 1992. While it was possible to note certain successes since the Stockholm Conference of 1972 it was clear that the growing gap between the rich and the poor was both causing and aggravating many environmental problems. One result was that the developed countries of the world promised to increase total aid by raising the level to at least 0.7 per cent of gross national income (the undertaking contributed to the agreement of the developing countries to work actively on environmental questions). However this undertaking has not yet been fulfilled in a number of developed countries.

Agenda 21

The UN Conference in Rio in 1992 also became the starting signal for Agenda 21, the UN action programme for the 21st century. Agenda 21 contains proposals for action in various areas, such as use of natural resources, social and economic matters, trade, population growth, health and housing.

Agenda 21 is a development agenda for work to bring about changes at national, regional and local authority level. Each country designs its own strategy for achieving the national goals. One important idea behind the implementation of Agenda 21 is to involve the general public in the work, both as private individuals and in voluntary organizations.

Together with other Baltic countries Sweden signed a regional Agenda 21, called Baltic 21, in 1996.

The Kyoto Protocol

Another important agreement in the environmental field which was reached during the 1990s is the Kyoto Protocol. In 1997 the countries of the world agreed in Kyoto, Japan, on new targets, “ceilings” for the emission of greenhouse gases. The Kyoto Protocol required the industrial nations to reduce their emissions of greenhouse gases by 5.2 per cent by 2012, compared with 1990 levels. However several large countries subsequently withdrew, the USA and Russia among them. But the protocol is still in effect in many countries and is regarded as a valid international agreement.

The UN Conference in Johannesburg

At the UN Conference in Johannesburg in 2002 the countries of the world agreed that the three dimensions of sustainable development – the social, the economic and the ecological – should be integrated with all questions of development. The conference also underlined the need for incorporating sustainable development in teaching at all levels of the school system, with a view to ensuring that education is an essential factor in change.

Differing views of the concept

Sustainable development is a concept with many different dimensions – but also a

political vision. The concept is an attempt to bring together the needs for welfare, security, health and sustainable nature which are common to the people of the world, who live in very widely differing conditions but are nevertheless affected by the same forces.

For that reason the concept is far from unambiguous or uncontroversial. Some critics regard it as a combination of two irreconcilable positions. They state that economic growth, social development and ecological sustainability are impossible to attain within the present world order, partly because they require a fundamental change to the economic system and the attitude to growth.

Other critics, who take the argument a step further, regard the concept of sustainable development as an educational “feint” designed to draw a veil over the inherent contradictions that exist in the world.

But many experts assert the opposite, namely that sustainable development can take place within the framework that exists today. With the aid of environmentally adapted technology it is possible to bring about a sustainable industrial production and economic growth. They believe that the countries of the world can agree on criteria for achieving sustainable development on a national and global level, and together build structures to achieve this.

The concept has sometimes been compared with words such as freedom and democracy – strongly loaded and multi-dimensional concepts, which may unite different groups – but which acquire differing contents depending on who is using them. (Skolverket, 2002).

The risk in the concepts of both democracy and sustainable development is that with time they can become empty and watered down, if too many different meanings are attached to them by different countries and political groupings.

But despite this risk, many experts believe

that the concept of sustainable development can fulfil an important function. “Discussions on sustainability may bring groups together who are looking for a common language in which to discuss environmental questions,” say Wals and Jickling, for example. “When different views of the world meet, it creates dissonance and, with it, the opportunity for learning. Taking part in such a discussion is an excellent opportunity to learn about a relevant, controversial, value-laden and much-discussed subject at the crossroads of science, technology and society.” (Skolverket, 2002)

Different countries have a different focus

Different parts of the world are affected differently by such problems as environmental destruction and overconsumption. Citizens of industrial countries, who are primarily responsible for overconsumption, are affected differently from those who have to bear the burden in the form of pollution or exploitation of the workforce.

Which developmental questions have the highest priority in a particular country is determined by social and cultural values, but obviously also by which problems are the most acute.

In many countries of Africa which have been hard hit by AIDS, the spread of HIV is undoubtedly the most important question for the future. Whereas industrial countries have traditionally focused on environmental questions and consumption of natural resources, the developing countries are often more concerned with health and poverty issues.

Similarly democratization and equality are often seen by western countries as important aims and means in the work for sustainable development, whereas governments in other parts of the world do not place these aspects of social development so high on their list. ♠

The Role of Education



AT ALL UN CONFERENCES, and in all international agreements, education has been portrayed as a tool for solving the questions of the earth's survival. This is irrespective of whether the spotlight has been on environmental destruction or whether global development has been discussed from a holistic perspective in which social and economic development are also integrated.

The documents recording the decisions of both the Rio Conference and the UN summit meeting in Johannesburg contain statements on the significant role of education in development work. The Baltic 21 agenda for the countries around the Baltic states the requirements for education on sustainable development in more concrete terms. The Haga Declaration lays down that education in sustainable development must be given at all levels and integrated in all subjects, and also developed as a perspective of its own. From a teaching point of view this demands the development of process-oriented and dynamic teaching methods that place the emphasis on critical thinking and democratic processes, it is stated there.

Method and content – the way it has been up to now?

What should learning for sustainable development contain in the form of subject matter and methodology, in order to give today's youngsters the means of contributing to a better and more secure world? Well, there are no easy answers to that question.

Until recent years teaching on sustainable development has focused particularly on environmental matters, both in Sweden and elsewhere in the western world. In content the area has been defined as a scientific or environmental science area.

According to Östman (2003) teaching on environmental destruction has been either fact-based or focused on transmission of

standards, or both. The teachers have assumed that if the pupils acquire knowledge of environmental impact, and form the opinion that it is important to act in a pro-environmental manner, then they will also change their behaviour.

In recent years instruction on sustainable development has expanded from a narrower environmental teaching from a scientific perspective to a more sociocultural perspective on complex questions of social development. (Björneloo, 2004)

This has kept pace with globalization and the process whereby the great questions of the world's future have become increasingly integrated and therefore multi-faceted. Questions of human relations, of lifestyle, behaviour and conflicts of interest between groups, have become the focus of attention, and that has led to greater importance being attached to humanist and social science perspectives.

The shape of teaching in Sweden?

A few years ago the National Agency for Education carried out a study of environmental teaching in Swedish schools. The report noted that the concept of sustainable development, as described in national policy documents and international agreements, had not yet achieved a broad breakthrough in the school's activities (Skolverket, 2002). According to this report a normative and fact-based tradition continues to dominate environmental teaching, rather than a holistic perspective in which environmental problems are integrated in other societal questions.

The most positive picture of environmental teaching comes from preschool classes and the early years of school. Here children do practical and concrete work on environmental questions, making use of outdoor teaching, where they can build up a positive relationship with nature and an understanding of ecological cycles.

The study shows that teachers of older children feel that they have difficulty in taking the pupils' thinking on from practical and concrete environmental teaching in the early school years. Environmental teaching easily gets stuck at the compost heap stage and there is not enough development and deepening of learning from year to year. With time the pupils' commitment declines and the older ones regard environmental teaching as boring. The teachers also think that the school's focus on grading criteria and targets in the syllabus is inconsistent with the effort to work across subject boundaries.

In order to improve their teaching the teachers want time for in-service training, reflection and discussion and collaboration with colleagues.

Much is already being done today

At the same time one must not forget that schools are engaged daily in teaching activities that may promote sustainable development. This may involve, for example, prevention of bullying, conflict resolution, gender equality work, pupil influence, health education etc. (See school examples later in the book). Much of the value-basis work being done lays the very foundation for society's upbringing of strong, independently minded individuals, who care about both themselves and others.

The global questions are also part of the daily life of many teachers and pupils. Not only through news reports in the media. The classrooms contain children and young people from other cultures, whose life histories are very much tied up with global development processes in the world economy, with hotspots of conflict and poverty. Using their experience and ideas as a starting point in teaching may be a way of bringing the questions to life and obtaining different angles from which to approach the area.

What form of teaching favours sustainable development?

One "dilemma" with regard to sustainable development is that in science, too, there are differing views on, for example, how serious different environmental problems are, and how we can tackle them.

Today's ideas on which social problems should receive priority and how they should be solved may not apply in the future, because both the reality around us and human values are always changing.

On the basis of this point of view, some researchers consider that education ought to concentrate on offering the pupils methods of searching for knowledge, and teaching them to understand and discuss different connections and to analyse for themselves different statements and proposed solutions (Björneloo, 2004). Democratic conversation and pupil influence are becoming important instruments in the school's teaching, as is the inculcation of basic values and standards, such as equality and solidarity.

Both environmental matters and questions of fair distribution of resources are affected by – and defined by – various power relationships and political interests. Introducing a conflict perspective on development in school instruction is therefore important, say several researchers. (Björneloo, 2004)

No educational research into learning for sustainable development – in the broad sense of the term – is available today. Those studies that have been carried out in the field have had environmental teaching as their starting point.

But there are nevertheless a number of didactic conclusions that can be relevant to learning in the field in general.

- There is a need for wholes and for contexts in the teaching. To enable pupils' appreciation of different phenomena in nature to develop into a more general

understanding of sustainable development they may need help, for example by questions expressing the problems.

Challenging questions may give rise to new ideas and perspectives in the pupils.

- Different disciplines can contribute to context and holistic thinking with regard to matters of sustainability. This is facilitated if instruction starts with authentic problems that contain a number of integrated perspectives.
- If the pupils are allowed to make use of their senses in various ways in their work, the possibility of deeper learning is enhanced. When the content and method of working are interwoven (e.g. when the pupils learn about nature's life cycles by caring for a garden together), democratic participation and cooperation with others also become a part of the learning.
- Communication and reflection on what one is learning may facilitate understanding. Pupils can process their experiences, for example by formulating what they have understood in a speech, image or writing. (Skolverket 2002, Björneloo 2004, Östman 2003)

Lisa's shirt

Here is an example of an actual assignment: Teaching begins with a question to one of the pupils: Where did you buy your shirt? The teacher then goes on to ask: "Why did you buy it?" What influenced you – advertisements, mates, the price etc? The whole class has to discuss and look deeper into the economic role of advertising and how we are affected by it.

Why was the shirt made? From this answer the pupils can investigate conditions in the country concerned, such as environmental pollution, working conditions and wages of the employees. The discussion passes on to ethical questions such as: Is it

important to be able to buy ten cheap shirts instead of one, if the consequence is that you contribute to environmental pollution and connive at competition that leads to poor working conditions and low wages. The next question may be: “But what would happen if no Swedes or others bought the shirts?” Then the people in that country would have no work. And the country cannot grow economically and provide welfare for its citizens if nobody pays taxes. How can this dilemma be resolved?

So from an everyday item of clothing it is possible to touch on everything from consumption and lifestyle questions to questions of identity and confidence, environmental impact and the globalized economy.

Belief in the future and optimism

Research supports the conclusion that teaching gets through better if it gives the pupils hope. In the National Agency for Education study of environmental teaching the teachers said that threat scenarios no longer succeed in motivating the pupils.

Minister of Education Thomas Östros also pinpoints optimism as important when teaching about sustainable development. “We must get them to be optimistic if they are to be able to face the challenge,” he said in an address in 2003 to a Nordic seminar on teaching for sustainable development. (Regeringskansliet, 2003) “The most dangerous conception that people can have is definitely that the way things are going is so dangerous and so impossible to change that you can’t do anything about it, and that therefore it is not worth acquiring knowledge and understanding of the question”, he went on.

National guidelines on teaching for sustainable development

What support do school policy documents give?

The preamble to the Education Act states that all those working in nursery school, school proper and adult education should foster a respect for the intrinsic value of every individual and our shared environment.

Four general perspectives should characterize teaching from nursery school up to adult education level, namely the environmental, the historical, the international and the ethical perspective. Together these general perspectives may be said to form the core of sustainable development. (Myndigheten för skolutveckling, 2004)

Curriculum for the nursery school

The curriculum for the nursery school (Lpo 98) places a great emphasis on environmental matters. The children should develop an understanding of their own part in the life cycles of nature, and of how people at work and in their daily lives can help to create a better environment. They should also learn to understand that it is important to care for their health and their well-being.

Curriculum for compulsory school

The concept of sustainable development is not explicitly defined as a perspective containing three different integrated aspects in the Swedish policy documents for the compulsory school. The Curriculum Lpo 94 was written during a time when there was a discussion of the content of the concept.

The knowledge and value targets in the curriculum represent important aspects of a learning that is conducive to sustainable development.

The basic values which the school is to pass on to and instil in the pupils are the sanctity of human life, the freedom and integrity of the individual, the equal value of all people, equality between women and men, and concern for the weak and the vulnerable.

These values must be passed on by

“fostering a feeling for justice, generosity, tolerance and responsibility in the individual.”

Encouraging democratic participation is another important task of the school. The pupils must learn to accept responsibility for their own work and the school environment, and be encouraged to express opinions. They must also have a say in the learning process.

The development of a critical attitude in the pupils is another aim of the teaching. Furthermore our children and young people should develop an ability to act on the basis of their knowledge and experience, and to decide on ethical questions. The teaching is intended to help them to develop a personal attitude to the overall global environmental questions, and to obtain insight into how they themselves can avoid contributing to negative effects on the environment.

Curriculum for upper secondary school

The curriculum for the upper secondary school, Lpf 94, lays down the same basic values as the policy document for the nine-year compulsory school. It also emphasizes that the teaching should give the pupils the basis of a lifelong learning. New technology, changes at work, internationalization and the complexity of environmental questions demand new knowledge and skills which the pupils need to acquire in order to become responsible members of society.

Education should give pupils insights that enable them to help prevent harmful effects on the environment and help young people to develop a personal relationship with the general and global environmental questions. It should “shed light on how the functions of society and our way of life and working can be adapted to create sustainable development.”

The international perspective is emphasized, together with the ability to see one’s own reality in a global context.

No royal road – but every little counts

The vision of sustainable development allows more people to become involved in the work for a better future – many teachers and researchers bear witness to this. People with differing educational backgrounds and interests can join forces in order to search for solutions together.

In a new special report the National Agency for School Improvement draws attention to the role of the schools in learning about sustainable development (Myndigheten för skolutveckling, 2004). Sustainable development is presented as a perspective of its own, where the task of the schools is to integrate the many different questions and subjects making up the concept of sustainable development in their teaching, and to treat them as a single entity. A challenge that also gives the opportunity to develop teaching methods, forms of organization and collaboration across subject boundaries, it is stated.

At the same time a lot of teaching that can contribute to sustainable development is already taking place, e.g. in the form of gender equality work or efforts to increase pupil influence. It is important to note and support the efforts that are already being made, says Martin Westin, of the National Agency for School Improvement.

“We want to show that there are many different sides to work for sustainable development. One school may perhaps feel that it needs to work particularly on gender equality or democracy, another on environmental issues.”

Which questions need to be given priority within the framework of sustainable development is something for each teacher to decide on the basis of the particular class.

“Teachers should also start from the things that children react to in the world around them, and then help them to struc-

ture their ideas,” says Siv Sellin, who has been working on the teaching of sustainable development within the National Agency for Education and the Ministry of Education for many years.

The age and previous understanding of the pupils must naturally guide design and content.

Clearer goals needed

Siv Sellin considers, however, referring to the National Agency for Education survey, that both teaching content and the method used need improving. More research and greater support to the teachers are important if this is to be achieved.

“In due course there should be an analysis of how the policy documents function with regard to teaching on sustainable development, so that they can be revised if necessary.”

Per Wickenberg, who does research on influence processes, control and sustainable development at Lund University, believes that the policy documents need updating. He considers that the Education Act should be revised, in order to insert the perspective at all levels of instruction – from nursery school to teacher training.

How do we get the pupils involved? What teaching methods give inspiration?

How do you get pupils interested in sustainable development? What teaching devices arouse enthusiasm and interest?

Per Wickenberg and peace and development researcher Leif Ohlsson of Gothenburg University offer a few suggestions from their different perspectives.

Leif Ohlsson: “Let them travel and see how aid work and work for sustainable development look in other parts of the world. Show them what is involved in trying to deal with the AIDS infection, or giving out food to the hungry. Get them to ask whether

this sort of work is something that they themselves may do when they start working. Health and development work in developing countries is in fact a growing labour market.

“Give them a feeling for the forces for good in the world, and that this is something you can spend your life doing. Both by keeping informed about what is happening but perhaps also by active work. And not merely being indifferent consumers.

“Show them models with which they can identify. The actress Angelina Jolie may be such a model. She is an honorary ambassador of UNICEF, and travels round children’s homes in different parts of the world. She keeps diaries of her journeys, which can be read on the Internet.”

Per Wickenberg: “I think that the Green Flag award, supported by Keep Sweden Tidy, and the National Agency for Education’s Environmental School are good methods. Once a school has satisfied the criteria for the award, or the green flag, there is obviously a pressure to carry on the environmental work – expectations grow.

“The method also allows the children to have a real influence in their daily lives. It is in their daily lives that children and young people should be able to influence the things close to them and important to them and feel that they are really participating.

“In this way children and young people also learn how to make the right choices from the start – instead of trying to repair things afterwards. This applies both to the necessary global action and the very local things in this world. The situation of children after HIV/AIDS in Zambia and the equality of women in Bangladesh are just as important as sorting refuse and cycling to school here in Sweden. Local and global focus at the same time.” ♠

The World Situation

WHAT HAVE BEEN the prevailing social, economic and ecological trends in the world over the last few decades?

Well, the problems and the challenges have been – and still are – many. At the same time there have been improvements in several areas.

Over the last 20 – 25 years income development in the world as a whole has in fact been positive. In developing countries, average income almost doubled between 1975 and 1998, enabling more people to raise their standards and live a better life.

The proportion of people living in absolute poverty, i.e. on less than 2 dollars a day, has also fallen. In East Asia alone the number of poor dropped by 50 per cent between 1990 and 1998. In the world as a whole the proportion of poor people fell during this period from 29 per cent to 23.4. (Regeringskansliet, 2002)

In the developing countries the proportion of people with a basic education has risen sharply in recent decades. More than forty per cent of the world's population have – or are on the way to getting – a basic education. At the same time, more countries than ever have democratically elected governments (Svenska FN-förbundet, 2002).

Medical progress and better health care have added 20 years to average life expectancy over the last 30 years (Regeringens proposition 2002/03:122). Infant mortality has been halved during the same period.

Scientific progress, such as technical innovation and vaccines, has given the emerging countries of today the opportunity to develop much more rapidly than Europe and the USA were able to (Regeringskansliet, 2002).

The environment

In the environmental field, too, there are positive signals. Improvements in air quality

and flood control have been made in Europe and North America since the Stockholm Conference of 1972, reports UNEP, the UN environmental programme. There is also evidence that the reduction in emissions of CFCs has slowed down the thinning of the ozone layer (Svenska FN-förbundet, 2002).

Developments in environmental technology have permitted a reduced and more efficient use of energy in the industrial production of many countries. Since 1970 Sweden's economy has grown by 64 per cent, while energy consumption has risen by only 4 per cent. Carbon dioxide emissions have decreased from 100 tonnes a year to 55 tonnes (Regeringskansliet, 2002).

Difficulties and challenges

Each year more than 6 million children aged under five die of hunger, and over 800 million people are permanently hungry. In many countries of sub-Saharan Africa the number of poor has increased in the 1990s. About half of the population here live on less than a dollar a day.

HIV and AIDS continue to spread in many developing countries. Thirteen million people have died of AIDS in southern Africa during the last twenty years. If there are no dramatic improvements in preventive work and treatment, something approaching a further 70 million are expected to die of AIDS in the 45 worst affected countries in this region between 2000 and 2020.

The environment as a whole has deteriorated over the last 30 years, particularly in developing countries. Fifteen per cent of the world's previous productive land area is now degraded, and some areas are damaged beyond repair. Causes of soil erosion include overgrazing, deforestation and over-irrigation of agricultural land.

Forty per cent of the world's population live in countries where there is a severe shortage of water. Some 1.1 billion people



do not have access to clean drinking water. Almost 25 per cent of our mammals and 12 per cent of all bird species are threatened with extinction.

The worst source of marine pollution is waste water from densely populated areas in developing countries with rapid urbanization and population growth, poor sewage systems and a shortage of finance for sewage treatment.

Emissions of greenhouse gases have contributed to a rise of between 0.3–0.6 degrees in the global average temperature during the last century. If combustion of oil and coal is not reduced, the rise in temperature is expected by the end of the 21st century to have raised the sea level by almost a metre, flooded coastal areas and islands and begun to melt the polar icecaps. (Svenska FN-förbundet, 2002)

Increasing pressure on the earth's resources

While many people have improved their living standard in the world, world consumption has doubled between 1975 and 1998. (Svenska Naturskyddsföreningen,

2000). And the depletion of natural resources has never been as rapid as today.

There are several reasons for the trend. In some cases overconsumption and over-exploitation of natural resources are caused by ignorance of the consequences of our lifestyle. Sometimes there is the knowledge but not the money for investing in environmentally friendly technology. In other cases environmental destruction results from the profit motive. There are powerful financial interests, in the coal and oil industries for example, that benefit from a continued demand for these sources of energy. The financial interests of the food industry strongly resist the idea of lowering duty and tax on the farm products of developing countries.

In the case of lifestyle-related overconsumption, convenience is probably a factor that should not be underrated. It is convenient for us to continue with a lifestyle to which we are accustomed, and change often meets with initial opposition – especially if it seems that the change demands effort and takes time and energy.

Trying to bring about limitations on the

lifestyle of the population and at the same time resist powerful economic interests presents politicians with a difficult challenge.

Population growth an important cause

Another important cause of environmental destruction is the enormous growth in the world's population during the twentieth century. This has trebled over the last hundred years, which has dramatically increased pressure on the earth's resources.

Leif Ohlsson is a researcher at the Department of Peace and Development Research at Gothenburg University, and editor of the news letter "Omvärldsbilder" [Environmental Pictures], which is partially financed by the Swedish International Development Co-Operation Agency (SIDA).

We must realize that we live at a very special time in history, he believes.

"Even within my own lifetime the world's population will probably have trebled. And all these people must have work and sustenance. These are the bottlenecks confronting us today. Everybody on earth has a need to be something, to be something in his/her own eyes and those of the world around him. And to be able to live on the work he or she does."

Most people in the world were born into an agricultural society. But today agriculture does not offer everybody a livelihood. There is a limit to the expansion of cultivated areas, it is yields that have to be increased. But the refinement of crops to give bigger harvests still does not give adequate employment and support to all who need it.

"That's why people can't find work, and we see a huge migration to the cities, where there is the additional attraction of modern life.

"Population growth comes on top of the fact that we have begun to deplete our resources, and that at the moment the world is suffering from economic recession and unemployment."

Leif Ohlsson sees the situation of young men as a particular source of problems in the world. When these young men cannot find a place in society, and fail to achieve a status equal to that of their fathers or grandfathers, a frustration is born that various interests may exploit.

“There is a risk of their recruitment by power elites and militias. It is important to try to remove the basis for this.”

Successful tools

Certain efforts have proved particularly likely to promote economic and social development in a country.

Education has been a key factor in the countries where poverty has been reduced most rapidly. There is a clear connection between per capita income in a country and the number of years of schooling received by the average citizen (Gapminder, World Education Chart 2000). Education not only improves the prospects of increased growth and higher income, it also makes people better equipped to take part in and influence society and to find their bearings in the world around them. Strong citizens are the basis of living democracy. (Regeringskansliet, 2002)

Drive for gender equality

Equality between the sexes is both a matter of justice and a means of utilizing a country's resources effectively. When female farmers were given the same training and access to inputs (e.g. seed, means of pest control, water) as men in a Sida-sponsored soil conservation programme in Kenya, the harvests were increased by 50 % for maize and 66 % for beans (Sida).

All the studies show that when women have access to education and earn their own money it benefits the whole family more than in the case of men.

The result is a more nourishing diet and

better health care for the whole family, fewer pregnancies and a general decrease in poverty. (Regeringskansliet, 2002)

To get families to send both their boys and their girls to school, aid organizations sometimes run what they call “school feeding projects”. All the children who come to the teaching offered in these projects receive a good meal, but the parents are informed that a certain number of food packets are meant only for girls and will only be given to them.

A democratic society

Like education and gender equality, democratic government is both a tool and a goal in itself. Democracy gives people the freedom to decide about their own lives and to have an influence on society. At the same time, history shows that democracy reduces the risk of violent conflict, because democratic societies have other means of ventilating and resolving grievances.

Good health

Good health is essential to the quality of life, and also to the possibility of working and supporting a family. People who live in poverty state that illness or injury are the biggest risk factor leading to economic misery, especially when ill health befalls the main provider in the family. Medical care at a reasonable cost and access to a nutritious diet are therefore two important weapons in the fight against poverty. (Regeringskansliet, 2002)

Obstacles to change

TV and the papers give us daily reports of famine and environmental disaster. We see images of people injured in war, of families and children living in extreme poverty. To us, living in peace, in a country with social security and a functioning legal system, the world's problems may still appear remote.

Many Swedes may also consider the situation hopeless, and not see how their own efforts can help.

One difficulty when it comes to persuading people to involve themselves in the big questions of the world's future is that the effects of different efforts are often long-term, says Per Wickenberg, who is engaged in research into learning for sustainable development at Lund University and coordinates the research network “Utbildning och hållbar utveckling” [Education and sustainable development].

For the individual Swede the positive effects of working for the environment or the community may lie a long way ahead. Perhaps we will not experience them ourselves, but our grandchildren will, he says.

That is why we need to know about the long-term processes that may lead to positive change – and to see our own role in the longer term.

At the same time Per Wickenberg believes that in recent decades the world has come closer to people's everyday lives. Migration and the flow of asylum-seekers to many industrial countries signals to us in the West that there is a world outside. It increases awareness that globalization affects us, too.

If we can learn to see the connection between the conditions under which people live and the great global threats – how for example financial and social gulfs, both within a country and globally, like the lack of democracy and security, sow the seeds of conflict and extremism, and lead people to leave their native countries, we have come a good way along the road, he says.

“Education is important in helping us to see these processes and patterns.”

How to argue?

How, then, can more people be induced to take an interest in sustainable development? How do you inspire someone to obtain more

knowledge and become involved? How for example do we get teachers and pupils to care?

Per Wickenberg believes that the message must appeal both to emotion and to enlightened self-interest. The arguments for development and justice are in part moral ones – that all people are of equal value and should have the same opportunity of a good life. There are also purely rational motives for working for an ecologically sustainable and economically/socially just development in the world – the consequences of an unjust world without ecological consideration will affect us, too, in the end.

“Perhaps it is primarily self-interest that has to be emphasized, as self-interest is often what gets people to change their behaviour. What was it that led companies to start obtaining environmental certificates? Of course, it was that they began earning money from it.”

Failing to talk about self-interest is dangerous, he says.

“It has been the very basis of human survival.”

Is there any reason to care and to try to intervene?

Both Per Wickenberg and Leif Ohlsson answer “yes” to this question. They are themselves optimistic about the world’s future. A constructive attitude is rational, they explain.

“Resignation is not an option. Our only alternative is to keep working for change, nothing else is tenable,” says Leif Ohlsson.

The development trends which are unsustainable today cannot continue indefinitely, that’s logic, he says. The consequences will catch up with us in the form of chaos and revolution.

“We have to believe that we humans are rational,” he insists.

Recently he believes he can see signs that

“the forces for good” in the world have grown stronger.

“The fact that more people are becoming involved and informed is the result of the important work on sustainable development that we are talking about. Sweden is one of the countries that keeps the questions and the work for change on the agenda.”

The belief in positive change is important to pass on to pupils at school. Although there have recently been several setbacks, such as USA and Russia not ratifying the Kyoto Protocol on reducing emissions of greenhouse gases, a lot of work is being done in the right direction.

By way of example he mentions that the nation of a billion people, China, is now in the process of adopting an ecological perspective as a guiding document for the school.

Trying to support progressive forces is also a way that Per Wickenberg believes in.

“Just as in the classroom we cannot focus only on the pupils who misbehave: we have to pick up the enthusiasm and interest shown by other pupils. The important thing is to start the strong constructive currents.” ♠

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Big Questions in Little Boots

It makes no difference whether the sea is raging, with the Atlantic rolling in over the rocks, or the slush is sticking to their boots, or the sun is shining on the cowslips. Whatever the weather, the children on Brännö tramp round their island, discussing important questions of life.

◀ A walk by the sea is wonderful on a lovely late winter day. But the children of Brännöskolan walk in all weathers, for their health and to stimulate free thinking.

BRÄNNÖ, A QUARTER of an hour by ferry from the mainland, is in Gothenburg's southern archipelago. In a cleft in the island's grey granite there are fields, one or two farms, and a lot of houses. The island has a permanent population of 800. Many of them commute to jobs in the city. The school, for children from nursery school up to the age of ten, stands in one of the prettiest parts of the island, in the middle of a meadow.

Every Tuesday, after lunch, all the pupils from nursery school to year 3, 43 children in all, and three or four teachers assemble for "Walk & Talk" – the school's own preventive health initiative for body and soul. First the pupils are told this week's question. Then they draw lots to see who is going to carry the pedometer. Then the group is ready. The children go two by two. A child from year 2-3 walks with one from the preschool class, or a year 1 child with a nursery school child.

The walk takes about half an hour and the distance varies. It's between one and a half and three kilometres, depending on the kind of terrain chosen on the day.

"Sometimes we go towards the sea, sometimes we go in the woods," says the teacher, Margareta Gustavsson.

They have the walk every Tuesday, whatever the weather.

“When the group comes back, the children guess the number of steps and the distance and read the pedometer.”

While walking, the children discuss the question they have been given. It is often an existential or ethical question. The teachers usually go round the group listening to what is being said and encouraging the children to continue their discussion.

Once back in the classroom, the children discuss their answers and their thoughts with the whole group.

“We write down the ideas on a pad, which is then left up all week to let people read them and think about them again.”

The school has an important role in teaching and implanting the values of society, such as the equal worth of all people and solidarity with the weak and vulnerable. This is done by allowing the pupils to discuss things and ask questions themselves.

Among the questions raised by the Brännö children on their walks have been “what is a good friend?” and “what is important in life?”

A good friend is kind and considerate, several of them answer. A friend has to be someone you can rely on, say others. Someone wants a friend to be “playful and active”.

When new children join the class you can say “hello” and ask if they want to join in. That is how pupils suggest newcomers should be welcomed. Another idea is to let children who have been at the school a little longer be guides who try to help look after the new ones.

It is important to have someone who cares, say the children. Friends, brothers and sisters and parents matter. For life to be happy it is important not to be bullied, says one of them.

Food, clothes, a home and good health are also among the essentials of life, say the pupils.

When asked why boys have more friends than girls



A good friend should be ready to play, lively, and someone you can trust.

there were protests. They don't, said the pupils. It's just that there are more boys than girls in the class. And girls and boys have different games.

What do you do if someone is unhappy?

“Go and ask ‘would you like to play with us?’”.

“Comfort them.”

“Go and ask ‘would you like a cup of coffee?’”.

“That last one was meant for one of us adults of course,” says Margareta Gustavsson. It shows that they understand that adults may also need comforting now and then.

Sweden's strategy for sustainable development also includes promoting people's health, and making sure that youngsters keep fit.

“We wanted the children at our school to have more exercise on the timetable and at the same time to get to know each other and to communicate and to discuss ethical questions.

And we also wanted to make use of the fantastic

Here are some of the children's own reactions:

– “Walk and Talk’s” good. It’s good that we get exercise at our school. Every ten kilometres we get a present. We’ve walked thirty kilometres, it’s brilliant. (Boy, year 2)

– “Walk and Talk” was fun and at the same time it’s good for your body. We talk as well, last time it was about how to show you like somebody. When we’d walked thirty kilometres we got a badge. (Boy, year 3)

– I think the teachers are great for going out every time. (Girl, year 3)

– Every Tuesday we go for “Walk and Talk”. When we’ve walked ten kilometres we always get a surprise along the road. We always talk on the way, for example if someone’s upset, what do you do about it? We have pedometers to see how many paces we’ve walked. (Girl, year 2)

environment that children live in here on Brännö.

Parents, too, had stated a wish for more sport or exercise on the timetable. Whether the children have become healthier and more mobile can be difficult to judge, say the teachers.

“But at least there’s no complaining now when we set off,” according to Margareta Gustavsson.

The school started the walks in the autumn term, September 2003. The first time, some children thought it was hard work and some of them could not see the point of it. Now they are all for it.

“When it was slushiest after Christmas and the children were wet after break we did not expect that they would want to go out again. But there were no problems. All the children trudged off.”

At first the children could sometimes come inadequately clad for the walks. But now both children and parents realize that they need boots, a warm sweater and rainwear, in case the weather turns nasty.

The teachers, not only Margareta Gustavsson but also Anne Eugensson, Kjerstin Ryd, Eva Brolin-Widell and Yvonne Yngve, all think “Walk & Talk” is an extremely enjoyable way of combining exercise, health and ethics. Nowadays the Tuesday walk is a must.

“We think it is exciting to think up questions, or choose from the children’s own questions, for the week’s discussion. The children often bring questions of their own that they want us to take up. It’s nice that they are often ethical questions”, says Margareta Gustavsson.

The pupils enjoy talking while they are

walking. The conversations with their walking friends also make them bolder about sharing their thoughts with the whole class.

“There have been a lot of good discussions in the classroom afterwards. The children are interested in what conclusions others have reached and are keen to talk about it every time.”

The children seem satisfied. At an assessment all the children except two replied that they liked it. Of 27 children who were asked, 18 thought they had learned something and most of them also thought the questions were good ones.

As well as getting fitter, having to think about ethical questions and practising saying what they think, the children get a more immediate dividend.

When the children have walked 10 kilometres they get a little 10 K present. Something simple, but encouraging. A packet of raisins and a luminous tag for example.

“And for good measure we avoid sweets, of course.” ♠

Some of the aims of the curriculum are that the school should try to ensure that the pupil

- develops his or her physical, mental and social skills and develops a positive self-image;
- develops knowledge of what promotes good health;
- is stimulated to take a lasting interest in regular physical activity and take responsibility for her or his health;
- develops and improves her or his ability and pleasure in taking exercise and is stimulated to express imagination, feeling and community.

Giraffe is the Language of Conflict Resolution

It is easy to lose your temper in an argument, to start criticizing and condemn each other. But there are better ways of resolving difficult situations.

At Oscar Fredriksskolan both teachers and pupils learn the language of Giraffe.



USE OF THE GIRAFFE language means avoiding personal attack or stereotypes; it involves using words that can create contact. Talking Wolf, on the other hand, means showing one's teeth at once, criticizing and accusing the other person.

Giraffe is a language for handling conflict, and is part of the "non-violent communication (NVC) model". The basic idea behind NVC is that our way of communicating influences the course of a disagreement. A respectful and understanding response opens the way to



"If someone hits you it's hard not to hit back," says Axel in year 6. But today he tries to use words instead.

a resolution of the conflict with which all concerned can be satisfied. If we criticize, or hurt other people's feelings, on the other hand, the conversation often reaches a dead end.

Rick Lindkvist, recreation leader at Oscar Fredriksskolan in Linnéstaden, uses an actual event in the classroom as an example. A boy in the class is angry, he kicks things, speaks aggressively, can't sit still. Instead of telling him: "Sit down; get on with your assignment!" Rick may go up to him and find out what is wrong.

"First I make a neutral comment and say 'I saw you kicking the wall and waving your arms about.' Then I may add: 'I get so anxious when I see that you won't sit

down'. Then I think that perhaps this isn't going to be a good day for us."

"Or I ask: 'How were you feeling when you kicked the wall?'

"Then the boy may answer: 'I'm angry'.

"Yes, I can see that,' I say. 'What was it that made you angry?'

"And finally it may come out: 'I didn't have any breakfast today. I'm starving.'

"When the boy notices that I'm taking an interest in him and how he feels, I'm able to find out a whole lot of things. I get information on how the situation might be resolved, what it's really all about."

Everybody working at Oscar Fredriksskolan has gone through training in NVC conflict resolution in the period 2002-2003. The aim of this initiative is to prevent violence and verbal aggression in school, so both children and adults will feel secure and feel well. The teachers are important models to the pupils, and as adults they have the main responsibility for the working climate in the school. Therefore how they act in tense situations, and how they react to the children and each other, affects the whole school.

Rick Lindkvist thinks that the method is an excellent tool for his daily work. Especially with pupils who need special support.

"Children with problems often have to be shown extra empathy," he says.

As he now has a means of coping with the situation, he does not let his feelings control him in the way he did before.

"For example, when I'm faced with an angry parent today, I don't start off the way I used to."

But Giraffe is not a language that means being submissive or wimpish, he points out. It is just as important to be in touch with your own feelings and have them respected.

"Sometimes you have to know where to draw the line,

◀ The giraffe has a huge heart, over half a metre in diameter. That is why its name has been borrowed for the empathetic communication model NYC – the Giraffe language.



Axel and Hanna at Oscar Fredriksskolan have learned the meaning of two languages, Wolf and Giraffe.

and say in effect: 'I don't want you to do that.' It can be good for children to see clearly where the line is drawn."

Children may also need to practise showing their will.

"It's good to learn to say: 'I don't want to.' For example if a mate does something you don't like, and laughs it off by saying 'it was only a joke'", says teacher Birgitta Åström.

In the autumn of 2003 ten of the school's year sixes were given an introductory course in Giraffe. All the pupils had to state their interest, then the teachers made the selection, with a view to obtaining a mixture of people who are "peacemaking types" and pupils who need to find new ways of managing conflict.

Part of the training consisted of role play, where

teachers acted out various scenes dealing with relations between children, or between teachers and pupils. The youngsters had to suggest how the situation could have been handled differently.

"We talked about how you can avoid making the conflict worse, by thinking about why the other person said what he or she did. We also talked about giving somebody a label, for example by saying 'you're always so mean', or 'you never help', and what reactions this may provoke," recalls teacher Birgitta Åström.

The ten pupils have since gone through repeated NVC training sessions, every second week, with four of the school's teachers acting as tutors.

Axel, who is in year 6, thinks that the conflict

management course has been interesting and fun. And today he behaves differently in some situations, he says.

“I used to get into more fights. Like on the football pitch, if anyone tripped me up. Now I use my mouth instead. Say: ‘What did you do that for? Watch where you’re putting your feet!’”

Hanna, also in year 6, does not think she has used the method quite as much.

“But I don’t swear as much now, she says. Instead perhaps I say ‘that wasn’t very clever.’”

NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION (NVC)

The NVC model – or Giraffe language – was created by the American psychologist Marshall B. Rosenberg and is used today in some 40 countries around the world. NVC is both an attitude and a practical model for communication in tense situations.

The four stages of Giraffe

1. describe what you observe – without interpreting or judging
2. describe what you feel – without intellectualizing or analysing
3. try to identify and express your needs – why were these feelings aroused inside you?
4. say what you want in the form of specific action from the other person

Wolf can be like this:

“You keep interrupting me!” or
“You’re so pushy and domineering”

Translated into Giraffe: “Three times I was talking and you inter-

rupted and started talking at the same time” and “You decided without asking what the rest of us really think.”

Conflict resolution in Linnéstaden and Gunnared

The districts of Linnéstaden and Gunnared, together with the School Development Unit in Göteborg, started a conflict management course for school staff in 2000 – “On Our Own Two Feet”. The aim was to prevent violence and verbal aggression in school, so that both children and adults could feel confident and feel well.

Oscar Fredriksskolan, one of four schools taking part, has extended the programme and now the pupils, too, are being trained in conflict management.

More information about NVC and training in conflict resolution may be found on www.cnvc-se.org

Axel often talks to himself to try to keep calm. But sometimes it is difficult to think first – he and Hanna agree about that.

“You don’t really mean to hurt anyone when you shout – but that’s what happens all the same. And sometimes you’re so mad that you don’t want to think,” says Hanna.

“It’s not easy if anyone hits you. You get an adrenaline rush. But the best thing is to run and fetch a teacher,” says Axel.

Absorbing the ideas behind NVC and learning to apply the methods may take time, and sometimes it’s quite demanding, explain Rick and Birgitta, who guide the pupils in conflict management. To start with when the pupils do role plays, they often find it hard to express their own feelings and needs in front of their mates. It’s easier to snap at them than to say “I don’t like it when you don’t want to play what I suggest and you just say we’re going to do what you like.”

“It’s hard even for adults to talk like that. We haven’t learned that, so we aren’t used to it,” says Rick.

The method has had positive results among the pupils, say both Rick and Birgitta. Some children have definitely begun to get on better with their classmates, and with others.

Those pupils who have had the training will be training other pupils in conflict management. The sixes will be teaching the fives, who can then take over when the sixes go up into senior school.

It is hoped that the conflict management initiative will create ripples, with the teachers and pupils acquiring a new approach. All seem agreed that both adults and children have to be involved in order to create a good climate.

“You have to train the kids too. It’s not enough for the teacher to learn. Like at break, if the teacher is on the other side of the yard when an argument starts,” says Axel. ♠



Forty Languages, One Goal

Six years ago nobody would come to Gårdsten to play the school's football team. This immigrant area of the city had the reputation of being rough and the youngsters of looking for trouble.

Today the school's sports teams meet with genuine respect and win awards for fair play.

LAST MAY, YEAR nine at the International School in Gårdsten came second in the Swedish school football championships. And in September the dads' seven-a-side team won its division for the third year running, after going through the season unbeaten. Two important successes for the school's sports club, ISGIF. A club for both pupils and parents.

But it is not only in the sporting arena that the club has enjoyed success. Its activities have had an effect in many areas. There was a time when other schools in Gothenburg dreaded the prospect of meeting the children from Gårdsten in school matches.

"One school demanded that we had at least four teachers with us when we visited them," says PE teacher Hajrudin Heremic. "Nobody wanted to come to Gårdsten. They thought it was far too dangerous!"

Today the school sports club often hosts tournaments and arranges friendly matches with other schools.

The change began five years ago. The staff had noticed that there was a lot of interest among pupils in sport after school hours. At the same time the school's splendid sports centre was often empty.

"We soon realized that it would be easier to get times for training there for pupils and parents if we formed a club," says Hajrudin.

In the autumn of 1999 a club committee was formed, consisting of pupils from different school years, and statutes were approved. Today the club has 200 active members, half of them girls, who practise football, basketball, badminton or table tennis every week. As well as activities for pupils, the club has two football teams consisting of fathers and siblings, who play in local leagues, and a team of mothers that trains volleyball.

Gårdsten is a part of the suburb of Angered, just over ten kilometres from the centre of Gothenburg. The hills overlooking the Göta River were covered in the 60s with the housing of what was known as the "million homes programme". During the 80s and 90s immigrants and refugees moved into the tower blocks and today 95 % of the population of 6 000 consists of people from countries other than Sweden.

"Nearly everybody in the club is an immigrant. They represent 40 different languages."

Gårdsten got a reputation as a problem area. A reputation which was not entirely unfounded. When all the neighbours are as lost as you are yourself, it is not easy to find a firm footing in the new community. And how can you become integrated in Swedish society if nobody outside Gårdsten wants to go there, or receive the people who live there?

"Many of the young people here have problems from their experiences earlier in life, that's for sure," states Hajrudin Heremic.

"One lad always used to go around with a knife, even

at matches. In the life he and his family had lived before they came they had always had to be on the lookout for enemies. He hadn't been able to let go of that, although he lived in Sweden. Quite a few of the pupils here played to different rules in sporting contests from those observed by Swedes in general. When they lost they felt enormously insulted and were liable to start fighting.

"In our club we expect our players to behave well on all occasions. The face we show must always be correct and pleasant. We teach that as a club we must adapt to this society. We show our intentions best by respect, fair play and patience. We want to win, but only fairly and in the right way. Parents must be models.

"To a large degree it's a question of upbringing. For example we have taught the children not to throw things at the spectators even if they boo, that is not the right way to do things."

The club rests on two pillars. Sport and the Swedish language. As so many different languages and nations are represented it is important for everybody always to talk Swedish. So that everybody understands what is being said and to stop factions forming, explains Hajrudin.



Nearly everybody in the sports club of the International School at Gårdsten is of foreign origin. One of the club's aims is to facilitate integration into Swedish society. Team spirit has taken the club right to the top!

Nowadays opponents no longer ask the school to send four teachers to away games.

“We train often and purposefully. That is why we are always looking for chances to appear in matches and tournaments and take active steps to find schools and clubs who will meet us in friendlies. Our aim is first and foremost to meet schools and clubs where Swedes are in the majority in order to have more contact with Swedes.

“Many of the friendly matches have also led to personal contact between the Gårdsten pupils and Swedish youngsters, which they have not previously had”.

In Sweden’s national strategy for sustainable development, integration and diversity are among the priorities.

“We at the International School in Gårdsten chose this route to integration,” says Hajrudin.

Hajrudin Heremic has played a crucial part in the birth of the club and in obtaining the active participation of the parents. He himself came to Sweden in 1992 as a refugee from the war in Bosnia. He ended up in Härnösand and to pass the time he began to play basketball in the church sports club. He was soon the best player in the team and he moved on to other clubs. He ended his playing career in division 1.

Hajrudin has been energetic in attracting parents.

“Many of them have been involved in the war; they have fought on opposite sides in the former Yugoslavia. But now we all live here and this is a situation that we have to adapt to.

“The participation of the parents has led to better relations between pupils, parents and the school. The parents have become more active in the school itself, thanks to the sports club. And the club is very popular with pupils and parents alike.

“I arouse their interest, I don’t force anyone to come.”

The pupils in the school know now that they are from Gårdsten. Gårdsten, which is in Sweden, which is in the world. And they take part. ♠



– What do the members of the sports club think?

– I learn to cooperate with people I don’t know (Ebyan)

– It’s a good thing we’ve got the sports club instead of being out doing daft things (Ebyan)

– It’s good, because you get so many new friends that you don’t see so often in school.

– I learn to respect adults and other children and referees. I learn to be patient. (Sebila)

– Is it a good thing that adults are involved?

– Yes, they can stop arguments and things like that. (Sara)



Young children are soon moulded into traditional gender roles.

Read about the schools that are trying to break the mould.

The girls at Seminariegatan nursery school have found that woodwork can be fun. The nursery school tries consistently to let the children broaden their experience and interests, so that they are not restricted by their gender roles.

Would you like a little tuft?



Nice girls playing round the dolls' house and boys romping about in the forest – those are our stereotyped gender expectations.

But at the nursery schools of Seminariegatan and Karneol-gatan the children are encouraged to play and develop on the basis of their actual interest and personality, not their sex.

Here boys learn to be helpful and girls to be fearless.

IN HATTIFNATTARNA, a section of Seminariegatan nursery school in Linnéstaden, there are 18 children aged between 3-5. For the past couple of years the staff have been working to promote equality within the group of children. The main aim is to encourage the nursery school children to choose what they want to do and to be like on the basis of curiosity, interest and knowledge. Not of traditional gender roles.

In Sweden gender equality is an important goal. Women and men should have the same opportunities in all spheres of life, whether financial security, health, power or influence. Equality is justified on grounds of fairness, but also because society as a whole benefits when use is made of the creativity and skill of everybody.

Research shows that girls and boys adapt early to traditional gender roles, which influence their view of their options in life. The fact that little boys and girls often play in different ways cannot be explained by biological differences alone. Much of the behaviour is learned and the training starts in babyhood.

“We address girls and boys differently even in the maternity ward. Oh, look! What a sweet little girl! Oh, isn’t she lovely and she seems so peaceful! Oh, what an eager little fellow. What a solid lump! And he seems to have a bit of a temper. Let me feel the weight of him!” says nursery school teacher Gunilla Breman.

“Children in our society are fed with stereotypes. Many picture books make a clear distinction between the sexes – the girls wear pink dresses and the boys stand with their feet wide apart. Advertising depicts boys as tough and active and girls as appealing and passive,” she goes on.

The Swedish nursery school and elementary school are intended by the national curricula to discourage traditional gender patterns. The teachers must make sure that girls and boys enjoy equal influence and space in the school’s programme, and awareness of equality is to be integrated in all school subjects.

Actually the staff at Seminariegatan used to think that equality already prevailed there. But when they took the equality course “Våga bryta mönstret” (Dare to Break the Mould) in 2001–03 they realized that this was not true. Training taught them to recognize preconceptions and behaviour that revealed gender stereotypes, both in themselves and in the children. At the same time they found the tools to break the pattern.

The teachers began by observing what happened in various situations and activities at the school, and recorded this with the aid of a video camera. They looked at the activities that girls and boys themselves chose, what they liked doing and what they disliked. They also had to think about how they themselves responded to the children.

“We saw that the boys enjoyed playing by themselves,

well away from adults, and we knew very little about what went on in their play. The girls, on the other hand, were glad to be near the adults. They often chose activities that could take place round the table, like drawing, painting, sewing or weaving. There they could have conversations with adults and with each other,” says Susanne Lindau, nursery school teacher.

The girls’ games often involved various kinds of role play, like families. The boys went in for physical activities with a competitive element. If there was conflict, the boys preferred to settle it themselves, whereas the girls often accepted help from the adults.

“When we thought about what we had seen, we concluded that girls and boys practise different things in their activities and games. Girls practise conversation, interaction, cooperation. We also saw that the girls depended on what their friend did or wanted to do. If we asked a girl anything she had to check with her mate first,” she said.

The girls have learned to wait their turn and to take account of the boys, who are often more pushy and are allowed to be like that. The boys practise more competitively, express differing opinions and making themselves heard and visible.

Another observation was that some children took a lot of space in the group, and also a great deal of the teachers’ time and attention, because they “demanded it”. And these children were nearly always boys. How the staff should alter the fact that they consistently devoted a lot of time and attention to just a few boys and always let the girls – and other boys – take a back seat was an important question that they began to discuss.

The teachers tried using a new compensatory teaching in their gender equality work. This meant that they concentrated on the things that were poorly developed in the girls’ and the boys’ general gender roles. The assumption is that both girls and boys do the same things, for example gymnastics, building games, dancing, painting, drama. But they can do them in different ways.

Building with Lego or making a hut involves a certain technique, but the activity can be given different contents for girls and for boys. With boys the technique can be used to stimulate conversation and social ability. The adult takes an interest first and foremost in the boys' ideas about who is going to live in the house or what the structure is going to be used for. With girls the actual technical ability can be developed by asking questions like how many floors the building should have, how high it should be, how many kilos the foundation can support etc. In the groups the boys and the girls have the chance to broaden their image of their own sex.

The model comes from the Danish educationist Anne-Mette Kruse, who considers that the purpose of gender equality work is to develop autonomy in girls' groups and intimacy in boys' groups. But the ultimate goal is of course for girls and boys to work together and make choices together.

“At first there was opposition to working with girls' groups and boys' groups. We were afraid it would preserve the pattern rather than break it. But since we've realized that the children often choose on the basis of expectations and habit rather than interest, we have understood that we must subject boys and girls to new challenges for a while. People often avoid things they haven't dared try. If these things are seen as “girlish” or “boyish” as well, then perhaps they avoid them for that reason,” says Gunilla Breman.

An important step along the road away from an upbringing reinforcing gender stereotypes is for the adults to be sure of their own conceptions and expectations regarding the other sex. Why did the teachers find a lot of the girls clinging and inclined to moan? Was there anything in their own way of responding to the girls that played a part? What signals were they giving?

Today the staff see definite changes both in the group of children and in themselves.

“The girls have got bolder and more independent.

And that's partly because we adults don't make ourselves as accessible, we don't let the girls hold our hands or sit on our laps as often as we used to,” says Berit Torstenssen, children's nurse.

The boys, on the other hand, have become more helpful and considerate.

“They talk to each other more and their vocabulary is wider.”

Today the children are less traditional in their play;



At the hairdressers'.

both girls and boys choose among a wider range of activities.

Single-sex groups are now being used less than they were.

“We are trying to build gender equality into every situation, all the time. As our own awareness grows, we become better at reflecting on the question on each occasion, in each situation,” says Susanne Lindau.

The teachers have become more aware of how they express themselves and respond to the children.

“We ask ourselves: If this child had been of the oppo-

site sex, would I have acted in the same way? When we read stories we may exchange the words “he” and “she” if the story has traditional gender roles,” she says.

“We make sure that the girls, too, have their qualities acknowledged, not merely the fact that they are pretty or sweet. And we try to get nearer to the boys, to have longer conversations and reason with them more.”

Today the teachers help the girls and the boys to an equal extent, and they do not expect the girls to keep



quiet and be patient or the boys to be quarrelsome. They praise the girls when they are strong and brave, and the boys for waiting their turn and being helpful, explains Berit Torstensen.

“The girls are encouraged to have their own opinions, whatever their mate may think, and the boys are encouraged to cooperate and compromise.”

But work towards gender equality is not something that can be “done” and then regarded as finished, in the staff’s view. They have to keep working on their own expectations and conceptions.

“Work towards gender equality is something that goes on all the time. It’s a continuous process, not something finite. We keep coming across new things,” says Gunilla Breman.

Language boundary shift at Karneolgatan nursery school

At Karneolgatan nursery school in Tynnered, too, the teachers are working actively to discourage traditional gender patterns among the children. The starting point here was a course in gender equality work in 2001 – 03. It made the staff aware that they actually had different expectations of boys and girls

“We became conscious of how our expectations control the children’s opportunities of developing their abilities and interests, says Inger Sjöstedt, preschool teacher.

Today the teachers deliberately avoid expressing themselves in ways that reinforce traditional conceptions of what men and women can do. Once they might have said “Mum will wash that”, when the child went home with dirty clothes. Today they say “Dad or Mum will wash that”. And the broken toy is something “Mum or Dad can mend”.

“Today I give a lot of thought to what I say and do, and the possible implications for the children,” says Inger Sjöstedt.

In Nallen, a department with fifteen children between 1 and 3 years old, a number of different methods are used to foster gender equality.

- The preschool has no special “girls’ room” with a dolls’ corner or “boys’ room” for hammering or building. Instead different kinds of toys are mixed in every room.
- The toys which are bought should inspire the play of both girls and boys. There are both drills and babies’ bottles available for the children’s role play.

- When the children dress up for role play they are encouraged to choose roles and outfits freely across gender lines. The costumes include policeman, witch, firefighter, various different dresses, etc.
- The teachers, who are all women, put up pictures or mend anything broken in the school themselves, so the children can see that this is “woman’s work” as well. Instead of “phoning Peter” like they once did.
- They avoid distinguishing girls’ and boys’ colours, such as pink and light blue. The mugs that the children drink from at mealtimes have pink and blue lids, and the pink ones are usually put on the boys’ mugs nowadays. After a nap the girls put their dummies in a blue jar and the boys in a pink one.
- When one of the children says “Only girls (or only boys) can do that”, the staff ask why and start a discussion with the children. Such a discussion about ice hockey ended with all the children being allowed to try playing and wearing helmets. After that there was no talk about not letting the girls take part. ♠



Nursery school children at Karneolgatan like dressing up. And a girl can act as a knight just as well as a boy.

The Compulsory School Curriculum states:

“The school shall actively and deliberately promote the equality of rights and opportunities of women and men. The way in which girls and boys are received and assessed at school, and the demands and expectations made of them, help to form their perception of what is female and what is male. The school has a responsibility for discouraging traditional gender patterns. It must therefore provide scope for the pupils to test and develop their skills and their interests irrespective of gender.”

The Preschool Curriculum states:

“The way in which adults behave towards girls and boys, like the demands and expectations made of them, help to form girls’ and boys’ perception of what is female and what is male. The day nursery/nursery school must discourage traditional gender patterns and gender roles. Girls and boys in day nursery/nursery school should have the same opportunity to test and develop their skills and interests unrestricted by stereotypical gender roles.”

Facts and advice on gender equality work

Dare to Break the Mould

The equality project "Våga bryta mönstret" (Dare to Break the Mould) was started by GR Utbildning in the municipalities of the Gothenburg Joint Authority in the autumn of 2001. The aim of the course, which has covered work teams of about twenty units from preschool up to upper secondary school, has been to change traditional gender roles. The course has included gender studies, values clarification and methods of surveying and of implementing change, and the teams have received continuous guidance.

The project has been financed by the Swedish ESF Council, the Government, the County Administrative Board, the Board of Education, the National Secretariat for Gender Research, and the (four) municipalities involved, and will be concluded in the spring of 2004.

An evaluation report on the "Våga bryta mönstret" project may be ordered from GR on tel 031 - 335 50 35, fax 031 - 335 51 50 or by e-mail: mail@grutbildning.to

GR has also produced a video film about the project, which can be ordered from the same address.

Jämt i Göteborg (Equal in Gothenburg) – new gender equality training

In the autumn of 2003 the City of Gothenburg began gender equality training in continuation of the GR project "Våga bryta mönstret". So far the focus has been on nursery school, and twenty-three work teams and approx. 80 nursery school staff have taken part.

The aim is to give girls and boys equal opportunities to develop, irrespective of gender, to identify and combat mechanisms that may lead to harassment, bullying and violence of different kinds, and to break

stereotypical gender patterns and roles.

The course is intended to give teachers knowledge and ability to reflect on how traditional gender roles are interpreted and reproduced in the activities of the nursery school. It is hoped that this may contribute to changed working methods and approaches that confirm and reinforce the children's gender identity while at the same time enabling them to cross traditional gender boundaries. The course has consisted of lectures/seminars and process guidance in the work team.

Training in the nursery schools has been in progress since the autumn of 2003, and the first stage of "Jämt i Göteborg" will be completed in June 2004. A continuation is planned and it is intended that the nine-year compulsory school will also be offered the opportunity to take part.

For further information, please contact Inger Rydström, planning manager for gender equality questions, tel. 031 - 61 11 92 or e-mail inger.rydstrom@stadshuset.goteborg.se

Equality and sustainable development in control documents

Equality between women and men has been stressed as an important part of sustainable development, both in Sweden's own policy for sustainable development and in international agreements.

Sweden's national policy confirms that equality between women and men is one of the preconditions for sustainable development. "Power and influence, like the equal rights and opportunities of women and men with regard to economic and other conditions of life, are fundamental", it is stated.

The international Agenda 21 agreement lays down that the active participation of women in economic and political decision-

making constitutes a crucial precondition for sustainable development and for full implementation of Agenda 21.

Agenda 21 emphasizes the participation of women in national and international preservation of ecosystems and action against environmental destruction. It is also pointed out there that women have a decisive role in producing the changes necessary in order to reduce or eliminate unsustainable patterns of consumption and production, particularly in the industrial countries, and in encouraging investment in pro-environmental production and promoting an environmentally and socially acceptable industrial development.

The UN Millennial Declaration also puts efforts to promote equality on the priority list. One concrete objective is that gender-dependent differences in education must be eliminated all over the world, preferably by 2005 but not later than 2015.

Suggested literature

The Board of Education has issued a new publication on gender equality in school:

"Hur är det ställt? Tack ojämt." Erfarenheter av jämställdhetsarbete i grundskolor och gymnasieskolor. ("How Are Things? Unfair to Middling, Thanks!") Experience of gender equality work in compulsory schools and upper secondary schools.)

It can be ordered from Liber 08 - 6909576, order no.U03:024 or downloaded as a pdf file from website: <http://www2.skolverket.se/BASIS/skolbok/webext/trycksak/DDD/1218.pdf>

The Equal Opportunities Ombudsman's handbook against gender-based bullying in school. Can be downloaded as a pdf file from the website at: <http://www.jamombud.se/dokument/hogskolan.asp> under the heading Skolan.



Spring Yell in the Forest Makes Girls Bolder

When pupils just kept yelling four-letter words at each other the teachers at Västerbergsskolan realized that something had to be done.

A deliberate gender equality campaign has created a better atmosphere among the children.

Separate boys' and girls' lessons give the boys a chance to talk about their feelings and the girls to climb trees.

A FEW YEARS ago it was quite common to hear four-letter words echoing around the corridors among pupils in years 4–5 at Västerbergsskolan in Mölndal. The first attempt to improve the atmosphere was a lecture on how to counter gender-based bullying. The talk made people think a lot about the way traditional gender roles affect children at school.

In the autumn of 2001 one of the school's teams joined the project "Våga bryta mönstret" (Dare to Break the Mould), a three-year gender equality programme for schools in Western Sweden. The team, together responsible for 76 children aged between 6 and 11, began by videoing each group of children with their teacher. This was done to see whether the teacher's interaction

with boys and girls followed a definite gender pattern. They also looked at whether boys and girls behaved differently during the session. And they did! The girls sat quiet and still, waited for the teacher's instructions and spoke only if directly asked. The boys talked, asked questions, disregarded rebukes, clowned about and made themselves noticed.

The result was quite a shock to the teachers.

"We were sure that we treated boys and girls the same. But we didn't! It showed clearly that the boys grabbed our attention by acting out, while the girls obligingly accepted second place," says Lena Malmström, teacher of years 1–5.

"It was even evident from our tone of voice what we expected of them. After this unpleasant surprise we paid more attention to our approach."

Based on this film, a teaching plan was worked out for enabling boys and girls to broaden their experience and develop without the restraint of traditional gender roles. The girls needed to learn to make their presence felt and believe in themselves. Not to be ashamed or feel guilty. They also needed to practise daring to compete – and daring to win! The boys needed to practise listening to other people, learning to read other people's signals and showing consideration.

The aim is for both boys and girls to develop a positive gender identity. To break the gender patterns and strengthen the children's undeveloped talents the teachers felt that they needed some teaching in separate boys' and girls' groups. Separate-sex education was introduced for PE lessons and special girl and boy lessons were inserted in the weekly timetable. During these hours the children themselves are allowed to suggest what they want to practise to promote equality.

For the girls this has included vocal exercises and speaking to a group. Daring to take part in discussions and express an opinion is another thing they have practised. In group discussion the girls get the chance to

state what they are good at and they are encouraged to feel proud when they have done something good, like winning a contest. During some lessons they climb rock faces, wrestle and do other body-building exercises in order to find confidence in their bodies and an outlet for their energy.

The boys discuss things like rules and what a good mate should be like. They get to say what they are good at, but also what they are afraid of, what they find disappointing or sad. They can discuss problems that have arisen in the group, and practise listening to others. Exercises in expressing themselves verbally and developing linguistic ability are also included in the boys' lessons.

For both girls and boys there is body massage and "peaceful touch", assisting relaxation and creating solidarity among the children.

The staff can see several results of the gender equality work.

"We see that boys and girls have changed in their attitude to each other. Today they more often resolve conflicts themselves – the group discussions have improved both their capacity for empathy and their vocabulary when they express themselves and put forward an argument.

"The girls' confidence has also grown. They assert their rights both verbally and in body language more than they used to. And at the meetings the boys are better at listening, which also enables them to take a greater part in the discussion.

The massage exercises, where the pupils massage each other, have made them more relaxed. Today nobody has a problem about massaging any classmate at all.

This is what some of the pupils say:

"I think it is good having boys' and girls' groups so you can practise being a bit fairer to girls, and to make the girls a bit tougher." (Boy, aged 11)

"We do different exercises that make us stronger as girls. Today we had current affairs. There were some

boys who took over the question although we were talking first, but my friend and I wouldn't give up until we got it back. We said to the boys why should we have to wait just because we are girls? (Girl, aged 10)

The pupils see gender equality work as important, fun and useful. And they do not want to give up the separate "girls' lessons" and "boys' lessons". In their written evaluations they say why:

"I think boys' groups and girls' groups are a good idea because when you are in a big group you daren't talk about anything embarrassing or anything like that. Yet when you're in a boys' group you dare talk more about embarrassing things and things like that (...). It's good to talk about them because otherwise you bottle it up inside you all the time." (Boy, aged 10)

"I think girls' groups are good because when there is a girls' group they don't all try to be tough and cool. They can all be themselves." (Girl, aged 11)

"I think the boys' group is fun. We usually sit on chairs in a little circle and talk a lot about feelings and what is good and what is bad. It's nice to talk about feelings because you can say what you like and talk about all your feelings. It feels better saying what you feel and how you feel in a little group with just good mates." (Boy, aged 11)

In sport especially the girls have gained from being in their own group, the teachers think. They have become bolder physically and stronger mentally. At breaks the girls more often play with the boys today.

The girls in year 2 think that PE lessons have become calmer and more fun:

"In PE it's good us girls being on our own because boys just mess things up and shout and yell and annoy you. They won't listen; they jump and leap about. We think it's peaceful now. We obey the teacher at once. She thinks we are really good." (The girls in year 2)

The boys are in favour as well:



The boys need to practise listening to others and expressing themselves verbally.

"It's good having a girls' group and a boys' group for gym. You get bigger challenges in gym. And it used to take so long for the girls to get changed that we didn't get as much gym". (Boy, aged 10)

The only reservation came from one boys' group who wanted have sport together with the girls once a week. Their reason was that then they would be allowed to play more games.

The children's favourable reactions have led the school to increase the number of boys' lessons and girls' lessons. The pupils in years 4-5 now have some science teaching as a boys' group and a girls' group as well

"This gives the boys a little more responsibility for finishing off their work, they have both to write and to put things away. The girls

Pupils comments about separate boys' and girls' groups:

- You should have boys' girls and girls' groups, 'cause the boys show off in front of the girls!!!! At gym the boys are much rougher, they tackle you when we have floorball. But the girls are trying to be hard! (Sebastian, age 10)

- I enjoyed wrestling, yelling in the woods and writing lists of what we're good at. We got better at saying "no", being stronger. It was good not to have mixed groups at PE because the lads were rougher. I liked it when we had massage, too. (Natalie, age 10)

- It feels good to talk about things if you feel really upset. You're not afraid to talk about embarrassing things that are nice but a bit awkward. (Jesper, age 10)

get the chance to examine things and experiment more by themselves; no boys take over,” says Lena Malmström.

The parents are very much in favour of the gender equality work, she says. However some parents have been anxious in case boys’ and girls’ groups are a retrograde step towards an



Sievers from the Equal Opportunities Ombudsman’s Office a study day has been held where all teachers from the school and the nursery school have taken part. In the autumn of 2003 the teachers at the school drew up a gender equality plan together.

The actual project has now terminated, but



Massage gives relaxation and creates contact.

When you’ve got a girls’ group they don’t all try to act tough and cool. They can be themselves. A lot of them talk about their problems or something nice that’s happened. Everyone helps everyone else with what they think but some don’t want to talk about things. I want to practise standing up to the lads a bit more but not saying things that are mean. (Johanna, age 11)

–Nearly all the lads get a bit more serious in the lads’ group. If you feel mad with anyone there’s a chance to be friends again. (Nali, age 11)

“old-style” girls’ school and boys’ school.

“But then we have been able to show that the relatively small number of lessons in separate boys’ and girls’ groups instead have a positive effect on the spirit of whole classes and create a setting where every child has the chance to develop to the maximum,” she says.

It’s not just the children whose attitudes have changed. The teachers themselves have acquired a different view of equality and what is needed in order to counter gender patterns that inhibit children’s development.

An important aspect of the work for gender equality has involved “alerting” colleagues in the school. Another team soon became interested and joined the project in the autumn of 2002.

With the aid of the project leader and Lena

the equality work goes on.

“Once you’ve started, it’s like wearing new glasses: you see everything in a new light. The commitment leads to new opportunities,” says Kristina Westlund.

One of the nursery school teachers is now continuing her studies with a view to becoming the local authority’s gender equality adviser and tutor in these questions in Mölndal. The nursery school’s educational development leaders are expert members of the “Delegation for gender equality at nursery school”, which has been set up by the government.

“We see clearly that gender equality is a highly topical question. But the most important reason for continuing the work is the children’s needs and wishes,” says Lena Malmström. ♡

My Lifestyle Affects the World



Sustainable development, is that anything we can play a part in as consumers?

Students in class Sp2 B at Burgården upper secondary school were asked to answer that question. The result was a lot of suggestions and a lively discussion that went on far beyond the classroom.

WHAT SORT OF world do I want to live in, three years from now – or twenty? Will I be able to travel and see exciting places, will there still be a rain forest to visit? Do I want my children to be able to drink clean water? Can I influence these matters at all?

The discussion became the beginning of a cross-disciplinary project on consumer influence, on which the students of class Sp2 B at Burgården worked in the autumn of 2003. The idea came to science teacher Carina Svensson and social studies teacher Kjell Olsson after an EcoTeam course they attended. Spotlighting consumer questions was a good way of giving the environmental area a concrete form, they thought.



Students' comments

– I am very surprised at the high percentage of children who work in bad conditions. I would like to learn more about that.

– Invest more in public transport. Who wants to pay a lot to travel in discomfort? Then everybody will take the car instead, won't they? (Riika)

– A lot of small changes can add up to something worthwhile in the long run. Sort waste paper, stop dumping rubbish in the countryside, especially batteries, turn the light off when you leave a room, don't leave the TV on stand-by. (Jessica)

– You don't need to take the car to the shop when it only takes 15 minutes to walk. (Anneli)

– It's important for us all to think about what we throw away, flush down the sink or chop down. (Rachid)

Class Sp2 B, 30 active and enthusiastic seventeen-year-olds, began at once to look at different aspects of the questions.

“First of all they were asked to bring two pictures to school. One to show something having positive associations, one having negative ones,” explains Carina.

Not entirely unexpectedly, the pupils chose pictures of sea and boats, a summer meadow and happy people, as positive images. War, dirty factories and poor people aroused the opposite reactions. The students also wrote down their hopes for the future. They hoped that poverty would be eliminated and resources would be distributed more fairly. They feared future environmental and natural disasters, or global warming that was impossible to reverse.

When they had to prepare an environmental inventory of their own lifestyle, lively discussions arose.

“How much water does it take when you shower? Do you turn the shower off to soap yourself, or do you let the water keep running? These were the sorts of everyday questions we discussed, and a lot of them probably hadn't thought about their daily life affecting the environment,” recalls Carina.

The fact that their own lifestyle leaves its trace on the environment became more apparent when the students had to make their own ecological “footprint”. They went into the website www.winwin.se where by answering various questions you get an indication of how much of the planet your present lifestyle uses.

A lot of them were extremely surprised when they realized how much they really consumed.

“I thought I was quite environmentally

mindful, but when I saw the answers I realized that I wasn't, although I usually use public transport and don't eat meat,” says Julia, one of the students.

“We all got a shock. We realized that really there was a lot more we could do to save the countryside,” says Marlene.

“If everybody lived the way we do you'd need four planets,” says another.

Burgården has been actively engaged in environmental questions since 1996. That was when the school decided, after some students and teachers had been to an Agenda 21 meeting, to put more emphasis on environmental work and to raise awareness among students and staff. That autumn an environmental group was formed. Since then Burgården has had regular study days and taken various environmental initiatives, such as introducing ecological milk in the school canteen.

Carina teaches general science, environmental studies and biology; Kjell's subjects are social studies and geography. As environmental questions concern all subjects they see advantages in cooperating across subject boundaries.

“When we were working on consumer influence we were able to stimulate each other, the perspective became wider and there was a clearer total picture. We teachers showed the pupils that cooperation is productive. What is more, we gained a better overall view of our own pupils, which made grading them both easier and fairer. Most of all, teaching became more fun,” says Kjell, and Carina agrees.

When the pupils had to suggest subjects to study in more depth there were lots of ideas,

and most of them found it easy to choose something from the final list.

Yasmine and her group studied genetically modified food. Marlene chose to examine the occurrence of triclosan in various products.

“I chose triclosan because I didn’t know anything about it, I didn’t even know what it was, except that it had a harmful effect on the environment.”

Others went more deeply into subjects where they already had some knowledge, such as work with children, vehicles and alternative fuels. Quality and fair-trade marking of bananas and coffee, and sport, health and doping were other subjects chosen for in-depth study.

The students worked in groups of two or three. When more than one group chose the same subject they had to approach it from different angles.

Regardless of their previous level of knowledge, they all worked in a disciplined manner and with great enjoyment, report the teachers.

For their work the students had three school weeks, a good school library, computer rooms, two regular teachers and a student teacher.

Many sought information on the Internet. Quick and efficient, but also with a certain risk. Robert, for example, who tried to find how the fuel cell works, discovered that there are a lot of incorrect facts on the Internet.

All the group work was then combined in a wall chart, a new form of reporting that the teachers wanted to test. The chart was to be informative and capture the interest of readers.

The groups spent two lessons reading and studying each other’s wall charts and putting three questions to the compilers.

Each group then gave a very brief presentation of its work, lasting one or two minutes. The group then had a quarter of an hour to answer the questions put by the other students.

All the pupils, including those who are usually silent

or do not work very hard, were active and committed.

“We believe that the method has made the students better motivated. Answering questions felt much easier than giving a lecture,” says Kjell.

Both questions and answers were graded.

“The group reporting wanted to show clearly that they could answer the questions while at the same time the questioners really wanted an answer. So the level of activity was very high and interest was maintained throughout the reporting stage,” he says.

And the students confirm that the way of reporting has been appreciated.

“It was very exciting to work like this, to put a chart up and ask questions was absolutely new,” says Iman.

“In this way everybody got answers to what they wanted to know, instead of somebody standing there and talking about things they weren’t interested in,” says Sahar.

“You understood when everybody reported on their own work, because you could ask questions,” says Frida.

The discussions even continued outside the classroom.

“When the pupils feel involved, they find it easier to absorb knowledge,” says Carina.

The way of working has also turned out to be as good

Burgården upper secondary school has been working since 1999 to become an environmental school as defined in the Board of Education criteria. The school has had an active environmental group since 1996, consisting of between 5–20 students and two teachers.

The results of the work include:

- environmental weeks with various lectures by invited

guests, exhibitions, film showings,

- an environmental cafe and ecological food in the school canteen
- participation in environmental conferences and study visits
- collaboration across subject boundaries on various environmental projects



There are different ways of growing coffee. In some places so intensively that no other crop has a chance. But there are ecological coffee growers who guarantee fair wages to their employees, and this contributes to sustainable development. Class SP2 B report on what they have learned about how they as consumers can influence the future.

for the less gifted students as for the more able ones, the teachers believe.

“Everybody was satisfied with their final performance and proud of it,” states Kjell.

The pupils were also satisfied with the way grades were given, because so many different elements were included and the two teachers made their assessments from different angles.

They also felt that they have learned a lot themselves, partly because there was a free choice of subject and they were forced to put a lot of thought into giving a stimula-

ting and informative presentation. The report itself became a source of knowledge, thanks to varied and well thought out questions and answers.

“We conclude that this project has made the students more aware and led them to reflect more on their lifestyle. We hope that they will understand better that we need to change our way of living if we are to attain a sustainable society,” say Carina and Kjell.

Or, as Marlene writes: “I have learned a lot from this. Such as to stop using toothpaste containing triclosan. And now I buy ecologically cultivated bananas.” ♠

Energy-saving School Runs on Pupil Power

The pupils of Skälltorpsskolan are learning to reduce energy consumption both in school and at home. Some of the youngsters are also helping companies in the area to do the same thing.



“FUNNY THAT YOU’VE got the coffee maker on all day. And you’ve got far too many lights on.”

These were some of the comments when pupils in year 9 at Skälltorpsskolan visited companies in the district. The pupils have been checking their electricity consumption and suggesting improvements.

“As the pupils arrived in a spirit of healthy curiosity and interest, and with no trace of arrogance, they got a friendly reception everywhere,” says Magdalena Apelqvist.

Skälltorpsskolan on the Hisingen side of Gothenburg is trying to make pupils into conscious consumers of energy. Together with other schools in the Backa district the school is taking part in a project called PEAK, which is intended to give the youngsters insight into