

The Dream of the Good in Norrköping

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The municipality of Norrköping focuses on children's health and learning. In order to achieve the best possible results, security, peace and quiet for work, and the participation and collaboration of the parents are needed. Of particular importance are the leadership and attitude, commitment and respect of the pedagogues. The equal worth of all people and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child form the basis for the work of the preschool and school. Quality can best be measured in the human encounter between teachers and students. There's where the learning happens, and it is that process that has to be given the best conditions.

The key words in our Swedish directives for the preschool curriculum (LPFÖ 98, curriculum for the preschool) are care, upbringing, and learning.

During my 34 working years within the preschool I have lived through many changes. My co-workers and I - and many more with us - wish to enable our youths and children to live a good life. We must take care of each other, of the earth and of peace. We want to bring up our children to become friendly, loyal and caring human beings. We want healthy, peaceful, knowledgeable and proud children. Secure, responsible human beings who dare. We want the children and staff to be happy and content; it has to be fun to come to our preschools.

Through the work in preschools Armbandet and Kättsätter and other units within VISKA (nowadays known as Sydvästan with the areas Vilbergen, Skaphagen and Ektorps) - since January 2001 - we have found our strength. We see that the strategy of the municipality of Norrköping and the Swedish curriculum can be realized.

For us it is important to work toward the same goal, in the same direction. In Sydvästan we have agreed about the following goals:

"WE SHALL meet the children with commitment and respect".

VISKA also stands for -
the Will to do our best

Inspiration

Självständighet (Independence)

Knowledge

Ansvar (responsibility)

VISKA can also mean quiet dialogue. Creating peace and quiet is one of the goals of the activity.

The change

That was then:

The premises and the work environment at Kättsätter were at the time of the fusion lacking, 50 % of the staff was absent due to long-term sick leave. Among those in good health many worked only 75 %. The stress level was high, everyone trying to do everything and hurrying from one task to the other. In the beginning there was strong

resistance against change. Many pedagogues were approaching retirement age but because of the large numbers on sick leave it had been difficult to recruit new and younger co-workers.

In 2001 there were at Armbandet and Kättsätter respectively around 40 pedagogues and all in all around 160 children of which many needed special support.

The situation now:

The absenteeism due to illness has gone down radically; today, in 2008, we have no one on long-term sick leave. The children are calm and healthy. The staff knows what is expected and who is responsible for what. Everyone is working from clear areas of responsibility.

We have a positive atmosphere for change and development at both preschools. The tasks are clear and we formulate objectives for the coming years together.

Theory becomes reality in the everyday work with the Dream of the Good

How have we managed to achieve the preschool objectives and create a quality workplace and good learning conditions for the children - with security, peace and quiet, commitment and respect and the best conditions for health and wellbeing for all? How come our preschools have become attractive to new teachers and children and their parents?

Breaking the pattern was a lodestar when the changing process was initiated

I was aware that I as director had a key role in all of the process of change.

My ambition was to create a good working climate and a clear structure, security, good conditions, be clear in my leadership and stimulate development and happiness. Being present, seeing possibilities and facing my co-workers with respect, trust and commitment.

The work with the Dream of the Good with the preschool children

The objective: We shall create peace and quiet. Peace for the staff and peace for the children.

We want to be secure, responsible adults who dare. Creating the best possible conditions for raising, caring for and teaching the children.

The key features of our endeavor are summed up in this poem:

** Here I am never afraid.*

** Here I am accepted and liked.*

** Here I know what I may do and what I
mustn't do and why these boundaries exist.*

** Here the others listen to me.*

** Here I meet with tolerance and understanding and
get help with difficult things.*

** Here they see what I'm good at and tell
me about it.*

** Here I can try new ideas and make my choices.*

** Here I can experience that it's important
what I think, how I feel and what I want.*

** Here I can feel that I am good enough and that I am someone.*

*From "Läsinlärning och
Självförtroende."
K Taube*

"Children who are afraid won't learn"

(said by Tom Tiller, a Norwegian researcher).

Adults who dare don't close their eyes.

Children need to meet friendly people and they need to learn to recognize and understand their need for peace and relaxation.

Children need time for play. Playing outdoors stimulate motor skills and is good for the health and well-being. The more time they spent outdoors the healthier the children are. Movement is important for learning.

Dance and movements, like qigong, give contact and helps in expressing feelings.

Time for thoughts and reflection is important.

The Dream of the Good methods:

Peaceful touch (massage) is an important feature. All the staff has been trained in peaceful touch.

We use body massage with oil or balls and do variations with massage stories and poems. The massage games "car wash" and "planting a tree" are popular.

Twice a week, after lunch, we have massage where the children massage their peers and the children and the staff massage each other to peaceful music.

It creates a peaceful atmosphere and makes us wind down. It's important to reduce the stress and stimulate the hormone oxytocin, the body's own "peace-and-quiet" hormone.

The children become softer with each other, conflicts are solved more with words than with hitting and hurting each other.

"You don't hit the person you massage."

It's also good to dare touching each other. It should be something natural and nice.

In the beginning most of the children just wanted to watch, they didn't really dare doing it.

Now all the children are engaged in the activity!

We always start with the question "may I give you a massage"? It's important that it is voluntary and that the children feel safe.

Stillness

Moments of stillness are woven naturally into the daily activities. Stillness is the inhalation; exhalation is the playing and movements. . Stillness is included in the massage as well as in the children's qigong. When the children take a rest they should be able to stretch out on mattresses and get a nice moment of stillness. Peace and stillness are important for learning, for our ability to reflect and for our health and wellbeing. At our preschools we want to see secure, harmonious children who can feel peace and stillness.

Child psychologist and researcher Yvonne Terjestam confirms in her research project *Barn i balans* (Children in balance) that the Dream of the Good methods qigong, massage and stillness are good for the children. The children become more peaceful and can focus better.

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Reflection and life dialogues are created in the qualitative meeting between colleagues, children and parents in a sharing organization. This means that you give yourself time, ask questions and listen to each other. Children have great wisdom and love to express their thoughts about life when the right atmosphere is there. For the staff the pedagogic documentation and the staff meetings are natural occasions for reflection.

Children's' qigong

The children's qigong consists of five animals, the beautiful red bird, the fearless and wise black bear, a little clumsy and a honey lover, the smooth, silvery and glossy tiger prowling the savanna, the quick green and shining monkey looking for bananas in the jungle and the graceful deer. Each exercise ends with a moment of stillness with the child absorbing the quality of the animal. The method is developed within the Biyun School, and is included in the four-day instructor training of the Dream of the Good that all pedagogues at Armbandet and Kättsätter have gone through.

The method makes good use of the ability of the children to live the part and consists of simple movements and visualizations. To play the animals helps the children to get to know and balance the powers inside them and find emotional and physical harmony. It develops the feeling and the imagination and opens up the child to nature and promotes health and wellbeing, in accordance with Chinese knowledge and experience that are 5,000 years old.

All children, also the one and two year olds, may play the animals. The smallest children can't do all the movements, for instance stand on one leg, but they do what they can and like the exercises, especially the bird..

The Qigong room at Armbandet is decorated with light pieces of fabric and exciting pictures. And we light candle before practice, put on quiet music, for instance Native American flute (Carlos Nakai). We also offer the children something to drink or a piece of fruit.

We stimulate the imagination of the children and their feeling for the animals through stories, songs and painting. The fairy tale or the story is the entrance. It's also a great help that the exercises are fun to watch. Children can easily feel the effects of the exercises. They become happier, less restless, also physically. It's easy for children to enter the world of imagination and they are close to their feelings. We are very encouraging and tell them that they're wise, quick, good learners. This makes them open up and relax. We watch the children transform in front of our eyes and assume the animal forms. And this is exactly what is so beneficial according to the ancient and wise Chinese doctors.

The bird is connected with and promotes the heart and the qualities of summer. Its element is fire and its emotion happiness. The bear is connected with the kidneys and winter; its element is water and its emotion fear. The tiger is connected with the lungs and autumn and is related to the element metal and the emotion sorrow. The monkey is connected to the liver and spring and the element wood and the emotion anger. And the deer with the spleen, late summer, the element earth and the emotion reflection.

Exchange with other countries and municipalities

Through the work with the Dream of the Good the understanding that we are all brothers and sisters and the ability to meet other people regardless of cultural and national background grows. This understanding has led to a lively exchange of experiences with pedagogues and directors from other cultures and in other parts of Sweden. Our experience of the work with massage and qigong has raised a lot of interest and is demanded by many. We grow when we repeatedly get the opportunity to tell about our activities in different contexts.

In our unit we have had continuing qigong training not only for our own pedagogues but also for teachers from other schools close to us and from other parts of Sweden and even from Norway.

All pedagogues help each other during the study visits. The children are used to the visitors that come to watch the massage and children's qigong.

We cooperate and exchange experiences with schools and preschools and municipalities in other countries, for instance Rimini in Italy, the UK and Latvia. We have had visitors from Italy, China, Belgium and South Africa. These visits have resulted in fabulously fun and rewarding meetings with other cultures in the sign of the Dream of the Good. The cooperation has grown; in October I and several pedagogues went on a study trip to Rimini, and in the fall I plan to go to China. In 2003 the Hong Kong television made a documentary about Armbandet, "the best preschool in

Sweden”, that was broadcast nationally. During the years our preschools have received study groups from many Swedish municipalities, among others Oskarshamn, Danderyd, Linköping, Jönköping, Västerås, Örnköldsvik, Mantorp, Vässingebro, Djursholm, Stockholm, Lidingö, Malmö, Lund, Vinnevi and Umeå.

We are frequently asked to present our work in different contexts at seminars and workshops. During the past six years we have participated at the Preschool Biennale for Special Pedagogy at Linköping University, Skolforum and on several occasions in the Swedish Parliament.

Glimpses from the daily work with the children at Armbandet and Kättsätter

The staff’s experiences

We asked the pedagogues at Armbandet and Kättsätter this question:

“What have you learnt during the past year and how have you realized it in practice?”

I have learnt...

Children’s massage and I use it everyday in connection with the children’s rest period for peace and quiet and relaxation. I also work with the ball massage; this is something that has developed so well that even the smallest children can do it on each other. I have learnt to use the peaceful background music.

My attitude toward my colleagues and the influence of the children and their participation has developed.

I think and work more with participation and influence.

I am much more aware of my way of being. It gives a positive kick. I have also learnt a lot about *inner* leadership. Now I think about looking around with attention.

I have learnt to wind down with among other things the Dream of the Good methods and Do-In.

I have learnt how important and fun it is with documentation in words and images. I listen more; I don’t meddle but wait and see. I respect and accept. Qigong and inner leadership.

We have happy, curious children who are willing to learn and participate.

We create a peaceful everyday environment with the help of massage, qigong and calm music. Movement is an important element, good for the body, makes what you learn stay in your head. We learn to be good friends; social skills are the most important thing.

I have learnt more about children’s individual development. It has come about by my thinking more about my attitude toward the children and their situation here and now “Sånggodis” gave me the opportunity to make good collections of songs and musical fairy tales. I have learnt to take it easy and that everything doesn’t have to be perfect at once. Things can wait a little; it’s a way of coping with everything for me.

You learn something new every day that can be mediated by colleagues, children, parents or other adults. Not to take everything for granted, an advantage if you are flexible.

I focus on my abilities and desires, not so much on what I can't do or don't know.

The children as well as my work mates are happy.

I am conscious of my role in the meeting with parents, children and other personnel. The power of thought and a positive attitude help me to cope with the situation when staff is missing for different reasons. It's important that the children feel that they can participate and influence their stay in preschool.

I am very conscious of our important mission. That the children are content and happy we can see by how they are taking care of each other, their social interplay and confidence.

I have learnt how to meet the need for relaxation and stress management; children as well as adults must find time for recuperation.

We shall help the children feel good through massage that stimulates oxytocin, the body's peace-and-quiet hormone, by outdoors playing and movement for at least 60 min/day for the healthy effect of daylight or by simply having fun. Then we become calmer and happier. This promotes health.

It's important for the children to be able to lie peacefully and listen to stories told in a quiet voice, to the sound of beautiful music.

Positive conflict solving has taught me to see the positive things in everyday life. To reflect upon how to speak to the children when you have to tell them to do something.

The most important is all my new pedagogic thoughts. I'm thinking about everything that I do in a different way. Small details can mean so much. Instead of for instance shouting "Don't fall down!" I say "Hold on", or "Don't stand up" is changed to "Sit down!"

It's important to be straightforward in your message to children. Being clear, not verbose makes it easy for the children to listen and understand.

I have learned a lot and have really been able to practice my new knowledge. It feels good when everything works in the group and when we have peace and quiet. There's harmony from morning until evening. The work with individual children gives results, they have developed very much. I have also developed a lot and I have gained experience that has made me more secure and self-confident. My competency development in stress management, portfolio, rhetoric, movement, guitar, the study days in The Dream of the Good and the sign course have all strengthened my self-confidence. I have dared implement certain things.

The Dream of the Good creates good conditions for the children as well as adults by our creating places and moments for peace and stillness, the music, the massage, lighting candles at lunch time. We make a beautiful peaceful, playful, and stimulating environment

indoors and outdoors, plenty of time for free creativity. I have understood the significance of peace and quiet and not to rush. It gives a calm and secure children's group and peaceful and relaxed pedagogues. We often play the calm and peaceful music.

The children love to get and give massage. I have got a better understanding of what effect the children's massage has; it's an advantage to have done the course. What a response I get from the children!

The portfolio documentation. I write more in detail, I can follow the children's learning process with the help of photos, drawings, cut outs, etc. My book is fun to work with. The children are proud of their work and often want to sit and turn over the pages and remember.

I have learned to let the children have their own time. To respect the children's desires and wishes. To train the children's thoughts, let them try different solutions, stimulate their independent thinking, allowing them time for this. To give praise and see the able child. To see the small situations and causes for joy and the small steps forward of the children. Document it and bring it out for my colleagues.

The visible result of our work of change in brief (some examples):

We see happy secure children who play well together and show compassion for each other.

We see independent children who assume responsibility and are part of the community.

We have created a clear and good work and development plan for the preschools.

We have an introduction plan for new employees.

We have two development dialogues per year.

Absenteeism due to long term-sick leave has gone down, short-term absenteeism is low.

We have created more full time posts.

More men work with us.

We have succeeded in recruiting newly trained preschool teachers.

We are Campus preschools and receive students from the university.

We have an Arabic speaking resource person.

The cooperation between the preschools has developed. The work place meetings and consultation group work brilliantly.

All of this gives delight and joy at work and a wish to keep working for the **Dream of the Good**.

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