

## **“FUTURUM – my educational dream school”**

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After 40 years working in the Swedish school system I'm now retired since half a year. I remember when I started, as an enthusiastic teacher 1973, that I had a lot of educational dreams. The dreams are still very clear in my mind. But I was very lucky one day in 1995, when I had the opportunity to fulfill my dreams, when we started the reform project “Futurum”. The background to our reflections and new thinking was following:

In Sweden, it has been a change of the entire 150-year-old industrial society in the end of the 1900's. With the introduction of computers and the Internet's entry into offices, school computer laboratories, and in our student's homes, has gradually developed a new knowledge and information society. What does that mean for our Swedish school system that has existed since 1842? An old school who was primarily based on teaching in an industrial way, where teachers, students, classroom and teaching time was the most important ingredients. We have now over the last 20 years, received a completely new type of knowledge, available in large quantities. New mobiles, Smartphones, Iphones, I pads ,Google, Twitter, Facebook and all type of new media have change the situation completely. Therefore we must try to change our old education model so we use these new changes in our new media landscape.

What I believe is that we must try to distinguish between information and knowledge. Our students find information about everything in seconds, from various sources in the Internet or via other electronic media. Therefore we must now ask ourselves, what is knowledge?



What must we teach our students and how? How should the school system and in particular the contents of the school changed, so that we can take advantage of the enormous potential this new technology give us?

And how do we “learn our students to learn”? How do we get our students take more responsibility, so that they ask the right questions and find adequate information to work with? Students work in our school sometimes individually, but also in team, holistic with different subjects at the same time, thematically and in project. It also means that they go deeper into the learning process, to achieve a greater understanding and see how information integrate to each other, and give them possibilities to draw new conclusions from their texts.

In connection with the rebuilding of our schools in the Håbo municipality, we therefore tried to concentrate fully on the new learning processes. It is no coincidence that our school is named Futurum, which means "future". Our idea was to offer a new organization, a better and different education, a partly changed role for our teachers and a nice environment. We have borrowed money from the bank, for renovating our old school buildings and also built a new school, mainly to renew and improve the internal and external environment. The goal was, in light of the intentions of the Swedish curriculum, including new ideas from the concept “School 2000”, make our schools in our municipality to be the best schools in the country. Holistic view on

knowledge and flexibility are important keywords in our pedagogical approach to learning.

We prepare our children in terms of both knowledge and their social skills, so they are well prepared for their future adult lives. We use a lot of energy to make the school system in Håbo municipality become a functioning unit of kindergarten, primary, secondary school, adult education and cultural and outdoor activities. In addition, we include also an excellent and beautiful and healthy working environment. All five schools in our community were rebuilt in 1997-2003 to accommodate flexible working practices and a modern education. In addition, we created an effective network between students, parents, teachers, preschool teachers and other cultural activities in our municipality.

In our schools in Håbo community, the desire to learn has high priority. We encourage new, modern ways of working and always put the individual at the center. Each pupil will be able to develop at their own pace. We work so that every student

follows their own development plan during all 10 years at Futurum, and then three years in our own Gymnasium. Because each student learns differently, we have to constantly developing a variety of pedagogical methods and approaches to satisfy this. Through experimental working, for example in project working, teacher's role partly changed sometimes to a coaching role. Delight and joy in preschool



will continue as a red thread through the entire school system. In our schools all students have opportunity to work scientifically, experimentally and also work creatively. Theme work and project work must be part of their work. By participating in the planning process, implementation and evaluation of school work, our students also are trained for future employment. In Futurum the student together with their mentor teacher is responsible for planning their own work. Students meet every morning for 25 minutes with a mentor and their schoolmates in the mentoring group. This mentoring group consists of 12-15 heterogeneous age mixed students. The mentor system is an important part of our educational system. We use our different experiences and personalities in the team and we believe in diversity and that we have different skills. It promotes team work in a very positive way. All teachers have to work 45.5 hour / week, 10.5 hours of our working time are confidence-working, and can be made elsewhere than in the school building. Teachers in Futurum are therefore 35 hours in school. They have 18 hours of teaching and 16 hours of conferences and planning time. One hour is for student and parent talks. In this way a network is formed of teachers in the team who support students throughout the school year, and provides students with the important adult support. The determining factor is what the students must have.

We want our students work on an investigative approach, and in addition able to communicate, collaborate and develop their critical thinking. Success built on their own conditions, creating a desire to learn and make our students curious and give them self-confidence. Good conditions for learning are where all our senses are stimulated. By using different learning styles, we give also our students possibilities to be successful in their studies.



In the first new local school plan from year 2000 we could read that we should focus on....

☺ organizing the school into smaller autonomous teams - " the small school within the large school "

☺ create student influence through impact, individualization and responsibility and create a knowledge discovery approach with individually working methods with the teacher as a tutor and mentor.

☺ create opportunities for ICT use, where students in a natural way uses the modern information technology tools

☺ collaborate in teams between different groups of staff to provide a holistic view of the student. As an obvious starting point, the student will always be at the center.

☺ to implement the new information society with positive elements of new teaching innovations.

☺ create an inspiring learning landscape in the team, where creativity and desire to learn dominate.

☺ that the school building's spatial organization will provide an important condition for teaching and learning performance.



If we briefly look at the Swedish school system we can see that the mission during the 1900's has gradually changed from being a knowledge intermediary institution to become a learning and value-bearing organization. What previously focus was on factual knowledge and measurable outcome, have the last decades moved towards a process-learning that puts the individual pupil's progress in the center.

The Futurum concept is based on the intent of the recent Swedish curriculum from 1994 (Lpo94). It has a holistic view of knowledge and is oriented towards process-learning. The Swedish school system is a goal-oriented school model started in 1992, and the municipality is the owner of education. The importance of a real-affiliated, multi subject approach is emphasized and the school should have in all education history, environment, international solidarity and ethics. This is from our Swedish curriculum - Lpo94:

*"The school's mission to promote learning requires an active debate in the individual school of conceptual knowledge, on what is important knowledge today and in the future and how that knowledge develop " (Lpo94)*

*Education and personal development go hand in hand and the curriculum states that "exploration, curiosity and desire to learn should be a basis for teaching" (Lpo94)*

*"The work in school have to get space for various forms of knowledge and to create a learning process where this different forms balance each other to form and become a unit" (Lpo94)*

*For that learning should take place at depth in a lifelong perspective, the curriculum point out the importance of activating all the senses and the necessary interaction between the head, hands and body "*

*It should focus on intellectual but also practical, sensual and aesthetic aspects.*

*Students should be able to experience different forms of knowledge. They should be able to examine and develop various forms of expression and experience feelings and sentiments "(Lpo94)*



Futurum and the other schools in our municipality is very different from old schools. The 60 m<sup>2</sup> large classroom with 25-30 students and teaching in front of the blackboard are gone. To make it possible to implement a new pedagogy, a new organization, a new role for teachers it is also necessary to change the external and internal environment, including the spatial dimension.

The classroom shall have good light, good ventilation, many green plants and shifting conditions, Also be beautiful, spacious and provide a desire to learn. The architecture of the room can't be emphasized enough when discussing the future of pedagogic plans. The future information society allows for a flow of information 24 h per day, where millions of experts are present to answer our student's wonderings and questions in seconds, wherever they are. Therefore, the school building in the future will be constantly in need of the rapidly evolving and changing time and must have an internal flexibility. Flexibility thus becomes tomorrow's motto, not only for the spatial aspect, but also in the use of time for students and teachers. Flexibility is also needed in the team's organization so that students groups and various forms of education can be shifted during the day.

In Futurum the desire to learn is high regard. We are investing in a modern renew pedagogic and also with modern technology at the center. Each student gets a chance to develop at their own pace. We follow this with each student's individual development plan. We also work sometimes with mixed age groups. It allows the older teach the younger ones, but also the exciting contrary. Consideration is the key word in the process. It examines, communicate, collaborate and develop their critical thinking. To succeed in accordance with their circumstances give the desire to learn, and create safe and curious people. Good learning requires that all senses are stimulated and we provide varied learning environments to each student's learning style. Self respect and respect for others is fundamental to our school and to our society.





Culture is very important part of our everyday lives. We give students tools to understand our own and others' cultural heritage. We have our own library centrally located in the school with a full time employed librarian. The library is the school's center, a place for the acquisition of knowledge, seeking information, inspiration and recreation. To feel successful and succeed in their work, gives self-knowledge and self confidence. We also integrated the local music school, so students receive individual music tuition on their instruments during school hours in our own special soundproof music rooms. Culture Week, musical entertainment, theater, musicals, circus, etc. is also part of our cultural work. Students can create their own music in our music room, which then can enhance the quality of accounting for their projects. We have replaced the traditional lecture hall with a flexible cultural center. There is a big stage, combined with the cafeteria and one of our two restaurants. Each small school has its own small stage, with good technical equipment for presentations, lectures, briefings, project work, entertainment, etc. We also have internal TV with 12 monitors for broadcasting Futurum TV, where we have the opportunity to spread the school's overall information. Our TV's have 28 channels such as CNN, Discovery, English, German and Spanish TV that can be used as part of the important linguistic development. It is very important for our students to avail themselves of, and understand all the information that washes over them and us all. Therefore we concentrate in nursery school on a good language development. We achieve this by using different learning styles, and by activating the student's senses in the learning process. We also have several years not just a library at Futurum, but also a "Languagetek". In this room we have a full-time employed teacher who are educated for serve and support our teachers with materials and methods to develop and speed up the process of teaching our young students to learn to read and write as quickly as possible. There is another side of the new information society, which we have included into our educational model.

We work with an organization model that we call "The small school within the large school", where the group and individual are more important than the class and classroom. The small school is the student home area. The Yellow school (other small schools in Futurum are also named by color) have responsibility for students team members and they make their own timetable. They have also responsibility for part of the economy. Every team has 2 democratic elected educational

leaders who got extra money for this work. The yellow team has a workspace of about 1000 m<sup>2</sup> and consists of a big 220 m<sup>2</sup> general room in the middle and 12 smaller rooms around this big room in different sizes. Futurum has a whole school day schedule, with pre- and after school activities integrated with school work. This means that the school is "open" 12 hours, from 6 Am until 6 PM in the evening. Parents pay money for this. On the other hand there are no school fees in Sweden. The students and their parent don't pay for books and other school supplies either. Even the school lunch including a warm meal, lettuce, milk, water, bread and butter is free for all Swedish students. Teachers pay 2 dollar for a lunch.



The teachers in every team are 16 people, including 2 preschool teachers. It is important for us to follow student development during all these years continuously. We have the opportunity to document development during the students 10 years in Futurum with a portfolio model. The older students also help / teach the younger ones, and sometimes also the opposite. This way of transferring knowledge is also an important part of our pedagogy. Since the beginning of January 2000 we have introduced flexible starting time for older students. They can choose "flex time" which means that they start early or work longer in the afternoon. School, however, follow the Swedish course and lesson plans in accordance with the curriculum from 1994, called Lpo94. In this document states out that each pupil should feel respected and be understood. Both the students and teachers should feel safe and secure and feel that they have the best learning possibilities in our school.



Futurum organizational model is based on a 16 students group. We have five small schools in Futurum today. Each team (the "small school") consists of  $10 \times 16 = 160$  students from 6 to 16 years. These 160 students are taught by 16 teachers. We divide our team, the small school in an Early Team (pre-school class -> Class 5) and one Later Team (Class 6 -> class 9), all students are 10 years together in the team. After leaving Futurum they have three years study in a Gymnasium, where 40% start in our own Gymnasium - with the same pedagogical intentions as in Futurum.

All our teams have a total area of approximately  $1000 \text{ m}^2$ . Of this area we use  $100 \text{ m}^2$  for student lockers and space for movement during the breaks available throughout the day. The remaining  $900 \text{ m}^2$  are classrooms in which teaching takes place. In the middle, they have a large general room of about  $220 \text{ m}^2$ , we usually see this room as a great learning landscape and around this there are another 12 rooms of various sizes, from  $15 \text{ m}^2$  to  $60 \text{ m}^2$  in which teaching takes place in various large groups. The big general room can be used as a room for lectures for all 160 students, but mostly they work in smaller groups there. We can also work with students in heterogeneous or homogeneous age groups of varying sizes, depending on the nature of work or of course the students can work alone. Everything depends on the type of teaching / work in progress. The first school years in Futurum, mostly work take part in homogeneous age groups in a traditional way. Some part of the day can also be age-mixed. Then there are project work or individually work. However, the older students work more in mixed age groups when they work in projects. We also demand more responsibility and planning with the older students, which is part of the student's individual development plan. But of course there are also traditional age-homogenous education and regular classes at Futurum. The possibility of flexibility for us to use any type of grouping and teaching methods is of course the really big change after the rebuilding of our old school in 1976, and the implementation of the new pedagogy. But for individualized education at all should be possible, require that the teacher has adequate contact with their students to get to know them well. In Futurum every teacher is mentor for a mixed age group of 12-15 students. The teacher's "own children" who he/she meet every morning for 25 minutes in the same room, for planning and talk about the day's work and above all check the student's individual development plan. Mentors are responsible for their student's



progress and support them to reach the highest level of their capacity. This subsequently results in developing talk, at least once per semester, more if needed, with the student, parents and mentor. Talks started at home and then continue in school, during the one hour-long conversation between the three parts. It ended in a developing document signed by the pupil, parent and mentor. Facts behind this developing talk came partly from home, but one important part is also from the student's logbook. The third developing tool consists of digital records on our internal computer system, where all teachers who teach the student, have access to anywhere and at any time. It can also be accessed via web login at home or elsewhere. In the student's folder on our intranet, teachers write constantly in result of tests, diagnoses and goals achieved. This is what students have learned in all subjects, but we also have another dimension and this is the social competence in each subject. Together, it provides a comprehensive picture of the student's situation and enables parents, student and mentor to set new goals till the next time they meet and evaluate after half a year. Each student has different ways of learning in a variety of teaching and learning methods, which we have to develop all the time. Working this new way requires a new teacher role. They work of course as teachers always done, but also have a new guiding role in the new pedagogical costume. We try to meet each individual's needs in the best way. Preschool pleasure and joy will permeate the whole school at Futurum. Desire to learn and develop must be each student's attitude to school work. We had a motto during the planning phase of Futurum, and it was that all students on Sunday evening should shout out "tomorrow is Monday morning and we can go to Futurum". Not everyone has embraced this of course, but the joy, happiness and result in school has changed positively over the years. In school, the student will be given the opportunity to laboratory work, experiments and a lot of creativity. Thematic and project work with mixed subject is a natural part of everyday life. The individual development plan takes into account the level of the student's ability in just that moment.



To be part of the creation phase and decide how the school will be planned, implemented and evaluated is a good practice for both present and future social and working life for every student who leaving Futurum. The need to take responsibility should also be an important part of our ambition to shape our students to become independent personalities. In Futurum the student is responsible, for their own planning of work in collaboration with their teachers. In order to achieve the best possible development for our students, our teachers work in teams, where we use the teachers' different experiences and personalities. The teachers are specialists in their subjects, and therefore they have different qualities, and a variety of skills and specialties that increase the team's competence. The team follows the student throughout the school year, in our case 10 years together, including the so called pre-school year. In this way we form a network of teachers around each student. The diversity of knowledge flows to the student, and gives a more nuanced and varied picture of reality. But student's needs will determine the first step of reaction from the teachers.

In preparation for working life and for an increased knowledge base, we include the municipality in our educational model, through a lot of activities "in the real life".

Sports clubs and other associations, companies, culture and outdoor activities should be a natural part of daily operations.

"The school in the middle of our village" Futurum is now a reality since twelve years, for the 5,000 people who lives around our school.

We have a lot of foreign people visit us in the last 12 years. It has been about 9000 educators from 29 different countries around the world, who I have the privilege to show my educational dream for.

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