“Your School Can Make a Difference in the World”
Example of Gripenskolan/Nyköping

Education with a concern for sustainable development of mankind and environment

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“Gripenskolan – for your future” has been the motto for a long time for this upper secondary school in Nyköping, Sweden. The school has developed a concern for health and personal well-being as well as for the natural environment. Both local and global aspects have been in focus. This is a presentation of some “Best Practice” examples and strategies of Gripenskolan.

The campus of Gripenskolan holds six upper secondary programmes or units with a total of 1,000 students. These units provide education in natural and social science, various techniques such as ICT & construction/design, housebuilding, electricity/electronics/automation, motor vehicle techniques, a variety of handicraft and in addition individually adapted education for those with specific needs.

The principal of Gripenskolan, Hans Forsberg, has spent almost 40 years on a leadership with a focus on students’ individual progress and health and a concern for human and environmental values. Hans has gained much inspiration from international networks and specifically from some previous periods of leading a “United World College” in Tanzania.

In order to further promote the focus on sustainable development and to continuously raise the quality level of all aspects of the education, Hans has initiated that each unit on campus Gripenskolan is led by its own fully authorized principal in close cooperation with students and staff. Furthermore Gripenskolan is being integrated into a larger organisation, “Nyköpings Gymnasium”, holding all public upper secondary schools in town, with a total of over 2,000 students and 12 principals.

A basic strategy in the pedagogical work is to ensure that each student will experience personal progress in his/her study work on a day-to-day basis. All work is therefore characterized by flexibility with adaption to individual needs and also with additional space for personal interests. Learning is often enquiry-based with a critical research approach and application in real life and society. Students are always encouraged to ask their own questions, discover for themselves and to use their own initiative and creativity. Some topics are studied in an interdisciplinary way, where different subjects interact, thus promoting a holistic approach. Cooperation in various teams is usually encouraged.

The staff organise a stimulating learning environment based on a daily dialogue with their students, allowing for student influence in a democratic framework. The staff take time to always clarify the goals and relevance of the studies. They explain facts and information, give assistance and support and they allow sufficient time for the study work. They expect each student to take full personal responsibility for his/her study work and - last but not least - they allow everybody to have fun!

In order to do a good job and achieve good results one must be healthy and feel well. All students are therefore offered health care courses that focus on physical, mental and social well-being. A variety of sports and outdoor activities are offered as well, e.g. mountaineering, hiking, mountain skiing etc. Students learn about sound eating habits, regular physical exercise, ergonomics, handling stress, giving massage, dancing, positive thinking about themselves and the future, social contacts, relations and trust. In addition the school is specialized as a national training center for swimming and canoe sports. All the staff of the school, being role models for the students, are offered a variety of health activities.

The United Nations World Summit on Sustainable Development, held in Johannesburg 2002, stated that all future development efforts must cover the three dimensions of economic, social and ecological sustainability. All governments of the world need to take their full responsibility and cooperate in securing a sustainable development for the future – for mankind and for the environment. The world summit stressed that education is of crucial significance to make sustainable development.
possible. The UN General Assembly thus proclaimed the period 2005-2014 a decade for “Education for Sustainable Development”.

Gripenskolan has a tradition to work with environmental issues, particularly concerning water. The school is involved since many years in the “Baltic Sea Project” a UNESCO-based network with schools in nine countries all around the Baltic Sea. The objective is to increase awareness of environmental problems, exchange information and suggest strategies for action to protect the environment. Gripenskolan has been awarded “The Water School of the Year” as a result of outstanding student performance during many years of the national “Junior Water Prize” competition, which has become international nowadays. Every year students of Gripenskolan invite younger children of the compulsory schools in town for water experiments and mini lectures and work shops at Gripenskolan. Senior students of Gripenskolan also make regular visits in junior schools and give lessons in environmental issues. On an island in the archipelago Gripenskolan is running a “Nature School” involved in extensive environmental studies in close cooperation with students ranging from primary up to secondary and university level.

In order to understand, respect and strengthen the values of freedom, equality and human rights, a survivor of a former concentration camp during the holocaust in World War II lectures at Gripenskolan every year, giving examples of people exposed by oppression still today in some parts of the world. Some classes of Gripenskolan visit former concentration camps and are then often able to express their own reflections and visions about human values and solidarity in their own words or pictures. Thus students have produced a whole book as well as a film to be used as inspiration in many other classes and schools. For this work Gripenskolan was awarded the national “Peace Prize of the Schools” during a couple of years.

A student-staff committee regularly works across all of Gripenskolan to prevent mobbing and harassment and to promote understanding and friendship.

During some years students of Gripenskolan’s house-building/painting programme have spent many weeks restoring a big orphanage in Moscow, repainting, redecorating and repairing it, and also supplying it with medical help, hygiene articles, eyeglasses, clothes, toys as well as tuition. Having become the “best” orphanage recently, Gripenskolan has now directed its focus on another orphanage in Saratov in east Russia. Funds have been collected through “Gripen Helps”, the school’s annual 1-day odd jobs project as well as through external sponsors and a parent association.

For some years students of Gripenskolan’s natural science and social science programmes have supported twelve upper secondary schools in Tanzania with laboratory equipment for science studies as well as computers. Funds have been raised through “Gripen Helps” as mentioned above as well as through financial contributions from Swedish national agencies and private companies. Within the framework of Gripenskolan’s locally designed course “Developing Countries” some students have travelled to Tanzania every year to study the situation of people, especially children and women, health especially HIV/AIDS, education, employment, culture, environmental problems, access to fresh water etc. The students express their findings in scientific reports and extended project essays and they are often invited to lecture about their experience and results. For several years some graduates from Gripenskolan have returned after school to work as volunteers for some time in Tanzania. Having completed this project of giving “help for self reliance”, Gripenskolan has now made connections with South Africa and recently sent 16 students and three teachers on a study tour there. Contacts are also being established with a poor orphanage in Venezuela.

These examples show how staff and students at Gripenskolan go from words to action with a purpose to promote a focus on sustainable development in education, to strengthen international understanding, knowledge, attitudes and values. Likewise to support every individual to take personal responsibility and action in one’s own life and, being a global citizen, to contribute for a better world here and now.

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