

**Gender didactics for sustainability - bridges between vision and reality**  
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ABSTRACT

Education for Sustainable Development is often characterised as an education that aims to reach action competence, analytical and problem-solving abilities, through learner active and democratic pedagogical processes; critical examination of outcomes, solutions and consequences; ethical considerations, interdisciplinary cooperation and a variety of pedagogical methods. The goal for sustainability when it comes to human development is to a great extent depending on equality between girls and boys, women and men in our societies – and vice versa is poverty, health problem and collapsing social security in our societies all a consequence of unequal distribution of power and means between people – due to for example gender discrimination.

A school system that manifests equal rights, opportunities and responsibilities for all learners, as well as provides the learners with tools, knowledge and possibilities **to understand** structures of power and subordination in society, **to critically examine** their ground, and **to contribute** to a more democratic society, locally and globally, is a primary force in the work for a sustainable future. When a school in it's practice show all learners what democracy and equality really means, what it really feels like, then we lay a good ground for the young people to continue their contribution as active conscious citizens in a democratic society through out their life. This is a brief presentation of our interdisciplinary and learner active work in an upper secondary class at Lundellska skolan in Sweden, aiming to inspire teachers and learners to take on the challenge to keep on reforming the educational practice to a gender aware education for sustainable development, within the frames of the present curriculum.

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## INTRODUCTION

*" Things struck me that I hadn't thought of before and it was bit weird actually. At the end of the project I felt disappointed with myself and my education. I regretted that I hadn't been more engaged in questions about equivalence and equality. Therefore, I have a better feeling today, now that I am so committed."* From a project journal by a learner at an upper secondary school in Uppsala, Sweden.

When a experience that learning means a widening of perspectives of the world around her/him and a more profound trust to her/his own possibilities of playing an active role in society - then life at school is at its best. In the text below we'll give some glimpses from our and our learners education in sustainable development (ESD).

The concept sustainable development " *originates in a holistic outlook on the needs of societies and people, their pre-conditions and problems. The leading principle is the belief that economic, social and environmental conditions and processes are integrated - they require and support each other.*" Sustainable development has three dimensions: one economic, one social and one environmental. The economic dimension is regarded as a pre-requisite for development. But no country can achieve a sustainable economic development if the environment is in danger, if the welfare isn't distributed fairly or if there is no growth of what is called human capital resources. Social development may therefore be regarded both as a result of and a pre-requisite for economic development. The social dimension of sustainable development impresses the importance of a fair and equal distribution of influence and power, that all people have access to social services and that each individual feels she/he is safe and can play an active part in society. Finally, the environmental dimension will protect the ecological systems, what they produce as well as their recovery potentials.

Equivalence is a central issue for global development today. As a tool of analysis, it intersects all the three dimensions mentioned above. To work for equivalence and equality between women and men means to have a wide perspective, a holistic view and to take all the three dimensions into consideration. Women and children are more exposed of sexual exploitation in ecological catastrophic areas. There is a manifest connection between women's reading ability and the survival of their children. Women who are landowners are to a lesser degree exposed to violence and sexual abuse than women who don't own anything. Women are often responsible for the handling of garbage. If more labour intense methods are to be established in order to improve the environment a gender analysis has to be done. Otherwise there is a risk that a change of methods might increase the labour of women in an unacceptable way. Democratic and economic development profits from reduced differences between the rights of men and women.

Education for sustainable development can not only deal with the consequences of lack of equivalence around the world but must also be a concrete experience for the learner in the actual learning situation in the classroom. As a conclusion, you might say that the environmental dimension outlines the borders for sustainable development while the social dimension might be regarded as a part of the main goal, and the economic dimension the means for achieving that goal.

It is an important first step for education in sustainable development that the teachers in their different work groups discuss and try to concretize the connections between the three

dimensions of ESD. Education for sustainable development is characterised by democratic learning methods, critical approaches, interdisciplinary co operation and a great variety of teaching methods. In examples below from our own classroom practice we want to illustrate how we have interpreted the intentions of sustainable development. But first we'll consider how equivalence and equality are implied in the Swedish school system.

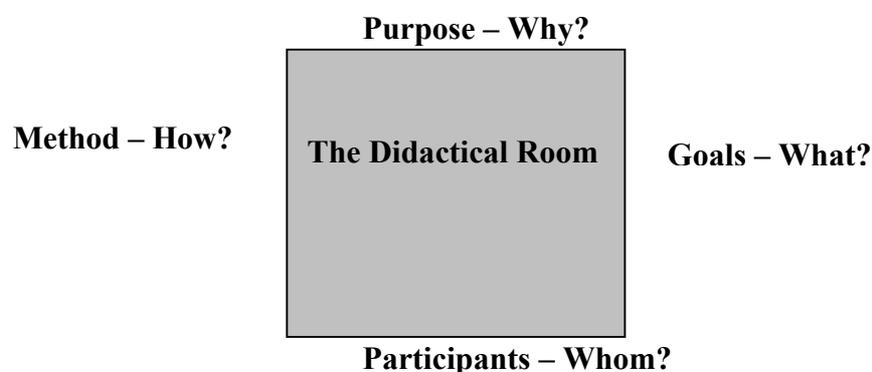
### **The School and equivalence and equality**

The national curriculum for upper secondary schools clarifies the importance of the gender perspective in schools. The gender perspective is found in the value goals of the curriculum which shall influence what knowledge is being taught, the didactic choices concerning working tools and methods, the learning environment that is created in the classroom, the teacher as a model, leader and component in the interaction with learners, the assessment of knowledge and grading. To work with equivalence and equality and the great issues of our future in the classroom is far from "chalk and talk", and it's a work that should permeate every lesson, every course and program. It's a work that is never ending, complicated and difficult but at the same time very rewarding, challenging and full of life.

All our learning environments and situations, as well as the school itself as an organisation must therefore be impressed by gender sensitive choices in order to get a few steps further towards the goal of a more equivalent school. Gender and equivalence issues permeate everything we do at school, our own personalities, our own practise and our own behaviour in meeting with others. You have made good progress in your own equivalence work if you are conscious of the complexity of this gender machinery - that gender identities are created in the, often subconscious, actions in which the teachers themselves play an active role. The greatest challenges for a successful equivalence work are the myths of the gender equality of Sweden, of individualism and your own objectivity." In this school, we treat each other as individuals - fairly and equally." You will become gender sensitive if you can narrowly observe these myths, continue to develop yourself professionally together with your colleagues and have the courage to face how power and gender are linked at different levels at school.

### **The Didactic Room**

As a tool in analysing the complicated aspects of every learning process the model of the didactic room can be helpful:



Teachers use the didactic questions more or less consciously to create learning situations for their students. We do that by choosing the contents, the organisation and the working and

evaluation methods for lessons or part of lessons. In a goal-based school the aims and goals are set out by the national steering documents for all levels, from the school curriculum to course syllabi. The gender perspective that is valid in all documents implies among other things:

- The learners' "possibilities to discover and react against discriminating and non equivalent conditions in society will be improved."
- A gender perspective in the learning process "will make evident and work against conditions in society that tend to permanent traditional notions of what is female and male respectively".

The trust in the teacher's skills is great, isn't it? But our responsibility, and that of our school, is also great. How can I as a teacher of a particular subject integrate a gender perspective in the aims and goals of my subject? What space is there within the range of my subject to develop my learners into future citizens with critical eyes and a strive after equivalence? What do I do in my school subject to make gender structures in society visible for my learners - and how do I plan my teaching so that my learners will be able to put a stop to them? Questions like these can help the teacher to interpret the steering documents with the gender perspective in mind. It is more or less difficult to find support for the gender perspective in the course syllabi of different subjects. Still, we all share the responsibility for its realisation. Interdisciplinary co operation is almost necessary to reach the superior goals at the curriculum level. As a spin off effect you'll find it rewarding when you work together with others on these complicated issues.

The other two walls in the didactic room deal with specific situations. **Whom?** reminds you that as a teacher you must be reflective and have good self knowledge in your profession. Who am I as a teacher and what effect does that have on my teaching practise? What does it mean that all learners have the right to participate and exercise influence on their education? How much have I myself as a teacher thought about the impact of gender and equivalence? What is required from me in this context? Teachers are not free to give personal answers in matters like these but have to work for a levelling of power between the sexes, using knowledge and tools based on gender theories. How can I make myself conscious of how I manifest, create and recreate gender in my classrooms? We all know that our teaching job is a profession of relations where we have to communicate in many different social situations. It is impossible for us to examine our own relations in an unbiased way. Therefore, colleague tutoring, observations and reflections in a log are necessary working tools for pedagogic development.

**Who** is my learner? The answer of that question is working methods - respectful methods that level power - a kind of teaching that is characterised by sensitive listening and constant communication and where the learning situation is formed in co operation with the learners, their questions, needs and precognition.

Thus, the answer of the question **How** (will my learners and I work to reach the goals?) is a key to the teacher's knowledge of her/his students. Her/his understanding is based on how well she/he can judge the students' learning needs, their precognition and their progression. To really get to know your learners is the result of a conscious choice of working methods, an ambition to gently transform the students' voices and stories and thoughts into learning material in a "multi-voiced" classroom. It is obvious how the gender perspective must influence the choice of teaching methods if we are striving after an equivalent education for all learners.

Our choice of teaching methods and working material for a specific lesson are also dependent on how we personally value knowledge, how we interpret our school subject and how we express our general outlooks on life and mankind. Dialogue as a learning method is typical for an understanding of knowledge as a social activity in a collective and communicative context. It is a democratic and therefore power levelling way of gaining knowledge. It agrees well with feministic pedagogics that are built on values, a constant testing of traditional knowledge bases and founded on equivalence, non-hierarchy and democracy.

In a non- hierarchy classroom neither you nor anybody else is the owner of the key to "the correct answer or solution". The ambition is instead to formulate, test and respect different answers to complicated and essential ethical questions. In a non-hierarchy classroom, the dialogue represents the way we are behaving towards each other and the contents of the learning processes.

The dialogue means to give and take all the time. It means a meeting with positive interpretations and a collective ambition to build a holistic learning environment. In a classroom where the dialogue is the most important working method you listen to all the various views, experiences and thoughts. Democracy means real influence and participation, in decision making as well as in the process towards it. In a dialogue classroom, the focus is shifted from the teacher to the learners. Trust, fairness, respect and discipline are essential in order to create such a classroom. When there is a displacement of power between groups based either on sex, ethnic origin or class, the dialogue classroom is in danger. The hierarchy that replaces the dialogue is sustained by different ruling methods. The dialogue classroom also requires a strong leadership in spite of its power levelling goal. Everybody must feel safe, has trust and gets some space. Only then equivalence may be a living experience and not only something taught in a classroom.

How does a dialogue classroom look like - in reality? How are the working methods that always keep equivalence and equality in focus? The complexity of these questions won't allow a single straight forward answer. But we will in what follows give you some examples from our own practice of teaching sustainable development in an upper secondary school.

### **Classroom work in practise**

As a result of our interpretation of the goals for sustainable development we have chosen to work interdisciplinary and with themes. We have wanted to include all the dimensions of sustainable development in our teaching, to make it analytical and to link it as much as possible to the reality of our learners. We have had the ambition to strengthen the learners' will, knowledge and power to make the world around them more sustainable in a broad sense. In our planning of our work we have wanted to find methods that will stimulate both heart, brain and action. We believe strongly in starting with an emotional experience - to think with your heart. Therefore, we have worked with stories in different forms, professional writers' or learners', when we have started a new theme. Films and literature are excellent means for creating involvement in questions about human rights. They offer a possibility to identify yourself with someone living under different circumstances.

Interdisciplinary working methods in Sweden are more commonly used in pre-schools and the lower classes in the compulsory schools. The school organisation is more complicated at

higher levels where many teachers are involved. That is even more so in upper secondary schools with special teachers in every school subject. The organisation we were working in made it difficult to find time for planning interdisciplinary projects. But for us the co operation was possible because we shared the same ideological views on human rights, on knowledge and the role the school can play in developing society. It is important for a successful interdisciplinary work that the teachers involved will trust and respect each other's various fields of competence.

The following examples can easily be integrated in the existing course syllabi for Social science, History, Swedish and Religion. It is important that the goals of the course syllabi are made explicit for both the teachers and the learners. We built our teaching on the course syllabi for Social science, History, Swedish and Religion so that it was obvious how the thematic work was derived from the goals of the different courses. Thus, we could follow the learners' progressions, and monitor grading and assessment within each school subject. We have not worked with activities outside the scheduled time table. From a planning sketch, we've tried to work very flexibly in a learning process where the students' interests, questions and foci have been our guidelines. In our work with World Development Chart we have also co operated with teachers in Mathematics and Computing, and with teachers in Economy when we worked with the film Pay It Forward.

Our examples are presented in a progressive order that we have found functioning. They intend to focus in turns on heart, brain and action.

### ***Your history - a co operation between Swedish and History***

We start the autumn term with the theme work *Your history*, where the learner's personal history will meet with History as a school subject. At the same time this work enables the learners to introduce themselves to their teachers in a playful and structured way. This task is an individual writing assignment during a History lesson and only the teacher will read the finished texts. It is important to make the learners understand that this is a writing task without any constraints, and that they should only take down what they really want to tell. For learners with difficult childhood experiences this task can be very emotional. It is important that the teachers are fully aware of that. But on the other hand, we strongly believe that the learners' own unique personal history should be asked for and respectfully valued within the learning process.

After reading all the texts the teacher may do a summing up where he points out common or similar events that link the histories of the pupils with History as a school subject. Such events could be the working conditions of the place where they have grown up, how many children each generation has had, average age and how the educational level has changed from one generation to another. Here is an opportunity to particularly stress how the conditions of women have changed in the last hundred years

### ***Your history***

1. Think of your own history. Choose three events that you think have had a great impact on your personal development.
2. Discuss with your parents what important events and conditions in their lives that have in various ways influenced their lives, experiences and views.

3. Think about how your personal history has been influenced by the development of society. Choose three events or social conditions that you believe have had a great impact and explain why?
4. The history of women is often forgotten. Investigate in your personal history who is the first woman in your family to go to school and for how long. What woman is the first to have a paid job? What woman is the first to vote? How has the number of children changed with time and why?
5. Make a family tree some generations back and illustrate where your relatives used to live, what education they had and what professions. You can also add how many children that were born in each generation. Make a summary and discuss the result. What conclusions can be made about the history your investigation covers in time?

In the Swedish class the learners work with story-telling at the same time where they are given the task to write a story about life - *The story about myself*. This story is a playful text with some compulsory elements: the learner must be the main character but as a small child and with a fairy-tale name. The name might be symbolic or a tricky interpretation of her/his real name. The learner will choose three important and positive personal characteristics for the main character that will be illustrated in the story. Furthermore, the main character will meet with three challenges that she/he will overcome by using her/his good characteristics. The challenges may very well be symbolical or in the form of riddles.

By overcoming the challenges, the main character will learn three important things that a child must know in order to be a good and strong person - a heroine or a hero. When all texts are written they are discussed from a gender perspective.

### ***The story about myself* - gender revision**

- Are there any similarities or dissimilarities between characteristics and lessons attributed to girls and boys respectively? Why?
- Had the story turned out differently if you had been allowed to write about a main character of your opposite sex? In what way?
- What gender stereotypes are there in children's story books in general? Make an inventory of popular story books together with your learners or as a pair project.
- Write a "the-other-way-round story" that gives the boy or the girl less common characteristics.

An example of a "the-other-way-round" text from the movement of women's suffrage in Sweden is a fly-sheet from 1915 with the headline "The reasons why we are against men's right to vote". One of the arguments is: "*because men are too emotional to have the franchise. That is very obvious when you study their behaviour at football matches and political meetings. Besides, their inborn tendency to use violence make them very unsuitable for government.*" Imagine Alice Duell Miller who wrote this fly-sheet in 1915 being present in 2000 when the Security Council of the United Nations passed resolution number 1325. It summons the members to ensure that women are represented at all levels of decision making which have the aim of preventing, handling and solving conflicts.

In connection with the learners' personal histories we continue the work with the task *Alternative family trees*, i.e. everything that influences us besides what we are born with. On the white board, we list things that make us the persons we are, good and bad. Together we

identify good influential powers that we are proud of and negative influences we should be aware of. The teacher listens to the learners' suggestions and formulates guiding questions in order to develop and penetrate this topic. Here is another opportunity to observe and discuss if there are any differences in the suggestions given by girls and boys and how to explain such differences. The learners will then individually make a picture of the positive and important influences in life under the headline *My alternative family tree*, and present the picture for the class. In these pictures, our learners choose to illustrate friends, music, sports, parents and schools. Religion, fashion styles, idols, important places and other native countries than Sweden are other things that the learners will pay attention to. The personal alternative family trees are exhibited in the classroom. We walk together round the classroom trying to distil the most important and most common influences from the outside world that make us form our identities. This time we focus on the striking similarities that characterise all the different trees in the multicultural class. The similarities are a revelation for us all, not in the least for the learners. Usually they make groups that are built on differences between people, experiences they have exaggerated, very often because of their sex.

## **2. *Lilja 4ever***

Our choice to use Lukas Moodyssons film *Lilja 4ever* (2002) is founded on its excellent description of trafficking and the many questions it arises about equivalence, equality and human rights. *Lilja 4ever* is also often shown in school cinemas throughout the country and it is available with institutional rights. We feel it urgent to inspire the use of this film in such a way that both its upsetting message and many of its social issues are profoundly treated within the learning process. The film is black and without hope but at the same time unique in its emotional power of awaking empathy and a will to change things. We will show some examples of that later. In spite of its age the film is still of current interest, not in the least this year when new brothels were being planned for the World Championship in football in Germany where imported women from the east were supposed to work. Lilja is 16 years old and lives with her single mother in a poor and collapsing town in the old Soviet Union. In the film, we will see how Lilja is being betrayed by the world of grown ups over and over again in a steady downward trend towards the catastrophe. Her mother meets with an American man with whom she leaves the town. Lilja is left on her own.

Lilja is abandoned and has no means to support herself. Life seems eventually to improve when she meets and falls in love with Andrej who is successful for the look of things. But he turns out to be a man who is a sex slave-trader. With the promise of going to the rich Sweden with him and build a future together she is sold for prostitution. The outcome is obvious in this slowly and skilfully told tragedy and Lilja's suicide had a parallel in reality in Sweden. The film doesn't avoid the unmerciful elements of the story but the focus is on the men that exploit, on the silent consent, and the blindness of the surrounding society which makes the exploitation of Lila possible. The careful imagery in the film doesn't search for sexualised effects by showing the abuses. On the contrary it shows great respect for the actress and all the Liljas of the world by filming the men throughout the film from Lilja's point of view. By this choice of perspective even the watchers are spared and we can safely show the film for our upper secondary learners.

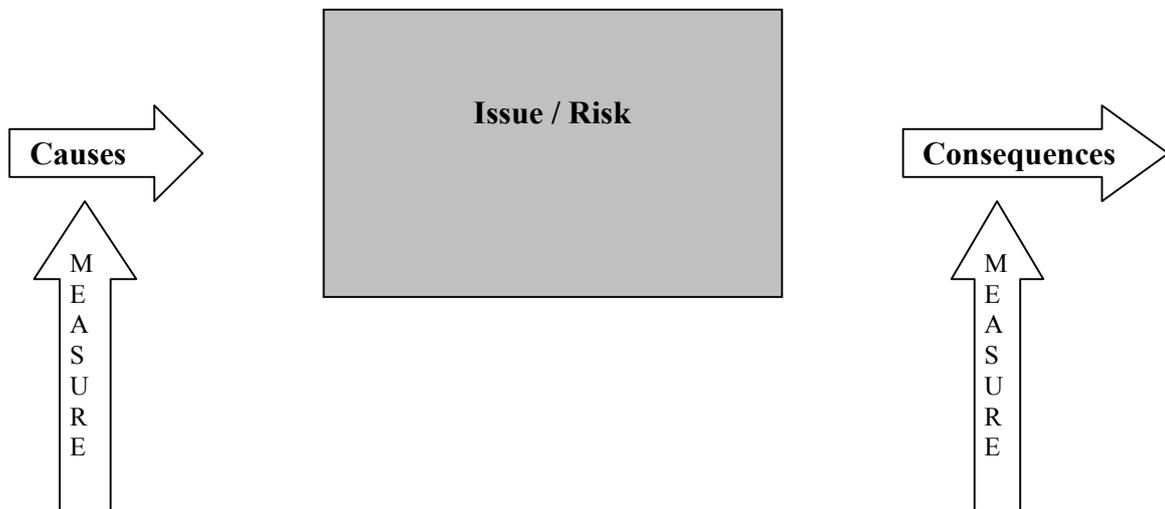
We watched the film at one of the subventionalized shows for schools and then worked with the message of the film. First the learners wrote individually about their impressions in their logs and then the film was discussed in small groups in the classroom. It was quite easy to

start a discussion, but as a help the pupils got some questions to concentrate on. Here are a few examples:

- Describe how Lilja is betrayed, betrayals that eventually leads to her death.
- Why do men buy sex?
- Lukas Moodysson has said in an interview "that trafficking is the ultimate consequence of a capitalistic society. There must be an economic gap in order to make trafficking possible." Discuss his statement.
- What responsibility lies within the Swedish society and the Swedish business world for the fact that poor people become victims of trafficking?

After a group discussion around these questions the learners' thoughts are in a turmoil. They need to be structured to avoid that they get stuck in frustration and hopelessness. A good help for such a structuring is a analysis model that we have used, a model that is now frequent in textbooks in Social science for upper secondary schools in Sweden. The questions and answers that the learners have got after the discussion described above can easily be put into this model.

### Model of Analysis



### Model of analysis in four steps.

It is often difficult to separate facts from your own views. You must be aware that your and other people's values influence how you'll describe the causes and consequences of a problem. It is important to be aware of your own values and see how they influence an analysis of a problem. Here the teacher's responsibility is to assist in the classroom discussion and to widen the reflections to include respect for individual contributions as well as to focus on the fundamental values at school

### Step 1: Description of the issue / risk

Watching the film *Lilja 4ever* is the first step of the model. Questions to use here are: What do we know for sure? And what do we think we know? It is important in this first step that the learners feel committed to the issue.

## Step 2: Causes

In step 2 you continue examining the causes behind the issue / risk. Preferably you can here divide the causes on different levels. This makes it easier later on to find suitable measures and solutions and make it clear who is responsible for what

*Individual level:* Attitudes of men who buy sex. Desperation among them who sell sex - very few other sources of income.

*National level:* Lack of a social security net. (Russia)

Immigration policy (Sweden)

*Global level:* Economic inequality between countries. In order to illustrate how the three dimensions of sustainable development are linked it's also possible here to bring to light the consequences for the means of support in Russia due to effects of environmental destruction. The film is partly set in surroundings where you can see traces of closed down industries and what might be called ecologically catastrophic areas partly due to the nuclear plant accident in Chernobyl 1986.

## Step 3. Consequences

What are the consequences for individuals, groups, nations or maybe the whole world?

*Individual level:* human suffering

*National/global level:* easier for organised crime to profit.

## Step 4 Measures

Measures can be aimed at the causes of an issue or the consequences of an issue.

Depending on what you might think about the causes or consequences the solutions and measures will be different. This may seem self evident but that is not always the case in a classroom debate.

*Individual level:* We can react as individuals - the problem is near us, maybe in the neighbouring flat - and you can act by calling the police.

*National level:* Change laws and regulations.

*Global level:* Act in order to change unjust international trade agreements.

Sometimes you are lucky as a teacher. When we worked with *Lilja 4ever* for the first time we made an investigation about trafficking in the law-making field in Sweden. It then turned out that the same day as we were working with the analysis model there was a voting in the Swedish Parliament about a newly proposed bill. This bill was the result of strong reactions to the film *Lilja 4ever*. Apparently, the film was powerful enough to affect not only experienced members of parliament but also to make our pupils strongly committed to put up a fight against trafficking. Here we got an opportunity to work with a traditional and heavy part of the course syllabus in Social science and turn it into a subject matter of reality and current interest.: "The way of a bill through Parliament". Even learners with less scholarly skills could, thanks to their strong commitment, understand the legislation process in Sweden and read government documents, as they followed the work in Parliament. "Can't we go down there and give them a cheer?", Jafar suggested when the bill was to be passed in the Swedish Parliament.

We have now a grey file called "The way of a bill - Lilja 4ever" that we use for step 4 in the analysis model. Thanks to a coincidence our learners also learnt to respect the decision-making process in a democracy and the work of its politicians.

The gender perspectives of the film are many and difficult. As a teacher, it is important both to open up for discussions about different values and thoughts around the sexual industry and pornography and to keep the focus on the value foundations of school education. We are not value neutral in our Swedish classrooms. We are supposed to work for a deeper respect for deprived people, for knowledge about human rights and solidarity with those exposed to inhuman conditions of life. Equality between men and women demands that no human being should be used as a means for somebody else's goal. To work for improved conditions for others means that we all have to consider what privileges and power we are willing to give up for the benefit of non-privileged people. The widened definition of poverty that Sida<sup>1</sup> uses: "a lack of access to and control over social, economic, and political resources that people must have to satisfy their basic needs" demands that the social conditions for many people in Sweden have to be changed, too. Some of our learners come from circumstances that could with this definition be called poor. And the silent, indifferent, blind majority in *Lilja4ever* - you'll find it even in Sweden. How do we react to that?

We continued our work with some of the following questions.

- What gender structures lie behind prostitution and trafficking?
- Why do some people think they have the right to use others for their own needs?
- What connections are there between prostitution, pornography, and the sexual exploitation of the public space and the views on rape and violence against women?
- Pornography and prostitution lead to an exploitation of men and women. What views on manliness and womanliness characterise the debate about prostitution and pornography?
- What rights should protect children from a situation like that of Lilja's? What other degradations are common and what legal protection do children and young people have in our country?

A more profound work with the Children's Convention and our educational laws is very important and rewarding, e.g. through value exercises, individual writing about the human rights and forum games, all methods of intense student activity.

We have, among other things, worked with a value exercise where all the rights of the UN declaration are to be found in the form of playing cards. The learners work in groups and decide together to take away five cards, i.e. five rights, and when that is done, another five. Having to make the choice about what rights to give up leads to very deep and interesting questions about human rights and their relative dignity.

We recommend co operation with the health counsellor and NGO's with experience of working with victims of domestic violence, to thoroughly address the complexity of this social problem and strong reactions that can come from the learners during the work with these serious issues. Statistically we have in each class several learners with personal experience of violence, rape or sexual abuse, and we need to be aware and prepared for what they need from us in support and guidance.

### **3. To work with rolling statistics - Gapminder**

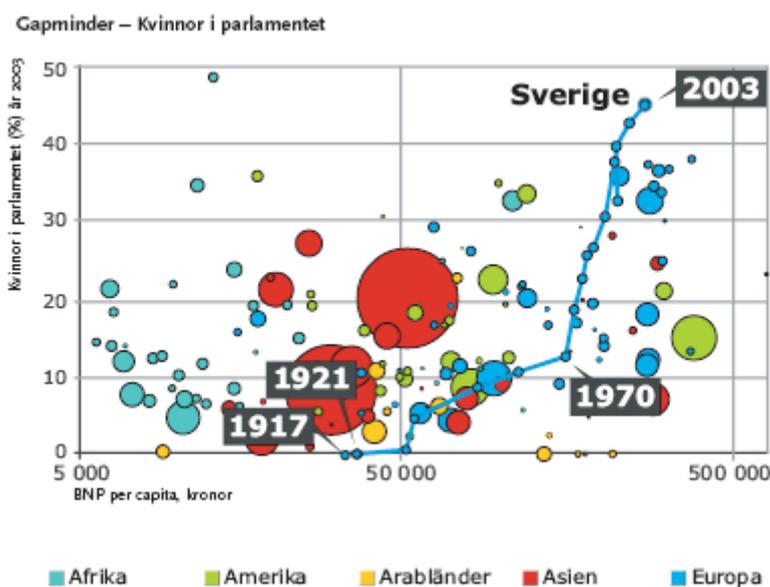
After having worked with *Your history* and *Lilja 4ever* the learners are prepared to see the structural facts that influence a person's situation in life and determines her /his freedom of action. The dominant concept that people are independent, free and rational in their actions is

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<sup>1</sup> Swedish International Development Co operation Agency

by now more modified. It has been scrutinized in various ways and the learners are therefore better prepared for the study of historical, economic, structural and political facts behind people's situations in life at different times and in different places on the earth.

Starting from the history we all share, a summing up after the introductory task *Your history*, we study the history of Sweden during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, focusing on the economic and social history. This topic will be even more exciting if you use Gapminder's<sup>2</sup> different programmes, e.g. *World Development Chart (WDC)* and *Women in the parliaments* which present statistic studies in rolling graphics. If you belong to those who usually think the study of graphs and statistics is boring and difficult we will ask you to give it another chance. When we show how to use the Gapminder-program during the first lesson the learners usually lean more and more forward. One after the other calls out suggestions "Can you show Iran, too and then ...Pakistan, as well", while they are watching comparisons in the rolling graphs between e.g. the reading ability in different countries from the second world war and onwards. In the program WDC you'll find statistics from a number of different fields as far back as it has been possible to find any. In Sweden, we have statistics from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century while in many of the so called developing countries you will only find statistics from the 1980s and onwards. Gapminder's presentation *Women in the parliaments* has its focus on women and political power.



Because the statistics cover so many fields it is possible to study a number of facts that are relevant for sustainable development, e.g. CO2 emissions, level of education, economic growth and so on.

Then it is time for the learners themselves to use the programs. A period of training is necessary before everyone knows how to master all the functions. A couple of lessons later the open computer area of the school is usually crowded and many learners don't want to stop studying statistic comparisons. It is a moment for the gender sensitive teacher to walk around and very satisfied notify that without problems the learners "analyse causal connections behind historical processes of change" to quote the course syllabus in History for upper secondary schools - and on the top of everything else, they do it from a gender perspective.

<sup>2</sup> [www.gapminder.org](http://www.gapminder.org) - programmes are free of charge

The effects of violence and war can clearly be demonstrated in WDC. We let our learners choose a country for a closer study with the help of the questions below.

### **Penetrating questions on gender for further work**

- How have the situations of men and women changed in a certain country during the 20th century in the matters of education, working life, the opportunities of using contraceptives, number of children born, expected length of life and so on?
- How have external events, e.g. war, political decisions or economic crises influenced the life conditions of men and women? According to the Gapminder program *Women in the parliaments* it is obvious that the economy of a country isn't the only determining factor when it comes to the representation of women. What is?
- Are wars and violence founded in the norms of manliness? Would matriarchy lead to less violence and war? Test the connection between the representation of women in the parliaments and the involvement of countries in conflicts.

By guessing games you may reveal our false notions of the world around us. You may i.e. make an inventory of what country the learners believe has the highest rate of reading ability among women in a certain age span. Let them then make a comparison with the statistics in WDC. How many guesses were right? Why were the guesses wrong? What is it that influence our notions of the world?

We continue our work with a medial survey where our views on the world around us are analysed during one week. What is being focused on as news? How is the news watch? What a picture of the world does the selection of news create? Why is there a selection? What individuals are seen and heard in the reports - women, men, children, young people, people of different national or ethnic identity, social status, representatives of religions...? What people get the greatest medial space - in what way and why? What will the consequences be?

Here you can go further on and read short stories and novels about relevant issues, such as women and men's living conditions under different historic periods, during industrialization and urbanisation, during time of war, depression and social change.

#### ***4. Zenit - to walk in somebody else's shoe***

Another way of identifying with someone else's living conditions is role plays. *Zenit City* is a web based role play in the youth educational program funded by Sida. There are two different games in *Zenit City*, where one focuses on equivalence, democracy and human rights. It also puts some impacts on other issues like health, hiv/aids, and education. It is based on experiences from international aid and the player interacts with what is happening by letting the role character making choices. The role characters are people who live very different lives in comparison with the learners. As the role character Rebecka the learner has to choose e.g. to spend her last pennies on medicine for her sick husband or to pay her son's school fee. There are information material and a teacher's guide to the game. Links for more penetrating studies come up automatically after the learner has finished the game. The question that really engaged our class in a discussion was if Rebecka's dilemma is caused by the fact that she is poor or the fact that she is a woman? The learners discussed for a long time whether an economic crisis will affect men and women equally hard? Their discussion brought up questions about power and subordination.

*Zenit* gives you an experience of a different person's conditions of life. Another easy way of accomplish such an identification and empathy for another person is to study literature. Deep-reading a good story demands of the reader a skill to put yourself in somebody else's shoes and to be able to go beyond your own self for some time in order to the fate of another person. Literature reading strengthens a kind of social imagination, a skill that is necessary for a sincere wish to improve the life conditions of another human being, even if your own life might be good and safe. Reading makes it also possible to travel in time and space and have the world brought into the classroom in many unique ways.

We have had the privilege to travel with our learners also in reality on field studies in e.g. South Africa. In order to prepare the learners for the many things that they will meet during such a study trip we have first travelled with them through literature. They read poems, short stories and novels by translated contemporary writers from the countries they are to visit. We also work with a log for studies in the classroom and the close environment to train their observation, reflection and analysis in three separate steps. Another important element is to stress how people's dreams, longings and needs are alike all over the world, and to closely examine our own "invisible" majority culture instead of only examine those of others. Here a gender perspective can be brought in. The learners can e.g. read texts where the main character is of the opposite sex and notify the similarities between themselves and this main character, reflect on the character's choices and her/his general life conditions etc. When the log for reflections is used before a field study trip our learners make mini studies of the close environment in their Swedish and Religion classes. Either patterns of communication are observed, social habits or rituals or holy places and behaviours attached to them. Here it is interesting to draw attention to the great similarities between people, but also to make the learners aware of the problems with differences, i.g. gender issues.

## 6. *Pay it forward - about unselfish man*

Finally, it's time for the learners' last work in their learning process about equivalence and sustainable development. Once again, we choose an excellent film – *Pay it forward* (2000) - from which we work with certain episodes. The film is based on a book with the same title, written by Catherine Ryan Hyde. This work is a co operation between the school subjects: Social science, Economy and Religion.

There are thematic connections between *Lilja 4ever* and *Pay It Forward* which further strengthen the messages about equivalence and sustainable development in our work. Both films have the advantage that their chief characters are teenagers, a boy and a girl respectively, who in certain respects share similar life conditions. Trevor is not so poor and not so exposed as Lilja, though he knows what it is like. He also knows what it is like to be betrayed by the grown-ups and as a child be forced to take too great a responsibility for his situation in life. The picture of the school and the possibilities of the school as a social force can be discussed in both films. In both stories you will find an oppressing manly force and mothers who in various degrees betray their children because they are themselves exposed and powerless. *Lilja* is a film without hope but Trevor's story awakes a trust in the goodness of mankind, in spite of the tragic end. *Pay it Forward* is the story about 12-year-old Trevor Mc Kinney who lives with his double working alcoholic mother Arlene. Trevor's father is absent but a constant worry because of his aggressive behaviour. When we first meet Trevor, he is just about to start high school where he will meet the third important character in the film - the teacher in Social science Mr Eugene Simonet. The description of the school and the world around Trevor is not a very positive one. The thin, deep-thinking boy forms the theme of the film in the very first episodes. What are your chances as a small solitary individual - a child - to influence your living conditions and to gain power of your life, when you are the object of suppression and the wielding of powers by others? Through the meeting between Trevor and Mr Simonet all people involved get a chance to review their lives and possibilities to act.

There are many different issues of general human interest to work with in this film. Here we choose two perspectives in connection with sustainable development and equivalence. In the first scene of the film where the first meeting between Mr Simonet and Trevor's class is described the pupils in the film are given an assignment to work on independently during the term:

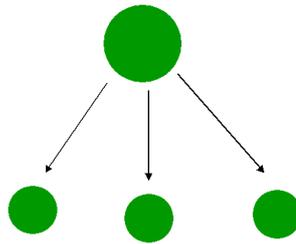
*"Come up with an idea that can change the world and put it into action." The pupils are first protesting, finding the task impossible. But the radical teacher says: "How about possible? The realm of possibilities in your minds..."*

For Trevor in his life situation this task has a great appeal. He sets about to change the world in an action that develops into a kind of pyramid game of altruism, a kind of chain reactions of good deeds.

Trevor's task:

*"Think of an idea for world change, and put it into action."*

Trevor's solution:



*"You see, I do something real good for three people. And then when they ask how they can pay it back I say they have to Pay It Forward. To three more people. Each. So, nine people get helped. Then those people have to do twenty-seven. Then it sorts of spreads out, see. To eighty-one. Then two hundred forty-three. Then seven hundred twenty-nine. Then two thousand, one hundred eighty-seven. See how big it gets?"*

Through log writing and discussions in small groups our learners will test Trevor's idea and see if they think altruism is something natural in a human being or not. We gather different views and explanations on the causes behind human actions and behaviour and compare the learners' contributions with different theories and conceptions from ethics and economics. Our aim is to show the complexity of man and challenge the common notion of a human being as rational, individualistic, biologically conditioned and egoistic.

In the table below the first line shows how economic theories differ in understanding the reasons behind people's actions. To the left we place the neo classics with their concept of man as a purely rational human being activated by maximizing the profit for himself. In the middle, we place economists who have a very wide definition of rationality and therefore regard most of our human actions as rational. To the right we find economists with a radically different, more diversified view of man in accordance with new research. Under the economists in the third column we place theories about man from ethics. Under the left column, to correspond with the view of the neo-classics, we place the concept of ethic egotism - e.g. the view that everything an individual does is done for his or her personal gain, i.e. for services in return, a positive self image, or social rewards. To the very right on the other hand we place the ethical view that man can act altruistically because of a moral duty or for the benefit of another man, even at the cost of his or her own life. The key words of the last line tell you what basic concepts these ethical theories are founded on. Our aim is to show the learners how models of man always are simplified and therefore have to be examined and revised in course of time.

<b>THE VIEW OF MAN – GROUNDS FOR OUR ACTION</b>			
<b>Economic theory</b>	Neo-classics	e.g. Douglass North Amartya Sen,	e.g. Ernst Fehr Hodgson
<b>Key words</b>	Rational economic man	A wide definition of rationality	Raises the question if the concept of rational economic man is relevant
<b>Ethical theory</b>	Ethic egoism	Consequence ethics	Altruism is possible and natural
<b>Key words</b>	Mainly biological view	Pragmatism	Mainly humanistic view

This summary of how man is described in different connections opens up for another of the themes in the film: violence among closely related individuals, how Trevor and his mother become victims, and even Mr Simonet as a child. One of Trevor's good deeds is to arrange for Arlene and Mr Simonet to meet and hopefully fall in love. One reason for his wish is his great fear that his father will return with his drug abuse and violent behaviour. When Trevor's misgivings come true, Arlene's and Mr Simonet's budding relationship is hindered to develop. Arlene lets Trevor's father move into the house again without any power to stop it. In a quarrel Mr Simonet tells Arlene of his own personal experiences of abuse as a child and accuses her of not having the courage to see how her lack of power to act also affects Trevor. The film theme of violence in close relationships needs to be studied more thoroughly, expanded and diversified. We know that we might have some learners in our classes with the same experiences as Trevor. The film describes how the child is affected but also how he takes the responsibility to find a solution. The description of Arlene as a double working single mother with alcohol problems and experiences of abuse is very moving. But it is also risky that we will see her as a stereotype of a woman that meets with violence at home. Here we have to point out how frequent violence is in Swedish homes of today and how this violence intersects all class and ethnical borders. Why don't you do anything? Mr Simonet asks Arlene, just as we do as watchers of the film. Here we can go back to the established theories about the causes of man's actions and test them with our knowledge of the structures that lie behind violence. We will find that morals, rationality and biology have no relevant answers to provide for our understanding of the problem. Why is it that we put the question, Mr Simonet's question to Arlene, to the victim? What does that tell us about our own views on manliness and womanliness when we are trying to understand men's violence against women and children? Why do men hit? What are the explanations behind men's violence which not only affects women and children but other men as well? By starting with the emotionally strong view that you can't defend a use of violence against someone you love many other examples of power abuse and its effects can be brought up in discussions with the learners. The analysis model from the Lilja example is an important tool when you look for suggestions of measures and solutions of this global social problem.

Political economy has always set out from a model of man as being selfish and rational. New research, though, shows that this isn't the whole truth. What we have suspected for a long time to be a reality we now have empirical proofs of: man has quite an incomprehensible wish to share with others. The economist Ernst Fehr has found these results in his research in co operation with brain scientists. The results are revolutionary because empirical facts prove

that human altruism has two aspects: We have both a tendency to unselfishly reward fellow men and a tendency to punish unselfishly those who break the written and unwritten laws of society. These characteristics, Ernst Fehr says, are unique for mankind compared to other species and these characteristics make it possible for us to live in big societies. A sustainable development demands just that, unselfish actions and considerations both for people, animals and nature. When we prepare our young generations for supporting sustainable development we mustn't fool them to believe that altruism is impossible. Otherwise there is a risk that egotism becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy.

It is important that we are courageous enough to question accepted "truths" about human nature – like a one-sided view that biology is the only thing determining us or homo economicus and the maximizing of profits. Both these "truths" are often used as arguments for how society and politics ought to be, and against equivalence and altruistic actions. The biologicistic view on man is sometimes founded on the mistaken conception that egotism is of great importance for an individual's survival in the evolution. A fundamentally biological view of gender or race might lead to political arguments that society needs to be founded on a "natural" difference between people, when it comes to life conditions and possibilities, based on the assumption that women and men, or categories of race, are fundamentally regarded as more different than alike. We can see evidence of this in history as well as in society today. Our main challenge as teachers is to work for a change of the world so that it will be a better place for all its inhabitants, in accordance with the educational goals of sustainable development. That means that together we will "come up with an idea that can change the world and put it into action" in the classroom. Here we finish the last lesson with our learners in this thematic work.

We'll also leave you here - with the recommendation not to think: "This is difficult ... maybe not possible", but instead: "How about possible...?"

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