

Efforts and Changes Around School Libraries in Sweden Today: Part Three-What's New After Istanbul?

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Abstract

As the IASL conference theme in Istanbul, Turkey was “Information, innovation and impact of school libraries” it is interesting, a year later, to focus on how the school library, as well as the school librarian, will have to adopt the field, as well as: looking back at the material brought out during the first two occasions of this theme, presented to the public at the IASL conferences in Long Beach (2017) and Istanbul (2018).

The third part of the theme will mainly be a contribution of useful material and methods, practically applied in Sweden for over ten years. The material and methods function as an inspiration to the work and progress for school libraries and school librarians, both on a national and international level.

This time a wider scale of the recurrent subject will be presented - mainly to create a practically developed knowledge adapted for school libraries. Knowledge ready to be transformed directly as the participants return to their homes, facing their own school library activities.

Objectives of the Presentation:

The following subjects are set to be the material and methods, presented through the session:
Efforts and changes around school libraries in Sweden today. Part three – What's new after Istanbul?

The topics are:

1. Sweden's reference group for school libraries - an effective working tool established and developed by The Swedish National agency for Education.
2. School library associations, networks, social media platforms, as well as digital portals and work modules, created by The Swedish National agency for Education – as useful working tools dedicated to each and every school librarian, located in the shadow of a nonexistent education for school librarians.

3. A future investment in a national school library education. Something that is not the reality in Sweden today, but will be, tough on a smaller scale, with a start in autumn 2020. A first start that hopefully will spread rings on the water to other major educational sites.

The ambition is to give participants in Dubrovnik thoughts on how changes around school libraries can be done in a practical way. Also, learn how to use a reference group, where discussions can lead to knowledge. Learn more about the advantages of working with and through a school library association, as well as how to use different digital tools in a more effective way. And... if participants in Dubrovnik wants to use the material and methods directly during the conference – then there will for sure be even more knowledge to gain.

Introduction

Sweden (10,2 million people) has 290 municipalities, 290 public library systems, and about 4 000 school libraries. Local authorities finance public libraries and school libraries.

The municipal council makes decisions in matters concerning libraries, compulsory school, upper secondary school and preschool. Sweden has a long tradition of local municipal autonomy. Local authorities are independent bodies, which are free to make their own decisions within certain limits. Compulsory schooling in Sweden is from first to ninth grade. A preschool year from six years of age is a part of Swedish schools, but not compulsory for children.

“When local authorities are given new tasks, their right to municipal autonomy must be taken into account. This sort of situation may arise when an area in which local authorities have previously provided services on a voluntary basis, such as libraries, is brought under regulation”, the government says. This is why legislation often is not detailed. School directors and principals are the ones who have mandate from the local authorities to decide how the money is spent and how the schools are going to follow the law. The Swedish schools, principals and municipalities must now manage school libraries.

The Swedish education system I:

In Sweden there are almost 11 000 schools (pre schools included). 1,5 million pupils (21% of the population). There are about 4 000 school libraries connected to compulsory and upper secondary schools (6078 school). According to statistics from 2010 67% of the Swedish schools units have a school library. One third of the Swedish pupils have no access to a school library. Statistics from 2017 and 2018 shows similar figures as mentioned above.

The Swedish education system 2:

The Swedish school system is decentralized since 1991, which means that the municipalities/local schools authorities are responsible for and finance the schools, even the independent schools. Independent schools: 9% of the pupils in compulsory and 17% in upper secondary school.

The national goals for Swedish schools are set by: The Swedish Parliament and Government in The Education Act, Curricula, Course Syllabi and Program Goals.

The Education Act:

A proposition about a new Education Act was left for political decision in 2010.

It was approved. The start was set to autumn 2011. One important reform within the Education Act is that Swedish pupils are guaranteed access to school libraries. This does not mean that every rural school with 50 pupils have to employ a librarian, but as school authority you have to include school library – the pupils need for information and reading possibilities in your plan for school activities. Being part of the Education Act also means that the school libraries are included in the inspection of schools (made every third year by The Schools Inspectorate).

1. Sweden's reference group for school libraries - an effective working tool established and developed by The Swedish National Agency for Education.

The Swedish National Agency for Education is one out of three big national authorities for schools, belonging to the Ministry of Education and Research. The other two governmental authorities are The Schools Inspectorate and The National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools.

The Swedish National Agency for Education and school libraries:

The goal for the Agency is to steer and support schools through different steering documents.

The Agency was head of big national school library projects during the years 2000-2004 as well as in 2007, including competence development for school librarians.

The Agency has a valuable department working with school library issues. Most important and of biggest use - a reference group for school library matters. An Agency officer manages an online discussion list for school librarians (with around 1000 subscribers), provides informative journalistic web articles on a wide scale of school library topics, publishes research reports about school library and information literacy, and until summer of 2018 promoting a website called *Check the source* - about information literacy, critical awareness, use of social media and web tools for ordinary daily work in school. Since summer of 2018 a new web portal runs for the Agency, where a special section for school libraries has been established.

The reference group for school libraries:

The reference group was established back in 2009. At start there were discussions about strategic issues. Printed/digital materials were produced through the group. Later on the group started to focus on a referral for the new Education Act, as well as a definition on what a school library is. Some parts of the

definition mentioned in the Education Act are taken from the suggestion headed over by the reference group.

A new reference group of school librarians (40-50 members) was formed around 2016. As an effect of that a wide scale of conferences, meetings and projects has been organized until 2019. There were more meetings arranged for the group in the early years of its existence. But, back then there were only school librarians called for meetings, and almost no conferences were arranged. With the start of the new group that shifted rapidly. This time there are relatively few meetings, but when they take place it happens with a great variety of participants – such as librarians, teachers and responsible persons for digital development. Shifted meetings, where different professions get together around relevant issues, have been a massive challenge and of great use – for the Agency, as well as the reference group itself.

The main activity for the reference group has consisted in being an active part of the conferences arranged by the Agency. One conference in every six months has been offered for the group. They have been spread out all over the nation. The model for each conference has been: An informative content with several lectures and workshops around a current topic, as well as an interactive element, where participants at the conference have been held around certain topics, managed by the members of the reference group. One main purpose has been to engage active and reflective discussions out of the group, mainly as important knowledge for the contenders' development inside their own professions.

Digital applications and suitable programs have been used for documentation, where contenders either have contributed all together, or simply by purchasing answers on each contender's digital tool. Much of the information collected by the Agency have been used for developing relevant support platforms, as well as implementing further discussions and new printed material.

2. School library associations, networks, social media platforms, as well as digital portals and work modules, created by The Swedish National agency for Education - as useful working tools dedicated to each and every school librarian, located in the shadow of a nonexistent education for school librarians.

As an introduction to this specific field, which for me personally has been the main priority over the last ten years, I would like to state the following fact: Sweden has gone from being quite slow at start to establish themselves in the front when it comes to the ability to communicate, discuss, creating an ongoing working dialogue and using social media platforms in an interactive way. The reason for the development of this environment goes way back in time, as Sweden has a long tradition of democratic forms, such as: free speech, free press and laws that support those specific parts of the democratic system. But, to get a tradition like that into a modern upcoming digital environment, where the school and the library field, the teachers and the librarians, together with the knowledge and support from decision makers, handled on many different levels, has been a long and quite struggling path to walk. But, as the development of digital tools has increased over the years, and many of the traditional arenas for documentation and communication has been left behind, the whole practical interaction has more or less moved to a whole new platform. A digital interactive platform designed and put into work for the whole

school library base, concentrating on: communication, interaction, discussions, dialogues, and most important: further education beyond the regular traditional agenda named *library education*. As the wheels are turning faster, and the need of new knowledge to guide the pupils into a modern age grows, the educators have to let go of old habits and follow the sound of its time.

We are not finished. But, we are on an exciting adventure together - towards what is yet to come. With the support from the Swedish democratic laws and traditions, the will and needs inside present schools and libraries, as well as a higher acceptance and curiosity of new digital tools, we will for sure advance even further. If we then, at last, want to reach the top and stay there, we need to do this journey together. Schools, libraries and decision makers need to work as a unit - tight together. There is really no other way around. Of that I am most sure.

The Swedish School Library Associations:

There are three regional associations of school librarians in Sweden: *East, West and South*, all of them located in each geographical region of the country.

The first regional association *south* started in 1998. Then a few years later followed the association *east*, and in 2008 the association *west* was born. The main issues for the associations are: promoting school library matters, operating lobbying activities, arrange seminars and activities at national fairs. The associations also produce supporting materials for school libraries. First published and stored on a web portal, later on a blog site, and nowadays, as a combination of the blog site and a Facebook site, as well as an account on Twitter.

The Associations are member-based groups. There is a traditional board with several members, as well as a chairman. There is, like in IASL, an annual meeting on a every year basis, where the board is elected in a democratic way. Each member in the association has the right to vote. There is also a fee connected to the membership in the association. Worth mentioning is also the fact that all the associations together own one common chair, as a representative part of the *National School Library Group*. A group consisting of 20 organisations, as well as stakeholders – all with a major interest in the school library issue. That means the associations has to co-operate with each other as well. Not always an easy task, due to differences in regions and big geographical distances between the regions, but an important part, and a great opportunity to act inside a strong lobby group, much more powerful than a single association on a regional basis.

School Library West:

The regional association School Library West was established more than ten years ago, back in 2008. There were particularly two reasons for the establishment of the association:

1. To take advantage of the facilities of Gothenburg as the major "city of fairs" in the region, country and on several perspectives even abroad.
2. To put effort in the working method, where librarians and teachers get connected and cooperate as a working unit in school.

Five goals were seen through the many suggestions that reached the board during this period:

- Bring the school library issue into the future
- Being a creating venue
- Acting in a modern way
- Acting through crossover
- Defend the regional touch

School Library Wests activities through the years have been of great amount. Some of them worth mentioning more specifically:

- Arrangements - conferences, lectures and meetings for school librarians and teachers.
- Operating lobbying activities, as well as meeting members of Sweden's school library associations, mainly at Book-fairs and Teach-meets.
- Managing the yearly "Malin Koldenius scholarship" award.

One of the more important issues for the association has been to act as a communicative part around the school library issue. Through the years School Library West have been an active part at fairs, as well as meetings, arranging showcases especially for members from the associations. Delivering free-tickets, selling in memberships to both - single school librarians and corporations and sponsors. The last five years School Library West and the book-publisher Nypon have been acting together, with one common goal: to offer more activities around reading and learning in the school library. To act together with a commercial publishing company has been of great importance for the association. Except meeting and communicate with people, School Library West and Nypon deliver information, informing about membership and helping customers finding suitable reading material.

National Networks and social media platforms that supports school libraries:

Some of the networks existing today are the already mentioned ones, administrated by *The Swedish National Agency of Education and The Swedish school library associations*. Digital established portals connected to a modern arena of social media tools, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Bambuser, as well as a national mail-serving list, are the main platforms, earning the highest visiting frequency known today. A lot of different discussions mainly made out of questions and quotes to colleagues, are taking place over a month. At the same time a lot of posts are being published, and links to a wide scale of articles (both on a national and international level) are spread around. More over, there are nowadays several local networks and forums established, as well as special events booked for further education, all to support different parts of the school library field.

On a national level more support reach out, especially from *The Swedish Library association and The National Library of Sweden*. As they both are active parts in *The National School Library Group* and have the school library issue on their every day agenda, they are natural actors with established networks, focusing on a broad scale of relevant topics.

The National Library of Sweden has the responsibility to coordinate support for all types of libraries. Within the public library sector, there are 20 county and regional libraries with the assignment to

encourage cooperation and development. According to the Library Act, regional libraries do not have mandate to provide for school libraries, but they can cooperate with school libraries in their regions. One more network should be mentioned, as they are both unique and of great importance when it comes to prepare questions and handing them over to the government.

The National Agency of Education is since 2016 member of a network consisting of eight national authorities. Three of them are school authorities. The main issue for the group is school libraries! The group supports the work around the national library strategy with some external environment monitoring. For example: As a kick off, the network published an overview about Swedish school libraries. After that a leaflet addressing school providers has been published, and several hearings and lectures have been offered to a broader public. The last hearing, presented in autumn of 2018, was arranged at the Book Fair in Gothenburg.

3. A future investment in a national school library education.

In the abstract the following information is mentioned:

“A future investment in a national school library education. Something that is not reality in Sweden today, but will be, tough on a smaller scale, with a start in autumn 2020. A first start that hopefully will spread rings on the water to other major educational sites.”

The simple truth is this: There is no school library education in Sweden today. There is, since way back in time - a standard library education, but it offers nothing in the specific direction needed in a school library 2019. On the contradiction it's a education filled with administration and theoretical parts, of course open for the research field, but not even with the slightest little part of the pedagogical skills needed in a modern school library in Sweden today.

Close neighbours to Sweden, like Denmark and Norway, have themselves descent educations, but Sweden has not. Until now!

The reason for a new school library education in Sweden is simply because one researcher connected to Södertörns College in Stockholm, made a survey and found a big gap between the educational demand and the reality shown in Sweden today. There for a decision now is taken. A first education for school libraries will be launched by Södertörns College with a start autumn 2020. This will hopefully be the real start for a new wave of educations through out the institutions based in Sweden, providing the staff that schools need. This is in no sense - a big massive national breakthrough, but at least its something. Like a crack in the old traditional foundation of: how to look at a school library. At least, this is my personal hope. The sooner and greater the better!

The premiere group will consist of 30 students. The education will go on for three years and lead to a bachelor degree in school library science. In time the education can turn out to be a master degree, and then on a much broader scale, where an interdisciplinary intercultural profession will be possible to achieve.

And... due to all this, another decision has been made. *The National School Library Group* has the new education put up on the agenda for their next meeting. They will discuss how they can support the education and how they can court it for the other educational institutions in Sweden. School Library West has suggested that they can try to visit Södertörn College, to get a better picture on where and how the education will take place. At the same time its important that the responsible part, in this case Södertörn College, will get the chance to test this prototype properly, and not be interfered during the process. More news will follow.

Conclusion

After three different papers - published as: one paper every year for three years, I can easily see what the keywords are. Words following the work like a red thread all the way trough. Ok, there are several keywords mentioned through this paper, but only one that bumps through all the papers - time after time, again and again.

Co-operation!

And there is nothing strange with that. Not at all. Cause it is really that simple: With co-operation everything is possible. At the same time, without any kind of acting together for common goals it wont happen. At least, it wont happen on such a degree and level that it will make difference in the long term. I think many of you that are a part of the every day work in school knows about this. I think that all of you are able to relate to the specific feeling that I am pointing out here, right?

Cause when it happens, in a creative open environment that allows co-operation, that allows you to discuss and reflect, where the roof is of high level, and leaders as well as decision-makers want to know, want to hear, want to learn... then it is like stepping into a learning heaven. I have been there many times. Into that heaven. There for I know its worth every second of your time, if you not have been there before, to get you into that state of mind.

To get you progressive and proud of the work you do!

Just recently I had the chance to read a new research-report focusing on the kind of support librarians value the most, when it comes to their further learning. It was interesting to go through the data coming out of the report, and even if the amount of answers were of small validity, it proved one thing – that the most satisfied librarians were found in the places where co-operation between colleagues made a natural part of the everyday work. There were also figures connected to the answers, from the different nations included, that showed that: new digital tools combined with traditional ways of communication, made high levels of satisfaction in the everyday work.

This is a report that owns a topic that goes really near this paper. They basically show almost the same thing. Doing things together, with clear goals, stated out on a higher level than before, makes us feel stronger in our profession. The culture grows, the visions turns into action, and the pupils, teachers and decision makers get a feeling that its worth the effort. I can easily see how the new report mentioned here,

presented in Taiwan, for the Chinese section of school libraries, making an impact. The report also mentioning Dr Ross Todds research from 2009, where focus were put on what was called: *Guided Inquiry*. The interesting thing is that Ross Todd states almost the same thing: Interaction and communication through the library community makes differences when it comes to how we learn and how we interact with each other.

If this pattern mentioned here and through this paper is used as a guiding light for you and your work, there will be a lot of wide open doors for you to find. But, if it is going to happen, you and your colleagues must co-operate. Besides that you must do the work you need to do, and I must say this – You all must love to work like this. At least, you must want to try!

Some impacts are of more use than others. Here are a few examples for you to try out, ok:

Like the view from the inside of a reference group...

A sounding board. Being the first ones to know. Being the first ones to get questions around new things coming up. Being the first ones to test new material. Being the first ones to get response around the field. Being the first ones...

To communicate, listen carefully and exchange knowledge with each other – Both between the Agency and the members in the group, and between the members *inside* the group itself, is extremely important. This is in my opinion the best education a single school librarian or teacher possible can get.

Or being an active part of a school library association, a network or a social media platform...

Interact Together. When the process is running, a lot of different activities can take place. There are so many things that you can do. From arranging meeting and create places for learning - at fairs, conferences, exhibitions, to handing out prizes for great achievements, then getting the media to write about it, taking pictures for the social media, doing interviews and articles – using the social media platforms as marketing tools. The most of this demands creativity and action, but that's about it. The actual costs for marketing stuff on the social media is Zero. When has it ever been like this? Exactly. Never ever before!

I wish you all the best of luck with your upcoming work. If you want to learn more about how to make it happen, get in touch. Don't hesitate to put me on for a presentation, lecture or even a project. I am most willing to help you down the line.

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