

Utbildningsförvaltningen

Artikel till Lära, intervju med Bengt Kristensson Uggla

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LÄRA Stockholm has highlighted The Stockholm Summit 2008, which attracted visitors from around 20 countries, in a series of articles. This final interview in the conference lecturer series is Bengt Kristensson Uggla.

## "Learn from Harry Potter's world!"

– Schools should use music, poetry and stories to demonstrate what a fantastic adventure knowledge, learning and education involve, says Bengt Kristensson Uggla, a professor in philosophy, culture and business management at Finland's Swedish university, Åbo Akademi. School time should be like a huge, inspiring voyage of knowledge! Bengt Kristensson Uggla is an expert in interpreting philosophy and has been a lecturer at the Stockholm School of Theology, adjunct professor of philosophy and business management at Stockholm University and department head at the Stockholm Institute of Education's Institute for Community, Culture and Learning. Alongside his academic activities, he is also a busy lecturer in the subjects of community, popular adult education and the business world. During The Stockholm Summit, he lectured on knowledge in a world of globalisation – and the challenges faced by the education system.

*You have said that teachers and headmasters should seek inspiration in Harry Potter's school. Could you elaborate?*

– When, in the first book, Harry Potter arrived at the boarding school Hogwarts, he was met by an enchanting, magical school. When our own children start going to school, they are often met by an "administrative reception" with information about times, schedules and rules. Instead, right from the start, schools should show children that the school years they have ahead of them contain a vast and inspiring journey of knowledge.

*What can the school system learn from your research?*

– My own research is of a more theoretical and philosophical nature, but I think it is important to emphasise that science alone cannot teach us how to act. Instead, we have to look at greater interaction between the world of research and the community. The time has definitely passed when the so-called third task (the university's cooperation with

the surrounding community) was limited to arranging research days when one delivered lectures to a dumbstruck public. Today's community knowledge is instead about the research world building partnerships and alliances with competent agencies in the community – agencies that have to be perceived as active partners that can be worked with in a common knowledge process.

*What do you think will characterise future teaching?*

– One could easily imagine that the knowledge society would automatically mean an upswing for the traditional institutions of knowledge, but I think that would be a mistake. In many ways, schools and universities currently find themselves in a crisis. But, that is definitely not dependent on us having been unsuccessful – on the contrary, it depends on the exceptional successes that schools and universities have demonstrated. Fifty years ago, very few people went to university. Today, it is about as common as it was to finish secondary education fifty years ago. After a couple of generations of people commonly graduating from universities, the entire community is seeded with competency. The question then becomes: if nearly everyone is dealing with knowledge and the number of arenas for learning and research explodes, what is it that will then make schools and universities special?

– My 13-year old son says he has learnt more English on the Internet than in school. This is why it is naïve to think we can solve school problems by only focusing on schools. We have to have a broader perspective, one that actually includes children's entire life situations and a broad community point of view.

– Today, new concerns about knowledge are being raised by all OECD member nations and that thinking is spreading quickly throughout the rest of the world. There is a global consensus that the best way to meet the extremely competitive conditions brought about by globalisation is precisely by focusing on knowledge. Even in countries like China, it is more and more about going to the right school. If you add the fact that China's age pyramid is worse than Europe's and that in their one child policy, there is no pension system to speak of, it is easy to understand that the system creates an enormous incentive for the population to get a good education. The elderly in China are nearly always dependent on their children in order to live a minimally decent life. The situation leads to enormous demands on Chinese students. For example, at one of China's leading universities, there are 6,000 applicants for every space!

– All this has to be understood against the background that there is a clear relationship between economic-technological globalisation on one hand and a growing call for better education on the other. The schools have not suddenly become bad – rather, this deafening call mirrors a situation where the challenges faced are both huge and serious. The danger today is that our education policies follow a school of thought that is much too traditional. Nostalgic memories of school days are

often the reason for devastating decisions being taken. Entry into the knowledge society means that the big challenge we face in the future is actually having to reinvent schools and universities from scratch!

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Photo: Björn Tesch

Professor Bengt Kristensson Ugglå speaking at The Stockholm Summit 2008. LÄRA Stockholm was granted an interview with him after the conference.

– Orderliness is probably important, but it is definitely not enough on its own to meet future challenges. As students develop their knowledge in so many different arenas, we have to seriously think through the specific tasks that schools need to undertake.

*What do you think of the future of Swedish schools with respect to accelerated globalisation?*

– I think we underestimate Sweden and exaggerate today's problems. Obviously, Swedish schools and universities are doing a lot of things right – otherwise we would not have so many highly successful companies and one of the world's most effective and democratic administrative organisations. We are good at flexibility, creativity, playfulness, cooperation, wealth of perspectives and teaching a democratic style of leadership. This kind of knowledge is not always easy to measure in surveys, but the results are noticed throughout the community. On the other hand, we should definitely not rest on our laurels. Schools need to always have higher knowledge ambitions and today I think it is important that schools can transform into a more enchanting world for our students.

*Which structural community changes should the next decade be prepared for?*

– We are on the cusp of great changes. The digital, creative community is deeply affecting the conditions for how we create, share and transfer information, knowledge and valuations. There are many challenges ahead of us: how do we provide more access to more knowledge, thus reducing the gap between those who are connected to the network and those who are not? We have to support students' capacity to interpret information. This means we have to be able to make choices within a deluge of information, we need the ability to grade information ourselves, to create meaningful connections in a world where information will always be presented unsorted – as well as be able to use that knowledge. To differentiate between what is usable and what is not will become an incredibly important competency.

– The load on the individual will, of course, be much higher in a world where you have to select, arrange and piece together units of information for knowledge. In our community, there are fewer and fewer jobs where you simply undertake determined tasks. Instead, there is a growing need for self-sufficient individuals who are able to reflect, think and decide on their own. But, in order to be able to do all that, we currently need to "un-learn" knowledge, as we simply cannot cope with

taking everything in. Knowledge becomes out of date, or we discover that what we have learnt is wrong. Therefore, we need to develop processes to un-learn things that we have learnt, either consciously or unconsciously. This is also true for many organisational contexts.

*Finally, what was your experience of The Stockholm Summit 2008?*

– Interesting. The conference was a source of new impulses and ideas. The Stockholm Summit is a great initiative. The educational administration in the city of Stockholm has dealt with its duties in an excellent manner and received a very nice response from a broad swathe of participants. Every sector in the knowledge society needs to have a link to science and research, but it needs to make space for two-way processes and exchanges – and a conference like this contributes to that. I am pleased and honoured to have been invited to speak at The Stockholm Summit.

Olof Engfeldt

Bengt Kristensson Ugglå has written, among others, the following books: "Slaget om verkligheten: filosofi, omvärldsanalys, tolkning" ("The deal with reality: philosophy, situation analysis and interpreting") (2002) and "Kommunikation på bristningsgränsen" ("Communication at bursting point") (1994), both published by Symposion. Later this year, he will be releasing a book about the challenges faced by the knowledge society. The next edition of The Stockholm Summit will be held in 2010.