

**Association of Comprehensive School Principals in North Rhine-Westfalia  
Trade Union for Education and Science  
Society for the Fostering of Comprehensive Schools  
Council of Parent Representatives at Comprehensive Schools  
in North Rhine-Westfalia**

## **A SCHOOL FOR THE FUTURE**

**International Conference about Independent school  
and the development of quality standards:  
A European perspective  
Velbert, Germany, November 2 - 3, 2001.**



**TRANEMO  
KOMMUN**

En del av Sjuhäradsbygden

**STURE NORLIN**

Director of Educational, Cultural,  
Leisure and Social Services

## **General background**

Questions now being raised about the adequacy of schools in Sweden and probably also in Germany, often boil down to such seemingly-obvious questions as:

- Do we seek to develop and use good habits or bad habits?
- Do we want productive people or unproductive people?
- Should we promote self-actualization or failure and disheartenment?
- Do we value pleasure in learning or boredom/frustration?
- Shall we promote a sense of achievement or a sense of failure?
- Do we hope to induce enthusiastic effort or listlessness?

One could put the above dichotomies in almost any order and one could add many new questions to the list, without disturbing the notion that the first alternative in each case is absolutely to be preferred!

Now a critical question: does the above list refer to factors we would prefer to find in CHILDREN's lives, or does it refer to what we would hope to see in TEACHER's lives?

Or might it refer to BOTH?

All the desirable (left-side) traits or conditions are and have long been prominent in discussions about what we hope children will become under our guidance. However, they also speak to the sorts of professionals all persons who work as educators seek to be.

In my own career, first as classroom teacher and then as in-service training consultant, as a principal, as a principal administrative officer, as a leader of school development and today as director, I have at least tried to develop good work habits, to be productive, to fulfill my potential as a person and as a worker, to be a life-long learner, to find success in my work, to enjoy my work and never stop trying being a good educator. I would be astonished if you, in this audience or readership, would not regard these traits as among those that you, too, value.

Similarly, after a long life of thinking about what public education is all about, I see merit in helping students to develop good work habits, to be very productive in many respects including academic, to fulfill their innate potential in all possible ways, to find pleasure and meaning in their learning, to make an earnest and enthusiastic effort toward accomplishment of their goals and throughout their lives to continue being a learner.

Doubtless there are other important goals that we have for ourselves and for our students, but if the above partial list is at least acceptable for starters, then we can move ahead to examine implications for the way we organize and operate the schooling enterprise.

### **A SCHOOL FOR THE FUTURE built on SYSTEMS THINKING**

By experiences and studies I have learned that to reach above important goals and reach the aims of the curriculum, you have to organize and operate the schooling enterprise with a concept which is founded on a holistic thinking. During the last 8 years I have become familiar with the concept of Systems Thinking, specially by professor Karolyn J. Snyder, University of South Florida, Tampa, USA.

Some of her statements are;

*“Systems Thinking is a way of life [...] where professionals focus on a common vision and a few operational goals while they work together in teams that function interdependently.”*

Another is;

*“The stronger the interaction system is, the stronger is the resulting force between particles; which in turn increases the probability that future particles will be exchanged”*

and, in my opinion, probably the most important;

*“Team Teaching is the # 1 support structure for change in the classroom.”*

Before I present my own concept of Systems Thinking, I want to make some statements of my own;

First of all you have to make a choice as a leader/principal. Do you believe in Dialogue which means that you build your relation towards teachers/students on responsibility, confidence and decentralized decision...

Or

Do you believe in the Strategy that your relation with teachers and students have to be build on power, control and inspection.

It is very important that you choose one of the directions. In my opinion, you can't mix them.

Many years ago I myself choosed the first direction and that direction is what my further lecture will be build on.

One consequence of my choice is my view on which way we can help each child to learn and develop as a human being on his or her way to lifelong learning. My opinion is that we can't teach a child anything. The only thing teacher teams, principals, directors, politicians can do is to create as good conditions as possible for each child to “climb in the tree of lifelong learning”. Within a chaos

of impressions the child, during about 16 years, pass preschool, compulsory school, upper-secondary school and every day get information and advices from parents, relatives, friends, media and organisations during their leisure time. So, what we can do in school is to be good mentors, supporters and “speaking-partners”. That's the way each individual child LEARN!

That doesn't exclude teaching - but teaching when the child realize that she or he needs it!

### **Systems Thinking Model - The Seven Cogwheels (see appendix 1)**

My own concept of Systems Thinking, I call a “Cogwheel Approach”. As a principal you have to work with the seven cogwheels at the same time and use in-service training as an important “grease” in your leadership. You have to be conscious about that when you start to work with one cogwheel, the work will influence the other cogwheels. If you ignore or don't work with one of the cogwheels, the educational change process will stop. For further information I propose you to read my thesis “*Systems thinking for School Restructuring*”, chapter 3, page 26-53.

### **Community of Tranemo**

Today I work as a director of educational, cultural, leisure and social services. My administration include, within the educational sector, responsibility of Pre-school, Compulsory school, Upper Secondary school Adult education, Learning Centra (academical studies) and School of Culture. This wide responsibility gives me good conditions to work with the platform of Systems Thinking and focus on, not only the student, but the needs of whole the family. I can integrate and “build bridges“ between my different sectors and leaders to give each child or family as good conditions as possible to live a good life in the community of Tranemo and for a long life of learning.

### **References**

- Anderson, Robert H. Professor, University of South Florida. Paper from school-based conference in Sotji, Russia, 1994.
- Snyder, Karolyn J. Professor, University of South Florida. Paper from ISC-conference, International School Connections, in Åre/Östersund, 2001.

Appendix

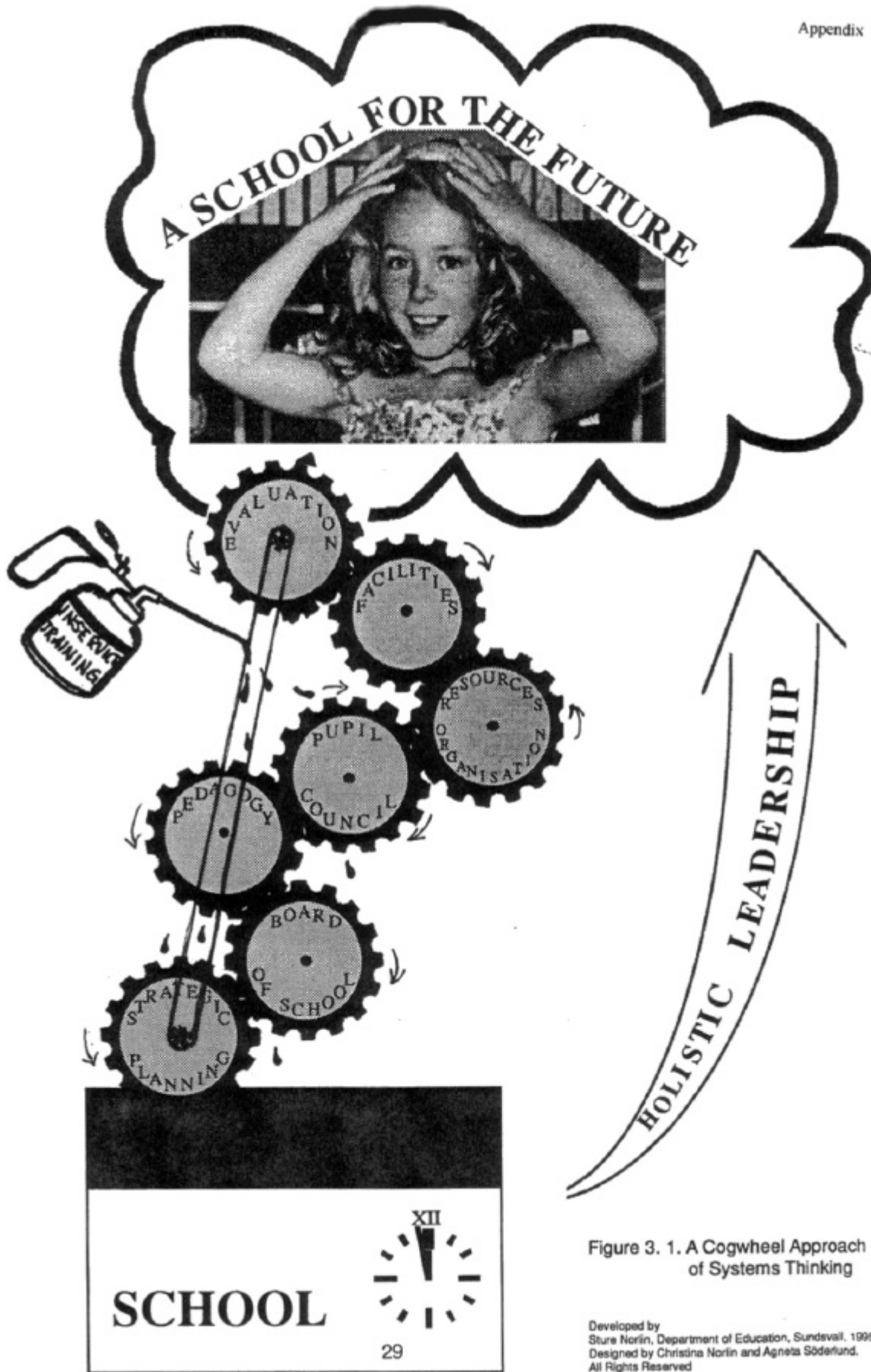


Figure 3. 1. A Cogwheel Approach of Systems Thinking

Developed by  
Sture Norlin, Department of Education, Sundsvall, 1995  
Designed by Christina Norlin and Agneta Söderlund.  
All Rights Reserved