

Markus Sirkka from Kunskapsskolan Fruängen just completed a teacher exchange with Murat Okal at Nün Academy Kunskapsskolan, Jeddah. At the end of the exchange visit, Markus was offered a job as English teacher and KED Program coordinator at the school in Saudi. He will start his new position in August and his family is coming along.

KED

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The Human Connect



Eight years have passed since Kunskapsskolan's Global Director of Education, Birgitta Ericson, died unexpectedly. Birgitta is one of the pedagogical founders of the KED Program. She was a dear friend of mine and I still remember her soft yet strong voice. Birgitta always knew where she wanted to go, and she walked fast. Just like Birgitta, I pack light when traveling, only hand baggage, also on long distance trips from Sweden to India. Coffee tastes best in the cup with the pink inside and our own names in blue on the outside, along with the KKG logo, that we received on our joint trip to Kunskapsskolan Gurgaon in 2014. We

cannot have fika together again, but Birgitta is part of my coffee moments in spirit.

Birgitta helped me build the foundation for exchanges in the KED Network. Her basic idea was that our exchanges should not be viewed as icing on the cake. On the contrary, exchanges are core ingredients of education in Kunskapsskolan.

This led us to experiment with creating a global theme course that students would study together in all different parts of the world. We looked at overlapping parts of the curricula and tried to identify topics that could be studied

collaboratively by KED Buddies in different countries. But the largest benefit of collaboration turned out to be much easier to catch.

Instead of a global theme course, we developed the KED Teacher Exchange Program, Global Buddies, KED Model United Nations, exchange projects for base groups around the future skills and world affairs, and various other exchanges initiated by teachers and students based on common interests with buddies in KED schools across the world. All these formats have effectively rooted themselves as natural parts of KED education.

Ten years after Birgitta and I started exploring how the growing global KED family of schools could enrich the understanding of the world, I know what works: relationships created between students and teachers in global exchanges. We do not need to learn the same course, but we need to learn to respect and appreciate each other's differences. In fact, these relationships are the foundation for all other learning and coursework regardless of curriculum and culture. As Kunskapsskolan's founder Peje Emilsson said in his opening speech at the KED Network Conference in Gurgaon in February:

“It is not only about what you know. It is about who you are and how you function in different contexts and with different people.”

To get there, the brain's cognitive absorption of knowledge is not enough. We need a human platform to start from. This platform is created by the KED Teacher Exchange partners who meet for the first time on arrival in a new country. Before starting the research

on coaching or workshop effectiveness, they sit down and have coffee, or pat camels. This is the idea of learning as a cognitive-emotional process.

This was also the main theme at the three-day KED Network Conference in Gurgaon. Social and emotional development is the foundation for all academic learning, according to Dr. Nandini Chatterjee Singh, Cognitive Neuroscientist at UNESCO Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development.

To start with, we must be human. And at the end of the day, this is the only thing that keeps making us special. Other schools also personalize learning and have digital portals and logbooks. We cannot prevent our good ideas from influencing others, but since all people are different, our relationships are always going to be unique.

Rupa Chauhan, Head of School at Kunskapsskolan International, calls it the human connect, which is also the title

of a book written by Indian online travel entrepreneur Manoj Gursahani. It is a good phrase to describe the essence of exchanges in the KED Network and our character as KED Network members.

Being human is to fail, recover and move on. In this process, we learn to respect our differences and appreciate our commonalities. It probably feels the same to miss a dear friend in Saudi as it does in Sweden.

Emotions are as important as facts to bring out our full learning and understanding. To walk the talk, I will now let Lata Tejpal, Head of School at KED Network School DPS Abohar, report the outcome of the KED Network Conference, in her poem “Expressions”. Lata has been part of the KED Network since the start of Kunskapsskolan India in 2013. ■

Cecilia Aronsson
Network Director
cecilia.aronsson@kunskapsskolan.com



Cecilia Aronsson together with the team leaders at Kunskapsskolan Gurgaon

Expressions

From landing in a remote, unknown town
 To making connections strong
 From chasing timelines for infra developments
 To bringing school into operations
 From struggling with recruitments
 To training them to skilled one
 From individuals from diverse backgrounds
 To molding them to one team

I've relished every moment, every bit
 Tasting experiences - bitter and sweet
 It hasn't been easy
 But it surely kept me busy
 By the blessings of God above,
 With ample courage, patience and love
 By the ongoing targets set by seniors
 And with the support of KED educators
 That I became a little more capable
 And this journey feasible

It was exceedingly very difficult
 A long way with no available shortcuts
 Persistently working to meet high expectations
 Tried to put all efforts with integrity into actions
 In the growth process, did multitasking in excess
 Where resources were limited but determination and
 team support was boundless
 Facing ups and downs in school together
 We, as a TEAM, transitioned from good to better
 Our work place, DPS Abohar
 Made my team - my family member
 Worked with heart & soul
 Always prioritizing the school as a whole

Used my little brain
 And invested all my energy without refrain
 I didn't realize when it became a part of my heart
 May be because I was involved from the very start

Upon completing my tenth year
 For the first time, I got to hear
 My school's and my name
 Amidst the KED Fame

Providing not only visibility
 But adding to our identity
 Our presence in the conference room
 Was like a garden supporting a flower to bloom
 Meeting great minds from Saudi, UK, India, Sweden, the
 Netherlands
 A wonderful opportunity for us to better understand
 The KED Network, a place of excellence and glee
 Thanks to your guidance, for all to see

With wisdom & kindness, we've led the way
 Creating a school where dreams can sway
 Working to bring unity and grace
 Creating a warm and welcoming space

As ten years come to a close,
 Receiving a motivation dose
 A recognition ...
 for all that we've chosen
 Thanksgiving for unwavering dedication
 For shaping lives, a sparkling inspiration

Almost a - my life's quarter
 And more than half of my career
 The last ten years working with KED
 And many great minds & influencers I've met
 Has been the journey of 'making of me'
 Equipped well with innovation Key
 As a happy schools maker
 Hope we can do more together

Lata Tejpal

Head of School, Delhi Public School, Abohar

A man in a light blue shirt and dark trousers stands in front of a sign for 'NÜN ACADEMY'. The sign is decorated with colorful bunting and Arabic calligraphy. The background shows a building with a staircase and a clear sky.

An Unexpected Possibility

Markus recently completed his teacher exchange project at Nün Academy, Kunskapsskolan Jeddah

A couple of weeks ago, I went to Saudi Arabia to visit Nün Academy Kunskapsskolan, Jeddah for a teacher exchange with Murat Okal who works there. I stayed for a week, and my research topic was to see differences and similarities in teaching English at my and Murat's schools. It was truly an amazing experience which I will never forget, and which is not over yet.

My trip started in Stockholm with a connecting flight at Istanbul airport to

Jeddah, where I arrived early on a Friday morning to be greeted by Murat.

Since Friday is not a working day (but Sunday is) in Saudi, I had two days to experience and explore. I was taken to a traditional Saudi family restaurant outside of Jeddah, where the seafood was caught straight out of the Red Sea only a few meters away. We picked what we wanted from local fishermen outside and the food was taken to the restaurant where it was cooked

for us. The next day we went on a trip to the desert and a place called Moon Mountain. Saudis often take trips like this for barbecues and family gatherings in the desert, and even stay one or two nights in tents or more luxurious glamping. You just drive outside town, turn off the main road and enter the desert. We barbecued together with another Nün academy teacher family and hiked the surrounding hills, where we met a camel herder who let us pat the camels and take pictures.



Nün had prepared a schedule for me to investigate my research topic. I met the Head of School and different department heads, and visited lots of base group sessions and lessons throughout the week. It was flexible and I could wander around the boys section as much as I wanted. The students were extremely curious and talkative.

Changes for more digital planning are ongoing and students have Chromebooks. The KED Program and values are thoroughgoing, as are the KED future skills. Personal coaching and coaching sessions are used.

are divided into lectures and work, so the concept of workshop is there and the plan is to make it more formalized shortly. Changes for more digital planning are ongoing and students have Chromebooks. The KED Program and values are thoroughgoing, as are the

KED future skills. Personal coaching and coaching sessions are used, with the slight difference that students are pulled out of other sessions for their coaching, which is not a separate part of their schedule.

The school day started with a session outside, where we listened to the national anthem before heading to the classrooms. Base groups have their own classroom for start and end of the day, but lessons are held in different rooms depending on the subject, just like in Sweden. During base group sessions, students plan their day. There is no workshop yet, but many lessons



Girls and boys are taught separately but all staff work together



The Future Skills are the same for all KED schools



Life becomes what you make of it



The digital logbook is on its way to Saudi Arabia too

Nün Academy follows the Cambridge curriculum and uses books rather than a Learning Portal. Their three core subjects are Arabic, English and Math. English is considered a first language like Arabic; most students are fluent in both and have far better English compared to Swedish students. There is a subject called Global Perspective, which handles e.g. why laws are important, what would happen if there are no laws and discussing them. In Sweden, this is covered in Social Science. Another subject at Nün is called Social and Emotional Learning, with content similar to Religious Education in Sweden. The school is divided into a girls and a boys section. Male teachers teach the boys and the females teach the girls. After the school day, all staff meet at the library in the girls section.

My experience exceeded my expectations by far, thanks to the fantastic team, teachers, students and friends I met. Murat will soon come for an exchange visit to Kunskapsskolan Fruängen, specifically observing how we use digital tools at KED schools in Sweden.

And in August we will be colleagues at Nün Academy Kunskapsskolan, Jeddah. During my exchange, the school presented a vacancy to me, teaching English and ICT to Year 7, as well as guiding the teacher team in using the KED Program throughout the school. I discussed it with my family and we have now decided to move to Saudi for

two years. My wife will work remotely and my son is about to change schools after this semester, so it suits him well too. Unexpectedly, our Saudi adventure continues.

Markus Sirkka
English Teacher,
Kunskapsskolan Fruängen



Emilia became an expert at bargaining at the local markets

A Piece of Our Heart Lives in India

“Last spring, we hosted 13 Indian students from four different KED schools in hopes to learn more about another culture. Through a week of programs, we aimed to show our Indian fellows not only the serene landscapes of Sweden but also our genuine intention to start a long-term friendship,” says Matilda who was a great host for two amazing girls, Vedika and Omera, from India.

By the end of January this year, Matilda together with five friends in Year 9 at Kunskapsskolan Nacka had a chance to visit their Indian fellows in Gurgaon and Lucknow. By visiting three different KED schools in these two cities and being part of the local culture for a week, Matilda and her Swedish friends proved that the seeds of friendship they had

planted together with their Indian counterparts last spring already proceeded to seed.

“We were warmly received and well looked after as well as served delicious food during these days,” says Elliot who dived into the heart of Indian cuisine with the guidance of home economics teacher Sunitha at Kunskapsskolan Gurgaon (KKG). Sunitha did not only teach our stu-



Felix from Kunskapsskolan Nacka received a warm welcome from Head of School Madhulika Agarwal and her team at Kunskapsskolan Lucknow.



The team from Sweden accompanied by their hosts along with Kunskapsskolan Gurgaon Vice Principal Ramneek Batra, Head of School Inderbir Thussu and Academic Head Henrik Svärd.

dents the techniques of authentic Indian cooking but also let them spice things up in the kitchen by embracing the flavors and aromas of world- famous masalas and curries.

In addition to cooking skills, this exchange offered our students the opportunity to improve their negotiation skills. Both Emilia and Felix became an expert at bargaining with the craftsmen in Dilli Haat, a village market, which displays the richness of Indian culture, handicrafts and ethnic cuisine. They



Matilda and Arman enjoying Indian cooking



We cooked our own lunch today



Anton from Kunskapsskolan Nacka was hosted by Kunskapsskolan International student Divit and his family in Gurgaon.

proved how persuasive they could be by paying half price for gorgeous shawls they bought in Dilli Haat and the Taj Mahal maquettes they saw in Agra.

The field trips organized by our host families deepened our amazement and admiration for the country. The inauguration of Temple Ram and the Republic Day offered us more time to spend with our hosts and get to know them much better. During these days, we were fascinated by not only the vibrant rhythms of India but also the tranquility, resilience and mental clarity of Indian people, who believe in the power of yoga, meditation and breathing to find

harmony in one's life. Apart from yoga, a wide range of sporting activities that the Indian KED schools offer enchanted our students:

“At KI, students have their own outdoor pool and even a real shooting range. We got to try shooting with air rifles, and it turned out to be more difficult than we thought,” says Anton, a real sports lover, who wishes to come to India next October to join the KED Marathon organized by KKG.

This exchange also allowed our students to immerse themselves in a different cultural environment. A visit to a non-



The students from Kunskapsskolan Nacka visited a local school for underprivileged children in Gurugram run by an NGO.



Matilda interacted with children of all ages at KKG.

governmental organization in Gurugram was a peerless example of such a cultural experience.

“We visited an abandoned building that had been turned into a school for a small group of students who were so happy and positive. The fact that these children, despite their circumstances, still had a smile on their face and were still nice and social brought us almost to tears,” says Arman, who was deeply touched by the incredible work of this children’s initiative that helps underprivileged children and families facing challenging times.

We, two teachers who accompanied our students, also created lasting memories with our buddies. Seval left one piece of her heart in the house of a wonderful woman, Ramneek, who made her see all sides of this unique and endearing country. Similarly, for Johan the trip to India was a warm and pleasant reunion with Krishna, who accompanied the Indian buddies to Sweden last year.

“To stay at the home of Krishna’s family, to get to know them and eat the amazing

Arman was touched by the incredible work of this children’s initiative that helps underprivileged children.

food that was served, was a blessing. Thanks to this, the ties between us were further strengthened, and both are convinced that we will meet again,” concludes Johan.

Seval Orhan Bahsi & Johan Holmström
Teachers, Kunskapsskolan Nacka



The yoga mat is part of the KED tools in India

A Life Lesson With a Twist

Alvin from Kunskapsgymnasiet Globen explored the local markets in Agra

The pace of life in Delhi often startles outsiders. Our Global Buddies project this year was no exception. An election year in the world's largest democracy, coming on the tail end of the 2023 G20 summit—and not to mention the global KED Network conference happening at the very school we were visiting. It was not difficult for our Global Buddies' excursion to feel small, like cogs from Sweden, swept up in the gears of multilateral development and international education sum-

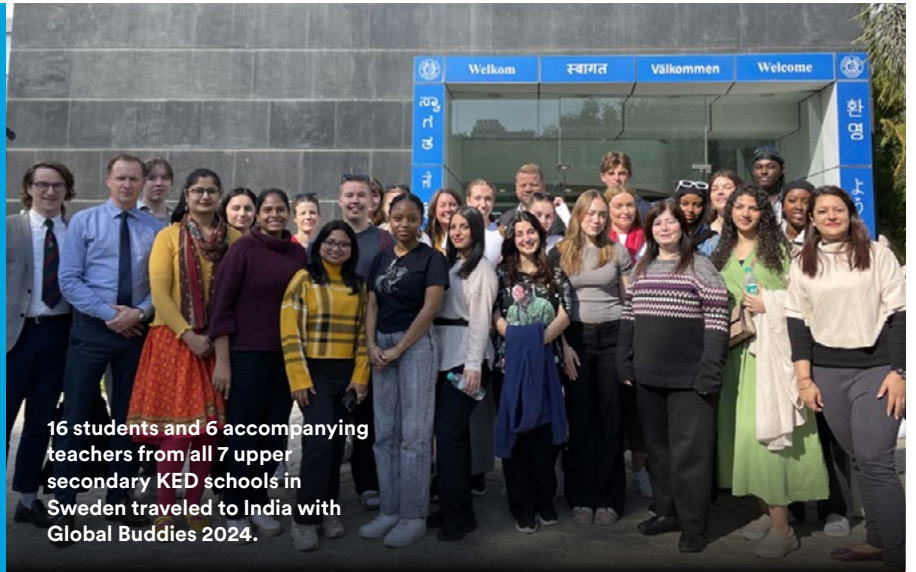
mits. Indeed, we left with a paradox of scale – of things small and large. That is to say, it reaffirmed what a small group of strangers can create through international encounters in the largest country in the world.

Our week went by as briskly as the beat of a dhol drum echoing through the bazaar. A trip to the Taj Mahal, the Red Fortress, and a few temples, all flashes of color and affable strangers. Several stops at the local markets. The curious street dogs.

However, the purpose that brought us here was for our students to conduct research for their graduation thesis. Past the security gate, and tucked away from the streetscape of noisy vehicles, we found a wonderful school uncannily familiar and foreign to us. After two days of interviews, lesson observations, and even a friendly Sweden vs India football match, what did the students have to say about Kunskapsskolan in India?



Stella from Kunskapsgymnasiet Norrköping asked students at Kunskapsskolan in Gurgaon whether it is possible to buy happiness with money.



16 students and 6 accompanying teachers from all 7 upper secondary KED schools in Sweden traveled to India with Global Buddies 2024.



Kunskapsskolan Gurgaon defeating the Global Buddies in football

For starters, “they can play football”. Sweden lost. But more to the point, one student observed from her focus group interviews dealing with perspectives on happiness:

“There is a sense of well-being stemming from helping others, compared to Sweden. The students here are much less materialistic and individualistic, in a good way.”

Another response came from a student comparing attitudes towards the learning environment:

“Academic excellence, the peace and respect these students have for their own learning is remarkable.”

These small encounters would, of course, add up, accumulating into what one student elusively admitted to being

a “life lesson” – one that we teachers know can be such an important rarity among adolescence, that is: coming to terms with one’s privileges, prejudices, and blind spots.

But this life lesson has a twist. Our group of Swedish students is multi-cultural, being ethnically, linguistically, and culturally diverse. And as the air conditioning pressed against us in the hotel lobby, their reflections on our last night in India centered on how this experience had united them all. “The best thing about this trip has been learning to get to know all of you, who were strangers to me so little time ago,” and, “I had preconceived notions about the group, but all of you are great people.”

If our project in India taught us anything, it was the consolidation of small differences towards finding common ground, especially amongst ourselves. And in such a divisional global context as the world faces right now, what larger lesson could be more pressing than that? ■

Jordan Mathes

Team Lead Social Science Program, Kunskapsgymnasiet Liljeholmen

My Exchange with Kunskapsgymnasiet Malmö



Joep learnt a lot from the students at Kunskapsgymnasiet Malmö

In 2019, I made a few quick visits to several Kunskapsskolan schools. I gained a good idea of what a Kunskapsskolan school in Sweden is like. The challenge with these brief visits was that we only got an impression of what the schools did, and there was not enough time to speak with students and teachers to get a complete view of how the KED Program worked.

When my school offered me an exchange visit at a Swedish KED school for five days, I got excited. My first impression when I reached there was the sense of community. Students and teachers worked together to make the school a better place. Upon returning to the Netherlands, I had lots of good ideas and inspiration for my own teaching and school.

During my visit, I observed a more formative approach to teaching. I saw

a teacher who created her lesson plans based on the answers students provided during formative assessments. After that, I started considering implementing similar practices in my own teaching.

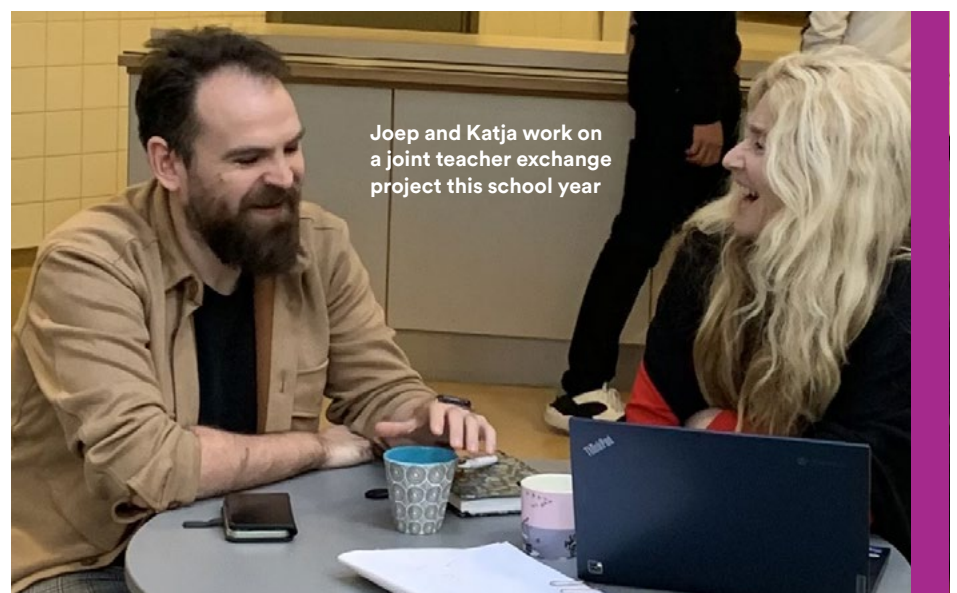
Back in the Netherlands, I reviewed my lesson plans based on good formative assessments and added them where they were missing.

I also conducted a few interviews with students, discussing the differences between their current school and their previous one. They appreciated the fact that teachers made it clear what they needed to do in order to grow. Additionally, the school provided a safe and welcoming environment for them so that they felt at home.

One of the challenges I would like to address is how to create a sense of community similar to Kunskapsgymnasiet Malmö in Sweden (with about 400 students) within our larger school of 1000 students.

KED Teacher Exchange allows you to gain a better understanding of approaches and ideas that you can implement in your own educational setting. ■

Joep van de Wouw
Physics Teacher, 2College
Cobbenhagenlyceum



Joep and Katja work on a joint teacher exchange project this school year

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