

Distance Teaching for Mother Tongue Pupils

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Abstract

Distance teaching in Sweden has quite a long tradition. It became especially important because of the long distance some pupils have to go to school and because of every pupil's right to study every subject during their time at school. The need for distance teaching seems to be growing and in 2008/2009 the Swedish government gave an order to some of the Swedish municipalities to prepare and to carry out distance teaching in different subjects in all the different kinds of Swedish schools. One of these subjects is mother tongue teaching. In Sweden pupils with other languages have the right to study their own mother tongue. It belongs among the subjects in the curriculum in school and more than 200 languages are offered in Sweden. They are taught by a large number of mother tongue teachers. But some of the pupils cannot participate for various reasons: for instance distance or too few pupils who want to learn or because of the absence of a fully qualified teacher. The municipality of Uppsala and the Uppsala Mother tongue Language School and the University of Uppsala decided to start a project in 2010, which would focus on producing a model for distance teaching for mother tongue pupils. This "Uppsala Model" for distance teaching provides the mother tongue teachers with a tool, which makes it easier for them to start distance teaching and therefore make it possible to fulfill the purpose of having mother tongue lessons in the curriculum. It contains a lot of didactic ideas and takes into account the differences and the similarities between distance teaching and teaching in an ordinary classroom. We would like to introduce this project and show how ICT makes it possible to share and to participate in mother tongue classes in Uppsala, Sweden.

Our presentation contents the following head points:

- 1. Mother tongue teaching in the Swedish curriculum: Lgr 11*
- 2. Description of the project "Distance teaching for mother tongue pupils"*
- 3. A short summery of the first outcomes of the project and looking forward*

1. Mother Tongue Teaching in the Swedish Curriculum: Lgr 2011

Mother tongue teaching has a long tradition in Sweden. During the last thirty years or so, many pupils have had the possibility to study their own mother tongue. Fresh for this year a new curriculum is being introduced for all subjects on a national level. Looking at student numbers, in compulsory school at a national level there are 181,412 or 20.5% of all students eligible for instruction in mother tongue, of which 157 950 attend municipal, and 23,321 attend independent schools. In total, 100,273 or 56.65% of all pupils eligible for mother tongue education were taught during the academic year 2010/11. [1] Mother tongue teaching is a part of the Swedish school curriculum. The curriculum states that language is a person's primary tool for thinking, communicating and learning. Having a rich and varied language is important to understand and operate in a society where cultures, philosophies, generations and languages meet. Having access to their mother tongue also facilitates language development and learning in different areas. The purpose of the teaching should aim for pupils to develop skills and their mother tongue. The teaching goals are for students to have the opportunity to develop their spoken and written language so that they have confidence in their language and also

express themselves in different contexts and for different purposes. The curriculum demands that students should gain knowledge of the structures of their mother tongue and become aware of the significance of their mother tongue for their own learning of different school subjects. Teaching should help students develop a comparative approach to cultures and language. To summarize, mother tongue teaching should give the opportunity to develop the ability to

- express and communicate orally and in writing;
- use mother tongue as a means to develop their language and their learning,
- adapt language for different purposes, receiver and context;
- distinguish linguistic structures and follow linguistic norms,
- read and analyze literature and other texts for different purposes, and
- reflect on the traditions, cultural events and social issues in areas where the mother tongue spoken in comparison with Swedish conditions. [2]

The national Agency of Education has published several reports on the effects of mother tongue teaching on student development, which are based on research on the topic. The results show that:

- Mother tongue teaching is very important for the child's identity and self- esteem.
- Mother tongue teaching is the basis for the child's learning capacity.
- The child learns a second language and other subjects more easily.
- There is a great benefit to society that many people are multilingual. [3]

Because of the aforementioned positive effects it seems very important to give all students who want to study their own mother tongue the possibility to do it, even if there are sometimes not enough pupils to build a group. The prerequisite is to have at least 5 students, who want to study. This is the primary reason as to why distance teaching is so important since it allows for even for just one pupil from a municipality to receive mother tongue teaching if they can join students from another location.

2. Description of the Project Distance Teaching for Mother Tongue Pupils

A substantial amount of previous research has shown that distance teaching is often no better or worse than traditional classroom methods, [4] but very little work has been done on mother tongue distance teaching. The Swedish government directed the national Agency of Education back in 2008 to explore the feasibility of distance teaching. [5]

The municipality of Uppsala (Uppsala Kommun, Språkskola) together with Uppsala University (Fortbildningsavdelning för skolans internationalisering) have seen the potential benefits of new technologies and in 2010 began working together to create an **Uppsala Model** that mother tongue teachers can apply regardless of the target language.

Språkskolan (School of Languages) the school in Uppsala responsible for providing mother tongue teaching currently works with 39 languages.

With the new curriculum Lgr 11, and a new grading system being introduced in Autumn 2011, it is now most appropriate to explore new ways of teaching and new technologies at the disposal of mother tongue teachers. The purpose of the "Uppsala model" is to give teachers a way to plan, teach and evaluate their distance teaching. One of the big challenges facing mother tongue teachers is to find a "common ground" since each language is distinct and has its own challenges. It has been difficult for teachers of different languages to speak in the same terms about their teaching and students' learning. Another purpose of this project is to develop the competence of mother tongue teachers. Some of the teachers lack a special education for this profession and they therefore need is a didactical/ methodological tool to deliver effective education.



The whole project is expected to run from 2010 – 2012 and has been divided into **two phases**.

Phase one, 2010-2011 has been to create, discuss and to prepare a draft model.

Phase two 2012 is aimed to create an in- service training program for mother tongue teachers based on the model for distance teaching.

To begin with, one representative from Uppsala Kommun and Uppsala University decided how the project should be run. A **reference group** and a **steering group** have been formed for the project. These groups have worked with the project material and will give greater validity to the model.

The **reference group** enables teachers of different languages to implement and evaluate the model. Phase one is a starting point for the reference group to work together, to take a draft model and apply it to their own classroom contexts.

The head of the language school decided to give all the participants of the project the possibility to work on this topic in the reference group every Wednesday.

The **steering group** is the key to good partnership between the two institutions and the participants and its main role is to decide on finance and of course give some guidance to the project's development and confirm the project's planning.

The two **project leaders** meet each other weekly and discussed the didactical and methodological lesson preparations

3. A Short Summary of the First Outcomes of the Project and Looking

Forwards

The draft model has been developed from almost 20 weeks of teaching by the teacher representative from the municipality. For the initial phase of the project students from groups in their second, third and fifth year of compulsory schooling were used in the initial planning stage.

The teacher and the project's representative from the municipality sat in Uppsala, with pupils sitting in different schools but able to participate in the same classroom. The municipality of Uppsala has leased classrooms from Adobe Connect Pro, which provide a learning environment, which appears very conducive to learn. There is visual and audio face to face communication between all the participants and the possibility to play audio/ visual files, chat, write and upload text, PDF and PowerPoint files. Even the youngest pupils after the first few lessons are able to use the software without adult help at their end.

In order to fulfil the end purpose of the project, that is to say provide a model that can be applied by all mother tongue teachers regardless of their language, it has been crucial to provide a solid starting point or a scaffold for the project. Ignoring the potential distractions of the idiosyncrasies of each language, but instead focusing on the curriculum, its central content, its goals and assessment criteria it has been possible to begin building a framework for the teachers who will then test the model. The decision was taken to work thematically, working with clearly defined topics stretching over four weeks, to see whether a general model could be applied regardless of the language,

The representative and mother tongue teacher of the reference group taught four week blocks of lessons on the following topics, carnival, water and travel. A careful rationale was given for each topic: lessons plans, evaluations, resources and timing have been recorded. The reference group has also been provided with guidelines on how to choose and how the topics so far have been chosen and also a framework of how to plan for any theme. The representative from Uppsala University has also participated in several distance classes to observe and to give feedback.



The current phase of the project is for the reference group, now having decided to test the water theme to try to implement the draft model.

The model should then bring together the different cultural and educational backgrounds of the teaching body and combining the following three strands of pedagogy, didactics/method and technology, create a structure which can guide and improve the overall quality of mother tongue teaching in a distance classroom and potentially in traditional classroom teaching.

List of the References

- [1] *Modersmål i siffror från läsåret 2010 till 2011*. Skolverket. (2011)
- [2] *Läroplan för grundskolan, förskoleklassen och fritidshemmet 2011*, Skolverket (2011)
- [3] *Med annat modersmål– elever i grundskolan och skolans verksamhet*, Skolverket. (2008b).
- [4] *Evaluation of Evidence-Based Practices in Online Learning*. U.S Department of Education.(2010)
- [5] *Distansundervisning för elever i grundskola och gymnasieskola*. Skolverket. (2008)