



Education and leadership

Let nature be an opportunity!

The achievement of knowledge through sensuous experiences

In nature, we can retrieve knowledge, emotion and inspiration. A feeling for nature turns into commitment and an opportunity to evolve. Through experience and reflection, life out there in the landscapes can become an important fundament for our future. We perceive sensuous experiences because outdoor life is more than a course of action. It is about living!

Outdoor life presents challenges where you can use your creativity, ability to solve problems and manage shared difficulties. With a conscious and not to technical or specified outdoor life, we come close to nature, which in turn can inspire commitment to the environment. In nature, you exercise your body physically, and in the pathless terrain, both coordination and balance is trained. We can learn to appreciate simple things, but also to enjoy the hot shower when we come back home. Outdoor life gives us an opportunity for peace and reflection – an opportunity to approach the eternal questions of life. Being close to nature can also help us enjoy poetry, art and music more intensively. When we are walking in the forest, finding a good place to set up camp and cooking our food, we better understand how people used to live before. It is also easier to see how people live today without the commodities of the industrial society. With outdoor life as a starting point, we have the possibility to approach other subjects achieve a better understanding of how to process this in for example preschools and schools.

Outdoor education – an alternative

Outdoor education can be complimentary to traditional pedagogy (where learning usually takes place within four walls) and should be considered a natural part of all teaching. We carry a landscape within us, something that has lingered under our eye lids. It lives its own life no matter where we are, perhaps it entered already when we were children: the plain, the forest, society, the city, the mountains, the beach or the sea. We become a piece of the landscape ourselves – here and now. The landscape is the memory of the people. Outdoor education meets the landscape and uses units where all senses are active during learning.

Nature is a pedagogical environment where we can work in different ways. It is important to remember how ever that nature is not a natural environment for everyone; instead you have to work with it from different perspectives to achieve a positive relation to it. It is important to take turns in using the indoor and outdoor perspective. Outdoor education creates conditions for environments of learning with more intensity of movement where the body activates the mind. The term “outdoor

education" has many interpretations. Our definition is the one that the National Center for Outdoor Education, Linköping University, has agreed on:

Outdoor education is an approach which strives towards learning, alternately through experience and reflection based on concrete knowledge from authentic situations.

Outdoor education is an interdisciplinary area of research and education, which among other things means that...

- *The environment of learning is also moved out in society, nature and cultural landscapes*
- *The alternation between sensuous experience and fact based education is emphasized*
- *The importance of the location where the learning takes place is emphasized*

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The spreading of outdoor education

Today, outdoor education is a well known term and becomes more common within the school system. More and more preschools and schools have realized the importance of a varied method of education. "Learning with your whole body" is, for many people, a way to combine movement, knowledge and outdoor environment into one entity. As research now shows that outdoor activities and movement is positive for, for example, health, motor function and learning, there is no longer any obstacles to moving education outdoors. The problem as a teacher is to accept the methods that outdoor education demands. The teaching of outdoor education has begun but we are still far away from it being a natural element in teacher training programmes.

Outdoor education has also been discovered internationally. Norway, Estonia and Great Britain are examples of that. Furthermore, international courses have attracted many participants from all over Europe. There is a great interest in finding methods that can be performed in the school court or in the nearby green area, if it is available for others than the landowner. Through exchanging ideas, you realize that there are many new ways to look at it and methods just waiting to be used. You just have to dare try something you have not done before!

Experience in nature

In nature you can experience and learn with all senses. Nature arouses our curiosity in different ways, like when you first bent down and picked up a beautiful stone or when you realized that some types of wood burn quicker than others. It can be stimulated by smelling a butter knife made out of common juniper, or standing by the ocean looking at the horizon. Nature is full of experiences in shapes, colours and smells that arouses different emotions. It offers dramatic events and safety and can create possibilities for new attitudes, new sense of belonging and new values. That is what we, among other things, want to highlight in the following chapters, as well as the importance of learning in the outdoor environment.

The didactics of outdoor education

A bridge between theory and practice

An important step for the school and other places of learning is getting away from the traditionally strong opposition between theory and practice. Today, when learning foremost takes place indoors, often in front of a computer screen or through a theoretical description, outdoor education is an important base for the body's need of movement and sensuous experience, as well as the stimulation of the brain (intellectual thinking). Because of this, outdoor education can become a significant tool to vitalize, for instance, the intentions of the curriculum. To be able to do this, you should think of...

- The possibilities of the outdoor environment as a place of learning
- Working in teams by problem based learning
- Working thematically and interdisciplinary between subjects
- Working with entities where the personal safety has been conquered and when the outdoor space becomes classroom and equipment
- Seeing the outdoor space as a complementary alternative to the indoor environment
- Laying the fundament for outdoor life and activities in preschools and schools.

Where

In outdoor education, knowledge does not just become words to be written in a text or in an equation. The "silent", not yet phrased knowledge, the fertile soil of the explicit knowledge, which bears our culture, is the one present in the tension in the muscle, the apple's smell, the rhythm of the body, in the sense of proportion, in the richness of language beyond grammar and the dictionary's correctness. In this perspective of learning, outdoor education is focused on the place of learning, to its *where*. It is the physical nature and cultural environment that inspires the search of knowledge. By complementing the usual classroom with "the expanded classroom" (the outdoor space) you have the possibility to increase curiosity and motivation. This has been taken a note of when it concerns the preschools.

The children shall alternate between different activities during the day. The organisation shall give space for the children's own plans, fantasy and creativity in play indoors as well as outdoors. The outdoor stay should enable play and other activities in both planned and natural environment.

Curriculum for the Pre-school, 1998

Then, the outdoor space becomes a just as obvious place of learning as the preschool's premises and the school's classroom, as workshops, gymnasiums and libraries. When "opening new doors", you have the opportunity to see things from new perspectives and initiate a process of change!

To be in nature can also bring fundamental change to the indoor space, which can reflect the biological, cultural and aesthetic diversity of the outdoor space. It is also important to use the "green" areas present adjacent to the city landscape's school yards. Once you have stepped out in the school yard, the step to other places, which can be used in situations of learning, is closer.

Examples of this are the city landscape, the park, the farm, the forest and the waters in the close environment.

What

Interesting questions of didactic importance are: What can we do outdoors (which we do indoors today) to increase motivation and first hand experience? What effect could this have on the understanding of different concepts? In outdoor education there is a starting point for practical environmental education and reasoning about the biological cycle of life, a base for education regarding our body and health, a place for aesthetic experiences, a place for reflection and a "textbook" for all subjects. Some examples of this kind of themes that could vitalize knowledge and integrate nature, culture, environment, technology and outdoor life are:

- From the soil to your plate – the school's garden and the farm
- From seed to paper – forestry before and now
- From bud to compost
- Water wheel and energy – life in the lakes and oceans
- Life in leaves and soil – small organisms in the cycle of life and compost
- Forgotten technology – ancient food, ways of living and the fire
- Outdoor life and art – outdoor crafting.

How

How does knowledge from society reach into our classrooms? Believing that learning only takes place on a special time or place is as wrong as saying that learning in the outdoor environment is the only way to attain knowledge. We can find clear relations to the landscape, literature, art and music in all subjects in the school and preschool, as well as within the science of nature and culture.

The aesthetic experience in the outdoor space creates an entity which, for the individual, joins the world into one. A methodical connection between aesthetic, nature and culture scientific expressions would be creating more "live" knowledge. Examples of this are: play and movement, crafts, drama, music, arts and form. Both these perspectives (art and science) could create new forms of expression and "entities". Perhaps scientists and artists in cooperation can better answer what a sustainable development is, than if they single-handedly claim to know what the answer is. As a leader, the trick is to combine the subjects and see how the outdoor environment can be used. An example: The team "Our forest". To this theme, you can connect nature and environment, the forest importance for society, forest and religion, mathematical exercises, crafts, forest and music, language through stories both verbally and written down, and poetry and literature. Last but not least, you can use physical activity and intimacy adapted to the theme you are working on.

When

As a teacher and a leader, we have to think about what environments we have access to when we want to arrange activities in these environments. This demands knowledge of the places, connected to both humanistic and science. During the change of the seasons, you have to know when to be in a certain place to be able to hear the frogs croak, pick ripe berries or see the bird special to your region. The when-question is also important when looking at the experience, to know when it is suitable to pursue different activities or when to grasp the moment with a special atmosphere. If the group is cold, you start the game where everyone gets warm. If you are sitting around the fire, familiar talking can be enough. The when-questions often has a lot to do with the sensitivity of the leader. It is often the "when" that rules the programme, and then, flexibility is important.

Why

One of the reasons that outdoor education should be taken seriously to a greater extent, is the research of humans and our relation to our physical environment. Our increased knowledge of the possibilities of positive effects of contact with the outdoor environment, for children's health, motor development, play and ability to concentrate, has to be transformed into practical action. Another reason to perform outdoor education is the completely different demands of an outdoor environment, which can train cooperation and by doing so, train social competence. Working outdoors in a varied environment embossed by nature, often invites challenges which can demand a cooperation which the indoor environment does not offer to the same extent. The mobilisation of all senses is another advantage of learning in an outdoor environment. You learn in so many different ways when different perspectives and approaches are put forward.

Many of the species "Homo urbaniensis" (the man living in the city) has forgotten how to marvel over the richness of nature today, or with a modern expression, the biological diversity. We risk losing the capacity to be astonished and by doing so, place ourselves at the side of nature, instead of in it.

When our verbal culture transformed into a standardized written language we lost part of the sensuous experience, conquered by verbal tradition and with many connections to the landscape. The folklore telling of fairytales and sagas is still an important part of our traditional education. In outdoor education, it is important to restore this form of communication, and keep it alive. We can ask ourselves the question: how does knowledge come to life and how do we make knowledge come to life?

The creatures in folktales have always reflected people's need to explain the inexplicable. Humans' meeting with nature formed a relation to the landscape which can include both the natural and supernatural. We as teachers must defend these traditional ways of storytelling in our teaching, since it concerns our nature and cultural heritage.

The outdoor space enables meetings with the unexpected and unstructured, thus, possibilities for adapted and flexible learning. We learn about the world through our senses, parts and entities. Although, there is a great difference between "knowing of" and "knowing". To know of generates much shallower knowledge since learning is detached from the emotional and action related. An

increased contact with the outdoor space's nature and cultural phenomenon and processes of change, should to a greater extent be seen as a resource of learning. Outdoor education thus gives us an opportunity for contact with nature and a possibility to reclaim our cultural heritage.

To be a teacher, leader and pedagogue in the outdoor environment

The pedagogical premises for experience based learning in the outdoor environment demands that we are constantly open to increasing our knowledge. In this book we want to point out the great possibilities that the landscape offers in forms of outdoor life and leadership – group dynamics, contact with nature and education of environmental issues – and how this can be connected to other subjects. The pedagogical perspectives on health also become central, as well as globalisation, in pedagogy for thematic integration and overall perspective. Since nature does not have any walls, learning is not limited. Instead, new possibilities are constantly emerging. The school as well as preschools should make use of the outdoor space as a pedagogical resource as research shows, that children's health, motor development and ability to concentrate increase in a varied and nature embossed environment.

The purpose of outdoor education

Outdoor education aims at making subjects' often all too abstract concepts come to life in activities in the outdoor environment, through thematic and interdisciplinary studies of them. Through this studying, a locally relevant historic, ecological and social connection can be established among our children and youths. The path to experience and the sensuous education is a possibility for more active knowledge, where emotion, action and thought are united. A teaching and learning situation with immediate experience, in its right place and time, gives sensuous experiences of colour, form, sound, smell and atmospheres as reinforcement of learning.

The starting point in outdoor education for learning itself is the immediate experience, when you understand "with your whole body" and when it is important to reflect upon what you have learnt and felt. It increases motivation and understanding of our surroundings (nature, environment culture and society). Children's and youths' commitment to environmental issues can be endorsed when knowledge is firmly established through immediate experience in the environment, and therefore, become a more active commitment ("learning by doing"). Through outdoor education you can "open doors" within most subjects. This could result in a school for outdoor education, where the enjoyment of learning, entities, thematic integration and direct contact between people are central aspects. Our outdoor space is a mighty classroom with an area of millions of hectares just waiting to be used by both children and adults.

Authors

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Reference

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