Nature kindergartens Learning outdoors

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What is going on out there?

• What does it mean for children’s experiences when the kindergarten is moving their everyday activities into nature-landscapes and its places?

• Doctoral thesis University of Gothenburg 2014
The National Curricula for the Content and Tasks of the Kindergartens

Kindergartens shall provide children with opportunities for play, self-expression and meaningful experiences and activities in safe yet challenging surroundings (Department of Education 2005:15)

Under learning areas:
....love using the nature (Ibid 2005:23)
An increasing interest for outdoor education in early years


• Learning outdoors (Thulin: 2011, Waller: 2010)

• Schoolyards as sites for learning (Lindholm, 1995, Tranter and Malone 2007)
Theories

• Relation between the affordance of a landscape and the individual perception. The function of the landscape. (James Gibson, 1978)

Phenomenological approach as a reference «The lived body and the pre reflective cogito (Merleau Ponty:1962)

‘Sense of wonder’ (Rachel Carson, 1965)
Experienced Place

• Edward Casey
  - Displacement and implacement
  - Wild places

• Otto F. Bollnow
  Experienced space above mathematical space
Children experiencing places outdoors

Affordance
The function of the landscape
Climbing, Hiding, Sliding, Swinging

The senses
The intertwining place and body
Importance of sensory experiences and the sense of place

The lived body
Narratives
Play and the wild places
The world of wonders

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Island group
Forest Group
Steps in the research process

Ethnographic fieldwork on children’s experiences of nature landscapes and its places in Norwegian Kindergarten groups

Field notes, informal conversations, photo

Narrative analyses of the data, thick descriptions (Geertz, Polkinghorne, Corsaro)

Narrative maps to place the wide range of imaginary play in the landscapes

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Landscapes and places for outdoor education
All the senses involved

Sensory experience

- Visual
- Kinaesthetic
- Gustafactor
- Auditive
- Tactile
- Olifactory
“Humans are tuned for relationship. The eyes, the skin, tongue, ears and nostrils - are all gates where our body receives the nourishment of otherness.”
David Abram 1997
Environmental consciousness and the sense of wonder, two dimensions of environmental learning
The Jellyfishes

How the jellyfish went ashore and how it entered the ocean again.

The group has gone over to the beach and finds a lot of jellyfish that are left on the beach because the tide going back.

Tom: “We have to bring them back to the ocean, if not they will die”

In his hands the boy of four carries blue jellyfishes, one by one. He continues: “Many years ago there were lots of water in the ocean, and then the jellyfish were swimming in the sea, now the ocean has withdrawn. Good luck that we found them!”

The boy and his mates- a group of ten children-boys and girls in the age from two –six years are all working on the rescuing project.
Experiences and relatedness

• “Animate “ relatedness : The animal as us, The Jellyfish wanting to go home or Lilla Billy as a pet

• Intersubjective relatedness: The communication

• Linguistic relatedness : The process of use of language in shared stories
Approaches on “the others”

• Antroposentric; From human perspective

• Biosentric; Other species with intrinsic values

• Value of an experience – get to know
The others as ourselves -experience of other species

- The love of nature is a difficult topic because nature is a contested concept
- Looking at children’s play and exploration of other species brings up a more diverse approach on how they connect and develop relatedness to other animals, animated, Intersubjective and linguistic
Anthropocentric or biosentric?

• Even if children understand the others from their own life-world perspective identification also leads towards an understanding of other species as animals with intrinsic values and needs

• Value of the experience is also links to the existential “sense of wonder” as a driving force to understand the others
Experience and learning

• John Dewey: Experience is not learning, but a stepping stone towards learning

• Experience and reflection

• Socio-cultural learning
Places and the sense of wonders

• ‘If facts are the seeds that later promote knowledge and wisdom, then the emotions and the impressions of the senses are the fertile soil in which the seeds must grow.’

(Carson & Pratt, 1965).

Deep or shallow ecology – ecosohy (Ness, Arne 1973)
The cave
The trolls made of ice

Per: «Do you know what this is?»
Me: «No»
Per: «It is the bones of the trolls prisoners. It is the entire family.» Per takes off his mittens placing his hands on the ice, smiling and nodding his head. «Right it is ice.» More children comes along. The play is going on inside and outside the cave.

After a while one ice-troll is brought down to the fireplace. It transformes into water. Excitement and experiement. Scientific and imaginative explorations
Negotiations in play - clans

The play of the Bakugas developed on a sandy part of the beach. It seemed to be an everlasting story that spring.

The malleability of the material is explored and manipulated in an imaginative and scientific way.

All children involved during the weeks the play went on.
«OUH!!!!!! Now she ruined everything», one girl is running across one of the Bakuga spaceships made of sand.

Leif one of the main builders «Yes, but thet was really fine, now we can build a new one.»
Didactic implications

• Wonders, experiences and exploration on the agenda for the use of nature dominated landscapes and places

• Pedagogues should be able to find places that opens for play and playful learning and to use the landscapes and places for situated learning.
Results

Sensory experiences – the multi-sensoric aspects of the environments impact on children play and learning

Environmental consciousness and the sense of wonder, two dimensions of environmental learning

Didactic implications – Embodied experience exploration through movement connected to children’s learning.

Social interaction and group organization in play, a way of learning for democracy
References

- Jørgensen, K-A (2014): What is going on out there? - What does it mean for children's experiences when the kindergarten is moving their everyday activities into the nature - landscapes and its places, PhD, Universitu of Gothenborg

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