The Pedagogy of Emotions

Exploring Emotional Education in a Swedish Nature-Based Preschool: Building affective bonds with nature

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Abstract

Research has widely approached the benefits and potentials of nature contact and outdoor education on children’s emotional development. There is however little evidence on teachers’ approach and educational methods on emotional education in nature. This paper investigates the potentials of outdoor education for children’s development of emotional competences by exploring in which ways emotional education is included within the didactic methodologies in a Swedish “I Ur Och Skur” nature-based preschool. Through an ethnographic approach the author identified three main educational methods by which emotional education is included within the daily teaching in the outdoors: emotional expressiveness, direct sensory experience with nature and affective social interaction. This study contributes in two main ways: first, it shows how educators approach and include emotional learning in nature spaces as a mean to help children engage affectively with their social and natural world. Second, it highlights and illustrates the potentials of outdoor and emotional education in young children.

Keywords  Outdoor Education, Nature, Emotional Education, Preschool Education, I Ur Och Skur
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I. INTRODUCTION

Learning by playing in nature is the main pedagogic principle of nature-based preschools (Westerlund, 2009; O’Brian & Murray, 2007). These schools present an educational scenario where children’s learning and developmental process takes place through play and social interaction in long-term contact with natural spaces. Here in nature, children find a safe, healthy space to learn about their senses and their emotions, to identify and regulate them. Playing and interacting with their peers in nature, children learn to understand their own feelings and emotions as well as others’, developing a sense of emotional awareness and social empathy (Leslie, 1987; Mayer and Meher, 1996), while creating an affective bond with their close natural spaces (Chawla, 2006; Fjørtoft, 2001; Hinds & Sparks, 2008; Kellert, 2004; Khan, 1997, 1999; Khan & Keller, 2002;). And here comes the magic of nature schooling. Nature-based preschools present a learning scenario in which social and nature interaction takes place simultaneously during regular, long periods of time. Emotions, senses and empathy processes involved in the nature of children’s play and social interactions with peers and teachers, allow children to consider nature as living being, sensitive to other beings. Thus in a stage in which children’s development is in its apogee (Ribes et at., 2005) and children are starting to explore their self, senses and the complexity of their emotions (Lewis, 2011), the development of social and environmental affective processes become interdependent processes within the child’s understanding of its own relative position to the environment; establishing, in consequence, that children’s emotional learning and sensory engagement undeniably constitute centric constructs that lead to an affective bond and a socio-systemic way of thinking of the human-nature relationships. (Änggård, 2010; Hussar & Horvath, 2011; Lithoxoidou et. al; McDonnell, 2013; Moser & Martinsen, 2010;; Phenice & Griffore, 2013; Shultz, 2000; Tam, Lee & Chao, 2013). However, concerning nature based preschools, what is the pedagogy behind this bond? What are the educational practices and methods that lead children to develop such a special, affective bonding with nature?

Over the last decades, a wide body of literature has referred to the benefits of nature contact on children’s psychological development and wellbeing, and how experiencing nature in both formal and non-formal educative contexts has a positive
effect on children’s emotional development and socialization processes (Berger & Lahad, 2010; Collado, Staats & Corraliza, 2013; Collado & Corraliza 2017; Corraliza, Collado & Bethelmy, 2012; Burdette & Whitaker, 2005; Hinds & Sparks, 2008; Khan & Keller, 2002; Mackenzie, Son & Hollenhorst, 2014; Miller, 2007; Sandell & Öhman, 2010; Thompson & Thompson, 2007; Wilson 1995).

At the same time, another significant collection of research has addressed the contributions of nature-based schooling programs to children’s development and learning process (Änggård, 2010; Berger & Lahad, 2010; Cree & McCree, 2012; Fjørtoft, 2001; Lithoxoidou et. al; Moser & Martinsen, 2010), and the role that game and hands on experiences in nature in educative contexts play on children’s development of positive attitudes towards the environment (Chawla, 2009.; Collado, Staats & Corraliza, 2013; Collado & Corraliza, 2017; Miller, 2007; Kals, Schumacher & Montada, 1999; Hinds & Sparks, 2008; Hussar & Horvath, 2008; Lithoxoidou et. al; Maloof, 2006; McDonnell, 2013; Stone, 2009; Tam, Lee & Chao, 2013; ; Singleton, 2010; Wells & Lekies, 2006; Wilson, 1995).

Yet, while regarding children’s affective development, much of the literature has focus on the benefits of children’s contact with nature and its influence on affective and empathy processes leading to empathy, well-being and environmentally friendly behaviors, little has been written about the role and influence of emotional learning or the development of emotional competences in nature / outdoor education programs; neither has the research addressed much about the way on how outdoor school educators manage emotional learning as guiders and facilitators of the means and spaces for this extraordinary process to develop (Davies, 1997).

Following this line, I aim to address children’s emotional bond with nature by exploring and presenting the nature of the educational methods implicated in children’s learning process of emotional competences within a formal outdoor educative context.

The main purpose of this study is to explore in which way emotional education was included within outdoor didactics in a studied nature-based preschool. Therefore, the research seeks to examine the following research questions:

a) Which didactic methods are used by preschool teachers in nature spaces?
b) How do educators integrate emotional education within these methods?

c) How does the inclusion of emotional education in outdoor didactics promote children’s learning and understanding of their emotions and influence the development of empathy towards their peers and the natural world?

It is in the hope that this study may contribute to a better understanding of the important benefits of working on and addressing emotional competence in early years education in nature. I also hope, in last instance, that by presenting an analysis of the educational methods used by teachers in nature to facilitate the children emotional learning and engagement with nature, it may facilitate other educators to understand and see the potentials of experiential education for teaching emotional competence, and to actively make use of the natural surroundings on their schools to develop additional educative methods and activities to promote children’s emotional learning and developmental process and bond affectively with the natural world.
II. COMPREHENSIVE LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Emotional intelligence

1.1. Historical context evolution of the concept and relevance for education

The concept Emotional Intelligence was adopted for the first time in 1990 after the publication of the article Emotional Intelligence in which Peter Salovey and John Mayer (1990) defined Emotional Intelligence (EQ) as the individual's ability to recognize, understand express and manipulate emotions towards an adaptive behavior. The term however, did not become popular until 1995 when Daniel Goleman published his best seller “Emotional intelligence” in which he related the benefits and scope of EQ to the field of administration and business. (Goleman, 2000). Since then, the term Emotional Intelligence has become central for multiple investigations, showing special interest on research on education, being its relationship in educational contexts one of the most popular research lines (Trujillo & Tobar, 2005).

In the mentioned article, the authors criticized the traditional negative conception of emotions in Western societies which considered them as a disturbing, visceral, impulsive and disorganized phenomenon, and if anything, an element of interference in behavior control and reasoning (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). As Salovey and Mayer (1990) stated: "From a Western perspective, emotions are seen as disorganized interruptions of mental activity, so potentially disruptive that they have to be controlled" (p.185). The emotions were, therefore historically considered in scientific tradition an element to be controlled through its repression until a great part of the XX century.

From this perspective, the vision of emotions is reduced to a phenomenon causing the lack of control over reasoning, interfering on cognitive processes basically devoid of conscious purpose (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). However, Salovey and Mayer chose a different approach towards emotions, one connected to a more modern tradition.

A decade previous to Salovey and Mayer’s work, in 1983 and after the publication of his work “Frames of Mind” on multiple intelligences, Gardner (1995) highlighted two types of capabilities which he included within Thorndike’s earlier conception of social intelligence during the 1930’s. Gardner differentiated between
intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligences. Interpersonal intelligence, as the ability to discriminate between people, developing empathy and establishing satisfactory social relationships. Intrapersonal intelligence, referred to one’s ability to perceive, identify and express the different sets of feelings and emotions in an optimal way (Salovey & Mayer 1990; Cassà, 2005). In this sense, following the line of work of Gardner, Salovey and Mayer addressed emotions as an organized adaptive response aiming for the personal and social transformation of the subject, and in 1990 they incorporated, for the first time in the field of psychology, the emotional processes under the term of intelligence; term which, until then, was restricted to cognitive processes. “We view the organized response of emotions as adaptive and as something that can potentially lead to a transformation of personal and social interaction into enriching the experience.” (Salovey & Mayer 1990, p.186).

In their original definition of EQ, they defined the concept in terms of the individual's ability to access and manage the set of mental processes involved in processing the emotional information. Therefore, they proposed EQ as the ability to perceive and express one’s own emotion and others’, in order to be able to regulate and use it to adapt to the environment optimally (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Later, in 1997, they restated their original definition for that of EQ as the capacity that the person possesses and develops to perceive, identify and express both one’s and others’ feelings and emotions, allowing the individual to understand, discriminate and regulate such emotions and therefore, develop the ability to handle this information to guide and direct their own thoughts and actions (Dueñas, 2002), endowing the concept with the capacity to not be dependent on the individual’s intrinsic aspects but to be externally thought.

This proposal was a revolution both in the field of psychology and education, since it showed the influential role of emotions on learning processes (so long ignored), questioning the educational theories and approaches relevant until the end of the XX century, since they prioritized cognitive processes over emotional and social processes (García, 2012).
1.2. Mixed models and skill models: Salovey & Mayer’s theory

It is possible to find in the literature a differentiation between Emotional Intelligence models that define it as a mental ability that allows the individual to manage emotional information towards a better cognitive processing, and those mixed models that adopt a vision of Emotional Intelligence as a combination of mental abilities and personality traits.

The problem with the latter ones is that they offer a much broader and vague vision of EQ since they focus on a set of stable features of behavior and personality variables (Fernandez & Aranda, 2008), which limits the options for development and leaves almost no room for emotional learning. Skill models, however, propose a functionalist conception of EQ in which emotions constitute a positive element in cognitive processes such as problem solving, decision making and reasoning.

As Fernandez-Berrocal & Pacheco (2005) state, EQ within Salovey and Mayer’s theory (1997), can be conceptualized based on four basic skills: emotional perception, emotional facilitation of thought, emotional understanding and emotional regulation.

- emotional perception:

  It is the ability to identify, understand and express both their own feelings and those of others conveniently as well as the states and physiological and cognitive sensations that accompany them. For this, it requires the intervention of attentional processes that help us to orient and decode the emotional signals present in body language, facial or tone of voice.

- emotional facilitation of thought:

  It is the ability of the individual to take into account the emotions when dealing with a problem. This allows us to be aware of how the different emotional processes and affective states influence the cognitive system and our decision-making capacity in such a way that we can use emotional knowledge to direct thought towards an adequate processing of the information to which we we face facilitating the reasoning process.

- emotional understanding:

  It is the ability to identify and discriminate between different emotions in order to understand and recognize them as well as their causes and consequences, the ability
to formulate a set of emotional knowledge that allows us to develop the necessary skills to understand complex states, transitions and contradictions.

- emotional regulation:

It is the most complex capacity. It constitutes the ability to reflect on emotional states and processes, increasing their knowledge in such a way that we are able to manage them throughout life. This skill supposes an advanced level of emotional comprehension in which the individual is able to evaluate the emotional information attending to its usefulness mitigating the negative emotions and enhancing the positive ones.

1.3. Emotional Intelligence and emotional competence

Very tightly related to Emotional Intelligence, is the concept of Emotional Competence. Thou both EQ and EC refer to how people deal with emotions of their own and in interaction to others by establishing a set of skills aiming to effectively adapt to the environment, Emotional Intelligence is view to consider the person’s usage of certain aspect of cognitive thought processes to aim this goal while on the other hand Emotional Competence considers the person’s degree of proficiency on one aspect of Emotional Intelligence, the ability to correctly recognize, manage and use emotions, speaking to the degree of self-regulation and awareness (Seal & Andrews- Brown, 2010). Therefore, EQ builds the foundation of EC while EC functions as an expression of EQ.

Denham (2007) state that emotional competence is central to the children’s ability to socially interact and form successful relationships, and identifies the main components that impact preschool-aged children: “(a) awareness of emotional experience, including multiple emotions; (b) discernment of own, and others’, emotional states; (c) emotion language usage; (d) empathic involvement in others' emotions; (e) regulation of own aversive or distressing emotions; (f) realization that inner and outer emotional states may differ; and (g) awareness that social relationships are in part defined by communication of emotions” (p.4).

Both concepts are not excluding but complementary in education as both share the focus on common component of self-awareness and its development, establishing that as EQ evolves so does the ability of the individual to recognize and evaluate patterns of emotional response and grow self-awareness.
1.4. Implications for education

As it has been said above, much of the attention to the learning process in educational contexts until the late XX century was focused on the individual’s cognitive processes over the emotional ones which were considered just relevant from within the personal dimension of the individual (García, 2012) in such a way that the competence to promote the affective development of the child was lead to parents and therapists and not to educators (Liccioni & Soto, 2003). However, approaching education as a process aimed to the integral development of the student, it is necessary to pay attention to the influence of emotional aspect on the learning process.

Skill theories like Salovey & Mayer’s, conceive Emotional Intelligence as a dynamic system of intelligences linked to one’s capacity to express and understand feelings and emotions in constant influence on human behavior, centered on the ability to process and handle relevant emotional information, independently of our personality traits, facilitating thought processes, fostering social interactions and promoting the individual adaptation to the environment and, in final instance considering it an adaptive, learnable capacity (Mayer, Salovey, Caruso & Cherkasskiy, 1999; Salovey, & Mayer, 1997).

Therefore, if we aim to understand the importance of approaching Emotional Intelligence’s development within educational contexts, it is necessary to reflect not only on the capacities that encompass the term EQ but also what is its influence regarding the developmental processes during the early years stage, exploring how emotional development occurs, what is the role of emotional education in an educational context, what is its influence on the learning process or what is the role of the educator (García, 2012).
2. Child Emotional development

2.1. Emotional development in the early years stage

Humans are fundamentally emotional and social creatures (Imordino & Damasio, 2007) and this emotional, socio-affective development begins as soon as we arrive in this world and we are exposed to the infinity of external stimuli from the surrounding environment.

During the first six months of life, the experience and emotional expression of the baby is intense. They are sensitive to the voice and facial expression of other individuals and respond to this stimulation through the imitation of gestures and sounds generally of the adult with whom they create the first bonds of attachment (Jeta, 1998).

Before reaching the first year of life the baby no longer requires the stimulation of the adult but is already able to manifest its own emotional states (Ribes, Agulló, Filella & Soldevila, 2005) and by then the whole set of primary, basic emotions has already developed (Lewis, Stanger & Weiss 1989). By 12 months, the baby is already able to express the emotions of joy, sadness, anger, disgust and surprise; the first step towards the understanding of him/herself as a social being.

However, it is not until after between the first year of life and half of the second that an elaborate series of cognitive skills start to take part so that the child develops a sense of "self" in reference to its environment which, consequently, will lead the child to develop its emotional self-consciousness, allowing access to a whole set of complex emotions; the self-conscious emotions (Lewis et. at, 1989).

2.2. Emotional development as a social process: the formation of the emotional self-consciousness

Therefore, from the moment of birth, cognitive and emotional development begins within a context of social interaction between the baby, his/her environment and the figures of attachment that surround the baby. This way, the development of emotional self-consciousness results hand to hand with a set of cognitive and socialization processes that allow the child to develop an awareness and notion of self
According to Lewis (et al. 1989; 2011) self-awareness follows a developmental process, emerging between the first 15 and 24 months of life; and, having developed the cognitive capacity to reflect on the self, the emotions of shame, envy and empathy result as the child’s ability to consider him-self in interaction with others.

However, it is between the 3 and 6 years of age, and as a consequence of the rapid advance in the development of language, that the great milestones of affective development emerge (Ribes et al., 2005). In this period and through adult mediation, the child begins to interpret the verbal and body language of others, expanding their emotional vocabulary, which progressively will lead the child to identify and understand their own and others' emotions, developing further the sense of empathy (Lewis, 1992). In this stage, the influence of the social context begins to increase and the affective and social processes take on a greater dimension. The child then begins to incorporate the standards, rules and goals of the culture and society in which it operates, which allows him/her to see him/her self and the elements of his environment in relation to the shared social system. As a result, a final set of more complex emotions is developed, such as social shame, guilt, pride and ubris (Lewis, 2011), meaning that the child is now able to consider its own behaviors and attitudes as well as those of others in relation to a shared system of values, beliefs and expectations (Proshansky, Fabian & Kaminoff, 1983), a key point for the development of future personal, social and environmental behaviors, beliefs, attitudes and values. "All emotional life takes place in a social environment" (...) so “as we move from early emotions to self-conscious emotions, socialization plays an increasing role in determining what situation elicit what emotions, as well as how they are expressed. One might think of development of emotional life as requiring an ever increasing socialization influence "(Lewis, 2011, p 4).

Following the line of emotional development, Sutton-Smith (2003) outlined the role that children pretense play plays on children’s emotional learning and development. He presented a view of children’s play as a result of the emergence of new emotional systems for which it functions as a “dialect mediator” between the development of basic and complex emotions in such a way that through pretense play children would not only
be able to represent the social rules and values of the society (think on children playing “to be a family”), but also be able to express and represent social interaction contexts and emotions without necessarily experiencing them. Then play is to function as an opportunity to represent emotional experiences and develop emotion regulation skills by enabling children to symbolically represent, recognize, express and manage the different existing feelings and emotions in themselves and others, its causes and consequences through a social negotiation with peers (Bretherton, 1989; Fein, 1989; Howes & Matheson, 1992 in Hoffmann & Russ, 2011).

"The recognition of one's emotions is the alpha and the omega of the emotional competence. Only when you learned to perceive emotional signals, categorize them and accept them, is it possible to direct them and channel them properly" (Jeta, 1998, p 7).

Perception and emotional identification constitute the fundamental pillar onto which emotional consciousness and emotional competence development stand for. Learning to recognize and manage emotions intelligently is therefore the first step towards the integration of the child into the social and cultural system of which he/she will become part and which will define his mental representation of the world. In this way, early childhood education as a social context of development between 3 and 6 years constitutes a fundamental space to address the education and development of emotional competencies that allow the child to develop emotionally and socially in a positive way.

2.3. Emotional education

The learning process is largely the result of processes of social interaction. The vast majority, not to say the totality of learning, occurs in social contexts such as the family or the school, therefore learning cannot be reduced to a merely cognitive or individual function (Pozo, 2008). It is the process through which the individual internalizes and incorporates the culture in which we develop through the accumulation of socially shared and represented experiences. These experiences as cultural constructions cannot occur therefore within any other context but the social environment from where the information is managed and constructed towards shared objectives by a society (García, 2012), and the same way, because of a product of a
social construction these experiences are inseparable from the emotional processes of the individuals that construct them (Bisquerra, 2005).

According to Denham (2007) and Denham, Zinser & Bailey (2011) a deficit on emotion knowledge and the capacity of understand, express and regulate emotions and situations is linked to unsuccessful social interactions and behaviours and following this line, he argues previous research on preschoolers show how this lack of emotional understanding leads to social conflictive and aggressive child behaviors (Denham, Blair & DeMulder, 2002; Denham et al., 2003; Hughes & Dunn, 1998). As the author states, some children are advantageous in developing better cognitive and language skills allowing them to be better predisposed to communicate their feelings and emotions or shift attention from a distressing situation being more capable of regulate their emotions. However, many children, despite their more or less predisposition to develop emotional competences, require intentional help from their adult social context to learn about the world of emotions and develop the capacities to effectively and healthy respond to it (Denham, 2007). “Therefore,” -she pleads- “because of the increasing complexity of young children’s emotionality and the demands of their social world- with “so much going on” emotionally- some organized emotional gatekeeper must be cultivated.” (Denham, 2007, p 8).

The use of social and emotional skills is useful and frequent in the school context. Both students and teachers have to use these skills to promote the adaptive success of students in school (Fernández Berrocal, 2005). At the same time, recent research in neuroscience that outlines the influences between the social, emotional and cognitive human functioning, suggests how emotions influence cognitive processes of attention, memory or decision making that have a determinant role in the learning process, having the power to open new exciting possibilities in our conception of how affective emotional processes impact in education (Immordino & Damasio, 2007). Therefore, educating in emotional intelligence and emotional competences is a fundamental task in the educational field. It is fundamental to educate through programs that contain and explicitly highlight the set of emotional skills and competencies that constitute EQ, through its practice and implementation as a natural response from the individual's repertoire (Fernandez & Aranda, 2008).
"To educate in emotionality means validating emotions, empathizing with others, helping identify and name the emotions that are being felt, setting limits, teaching acceptable forms of expression and relationship with others, loving and accepting oneself, respecting others and propose strategies to solve problems”. (Cassá, 2005, p 156).

Therefore, including emotional education in the school context from an early age means guiding the students towards the development of an emotional awareness (Ribes et al., 2005), making available to the student a system of skills and knowledge about emotions that allow him/her to explore and reflect on him/her self, others and his/her relationship with the environment that surrounds them, promoting the development of personal and social well-being (Bisquerra, 2000). Introducing emotional education in the school is to create a bridge of understanding between affective and cognitive developmental processes; a nexus that allows addressing child development as an integral process.

3. Nature Schooling: school, the natural world and child development

3.1. Self-conscious emotions, referential self and the eco-psychological self:

To understand how emotional intelligence education promotes the development of this process, we must go back to the point where the child constructs the self concept in relation to his/her environment, to incorporate a new term originated in the field of environmental psychology, the *ecopsychological-self*. The concept emerges as a synthesis of psychology and ecology intending to embrace a vision of a permeable human “self”, interconnected with all the living beings in this world and refers to the child’s natural, innate ability to develop and construct this notion of self in relation to the context within is born, not only social but ecological, including therefore child development within the natural world (Barrows, 1995; Phenice & Gifford, 2003).

As said above, by the first 3 years the child begins to develop further in their social environment, incorporating in his self concept the beliefs, goals and values shared by the socio-cultural system in which him/her develops. Self-consciousness or sense of oneself as a social identity is then developed as a result of a set of social interaction
processes that allow the child to differentiate him/her self as an independent individual, belonging to a social system. However, the self, argue Prohansky et al. (1983), is not only based on social interactions but also through the relationships the child establish with the different physical elements within which he/she daily interacts. Therefore, if this phenomenon of self awareness and self construction is produced in isolation from the interaction with the natural physical environment, it can be expected that the development of this sense of the self will grow disconnected from the natural world, preventing the child from understanding him/her self as a part member of a natural system (Phenice & Griffore, 2003).

Following this line, Shultz (2000) argues that the development of pro-environmental attitudes and behaviors is intimately linked "to the degree to which people identify as part of the environment" (p.1) in such way that if the separation between the child’s personal development, the implicated psycho-affective processes and the natural world is maintained, the view of nature goes on to acquire an utilitarian value, external to the individual, considered as something that has to be controlled and dominated (Phenice & Griffore, 2003).

As Phenice & Griffore, (2003) point out: “Children's educational experiences can promote the conception of the child as part of the natural world (...) Therefore, young children's educational experiences can foster the conception of the child as part of the natural world” (p.169). However, argue the authors, the problem lies in the few opportunities of children to have direct experiences with nature, which leads to a progressive loss of the sense of connection with nature (Phenice & Griffore, 2003), Furthermore,

“the important role of preschool professionals can not be overemphasized in nurturing the development of a child's healthy ecopsychological self. Helping children to see the interconnectedness and relationship of the self as a part of the web of nature is essential. Positive interactions within nature, as within families, help children respect and care for their environment. When children have a strong conception of relatedness to the earth, there is likely to be a stronger sense of bonding with the self”

Therefore, promoting the development of emotional intelligence in children's education in nature, allows the child to develop the ability to understand himself and his emotions in relation to other beings. Moreover, the fact that educational experiences take part, daily in the same natural setting (or settings) allows to develop a sense of familiarity with the place awakening a process of affections towards others and towards the close natural environment (Ånggård, 2010).

**Nature as the classroom**

"Schools, as social institutions, are in an advantageous position to directly influence behavior, modify attitudes and develop guidelines and principles that affect the masses. Outdoor education designed to develop greater reflection and understanding about ecological relationships and the appreciation of humanity's responsibility for the quality of the environment must therefore be an integral part of the fabric from which the curriculum is designed." (Knapp & Smith, 2011)

Therefore, while access to nature is declining, nature schooling presents an educational approach in which the natural world is included by means of children’s regular experience of it within an educational context, offering a rich learning environment for the child’s physical, affective and cognitive development and well-being (Johnson, 2007). An approach where the teacher has the function of guiding the child in his own process of self-discovery, helping him/her to connect with his/her natural surroundings through the children’s own curiosity and exploration of the natural environment (Davies, 1997; Knapp & Smith, 2011). And "if nature's deficit disorder (Louv 2005) is the plague of our time, then education in nature can be the remedy" stated Knapp and Smith, (2011, p.)

If conventional schools function as a context of social interaction, schools that include the real, tangible natural world and authentic experiences and situations in nature within its educational didactics, represent an integrative proposal of human development by including both the physical environment in which these relationships occur throughout life and the rest of beings that coexist in and compose this environment. Therefore, children not only learn to understand themselves as part of a system of human social and cultural interaction, but as part of a system of interaction
and interdependence between the different species and elements that coexist in the natural world. In 2010, Ånggård carried out a study on a Swedish outdoor school where she explored the different ways the preschool made use of nature. In the study she argued that when nature was used a place where to eat, sleep, socialize and feel safe and cozy, then nature was considered and felt a homelike space (Ånggård, 2010). Here in Nature, the concept of classroom takes on a different meaning. It is not a space designed specifically for human development, it is a space that develops itself; a space from within the child takes an active part and next to which (not from) it develops. The classroom here is a living space in which the child develops not as a human being but as a living being.

3.2. Affective processes in outdoor and experiential education: towards a connection with the natural world. Awakening empathy for nature

Experiential education is defined as both a methodology and a philosophy of learning through direct experience, reflection on that experience and its application to new situations as a cyclical process of transformation of the experience (AEE, 2004; Knapp, 1992; Kolb, 1984). Following this line, outdoor education emerges as an educational approach of learning through outdoor experiences; in which outside the traditional classroom (being the natural environment one example of outdoor setting) the child finds a whole laboratory to explore and develop awareness about the world around him (Hammerman, Hammerman & Hammerman, 2001); An approach which main objective is to offer meaningful learning experiences (Knapp, 1996, in Woodhouse & Knapp, 2000).

However, not all educational experience taking place in nature involves developing a connection with the natural world. Thus, the educative experience should offer to the student opportunities for an active participation in direct experience with nature in such a way that this experience awakens a set of affective processes making it significant for the apprentice.

In this line, Dewey (1995) already approached the importance of experiential education as an affective vehicle with the student's close natural environment, advocating how the experience outside the classroom included itself a set of elements
(natural, geographical, historical) linked to the past of the specific natural setting; elements that, through the direct experience of the student, would allow children to connect with their natural surroundings, "their particular corners of the world" (Woodhouse & Knapp, 2000, p 2).

One of the critiques that may arise, however, is that through the development of the feeling of attachment and care for the nearby natural environment, pro-environmental attitudes and behaviors would consequently develop locally, which, despite being a positive result, would not be favoring the development of empathy for nature as a global system.

Stern and Dietz (1994 in Shultz, 2000) identify three types of environmental consciousness rooted in the value system of the individual: egoistic, socio-altruistic and biospheric. The first ones, egoistic values, are associated with the tendency of the individual to protect the environment to the extent in which the damage affects him/her personally. The socio-altruistic values refer to a sense of environmental protection not only as a result of perception of personal threat but also in relation to the costs associated to the collective social system. Finally, the biospheric values of protection and care of nature are based on the individual’s perception that the damage or threat affects the whole set of living beings; human and non-human. In this sense, Shultz (2000) argues that different environmental values are based on different motivational forces originated by a process of social identification and linked to the individual's notion of himself as dependent or interdependent individual of other living beings:

"From this perspective, the concern for environmental problems is an extension of the interconnection between two people (Bragg, 1996; Weigert, 1997). We can be interconnected with other people, or more generally, we can be interconnected with all living beings. Indeed, non-scientific literature is replete with references to being "in contact with," "connected with," or "being one with" nature (Hertsgaard, 1999; Nabhan and Trimble, 1994)", (Shultz, 2000, p. 394 ).

And he adds that although the three types of values can be predictors of positive environmental attitudes, it is more likely that those individuals holding a biospheric values’ system, by which they identify themselves as part of an interconnected natural system, would develop a kind of environmental awareness related to the development of
global pro-environmental attitudes and behaviors (Shultz, 2000); so if we are to educate towards the development of affective engagement for the natural environment as a whole, then education should approximate the development of empathy for nature through a perspective that allows us to relate and expand direct experience in the local environment within a global system.

3.3. Teaching in nature

3.3.1. Sensory experience and Emotional education

As expressed by Cassà (2005), educating in emotionality is not limited to the development of activities. To educate in emotionality consists in approaching the daily didactics in such a way that it allows the students to live their emotions and to explore them in their amplitude. Educational methods must therefore not be reduced to the emotional development of the student, but must include the development of the educator's own abilities during the teaching process. "How an actual entity is constitutes what that actual entity is" (Whitehead, 1978, in Knapp & Smith, 2011, p 45). It is not just a matter of addressing what is offered but the way in which it is offered. And since the teacher is the facilitator and mediator during the student learning process, it is important to pay attention to the attitudes and forms of expression that are used daily to educate the students and how emotional experiences are lived together in the educational context (Cassà, 2005).

Within the educational methods or didactics of outdoor teaching, two fundamental processes for learning are therefore proposed: exploration and discovery (Hammerman et al., 2001). These two processes are mainly influenced and directed by the child’s ability to experiment with the senses and through the body. In this sense, Dewey’s “learning by doing or learning under the skin” (Szczepanski, Nelson & Dahlgren, 2006, p 5), understood as learning by experiencing the world, should be translated to learning by moving, hearing, touching, tasting, smelling, observing and, moreover, learning by feeling. “Our first teachers, are our feet, hands and our eyes” (Rosseau (nd) in Hammerman et al., 2001, p 1).
Emotions and senses are interconnected very tightly. Moreover, emotions are directly connected to the sensory experience and our interpretation of it. They have the power to boost the parts of the brain responsible of the sensory experience. They result from the perception of a set of psycho physiological events induced by a real or imaginary situation which has the capacity of eliciting specific responses and changes in the body and the mind, and modifying perception (Vuilleminier, 2005). From an evolutionary perspective, the brain has evolved to allow the organism to cope with uncertainty by developing the capacities to “read the body’s condition and respond accordingly” through emotions; and “In the brains of higher animals and people, the richness is such that they can perceive the world through sensory processing and control their behavior” (Immordino & Damasio, 2007, p6). Thus, the development of an affective response and attachment to a natural space may be elicited by a previous association of it with a pleasant sensory experience which, likewise, can elicit a positive emotion towards the specific space.

But sensory experience does more than help us explore and understand the world around us. It allows understanding our feelings and reactions, its causes and consequences and in last instance managing them into functional and adaptative responses. “Out of the basic need to survive and flourish derives a way of dealing with thoughts, with ideas, and eventually with making plans, using imagination, and creating. At their core, all of these complex and artful human behaviors, the sorts of behaviors fostered in education, are carried out in the service of managing life within a culture and, as such, use emotional strategies. Emotion, then, is a basic form of decision making, a repertoire of know-how and actions that allows people to respond appropriately in different situations” (Damasio, 1999, in Immordino & Damasio, 2007, p 6). Therefore, paying attention to the feelings and emotions that sensory experience arises in one’s whole self (body and mind) when we touch, smell, hear, etc., plays an essential role in perceiving and becoming aware of one’s emotional capacities, its causes and consequences; being this extended to the understanding of how a person processes the sensory and emotional information towards specific attitudes and behaviors like those of nature protection, nurture or attachment, changes involving attention processes, memory and learning processes which are of great relevance and concern for education (Immordino & Damasio, 2007).

As an example, from Änggård’s study (2010) she wrote:
“Something that permeates all three ways of presenting and using nature (...) is a wish to create a feeling for nature in children. Such a feeling is thought to emerge in the nature classroom when the children learn the names of plants and animals, these things become visible to them, and a world that earlier was invisible and undifferentiated becomes accessible. When children learn about what grows and lives in the forest, and when they learn to understand nature’s recycling process, the conditions needed for them to acquire a feeling for their environment are established. Further, there is a notion that the children will experience a feeling of wholeness and harmony through sensory experiences in natural environments—like feeling the wind and the warmth of the sun on their skin and listening to the wind in the trees and the warble of the birds” (p. 22)

Therefore, to educate in emotionality through direct experience within the natural world is to encourage children to experience themselves and their abilities at the same time as experiencing the world. Touching, observing, listening, smelling, tasting. It is to guide the child through his/her own sensory experience to perceive the social environment and physical environment, and in turn perceive consciously the world in order to understand it and to understand his/her position within.

What happens, however, is that unlike social interactions most of the child’s interactions with the physical environment occur indirectly, that is, without consciously being aware of the variety of elements influencing the response to the physical world. Among those, feelings (Prohansky et al., 1983).

In this line, Szczepanski et al. (2006) criticize the lack of the child’s physical action and active role within its learning process, and the physical context in traditional schools:

“When pupils make their own observations and gain their own experiences, which is typical of learning in outdoor environments, they acquire the status of subjects (...) The classroom situation, rather, reduces the pupils to objects since their own observations play a very marginal role.(...) In today’s classroom, the educational goal is, rather, removed from its context and the reality in which the children’s bodies exist (...) The traditional classroom does not relate in a dynamic way to the life the child feels in its body. In this way, we are separated from the life world, the contact with objects and life itself, (...)”
The learning body in movement increases the status of the sensory experience’s path to knowledge in the learning process” (p.6)

Both Pestalozzi and Geddes, believed education must focus on the child's integral development and, therefore, the authors affirmed that formal education implies activity, affective and cognitive processes and should be addressed in the learning process “in that order of priority since in that order they are developed” (Geddes, 1994, in Knapp & Smith, 2011 p 35).

In this line, one of the fundamental values of outdoor education is the relationship between the educator and the apprentice. Emotional competence and the world of social interactions are result and consequence of each other, closely interdependent, therefore, emotion’s function is dependent on the given meaning of its social expression and experience (Denham, 2007)

3.3.2. The role of the teacher in the outdoor classroom

For authors such as Dewey, Montessori, Rousseau or Pestalozzi (Knapp & Smith, 2011), parents of experiential education, the educational and learning process must be centered on the apprentice, as he/she is a director of his own learning process through his natural inclination towards curiosity and discovery. In this sense, the educator plays the role of facilitator of the experience and guide of the learning process of the student, offering an educational environment for children exploration and social interaction through play (Bredekamp & Rosegrant, 1992; New, 1992) where encouraging the child’s to develop his/her own ideas by guiding him/her to find answers and make sense of his discoveries and ideas; allowing the child to develop his/her natural tendency towards growth and moral development (Knapp & Smith, 2011).

The teacher’s action also plays an influential role on children’s emotional development and learning, promoting dialogue and children’s self-control by working as mediators on children conflict (David, 1990; Fleer, 1992; Jones & Reynolds, 1992). As Davies (1997) points out, the teacher’s participation on children’s activity in outdoor preschools may vary, however, is common that most teachers adopt the role of observer (more or less active), monitoring children’s activity and intervening when safety hazard arises or children call for teacher’s assistance or attention, or, during conflict, when the teacher interprets the situation can be managed by children and needs
the intervention/mediation of the teacher. Moreover, she argued that emotional support from teachers play an essential role in encouraging children to take part in challenging activities to increase their self-esteem but also allowing them the freedom to wander, wonder and engage in the activities and places they found interesting. Foran (2005), who explored teachers’ experiences of outdoor pedagogies in Nova Scotia, found that among leaders was common to describe the teaching experience outdoors in terms of emotions. She found that most of the teachers referred to a feeling of intensity when working outdoors as a result from the whole set of elements involved in the experience: the excitement of the hands-on experience, the uncertainty, the student growth, etc. A magnification of the learning experience resulting from the emotional experience; and when asked about the student-teacher relationship outdoors, leaders also referred to a deep, intense emotional connection between the child and the teacher driven by the shared experience outdoors "I felt their cold, their fear, their discomfort, their doubt, and their depression when they said they could not make it." (Foran, 2005, p 156). Likewise, Mc Donnell (2013) found in her interviews that a large majority of the interviewees expressed their sense of connection to nature through descriptions of their experience in nature in terms of feelings and an affective, deep emotional immersion linked to the experiences of outdoor activity with parents, teachers and peers during their childhood.

When young children develop a positive relationship with their teachers they develop a sense of emotional trust and feel safe and secure in the school environment (Sansone, 2014) allowing the child to establish a safe base from which to explore the learning opportunities within the classroom environment (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2001, p. 50). Accordingly, Denham, Zinsser and Bailey (2011) argue that adults within the affective social context of the child (family, teachers) play an essential role in the development of children’s emotional competences both acting as modeling figures on emotional expressiveness and reaction, and providing affective climates that promote children’s positive and effective display of emotion. Emotion discussion and child-teacher conversations about feelings contributes to children’s emotional learning, awareness, expression and regulation by allowing them space to develop perspective reflection on their feelings and emotional states while helping them to formulate “a coherent body of knowledge about emotional expressions, situations and causes” (Denham, Cook, & Zoller, 1992; Denham & Grout, 1992; Denham, Zoller et al., 1994;
Dunn, Brown, & Beardsall, 1991; Dunn, Slomkowski et al.,1995; Eisenberg et al., 1998; Gottman et al., 1997; Zahn-Waxler, Radke-Yarrow, & King, 1979, in Denham, 2007, p 28).

Thou generally, Outdoor teaching is conceptualized in terms of its unstructured nature (Änggård, 2010; Davies, 1997;; Foran, 2005), the teacher’s main role on providing opportunities for children’s integral development makes it essential to include emotional learning in their pedagogies.

As Johnson (2007) points out:

“At a time when children’s play in natural environments is declining (Rivkin 1990 quoted in Herrington and Studtmann, 1998), the physical environment’s influence on learning is to a large extent not considered or clearly understood (Cosco & Moore 1999) (…) The overwhelming weight of evidence from science, psychology and education clearly demonstrates that where natural environments are accessible to children they afford children significant physical, cognitive and emotional benefits” (Wells, 2000)” (p.298).

Therefore, nature-based/ outdoor schools provide a rich environment for children learning development. This educational approach responds to the child’s interest and necessities by offering a wide space for children to experiment and explore their body and their senses through the pedagogy of free play and exploration (Änggård, 2010) in varied opportunities for cooperation and communication with teachers and peers (Mirrahimi et al., 2011)


Greatly influenced by the large Nordic culture of appreciation for and identification within nature (Änggård, 2017; Beery, 2011; Sandell & Öhman, 2010) and Rousseau’s conceptions of nature’s influence on child development and learning, nature has been playing a significant role in Nordic countries’ views and methods on education since the late 50’s (Änggård, 2010; Änggård, 2017; Beery, 2011) and as a result of the
perception of nature experiences as belonging to the realm and desired outcomes of education (Beery, 2011), outdoor teaching has been taking part of the pedagogies in many schools and preschools since the mid 90’s (Änggård, 2010; 2017) with a long tradition of providing children with opportunities for free play, exploration and discovery in nature environments (Änggård, 2010, 2017; Beery, 2011; Mårtensson, 2011, in Lysklett, 2017)

The “I Ur Och Skur” pedagogy (“better translated as “all weathers” or “rain or shine”) emerges during the 80’s in cooperation with Swedens’ largest national outdoor association “Friluftsfrämjandet” (Änggård, 2010) and Frohm’s “Skogsmulle”. This organization is based on the Swedish cultural concept of ‘Friluftsliv” (translated as open-air life), a term describing both an outdoor philosophy and a lifestyle with the final aim of developing “a personal relationship to nature from one’s own experiences’ (Öhman, 2010 in Beery, 2011, p. 96). In 1957, Gösta Frohm, member of Friluftsfrämjandet develops the “Skogsmulle”, a fictional, mythical forest creature living in the woods, created to capture young children’s imagination and curiosity and help children learn about and engage with nature through their own sense of wonder in nature (Beery, 2011). In consequence, the organization starts to become actively involved in environmental education (Beery, 2011) and nowadays, not only has largely been working towards the promotion of an outdoor life philosophy to provide people with the experiences and opportunities to enjoy and engage with nature (Hendersson 2001) but one of its main milestones has been to develop a pedagogical approach for preschools and schools in accordance to the national curriculum goals and guidelines (Westerlund et al., 2009) including nature and outdoor education “as a basis for childrens’ physical, emotional, social and intellectual development” (Sandell & Öhman, 2010, p 121).

4.2. The Pedagogy

The first I Ur och Skur preschool was established in Sweden in 1985 and its pedagogy is based on the principle that in nature children find the necessary tools for a satisfactory development (Beery, 2011; Westerlund, 2009). Quoting Ånggård (2010) “One central idea is that children should learn by having fun, by playing, singing and fantasizing about the animals and plants of the forest”. Following this premise, I Ur Och Skur has adopted the teaching methods of Friluftsfrämjandet, and the pedagogical
practices within the pedagogical approach are based on the conviction that children learn from and develop a close awareness and understanding of the relationships in the natural world by actively interacting with and making use of nature and its different changes all year through its seasons and climate (Ånggård, 2010; Lysklett, 2017; Westerlund, 2009).

4.3. Didactical approach and teacher’s role

Despite the weather conditions, children and teachers spend most of the day outdoors in natural environments, integrating nature within the preschool’s everyday life through “a bodily, experienced interconnection established through the habit of working and playing out-of-doors” (Sandell & Öhman, 2010, p 122.)

The pedagogy stems from the premise that children’s learning process is distinct for each child, following different paths and tied to different conditions for its development, setting, therefore, the child in a central position towards its learning process where children are the active directors of their learning by taking the initiative on their play and play situation (Ånggård, 2010; Westerlund, 2009). Accordingly, the children’s own experiences become central to the didactical approach aiming to stimulate the child’s interest by encouraging them to explore in nature (Ånggård, 2010; Nilsson & Sommarström, 2009; Sandell & Öhman, 2010; Westerlund, 2009).

In order to arouse children’s interest and learning, sensory experience and dramatization play a main, fundamental role in the teaching-learning methods.

To touch, to smell, to see, to hear or taste become the principal didactical tool to experience and discover the natural world actively using their entire body. The inclusion of dramatization of expression and talk in teacher-child communication becomes a key point in rising the child’s interest. When educators use drama as a teaching tool in storytelling, songs, games and child exploration, they stimulate the curiosity of the child and provide inspiration and desire for children’s learning and play (Ånggård, 2010; Nilsson & Sommarström, 2009; 2010; Westerlund, 2009), fostering children’s physical, cognitive and affective engagement towards the object observed or the story told.

Educators are responsible to provide learning and socialization opportunities for children based on children’s interest (Nilsson & Sommarström, 2009). Nature becomes integrated in daily activities including drama, creativity, movement, fairy tales, songs and play (Ånggård, 2010; Westerlund, 2009).
The child is considered a competent individual physically, emotionally and cognitively, active in its learning process (Nilsson & Sommarström, 2009; Westerlund, 2009). Therefore, the role of the educators is clearly established within the organization’s pedagogical approach as a facilitator of the child’s own experience, allowing free time and space for the child to discover and experience outdoors without being interrupted. Educators are meant to provide the opportunities for children’s concrete direct experiences with the natural world, encouraging children to use their senses, body and feelings to explore and wonder and develop their own, genuine experience, enjoying nature, creating good feelings and lifelong memories. (Westerlund, 2009). Also, educators as responsible adults, must offer a good role model to the child.

A positive approach to nature is one of the pillars of the organization. A main intention is to provide children with a sense of respect, care and joy for nature, therefore the educational approach aims to promote children’s sense of environmental concern and responsibility for the natural world, providing an understanding of the interdependence between humans and nature. In sum, the educator’s role is to guide the children through its own learning and developmental process as a co-explorer of the natural world. (Westerlund, 2009).

Add synthesis
III. METHODOLOGY

1. Methods of research

An ethnographic/participatory observation approach was employed in order to answer the research questions. Ethnography as a methodological approach to data collection implies the researcher to get immerse for a period of time within a social setting as an observer to study and appreciate the culture of the social group being studied (Bryman, 2012). However, Bryman (2012) reminds us that although ethnography and participant observation are similar approaches to data collection, ethnography makes reference to both the research process and its written outcome, within which participatory observation is included “to encapsulate the notion of ethnography as a written product of ethnographic research”. Hence, as the study intended to explore the teacher’s role, perspectives and teaching methods within a particular school I decided to take the role of participant observer.

2. Collection of Data

According to Bernard (2011), participatory observation is an ethnographic research approach in which a researcher immerses in the field as insider or outsider observer observing and collecting aspects of life around them. In most cases, these observers collect qualitative data such as field notes, videos, photographs, audio recording, and transcriptions of interviews, however, in many cases, observers may collect additional quantitative data through surveys, questionnaires or direct observation. (Bernard, 2011). As I intended to collect data on teacher’s work and perspectives on emotional education outdoors, I could have just develop a questionnaire and open survey from the literature research to collect the data. However, teaching is a subjective relationship between the teacher and the learner (Penlert, 2016), therefore it had sense to me to approach the research from a closer, more humanistic point of view.

My inclusion as a participant observer in the research was therefore an argued, thoughtful decision. As the study’s aim was not to produce a list of activities and methods to work emotions in nature but to explore in depth how professionals work in the field, for the collected data to be relevant and the study and the analysis to be
significant I needed therefore to observe it firsthand. As Bernard (2011) points out, “participant observation gives you an intuitive understanding of what’s going on in a culture and allows you to speak with confidence about the meaning of data. It extends both the internal and the external validity of what you learn from interviewing and watching people. In short, participant observation helps you understand the meaning of your observations” (2011, p.286).

In this line, I took the role of a participant observer in an Outdoor Preschool in, Sweden, for a week and the data I collected during my research consisted, of a combination of field notes from my observations, informal conversations and interview with the teacher, videos and photographs in order to provide a relevant, significant picture of the experiences of the participants in the study.

Likewise, as I intended to collect data on teachers’ perspectives on didactic methods, it was essential to run an additional interview post observations.

In order to get to know the school and the perspectives of the teacher from the preschool where I did my observations I chose to run a semi-structured interview with her. Unlike unstructured ones, semi-structured interviews allowed me to follow a general script and cover a list of topics relevant for the study (Bernard, 2012). An unstructured interview would have probably provide many additional interesting information, but most likely not related to the topic and, consequently, useless for the research. In this line, semi-structured interviews gave me the opportunity to control the direction of the interview while approaching the interviewee through a comfortable method. I wanted to keep an open space for dialogue between the interviewee and myself as interviewer without giving the impression of exerting excessive control over the interview. Unlikely, structured interviews would have been an impersonal method to approach the interviewee, limiting the answers to specific options and not letting the, probably so needed, space enough to express their perspectives on education and their methods. To have chosen structured interviews would have then been somehow, within the consideration of educational field experts, so much of a mistaken approach both towards the educators and to the children’s learning process by limiting it all to a standardized approach. Particularly to this study where the main aim of the research was focus on teachers’ perspectives, it would have been ironical and pointless to not allow
space enough for the professionals to express themselves and for me to explore these perspectives properly

2.1. Participants

For the first part of the study, from April 9th to 14th, I participated with the preschool group aged 3 to 6, therefore I was able to observe a total of 25 children and 4 pedagogues. I chose this sample as it was the most relevant age group to study according to the milestones of children’s development of emotional awareness (Ribes et al., 2005; Lewis, 1992).

Among the present pedagogues, I mainly focused on one’s work: the main leader and I Ur Och Skur pedagogue within the group. Hence, for the second part of the study and based on my observations and experience for the time spent with the group, I interviewed the teacher in order to collect relevant data on her perspectives on outdoor education’ didactic methods and children’s development and learning process.

2.2. Location

The research took place at, a preschool which I was familiarized with and had the opportunity to visit during my masters’ studies. It is an I Ur Och Skur preschool, one of hundreds of outdoor schools in Sweden which are conducted in cooperation with Swedens’ largest national outdoor association Friluftsfrämjandet (Änggård, 2010).

As Bernard (2011) points out, anthropological field research may take traditionally long periods of time due to the necessary time to immerse into the study field, culture or people’s lives. “It can take that long just to settle in, learn a new language, gain rapport, and be in a position to ask good questions and get good answers” (p 280). However, many observation studies can take place in shorter periods of time such as few weeks or days (Bernard, 2011). “The amount of time you spend in the field can make a big difference in what you learn” (p 281) argues Bernard (2011). Nevertheless, if observation is to take place within one’s own culture and familiarity, time spent can be shorten by one’s wealth of personal experience, familiarity and fast acceptance of the research population, allowing the researcher to carry on highly focused participatory observations (Bernard, 2011).
Therefore, the choice of that particular school was made due to the eligibility of the school as it was located the closest I Ur Och Skur School to my own location and also due of my previous knowledge of the school and the teacher.

The preschool yard is large and well adapted to the preschool activities, divided into different sections where children can develop different skills. There is a sand like area, a wooden crocodile, a wooden water system to play, different wooden structures to play with, climb and jump, few big gardening beds and tunnels in the back of the school yard and “teepee”. Some of the school staff and leaders influenced the design of the school building and the backyard looking for a place which filled the outdoor learning approach by incorporating nature spaces and elements as well as experiential learning opportunities for children in its design. Moreover, The preschool is located in an open area close to the city university, a modern urban area, and within walking distance of the main protected nature woodland reserves.

3. Interpretation of data

The sorting process among the collection of data took a long time as I had to go through my many field notes on observations, the sorting of photographs and the transcriptions of the videos taken during the observations and the 2 hours of audio and video of Eva’s interview. The chosen method was thematic analysis, a common way in ethnographic research to interpret the research data (Bryman, 2012). As I ought to examine the field notes the interview to find similarities and common patterns on how emotional education was integrated within outdoor education didactics, I firstly went through my transcriptions coding the information and sorting it into categories with similar themes. I then compared themes found in both observations and interviews transcriptions and looking at general patterns I categorized the information into three main themes to be interpreted through an ethnographic narrative of the findings.

4. Discussion of methods and Limitations

The lack of long-term observation time I found myself with to develop the study was surely one of my main worries and limitations at the start of the research.
My original intention when I first develop the research question was to carry out a wider research of different outdoor preschool pedagogues with the intention to offer a more representative view on outdoor didactics in preschool. Therefore, in January 2018 I contacted one of the main responsible at the “I Ur Och Skur” organization to have the possibility to visit or interview professionals from different outdoor preschools around Sweden in order to collect and compare a significant amount of empirical data and be able to provide a better, more accurate view of the didactic methods and perspectives shared by different preschools and professionals working under the same pedagogy and philosophy. However, and despite the first positive replies, it was not until the end of March that I found it impossible to carry on the research how I first designed itTherefore, I decided to carry on a case study research collecting data from the observations and interview about the work and perspectives of one single teacher. However, it would be interesting to keep in mind this limitation and take it in account for the development of further, wider, and more representative future research.

On the one hand, the impossibility of visiting other preschools disabled the study with the opportunity to provide comparative data. On the other hand, attending to just one school allowed me to spend a longer period of time observing at a place wich I already was familiar with. Also, it is to be noted that the results and data from the study would have been richer if spent a longer period of time in the preschool. This would have also reduced the effect of reactivity on the studied population, “the problem of people changing their behavior when they know that they are being studied” (Bernard, 2011 p. 285).

Another limitation in the study was the language. Firstly, during the literature research on the topic, I found most of it waswritten in Swedish and I could not have access to it. However, I could translate some of the documents and previous studies. Also, during my time researching in field, the totality of the interactions between teachers and children took place in Swedish and as I had not enough knowledge of Swedish language this fact limited importantly my research as an observer. I was able to observe and take field notes based on behaviors, however I had to infer great part of what was taken place during my observation as I wasn’t able to understand the conversations between teachers and children. Taking acknowledge of this important limitation, and to prevent the investigation from a lack of trustworthiness I had to be
very attentive and specific on my field notes and recordings to be able to discuss my doubts and inquiries in English with the teachers after the session in order to clarify and understand the interactions.

5. Ethical Considerations

According to Diener and Crandall, research must take into account whether there is harm to participants, whether there is a lack of informed consent, whether there is an invasion of privacy and whether deception is involved (Diener and Crandall, 1978, in Bryman, 2012)

The participants of the study were children under age, therefore parents and adult responsibilities were contacted by the teacher and were informed about the purpose of the research by giving a brief description of the procedure and the researcher myself; in fact, I was asked by the teacher responsible to write a general, personal letter to the parents explaining the aim of the research and giving a brief description of myself and my background.

As parents were informed of the procedures and media means of data collection, all videos and photographs were allowed as long as its use was strictly for academic purposes.

Before I started my observations, I contacted the main teacher and the school by e-mail about the possibility to carry my research at the school. After their positive reply and interest in the study I met the school teacher a week before the start of the observations and informed her about the main purpose of the study, my interests and background and discussed privacy, anonymity and children’s safety issues before the individual interview. Therefore though the pictures show some of the participant adult and children’s faces, for privacy issues their names remain anonymous as well as the school’s name and location.
6. ANALYSIS

In my observations, I found that emotional learning is encouraged by teachers and integrated within daily activities outdoors through three particular didactical tools: Emotional Expressiveness, Social Affective Interaction and Direct Sensory Experience with nature.

The three categories occurred, however, interlaced. There was not emotional expressiveness without displays of social affective interaction, or sensory experience without emotional expressiveness and social affective interaction; therefore, the categorized methods of approaching emotional competence were, as I observed, clearly differentiated but taking place one within another, nourishing and complementing the function and outcomes of one another.

A. Emotional Expressiveness

Early childhood as the womb of children’s affective development is the fundamental stage for the development of the emotional competences (Ribes et al., 2005). Occurring within a context of social processing and interaction, it is significantly influenced and mediated by the verbal and facial display of emotion and affective expression of the adults that surround him (Lewis, 1992; Lewis, 2011). Therefore, by being exposed to adult emotional expressiveness and by being able to model different emotions allows children to become aware of the various emotions and their nature, perceiving how, when and why they occur (Denham, Basset & Wyatt, 2007; Denham, Zinsser & Bailey; 2011; Lewis, 1992;). As Denham, Basset & Wyatt (2007) point out, “children are constantly viewing and processing the emotional behaviors” (p 9). Therefore, emphasis on emotional expressiveness can promote children’s own experience and expression of emotions, contributing to the perception, identification and discrimination of the different emotional states in oneself and in others. (Denham, 2007)

I could observe this use of expressiveness of emotions integrated in all of the activities and interactions between the teachers and the children during the course of the day.

At the beginning of the day when children first arrive to the preschool and enter the teepee the teacher holds her arms wide open and welcomes children inside with a big smile, encouraging even the shy sleepy ones to smile
and join this magical space almost like entering a fantastic world. Before starting the class they send love to their beloved ones, this can be family, friends, or children who are absent today. The teacher represents a heart shape holding her hands together and looks kindly to it, closes her eyes and keeps it close to her heart as she tells the children who is she sending love today to and why, and finally lifting her hands up in the air as she blows into the heart pretending to send it up through the top of the teepee from where the smoke leaves like if the heart shape had vanished, slowly separating her hands and moving her fingers as she looks up with amazement and excitement.

“The meaning of the “heart shape”, the teacher explains to me, “is to symbolize that we feel love. When children make it in the morning they can think who they want to send this love to, to their parents, maybe to a child who is sick at home and didn’t come to school” (Teacher interview April 14th 2018) She calls it “the warmth inside” making symbolic use of the word warmth as to refer to the feelings of love and caring; as a cozy, pleasant sensations inside of oneself represented, and shared, through a dramatization of body language and expression.

I can see how children imitate this action and share different emotional states and expressions explaining who they send it to, why, and how does it make them feel. Some children send love to their families abroad and share their nostalgic feelings, some others turn to the peers next to them and blow the heart to them laughing together.

This dramatization and expressiveness of emotions from teachers, helps children to experience the connection between the physiological states, senses and emotions. It encourages them to reflect upon the complexity with involves the emotional processes by being attentive and becoming aware of their own emotional states and feelings, expressing them and understanding them as well as identifying other children’s feelings and be able to respond to their feelings empathetically and effectively (Immordino & Damasio, 2007).

Different activities take place in the teepee. Apart of the daily “warmth inside” activity, teachers include stories and songs during the morning gatherings.

Reading the daily schedule becomes a wake up-like fun routine for children. Every day a different child stands in front of a poster with pictures and stickers of the activities to be held during the day. As he/ she reads and interprets these activities, the teacher encourages the rest of the children to represent each activity with the hands, pretending to read, pretending to eat, to garden…

I believe this adds importance to the role of expressive language and dramatization, emphasizing the action and helping children become more attentive and interlacing children’s active sensory experience with language and expressiveness.

Inside the teepee, one of the most interesting, relevant, songs I could hear and presence during my stay was a song that talked about the body as they move
side to side, then forward and backwards. The teacher was singing a song about emotions, something like “I woke up this morning angry and I feel it in my back, in heart, my knees, my belly…” She would sing this while touching her body where she said she felt it and she would repeat this action for different emotions like happiness, sadness, disgust, surprise... She was very expressive while singing this song using her body, facial and even her voice to express and dramatize the song. Children copied her moves and her expressions representing all different emotional states and their corresponding physiological states, so much dramatic sometimes that many children would start laughing as everyone’s reactions turned up to seem a funny way of embodying emotions.

When I ask her why it is so important to be so expressive representing emotions through activities such as the warmth inside, songs or stories and what was the connection to children’s development of nature nurture she replied:

We try to teach the children to take care of the nature and themselves as a good friends, is a base I can say. The value is about you behave somehow so the other feels good, “warm inside”- says rubbing her chest kindly with both hands- Because they are going to learn the different feelings, how they can feel. It is ok to be angry, it is ok to be sad, and so on. Often I tell them “ohh you good, you happy now, that’s how “the warm is” and make the sign with the hands. Feel good here (inside) if someone helps you, and they often ask me, “can I help with something? can we work together?” and I put my hands on my chest and smile and show them how I feel this “warmth inside” so they understand they are doing something that makes me feel good. Perhaps they can say bad things to each other too, but then I say “noooo its cold”- she puts both hands on her chest and show a sad, painful face expression-. “I want them to know about the different feelings you can have, that’s why I do that” (teacher interview; April 14th 2018) Regarding this method of using body language to address feelings, she explains:

“when you are a teacher you can’t just stand and talking all the time, you must use a lot of other things, I have my body I work often with my body, body language. And I use my hands, and my face and then the children know more about this feelings than if I just stay there saying -huh you can get angry- and also when I tell the stories, they are looking like that, astonished, they are with me in my stories” (teacher interview; April 14th 2018)

As a matter of fact, elsewhere it has been recognized that one of the most significant, expressive and dramatized activities within the outdoor preschool programs is story telling as a way of bringing understanding about the natural world closer to children (Abram, 2005; McDonnell, 2013; Nanson, 2005; Strauss, 1996). This too can be seen in this school.

On a morning day inside the teepee children and teachers hold hands and coordinately move their bodies back and forward in circles shushing loudly like
if imitating the move and sound of a wave, announcing the start of the story. All through the course of the story, the teacher gesticulates representing the story with her hands, her face, her voice. Her reading is very empathized through whole body language and facial expressions captivating children’s attention towards the content of the story, embodying the characters representing their voices and expressions according to the emotions and feelings that the character experiences in the story (Figure 1).

“The language of poetry is the language of evocation” (Bruner, 1986, p. 24) Teachers’ usage of dramatization of verbal and body language in activities such a story telling captivates the children’s attention and interest towards what is being told, stimulating curiosity and eliciting emotions (Nilsson & Sommarström, 2009). This dramatic representation of emotions allows the child to submerge into the story that is being told and experience, share and express the different emotions and feelings of the characters in the stories and developing a sense of empathy through the power of teachers’ expressiveness in their narratives and metaphors (Mc Donnell, 2013).

All through the duration of the activity children are very attentive to the teacher’s story. Some children dramatize with gestures while the teacher is telling the story. They open their eyes, look surprised. Many times the stories are “poetry like” narratives about characters and situations representing elements of the natural world such as animals, plants or places like bee pollination’s phenomena, the start of spring or fictional characters’ adventures in nature (Figure 2).
Elements of the natural world are included within daily stories loaded with a whole body expressiveness and a significant emotional and affective identification, allowing children to feel part of the story and to empathize with the happenings in and to the natural world embodying the feelings and emotions expressed in the story, reflecting their own emotional qualities as living beings with the rest of living beings, humans or not. This way the child develops a connection to nature as it becomes much more than a spectator of the natural world but an interdependent living part of it (McDonnell, 2013).

Historically, human narratives were developed to pass on cultural beliefs and shared life experiences with the aim to extend one’s horizons, building a foundational bond to understand other’s experiences and cooperate socially (McDonnell, 2013; Pozo, 2012; Pringle, 2013) “Through stories, we can feel for the character’s plights, imagine the settings and interactions. A person can be changed forever, almost as though actually having lived it” (McDonnell, 2013, p 45). They extend one’s imagination towards new, exciting perspectives of previous unknowable relationships (Mc Donnell, 2013). Therefore, “when you hear someone's own story, your sympathy is engaged and you recognize that other person as a conscious being capable of suffering and joy” (Nanson, 2005, p 34) and when characters form the natural world are included within children stories and emotional expressiveness, then “stories can re-enliven the land (…) reawaken the wonder of the natural world” (McDonnell, 2013, p 49) In this sense, Leopold (1996) points out, “We can only be ethical in relation to something we can see,
feel, understand, love, or otherwise have faith in” (Leopold, 1966, p 251) therefore “if you teach a child to love and respect nature, they will take care of it, because you take care of what you love” (Linde 2008, in Mc Donnell, 2013, p 49); “we must engage in an intimate contact with something in order to understand its value and act in an uplifting manner” (McDonell, 2013, p 49.)

Furthermore, Mc Donnell (2013) remarks the importance of the way on how we speak about the natural world pointing out that “objective scientific language deadens natural phenomena by its rigid compartmentalization of facts” (p 49). But narratives in contrast arise children’s interest and affective engagement for the natural world (Abram, 2005; Nanson, 2005; Strauss, 1996).

I could also see many children’s faces imitating the teacher’s expression, looking around, exploring the other children and teachers’ faces checking if their expression matches the teacher’s or their own, or if it is different. If some children weren’t paying attention or didn’t seem to express openly the emotion shared by the group then some children would look at them and represent this emotion extremely expressively with their faces and bodies, like what the teacher would do, trying to help the other children to vividly experience and the emotion that the character is experiencing.

Therefore, the usage of teachers’ expressiveness during storytelling, may seem not only to help children to identify and express emotions of their own, others and the natural world, but furthermore serve as a model to encourage children with the autonomy to guide other children towards an understanding of the character’s emotions through recognition and identification of their emotional states and experiences Bruner (2003).

Besides the activities in the teepee, during daily walks and free play in the woods, emotional expressiveness also plays a significant roll. Different events take place as a result of children’s curiosity and exploration in nature where teachers make use of emotional expressiveness. Both during walks and free play children and teacher gather to look at new bloomed flowers, little insects, to listen to the birds and surroundings.

“*They often come and say “come and see!”*. If they have found something in the nature, some little insect or something else. And I can also perhaps find something I want to show them like the decomposers. And often in their play they come very excited about a discovery they made and ask me about
Standing by a tiny yellow flower during the walk, the teacher stops and shows the flower to the children, with a very surprised face:

- “Look at this!” shouts the teacher with excitement provoking the children to come in a circle around her looking with fascination.
- “It is spring because they blossomed” they shout happily and excited for their discovery.

Once more, body language and facial expressivity are used outdoors by teachers to emphasize learning aspects and help children pay attention to particular events while engaging them emotionally in the discoveries. The usage of the body language in relation to the emotions helps students reflect on the causes and consequences of events and relate to the emotions of the natural world. This can be seen in the following episode that took place when we arrived at a pond where children were allowed to explore: “Do you see the insects? Where are they?” asks the teacher with a hand on her waist and the other holding her chin showing an expression of doubt and uncertainty
- “But it was winter just 2 days ago, there are not insect yet, the pond is frozen!” responds one child with an expression of surprise.

Basically, any teacher or child’s findings or experiences in nature becomes a whole, amazing discovery to be openly approached and shared with excitement.

B. Direct Sensory Experience of Nature

In 1762 Jean-Jaques Rousseau first wrote “Since everything that comes into the human mind enters through the gates of sense, man’s first reason is a reason of sense-experience (...) Our first teachers, are our feet, hands and our eyes. (...) To learn how to think, we must exercise our limbs, our senses, our organs, which are the instruments of our mind” (2006, p 267) In outdoor education, the use of sensory experience plays a fundamental role as a mean to explore and discover the child’s sense of self as well as their surroundings (Dewey, 1915; Hammerman et al., 2001; Szczepanski et al., 2006) To touch, to hear, to smell, taste, move, observe… perceiving and feeling the outer world through one’s own direct and active experience allows us to process the
information we are exposed to by making associations between physiological, emotional and cognitive elements, building representations about our-self and our behaviours as living beings and about the functioning of the world within which we develop and interact (Immordino & Damasio, 2007; Pozo, 2012). Sensory experience has the power to awaken emotions within the individual, emotions to be aware of as which, as a matter of fact, constitute strategies that help us organize and give meaning to the world, the culture, the society, one’s own decisions and behaviours (Immordino & Damasio, 2007). Therefore, within outdoor education methodologies, sensory experience plays a fundamental role encouraging the child to learn by actively exploring its own abilities, capacities and the external world with the purpose of helping the child develop awareness to understand its own position within the natural world (Knapp & Smith, 2011; Szczepanski et al., 2006), and one of the essential points within sensory experience’s educative methodologies is the role the educator plays in facilitating opportunities for children’s curiosity, and active involvement in the experience (Davies, 1997; Foran, 2005).

In my observations I could witness children’s usage of sensory experience absolutely anytime and anywhere.

During all the activities children are not only allowed to experience with their hands and their body but moreover encouraged and praised by teachers with words and physical displays of kindness and enthusiasm. I here provide an example of sensory experience and children’s usage of the nature elements within the learning environment:

The teepee is an Indian teepee looking like man-made space. Despite the artificialness of the space itself, many aspects and elements remain part of the outdoors and connected to the natural world. There’s an open fire pit burning in the middle heating up the space around which children sit on wooden benches. There’s no artificial floor -it is just soil -and the smoke of the burning wood leaves through the open top of the tippy. Inside it feels warm, dry and cozy. Children sit and chat to each other rubbing their shoes on the ground and playing with the soil. Some also pick up a bit of bark and play with it during the course of the lesson.

The wood, the soil, the open ceiling, the smoke… in the teepee the whole classroom environment invites children to feel in contact with nature elements as they enter a safe, comfortable, cozy space for learning. The outdoor nature of the “classroom” provide children the possibility to explore nature with their senses while the teacher continues the “lesson” (the stories, games or songs). (Figure 3)
The fact of staying in contact with nature by being able to play with the soil and the bark, or smelling the wood burning in the fire pit and watching the smoke leaving the room as a mean of directly feeling and experiencing nature is closely related to the children’s emotional states within a natural environment and has wide potential benefits to children’s learning process and well being as helping children remain calm, feel good and safe and keep attention and interest. (Immordino & Damasio, 2007; Szczepanski et al., 2006; Taylor, Kuo, Spencer & Blades, 2006; Taylor & Kuo, 2009; Waite, 2011; White, 2004; Winterbottom, Mehta and Roberts, 2010;).

Experiencing nature helps children understand the natural processes of the natural world at the same time as gaining awareness of themselves and their emotional world, being able to develop awareness of their physiological states and the links to their emotions as well as to other living beings. In this sense, teachers in the outdoors play with the opportunities to provide multiple scenarios and opportunities for children to use their body and their senses to explore their emotionality and their surroundings through activities and conversations in nature (Ängård, 2010; Denham, 2007; Johnson, 2007; Mirrahimi et al., 2011).
In one of our walks out of the school yard, we walked up a small hill between the woodland and a modern new city. There, the teacher shows the children the new born buds in the trees. There, the sense of sound is also brought into the walk.

- “Stop here, close your eyes, what do you listen to?” asks Teacher
- “I hear a bird” says one child
- “Who else heard the bird?” Asks Eva.

Some children raise their hands. In order to listen closely and better they have placed their hands behind their ears and have closed their eyes. No child speaks now. They all remain silent respecting their peers trying to locate the position of the bird. Even those who have chosen to keep their eyes open keep silent placing their hands closed making two circles on their eyes as binoculars, looking up for the bird.(Figure 4)

After a few minutes of silence, the teacher uses this activity to discuss the different sounds they heard, nature sounds and city sounds and how it made the children feel.

This moment and conversation lead to a nice discussion about the interactions between city life and nature:

“ They built the houses here the year before. When we come out here today I ask them do you see the bird? The bird wants to live in the grass but, what happens when we build all these houses?” And then the children can reflect and say “they can’t live here!” “can they?” I said “noo we must clean up first!” they say. There was an area with a lot of grass last year but now there’s so much trash”. (Teacher interview; April 14th 2018)

Figure 4: Teacher and children listening to the bird

Figure 5: Children using hands as binoculars
And it is a good example of how the teacher integrates sensory experience within the learning context (Ånggård, 2010; Lysklett, 2017; Westerlund, 2009) but also making use of it as a means to help the children reflect on how emotions are included within the equation self-social world-natural world towards a better understanding of the child’s own capacity to understand, express, and regulate its emotions linked to social interactions and its connection to the natural world as a system (Barrows, 1995; Bisquerra, 2005; Denham, 2007; Fernandez & Aranda, 2008; Phenice & Griffore, 2003).

During daily walks and free play in nature and in the woods, children pick up flowers from the grass, dried high flowers from surrounding the pond (Figure 6). They like to touch and smell what they find (Figure 7). Some children collect pinecones and count them, and explore their findings separating the parts of the flowers or the pinecones, looking closer (Figure 8). They also keep putting their hands behind their ears or around their eyes exploring around while they walk, smiling, looking curious, looking with disgust… All along, it is easy to perceive their emotions through their facial and body expressions when they use their senses. If they like or not what they taste, if they feel amazed by what they find, if they are happy playing.
Sensory experience is here in nature thereby closely related to exploratory play and emotional learning (Änggård, 2010, 2017; Hammerman et al., 2001; Knapp & Smith, 2011). In one occasion for example, there was one girl who wanted to play with another one who was playing on a big lodge exploring the bark. This second girl was interested in playing with the first girl who then went and told Eva. Eva encouraged her to understand that if she wasn’t interested in playing with her, she could go and play with someone else.

This event is a good example of how teachers manage conflict as mediators encouraging children to understand others’ mood or states and will be analyzed later on. However, in this section it is of relevance to understand the potential of open natural areas to facilitate children’s emotional understanding of other’s feelings, empathy development and the child’s own emotional regulation (Mc Curdy, Winterbottom,
Mehta & Roberts, 2010). The teacher showed the upset girl another option and so the little girl, didn’t let this emotion over take her and get sad or angry with the other child but she understood the fact that this girl didn’t want to play with her and she processed her emotions smartly in an adaptative way and transformated her first unpleasant emotion into proactivity and went to play somewhere else. Somehow conflict is easily mediated and solved by nature as children get more opportunities to explore, share interest and focus attention on other things. Also the point that there are not artificial toys but natural elements to which children give their own meaning makes every element around the possibility to be anything the children want as they can easily focus their attention on other elements of their surroundings or other possibilities of play rather than the one originating the conflict.

Moreover, and according to the principles and methodologies within the I Ur Och Skur Organization, the pedagogical practices are based on the conception that children learn about the relationships in the natural world from nature itself, by making active use of it all year through with their senses and body (Angard, 2010; Lysklett, 2017; Westerlund, 2009). The teacher explains to me:

“I have the seasons and we follow them. Today we listen to the birds, in spring a lot of birds in the forest but when we come to autumn it is quiet and in the winter time it is very quiet(...)One child said to me this morning “we must help the bees because I want to have honey on my yogurt”. So I talk about the bees. Another child asked in spring “where are the butterflies that want to come to us?”. And then is when we build this insect hotel together because we want to see how insects live. When we started there was none and now there are lots of birds and insect coming here, the children know that it is because we have made special places for them and they took part in it and they experience each part of the process, they live it” (Teacher interview; April 14th 2018)

Her statements are an example of the importance of children’s active experience of the world to its understanding and building an emotional attachment to it, but it also is a manifestation of the importance of the affective, participatory and inclusive dynamic that is established between teacher-student communication.

“When pupils make their own observations and gain their own experiences,(…) they acquire the status of subjects(…)The learning body in movement increases the status of the sensory experience’s path to knowledge in the learning process” (Szczepanski et al., 2006, p 6). Through direct sensory experience with nature, children learn about its relationships and embody the experience of being part of the natural
world beyond reading facts on a book, or being told so by an expert. Here the teachers don’t “spit” facts, they provide as many opportunities for children to experience reality as they can to help them connect emotionally and affectively with that reality they are experiencing (Davies, 2007; Sandell & Öhman, 2010; Westerlund, 2009); smelling, hearing or touching, planting the seed of love and nurture for nature that will progressively grow into a personal affective bond between the child’s self concept and the natural world (Phenice & Griffore, 2003).

C. Affective social interaction

Nature can be considered many times as wild, hazardous and challenging environment. Especially within educational contexts, many teachers and parents may be reluctant to allow children to play outdoors afraid of the many cases that the child can get hurt. However, what happens in nature-based preschools where it is common to see children climbing and falling and not feeling fear for nature? How do these children get to feel so safe in this so called by some dangerous space?

As I said at the beginning of the analysis, all three methods by which I categorized teachers’s work on child emotional competences (emotional expressiveness, Sensory experience with nature and affective social interaction) occur interlaced. Because of it, I have been trying to show to the reader the main occurrence and elements of these categories separately in daily activities within the preschool. Therefore in this section, I will refer to how and when is affection included and present within social interactions between children and their teachers and peers through daily activities in nature.

Outdoor education’s tradition and outdoor education practitioners base their work and educational approach on the foundation that if children learn to act and feel safely in nature loving and feeling familiar with its elements, then nature won’t be approached as full of potential dangers but a familiar, safe place to be where to find challenging opportunities for the development of the child’s capacities (Knapp & Smith, 2011). In this line, the child’s affective social interactions with peers and teachers constitutes an essential point in the development of the child’s emotional competences to feel happy, confident, safe and autonomous in nature (Davies, 1997; Denham, 2007; Foran, 2005).
Children development takes place within a context of social interaction by which the child integrates the values and standards of its culture and society (Lewis, 2011). As the child interacts within its social world he/she starts to becomes aware of its own emotional world and competences perceiving the complexity of the socio emotional environment, reflecting on the causes and consequences of its own and other’s emotions as well as learning how to identify, manage and regulate them and considering its own behaviors and attitudes as well as those of others in relation to a shared system of values, beliefs and expectations (Lewis, 2011; Proshansky et al., 1983).

Therefore, and as the child is considered to be the center and director of its learning and developmental process, the leaders and educators are the mediators within this process, with the objective to facilitate the child’s autonomous experience in nature, offering opportunities for children’s self exploration and social interaction (Bredekamp & Rosegrant, 1992; New, 1992 in Davies, 1997).

In the woods they find many interesting elements to play with and try themselves and their capacities. Climbing and balancing on a lodge, climbing and sliding from a big rock, building and playing around tree shelters.

At all times the teachers’ role is to allow them to explore making sure they stay safe and if any child gets hurt or feels scared or if there is a conflict, the teachers approach it kindly, encouraging the child to embrace and understand the feeling and the emotion, not letting it limit their action by fear but encouraging the child to try again (Davies, 1997). This freedom of exploring their choices based on the emotions they are going through can be seen in the following example:

Next to the edge of the pond many children are very excited to step close enough to put their boots in the water but conscious of not going further, aware of their capacities and helping each other move around the water carefully.

Similarly, when referring to their social well being, the teacher explains:

“When they are free here in nature, they are free to do what they want and they can play with which friends they want to play with and they learn how to behave socially” (Teacher interview; April 14th 2018)

Educators are responsible in providing learning and socialization opportunities for children based on children’s interest (Nilsson & Sommarström, 2009) and many times, the exploration in nature leads to teacher-child interaction when children look for the teachers or their peers to share their inquiries and discoveries with. This is the case,
for example when a child asks Eva about why the bark looked the way it did and then the teacher started explaining to her about the insects that eat the trees (termites) (Figure 9). The same situation was seen when two children found a seed and asked the teacher about it (Figure 10). In the teacher’s words:

“To be a good pedagogue, you have to be with the children all the time, explore with them. You are going to be with the children when they are in the forest, help them to see. You show them this little bird, you show them little insects and you are together and learn” (Teacher interview; April 14th 2018)

Moreover, this interaction leads to the development of an affective bond with the explored surroundings that constitute somehow of their daily social interaction spaces which originated by a process of social identification lead in fact to positive attitudes and behaviors of protection and care of nature (Shultz, 2000)

Every day, before entering the woods, the teacher stops with the children in front of a large lodge and let the children know they are going to ask the woods for permission to go in explaining children to get in the woods gently, slowly and quietly one by one as a mean to respect the forest

“It is very important that we have knowledge about the nature so we can take care of it. Children need to learn names of trees perhaps or insects because if the tree has a name you take more care of it” (Teacher interview; April 14th 2018)

Emotion’s function is dependent on the given meaning of its social expression and experience (Denham, 2007) Therefore, sharing the experience through social interaction, and discussing about it constitutes a very important way for children to experience physically and emotionally the world around them. As through socialization children get to explore their senses and their emotions, identifying similarities and
differences between their own and other’s experiences and take perspective. Abilities that are interdependent of the development of emotional capacities and competences and linked to the development of empathic behaviors.

As the children walk independently back to the school, some children pick up flowers along the way, smell them, taste them and collect them. They also show them to their peers and compare smells and tastes looking for other children to share a similar emotion elicited by the experience. If that emotion is shared, both children get really excited and laugh imitating each other’s faces of pleasure or disgust for the plant they are smelling or tasting; if however, the experience is different, the child who was amazed by it looks for someone else with a similar emotion to share it or keeps it for its own staying alone for some time.

Emotional affection is present in the way teachers and peers communicate verbally and physically:

   During storytelling, for example, sitting in a circle allows children to see each other, all of them are in their vision field and so child is left behind.

   In one case, one of the drawings in the book was of a butterfly which’s name in Swedish is similar to “sad”. The teacher used this opportunity to talk about what makes her sad and ask children about their emotions and one little and another next to her are responsible to mark the names in green if the child named came to school. Through the duration of the activity sometimes children sit on her lap and the ones sitting on the benches hold each others’ hand, look close to each other, touch each others’ clothes or hair, laugh and hug while listening to the story.

   And hereby once more, sensory experience shows its importance for children exploration taking this time place in the form of physical social interaction between peers and teachers. It is very important that children explore their feelings with their bodies, not only their surroundings but also other human beings (Denham, 2007).

   Kind language and affective behaviors when approaching each other’s needs and emotions plays also a fundamental role on the development on emotional competences and empathic behaviors (García, 2012):

   A child is not paying attention, he is distracted talking loud to his companion. Eva stops the story and explains “I am getting a bit tired now” She stands up and goes to the child to explain him “please, now you have to be attentive, and listen” He pays attention now.

   And encouraged by their teacher’s affection and their natural altruism, children develop a set of emotional competences and abilities to identify and understand each other’s necessitates and emotions. This was seen for instance when getting ready to go
outdoors and some children would get dressed faster go to help their friends. It was seen in the woods during gardening when:

children help each other out, work in groups and help each other to bring leftovers to the box and then compost running and holding the box together (*Figure 11*). They like to use the big scissors with me as long as I hold the plant and they cut. One by one they cut with the big scissors with me and we work together and when another child wants to work with me children understand each other’s desires fast and kindly and agree to let other children use the scissors too. They really want to help.

![Figure 11: Gardening in groups](image)

This was also seen in the woods many times during free play (*Figure 12*) when children help each other to climb, jump or during play:

The teacher plays with the children a game about ocean pollution, sustainability. Every time the children are out of the rings “swimming” she puts garbage in one ring and the children can’t go back in it. Eventually the rings are full of children who understand there is no space for all. During the ocean game the children are encouraged to call the children without a ring to come join their ring. She explains to me that this game is not only made for children to understand and experience the problematic of ocean pollution but to develop positive social attitudes, empathy and help behaviors.
Finally, nature is likewise included within social affective behaviors during storytelling, when children listen to stories of the natural world and are encouraged to empathize with the emotions of the characters of the natural world; during play in the woods when they discuss the living conditions of animals and plants; and it is included within sensory experience of nature and within daily talk and routines:

To reunite the children after the play in the woods the teacher imitates a bird call to call the children back making a circle. Once more the children hold hands and one by one count to make sure all the children are together and ready to go back. They get back to their “kompis” (friends) hold hands and follow the teacher back to school.
7. CONCLUSIONS

Emotions, are fundamental means by which children process, interpret and give meaning to the world. They play an essential role in the development of affective attitudes, values and behaviors and are interdependent of the social contexts within which they occur. Hence, emotional education in preschool becomes central to the child’s ability to develop and construct successful relationships with others and its environment during one of the most significant stages of the child’s development. To educate in emotionality means guiding the child towards a full sense of awareness of itself and its surroundings. Emotional education aims to help the child to effectively identify and express what is being felt taking in account, understanding and accepting other’s perspectives; abilities that will play a fundamental role in the formation of adaptative social and environmental behaviors.

In this sense, the role of the teacher becomes a key point in children’s emotional development and learning. They become the children’s guides all along the process of discovery of their physical, cognitive and emotional world. They are the ones who design and facilitate the spaces and, more importantly, the methods by which children will explore, develop and master the width of their affective and emotional abilities, understand its causes, consequences and learn to manage them adaptively. Through the teachers’ use of verbal and non verbal expressiveness, providing love, understanding and comfort and promoting the direct sensory experience of children’s findings, teachers can encourage children to explore and understand their emotionality in depth.

Because of its unlimited possibilities and multiple benefits, nature and nature schools offer a rich, magnificent educational context for the development of emotional competences. Playing, being, interacting and learning with other children within nature, they are encouraged to safely explore the complexity of their emotional world engaging affectively with each other and with the natural world. Outdoor preschool practitioners work to promote a deeper learning and understanding of the child’s relative position within nature by encouraging them to feel, physically and emotionally the world. Working on emotions in contact with nature allows children to consider nature as a living, sensitive system and to understand themselves as emotional individuals that play an active, sensitive part of the natural world. Aiming, in last instance to allow children
to create an affective bond with nature while developing a socio-systemic way of thinking of the human-nature relationships.
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