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Outdoor education as a tool for immigrant learning: An action research study

Magisterutbildning i miljö- och utomhuspedagogik

Magisterarbete 15 hp

LIU-IKK-MOE-D--08/006--SE

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	Avdelning, Institution Division, Department Institutionen för kultur och kommunikation 581 83 LINKÖPING	Datum Date 2008-06-07
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Språk Language Engelska/English _____	Rapporttyp Report category D-uppsats _____	ISBN ISRN LIU-IKK-MOE-D--08/006--SE Serietitel och serienummer ISSN Title of series, numbering _____
URL för elektronisk version		

Titel Title Outdoor education as a tool for immigrant learning: An action research study.
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Sammanfattning Abstract <p>In what ways can outdoor education be used when teaching immigrants the language of their new country? There is a need to both concretise grammar teaching and diversify teaching methods to bring language acquisition closer to real life situations. By using action research a collaborative study was made with four Finnish teachers in four immigrant language classes by implementing a series of lessons using outdoor education. Focussing on the teacher's experience qualitative interviews were conducted both before and after the collaborative outdoor lessons. This was supported by observation and student verbal and written evaluation.</p> <p>Both positive and negative aspects of outdoor education were explored in relation to how effective it is as a teaching method and as a method of cultural assimilation and group socialisation.</p> <p>Outdoor education was found to support a sense of group inclusion and strengthen collective group experience. Difficult concepts were dealt with in a more tangible manner which specifically benefited weaker students. By exploring the unfamiliar as a group in a supportive environment constructive outcomes were gained. Being outdoors and using natural materials democratised the cultural meeting. Peer collaboration was demanding but fruitful and should be used more as a developmental tool in education.</p>

Nyckelord Keywords Outdoor education, immigrant education, action research, language learning, sense of place
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1 Background

Is it possible to enhance learning for immigrants by using outdoor education? How can we promote being outdoors to immigrant groups from exotic climates? In this study I would like to examine some of the difficulties that adult immigrants face in the educational courses they are offered to help them adapt to a new country and culture. I would like to explore how effective outdoor education could be as a complementary method to traditional teaching.

Immigration to Europe from all parts of the world is increasing, and we are currently experiencing a rise in discourse and criticism from both media and politics of immigrants' patchy or slow amalgamation of the host country's culture and language. Finland is a country with limited experience of open immigration; pre EU migration to the country was comparatively small. The number of foreigners living in Finland has grown more than five fold since 1990, not including naturalised citizens (Finnish Immigration Service).

There is therefore a need to examine the success of education dedicated to preparing immigrants for an active place in our society. According to the language teachers interviewed, The Finnish Board of Education is eager to encourage Finnish language teachers to develop more active methods of grammar teaching. Whilst language teaching overall should be developed to better represent real life.

Many immigrants have difficulty learning the language of their new country. There are a diverse range of reasons for this in adults and young people. Some may have little educational experience from their home country or there may be other cultural or social factors that influence their learning. Indeed merely different educational cultures can lead to misunderstanding and potential problems. (interviews with teachers A, B, C)

I have also the experience of students that are used to being physically active in their working lives finding difficulty when faced with a traditional college environment.

Cultural factors and a weak language also make expressing oneself without physical expression or movement difficult.

In Nordic countries various outdoor activities are an important element of cultural identity. If immigrants are unable or even afraid of being outdoors how can they assimilate a Nordic culture and way of life?

The aims of immigrant education according to Leena Nissilä (2008), head of the expert unit at The Finnish National Board of Education, should be:

“In conjunction with teaching in the mother tongue, Finnish as a foreign language teaching should strengthen the student’s multi-cultural identity and build the base for functioning bilingualism” (own translation)(a.a: 9)

There has been a great deal of research on immigrants’ experience, cultural meetings, cultural identity, integration, health aspects, status and well-being amongst others. In studies on education and immigrants the main focus has been on learning especially in the fields of second language medium learning, culture, gender and equality. Immigrants’ relationship to nature and the reasons preventing more access to outdoor environments has also been studied. But as far as I am aware there is no research on the effects of outdoor education on immigrant subject learning. (uppsattser.se, scholar.google.fi)

2 Aims and purpose

The aim of this study is to see what learning outcomes can be achieved by implementing outdoor education lessons in collaboration with four Finnish teachers in four immigrant language classes.

Using this aim I intend to explore these secondary questions:

- In what ways can we use outdoor education to raise awareness and interest in being in nature?
- How can outdoor learning reinforce concrete understanding of concepts?
- What influence does an action research intervention have on the continued practice of the educators?

3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In my opinion an underlying philosophy of outdoor education is that of collaborative learning, a method whereby the teacher leaves the expert pedestal and can near students by becoming a co-investigator of phenomenon and co-discoverer of knowledge. I feel adopting an approach of an external observer in an investigation does not fit snugly with this facet of outdoor education.

Action research was an unfamiliar term to me, introduced when discussing my thesis topic with Dr. Robbie Nicol of Edinburgh University. I became further inspired whilst reading obligatory course literature such as Tom Tiller's (1999) *Aktionslärande* and this led me to want to explore this approach to conducting research myself; exploring the question of what impacts one can have through reflective intervention on other teachers' practice.

The study was carried out in a folk-high school in a medium sized Finnish city. I will use the term institute when I refer to this specific folk-high school as I consider the term "folk-high school" a clumsy expression unfamiliar to English. Institute is also how the institute refers to itself in its English publications.

The institute has approximately 450 students on vocational and general courses with an additional 200 on polytechnic courses. The main course areas are; modern languages, sign language, communication, religious studies, social studies and education for immigrants; both Finnish language and preparatory courses for general study in Finland.

The system of folk-high schools is an important educational form in the Nordic countries that differentiates itself from more formal educational institutions. The courses offered can be for both young people and adults and can be of a vocational or non-vocational nature. Many are boarding schools where there is an emphasis on personal growth, social skills and mutual understanding. A holistic approach to learning is adopted which gives a great deal of flexibility in how learning takes place. Schools can be independent or represent a religious domination, language group,

political alliance or promote some minority interest; like a specific form of disability, for example. (Finnish Folk High School Association)

3.2 An action research approach

Kurt Lewin, a social science researcher is attributed to instigating the first action research in the 1940s (Levin, 1999: 26). The use of this approach was as a critique of positivistic methods which were purely scientific and where great effort was made not to influence the actors or object of the study. The intention was to develop a means of study which would attempt to use research as an active way of influencing behaviour or practice (a.a. 27). The approach is most commonly used in the fields of business, education, social science and health.

Tiller (1999:12) describes action research as a partnership between researcher and practitioner whereby a democratic process is possible and change is achievable through intervention. This is contradictory to the dominant practice of educators who have a tendency for autonomous work behind closed doors where new practice is developed not by professionals in the field but rather by visiting professors or administrators. This despite evidence from surveys in the US that show that successful schools tend to have a more open culture of collaboration and peer dialogue (Sagor, 1993: 3-4).

Typically the researcher is intimately involved in both the planning and instigation of the action as well as the analysis of the resulting changes and effects. In some cases action researchers can have a more passive role but there is always a close working relationship between all the actors involved (Lorentz, 2004: 5).

In this researching partnership, it is normally the researcher who has methods and mechanisms for analysis whilst the practitioner has the in-depth knowledge of his or her own working sphere and awareness of the context in which it exists (Rönnerman, 2004: 20).

Action research is an approach rather than a specific method, one well suited to practitioner as well as researcher. It is also an appropriate method for fields such as teaching as the primary concern is to gain deeper insight with an eye to developing

practice, particularly when new methodology should be incorporated into existing practice (Bell, 1999: 10).

Scientific research can be characterised by professional researchers who pre-decide their area of investigation external of the research object; report publication contributing to the knowledge base being the central aim. Action research however is inherently based around a problem which the practitioner wishes to solve; problem solving being the necessary means to an end (Sagor, 1993: 7).

Though, according to McTaggart (1997: 40) problem solving can not be the core aim of action research as we should be actively problem posing. He believes that participatory action research "... is motivated by a quest to improve and understand the world by changing it and learning how to improve it from the effects of the changes made." (a.a. 40)

A cyclical model or spiral of action research was first drawn up by Lewin and further developed by Kemmis and McTaggart and is explained later (McTaggart, 1997: 27). However, it is important to note that the research process does not need to start from the beginning of the cycle, from a problem, it is possible to start for example from a reflection and problematise later (Rönnerman, 2004: 26). Also the action research plan needs to be receptive to adaptation in order to accommodate the complexity of the real dynamic processes being studied (McTaggart, 1997: 27).

Tiller (1999: 11-13) uses the allegory of three research paradigms; investigation from a cool distance, research from a within perspective and a research partnership. In this final phase the fundamental premise is that the practitioner will benefit directly from the research process (a.a. 52). Indeed subsequent publication may not even be of core concern for the research partnership (Sagor, 1993: 7). Because the inherent rationale of action research is of devising new practice any study is incomplete without implementation of the conclusions of the investigation. (a.a. 11)

It has been shown that research in social, economic and cultural fields have limited spread and effect if those actors that are directly involved in the studied area are excluded from the research being conducted (McTaggart, 1997: 26).

3.3 Available methods

There are a variety of research tools typically available in action research; methods of reflection being the most central (Tiller, 1999: 36). Reflective writing in the form of a logbook can provide an important foundation for later dialogue (a.a. 117). It is after all in collaborative dialogue that awareness of the potential for development is created by sharing different perspectives. Tiller considers it essential to establish distance to one's practice and uses a 3 level series of reflection. The first is on an individual level either as a written logbook or as a thoughtful reflection. Level two is on a team basis where teachers can reflect together creating further distance and widening of perspectives. The final level is where unequal actors meet; students, teachers or college administration share their respective perspectives democratically (a.a. 47-49). This uncommon element of also involving student groups in a developmental process is not new; Key (1909: 89) called for student consultation in the appointment of new teachers for example.

Observation of practice is also frequently used through use of video filming, passive observation or interview of the target group. External guidance of teachers or a teaching team became more common in the 90s. Generally the guidance is from an external academic source which can be problematic if there is not an open discussion. But this has the supportive function of bringing theory to strengthen prevailing practice, resulting in an increased understanding of the processes and dynamics at work and leading to awareness of further developmental needs (Rönnerman, 2004: 21-3).

Action research is often instigated by individuals with a drive for change; as there is an explicit goal it is impossible for the action researcher to maintain a pretence of impartiality. Research plans are based on intervention with a view to change. (Tiller, 1999: 53). A critic of action research is the political element of open values but McTaggart (1997: 37) considers any value free research impossible as they innately exist but are merely unspoken, hidden under the facade of objectivity.

A question of objectivity also arises due to the researcher being so intimately involved in both the planning and implementation of the action. Whilst critics claim that the

ability or desire of the researcher to be objective will be lost others argue that a deeper understanding and capability for finding relevant information is stimulated (Lorentz, 2004: 5).

Stridsman (2001: 87) argues that opposing academic factions would engage in more constructive dialogue if argument was based upon open values instead of searching for scientifically proven fact to support a certain stand or position whilst covering a hidden or unspoken agenda.

Additionally action research is not completely uncontroversial as it is primarily concerned with local action and development as opposed to theory development. It also can be led by non academic practitioners who are not fully trained researchers (Tornberg 2004: 43).

Action research can be considered ineffectual as a research form as it involves small action on a local plane and has consequently limited potential for generalisation. Therefore the choice of research instrument is important to enable wider validity out with the organisation involved (Lorentz, 2004: 6).

Qualitative methods are most commonly used in action research but quantitative methods are by no means excluded. It is vital that the most suitable method is applied to the problem under investigation so that methodology does not influence how or what should be studied (Tiller, 1999: 125). What we are actually endeavouring to discover should determine the choice of method (Silverman, 2000: 1)

Traditionally research has viewed the world from an objective standpoint. The individual is isolated from its environment and through analysis of collected data various hypotheses can either be verified or disproved. Qualitative methods on the other hand focus upon how individuals construe and shape their reality and are consequently subjective in manner. Therefore qualitative research should be conducted in real environments and not in artificial or controlled situations (Backman, 1998: 47-8).

Qualitative research has been criticised for being too political. But can any research be value free? Silverman (2000: 2) gives the example of how by changing the input values of quantitative studies statistical outcomes can be changed to reflect a desired result. So value free research can be argued by some to be impossible. Indeed it can be more dangerous to operate seemingly objective study which contains a hidden bias.

Quantitative research has been viewed as having a greater validity as it contains verifiable statistical proof. But it is also possible to find statistical correlation between phenomena that do not represent the causal factor (a.a. 4). Quantitative research is characterised by results that can be statistically compiled for comparison and analysis. This is not the case of qualitative research which cannot be transformed into statistics but is left in a verbalised form (Backman, 1998: 31). The research process is less standardised and gives greater scope for variation than quantitative research (a.a. 50). This flexibility is considered by some to give wider possibility for innovation whilst detractors criticise this as a system devoid of structure (Silverman, 2000: 2). And whilst quantitative methods can be supported for resulting in trustable truths, qualitative methods can be argued give a depth of knowledge and answers to the underlying reasons for a phenomenon (a.a. 8).

According to Backman (1998: 29) observation is a general term encompassing all empirical contact, it includes, interviews, direct observations, questionnaires etc. The method chosen is a “frame” with which to make the collected data manageable. The methods chosen in this study are of interviews and direct observations.

Questionnaires have the advantage that they can be sent to a large group of respondents both quickly and cheaply but they demand both careful planning and exact language (Bell, 1999: 119). A further weakness is that they demand response in a way designed by the researcher which may not be appropriate or too constrictive for the interviewee (Arfwedson, 1998: 10).

Interviews have the advantage over questionnaires that follow up questions can be made and depth of answer can be elicited. Answers can be developed and expanded in a way that questionnaires can't. There is a subjective nature of interviewing which

must be taken into account. Interviewing is also extremely time consuming as is transcription (Bell, 1999: 135).

It is important to structure the interview in order to gain useful responses, with an informal strategy at one extreme and mechanical questioning at the other (a.a. 137). As the interviewer can affect the answers of the respondents it is possible for serious bias if a team of researchers conduct the interviews. This is less important if it is a single questioner as a certain bias will probably be regular and affect all respondents equally (a.a. 139). Time and place of the interviews can also affect the responses given and should be given careful consideration (a.a. 141).

Many interviews are recorded in the form of tick responses or notes. A more dependable technique for later analysis is recording with subsequent transcription but this is terribly time consuming (a.a. 140). However it is only possible to remember a summary of a conversation. Recording enables us to identify the significance of pauses and other non-verbal noises. These are not always important but a transcribed interview allows us to study detail more carefully. Another important aspect of transcripts and taped material is that it exists in original for later study. (Silverman, 2000: 149)

With the removal of gesture and verbal emphasis a transcribed interview loses some of its supportive colour (Arfwedson, 1998: 10). Therefore an exact transcription is not a criterion of precision. It is also possible when transcribing to include extra comments for the interviewee to check and approve later. A weakness here is that the interviewee may attempt to change the original meaning in retrospect (a.a. 14).

Direct observations can have advantages over interviews as interviews only reveal individuals' perceived view and does not necessarily reflect what happened in reality. There are two types of observation "non-participant" and "participant". The later is based upon a longer period of visitation in the environment to be studied. It tends to be unstructured and time consuming but can lead to good results if performed well by experienced researchers. There is an inescapable risk of bias as there is such a long period of contact between researcher and study objects. There are a number of

observation methods available from video filming to interaction analysis (Silverman, 2000: 156-8).

Most research institutes have codes of conduct which should be adhered to or have ethical committees that examine new research proposals. It is important to clarify ethical issues to respondents involved in a study. Anonymity must be ensured. The rights of respondents must be guaranteed both by making the individuals aware of them and by ensuring this is upheld during the research process. This is essential in cases where the subjects of the study are unaware they are involved in research or where they are oblivious to the real intentions and must therefore be protected by the research team (Bell, 1999: 38-40). When interviewing it is important to explain the research process to the interviewee and make clear how the collated information will be used whilst maintaining an objective approach. Agreed time frames should be adhered to (a.a. 141).

3.4 Reliability and validity

The resulting information of a study should stand up to critical appraisal and be of such standard and breadth as to enable later use by other researchers. The quality of the data should in turn be so reliable as to allow the same results to be obtained during subsequent scrutiny. So research should be implemented in such a way that similar study in similar conditions would result in comparable outcomes; reliability. And the research questions is indeed what has been studied with appropriate methodology; validity (Bell, 1999: 103-4).

An inconsistency of qualitative research is the subjective nature of the researcher which could result in different conclusions being drawn from interpretation of the data within the same methodological framework (Silverman, 2000: 9). The problematic nature of how to transcribe interviews, as has been discussed earlier can result in a dichotomy of views as to which is the most valid method (a.a. 10). I believe through careful transcription and cataloguing of the original recordings the resulting respondent's responses can stand up to scrutiny and further analysis.

Qualitative research has also been charged as being anecdotal evidence devoid of hard facts that can withstand tough scrutiny. Interpretation of phenomena can be so closely linked to the researcher's own experience as to prevent objectivity. But as other critique of quantitative research can be levelled it is more appropriate to concentrate on utilising appropriate methodology than on attacking competing research forms (a.a. 11).

The validity of action research has been criticised as the primary concern is with local development that does not necessarily transfer well to wider theory progression (Tornberg, 2004: 43). Never the less I have argued previously that generalised theory is not always implemented by practitioners and can therefore also be criticised as ineffectual. As there is an explicit aim of the action non impartiality cannot be defended (Tiller, 1999: 53). But as has already been discussed it can be argued that no research is completely without influence of values.

3.5 Presentation of student groups

I cooperated with an educational institute which has introductory courses for immigrants in Finnish life and language. Some students only study language courses whilst others also study basic subjects to qualify them for entry to general education. The main age range was 16-25 with an additional number of mature students. For practical reasons of timetabling I produced four double lessons for four different classes run by four different teachers. In the last lesson I collaborated with a trainee teacher who was completing her last teaching placement, she was supervised by teacher B.

The first group was an advanced group whose main intention was to gain sufficient Finnish fluency to enable them to pass the language level tests for educational establishments. They had studied at the institute for one and a half terms. Their goal was therefore clearly defined and their attitude to learning serious. The group included one deaf student with a Finnish signing-translator and one with physical mobility hindrance. Fifteen students were present during the collaborative lesson. There was a homogenous language level and age in the group.

The second group was also half way through their second term at the institute. Their progress had been much slower than the first and the level significantly slower. The group had eighteen members aged 16-25 with only two over 30. Their main aim was to increase their Finnish language competency but they also studied other subjects. Many will continue the following year in the first group to enable their entry to general education.

Group three was very diverse, comprising of twenty two students which had an equal spread of ages from 16 till mid 50s. They also differed from the other groups by having a bigger spread of nationalities. The group was split from the second one by means of a level test enabling them to study Finnish more intensively than the other with fewer extra subjects. The group was halfway through its second term of study and had started from a beginner's level. The course aim was to enable the students to cope in general life situations in Finland.

The fourth group had only studied three months of Finnish and had an elementary grasp of the language. A majority of the group were living at the refugee reception centre, indeed the name of their course was "young asylum seekers in folk high schools". There were seventeen students present aged 16-18 with two closer to 20.

A common feature of all the groups was the diversity of the length of time in and reason for being in Finland. Some had arrived immediately prior to the course start whilst others had been living in Finland for a number of years. Whilst a number had come because of marriage or family connections others had come as asylum seekers. A number of asylum seekers were still waiting for a decision on their application to stay in Finland and were presently living at the refugee reception centre in the town.

3.6 Presentation of research partners

Teacher A is a Finnish language (mother tongue) teacher specialised in literature. She has taught at the institute since 2000, becoming fulltime four years ago. She previously taught immigrants at high school and adult education centres. Virtually all her earlier teaching experience has been with immigrants although the past two years

have seen the majority of her workload teaching Finnish students. She had no previous experience of outdoor education.

Teacher B had studied to be a primary teacher on an international teaching course in Finland where the medium of study was English. Her four years of teaching experience has been at this college immediately after graduation. She has been teaching Finnish as a foreign language, some beliefs and society classes and latterly student counselling. She had experienced outdoor education through teacher training and has taken classes outdoors to a limited extent.

Teacher C has worked for six years as a Finnish teacher in Swedish speaking schools, in primary, lower secondary and with adults. In Finland 6% of the population have Swedish as a second language and most students in Swedish medium schools have either Swedish as a mother tongue or are bilingual, Finnish - Swedish. This is her first year of teaching at the folk high school. She had a certain amount of experience of outdoor education in both natural and urban environments.

Teacher D is in her penultimate year of teacher training to be a primary teacher. She has specialised on Finnish language teaching. This is the only placement period where she was not required to teach primary classes. She has studied outdoor education for PE, geography and biology classes but has never practiced it in a school environment herself.

3.7 Place

The lessons were implemented directly behind the institute in full view of the dining hall. The setting was a wooded rocky mound of predominantly mature Scots pine, it experiences some level of protective status due to its use as a strategic fort in the Iron Age (Turun Sanomat, 2005). An industrial area bordered the area to the north, housing to the west and the institute to the south. A slim area of rough parkland continued to the east. The area was chosen due to its proximity, aesthetic beauty and cultural heritage.

We anticipated the place to be a visually familiar one for the students as they had had the opportunity to see the area from their dining hall but it was thought unlikely that many of them had been there physically despite it being directly behind the institute. The aim thereby to provide a secure setting that felt safe to the participants that would hopefully encourage their independent exploration of the area at a later stage. I also wanted all groups and teachers to use the same area in order to enable them to compare experiences with each other and possibly collaborate on outdoor projects in the future.

3.8 Procedure

Teachers have the responsibility for planning, producing materials and implementing lessons. Therefore I decided to focus on the teacher in the educational process and their perspective of outdoor education. My rationale was that if the teacher sees the value of a particular method they will pursue this despite perceived or real challenges or obstacles, having to make new materials for example. Secondly there was no reliable medium of communication between myself and the students leaving too large a margin for misinterpretation. As Silverman (2000: 45) notes various communicative problems arise when there is no common linguistic or cultural base.

Typically research ends in a report or publication with a suggestion for further research (Sagor, 1993: 7). Action research following a cyclical model of five stages was established by Lewin:

- 1 based on one's own experiences plan an action
 - 2 produce the action
 - 3 observe the consequences of the action
 - 4 the results are the focus of reflection
 - 5 which leads to new planning and action
- (Rönnerman, 2004: 26)

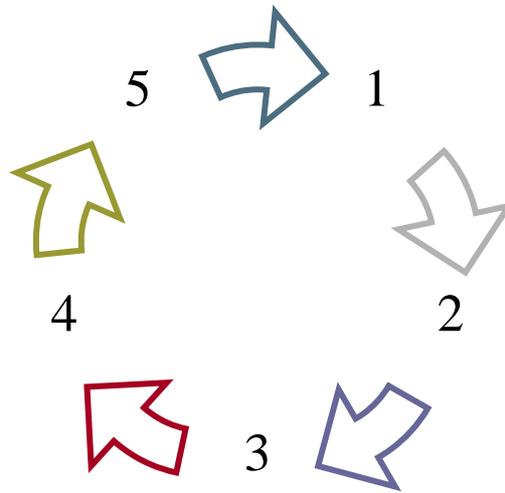


Figure 1: Lewin's Cyclical Model of Action research

Phase 1: In this study I was an external agent who approached the educational institute. The action was therefore not initiated from within the institution. It was however based upon my own experiences of outdoor education and working with immigrants. In order to develop my ideas further I searched for teaching partners whom I could bring into the study. This enabled me to widen my sphere and engage teachers who were unfamiliar to outdoor education.

I used qualitative research interviews with the language teachers in two stages. Each time the teacher was interviewed at the beginning of our collaboration when the cooperation framework had been decided but without there having been significant intervention from myself. During this initial session I introduced them into some basic aims of outdoor education. The interview with teacher A took 40 minutes, teachers B and C 30 minutes and teacher D 20 minutes.

The interview questions were adapted according to the responses of the teachers but followed the interview sheet (appendix 1). All the interviews were conducted in English except with teacher C where they were conducted in Swedish.

The lessons were planned collaboratively with each respective teacher involved immediately after the initial interview with email contact in the intervening time before we met again for the lessons. The length of the planning session was one hour with the first teacher and forty minutes with the other teachers. The language teachers

decided the theme of the lessons whilst we collectively designed the lesson plan and activities which were intended to activate or concretise parts of language that were being taught. The outdoor activities were planned specifically for the session or adapted from existing activities.

Phase 2: The lessons were conducted cooperatively, with the language teacher taking the main instructional role. Lesson outlines are included as appendix 4. It would have been desirable to have had a longer intervention with each class and teacher but the timetabling issues and curriculum pressures made this impractical. A degree of uncertainty about a new method also influenced the reluctance of the teachers to offer more lessons, they were unsure of how the cooperation would function. Nevertheless teacher C, not initially part of the study, became interested later after she heard about our collaboration from the other teachers. .

Phase 3: For each session I used a written observation scheme (appendix 2) for both myself and the teacher. These were identical with the questions written in both English and Finnish in order for each of us to give spontaneous comments as accurately as possible. The observations were used as a support for the evaluation interview but not collated separately.

Students were asked for their opinions and reflections too by their teachers. I considered that their own teachers would be able to interpret their opinions in the context of the class and would be better able to interpret meaning from weak language responses. I also believed that it was important for the language teachers to have a direct dialogue with the students as it is them who would be potentially continuing with similar sessions with the same classes in the future. After the outdoor lessons, the teachers waited for spontaneous responses before asking directly for opinions. Teacher A and B did this orally and this was reported during the reflective interview. Teacher C had written questions for her class which I received later. I received an email of oral responses from Teacher D.

Phase 4: The reflective interviews were carried out immediately after the outdoor teaching sessions except with teacher A who was interviewed the following day. It would have been desirable to have the reflective interviews at a later date in order to

give perspective to the collaboration and to enable the teacher to observe the group in subsequent lessons to see if there had been any change in the group or if the outdoor session had elicited response from them. I believed it was important to be sensitive to the schedules of the teachers so purely practical reasons led to the interviews taking place in conjunction with the lessons. The same interview scheme (appendix 3) was used as a discussion base for all the teachers although the specific content of the respective interviews varied.

Phase 5: An important phase in action research is planning and instigating new action based on the reflective learning of the previous study. Due to the study being voluntary on my part there is no structural framework for further collaborative action. As will be discussed later I will incorporate the outcomes into my own practice and I hope that my research partners will do so too. A concrete continuation will be a visit by the teachers and their new classes at a later date to my own college. This can be seen as an effort to broaden the study by comparing working practices at different institutions.

4 Literature review

4.1 Views on education

There has been a long tradition of critique against the dominant forms of education which have been viewed as pacifying as in the case of Key (1909: 64) who considered that learning was made despite of schooling not because of it. Tiller (2001: 12) sees the same weaknesses and considers the task of schools to teach students to become independent learner, thereby stimulating the desire to learn and laying the foundations for life long learning.

Orr (2004: 23) does not see education as inherently good but sees a potential danger in our current system which compromises our innate wonder of the world, splitting a holistic understanding of the world into specialised subjects without context. Schools may equip or prepare young people for careers but is lacking at delving into the realm of values and personal understanding.

Key is one of many educationalists who has called for education to consider the individual and be based upon students' interests and potential. This perspective ought to be shared by the teacher who should not only continually develop his or her individual methods but also engage as a co-learner (1909: 89). Individual personality should be the base for independent feeling and thought (a.a. 37) where there is a holistic approach to education with diverse methods of examination and student led investigation (a.a. 82).

Rousseau was also a proponent of student centred education where individual experience of the surrounding cultural and natural environment both random and manipulated was central to learning (Andersson, 2001: 22). Dewey who was influenced by Rousseau (a.a. 50) believed that education and democracy were intertwined (Dewey, 1916: 24). For him education has a strong social function (2004: 46) where work in a group with some degree of autonomy from the teacher is important not only for subject learning but for socialisation (a.a. 50).

Education should be hands on and practical with experimentation encouraged but it should not be too undirected or without demands (a.a. 32). Experience is also a vital learning tool which cannot be directly equated with education as not all experience is educational (a.a. 171) but none the less helps to form our world view (a.a. 177). The challenge is to create experience that has a conducive effect on future experience and learning (a.a. 173).

By applying a framework to experiences we can ensure that individual learning styles are accounted for. Experiential learning uses cyclical learning patterns such as Honey and Mumford's learning style; a cyclical pattern where one can start at different stages according to ones own learning style. The learning style is outlined below: (Beard, 2006: 33-4).

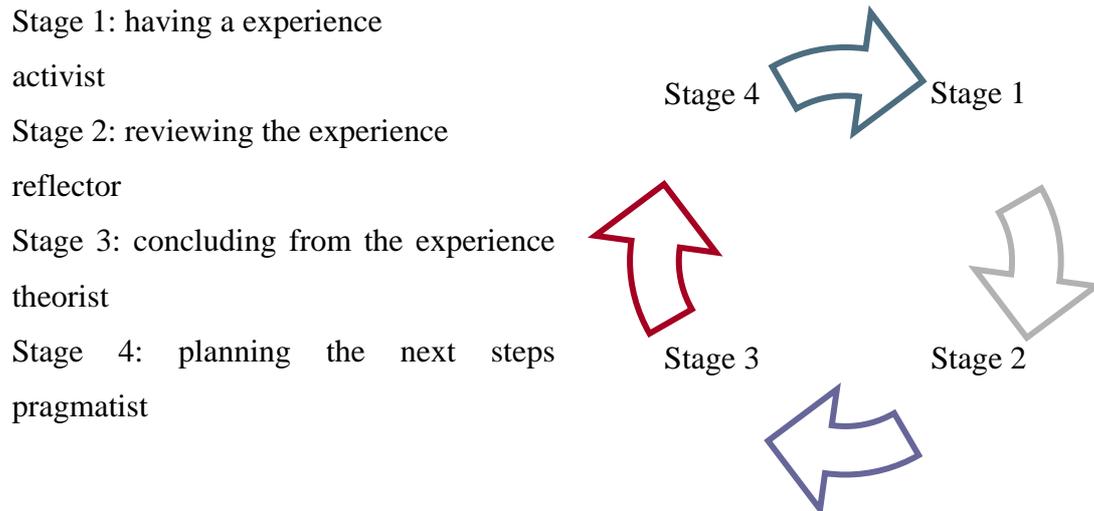


Figure 2: Honey and Mumford's learning styles

Through experimentation we should not focus negatively on making mistakes. Mistakes making is in itself an important learning process and a useful method of gauging grades of importance (Key, 1909: 82). Unless educators are unafraid of making mistakes and willing to let students learn from own mistakes, students will either avoid the problem area in the future or fail to learn from experience (Beard, 2006: 29). As Oscar Wilde wrote "Experience is the name everyone gives to their mistakes" (Lady Windermere's fan Act III).

4.2 What is outdoor education?

The roots of the underlying idea traditions of outdoor education can be traced back to Aristotle whose world view emanated from our senses. His holistic and organic view of nature is reflected by many outdoor educationalists (Dahlgren, 1997: 13). Other important principals are the use of authentic environments for concrete teaching as advocate by Comenius and the utilisation of our senses as a learning tool, considered so important by Pestalozzi (a.a. 17-18).

A fundamental building block for outdoor education must be to utilise the existing knowledge of the learner, as it is through utilising experience that we learn. While in order to achieve the ultimate learning efficiency of Csíszentmihályi's flow an appropriate level of difficulty and excitement should be involved, this being an inbuilt trait of many outdoor educational activities (a.a. 20).

Taking the classroom outdoors can be seen from different perspectives, it can be used purely as a learning method or can be an outright goal in itself; of exploring nature, the local environment, of just being. It is a contrast to modern society, an immersion in a natural environment where quality of life can be increased (Sandell, 2006: 17). The intrinsic values of outdoor education can bond theory and practice whilst giving diversity to learning environments and styles. School subjects can be thematised, creating the opportunity for a more holistic approach to integrated subject learning, simultaneously increasing the possibility for team work and problem solving whilst bringing an element of physical movement into the normal school day (Brügge, 2006: 27).

4.3 Value of place for learning

Key (1909: 83) believed that large gardens with aesthetic beauty were an important stimulus for a creative learning environment. So important that even during the winter months she proposed using window boxes to bring an element of the outdoors inside. Other non-school environments also encourage learning but appropriate didactical methodology should be used such as student led discovery or play (a.a. 84).

A specific place can be so central to learning that the curriculum should allow flexibility in order to utilise these. For example Key (1909: 86) considered that ecology and biology should only be studied outdoors when conditions allow in the spring and autumn. And as with PE (Physical Education), which she considered also to be a fresh air activity, exclusively practiced when the weather is conducive. Therefore place was considered so important as to take precedence over scheduling issues (a.a. 83).

Regular nature contact develops a relationship between people and nature (Glantz et al, 2006: 167). Indeed human culture has its roots in the natural environment where we live. Interaction in an environment is a mutual experience where both individual and environment have a reciprocal influence on each other (Andersson: 2001, 35). Indeed Nicol (2001: i) argues that "... the 'well-being' of nature is inseparable from the physical and psychological 'well-being' of the human condition".

It is not necessary to travel far to access the outdoors, indeed distance can be an obstacle for some people due to time constraints, uncertainty and money (Glantz et al, 2006: 170-1). The arena for outdoor education can be very diverse. Even friluftsliv, enjoying the open-air, can be practiced in quite urban landscapes as long as there are accessible natural elements. An open, receptive attitude is more important than a specific destination (Sandell, 2006: 11). Green urban areas for example can provide a sense of the wild, natural diversity and space; creating an arena for play, peace, celebration or culture (Glantz et al, 2006: 168). If historically outdoors was located in natural or cultural landscapes the situation is not so straightforward today, as educators it is important to be aware of the pedagogical consequences of the specific learning environment where we practice (Sandell, 2004: 151). In addition to the landscapes mentioned there are specific open-air landscapes set aside exclusively for recreation or education, these can be quite natural or partly artificial, in the case of regeneration projects for example (a.a. 155). There are even extreme examples of artificial indoor environments which recreate settings for slalom, climbing or diving amongst others, the cultural setting may also be themed (a.a. 162-3).

4.4 Culture and outdoor education

There is a paradox in a globalised world where we have the opportunity through education to promote multiculturalism and strengthen local knowledge that schools have been criticized as being an agent of homogenisation (Orr, 2004:129). What changes in methods are then needed to enable education to encourage learning of global diversity whilst upholding local traditions?

Sweden has had a long tradition of using outdoor life as a means of creating a national identity and promoting healthy lifestyle. School trips were established at the end of the 1800s primarily to strengthen national identity where Swedish nature was of central importance to building this identity. (Rantatalo, 2002: 84). During the 1920s in Sweden study excursions to the local area became an alternative to school camps involving more travelling. The purpose of these were to give pupils knowledge of the local culture, nature and working life through direct experience and were no less rich or important for their shorter period (Rantatalo, 2002: 156). At the beginning of the 1900s open-air activities were also considered important for health, fitness, well being and as a counter balance to the perceived hazards of modern life (Sandell, 2006: 10).

A great part of our cultural heritage is communicated through the generations by direct experience as a child of the cultural environment that prevails. Culture and values are in a precarious position as our modern society evolves so fast that modern children have no automatic direct contact with, or experience of the past. These important experiences which help to construct a sense of place are missing, giving rise to a need of intentionally creating them (Wohlin, 2004:50)

A strong feeling of belonging or feeling of home in a specific place is very much strengthened by our sensorial experience of the place; smells, sights, sounds and their associated personally significant meanings. These are feelings that are experienced by the whole body not just the intellect. They are strengthened further if they are part of a collective, social experience (Sellgren, 2004: 201-2).

4.5 Senses as a learning tool

Intellectual, abstract knowledge is not enough to create a deeper understanding of subjects; indeed inappropriate teacher intervention can be detrimental to the learning outcome. Empathic feelings to nature or art, for example, can only be achieved through direct exposure and experimentation. (Key, 1909: 84)

Descartes separated the intellect from the heart but later research by Damasio and others has shown an integral connection between bodily experience and cognitive function. We are influenced by our experiences both intellectually and emotionally. In order to function successfully as social beings we need an integration of the two. Emotions can be the dominant factorial element in decision making so we must be able to competently manage our intelligence and feelings. (Sellgren, 2004: 188).

Strong emotional experience strengthens our understanding. And time spent in direct contact with nature develops our emotions, enabling development of a relationship to that place. A later key to these experiences may be a smell, sight or sound. For Sellgren aesthetic values influence learning and for her there is little in nature that is ugly. Initially something may not be perceived as pleasant and good but we can be trained to like and appreciate it through positive experience, especially if it is strengthened by social or sensorial aspects (a.a. 188-191).

Neurophysiologist David Ingvar considers exposure of our senses to natural smells, forms and sounds important for our mental development and stimulation (Dahlgren, 1997: 19). Senses can also be used as a memory aid and as the different parts of the brain process different senses the more connections made the stronger the memorisation exercise. For individual memorisation we can use sense associations for things to be remembered. For example when memorising the maintenance order of a small petrol engine we can imagine both sounds and smells of its operation to assist later recall. (Liljeqvist, 2006:147). Other memory techniques can be organised around a place or on a walk for example where in a structured way different parts of the walk are connected to different parts of what should be memorised. In the same way a change of place can make a clear break in the structure of what is being dealt with (a.a. 171). These place changes involve physical movement which is in itself a memory aid, it is easier to remember movement than a static picture (a.a. 148).

4.6 Physical movement as a means of expression

Physical means of expression are the elementary communication forms for the first childhood years. This is superseded during the development of speech as verbal interaction becomes the dominant method of communication. Physical movement however continues to have a great influence upon how we can express our feelings and empathetically interpret people in our environment. (Ericsson, 2005:10)

Underdeveloped physical awareness can lead to concentration problems in children. There exists a relationship between physical awareness, physical well-being and emotional stability which can also affect concentration (a.a. 72). Studies have shown that physical awareness is enhanced with increased physical activity. However increased physical activity has not been proved to improve concentration (a.a. 99-102)

Physical surroundings and settings are an integral part of experience. By changing the learning scene to predefined places we can aid memory recall. A method of differentiating between different themes (Liljeqvist, 2006:169).

Physical inactivity is becoming an increased problem in society. There have been many calls to combat this through more PE lessons in schools; what becomes a habit

when young often follows us through our lives. Indeed outdoor education proponents also use the argument of increased physical activity in the open air and in natural surroundings as a rationale for this method (Öhman, 2004:171).

Physical movement outdoors differs from sport based activities as there are no predefined goals. Each individual can decide his or her own goal and this in itself is motivating. The activity is more autonomous as there is a less defined script and less equipment that dictates too narrowly how an action should be completed. Because of the diversity of natural materials that we work with outdoors there is less opportunity to evaluate how well an individual completed a task and rank them. Therefore the focus turns to how well a task was completed based on personal conditions emphasising self awareness (a.a 179-180).

4.7 Play and learning

Dewy (1916: 90) said “Work... with the play attitude is art...”. He believed that play should not solely be used as a fun diversion to the boredom of school work but should be utilised as a means of learning through experimentation. Play is the natural activity of children but was seen by educationalists as a free time activity that should not occupy important space in school life. It is true that the learning outcomes of play are normally incidental but it is the task of schools to provide the structure to enable clearly defined learning outcomes (a.a. 85-6).

Through this type of direct involvement in learning we can distance ourselves from splitting up themes into small topic areas to an approach of cross subject learning. Thus enabling abstract concepts to be concretised in a way that is relevant to the students’ sphere of life experience. The potential for incorporating skill and theory increases as does the choice of materials and subjects available for this type of learning (a.a. 87-8).

The value of play as a learning tool goes back to Plato and is naturally present in both human and animal young. It is equally powerful for adults who need to overcome inner barriers before being receptive to learning through play. Adults often consider themselves past the age of play or have previous life experiences that prevent them from participating fully. It has been argued that we all possess the ability to through

play distance ourselves from a particular role we occupy and experience the situation from another perspective. (Beard, 2006: 138-140)

Five features of play were identified by Smith et al (a.a. 139):

- 1 play is carried out as a means in itself and contains intrinsic motivation
- 2 play is enjoyable
- 3 play is not reality
- 4 play is concerned with the process and not the result
- 5 the way play is carried out is flexible

Beard argues that play can be used for effective learning in adults and states that “Games develop cognitive, affective and behavioural skills that can be used in both personal and work lives” (140).

5 Statement of results

5.1 Initial interview

The respondents all had a positive view of outdoor education before our collaboration. However only teacher C had what one could consider real previous experience of outdoor education. Teacher B sometimes went outside during lessons but this was primarily as a break in classroom teaching or as a method of collecting materials and not as an integral part of her teaching. When she had conducted a lesson outside, she did not consider it to be outdoor education as she simply had physically changed the teaching environment but did not utilise the existing elements outside. All the practicing teachers had experience of school trips once a year in the springtime to nature or culture environments. This is of course a type of open-air activity but is an isolated event in the school calendar. They all considered their institute supportive of alternative teaching methods as long as they were well motivated actions. The teachers also thought that this would apply to other schools too on condition that as the outdoors were easily accessible from the school. The exception to this would be upper high schools that are so focused upon the matriculation exams that there is little scope for complementary methods. They anticipated that their students would be motivated to go outdoors according to some limiting factors that will be discussed later.

In the first interview, before our collaboration I asked the respondents if they had heard of outdoor education and what it meant to them. The main concept of outdoor education for teachers A and B was as a form of physical education. The trainee teacher thought that it was a learning situation where all members of the class would be active outside, the teacher having a less dominant role. The learning was experimental and practical where the students would not get ready explanations nor too tight control from the teacher. For teacher C it meant giving students real experience of the concepts she was teaching, opening their eyes to the possibilities that exist in various places, thereby democratising teaching so that students can influence their own learning. For her outdoors also provided the opportunity for play, problem solving and discussion.

If the respondents were so positive towards working outdoors and they expected the full support of the head teacher, why did they not use the outdoors more? Of course experience and confidence is a major factor influencing implementation of outdoor lessons with a group and this was the main expectation of the teachers of our collaboration; how to manage activities, group dynamics and to become familiar with the outdoor environment as a pedagogical tool.

Teaching outdoors demands different materials and activities than indoors which is an immediate barrier to going out. Why go out when you already have good materials for indoor lessons and preparation time is limited? And if you are to go out what should you do there; if you have limited experience of the methodology it is difficult to anticipate successful didactical tactics. This was a hurdle for three of the teachers. Teacher C however thought it was quite easy to improvise when the opportunity arose, if the weather was good and the students were sleepy, why not just quickly go out and improvise a lesson there. She also thought that this was also possible if there was a misunderstanding or incomprehension of a topic that she was able to show concretely outside.

The accessibility of a suitable outdoor learning environment is the most fundamental factor in whether it is possible to leave a school or not. There is no money for transportation and this also wastes time, so easily reached, safe outdoor environments are vital prerequisites for taking lessons out of the classroom. A lack of resources also

limits visits to museums or other urban environments that cost. With younger children safety issues demand more than one teacher to look after a class and that is simply not possible in many instances. In general safety concerns were present for all teachers.

The other fundamental issue, particularly concerning working with immigrant groups, is weather or climate. With education occurring during the cold periods of the year there is limited time to go outdoors because of both lack of appropriate clothing and inability to be in a cold environment. It should be noted that in the first two outdoor teaching sessions the cold was definitely an issue for some students even though the weather would not be considered especially cold by Finnish people. The teachers agreed it was important to teach the ability to exist in the cold as this is the main season in the north but it has to be done through positive experience. It is also perhaps an example of something that cannot be taught abstractly but demands direct experience.

In an open environment it can be more difficult to focus the attention of the students, there are no physical confines and the teacher's use of voice has different effects outside. This was also seen as a potential problem.

They all saw clear benefits of going outside, teacher B, felt that simply getting fresh air was important as their teaching environment featured poor ventilation, cramped, concrete classrooms and long teaching days. This coupled with exercise and a mere change of place was anticipated to have a conducive affect on student motivation. The potential for varied methods focused upon different learning styles was also considered to be better outdoors.

A number of students had very limited educational backgrounds and teacher A considered more practical methods potentially supportive of their language learning; "... language concepts ... are very abstract. So, (outdoor education) could be a way of ... making them more concrete". For these students writing was often physically challenging so diverse methods were welcome. Teacher B said "... so how to teach grammar to someone who can barely write". Yet it was stressed that as well as language learning the students must also learn the unwritten script of Finnish education so that they would be able to study in normal schools and realise what is

expected of them in terms of behaviour and study. For a small group of students with poor learning skills techniques like outdoor education as the primary working method could be beneficial, teacher A "... actually I think there are many groups who would benefit from learning ... with techniques of outdoor education...".

For these students grammar and vocabulary are often very abstract. An issue further complicated by the lack of proper bilingual dictionaries for some large immigrant groups, for example in the case of Somalis; the fourth largest immigrant group and largest refugee nationality (Finnish Immigration Service). This makes vocabulary learning unreliable, it is uncertain if the student has grasped the exact meaning of a word, and leads to a need for contextual vocabulary acquisition.

Teacher D anticipated that outdoor education could help students who had concentration difficulties, especially those who had a need to do practical work or move around. This could aid motivation.

5.2 Reflection after the collaborative teaching

According to teacher B and C a relationship to forests and the countryside is an important element of Finnish culture, even urban dwellers have an instinctive yearning for the countryside. And as teacher B says "... I can imagine a situation but I really can't understand it before I experience it". So such vital cultural elements need to be experienced rather than learnt to be truly understood.

Can similar cultural phenomenon not be experienced by the students themselves whilst living in Finland? None of the teachers believed that their students had visited the outdoor woodland before despite the fact that it was within sight of the dining hall and only a few meters from the institute. Regardless of whether you could claim the small woodland to be a forest or not the students received a small, positive experience of being in a woodland or forest.

In every group without exception discussion or jokes about bears or other wild creatures occurred. It was certain from the point of view of the teachers that this represented a real fear or uncertainty from the students about going into the forest (not specifically bears) which was for the majority unfamiliar. Indeed the lowest language

level group did not know the word “metsä” or forest even if it is the dominant landscape form in Finland. As teacher B states, “It is very important to go there because they didn’t even know the name for metsä, wood”. The teachers gave examples of students in the summer being scared of ants and also of a Somali boy who had been deeply scared of hares. Most of the students had never been in a forest before they came to Finland.

Due to concrete worries and insecurity of the forest and its wildlife the teachers considered it important to have first hand experience of nature to alleviate these fears. Probably they would not dare to venture into natural habitats independently. For new immigrants their teacher and class form a very important supportive structure, perhaps the only sympathetic and secure environment that they have. Therefore the tools already exist for creating positive experiences in supportive surroundings. Teacher B summarised; “I think it is important cause if they are living in the city they might not go to the forest at all so in the school you have a great possibility to go outside. With a teacher, you work there with a familiar person and you can notice that it is safety there and it is nice and everything like that”

An example was given of a lady in the autumn that had seen mushrooms during a lesson outside and upon discovering they were edible came back after the school day and picked them, preparing a meal that evening for her family.

These examples of succeeding and overcoming personal or group difficulties or anxieties also impact upon the well being of the group with advantageous outcome on group behaviour, dynamics and motivation. So an important learning outcome was simply to have dared go into the woodland, have a positive experience there, identify some plants and animals there and learn their names, directly or indirectly. This results in the groups’ ability to vocalise and discuss issues belonging to the forest as they have gained some experience; it is no longer a foreign concept to them.

Teacher D considered there to be a difference between prepared materials and natural materials; “... you can be very creative, you have your own creativeness there”. There were a number of instances where students adapted the natural materials they were working with to express aspects of their own culture thereby bridging a cultural

divide. One Afghani boy chose some pine bark in one activity because he made small bark boats of a different tree species back home as a boy. He was unaware that it is common practice for children to do this in Finland as well. This cultural meeting was unplanned but gave the boy a cultural connection to his new country. In another activity using natural material to illustrate face features a girl constructed a typical Ethiopian face expressing her own culture and what is important there in terms of good looks.

Although motivated and generally very positive over their opportunity to stay in Finland the teachers battled with some very basic behavioural matters. Some examples were, not bringing pen paper or books to school, not coming in time, not coming in time even cold on dark mornings and wandering around the classroom. A sometime lack of listening skills and tendency to argue was attributed to an over eagerness to talk. There was therefore a general apprehension over class control and individual concentration. This was not warranted as all the groups behaved well although some individual students had a tendency to wander away and had to be repeatedly called back. It was also clearly seen that the majority of groups and individuals worked well together, that the group was important to the individual students.

Students who were quieter in class became more verbal outdoors and in general the teachers considered outdoors to provide the opportunity for creativity for both the teacher and students. There was a dichotomy when planning, especially teacher D considered the outdoors demanded careful planning as no supplementary materials or resources exist there as in a classroom for example. But at the same time some elements of the lesson can be left to chance and more room for creativity exists. There is a diversity of natural materials available, and methodology is only limited by imagination rather than technical equipment or space.

The teachers considered elements of fun were integrated into the outdoor learning environment and due to the nature of the exercises there was more opportunity for fun. In fact the last group of students mentioned the word “hauska”, fun eleven times in their written feedback. The groups certainly needed fun and created opportunity for laughter and amusement themselves. Perhaps it is more acceptable to laugh and have

fun outside as the dominant script of formal education has a tendency to seriousness and deliberation.

It was unclear of the advantages of the learning outcomes of the outdoor session in comparison to indoor teaching in the teachers' opinion. They were sure these lessons would be well remembered but it was difficult to clarify if that was due to the remarkable nature of the lessons or if it was due to a specific feature of the methodology.

The students' opinions were very positive, the only real grievance being the weather (A short weather report is included in appendix 4). They enjoyed themselves, had fun, and appreciated being as a group and working together. Physically being outside was constructive and being in the forest was interesting. They liked the activity in the exercises.

Would the students like go out again? Overwhelming the answer was yes. When the later groups were outside the first two groups expressed their desire to go out side again, not in the future but spontaneously, right there and then since the weather was fine. Good feelings were reawakened by watching the other groups. When asked where they would like to go again most answered to a different location; beach, park museum or other undefined place. There were those students who did want to go back to the same forest area

All teachers whilst positive to the idea of using outdoor education as a pedagogical method used it rarely. Our collaboration had spurred them to using it in different ways. Teacher A would definitely use the same material the following year, teacher B whilst positive considered that they went outside sufficiently and that there was not such a strong reason for going out more. Teacher C saw the limitations of money and transport as barriers to further development and teacher D was happy to have received new ideas and methods.

The teachers felt that they had all learnt from the experience of going outside and were more confident to do this in the future. Would they have started outdoor lessons without support, the answer was probably not. To enable an increase in the future

teacher A wished to have a pedagogical support person available to encourage and help development of new methods.

6 Analysis and discussion

It was Comenius in *Didactica Magna* who first used the term didactics as a definition for the art of teaching as a science; the what and how of knowledge transfer. The task of schools is to adapt to individuals' potential in a manner of inclusion. He believed that education should follow a child's natural development, focusing on discussion around real life phenomenon and objects. Reality was at the core of teaching whilst simultaneously it symbolised a maze where guidance was demanded in order for students to filter their experiences and know which experiences could be relied upon (Rantatalo, 2002: 35-6).

The outdoor arena offers the possibility of more tangible ways of learning abstract concepts through kinaesthetic methods. And whilst it is important for students to become familiar with the predominant methods of learning and teaching of a country the immediate learning outcomes are equally important. Consequently a multifaceted approach is desirable, one aspect of which can be the use of the outdoors.

If there is an abundance of laughter in a classroom a passing colleague may wonder if there is no teaching going on. All the classes had a great desire for humour and it became a natural element of the outdoor lessons which was easy for the teacher to manage. The groups wanted to enjoy themselves and appreciated working as a group together.

The teachers stressed the importance of social aspects in immigrant learning. The mutual trust between group, individual and teacher is of significance. Outdoor education is by nature a cooperative learning method which strengthens self-awareness and empathetic group dynamic. Dewey emphasised the importance of the socialisation aspect of education and also promoted the use of play as a pedagogical tool (2004: 46). Both play and group collaboration are intrinsically found in outdoor education. One facet of play being enjoyment or fun (Beard, 2006: 139).

There were two types of situation where outdoor methodology was not advantageous for some individuals. Some students were experiencing difficulties in life which had consequence for their learning and motivation, the same type of behaviour was seen both inside and outside although literature supports the view that both group and physical activity has a positive benefit for mental health (Ericsson, 2005:10). For some other students who require a very defined structure the less formal nature of outdoor education was challenging. We have to respect this and the fact that one method will not be beneficial to all individual learning predispositions. It is for that reason important to again concentrate on the implementation of a method so that we as educators create the prerequisites for all students to learn to their optimum.

The school day is quite regular with lessons in confined classrooms according to a defined timetable. Going outdoors in itself can be of value; for fresh air, to wake the class up with a short gymnastics session or simply as a change. It did not use up too much class time and was not deemed ineffective. An amplified learning outcome may result, perhaps due to the originality of the outdoor lesson. And this novel element can of course be used wisely. Key considered certain physical places of such central importance to corresponding subjects that they should be sole taught there (1909: 84). Changing the physical location of a lesson can clearly define different subjects or expected behaviour.

Accessibility issues along with the weather are the two main pre-determinates that affect the ability to implement outdoor programs. Distance should not be a complication to outdoor education; I have shown earlier that both Key, Sandell and Rantatalo have acknowledged the validity of near environments. Despite their inferior status in relation to more attractive areas they offer almost the same potential for learning and experience. Beard (2006: 138) wrote that huge investments were made in playgrounds in the early 1900s to give opportunity for play in urban environments, a measure to promote good health and morals whilst simultaneously providing free play which aids physical and emotional development. Therefore it is important that schools have easy access to natural like environments where a variety of learning can take place.

Nevertheless the mere provision of attractive environments is no guarantee of usage. Of all the students involved almost none had previously visited the lesson place despite its close proximity and aesthetic appearance. How can young immigrants amalgamate into a society and root a sense of place to their geographical location when their cultural diet may be removed from the local plane. Collective sensory experience reinforces our sense of identity and place in a way our intellect cannot do alone (Sellgren, 2004: 192).

The outdoor environment gives the opportunity for individuals to engage emotionally in what they experience, not solely through intellect. Key considered deeper understanding possible only when students can engage directly with the subject (1909: 84). Through emotional engagement we gain a respect for our surroundings and fellow creatures. There is a democratic aspect of outdoors where inputs cannot be limited by the teacher but merely focused. This gives opportunity for individualised experimentation. The student who discovered that his boyhood hobby of bark boats was also a childhood hobby in his new country engaged on an emotional level. This is different from comparing through discussion differences or similarities in how various cultures celebrate New Year for example.

Teachers characteristically are dedicated to providing the best teaching they can. This often means going on courses and independently adapting new ideas and creating materials. However eager or motivated there are always time constraints preventing implementation of fresh methods. Collaborative working was welcomed by all the teachers and they expressed a wish for a continuation of this kind where innovation could be supported and evaluated. A view supported by Tiller's ideas of research partnerships (1999: 12).

7 Conclusion

Teachers' time is increasingly pressed with progressively more administrative duties and classrooms occupied by students with ever more diverse needs. This gives rise to a call for more teacher collaboration as a way of supporting individual teacher's practice. There exists the opportunity for experimentation in the classroom but external skills are needed to engage the teacher in a developmental process. If this can

be done in a collaborative teaching team the outcomes will become embedded in the institutions as opposed to being more loosely connected with individual practitioners.

As in this case the external input came from a practitioner so there is a further transfer out with the host institution to my own college. Although not a language teacher myself through intervening, reflecting and evaluating a collaborative project learning outcomes emerged that are relevant to my own practice.

Teacher training does provide the base for many practical methods for the teachers' portfolio of practice. But it does not give sufficient depth to complementary methods such as outdoor education. It is questionable if this can be achieved in a compressed educational program with many internal demands. If not in training for new teachers then the possibility should be offered through in-house training programs. It is furthermore important that the school administration also offers support to different pedagogical methods if their didactical reasons can be well enough supported.

I would argue that most students want to learn, in any case motivation in the students that I met was high. But studying is a challenging task especially if it is in a subject that one is not particularly inclined. Language learning does not suit everyone but it is a necessity of a move to another country. By providing varied learning methods and hands-on experience of the concepts being taught all learner types benefit. None the less there must be a balance between innovative methods and preparation of students for the acceptable ways of behaviour and study demanded in the country as a whole.

Nissilä stated that one aim of language teaching was to build a strong "multi-cultural identity". This demands both self-awareness and deep knowledge of the target culture. As has been argued earlier intellectual knowledge needs to encompass direct experience and an emotional response to enable full understanding. If we are optimistic we can create an understanding that is long lasting and leads to mutual respect of both the natural world and its inhabitants.

More comprehensive outcomes would have been achieved in the study if there had been the opportunity for a broader collaboration over a longer time span. This would

have also enabled the possibility to complete a full action research cycle and perhaps plan the following action stage.

I believe through this study I have shown that outdoor education can be an effective method of working with immigrants who otherwise have a sparse experience of the natural environment of the new home country. Further research is needed in how a sense of place can be reinforced for these groups, imbedding a localised sense of pride and belonging. Evidently there are many learning barriers for many immigrant groups and the role of outdoor education in helping some of these should be studied further.

Finally I would like to thank my research partners for the opportunity to engage in a collaborative process at their institute. Both teachers and students were flexible and enthusiastic in the process. It is never easy for educators to open their teaching realm to others who are there to observe and analyse. Additionally three of the teachers contributed to the interviews admirably well in English giving thought and depth to their comments. Although I took it upon myself to prepare the majority of the exercises extra preparation was demanded from all in a tight timeframe. The time schedule dictated that the outdoor lessons were sometimes implemented in less than congenial weather but simultaneously showed that the outdoors can be utilised even when the weather is not perfect.

Personally I gained courage to initiate a collaborative project, to intervene in other teacher's practice, influence it and mutually evaluate the outcome. This partnership was strengthened by the cross subject nature of the cooperation. I contributed with methodology and ideas, the teachers with language content and substance. What was obvious to one partner demanded explanation and motivation from the other. I believe all collaborators learnt from the process; individual practice was strengthened and new innovations established. Therefore I hope that I have shown that practitioners can be useful agents of change in the education field if the opportunity exists.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Pre teaching interview

Pre-teaching interview

- Discussion of the question of research ethics and permission to use recording equipment
- Background information on the teacher
 - o Age
 - o How long teaching experience in what types of schools?
 - o How long in this institute?
 - o How long with immigrants?
- Firstly I would like to get to know your ideas about education and learning especially in relation to immigrant groups
 - o What do you teach?
 - o Do you use mainly text books or authentic materials?
 - o What is the main goals of your course, both open and hidden
 - o Is there a connection between the language you teach and culture/society?
 - o Do your students have a sense of place, a connection to their new society?
 - o How do you think your students learn best?
 - What influences them?
 - What methods do you use?
 - o Do you have problems with
 - Motivation
 - Learning outcomes
 - Connect of concepts with reality
 - Behaviour
- Does outdoor education mean anything to you, if not can you describe what you think it involves, thoughts feelings (I then give a definition of what outdoor education is to me)
 - o How do you think we can use outdoor education with your students
 - o Do you foresee any problems with your group
 - o What extra value do you think being outdoor brings?
 - o Will they value the outside lessons?
 - Is there anything particular you think we should consider when planning?
 - o What about the institute's attitudes to complementary educational methods?
 - o What about student's attitudes?
- Expectations of our collaboration
 - o What are your expectations of our collaboration?
 - o How should we proceed?
 - o How do you expect our short collaboration to affect your practice?

Appendix 2: Teacher observation sheet 1

Please comment as fully as you can on the categories below. You may also write your own free, spontaneous observations

Peer to peer interaction Opiskelijoiden interaktio keskenään
Group activity Ryhmän aktiivisuus
Group mood Ryhmähenki
Individual motivation Henkilökohtainen motivaatio
Effectiveness of the lesson Opetustunnin tehokkuus
Difficulties Ongelmia
Difference in working outdoor compared with classroom activity Millä tavalla ulkona työskentely eroaa opetuksesta luokkahuoneessa?
Other comments Muita kommentteja

Appendix 3: Post teaching interview

Post- teaching interview

Questions were focussed around the following areas:

- What are your general impressions of how the outdoor teaching went?
- What were the strengths and weaknesses of the lesson?
- What were the learning outcomes?
 - o Were there differences comparing lessons been conducted indoors?
- Did you experience any difficulties?
 - o Leadership
 - o Other
- Observations of the dynamics of the group
 - o Peer interaction
 - o Behaviour of individual group members
 - o Difference to indoors
- What were the opinions of the students?
 - o From teacher's perspective
 - o Direct comments
 - o Reasons for these comments
- Significance of the place chosen
- Learning of Finnish nature or cultural concepts?
- Has your opinion of, or attitude to outdoor education changed since our collaboration?
- How will you use outdoor education in the future?
- What is your opinion of our collaboration?
 - o Is it useful to work like this?
 - o If so how can teacher collaboration be used more, what are the hindlers to it?
- Other points?

Appendix 4: Lesson plans

Lesson 1: Lesson plan with A.P. 11.3.08 2 lessons, 15 students

Lesson theme

Learning and using irregular comparative forms

Activity 1

Stand in line and place yourself according to a scale for different scenarios.
Comparatives

Activity 2

Walk far, further, furthest etc. group irregular comparative adverbs

Activity 3

Prepare a sketch based on a scenario from typical Finnish outdoor activities showing irregular comparative adverbs

Activity 4

Competition, physically making choices according to options given illustrating grammatical forms much and many and other comparatives

Weather: + 3° cold wind

Lesson 2: Lesson plan with J.P. 7.4.08 1+1 lessons 18 students

Lesson theme

Practicing genitive word forms

Activity 1

Acting out scenarios using to elicit genitive forms and why they are genitive

Activity 2

Grammatical form for “I like.....”, finding objects from nature

Activity 3

Group dividing activity

Activity 4

In groups, collect and find objects from a list and place in a rope circle on the ground. Done as a competition. Then they make sentences using genitive forms and words such as between and on.

Weather: +6° cloudy and windy

Lesson 3: Lesson plan with P.A. 15.4.08
1+2 lessons, 22 students

Activity 1

Pick an object from nature and explain why you like it to a pair. Hand over your object, take your partner's and tell onwards to a third person etc.

Activity 2 a

Make groups by matching up a jigsaw from individual pieces

Activity 2 b

In groups, collect and find objects from a list and place in a rope circle on the ground. Exercise using genitive and then imperfect.

Activity 3

Nature art; on white sheets making a representation of Finland. Pictures are taken and follow up done in classroom. Vernissage and discussion

Activity 4

Nature question orienteering. Find the questions and discuss the answers, funny aspect to nature knowledge.

Weather: +9° warm overcast

Lesson 4: Lesson plan with T.K. /J.P. 16.4.08
1+1 lessons 17 students

Activity 1

Place names of face parts on correct place on drawing

Activity 2

Identifying famous faces from pictures and eliciting descriptions of them

Activity 3

Pictures of famous people on their back they should ask about the features in order to identify who they are

Activity 4

Face sculptures

Activity 5

Song; heads, shoulders, knees and toes

Weather: +10° warm and sunny