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The Importance of Place for Learning and Teaching – an Outdoor Educational Perspective

Abstract

The study describes how 19 teachers linked to preschool and comprehensive school experience the importance of place for learning and teaching in an outdoor educational context. The methodological approach is phenomenographic. The semi-structured interviews are based on pictorial material intended to illustrate different physical learning environments. Nine categories and four place-related perspectives can be distinguished. The result shows that there is sometimes a didactic uncertainty around places for teaching and learning outside the classroom walls. The availability of different places in the outdoors, a woodland environment and natural materials are seen as meaningful complements in teaching. Town settings, parks and industrial landscapes are to a lesser degree perceived as learning environments. The study shows the experience of teachers using other contexts for learning and teaching than the classroom. Outdoor education is experienced as a place-related toolkit with opportunities to integrate different subjects and anchor teaching in the real world.

Introduction

In recent years the interest in outdoor education has grown steadily among teachers active in pre-school and the early years of the elementary school (Szczepanski, 2011). The aim of this article is to describe and analyse teachers' perceptions of learning environments from an outdoor educational perspective. Initially various place and learning perspectives are highlighted against a theoretical background. The interview survey is then presented of teachers' experiences of teaching in other learning environments than the classroom proceeding from a phenomenographic analysis. The research question is: *what perceptions do teachers have of the importance of place for learning and teaching outdoors?*

The meaning of place – theoretical and normative attributes

Our relationship to places is expressed in many different ways. In a teaching and learning context the place “in the classroom” is often taken for granted and therefore also the didactic where-question. This question fixes its focus on the physical outdoor environment and what

places the teacher perceives as suitable for learning and teaching. Outdoor education here enables a place-based learning and teaching which clarifies and makes visible the situated nature of the objects of learning in an interaction between text-based (intellectual tool, discursive practice) and non-text based practice (physical instruments). That is to say, a management of the intellectual and physical aspects of instruction. Such a place-related meeting outside the school walls raises the didactic where-question and thereby the significance of place for the teaching and learning context, creating opportunities for authentic meetings and an interplay between theory and practice (Szczepanski, 2008, pp.23-24, 53, 2011).

The didactic identity and specificity of outdoor education and thereby its place perspective is specified by the circumstance that the physical natural and cultural environment forms the framework for the content of learning. The argument for a place perspective also accommodates a teaching theme, a content and a way of learning. The direct meeting with the place, the learning environment is described by Dahlgren and Szczepanski (1998):

Outdoor education would be one of few – if not the only – examples of an education that is defined by an expression stating the location of education, its *where* (p.37).

The concept of place – geographical, cognitive and emotional

The word *place* can be described in several ways. The Swedish National Encyclopedia defines it as “an area with a well-defined position and restricted extent, sometimes more or less thought of as a point” (NE, 2012). In the present context it is used of delimited environments which can be used for pedagogical purposes outdoors. The concept *sense of place* is used to highlight the relationship to place in a broader sense – as part of cultural identity, an expression of a strongly personal relationship to the environment, which in a wider perspective can embrace a whole region, a country or a nation (Lennon et al., 2001).

In a school context a feeling for place can be related to the local environment of the school and lead to “a local historical, ecological, social and physical tie to the extended pedagogical space” (Szczepanski, 2008, p.58 *translated*). The difference between *place* and *area* can in this context be said to exist in the fact that place is more delimited and creative of identity –

charged with emotional memories and experiences. The concept *area* is more diffuse and is characterised by more impersonal points of reference (Lundgren, 2006). This is how Tuan (1974) describes the multifarious place relationship between people and the physical environment:

Topophilia takes many forms and varies greatly in emotional range and intensity. It is a start to describe what they are: fleeting visual pleasure; the sensual delight of physical contact; the fondness for place because it is familiar, because it is home and incarnates the past, because it evokes pride of ownership of creation (p.246).

Note that the concept of place *topos* (Greek ‘place’) is not only associated with geographical places, but also with mental, cognitive environments – mental landscapes. The experience of the objects that constitute the place can also be described as an emotional interplay between experience, perception and concept formation, an “I – place relationship” which can be encapsulated in the concept *topophilia*. An “undefined space” becomes a place with meaning if one has a relationship to it, gets to know it and charges it with meaning (ibid).

Tuan speaks of the cultural identity of the place and its experienced import, sensuous as well as mental, “mindscape”, of experience of place as a result of an integrated cognitive and physical experience coupled to the “landscape” (Tuan, 2005). Brusman (2008) also takes up the concept *mindscape*. He defines this as a medium through which a person’s perceptions of a place are shaped in memories and experiences: “A mindscape is a cognitive landscape, anchored in the physical structures” (p.199). Both refer to place-experience in a cognitive – mindscape - and in a physically perceived experience – landscape.

Another place concept in school practice is *locus* (*ställe* NE, 2012), often specified with a certain content or a certain function – bathing place, favourite spot, good place for mushrooms. The concept is usually related to a more personal experience and to what one does and how the place is used, i.e. a content and a doing, which focuses the didactic what and how questions. In its pedagogical context the concept place/locus becomes an example of land use, for example cultivation – natural sciences, construction – technology as a subject.

Place - learning and teaching

The anthology *Place-Based Education in the Global Age: Local Diversity* illuminates both the space and time dimension of place awareness, the cultural and historical memory, the significance of contact with nature, and the concept “placelessness”, i.e. the circumstance that a direct relation to the place is lacking (Gruenewald & Smith, 2008). It is maintained here that many teachers lack a relationship to their immediate environment and thereby also the possibility to connect to learning environments outdoors in their teaching. The authors also reflect on the re-use of nature, for a life in harmony with other species, “reinhabitation”, for the reconquest of a feeling for the place, historically, culturally, ecologically and socially (ibid.). Experience shows that place awareness counteracts psychosocial oppression and creates the possibility to use cultural differences as pedagogical assets, “decolonization” (Gruenewald, 2003a, b). This feeling for the pedagogical possibilities of place (Lundgren, 2006; Knapp 1996) in combination with a “sense of place”, in the form of cultural sensitivity, democratic participation, awareness of the global didactics of different environments, is illustrated by several scholars (Sobel, 2004; Smith, 2002; Hart, 1997). By global didactics is intended a widened understanding of ecology, sustainable development and a social relationship to place in nature and society through subject integration and environmental thematics.

The significance of an interaction with place in the relationship between consciousness and the physical space of the school is commented on by various scholars (Johansen, Lorentzen, Selander & Skyum-Nielsen, 1997; Kampman, 2006; Kirkeby, 2006). The message of the locus can be conveyed through text-based practice in the form of factual descriptions, but also by non-text based practice in the form of experienced scents, tastes, sounds and tactile stimuli which may be difficult to verbalise in a teaching context (Szczepanski, 2008). Von Wright (2011, pp.171-179) also provokes thoughts about the pedagogy of the place, materiality - awareness – communication, in the meeting with the pedagogical situation and its consequences for meaning-creating activities. Neisser (1994) highlights the importance of the interaction of the senses with the physical environment. In the argument for interaction with place, stress is laid on the greater and broader pedagogical possibilities of the “soft” functionalist architecture to challenge the imagination of the learner. Hard functionalism locks learning into more stringent forms (ibid. pp.392-407). The physical environment generally functions as a catalyst in play and learning. This also applies to places which are not

sanctioned as learning environments within given frameworks (Fjørtoft, 2000; Grahn, Ekman, Lindblad, Mårtensson & Nilsson, 1997; Grahn, 2003; Mårtensson, 2004; Åkerblom, 2005).

Proceeding from reflections of this nature Moser (2007) discusses whether the learning space in its pedagogical context can be understood as a teaching medium, a text. He stresses that this is the case, but that the ability of an individual or a group to read this text is dependent on background experience. This argument he relates to Skyum-Nielsen (1995) who maintains the concept of text can cover a complex of meanings which are verbal, paraverbal and non-verbal. In the ability to interpret are integrated according to Moser (2007) both the corporal physical experience of the teaching environment and the experience of place as an instructional medium. Moser also takes up the “outdoor school” concept, where more or less nature- and culture-marked, place-bound outdoor environments are given an added importance in the learning process (cf. Dahlgren et al., 2007; Lundegård, Wickman & Wohlin, 2004).

Sandberg (2009) explains the factors that are important for children’s and young people’s contact with nature in an urban environment: parental customs and norms, access to nature – undeveloped land, the attitude of the school and pre-school to being outdoors, as well as security in the residential area. Hyllested (2007) too underlines the importance of contact with nature and the authentic milieu. Similar ideas are found in Andersson (2008), who inter alia describes the meeting between archaeologists and pupils and teachers in the primary school, where archaeological finds are presented in the classroom, while the site of the dig was not visited. Westlund (1996) further argues for the need for a more flexible and less structured use of time which can be open for study visits and a more thematic way of working.

Jordet (2007, 2011) shows that outdoor and indoor teaching can complement each other and as a didactic teaching model strengthen the experience-based subject perspective. Mygind och Herholdt (2005) point out that subject related, health related and social gains can be made if the “outdoor school” and classroom teaching are combined. The locus can be given both an organising and a structuring, controlling function (cf. Ceppi & Zini, 1998; Moser & Dudas, 2007; Zini & Zoboli, 2002). Here the organisation of the school may be noted with the norm of teaching at a distance *about* phenomena, concepts and processes instead of locating teaching *in* the environment where they occur (Lundgren, 2006):

But he never took us out into the countryside, in his teaching he never mentioned the remarkable situation of the town. There seemed to be an

insurmountable gap between teaching about nature and the peculiar natural world to be found just outside the biology room. The mental distance was greater than the spatial (p. 254). (*translation*)

The place and awareness of the environment

In Hutchinson's (2004) survey of knowledge he describes the need for an extended learning space and the creation of a "local feeling of place". It is pointed out here that the mental landscape of children and young people has become ever more restricted by standardised curricula, television and computer games, which has resulted in fewer encounters with outdoor based local environments. He also describes different competing educational perspectives of importance for *holistic learning*. Here he clarifies and makes visible the concept of feeling for place as learning for increased awareness of the environment, social justice, human rights and knowledge of the conditions and effects of globalisation.

In Magtorn's (2007) investigation of ecological reading ability, to "read landscape" (ecological literacy), and conceptual understanding, the importance of understanding connections and relationships in their right context is described. In one of his four part-studies he shows the need for a close bodily, physical relationship to the natural landscape in order to understand ecological connections (ibid. Paper IV, p.76). Magtorn also stresses the importance of contact with nature for understanding of ecological concepts. Similar conclusions relative to the importance of contact with nature for a broadminded view of society and a greater engagement with the environment are presented by Fouhey and Saltmarsh (1996), Thomashow (1996) and Wickenberg (1999).

In an early reflection on outdoor education, Sharp 1943 (pp.363-364) established that the content of teaching should be adapted to the place which can be considered most suitable, regardless of whether it is indoors or outdoors. What he mainly opposed was the abstract teaching context which often differed markedly from the pupils' everyday experiences. As recently as 2010 Bentsen complains of teachers' knowledge gaps on *udeskoleundervisning* (*outdoor teaching*):

To summarize, there seems to be a gap of knowledge concerning *udeskole* teachers' use of and preferences for green space, place-based constraints to

outdoor teaching and how green space managers can facilitate teachers and pupils in their outdoor learning activities (Bentsen, 2010, p.21).

The implications of place – a summary

A pervading pattern in the above survey of knowledge is the emphasis on a personal, authentic physical experience of place. The corporeal sensuous interaction is an important basis for understanding learning and teaching outdoors. It is further argued for experience-based learning and that outdoor and indoor teaching can complement each other. One speaks of the significance of interaction with place, the place as text and learning medium to understand contexts and relationships in learning and teaching. The place-based perspective is also coupled with “ecological literacy”, with an environmental engagement which can lead to increased environmental awareness, a sustainable society and knowledge of globalisation. In this compilation there is also noted teachers’ lack of knowledge respecting outdoor education and local environmental relationships, which leads to a tendency to teach, often at a distance and in abstract terms, about concepts, phenomena and processes. Thus from a pedagogical perspective the where question and the use of loci outdoors are often rendered invisible and taken for granted.

Methodological considerations

The methodological approach in this study is phenomenographic, which implies that it is also inductive and qualitative. The phenomenographic research perspective aims to describe reality as it is humanly understood and interpreted (Uljens, 1989). The approach proceeds from a human – environment relationship which rests on a non-dualistic ontology, i.e. the postulate that the only environment that is meaningful is the one perceived by man. But the human way of experiencing our environment varies qualitatively. The phenomenographic project consists in describing these different ways of understanding and perceiving phenomena in the environment, “the empirical subject’s way of experiencing reality” (Uljens 1998, s.124, *translation*). The pedagogy is in the same way dependent on what the instructing teacher imagines or conceives that learning outdoors involves. Outdoor teaching can for the individual teacher consequently appear in many different ways (cf. Szczepanski, 2008). The object of this study is not to comment specifically on the reason for these differences. The purpose is restricted to describing on the one hand teachers’ perceptions of place-related learning outdoors, and on the other the qualitative differences that may be distinguished in the

respondent group. Neither is the primary research interest to decide how frequent the various conceptions are, but to seek and identify *nuances, differences* and *variations* in descriptions of the diverse nature of phenomena and how they appear (cf. Larsson, 1986, 2005).

The delimitation and character of the study

The investigation is based on interviews with 19 teachers in a municipality in southern Sweden in the school year 2008/2009. The aim is specifically to find out *what conceptions* can be observed and distinguished among teachers in the investigated group concerning the significance of place for learning and teaching. The conceptual apparatus round the physical learning environment proceeds from the teachers' own experiences and preunderstanding. In respect of the choice of a phenomenological approach, see for example Alexandersson (1994, 1998).

The respondents' school context

In focus for the study is an f-6 school, a pre-school class up to year 6 inclusive with about 260 pupils, an "autodidact school" (in respect of outdoor teaching) where five teachers, on their own initiative, have studied and apply outdoor teaching methods. The school building and playground with natural areas border on a woodland area. In the immediate environment there is a "school wood" of about 1 hectare with pedagogical subject rooms which vary according to the change of seasons. It is mainly pupils and teachers in the middle school who have built up and make use of the school wood. The respondents from this school are ten in number.

Eight respondents represent two other schools in the municipality. Among these three have previously worked at the autodidact school. One respondent is active as a school politician. Of in total 19 respondents who are denoted with numbers 1-19 thirteen work as teachers, five as school leaders and one as a school politician. All are qualified teachers with teaching experience. The following school forms are represented: preschool, elementary school, preschool class, low and intermediate level and upper secondary school. Formal training in outdoor teaching was lacking. Ages range from 30 to 64 and gender distribution was 13 women and six men. The respondents were chosen with the help of the schools' head teachers, a so-called convenient sample, which is a practical method to obtain access to a population (Troost, 2005). The selection as a whole was made to achieve a variation in

opinions with the respondent group, which is central to a phenomenographic study (Marton & Booth, 2000).

Data composition

Qualitative, semi-structured interviews with open questions and a low degree of standardisation were chosen to obtain as great a variation in the replies as possible. The researcher is not directorial, but establishes the framework and drives the conversation onwards (Holme & Solvang, 1997). It should also be pointed out that the interviewees are seen as respondents in the sense that they answer for themselves and express their opinions, as distinct from an informant who reports his or her observations to the researcher. The interviews comprised on average 60 minutes and took place in as similar contexts as possible to increase the comparability of the material (Kvale, 1997).

A pilot interview was conducted as a test of the serviceability of the questions before the study itself. The recorded interviews were transcribed in their entirety. With the intention of illustrating different physical learning environments, mainly outdoors, an interview guide was passed out at the interview with open questions (see below) and photographs of school settings, urban environments, parks and squares, water environments, industrial surroundings, woodlands, meadow land and pastures. The purpose of the pictorial material was to make visible the *didactic where-question* in connection with the interview questions.

The framework comprised the following interview questions: *What is outdoor education for you, what is knowledge for you, how do you teach about environmental questions and why do you teach the way you do?* After completion of the 19 interviews it was assessed that a so-called “theoretical saturation” had been reached (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Analytic procedure

The working process has followed the framework for the phenomenographic method of analysis (see also Hayes 2000). The transcribed interview replies were used as a basis for the analysis, which was carried out in six stages:

1. Various key words in important parts of the text were reproduced in the margin to give an overall impression.

2. The statements were picked out and sorted into different descriptive categories based on possible patterns – similarities or differences – to be able to identify different perceptions.
3. A clearer picture of the content of the text (the core of the perceptions) crystallised out after further perusal of the interviews.
4. Labelling, naming and describing what is distinctive for the respective categories was implemented.
5. Identifying and systematising the teachers' perceptions were presented in a category system comprising nine categories – with the focus on underlying didactic aspects.
6. From the category system four place-related perspectives were distinguished (cf. Uljens, 1989, pp.50-51).

Marton and Booth (2000, p.163) lists three criteria for qualities which descriptive categories should include, namely that they say something clear about the phenomena of the investigation, that they are logically related to each other and that they are of limited number so that the critical variation can be narrowed down. These three criteria have guided the analysis (cf. Larsson, 1986, 2005). In the presentation of the categories, under each category quotations are given which are typical for the content. The category system which is a result of the analysis presents outcomes within which the interrelationships of the categories can be described (cf. Uljens 1989, 1998). In order to ensure the exactitude of the categorisation of the interview material, consultation and negotiation with co-assessors has taken place in accordance with so-called "negotiated consensus", that is, a procedure in which researchers first each independently suggest their own interpretation and categorisation of data and then reach a common categorisation (see Beerman, Dahlgren, Diwan, Tomson & Walström, 1997, pp.224-225). In the present study the degree of coherence or *interrater reliability* between the researchers was about 70%, which is relatively high (cf. Alexandersson, 1994, pp.111-136).

With the point of departure in teachers' perceptions of the importance of place for learning and teaching outdoors – the phenomenon which will here be researched and described – categories emerge which can be place-, content- or explanation-oriented (cf. Kroksmark 1987, 2007; Larsson 1986, p.36). The aspects *where*, *what*, *how* and *why* that have been selected in

the contextual analysis make up the sense or meaning of the perceptions (cf. Marton & Booth, 2000). In the outcome field of this analysis, the didactic where-question appears as a template for the descriptive categories that have crystallised out.

Methodological reflections

The implementation of interviews within the researcher's own field of activity can in this case involve a risk of bias in the result. It is not always so easy to perceive any possible personal bias. At the same time, knowledge and experience of the framework factors which affect, as well as subject theoretical competence in the subject, can be an advantage (Alexandersson, 1994; Kvale, 1997). In this study the researcher's previous knowledge of the field has been central to understanding the statements of the respondents and identifying and formulating the underlying categories.

Nor can the result of the study be simply generalised beyond the special investigative context, in this case the place for learning and teaching where the study has been carried out. Larsson (2009) argues however for a pluralistic attitude (diversity of views) in his interpretation of the empirical problem of generalisation in qualitative studies – the results can have a general value in different ways. A similar context for example does not necessarily mean that the results can be used in another similar context, but it *may* be so. Similarities in the context indicate that there is room for action, a pragmatic potential in relation to the empirical result. For example, the results of this study may provide an understanding of the importance of place for learning and teaching. This understanding can contribute to and influence didactic thinking and application in other pedagogical contexts in other municipalities etc. The generalisation is however loosely related to its contexts, in so far as the researcher cannot with certainty predict in which cases the interpretation is of use. The usefulness emerges when the results are applied in a new context. One cannot therefore know in advance where the categories can have a more general applicability.

Ethical aspects

In the material both schools and teachers are decoded, the texts contain only anonymous statements. As a basis for the design of the study lie the ethical principles of the Swedish

Research Council (2006), namely *the information requirement, the consent requirement, the confidentiality requirement and the right of use requirement*. The notes from the interviews and the sound tapes will be preserved (Vetenskapsrådet, 2011, pp.70-71),

Results and analysis

The analysis of the place relationship of outdoor teaching proceeds from the research question: *What perceptions do teachers have of the importance of the place for learning and teaching outdoors?* The results of the interview survey are described below based on identified categories of reply, A – I, with short summaries and significant interview excerpts to describe the contents. Proceeding from the phenomenographic method of analysis, the respondents' perceptions about the importance of the place for learning and teaching outdoors are identified by nine main categories, which together form the basis of the outcome of the study: to discover different learning environments than classrooms, to use greater open spaces, to exploit a spatial diversity, to promote the interplay between different learning environments, to unite theory and practice, to apply a physical, sensuous learning, to create meetings rich in variety with different phenomena, to create an outdoor platform for environmental work and to dispose of the time in a freer manner.

A. Learning and teaching outdoors means opportunities to discover other learning environments than classrooms.

Examples: teachers 6, 8, 13, 15

The focus in this category is on the where-aspect of outdoor teaching, while the what- and how-aspects are in the background. In short, it is a matter of identifying for pedagogical purposes different learning environments – *where*, content – *what* and different ways to learn – *how*, in the playground, in the school woodland and other green spaces near the school. The playground is conceived as a possibility and a first step to getting outside the classroom teaching and learning environment.

In fact it is simply a matter of being outdoors and finding other environments to learn things in, if you leave the classroom and the school milieu, I think (6).

It doesn't mean that you have to be far away, but it can be close by and it can be in the playground, quite simply (8). It's a question of using the outdoor environment for a pedagogical purpose and finding other ways of learning (13). I can see possibilities of outdoor teaching by comparing it with living in one room and a kitchen and getting an extra room and discovering that one can have other activities there (15).

B. Learning and teaching outdoors implies opportunities to use larger open spaces.

Examples: teachers 4, 6, 17.

This category stresses the importance of the place, the where-aspect, for the access to greater open spaces in outdoor teaching in the playground. The what-aspect is coupled with the school subjects, for example technology and art. The how-aspect describes an increased degree of concretion and pedagogical choice. The method which is related to a larger open space *why*-aspect is made visible inter alia in the evidence around the item "gearing" in the subject technology. The understanding of subject-related concepts can be brought to life in a freer way outdoors.

We use these areas of the playground for different types of vehicles, "mousetrap cars" and "rocket cars". Working with cars gives the pupils an understanding of gearing. Yes, it's a good area of technology (4). If we have art in the classroom you have your table and perhaps the floor you can be on. But here we make a picture that is twenty metres, you don't have the external limitations and you can see that both in art and in textile classes (6). What makes the difference is that it's a question of greater space outdoors, which gives us more freedom (17).

C. Learning and teaching outdoors means opportunities to use a spatial diversity.

Examples; teachers 1, 2, 3

Outdoor teaching allows the possibility of taking advantage of the where-aspect's spatial nature variation in the wood. The spatial diversity means that the learning environment can be directly related to the object and phenomena of learning. The what and how aspects are in the background and it is a matter of selecting and building up pedagogical rooms (subject rooms) in the teaching. The spatial diversity means that the how-aspect is experienced as meaningful both for the imagination and for knowledge formation. The imagination is stimulated by elements fetched from nature's spatial diversity.

Outdoor education for me is having access to a whole forest, it is unlimited as I think. But if you're to make something good of it, you have to find a *place* where you can be. It's finding another room for learning, as I see it (1). There's such diversity out there of knowledge in subject rooms: crafts, drama, Swedish, English and maths (2). Diversity is an expression that I want to use, since I see a diversity of rooms that cannot be beaten for setting the imagination going and consolidating knowledge (3).

D. Learning and teaching outdoors means opportunities to encourage the interplay of different learning environments

Examples: teachers 2, 11, 15.

The where-aspect emerges through emphasis on the interplay between indoor teaching and outdoor teaching, which provides access to several places for learning. The what-aspect, what is to be taught, is coupled to the place. In this category outdoor education, i.e. the how-aspect, offers other forms of teaching than purely text-based practice, without being an end in itself.

It is the practical that one should lay most emphasis on, since it is harder to work in the classroom in that way (2). If you are both "in and out" it gives the children a greater chance of having more places for their learning (11). I don't endeavour to make it more theoretical in the woods, like taking out books and sitting there and swotting things. On the other hand I try to see that it's more practical even indoors. You can have the same knowledge and goal outdoors, but you have to do it a different way (15).

E. learning and teaching outdoors means the possibility to unite theory and practice.

Example: teachers 5, 11, 13.

In this category the what-aspect emerges through the possibility to unite theoretical and practical knowledge in outdoor teaching. The how-aspect in practical action (the method) is seen as giving increased understanding as a complement to theoretical teaching. The where-question is in the background. The underlying thoughts of the why-aspect in the coupling between theory and practice are not fully implemented in the teaching.

I see learning as the theoretical and the practical going hand in hand, and they are a complement to each other, this business of indoors and outdoors (5). I feel that they belong together if you can test the theory and practical know-how. If you only get the theory perhaps you won't understand, but you've also got to test it practically and then there'll be a greater know-how (---). You can probably have theory out in the woods too and the practical indoors, so it can be the other way round. It probably depends on how you plan it (11). The theory doesn't always have to come before the practice as it often does in school, but theory formation can surely also arise in a practical context, so to speak (13).

F. Learning and teaching outdoors means the possibility to put into practice a physical, sensuous learning.

Examples: teachers 4, 6, 9.

This category is coupled with the importance of natural sense impressions in relevant contexts outdoors. The how-aspect is in the foreground and is communicated by sense impressions and bodily movement. The where-aspect and what-aspect are in the background and are coupled with various language expressions such as metaphorical language and body language. Bodily

movement as part of a learning through the senses is present but is only affected on a superficial level.

It's a learning space where you have a greater chance of concretising different subjects and where you also open the senses of the receiver (4). It's one thing to sit and talk about it in a schoolroom than down there in the moss or to just look at the clouds and see how they move. It's concrete right off, your senses are greater and the whole thing contributes (---). We have picture language, body language and invisible language that we talk with and such things we learn more about if we are not sitting still on a chair (6). Yes, outdoor teaching for me is being outdoors and moving about and experiencing nature with all your senses. To experience things with the whole body is I think enormously important (9).

G. Learning and teaching outdoors means opportunities to create richly varied encounters with different phenomena.

Examples: teachers 4, 7, 13.

The what and how aspects are in the foreground in this category. Content and method coupled with the place mean variation in the encounter with different phenomena in learning. The why aspect is made visible in the testimony about the item "joining" in craft classes to show the differences in understanding and skill. Traces of human activity generate didactic questions.

I have tried to get the pupils to understand how one joins things outdoors, everything is "round about" in the woods and I have got them to understand the difference from indoors in the craft room, where everything is square and rectangular (4). You look at the landscape, the stones and how they lie: why are they lying like that, have people been living here and what did they live on? There's a lot that is brought to life, reflections on what is found here: what sort of trees are they, why are there cherry trees in the middle of the forest, or why do flowers grow here? (7) There are lots of things to do here like botany, to use the trees, and flowers and insects to study differences and dissimilarities and how they interact (13).

H. Learning and teaching outdoors means opportunities to create an outdoor platform for environmental work.

Examples: teachers 1, 3, 13

The way of working with environmental questions: here the how-aspect is in the centre for this category. The teachers perceive that environmental teaching is concretised by first-hand experience in the meeting with the physical local environment, the where-aspect. The what-aspect is exemplified by scientific processes in nature. The cultivation project is described in the imperfect and is in abeyance.

It is impossible to teach about the environment in chemistry without going out into the natural world and measuring PH-values and taking samples of snow, I reckon (1). We were working with Green Flag and I was in it driving a plant project, and we got the green flag. We were raising plants to see what happened from seed to plant, the whole process. There was quite a lot done outdoors, yes there was (3). It's a matter both of making use of the outside and working with ordinary subjects to study the environment and our environmental impact (13).

I. Learning and teaching outside provides the opportunity to dispose of the time in a freer way.

Examples: teachers 2, 3, 6.

A freer way of disposing of teaching time is seen as increasing focusing and the ability to concentrate in the learning process over time. Nature is seen as in itself reducing stress and guarantees a different approach to time and learning. The timetable-ruled time structure is broken up with teaching outdoors, and the way teaching is planned and carried out is affected, that is, the what and how aspects are seen as equivalent. This influence from the place outdoors emerges in relation to the classroom's perceived time restrictions. The where aspect's time relation is in the foreground and enables a freer and more flexible use of time in teaching.

Outdoors the pupils get an understanding that certain things take longer to learn, it doesn't go in an hour (2). Time stops in nature and I think it's a great plus. Just the fact that one is absorbed by time, it's the times when you feel good so you don't *think of time*. Indoors the children want to learn straight away, out in the woods on the other hand they have more patience about learning, they don't need direct feedback (3). It's more relaxed being outdoors, than being chased by signals and time limitations (6).

Summary of the results

The analysis of the empirical material of the investigation shows that the place relationship, on the basis of the respondents' perceptions *of the importance of the place for learning and teaching outdoors*, can be defined from four perspectives with the focus on the where-aspect, namely:

1. *The room perspective*, which is related to the opportunities to discover other learning environments and pedagogically useful places with both spatial diversity and greater open spaces, as well as encouraging the interplay between them.
2. *The knowledge perspective*, which is related to the opportunities to unite theory and practice, practice a physical sensuous learning, and create richly varied meetings with different phenomena. Reflection on acting in other learning environments than the classroom can moreover give rise to thoughts about the relationship between theory and practice.
3. *The environmental perspective*, which is related to the opportunities to create an outdoor platform for environmental work. The environment theme can be manifested via first-hand experiences in natural science subjects and thematic plant cultivation projects where all the school subjects are included.
4. *The time perspective*, which outdoors is related to the opportunities to dispose of the time in a freer way. The timetable-bound time structure of the school is perceived as loosened up in the place-related encounter with nature, which is felt to reduce the level of stress.

The study describes the respondents' perceptions of the didactic importance of the place for learning and teaching. Learning and teaching outdoors is thought to involve opportunities to develop the place relationship from four perspectives: the spatial-, the knowledge-, the environment- and the time-perspective, which come to expression and are mirrored in the content patterns of the different categories. These "thematized perspectives" have crystallised out of the didactic aspects *where*, *what*, *how* and *why* with their different nuances and variations. In the total outcome, the room or spatial perspective, the where-aspect, is in the foreground in the categories A, B, C, D, and I. The knowledge perspective, the what- and how-perspectives, which appear in category H, are more weakly embedded in the teachers' statements. In the time perspective, category I, differences are perceived in the approach to the limitations of the time structure from the why and how aspects. The *why-aspect* appears in the respondents' method-related perceptions in categories B and G, but otherwise occurs seldom in the material, whereas thoughts about the why-aspect do occur, for example see category E.

Discussion of results and implications

The study presents teachers' understanding of the importance of place for learning and teaching outdoors and the result indicates four place-related perspectives to outdoor teaching, namely the place, knowledge, environment and time perspectives. If we look at research coupled with the concept place and the importance of place in pedagogical activity, a rich variation in approach is revealed, which is apparent both in my empirical material and in earlier studies (cf. Gruenewald & Smith, 2008; Løvlie, 2007). There is however a lack of research in a place-related outdoor teaching context. In this study this is in focus with the four perspectives, the identified categories and the related underlying didactic aspects. In category B and C the importance is emphasised of access to large open areas in playgrounds and neighbouring woodland environments with spatial variety. Perhaps here the perception of the use of the local environment and playground which is described in category A can be seen as a first phase in a development and implementation of outdoor teaching, which includes text-based practice with sensuous forms of expression in the surrounding landscape, town and community (cf. Szczepanski, 2008; Åkerblom, 2005).

In the different categories the where, what and how aspects vary in strength, while the why aspect occurs rarely in the whole material. I consider that this indicates an uncertainty in the

respondents in explaining why they use certain places, and teaching methods coupled with them, something which may have its background in a difficulty in describing, from their own experiences, place-related learning factors and didactic questions in the outdoor environment (cf. Wilhelmsson, 2012).

A prominent feature of the teachers' perceptions of the importance of place for learning and teaching appears to be that the outdoor environment, mainly the forest in categories C, D, E, F and G, is seen as a pedagogical opportunity and a complement to the classroom learning environment. Natural and cultural traces in the landscape awaken didactic questions, category G. It is here a matter partly of learning to read landscape without an intermediate link such as text and illustration and partly of focusing in the learning environment on practical and theoretical aspects of knowledge (cf. Magntorn, 2007; Szczepanski, 2008).

The illustrative quotations in category F show how teaching outdoors is perceived as broadening the linguistic forms of expression by integrating the whole body and movement in learning. An opportunity for place-related interplay between different learning environments and the combination of theory and practice emerge in categories D and E. This interplay leads the respondents to think about the relationship between practical and theoretical aspects of knowledge. The significance of such an interplay has been stressed in earlier research (see Bentsen, 2010; Jordet, 2010; Mygind & Herholdt, 2005). Experiences in nature are seen as making way for an increased and strengthened sense experience (cf. among others Lundgren, 2006; Brusman, 2008). Against the background of these and other studies, Brusman (2008), Moser (2007), Neisser (1994), Szczepanski (2008) and Tuan (2005) argue for the importance of a physical, sensuous integration with the place during the learning process.

Outdoor teaching is also perceived to create opportunities for first-hand experience of environmental work, category H, while the variety of subject rooms outdoors is seen as stimulating the imagination and consolidating knowledge formation in category C. The opportunities to pursue successful environmental teaching are in other words seen as dependent on both access to subject associations as well as to natural environments where the effect of the environment can be studied (cf. Hutchinson, 2004; Thomashow, 1996; Wickenberg, 1999).

The respondents stress in category I the importance of being able to dispose the teaching time in a freer way in the open and thereby reducing stress. Westlund (1996) has also in his study called attention to the problem of inflexible lesson times which work against a problem-based theme-centred way of working.

If the importance of place for teaching and learning is to have a more prominent position in the future, the concept of place needs to be penetrated more deeply. An analysis of teachers' perceptions of outdoor practice is an important element in a broadened discussion of the concept of place. This leads me in conclusion to indicate some didactic and research-related implications coupled to the importance of the place for learning and teaching:

1. The spatial variety needs to be broadened beyond the playground and the forest to also include urban outdoor environments.
2. The ability to "read the landscape" needs to be developed in an outdoor platform which builds on the interplay between non-text based and text based practice in different learning environments.
3. The environmental theme needs to be strengthened in all subjects for long-term environmental work in a sustainable society.
4. The classroom-based time structure of the school needs to be broken up in favour of a freer and more flexible use of time which inter alia can make room for a more mobile learning environment.

As mentioned initially, Lloyd B. Sharp (1895-1963) early maintained the importance of an interplay between different learning environments in teaching and learning:

That which ought and can be taught inside the schoolrooms should there be taught, and that which can best be learned through experience dealing directly with native materials and life situations outside the school should there be learned (Sharp, 1943, pp.363-364).

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