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## **Back to Nature: Exploring the Potential for Implementing the Norwegian Idea of Outdoor Days in the Slovenian School System**

Short scientific article

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### **ABSTRACT**

Nowadays it is common to use the expressions 'in the classroom' and 'out of the classroom' (outdoors). In this article the word 'outdoors' will be replaced with the words 'in the natural environment', 'into the natural environment' and 'within the natural environment'. These words accent the equal importance of nature as a learning area, a concept that is often forgotten, neglected or ignored. In this area, Norway has forged a real connection between people and nature, a way of life called "friluftsliv," and has used experiential learning based on learning and playing in an outdoor area. In this article is presented a research study of teaching in nature, the Norwegian nature-oriented curriculum and the implementation of nature practice in the Slovenian school system.

**Key words:** nature, teaching, teaching outside the classroom, "friluftsliv", free play

## **V naravo: Iskanje možnosti implementacije norveške ideje učenja izven učilnice v slovenski šolski sistem**

Kratki znanstveni članek

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### **POVZETEK**

Danes se v šolah vse pre pogosto pojavljajo izrazi *učenje v učilnici* in *učenje izven učilnice*. V prispevku bo beseda *izven* zamenjana z zvezami *v naravi*, *v naravo* in *znotraj narave*. Prav te besedne zveze poudarjajo enako pomembnost učnega okolja v naravi, ki je v izobraževalnem smislu velikokrat pozabljeno, zanemarjeno in preslišano. Takšen kontekst pa uporablja Norveška. Z njim gradi močnejšo povezanost ljudi in narave, njihovega načina življenja, imenovanega *friluftsliv*, in izkustvenega učenja, ki temelji na učenju in igranju izven učilnice. Prispevek predstavlja raziskavo na področju učenja v naravi, v naravo usmerjen učni načrt in implementacijo učenja v naravi v slovenski šolski sistem.

**Ključne besede:** narava, poučevanje, učenje izven učilnice, prosta igra

## Introduction

In the distant past, many children did not go to school. School was something that was available only to people in the upper class of society. In those times, other people and children did their learning in the natural environment, outside the classroom. Nevertheless, this did not mean that these children learned nothing. Children used nature as an area for experimental learning, the place where they imbued their physical, emotional and social welfare with a sense of deeper learning levels (Waite 2010, 111–112). Another view from the past about the origins of schooling goes back to Ancient Greece. The word ‘school’ originates from the Greek word “schola”, which means a time of leisure, used for learning, spare time, debate, etc. It represented that segment of free time for children when they were released from work on the farm.

Nowadays, teaching takes place only in specially designed buildings. In these buildings, teaching and learning occupy a place and time between certain hours, with regular breaks for playtime, as well as requiring preparation and planning about when, what and how to learn and teach. As a consequence, in many educational systems, the natural environment has become an unnatural locale in which to learn and teach (Waite 2010, 111–112).

Taking learning into nature nowadays involves the concept of outdoor learning and can be performed in many different settings. The concept is a broad and complex system that touches on a wide range of educational activities, including outdoor adventure education, field studies, nature study, outdoor play, heritage education, environmental education, experiential education and agricultural education (Rickinson et al. 2004, 15). In the last part of this article, I will present the ‘outdoor day’ that I carried out in a Slovenian Primary school in the third class (9-year-old children). In that context, I transferred the whole day of learning into the natural environment, specifically to the park near the school, where we combined nature study, outdoor play, environmental education and experiential education with subjects from their timetable, which were mother tongue, natural and social sciences, art, music and sport. I have also presented this idea at the 15th International Student’s Research Conference in Latvia, organized by the University of Latvia, Faculty of Education, Psychology and Art.

### *Importance of a natural learning area*

The importance of a natural learning area was already familiar in the first half of the nineteenth century to Friederich Froebel. He gave children their own garden and encouraged them to establish the harmony of the natural environment by observing natural life, exercising in nature and playing in it (Garrick 2009, 15). He also gave items he called “gifts” to the children to play with and demonstrated how they should play with these. In this way, he wanted children to develop concepts of nature (Tassoni and Hucker 2005, 19). John Dewey made a further development based on pragmatism.

Dewey recognizes that when we first face a problem, our first task is to understand our problem through describing its elements and identifying their relations. Identifying a concrete question that we need to answer is a sign that we are already making progress. (Hookway 2016, chapter 4.2)

Further on he connected theory of pragmatism and the relationship of the play in the nature with the idea of 'constructivism'. To understand the connection between constructivism and nature, it is important to know the teaching stages of environmental literacy. These include survival, physical skills acquisition, relationships with the land and its inhabitants and the metaphysical aspect. Survival forms the first stage of environmental learning, representing new situations and places children need to face during their lessons in the natural environment. Before lessons, children need to use all their knowledge and experience, even when such knowledge is based on common misconceptions. Because of this, it is important to confront nature, find out the truth, develop your skills and build awareness of the surroundings. Physical skills acquisition is the second stage and relies on having a familiar environment, where children feel comfortable in the learning area and consider it as their home. The third stage represents the relationships among children, which can build up a sense of independence and community, while improving the child's awareness of nature and improving the child's senses. The fourth environmental learning stage is a metaphysical state of being and the highest level of environmental understanding. It is a state where one experiences harmony with one's surrounding. Once children have achieved these stages, it has a protective effect on their senses, knowledge and experience (Gilbertson et al. 2006, 29–33). Within the last paragraph, it can clearly be seen that both environmental education and constructivist learning theory depend on experience. The authors of *Outdoor Education: Methods and Strategies* (2006) say that constructivism is an "educational theory that builds upon students' prior knowledge and experience to help them to construct new learning" (Gilbertson et al. 2006, 197). Duffy and Savery (1996) characterize it in three primary propositions. Firstly, understanding is in our interactions with the environment and also represents a core concept of constructivism. It includes what and how we learn, what kind of experiences we gain, and how that learning can have an impact on an individual's understanding. Secondly, cognitive conflict is the stimulus for learning and determines the organization and nature of what is learned. It presents the purpose of learning in the environment where pupils learn their goals. And lastly, knowledge evolves through social negotiation and individual understanding. This one implements the social, collaborative and knowledgeable understanding focus on individuality (Savery and Duffy 1996, 135–136). Within Dewey's theory and individually oriented knowledge, the experience and knowledge mentioned above help to enable children to create a challenging environment where they develop concepts through direct experience. In that meaning, Dewey connects direct experience to experimental education, which leads to the strongest form of learning and builds a sense of community with the learners (Gilbertson et al. 2006, 29). This could

clearly be seen when the children showed emotions of fear, coldness, happiness, or amusement during their observations and experiences in the natural environment. Through such experience, Kolb developed an experimental learning cycle where, he explains, children reflect on and analyse their feelings in such a way that they develop or change their thoughts and actions to reach a high level of knowledge through their own experience (Warden 2015, 25–26).

Nowadays, we can find many research projects that discuss the advantages and disadvantages of outdoor learning. One of these is *A Review of Research on Outdoor Learning*, completed by the National Foundation for Educational Research and King's College London. In this study, the authors report that outdoor learning helps children to develop in the following ways: positive effects on both short-term and long-term memory, general and specific academic skills, promotion of positive behaviour and improved physical self-image and fitness, reinforcement between affective and cognitive knowledge, individual growth, interpersonal and social skills, etc. It also offers the opportunity of experiencing nature that automatically contributes to environmental awareness, commitment and action (Rickinson et al. 2004, 5–6). Another study from the pedagogical researchers Dismore and Bailey (in Skaugen and Fiskum, 2015) showed that learning outcomes in understanding increased with the usefulness of the academic topics. Moreover, children with difficulty understanding academic topics were able to show considerable achievement in outdoor surroundings. This means that teaching outdoors could be positively effective for all children, regardless of their ability level (Skaugen and Fiskum 2015, 17).

## **The Norwegian idea of nature**

### *My first impression of Norway*

In my last year of bachelor studies in primary school education, I decided to spend one semester in Norway. During this time, I had the opportunity to merge with the locals and their culture to learn as much as possible about them. I developed sympathy with and assimilated into the Norwegian country, people and the school system in order to understand the culture, which is in many ways so similar to my own but at the same time completely different. In this respect, I was most impressed by the human awareness of and attitudes towards nature. Even though Norway and Slovenia are both countries with beautiful landscape, rivers, mountains and other natural endowments, only Norway as a whole nation assigns a major role to the use of nature as a part of ordinary life. This is true even though Slovenia has about 25 % more forest resources for the size of the country than Norway has (Global Forest Watch). Many Norwegians have amplified nature into their daily, weekly or monthly lives as something they live with. I would like to present the Norwegian nature-oriented life style along with their nature-oriented school life style.

*Friluftsliv*

Norway has built a special relationship to nature throughout their recent history. This relationship is symbolised by the word “Friluftsliv”. By dividing the word in pieces and transferring to English, we see that the word “fri-luft-(s)-liv” means “free-air-life”. This word was probably used for the first time in a poem written by Henrik Ibsen in 1859: “On the Heights”. At that time and even earlier Norwegian artists were inspired by the Romantic period in Europe and began to use the Norwegian landscape and natural beauty in Europe to promote the value of nature (Faarlund 2009, 6). This was the time when Norwegians realized how important both nature and the value of nature were to life.

We are not at all claiming that the inspiration behind friluftsliv came from Norway. What we do say is that the economic and political situation in Europe as well as in our country was favourable for a unique cultural development in Norway in the 1800th century [sic]. Even a strong driving force was at hand, which turned out to be nationalism... It cannot be denied that the idea of the nation was also part of the philosophy of the Romantic Movement. To start with while tracking down the origins of the Norwegian friluftsliv tradition this was a frightening discovery. (Faarlund 2009, 7)

Næss says that friluftsliv is the way Norwegians identify themselves, their way of living their lives, and results in their not speaking of going out but of going into nature (Næss 1994, 21). It thus gives people the opportunity to explore the ideas of “experiential learning” (also called “Learning by Doing”) and “discovery learning” (Leirhaug 1994, 45). It is also a method of learning with a diverse range of challenges, allowing the opportunity for emotional, physical and intellectual engagement, rounded out by socialization and cooperation with people and knowledge about how to treat the planet. It is a process, a process of joy. And the joy is the strongest force we wish to achieve (Faarlund 1994, 26). Friluftsliv is also a self-motivating process of doing and learning about the life that is unfolding around you. This is mainly because learning outside does not happen in the ways to which we are accustomed; it is an alternative way, which the child’s experiences as play. This play in the natural environment represents an opportunity for children to develop their skills and knowledge through play (Leirhaug 1994, 44).

*Nature in the Norwegian core curriculum*

The Norwegian Core Curriculum demands that learners be given the possibility to develop through education in seven core areas as human beings. These areas include the ‘spiritual human being’, the ‘creative human being’, the working human being, the liberally educated human being, the social human being, the ‘environmentally aware human being’ and the integrated human being. An ‘environmentally aware human being’ can operate between economy, ecology and technology. This provides learners a deep range of awareness about the interconnectedness of human beings, nature and natural habitats, uniting a clear understanding of natural issues and a revitalization of the sense of joy in physical activity and nature’s richness. It stimulates learners to use their bodies and senses to explore the world and discover new places (Hagness 1997).

“Outdoor life touches us in body, mind and soul. Education must corroborate the connection between understanding nature and experiencing nature: familiarity with the elements and the interconnections in our living environment must be accompanied by the recognition of our dependence on other species, our affinity with them, and our joy in wildlife” (Hagness 1997).

In many Norwegian schools, teachers use outdoor play to implement the core curriculum. This is usually carried out in the first four grades of primary school, where children spend their time once a week, once every second week, or more or less frequently outside the classroom in the natural environment. The trend is to involve both academic areas and free play to provide children with optimal conditions for learning (Fiskum and Jacobsen 2012, 76). One of the examples is a study by Randi Skaugen and Tove Anita Fiskum, which shows us how and where schools carry out outdoor days. One part of this study is presented below”

The school uses outdoor education in grades 1 to 4 about 3 hours a week. Within walking distance from the school there are adapted outdoor areas used regularly. The school has a school garden situated on a farm nearby and an agreement with the farmer where pupils in grades 3 and 6 use the farm as a learning area. The regular use of outdoor education decreases from grade 5, but in lower secondary (grades 8 to 10) the pupils have two longer school trips to outdoor areas. The headmaster of the school emphasizes the need to concretize the theoretical topics of the curriculum, especially mathematics, even for the older children, and points to outdoor education as one way of achieving this. (Skaugen and Fiskum 2015, 21–22)

In the 1990s there were major discussions on the subject of Norwegian school reform. The debate started with the decision to lower the entrance age to 6 years old and to extend compulsory schooling from 9 to 10 years. The movement caused strong resistance in the country because of the fear of losing the play-oriented pedagogical methods of preschool. The Government decided this issue in favour of free play and decreed that the teaching programme in lower primary school should be organized around children’s need for play and free activities. In their meaning, play would become a goal for personal development (“free play”). “Learning through play”, become the slogan. So, within this reform, the most important element was that play should be given more prominence in the teaching of 6-10-year-olds in school. The importance of this is clearly seen in the schedule for the first four years, which places Play in fourth place following Norwegian language (912 hours), Mathematics (532) and Religion (266). After Play (247), came Physical Education (228), Art and Crafts (228), Social Science (190), Science (152), English (95) and Home Economics (38) (Trageton 1999).

Children’s free play has been a core value in Nordic Early Childhood Education (ECE) for a long time (Wagner and Einarsdottir 2006, 7). In Norwegian official documents, play stands even above ECE, making it a major part of children’s daily experience in the first four grades of elementary school (Hakkarainen 2006, 184). However, there is still debate across the Nordic countries about the concept of free play in preschool and primary school learning. How much free play should be allowed? What kind of balance should be applied between freedom and structure?

How free play should be assessed for entry into compulsory school? What kind of adult preplanning facilitates spontaneity, and what kind of creativity is present among the teachers and the children (Wagner and Einarsdottir 2006)? Within the last questions, there are some contradictory facts concerning the free play theory and teacher's involvement in the children's free play. Hakkarainen says, "To the contrary no one is trying to teach anyone anything during children's free play. Playing is a general developmental characteristic of children, not an opportunity for learning" (Hakkarainen 2006, 188). Fergus P. Hughes says that an activity is play if it contains five essential characteristics, as follows: first, it is intrinsically motivated and done for the satisfaction of doing it; second, it is freely chosen, so children can regard the activity as play and not as work (even if it is play); third, it exerts a pleasurable and positive effect on children; fourth, it should contain a certain distortion of reality that is applied in the interests of the player and has a non-literal meaning; finally, it must be actively engaging, so that players are involved physically, psychologically or both (Hughes 2010, 3–5).

To the question why free play is so important and what children gain from it, Hakkarainen proposes the following facts in support of the free play theory. During free play, children develop an understanding of the world around them, evolve imaginative creativity and learn how to cooperate with other children. It helps children to advance their psychological and learning development and constitutes an intrinsically motivated process. The results and developmental effects are therefore not immediately visible or may not even be visible at all (Hakkarainen 2006, 185–192). In that context Hakkarainen also says, "The true power and potential of play in the lives of young children often becomes lost amid discussions of its role in "real learning" at school or the largely intuitive argument that play always promotes development" (Hakkarainen 2006, 183). This concept of free play is strongly connected to *friluftsliv*. Hans Gelter says, "Friluftsliv it is not about teaching and lecturing or being on excursions. But it involves a sort of education, learning the ways of yourself and the place in the more-than-human world and learning the ways of every creature and phenomenon you meet on your journey through life" (Gelter 2000, 90). It is typified by absorbing games of imagination and fantasy that raise the level of consciousness by self-activation (Gelter 2000, 90).

## **Theoretical transfer of the concept**

### *Implementing this idea in Slovenia: reality and obstacles*

Since the Slovenian curriculum does not include free play in itself, teachers need to be innovative to include play in their classes. This can include each specific subject: mathematics, the mother tongue, natural and social studies, music, physical education and others. In that way play can be integrated through diverse pedagogical methods within the Slovenian educational system. In the study "The Role of Didactic Games in the Teaching Process," Katja Zupančič establishes

that teachers in the first three years of school use didactic play mostly in the motivational part of teaching, as well as for revising the subjects. These teachers mostly use didactic games such as puzzles, alphabet puzzles, construction games, computer dominoes, alphabet dominoes, memory games, mini quizzes, and a variety of play-acting techniques among other methods (Zupančič 2011, 68–69). We can clearly see that these didactic games do not include nature, even though there is good potential for integrating a range of didactic games into the natural environment. However, the obstacles appear in the teacher's realization of such play. These barriers or obstacles are not confined to Slovenia but also occur in classrooms across the world. These barriers to outdoor education and learning include fear and concern about health and safety, teachers' lack of confidence in teaching outdoors, school and university curriculum requirements, shortage of time, resources and support, as well as wider changes within and beyond the education sector (Rickinson 2004, 51).

In Slovenia, there are other acts and regulations that we need to apply in order to execute outdoor learning. In a study called "Attitudes of teachers in Slovenia towards experiential learning and outdoor teaching," most teachers mentioned four main obstacles. First, the need for an additional teacher. The Slovenian law prescribes an additional teacher for every 15<sup>th</sup> child when lessons move outside the school premises. The maximum number of children in one classroom in Slovenia is 30. As a result, any class that includes more than 15 children is unable to leave the school premises without an additional teacher being requested. The exception is the first class, where school law in Slovenia provides an additional teacher. Second, the need for a flexible timetable. Third, financial resources necessary to provide the material teachers and children need in order to implement teaching outside school. That includes transport, paper work for children, clothing, etc. Lastly, teaching outdoors is more stressful than teaching indoors (Hus and Korban Černjavič 2009, 78–81).

The professor of Didactics of natural and technical studies in the Teacher Education programme of Ljubljana University, Darja Skribe Dimec, implements outdoor education in her lessons each year in the 3rd year of study. In the questionnaire she gives to her students each year, 3/4 of the students see teaching outdoors as difficult to execute, something that takes too much organisation and time. In order to remove this obstacle, she provides students with first-hand experience of implementing outdoor education. Although these students do gain experience and knowledge about teaching outdoors, 44 % of them retain the same attitude towards it and show reluctance to embrace that kind of teaching. Given this reaction, one may wonder how teaching outdoors will develop in the future, since technology is becoming a stronger and easier way of teaching (Skribe Dimec 2015, 22). Nevertheless, in Slovenia we can also find examples of good practice among teachers who implement outdoor teaching in their classes. A good example of this is the teaching of the primary school teacher Mateja Pučnik Belavič, who



adapts nature study content to the situations that arise while she is teaching in the natural environment. Additionally, she manages to include all the instructional content of Natural and Social Studies while teaching outdoors (Györek 2012). Next to the subjects that are nature connected, members of the House of Commons list the cross-curricular nature study areas in out-of-classroom learning. These subjects are science and geography fieldwork, physical education, learning through outdoor play, history and citizenship, art and design, environmental and countryside education, practical or vocational skills, group activities, adventurous activities with an element of risk, etc. (HC, 2005, 8).

## **Transforming the idea into practice**

After my research concerning the Norwegian nature-oriented curriculum, I decided to investigate whether the Slovenian school system could adapt its teaching and learning for implementation in the natural environment. Because the Slovenian curriculum does not allow for or cover free play, I needed to set up goals and lessons that could be relevant to use in the Slovenian system. To this end, I performed my outdoor teaching days in the third grade (9-year-old children). In the first week of a three-week practice period, I introduced children to the concept of outdoor days. I thus prepared them for the mental adjustment of being in nature during the learning process for an entire ordinary school day. Over the next two weeks, we carried out two learning days in the park, one each week. Before I implemented the outdoor day, I had to consider how to deal with the obstacles mentioned above which I will briefly review: the need for an additional teacher; the requirement of a flexible timetable; the necessary funding, and the stress of outdoor teaching. The first of these remains an unsolved problem, with the exception of first-grade children, who already have an additional teacher, and in my case, where I represented the second teacher. A teacher can find an additional teacher who is free with the approval of the principal. The rest of the obstacles can be overcome within the Slovenian curriculum if the teacher and principal are willing to put their will, knowledge and power behind the concept of teaching outdoors. In the following paragraphs, I will explain the last three obstacles, how I dealt with these and what solutions emerged.

### *Need for a flexible timetable*

The second problem teachers focused on was the need for flexibility in the timetable. Precisely because my goal was to use the natural learning arena on an ordinary school day, I implemented the subjects as they appeared in the school timetable (Thursday and Friday, to be exact). To this end, I looked over the curriculum for each subject and chose the lessons I could use in the natural environment. Since the Slovenian curriculum allows and encourages teachers to connect subjects in an interdisciplinary manner, I decided to do so. That did not create any problems, since interdisciplinary connections between the subjects in outdoor education are one of its greatest strengths as an educational method,

mainly because outdoor education is interdisciplinary by its very nature (Bunting 2006, 14). With this kind of thinking and the openness of the Slovenian curriculum, I managed to find interdisciplinary connections between the following subjects: mother tongue, art class, natural and science studies, physical education, music and mathematics. More detailed interdisciplinary connections of the subjects, along with their main aims and accompanying activities for children, are available in the table at the end of this article.

#### *Financial resources*

I carried out my teaching in a city school, meaning that there were some difficulties in taking children to natural learning areas such as forests, meadows, lakes or similar habitats. Therefore, I performed my outdoor day lessons in the park near the school. This allowed the children and the teacher to have easy, fast and free access to the learning nature area. I had no additional expenses, since I made all the didactic material by myself, using school materials, recycled material and the 'life' material provided by nature itself.

#### *The Stress of outdoor teaching*

Stress is something many people feel when they leave their comfort zone and try something new. This applies not only to teachers but also to children who are thrown into a new learning environment with different roles and a setting with which they are not entirely comfortable and familiar. This can also be related to the first stage of environmental literacy, as explained in the introduction. Limiting stress for children leads to an easier and smoother teaching experience for the teacher. To achieve this, I focused on the following specific points that helped me before and during my outdoor lessons. First, choosing an area that you know and that is familiar to the children. The principles of pedagogical theory say that, just as with the learning process, the learning area also needs to be gradually introduced. Since the children knew this park from before, it was practical for the teacher to use this knowledge and amplify it in the educational process. The teacher thus leads children to follow their knowledge from the known to the unknown, from the simple to the complex, from concrete to abstract, from analysis to synthesis, from the practical to the general, from empirical to rational, from induction to deduction, from psychological to logical, from actual to representative, from the whole to the parts and, finally, from definite to indefinite (TET 2015). Second, it is important to visit the location where the outdoor day will be held, to check the location for the possible obstacles and to assess the learning potential of the place. Third, one must prepare the children for the outdoor days and discuss the learner's behaviour in the new learning area. This involves discussing how to behave to the animals, plants and other elements of nature. This is an opportunity to familiarize children with ecology, with respect for passers-by and for the life unfolding around them while they are in the natural environment. Fourth, it is necessary to set the aims you want the children to achieve in that environment. I set up four long-term aims towards which I wanted the children to strive. These aims established that the children

should achieve the following: Recognize, explore and discover familiar nature and amplify the methods to the wider world; learn how to behave in nature and live with nature; see the nature area as a site of learning; and, finally, to develop their social, personal and learning skills. These aims are mainly important for the teacher to clear their mind about why he/she decided to implement the outdoor day and how that will help children to develop their abilities. Lastly, it helps the teacher to feel capable, meaning that they know the methods used in outdoor activities that are excellent tools for experiential teaching and the interdisciplinary lessons connected with experiential learning. It can empower the teacher to assist children, encourage them, coach them and provide them with information about the natural environment and other interests (Bunting 2006, 5).

By properly preparing the children, the learning area and myself, I avoided problems with the execution of the lessons in the park. This occurred mainly because I was well prepared and remodelled my teaching to meet wider conceptions.

#### *Children's thoughts about learning outside*

At the end of the practice, I had a final discussion with the children about spending a learning day in nature. I asked them what they had learned and what was special for them about learning in the park. The final question asked whether they would like to learn in nature more often, and why. All the children said that they would like to learn in nature again, mainly because they liked the outdoor space and the change in atmosphere, which left them feeling joyful and happy. Several children pointed out the importance of the fresh air when they were outdoors. What is more, they also liked exploring the natural environment, which was also my hidden goal. My primary aim was to get the children engaged in focusing on events around them in the natural environment and asking why things happen and develop as they do. In this connection, I would like to quote a view of outdoor learning from one of the children who attended the lessons I held in the park: "Yesterday when we were spending the day outside the classroom, I liked the most that we were researchers. I would like to learn outside more often because there you can breathe clean air and because it is much more fun." In conclusion, I offer the following quotation:

The point is that we in nature get "experiences" that really "socialize" us in some ways and most of it brings us further on the way we originally have approached nature. This way of doing it, unites the immediate joy often in combination with immediate desire for more knowledge and unites these two aspects with a deep consciousness of being dependent and responsible. (Jensen et al. 12)

## **Conclusion**

Even in the past, it was evident that nature constitutes a major part of our lives and can have an influence on our thoughts, feelings and will—simply by being around us. In the practice of some other teachers in Slovenia and from my own experience, it is possible to transfer lessons into the natural environment on a weekly basis, even

though there is lack of additional teachers and other obstacles teachers cannot or do not want to surmount for various reasons. Some of these could include fear of accidents, parental objection/disagreements, weather conditions, location, workload and cost.

Nevertheless, these reservations serve to deny children first-hand opportunities and to deprive them of a genuine touch of nature. This is in direct contrast to the Norwegian core curriculum, which gives children the opportunity to enjoy outdoor play and free play regularly during school time, in order to connect children with nature and their way of living, called *friluftsliv*. After my practice, I thought about the meaning of my actions for the children and about the main aim of my teaching. After lengthy deliberation, I clarified my thoughts as follows: since children in Slovenia are not integrated into nature as in Norway, the main goal in Slovenian implementation of outdoor education is to impart the values of nature being a living entity. This conclusion arose primarily because of the aftereffects of the experience. Once we have achieved that realization, children should be able to go into the natural world by themselves, knowing how to spend the time there, what to observe, how to do things and how to do them so as to do no harm to nature, themselves or to anything or anyone else. In this context, the House of Commons wrote the following paragraph:

The broad extent of this inquiry has convinced the Committee that outdoor learning can benefit pupils of all ages and can be successful in a variety of settings. We are convinced that out-of-classroom education enriches the curriculum and can improve educational attainment. Whilst recognising this cross-curricular scope, we conclude that in order to realise its full potential, outdoor education must be carried out properly, with sessions being prepared by well trained teachers and leaders and in accordance with good curriculum guidance as well as health and safety regulations. (HC 2005, 9)

Natalija Komljanc says that, precisely for this reason, it is very important that schools provide open learning opportunities for children, that is, offer teacher and children the experience of going into nature. Moreover, they should offer the kind of environment where school, teacher and parents can agree to include and facilitate informal learning development for children. This spontaneous choice of interests from the natural surroundings provides children with new experience, involving authenticity, creativity, motivation and reflection (Komljanc 2009, 1–5). Through my own experience of teaching in nature, I can attest that work in nature demands considerable pre-planning and anxiety. However, the process of teaching and learning creates for both teachers and children a relaxing atmosphere, in which they usually receive learning as something involving fun and not as something obligatory and stressful. For the children and me, that provides a “perfect” learning harmony where we are open to accepting the challenge of learning as something that we can undergo with greater ease. To this end, we offer children the necessary skills and lead them through emotional and psychic learning and other developing states, which can ordinarily appear difficult to face, but which the natural learning area makes it easier to face with more joy.

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## **V naravo: Iskanje možnosti implementacije norveške ideje učenja izven učilnice v slovenski šolski sistem**

V preteklosti, ko so šole lahko obiskovali le višji sloji prebivalstva, so otroci svoje znanje pridobivali predvsem z izkušenjskim učenjem v naravi in okolju njihovega bivanja. Z možnostjo šolanja tudi revnejšega sloja prebivalstva se je izoblikoval pomen šole. Šola je otrokom predstavljala svobodo pred delom, ki so ga morali opravljati doma. Danes se je tovrstna svoboda prenesla v posebne ustanove s točno določenim časovnim razporedom za odmore, pri čemer učitelj in zakonodaja opredeljujeta, kaj se mora učenec učiti in kaj naučiti. Prav s to evolucijo šole se je izkušenjsko učenje v njihovem primarnem okolju, ki je bilo otrokom v preteklosti tako zelo osnovno, zanemarilo in pozabilo. Čeprav razni znani pedagogi in didaktiki, kot so Friderich Froebel, John Dewey, David Kolb idr., poudarjajo pomembnost izobraževanja izven učilnice za učence, se to v Sloveniji in mnogih drugih šolah po svetu ne izvaja dovolj pogosto in intenzivno. Prav zaradi tega se otrokom onemogoča maksimalno izkušenjsko učenje, ki ga to učno okolje omogoča. Učenje izven učilnice namreč pripomore k razvoju dolgoročnega in kratkoročnega spomina, osebnega, kognitivnega, socialnega in motoričnega razvoja, k angažiranosti po doseganju ciljev, povezovanju izkušenj z znanjem in ozaveščanju sebe z okoljem, v katerem se učeči nahaja. Našteti vidiki se močno zavedajo na Norveškem, tam so učenje izven učilnice, predvsem pa učenje v naravi, zelo dobro implementirali v svoj učni proces in sam učni načrt. Veliko šol z učenci do četrtega razreda en učni dan na teden preživi v naravi. V ta pouk vključujejo elemente izkušenjskega učenja in proste igre, ki predstavlja četrti najpomembnejši predmet v učnem načrtu. Prosta igra in izkušenjsko učenje se ne pojavljata le v času izobraževanja, ampak tudi med odmori, ki ga učenci ne glede na vremenske pogoje preživijo izven učilnice. Prav ta odnos šole do narave nakazuje na pomemben vidik norveškega življenja in doživetja narave kot nekaj primernega. Norvežani to povezanost označujejo z besedo *friluftsliv*, ki reprezentira njihov odnos in spoštovanje narave, okolja in življenja, v katerem bivajo. Næss pravi, da je *friluftsliv* način življenja. Norvežani ne govorijo o tem, da bi bili v *učilnici* ali *izven učilnice*, ampak dajejo enak poudarek pojmom *biti v učilnici* in *biti v naravi*. V Sloveniji imamo zelo podobne ali celo ugodnejše naravne pogoje, kot jih imajo na Norveškem, kljub temu pa se v slovenskih šolah izvedba učenja izven učilnice in predvsem v naravi pojavlja bistveno redkeje. Raziskava je pokazala, da veliko učiteljev ob tovrstnem izvajanju poučevanja navaja naslednje težave: potreba po dodatnem učitelju, neprilagodljivost urnikov, finančne omejitve in zahtevnost dela oz. nestrokovnost za delo. Vsa našeta problematika učenja izven učilnice me je spodbudila k temu, da v času praktičnega usposabljanja

običajni šolski dan prenesem v park. Praktični del tega prispevka opisuje, na kaj moramo biti pozorni, da se izognemo omenjenim težavam. Pri tem vsekakor ne gre zanemariti predpriprav učitelja in učencev, izbire lokacije izvajanja pouka, vzpostavitve medpredmetne povezanosti predmetov in samoiniciative učitelja, ki je nujna za strokovno korektno izveden pouk. Praktična izkušnja je pokazala, da je učno okolje v naravi tisto, v katerem se učenci počutijo srečni. Prav srečno okolje pa je tisto, ki prispeva k temu, da učenci na učenje gledajo iz perspektive, pri kateri učenje dojemajo kot nekaj prijetnega, lepega. Pomembno je tudi dejstvo, da se učenci z učenjem izven učilnice neposredno in spontano učijo sobivanja in spoštovanja okolja.

Table 1: *Interdisciplinary subjects*

Subject	Interdisciplinary	Activities	Aim
<b>Mother tongue</b>	Nature & social studies.	Observing and analysing specific flowers (see, touch, smell, cut). Answering questions (working on paper). Presenting the flower to classmates (while showing its parts).	Children develop skills in observing, talking and collaborating. Children develop clear expression—how to present something with facial expressions and good verbal communication.
<b>Art class</b>	Mother tongue, nature & social studies.	Observing and discussing trees. Drawing and painting a tree they have chosen (differing perspectives).	Children develop their art skills and transfer the observed subject to paper.
<b>Nature &amp; social studies</b>	Mathematics, mother tongue, physical education, art lesson.	Paper work, group work, five activities: 1. Orientation. On the paper, there were photographs of trees taken in the park. Children must find the tree with the matching photographs and mark it on the map. 2. Balloon greenhouse. Discover the importance of building such a greenhouse and what happens in the balloon after we fasten it. 3. The variety of natural textures. Finding textures and scribble-tracing as many as possible on paper. 4. Different colours on paper. Find the colours in nature, draw the item and name it. Discuss, do research with the team to find out the name. 5. Calculate the age of the tree in the Park.	1. Children develop experience by observing nature. Children develop orientation skills and learn how to use a map. 2. Children develop critical thinking and discussion. Children develop motor skills and patience. 3. Children develop their orientation skills, research ability and social skills. 4. Children develop their orientation skills, research ability and social skills connected to discussion and cooperation within a team. 5. Children developing their mathematical skills.
<b>Music lesson</b>	mother tongue sport lesson	Learning a traditional song (lyrics, melody, dance).	Children develop musical, social and physical skills.
<b>Physical education</b>		A football match.	Children develop social skills, and a sense of fair play and team play.

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