

Organized Chaos: Experiential Learning Through Physical Interactions

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INTRODUCTION

Vision, gustation, olfaction, audition, somatosensory, vestibular, and proprioception are biological aspects which makes us able to interact with our surrounding environments. Sight, taste, smell, hearing, touch, balance, and position are essential senses we all use to help us understand our world through physical stimulation. In a contemporary era of safety in childhood development, a child's ability to intrinsically and instinctually experience, learn, and grow is being compromised by the very things that take care of them – their parents and/or guardians. *They may get hurt; they may catch a cold; they may get lost; and/or they may get dirty* are common phrases iterated by adults who worry for the safety of their children – however, preventative acts of limiting outside exposure may be detrimental or restrictive to an individual's capability to flourish. A plethora of examinations into child development and education has shown iteratively that, experiential, place, and risk-based play are essential and positive towards the personal health and cognition of all learners. Play is not always safe, but it always reflective, responsive, and intrinsic.

RISK – AT WHAT COST?

Bubble wrapping is a metaphorical expression sometimes used as a descriptive for parental safety precautions when their child explores the great outdoors – anything beyond their household. However, this may lead to compromised opportunities, degradation of resilience, critical thinking, risk-assessment, and competency for all learners (Malone, 2007). Malone (2007) and Wilson (2010) believe that children play are essential and necessary opportunities to foster independence and personal growth. Based off Wilson's interpretation and articulation of the term play, it is anecdotally defined as the *set of behavio[u]rs that are freely chosen, personal driven, and intrinsically motivated* (2010). Even if this may lead to unpleasant emotions and pain, they are just temporary – (if) the growth of other attributes such as self-reliance, resilience, experimental learning, social awareness, and joy are permanently ingrained and positive to the overall well-being of personal health, education, curiosity, and creativity.

LIFELONG LEARNING? NO WORRIES, FRILUFTSLIV

Hakuna matata (/ha-kuna ma-ta-ta/), a colloquial phrase often said in East Africa and in the iconic Disney Film, Lion King (1994), is an expression to signify to *no troubles/worries*. In Norway, some educators and citizens are beginning to adapt the term, friluftsliv (*fri-luft-sliv*), which means *free air life*. Friluftsliv is the feeling, the experiences, the mystery of natural silhouettes from the environment – whether it is to experience nature, to be sociable, physical activity, or immersed in natural beauty (Dahle, 1989). Dahle (2003) believes that the principle of friluftsliv may have a major role to contemporary Life-long-learning which is nature-linked, continual, and communal. Since friluftsliv is a cultural phenomenon and not an institutionalized phenomenon, he indicates that this emergence is intrinsic which will foster lifelong learning and meaning to contemporary schools in Norway.

(e) EDUCATION OR EDUCATION?

Forest schools (and/or nature schools) are an educational approach to integrate and immerse outdoor learning to promote and foster a holistic model of education which is intrinsically nature-based (Andrachuk et al., 2014). This progressive design and philosophy of education emphasizes the head, heart, hands approach to outdoor learning. Forest and nature schools (FNS) are centralizes around an interactive play model of epistemology – some examples include social, communication, deep, imaginative, and rough and tumble play. Not only does FNS promote ecological awareness, physical activity, health literacy, and cognitive processing capabilities, it also embeds traditional indigenous knowledge (IK) which embraces respect, sustainability, and cultural significance.

EMBRACING RISK

After previewing the various videos (*The Land (TL)*, *New Zealand School Ditches the Rules (NZSDR)*, *Norwegian Kindergarten (NK)*, and *Tawingo College Forest Kindergarten (TCFK)*), it solidifies the need for more opportunities for children to play in their environment – albeit, maybe not to the extreme of removal of rules. TL and NZSDR emphasizes the responsibilities of children, when given the autonomy to make independent decisions in a place with no adult supervision. This potentially unsettling and worrying actions of many students such as the dangers of chaos and destruction, and clutter (NZSDR; 4:42-4:59). Norwegian Outdoor Kindergarten uses a more of a balanced approach to encourage outdoor learning. Guidelines, minimal supervision, and common sense are the main framework for student play. The Norwegian Kindergarten video promoting play-based learning suggest that “*this is the foundation, this is learning first hand*” for all children (NK; 7:39 – 7:46). TCFK has focuses on a quality outdoor-based program which believes that *[c]hildren are happiest, healthiest, and most open to learning when they are outside interacting with nature.*

REFLECTION

I believe that all children should be able to independently and non-interruptedly explore their uncharted environment as long as it is safe. Safe is a relative word – to some, that may mean no harm, to others some harm. I think that risks that are potentially non-life threatening and impairing are worth experimenting. Outlined by TCFK, experiential, hands-on play has many direct and positive correlations to creativity, criticality, physical limitations, and mental cognition – all important for fostering intrinsic, lifelong learning. In addition, by learning through place-based experiences, natural awareness and ecological responsibility becomes intertwined to children at a young age. With growing environmental changes in the 21st century, it is essential for all citizens to become environmentally cognizant of their human footprint. Only by fostering environmental appreciation and innovation, and action can global ecological issues be better holistically solved for all people and living things on Earth. Last year, I had taken a course with Dr. Hartley Banack in environmental education and epistemology and I quote – “*All education is environmental education.*” This message of immersing nature-based learning has really resonated with me as I read and viewed all the resources in this week’s module. As for my stance on safety it may change, as parenthood of raising my child has occurred.

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