

HORTEN NATURSENTER INTERSHIP PLACEMENT



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Outdoor education course – USN

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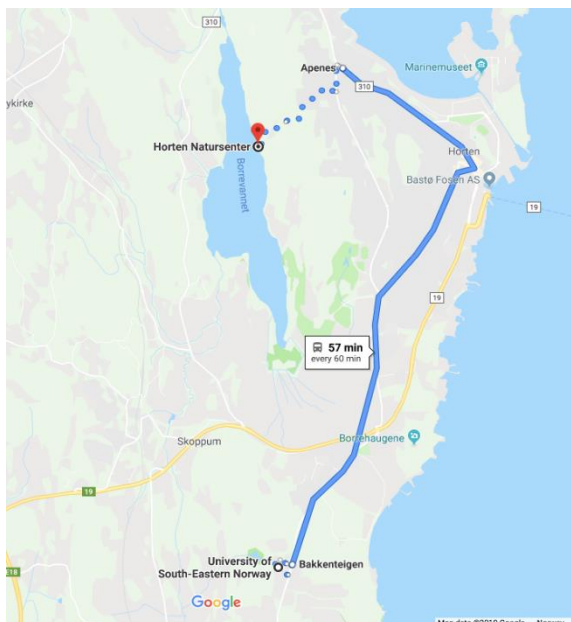
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1. INTRODUCING THE NATURSENTER

The place where every student of my class was supposed to experience his/her placement was decided by the teachers of the course. In my case, I stayed during the two first weeks of April in the Natursenter of Horten with other five classmates. We already had some first impressions from the centre because the whole class visited it the first week of the course, so we didn't go with that small fear of arriving to a place totally new.

The location of the centre is next to the lake Borrevannet at the west of Horten. It is possible to arrive with car, bicycle or walking. In our case, we had to take the bus from the university and stop in a bus stop where we had a 20 minutes' walk before arriving to the lake. The building is next to the water and between a forest area where there is not a big amount of houses.

The centre tries to use the area where it is placed to work any scientific content their different pupils. Indoors or outdoors, they try to give the students an experience that they can enjoy and they can remember in a future, because it is completely different from the traditional methodology. This is one of the reasons that makes that a lot of schools and kindergartens want to go the Natursentre. Because of this, the number of centres that want to go here creates a long waiting list.



As they explained to us, the opportunity to go without paying it is only for the elementary schools in Horten and the upper secondary schools in Vestfold. Also, they have preference to go to the centre before other schools that even paying want to go too. All these factors make that during the year the Natursenter accept a lot of different people, but it is common that the ones of Horten and Vestfold visit this place once per month. So, our placement was really distinct from the rest of our classmates that were in kindergartens, because we had to be with one different school each day of the two weeks.

The age of the different schools that come to the centre also changes every day, that is why each of the workers of the Natursenter has assigned one group of children depending on their age. The three monitors are Hege, Gunn and Andreas. Andreas has the youngest ones, Hege the middle age ones and Gunn the oldest ones. The students can be between kindergartens and universities, so the diversity of knowledge and levels are really big.

In the centre, Andreas and Hege work for the kommuna of Horten and Gunn works for the Vestfold county. But, apart from them, there are also some volunteers that go almost everyday for helping them with the maintenance of the centre. They really make easier the job of the monitors during the year, because it is so hard to have in good conditions every element of the area when it is in the middle of the forest and next to a lake.

Finally, when we talk about the content that the pupils work when they are in the centre, the diversity of subjects, knowledge and activities that they offer is really wide. In their webpage, apart from all the information of the Natursenter about their facilities, contacts and previous

projects, there is also a section where it is possible to find all the different content that can be worked with the different pupils of different ages. This information is useful to the teachers of the kindergartens and schools that want to go to this place. Normally, when the agreement of the visit of one school is done, the teacher and the monitor of the Natursenter decide together which content they want to work and in which way they are going to do it. This is a good way of planning the experience, having the both sides satisfied and well informed about the visit.



2. DAY 1

The first day we had to be in the centre at 9 in the morning. It was the presentation day where they explained to us everything that is written about this place in the introduction. Also, they showed us every facility and material that they used in their day-to-day, depending on the class, the content and the weather of the moment. They have activities and materials for every ambit of science: biology, geology, chemistry, etc.

After they finished to explaining every important thing that we needed to know, they tried to get known with us. Each of us made a short speech talking about himself and his/her reasons for being studying this degree and being in Norway right now. They were so kind with us, and it was a good way of being closer quickly.

A 14 years old class arrived at 10 and it was going to work with Hege. They had also had an optional subject called “outdoor education” and their lesson that day was not going to be related to any science topic in particular. They had to split themselves in two group for doing two different activities. We were supposed to help them and observe their way of working, but they were teaching us more than us to them. The two activities were cleaning the boats of the centre preparing them for the spring; and preparing the campfire for their lunch.

They seemed to have experience doing these outdoor activities because they didn't have any problem or question while doing them. The fact that the practical activities were necessary for the Natursenter benefit and their own benefit, was reflected in the students' positive attitude. This type of lessons are an incentive for the pupils that are normally inside a class, even if they are older students like the ones of the first day. Also, the teachers and monitors gave them a freedom while they were working that, in my opinion, as a student you miss sometimes during your stage at the middle school.

We were supposed to leave at 1 PM, but we could leave before because of the good job of the pupils.



3. DAY 2

The second day we had to go to the afternoon lesson in the centre. It was with a 12 years old class that was going to spend that night in the Natursenter, that is the reason why we had to be there at 5 PM. This day the class also was split in two groups that were going to do two activities during the day. The first activity was making a campfire like the previous day, and the second one was going in canoes.

Both groups had to do the two activities, but we finally spent the whole day with the canoes. Hege was the person in charge of the canoes and, before going to the water, she made a speech about the security required during these activities in the lake. She talked about the life vests, the oars and some actions that people should not do in the canoe. This was the first of two lessons about this topic. In May the class was supposed to come back to the centre and work more in how to rescue people from water. The objective of this day was to practice their canoeing skills.

In the port of the centre where there are all the canoes and boats, the students put on all the equipment and they split themselves in small groups. 3 people per canoe. After we helped them to go in the canoes, we split ourselves in two groups for going in the two boats with Hege and a teacher of the students. We were supposed to be the security of the pupils if anything happens, but our level rowing was worse than theirs.

The activity was basically sailing around the lake for some time and doing some stops for letting Hege explain some knowledge about the biodiversity of the lake. Being in the same place where the content that you are learning about is, it is a good way of making the children be more interested on it. Also, I think that practicing canoeing is not a thing that you forget easily, and that means that you are not going to forget the knowledge that you learn at the same time too.

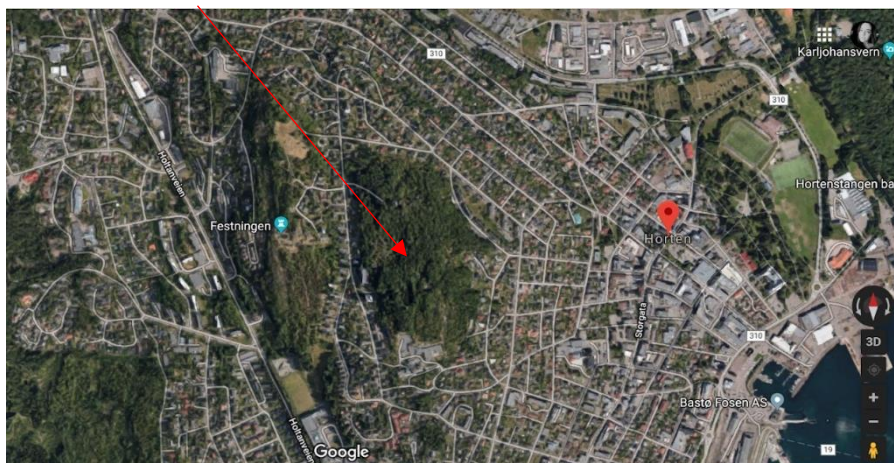


From my point of view, it is a good way of using the affordances that your area gives to you, and gives the opportunity to the students to practice a different activity that a lot of them unless they come a centre like this, it is difficult that they will experience it with their school.

After being with both of the groups on the lake, we left them having dinner on the campfire at 8 PM.

4. DAY 3

The third day we met with Hege again in a different place. We went at 9 AM to a forest that is located next to the Horten's hospital. A nature area that is in the top of a hill where you can see from some points all the coast and the town.



We had 3 classes of 12 years old students. But 2 of the classes arrive after lunch so we made the first activity just with one class. In this case, they had to find some different birds and know their breed. For doing it they had to split in small groups of 4/5 people and with the help of some binoculars and some laminated carboards where there are pictures of the different birds that live in this area and some of their characteristics. A simple and easy activity that let the students explore and try to analyse the different birds that they can find in the area.

During the activity the children didn't have a lot of confidence with us, so they were a little bit shy of asking for help. But after we had lunch in a campfire of the forest and the other classes arrived, we got closer to them. In that moment, the new students had to do the same activity that the first class did before, and the others had to find different plants of the area with the same method and a new cardboard. At this time, we were not just observing and walking around their groups like before, we were divided in their small groups helping and talking with them. After finishing the second activity, we said good bye to the children and they left at 2 PM.

All the classes came to the forest and left it walking because its location is not far away from the town. Having these nature areas near to the schools or kindergartens of the village is always a positive thing that a lot of places are lucky to have here in Norway. These landscapes give the children a bigger biodiversity to explore when they just have outdoor lessons near their school.

One interesting thing from this day was that one entire class was composed of refugees' students that have come recently to Norway. It was really impressive that their level speaking Norwegian and English was really similar to their Norwegian classmates. It is not easy to arrive to a new place and even more when you live what this families have lived, so I was amazed with what these students had achieved in a short period of time.

5. DAY 4

The fourth day we met Hege in the Åsgården school in the town called Åsgårdstrand. We went with a 12 years old class of this centre to the small forest that is next to the school.



First of all, we made an activity with all the children using the maths and the nature of their area at the same time. The objective was to know the height of any object without using a meter. In this case, they had to measure a tree of the forest, so every student had to find a stick that measures like his/her arm. Then they had to locate themselves in place where from their view the measure of the stick was the same as the tree. After that, they just have to count the steps as meters until they arrive to the tree, and that number of meters are the tree's height.

Like this one, they did with us some activities that I think are a creative way of finding a relation between the nature and the mathematics. A methodology that makes interesting two subjects that for some children are hard and boring if they study them separately in class.

When we finish these activities, we had lunch in a campfire with the pupils, and we tried to make some coal using a metal box with some wood sticks on the inside and leaving it for a while in the fire. It was an easy way of showing them the chemistry in their own nature area.



After a short break we split the class in small groups, and we gave them some binoculars and the same laminated carboards of birds that we used the day before. We heard and tried to see different types of birds with the students for 45 minutes, and then we said good bye to them at 2 PM.

6. DAY 5

The fifth day we finally met Andreas because he was sick during the previous days, and that was our first opportunity to work with him. We spent the day with an 8 years old class in the Natursentre. Of course, having these young students was a challenge for us, but we were surprised because a lot of them had really good level speaking English.

The activities that we did with them were related to the gravity and the hardness or fragility of the different materials that we have around us. For working this content, Andreas made them two different games where they had to cover in groups some eggs with various materials and threw them to see if they crash. A really simple activity that at the same time that shows them the importance of the materials and the gravity, also makes them enjoy a lot the moment.



After finishing the activities and having lunch, Andreas letted the children play freely around the area without any restriction. It was impressive to see how the children could use all the affordances that a place like the Natursenter offers and, at the same time, not letting that the risky play was converted in a danger. They were enjoying the nature while they were being responsible and cautious.

From my point of view, it was necessary to have this new experience of having students between 11 and 15 years old during the last days, but we also needed to be back with a kindergarten or primary class. Even if we can't have the best communication with them because of the language, I think it is important to take advantage of the opportunity that is teaching our education speciality in Norway.

7. DAY 6



The sixth day we went again with Hege to Åsgårdstrand with a 11 years old class of the Åsgården school, but this time we went to the lake that it is also near their area. In this case we spent some time with the students exploring the trees and the vegetation that was around the water and, also, exploring the different insects that can be found in the ecosystem that exists in this area. We used again some laminated cardboards of the plants and insects that could be there and some binoculars too.

After having lunch in a campfire, Hege suggested us to show the students a game from our homeplace that could be new for them. Almost all of us were Spanish so we decide to play a Spanish game called "the kerchief". The game had that warm reception that the students told their teacher if it was possible to play that game when they were back at school.

We were surprised about how the mix of two different cultures could have that good result. And it is an example of the importance of studying and researching knowledge and methodologies in other places that are not your homeplace. The diversity of points of views helps the education to complete fields that were empty in the past.

8. DAY 7

The seventh day we met again in the Natursenter with Hege and three different classes with 12 years old students. There were two activities planned for the day, but because of the amount of students they had to make turns for doing the activities while the other two classes were having lunch in the campfire.

The activities were related with the characteristic of the atoms when they are in different contexts. In the first one, after a short speech about physics knowledge, the students had to mix vinegar and baking soda inside a bottle and put a balloon on the top of it. The chemistry reaction made the balloon swelled and left no oxygen inside the bottle.

The second activity was based in introducing air in a plastic bottle with the pressure of an air pump. In this situation the bottle was shooted away, so the students made a competition where

they had to shoot the bottle as far away as possible. While both activities we were trying to help the students with any problem that they had.

From what we observe, they enjoyed more the second activity than the first one, because more energy and attention was required. Also, Hege and us tried to make it funnier putting water in bottles and making the students get totally wet. This is a perfect example of creating an alternative during an activity to make it more enjoyable.

9. DAY 8

The eighth day of the internship was with Andreas and a 6 years old class in the Natursenter. The eastern was close so we decided to celebrate with some costumes and some eastern eggs with some candies and chocolates inside.

Elena was dressed up as a rabbit and me as a chicken and when the children saw us, they got so excited, so they started to play with. At the same time, the rest of the girls hid the eggs with the sweets around the area. After that we helped them to find them and we let them to eat some candies.

The children were amazed about our painted faces and we decided to paint theirs. It was amazing the creativity that they had because every child wanted a different thing in his/her face. From queens and kings to balloons or diamonds, they were all happy with their choices and they created and played stories where all had a role.

After having lunch in the campfire, the class left early, so we had time to help the monitors to clean the area. Being located in the middle of a nature area with a big forest and a big lake entails an extra care of the centre. That is why the role of the volunteers helps a lot the monitors to have time for everything. It is important to know that they have another responsibility that in an ordinary centre don't have. The sustainability of the nature that they have around the area is their job too. Activities like the one that we did -cleaning the branches and rubbish of the lake's coast- are fundamental for the maintenance of the ecosystem of the area. Also, it is necessary to take care of the centre's facilities if they want to have affordances in good condition for the children.



10. DAY 9

The ninth day we were in the Naturesenter with Andreas and a 6 years old class again. This time we focused the eastern topic in another way than the day before. The children had to create a picture in the ground with nature elements and materials that represent the eastern for them. Before they started to do it the activity in small groups, Andreas explained them a little bit some knowledge about the eastern, the different seasons and why that happens.

In my case, I was impressed during the activity because they knew what plants they could take from the area and which ones were dangerous to touch or eat. This shows that they have experienced in nature areas and the effective methodology that outdoor education is when we talk about retain new knowledge. It is easier to learn the name of a plant or know that it is poisonous, if you saw it in person in one excursion that you can't forget because you enjoyed a lot. I think that using your emotions and your senses to remember things is one of the most effective ways of learning, and even more when you are a child and everything that you see are different types of stimulus.



11. DAY 10

The tenth and last day we had a more relaxed day because we just had to observe the different activities that another outdoor education class from the USN had planned for the 10 years old class that was visiting the Natursentre this day. They organised three different activities where the children had to work different motor skills: balance, jumps, throwing and catching, etc. For example, one of them was based on a teamwork game where three teams had to divide between them some roles and try to fill a plastic tube with water of the lake just using a plastic hat. It was interesting to see how other people, that are studying the same programme as us, have their different ways of seeing the same methodology when we talk about put it into practice. Different activities with more or less necessity of knowledge, motor skills and cooperation.

When they finished their activities and the pupils had lunch, we prepared the same Spanish game for the class before they had to go home. They really enjoyed it because they wanted to play some more times. And even the teachers, the monitors and some of us joined the game.

After the students finally left, we made a farewell eating waffles with all the monitors and speaking about our feelings about this unique experience.

12. CONCLUSIONS

This experience has let me live a different internship that I would not find in another place. It is common to say this type of affirmations, but I think that in my case is distinct because some characteristics of the Natursentre that is so difficult that an ordinary school or kindergarden has.

First of all, the variety of ages that me and my classmates have had to work with. Having a class of different course every day was a challenge for us. If it is difficult to do practises in a country that is new for you, doing it with students with ages that you are not used to work in the past is even more difficult. The way that you must treat them is totally different and the help that you have to offer to them too. There were sometimes when they were teaching us more than us to them.

Secondly, being with a different class every day was another challenge that when you go to do the internship in a kindergarden or school you normally don't have to deal with. It is difficult to get closer to the children when they don't know you and you are going to be their teacher or support and it can take you even some days. In this case, we had to create a relation faster with them because if we didn't do it, it was almost impossible to have their confidence for helping them.

Thirdly, we have appreciated different ways of teaching the children depending on the monitor. It was enriching to see how they explained new knowledge, how they dealt with problems and how they use the affordances that their area has.

And fourthly and finally, we have experienced how to communicate with the children without speaking the same language. Using English and the non-verbal language with children has been one challenge that I have never lived before. But it has been a real support to develop even more that communication skills that a teacher must have.

All these reasons have made my placement unique, and having experienced it with Andreas, Hege, Gunn and my classmates have made it lovely. This internship has made me expand my way of seeing the education and the role of a teacher in class and in the society.