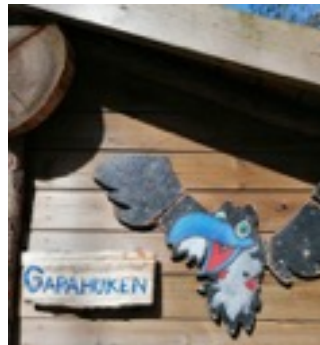


Assignment: Outdoor camp "Gapahuk", Crow Forrest



If you spend time with children in nature or especially in the forest, it is clear to everyone that they use and react differently to the place than adults. The different characteristics of a place in terms of topography and vegetation of a landscape are essential for what you can do there. From this we can also derive place responsiveness, which is either place-ambivalent, place-sensitive or place-essential. If you look at today's education system, you will see that it is often characterized by classical classroom teaching. However, if you look at Norway, you can see that it can also be different. For example, free play is considered important and accepted, using different place responses. In some Norwegian preschools, children are allowed to go wherever they want as long as they can see the kindergarten house. This is exactly how it is in the kindergarten in the Crow Forrest in Tønsberg. It belongs to one of the 32 kindergartens in the city, 27 of them are private and 4 take place outdoors. The "Gapahuken" group placed in the Crow Forest is one of them which is located just a five-minute walk behind the regular kindergarten. Outside the weekly kindergarten hours from Monday to Friday from 7.30 in the morning to 16.30 in the afternoon, it serves as a playground for all local children and families. The area has a large self-built entrance next to a passing forest path and is surrounded by a small wooden fence.



The entire place was built and designed by the children together with the people who work there. Especially Eirik, one of the founders of this outdoor camp, turned the concept of place-sensitivity into real affordances, as the chosen area in the forest

offers a variety of potential affordances. Together they have transformed this place from place-sensitive to place-essential.

Construction work as well as risky play were and are used as learning outcomes. The impressive construction of this area is constantly being developed in an ongoing process. Whether it's a tree house, a swing or a pirate ship, everything is possible here.



The special feature of this kindergarten is clearly that the children spend the entire year outside - really the whole year! Unlike regular kindergartens, the focus is not on short-term goals, but on larger and longer-term goals. The children learn to be a good friend and, above all, how to interact with others. Since they spend every day outside, nature is naturally of particular importance, but they also learn technical skills and how to use technology.

In the spring and summer months, everyone enjoys the sun and the warmth in the forest. Eirik described this time as bonus time, when they also do a lot of trips. In complete contrast is the period from September to January, when cold and rain play a major role. Of course, there is no question that the children get dirty while playing, that they freeze or cry because of it. However, these are all things that can be fixed! As there is always a camp fire, there is all the time the possibility to dry wet feet or warm cold hands, for example. This turns negative experiences into positive ones, which is the main goal, as the children will remember the smell of fire later on when they think about it. Furthermore, educators should always be aware of their great responsibility as role models. The most important thing is to be able to manage your own mindset for cold rainy days as the children will sense this mindset and try to adopt it.

Every morning the group meets at 07:15 am at the kindergarten to walk together into the forest at around 08:00 am and at 03:45 pm they go back to the kindergarten together. If there are no 4 employees, the group has to stay closer to the regular kindergarten in case something happens. Once in the forest they have time to play freely and decide for themselves what they want to do and play. The children bring their own food, which is usually some sandwiches that they can prepare themselves at the camp. Until recently, the group also had a barbecue or made soups together. Unfortunately, there is no more money for this at the moment.

Public health is very important in Norway, so every child has the opportunity to apply for a place in this outdoor kindergarten group. Because it is a public and not a private kindergarten, it also costs the same for every child, no matter where they come from. This is about 3000 NOK per month. Each year there are usually more children applying than can be accepted. The selection is made through a dialogue with the parents and the kindergarten teachers, whereby girls and boys are chosen equally. The focus is always on the question of what is best for the child, as for some it is better to stay in the familiar group where they know everyone and have friends. This is the only way to promote positive development.

After the time in kindergarten, it is clear that the children will be going to school. This is probably one of the most discussed topics in this area. It is assumed that the children will find it difficult to go to a regular school. However, this is contradicted by studies such as the one in the Journal of Environmental Psychology. They looked at the time spent outside during the kindergarten years and came to the conclusion that children who spent their first years of life outside are able to focus otherwise and also better. They not only interact with their environment but also use their bodies differently. Because children no longer have to watch out for roots, stones or branches at school, they can run freely and focus and concentrate on other things. So they have the opportunity to pay attention to other details. Normally, 5 year old boys are still unsure of running and balancing. However, in the outdoor kindergarten they gain more control, can climb trees and use knives. As Eirik said so well: The sky is the limit. For example, the children themselves know how high they want or can climb because they can feel and estimate the risk and know their own limit. Children can also be trusted to carve with a knife (under supervision). It is important to make the children aware that tools can hurt and are not toys, as they can cut wood as well

as fingers. However, care should be taken that only a sharp knife is used, as the handling of blunt knives is much more dangerous due to the pressure that has to be used.

Besides the better focus as well as the better control of the body, it is impressive that never one child is sick and the complete group is there every day. With the help of verbal beliefs and risky play the children get to know their limits as well as their fears. This gives them the competence to make responsible life choices and the knowledge on how to keep your physical and mental health balanced to master health and life skills. The outdoor kindergarten in Crow Forest supports this goal and facilitates in this way the children's learning in one of the three cross-curricular topics of the curriculum.

It is really impressive that the kindergarten teachers have built this multi-faceted camp in the middle of the Crow Forest. Furthermore, I have the greatest respect for them to spend the whole year outside, to be mentally prepared for it every day, no matter which weather or temperature.

The common and overarching goal of this outdoor kindergarten concept is clear: they don't want to raise polar explorers, but they do want to ensure that the children enjoy their time in kindergarten and to provide a good and positive experience that will stay with each child throughout their whole life. This is a skill that everyone should try to achieve in their life. After this exciting and experiential time outside, the children will most likely want to continue being outside - and being outside means freedom and making own decisions.



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