



REFLECTION TOOLS FOR TEACHER QUALITY

Title

REFLECTION THROUGH OBSERVATION - Outdoor learning

Goal

Stimulate reflection on teacher quality by observing organized learning situations out of door in a nursery school

Target group

This tool can be used with teachers and student teachers, both in pre-service and in-service education.

The group involved should have 3-6 participants.

Summary/description

Small children learn best through play, when using their body, their senses and communicating with others. This video shows an example from a Norwegian Kindergarten (Nursery school), where teachers learn how to organise learning experiences for the children outdoors. What problems do the teachers meet with their own attitudes, understanding and abilities?

These clips illustrate data from a regional project where preschool teachers get further education on how to use outdoor activities to promote learning for the children in their kindergartens/nursery schools. It also shows examples of children's activity, in play- and learning situations. The activities are with 3 to 6 year olds and their teachers and assistants. It shows the children managing problem solving-, motoric and creative activities using nature near their kindergarten.

This clip provides information about the teachers' planning and preparatory work, and their approach in the learning situation

Methodology

The clip can be viewed in one sitting. The students/teachers viewing it are recommended to make a log. This will be used in the reflection part. It is possible to watch some or all of the clips. The time-table must be adapted to the number of clips you use.



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A working time of at least 30 minutes is suggested for individual items, at least 60 minutes for a group.

If you are following most of the activities in the tool, it is useful to organize a plenary session to draw all the learning points together.

The discussions should focus on the possibilities in using nature for outdoor learning activities, and how this will change the teachers' work: their planning, organizing and managing of the learning activities and on the competence that teachers need to do this.

Specific suggestions about the use of the tool and the individual activities are given in the worksheet.

The outcome should be to provide the participants with possible strategies for using outdoor learning activities for small children. It should also strengthen the participants' ability to reflect on their own practice. It can also help them to be conscious about their own needs in the area of professional development for achieving improved teaching quality

Variations

See above.

The basic practices, attitudes and values arising in this clip about outdoor learning could also be applied to different age groups, and to several subject areas in school.

Background/resources

Gilbertson, Ken (c2006): **Outdoor education: methods and strategies.** Champaign, Ill., Human Kinetics. 213 pp.

Conditions

The activity should take place in an open and non-competitive atmosphere.

Materials

DVD about Outdoor learning and a DVD player

NB. Permission has been given to use this video material for Educational purposes provided they are acknowledged (as in the worksheets) and images of



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children and classrooms are limited to DVD transmission not freely available on the web.

The DVD can be ordered by sending an e-mail to M.Snoek@hva.nl.

Strength and weaknesses

Strengths:

Many teachers still work in isolation. They are not familiar even with their school colleagues' classrooms.

The clip provides a glimpse into an actual nursery school in a different educational context, using the outdoor environment to provide learning activities for the children.

The observation focuses on conditions that have to be met in this context, and the possibilities this gives for the children's' natural curiosity to explore their environment. The teachers verbalize the intentions and reflect on aspects of outdoor learning.

Because of the unfamiliar learning environment, the video provides the opportunity to reflect on the fundamental elements in learning for preschool children, and how the quality of teachers can open up for special outdoor learning possibilities.

Weaknesses:

The participants may find it difficult to transfer experiences from a little nursery school in Norway, with woods and coastal areas nearby, to nursery schools in big cities where children have another relation to the nature and with less outdoor opportunities.

The discussion and elaboration of reflective questions are dependent upon the co-operation of the group and the skill of the facilitator.



Comenius 2.2 Identifying Teacher Quality (ITQ) Reflection through Observation



Outdoor Learning

Using nature

Outdoor Activity from Early Childhood

How to use nature as a learning resource and learning environment



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Introduction

This is a video about prepared and planned learning outdoor activities in nature for children in a preschool institution.

It also documents reflections among teachers about the changes in the teacher's roles and tasks, and in the children's approach to and motivation for the learning activities.

Learning activities in schools are organized in classrooms most of the time. Such learning situations have frames that are easy to control, organize and reorganize for the teacher. To organize learning activities outside the classroom is complex and takes a lot of time. Many teachers are scared to take their pupils out of the classroom because it can become chaotic and gives the children the opportunity to become out of control.

In Norway and other countries there has been a movement to stimulate people to be more physically active and to use nature more both in school and in leisure-time. The video gives an impression of how preschool teachers take the children out in nature, and how they organize different tasks and learning activities for the children there. You will see some sequences that show children actively engaged and how their teachers have tried to prepare areas for motor- development activities and creative learning activities using nature, for example sliding and climbing. It also shows creative activities such as painting and how these have to be planned and organized.

The last part is an interview with a teacher about her reflections, which include how the staff have had to change the local curriculum and their working plans for the year, and how taking part in this project has changed their views of learning, their way of listening to the children's questions and how they have come to view their curiosity.

In these learning situations the teachers do not teach. They organize and plan for learning activities, but the stimulus comes from nature and from the opportunities for organized or self-directed activity. These are elements that characterize children's play.



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The learning objectives for this tool are for teachers to:

- Reflect on their fundamental assumptions about learning, and how learning processes can be stimulated outside the classroom.
- Reconsider how teacher-learner relationships change when learning activities take place outside the classroom in a natural environment
- Discuss how to see and stimulate the children's curiosity and their natural need to play and exercise in nature.
- Reflect on how learning can take part and be reinforced without traditional teaching from the teacher, for example how play can be transferred to learning.

Guidance for Facilitators

GENERAL POINTS

You are strongly urged to make yourself familiar with the clips and the exercises before you begin the work with a group. Timings may be given but you will have your own views on likely variations that influence your planning, particularly when you grow more familiar with the members of the group. If you don't like the phrasing of some of the questions then change or add to them, but be sure to retain the learning objectives of the activity. Thought should also be given to the use of the working space, comfort and visibility, small-group work areas etc and to the phasing of the items, allowing natural breaks etc. Try also to ensure that the hardware is working properly and is well placed! Remember that there is little benefit in watching a clip without doing follow-up work. You may identify items other than those addressed in the suggested activities. Feel free to develop further activities of your own both on the focus/learning objectives given, or any other learning issues you, or your group, feel the clip illustrates. Indeed that could be an extension item applicable to all the Tools.

Before starting on any of the tools in the tool-box please stress that these activities are not inviting you to criticize these teachers who are all volunteers, selected for their dedication and willingness to co-operate in benefiting others in the development of teaching skills. None of the material is role-play, it is all real. They are not offered as examples of 'best practice'. What they say and do is however often analyzed within the activities. As a learning group try not to come to verdicts or judgments about them. They, like you, are practitioners with strengths and weaknesses, so don't rush to conclusions such as 'I don't like that', 'I couldn't work with them'. You are advised to share your own version of this warning before starting each activity. There is also the aspect of the group members' own vulnerability to possible approbation or isolation within the



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working group. These exercises involve rigorous analysis of individual teaching styles and strategies, referring directly to members' own strengths and weaknesses. Facilitators should be very sensitive to the feelings of others in this respect while creating opportunities for co-operative growth which need not threaten individuals.

Most activities will require the group members to copy or construct data gathering formats for their observations. The activities will require work in individual, small group and larger group formats. Make sure ample opportunity is given to use and develop data/perceptions gathered during each session.

In some cases follow-up/extension activities may be suggested. Please use this opportunity, however, to create reflection in the most profitable manner for the needs, experience and contexts of the particular group you are facilitating.

EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE

This video is from a Norwegian context, and perhaps you have to comment upon the differences and similarities in the examples and in the questions and to relate it to your own or to the group's context. This can be done as an introduction, before you start using the video.

If activities or sections of an activity are done in small multi-country groups then a shared or plenary session is necessary to take advantage of the wide range of experience and cultural and contextual difference within the group.

POINTS FOR THIS ACTIVITY

Watch the clip as one complete session. Encourage the group members to take notes relevant to the exercises you have chosen (you therefore need to be clear about which items you are using)! Before beginning take five minutes with the group to look at the themes raised and possibly allocate a theme, or indeed a whole exercise to individuals for logging purposes.

Plenary sessions will be needed to draw together the learning from the activities.

Activity one

Reflect individually for 2 minutes, and after that, discuss:

1. Can it be called learning according to the curriculum when the activities are not directed by a teacher's teaching?
2. If so – what are the criteria for saying that this is a learning activity?
3. What are the differences between learning activities outdoors in nature and in a classroom?
4. Are there any advantages from the children's point of view in using nature?



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Activity two

1. Discuss your own experiences in taking pupils out for learning activities in nature. How would these small Norwegian children's perceptions compare with those of your own classes?
2. In what ways have changes in the learning environment affected:
 - the motivation and behaviour of pupils?
 - the interactions between pupils and teachers?
 - the interactions between the pupils?
 - co-operation between you and your colleagues?
 - The learning outcomes for the children?

Share your experiences.

Activity three

1. What changes must be made in the plans, curriculum and structure of the day before you go out?
2. Which of the issues raised in your discussion are **important in terms of teaching and learning** and which are 'peripheral' or 'red-herrings'?
3. Of those you consider important; **why** are they important in terms of teaching and learning?
4. Which factors are of general importance for the children's development and learning when using nature, and which do you think are special in a Norwegian (or other national) context? Discuss inter-country differences. How do they compare with intra-country differences? What does this lead



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you to think about important issues in teaching and learning?

Activity four

1. Many countries experience the fact that children develop health problems because they are less physically active and that their motor development is retarded. What should the school do to address questions raised by these problems? How will this change the teacher's role and tasks?
2. What policy concerns would be raised if this discussion had taken place in your own school?
3. These children were 3 to 5 years old, attending a preschool institution. What are the implications of your discussions for the way you treat different age groups differently when taking them out for learning activities in nature?

Activity five

1. What are the main characteristics for play-activity?
2. How can play be learning for small children?
3. Can play be a part of pupils' learning activities in lower and upper secondary school? Give examples.

Activity six

1. If your school decides to organize more of the learning activities outdoors in nature, how will this change the teachers' roles and tasks?
2. What types of support, such as competence-development, networking and so on, will the teachers need?



Activity seven

How can outdoor activity be planned to reinforce learning for

1. other age groups (e.g. primary; adult learners...)?
2. all subject areas?
3. all abilities?
4. other cultures?

Activity eight

1. What do you think the reactions of other stakeholders in the field of education would be to this discussion?
2. Imagine you are one of the other interested parties. What would you infer, or what would you now expect having viewed the discussion?

For example put your self in the shoes of:

- a typical range of parents
 - the governors of the school
 - a representative of national government
 - a local employer
3. How may these views change from country to country?



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Activity nine

Extension

Group members could recreate this discussion with their own staff and pupils as a piece of action research. It could then be used as a valuable tool for school development over a wide range of quality issues in the school.

For any follow-up work after the face-to-face sessions, the members could then use the data from their analysis of their own schools as a tool for looking at the European dimension of quality issues in schools.

Further reading

Gilbertson, Ken (2006). Outdoor education: methods and strategies. Champaign, Ill., : Human Kinetics, ib. 213 pp.