Learning in an Open Environment

1 event, maximum 1 school day

Learning outcomes:

- You will know how to raise pupils motivation by organizing a learning event.
- You can cooperate with colleagues, museum/factory/… employees, parents etc.
- You can recognise possibilities to teach subject-specific learning topics in an open environment.
- You can reflect on the process to improve your teaching practices.

Assignment

Together with your practicum partner, organise a learning event in an open environment (in nature, museum, factory, library, or other similar settings) and **analyse the activity**. You can also visit a museum, where an educational program is taught by a museum pedagogue, but you have to do preparing and summarising activities in the school.

For this assignment follow the four key ideas:

I Start planning early and with cooperation with colleagues and others.

- ✔ **Set purpose**, that relates to other learning aims (curriculum) and **involve other parties (**colleagues, parents etc).
- ✔ **Visit the place you plan to take your class to**. If it is not possible, you can visit their webpage, talk to employees working there and find different materials about the place. If you order a prepared educational program that will be taught by the museum pedagogue, you have to still read the descriptions, contact the museum teachers and find the best way, how the programme can suit to the needs of your practicum class.
- ✔ **Inform pupils (and maybe parents also) about the purposes and logistics of the planned learning event.**

II For the pupils the open environment learning should be connected to curriculum, offering the opportunity for independence but also giving a clear structure.

- ✔ **Before the planned visit, you need knowledge activating activities in classroom.** It can also be that you have been teaching a topic for weeks and the museum visit is a final event. If the visit is an introductional event for a topic (e.g., you start learning about a writer), then you need to do some pre-activities for children, so they can understand the context. Discussing the topic of the planned visit helps the teacher to adjust his/her plans and helps the pupils to be prepared for learning.
- ✔ **The most effective way of learning in an open environment is to use a semi-structured lesson plan** – so pupils have free time and also different guided activities, they can make choices. Thematically fragmented lesson does not support memory functions – it tires and hinders a holistic understanding of the topic (*e.g., visiting a Zoo with an assignment to explore 30 species, the pupils do not develop an understanding of any animal or group of animals*). Thus, its necessary to build an integrated lesson which focuses on one theme and creates a full understanding of it.
  NB! Not every type of structure supports learning experience! Very detailed worksheets or constant walking with the teacher without the possibility to discuss the topic is controlling and lowers motivation of pupils. The written instructions should help children to observe and explore the environment and discuss about it. They should not take too much time for reading and writing.
- ✔ **Summarising and reflecting at school**. It is important that the connections between the learning event and the learning materials in regular lessons are drawn.

III Meaningful activity enables pupils to make choices in learning and to be socially involved.

- ✔ **Pupils can communicate with each other** - at least partially this event must be built on group activities.
- ✔ **Pupils are involved in organizing the event**, they can participate in making choices about the place, time and purposes (e.g., which museum, how much free time, where to have lunch breaks etc).
- ✔ **Pupils can make suggestions about the planned activities** to make the activities more personal and meaningful for them (e.g., picking the exhbitis they are interested in).

IV Pupils and teachers value and remember learning experiences in an open environment.

- ✔ **Meaningful learning embeds elements of exploring**. Pupils search and analyse information.
- ✔ **Pupils and teachers both value learning event in an open environment as a special experience.** Affective connections (high emotions, thrill, etc) support also one's memory and develop historical thinking (How would it be to be in somebody else's shoes? Why these people made the choices they made? What explains the way people acted in old days? etc).
- ✔ **Learning in an open environment shouldn't include too many activities you can use in a regular classroom.** It is important to use the possibilities the visiting place is offering.
  In nature main goal is to observe, to describe and share, what we see (instead for looking in books or apps what there should be).

Write an analysing summary of the event:

1) **Explain the aim and the place of your visit!**
   Base your argumentation on curriculum and on specific interests and developmental needs of your pupils.
2) **Describe the preparations for the event.**
3) **Describe the event.**
   - **a.** Describe the preparation activities for children in the classroom.
   - **b.** How were the activities structured during the learning event?
   - **c.** How did you support children's autonomy before the event, during and after the event?
   - **d.** How did you support children's social skills before the event, during and after the event?
   - **e.** Describe the elements of inquiry learning you used.
   - **f.** Did the learning event use maximum of the uniqueness of the place you went to? How did it differ from the daily learning in school?
   - **g.** How did the learning in open environment offer your pupils meaningful and emotional experience?
   - **h.** Describe the activities you conducted in the classroom after the visit. How did it help to guarantee the enhancement of new knowledge and having a meaningful reflection of experiences?
4) **Reflect the process.**
   - **a.** What went according to the plan? What went wrong?
   - **b.** What did you personally learn from this experience?
   - **c.** How did your experience with your practicum class differ from the experience of your co-student's practicum class?

Read more

1) Anderson, D., Kisiel, J., & Storksdieck, M. (2006). Understanding teachers' perspectives on field trips: Discovering common ground in three countries. *Curator: The Museum Journal*, *49*(3), 365–386.

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3) Coll, S., Coll, R., & Treagust, D. (2018a). Making the most of out-of-school visits: How does the teacher prepare? Part I: Development of the learner integrated field trip inventory (LIFTI). *International Journal of Innovation in Science and Mathematics Education*, *26*(4), 1–19.

4) Coll, S., Coll, R., & Treagust, D. (2018b). Making the most of out-of-school visits: How does the teacher prepare? Part II: Implementation & evaluation of the learner integrated field trip inventory (LIFTI). *International Journal of Innovation in Science and Mathematics Education*, *26*(4), 20–29.

5) DeWitt, J., & Storksdieck, M. (2008). A short review of school field trips: Key findings from the past and implications for the future. *Visitor Studies*, *11*(2), 181–197.

6) Endacott, J. L., & Sturtz, J. (2015). Historical empathy and pedagogical reasoning. *Journal of Social Studies Research*, *39*(1), 1–16.
7) Greene, J. P., Kisida, B., & Bowen, D. H. (2014). Value of Field Trips. *Education Next*, *Winter*, 78–86.
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10) Kisiel, J. F. (2010). A program can change the entire field trip. In *Paper presented at the Association of Zoos and Aquariums, Houston, September 12-16.*
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12) Poom-Valickis, K., Jõgi, A.-L., Timoštšuk, I., & Oja, A. (2016). Õpetajate juhendamispraktika seosed õpilaste kaasatusega õppimisse I ja III kooliastme tundides. *Eesti Haridusteaduste Ajakiri*, *4*(1), 258–278.
13) Willingham, D. T. (2006). How Knowledge Helps. It Speeds and Strengthens Reading Comprehension, Learning— and Thinking. *American Educator*.