In the following chapter, I will show how the use of outdoor days in a particular school resulted in increased learning, where, among other things, knowledge of languages, culture and specific fields, as well as positive health-benefiting and psychosocial factors, play a part. This text is the result of conversations with the teachers Britt-Inger Baer, Hanne Sofie Brandsfjell, Elsy Labba, Katarina Spiik Skum and Margareta Åstot, and visits to the Sami school in Jokkmokk. In this chapter, the concrete work with outdoor days in the school is related to Sami education and the Sami language, based on being bilingual or multilingual, nature as a learning environment, outdoor teaching, and the concept of traditional knowledge.

Visit to and participation in an outdoor day

On a beautiful sunny day in late winter I accompanied a few teachers and students from the Sami school during one of their outdoor days. Skiing was on the agenda and the students arrived with ski equipment and backpacks containing, among other things, hot drinks. The Wednesday in question was the first outdoor day of the semester, which is why some students and also parents had missed the information or forgotten to look on the calendar. In spite of this, the parents who had forgotten the outdoor equipment gladly ran home to pick up what was needed. All of the students were very eager to get out into the woods, but before they set out, they all gathered in the classroom. The teachers went through the plan for the day and the central concepts for the day. Then in the woods everybody went skiing. One parent accompanied the group and acted as a ski instructor. Lunch was cooked over an open fire in the woods. After lunch, there was a period of free time and some students started skiing on a slope, while others played close to the fireplace. Before the school day ended, ski instruction continued on the slope and at the end of the day all of the students were daring to go down the slope.

The teachers have long used specific outdoor days as part of the school schedule, with the result that teaching takes place outdoors in the woods each Wednesday. However, they have chosen not to have outdoor days during the coldest part of the year, as it would probably not be very pleasant to be outside when the temperature is about minus 30°C. The idea of the outdoor days started at the Sami school a number of years ago when the teachers in year F–2 started to structure their teaching based on the immersion of a language immersion model. The teachers then started to arrange fixed outdoor days in an attempt to create informal language environments to reinforce the Sami language. The Sami school is a multi-lingual school. Accordingly, the teaching in Jokkmokk is carried out in three languages: North Sami, Late Sami and Swedish. The focus of today’s outdoor day is skiing. That means ski school, as well as looking at current central Sami concepts. This outdoor day has stimulated the use of the Sami language, but over the years, the teachers have found that an outdoor day also covers learning of Sami traditional knowledge, as well as more traditional knowledge in school subjects. In addition, this day also includes other factors, such as values and value bases, independence and friendship, motor functions and so on.

Sami education and the Sami language

According to Hyltenstam et al. (1999), historically speaking, education for Sami children was carried out according to the interests of the majority of society up until the middle of the 20th century and was used as an instrument for society’s assimilatory and segregational purposes. The role of the Sami language in teaching varied and it was always used to aid in conveying Swedish language, religion and culture. In this way, education did not support the use of the Sami language, which meant that Sami children lacked support in their development in the use of their mother tongue. This is something Balto also writes about: “Siden vi alltid skulle snakke norsk i timene, så utvikla ikke skolan morsmålsserifghetene våre.” (We always had to speak Norwegian during classes, so the school did not develop our skills in our mother tongue.) (Balto, 2007, 430). Accordingly, education was a reason why the Sami children were prevented from profiting from the knowledge of their own culture and their own language (Kuokkanen, 2000).

The Sami school today is equivalent to a nine-year compulsory school, intended to give Sami children a Sami-oriens-
The starting point of the school’s thematic work consisted of the outdoor days spent in the natural environment, where the practical experience was the basis for beginning theme work about fish and fishing. The outdoor environment, was the basis for learning in summer schools and field study courses. Sami traditional knowledge and the school

Technological development and urbanisation have alienated people from daily contact with their physical environment, unlike earlier cultures of gatherers, hunters, fishermen and farmers where the physical environment was used as a learning environment (Dahlgren & Szczepanski, 1997). The Sami have preserved a thousand-year-long tradition as hunters and gatherers among other things, through their reindeer-herding culture with gathering and fishing as important sidelines (Jerersdalen, 1994). Their traditional knowledge about nature has developed over a long period of time, in accordance with humans’ need to use the possibilities of nature for survival. Ruong (1982) emphasises that the rich terminology in use for natural conditions and terrain shows the importance of knowledge about ecological matters for people’s lives in the arctic and sub-arctic regions.

Sami traditional knowledge encompasses practical and theoretical knowledge about how to use the natural environment, as well as an understanding of psychological conditions, spirituality, social relationships, cultural and social values, and a theoretical understanding of how to deal with nature. The aim of this kind of knowledge is to provide students with the knowledge and skills needed to integrate practical work and theoretical knowledge within the school.

The choice of teachers to try and focus on the Sami language, through the method of an outdoor day, obviously might mean advantages for both students with Sami as their first language and those who have it as a second language. An outdoor day focusing on teach different Sami concepts involving skiing will probably be based on the learning of a second language. However, in order for the outdoor day to involve learning for students with Sami as their first language as well, the language needs to be used to communicate subject knowledge too. On a previous outdoor day the Sami language was also used when communicating subject knowledge, and spending time in the natural environment was the basis for learning.

Nature as a learning environment

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The starting point of the school’s thematic work consisted of the outdoor days spent in the natural environment, where the practical experience was the basis for beginning theme work about fish and fishing. The outdoor environment, was the basis for learning in summer schools and field study courses. The summer schools and field study courses were visiting activities which were carried out in the reindeer herding areas. In their teaching, teachers connected nature studies with practical activities.

Teaching outdoors is beneficial in terms of bringing theoretical and practical work together and it involves learning that is based on both experiences and places (Szczepanski, 2007). Sami traditional knowledge, based on reindeer herding and fishing, is on the bilingual immersion language or the second language (Centret för språkbad och flerspråkighet, 2007; To-
Crystals of Schoolchildren’s Well-Being

Today, there are still ways of living and livelihoods which continue to use Sami traditional knowledge, but this knowledge has partly disappeared or at risk of disappearing. People can be sums of their experiences and their knowing, and it can be summed up in the concepts of tradition and creativity. Regarding themself in the practices in which they had traded with others and then completed themselves. Mostly, it meant knowledge about day-to-day living which was practised within the immediate neighborhood. Things which were gathered were mainly found in the natural environment, and nature regulated people’s work through the changing seasons. Accordingly, there is an in-depth traditional ecological knowledge in this culture. Oskal (1999) emphasises that people should not try to dominate the world, but rather try to understand the world and be humble. A fundamental horizon of understanding, a certain base on which to form individuality, personal projects and a whole lifespan (Bergstrom, 2001, 127). Traditionally, knowledge in school could mean that students feel that their knowledge is part of culture in particular (Eriksdahl, 2001; Jannok Nutti, 2007). The school in Sami local communities has to have its base in traditional knowledge and local culture. This would mean a central role for the knowledge held by older generations, relatives and local people (Bergland, 2001; Hirvonen, 2004). Education based on the students’ own cultural background was the subject of an earlier research project by Bergstrøm & Gjelsvik (2005) where the school is seen as a natural place. In this place, education is seen as a means to enable students to transfer to the next generation (Balto, 1997). Stories contain good advice, morals, practical instructions or rules of living; accordingly, they have a strong message. Sami teachers use the fact that stories bring people together as a central way to get to know students, where the personal and the cultural is a central point for learning within outdoor teaching. The following activities in school are active communication based on familiar situations, including preschool work, tasks related to the Sami herding year, and contact with other South Sami. Accordingly, the language-motivating project had a clear structure in both preschool and school, mostly based on activities whose focal point was Sami traditional activities. It is important to be able to make a fire in Sami culture and when one spends time outside in the natural environment. Teachers report that students are responsible for making a fire. They go to the same place during the outdoor days and have made their own “árran”3 then. As soon as they get there, the students want to collect wood for the fire and make the fire right away. The students have learned to make a fire both together and on their own. The teachers also discuss where and how a fire should be made with the students.

Making a fire involves practical knowledge and even traditional knowledge. Ryd (2005) has, in cooperation with older Sami, documented different Sami methods of making a fire. Larson-Luxi (in Ryd, 2005) says that older people are happy when a fire is burning as a fire means warmth and light. Rassa (in Ryd, 2005) describes how each family had their own traditional method of making a fire. Linnaeus (2007) describes family traditions. This is also knowledge which the students gained during the outdoor day through conversations with the teachers. Besides the practical knowledge, the students also have noticed that there are different approaches in terms of what sizes of wood should be used and how to make a fire accordingly also includes value considerations.

Value bases

Once they were out in the woods they met some students from another school. The students from the other school were shouting and make a lot of noise in the woods. Later on, one of the students said: “They are really shouting, we do not behave that way in the woods!” The teachers say that they and the students would talk about how to behave in the woods, and not shout or hit and destroy trees and plants... The teachers convey a respect for nature. Nature itself and a sense of belonging to nature are central parts of Sami culture.

Osvald (1999) emphasises that people should not try to dominate the world, but rather try to understand the world and be humble in harmony with it. Many Sami stories describe how to relate to nature, and the relationship between humans and nature. In an indirect way, stories teach children norms, values, good and evil, and how to behave which means they transfer to the next generation (Balto, 1997). Stories contain good advice, morals, practical instructions or rules of living; accordingly, they have a strong message. The Sami story-telling tradition is marked by the importance of close social relationships and the relationship to nature (Nergård, 2006).

The teachers say that during the outdoor day they always first walk past a natural spring in order to fetch water. One teacher says that this is important both so that the students know where water can be found and also so that they know how this was done in the past. Once when the main water supply was shut off at the school and there was not enough water for a certain period of time, the students had to fetch water from a natural spring, and this did not matter because they knew how to get water… The teacher also mentioned that they have now started a project with a water theme, to give the students an understanding of the natural lifecycle and the importance of protecting nature.

One important aspect of outdoor teaching is creating a awareness of the relationship between humans and systems in nature, as well as making humans visible in the local and global lifecycle (Szczepanski, 2007). Teachers use water use to try to convey respect for nature and the importance of protecting nature in order to create sustainable development. The aim of this work is that people will see that various needs are met without jeopardising the possibility of future generations meeting their needs. Sustainable development consists of three mutually dependent parts: ecological sustainability, social sustainability, which means building a society where basic human needs are met; economic sustainability, which means using human and material resources in sensible ways (Kungliga tekniska högskolan, 2007).

Furthermore sustainable development is also about promoting cultural sustainability, to make it possible for different cultural groups to sustain and develop their own traditions and cultures. This means that cultural sustainability, to make it possible for different cultural groups to sustain and develop their own traditions and cultures. This means that cultural sustainability also includes value considerations.

3 Fireplace

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which are all concepts encompassing the knowledge indigen-
ous people have. Accordingly the outdoor day relates to
the concept of sustainable development based on Sami traditional
knowledge and value base concepts which also has links to
humans. The outdoor day and outdoor visits to the natural
environment have also proven to have a variety of health ben-
efits and positive psychosocial functions for the students.

Health benefits and positive psychosocial functions

Students get physical exercise by walking, running, climbing and moving
around in the woods, says one teacher.

For the teachers, the outdoor day also involves the physical
development of students, practising how to move around in
the woods in hilly terrain. During the outdoor day where I was
present, the focus was on skiing. If outdoor activities such as
skiing are considered important by the school, there could
lead to health benefits. Furthermore, placing an emphasis on
outdoor activities such as skiing could provide the school with
a health profile. Visits outdoors have positive effects on students’
health, physical development, ability to concentrate and
learning (Dahlgren & Szczepanski, 2004). Visits outdoors
give students an outlet for their natural need to move around.

The concept of outdoor teaching implicitly encourages a kind
of learning which involves more physical activity (Szczepan-
ski, 2007).

Outside in the natural environment it is quiet and everybody has time to
listen to the silence there…

According to the WHO’s definition, (in Szczepanski, 2007),
health means the greatest possible physical, mental and social
well-being of the individual in question. Physical health
do to with the mechanical functions of the body, i.e. how
healthy our body is from a medical point of view. Mental and
spiritual health involves our philosophy of life and presupposes
time for reflection on different matters. Mental health means
the ability to think clearly and coherently. Social health means
the ability to maintain relationships with others.

An outdoor day involves both being independent and helping each other. Inde-
pendence could mean being able to make a fire or find the way to
the campsite without the company of an adult. Over the past year, they have walked to
the same place in the woods many times. The first few times, the children walked
first and showed the children the way, but after a while, the students
were allowed to go on their own. The teachers were initially a bit worried
about letting them go ahead of the others alone; what if a child got lost? In spite
of their worries, the teachers allowed the students to go on their own without
a teacher. They did this to try and make the students independent. Today, all
the students are very good at helping each other find the way to the site.

In her research, Balto (1997), states that the most central aspect of
Sami upbringing was making the children inde-
dependent. Learning to become independent, i.e. being able to
manage on one’s own, is the ideal of how a person should be.

According to one parent who participated in the study:

“Selvstendighet lærer man ikke i barnehagen…Der lærer ikke
barna å tenke selv og opplegget i barnehagen kolliderer med ideen om at barne skal  läre på egenhånd gjennom erfaringer, ikke
å bli styrt hele tiden…” (Independence is not something you learn in
the day care centre…That is not the place where children learn to
think for themselves, and the way things are arranged in the day
care centre contradicts the idea that children should learn on their
own through experience, and not being guided all the time…)
(Balto, 1997, 11-12.)

This parent maintained that children do not learn to be
independent in pre-primary school and normal school. Balto
compared this with learning in the extended family, where
children had their own areas of responsibility and tasks to
carry out on their own, according to simple instructions from
the adults. The children learned from other adults or from
each other (Hirvonen, 2004). I have previously written about
the fact that the views of handicrafters and reindeer breeders
were based on children having their own tasks which they
could try to do on their own (Jannok Nutti, 2007). These
tasks had to be carried out properly (see also Sara, 2004), but
it did not matter if the children made mistakes when they
were carrying out their tasks (see also Balto, 1997).

My earlier research (Jannok Nutti, 2007) shows that it is
important for children to be out in the woods and learn to feel
safe there. It is also important for them to learn to find their
way out in the natural environment. Sami learning involves
children both learning to manage different things on their
own and learning from grown-ups or other children (Balto,
1997; Hirvonen, 2004; Jannok Nutti, 2007). The teachers in
the Sami school linked the outdoor days with the Sami view on
learning, where the students learned to find their way in
the natural environment together. They are trained to become
independent when working together. As I have also previously
discussed (Jannok Nutti, 2007; 2006), nature is an important
foundation for developing a culturally based education in
mathematics in the Sami schools.

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