

# **FRILUFTSLIV IN A NORWEGIAN PRIMARY SCHOOL : SIGNS OF SUCCESS**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

This paper has its focus on the subject of ‘Friluftsliv’ in a primary school situated in a densely populated area of the Troms province in northernmost Norway. Since 2000 I have been in contact with teachers at this school, and in 2003 I wrote an article about friluftsliv in this school (Frenning, 2003). The teachers had experienced major challenges in organizing friluftsliv as a subject: *The schools have poor friluftsliv equipment and they feel little support from the administration.* In 2008 a new survey was carried out in order to assess whether the challenges reported earlier by the teachers had remained unchanged, or whether there were signs of success.

As is broadly known, friluftsliv is a concept with deep roots in Norwegian culture, and its tradition communicates values of great importance for the Norwegian identity (Skirbekk, 1981; Faarlund, 1986; Christensen, 1993; Nedreliid, 1993; Reed & Rothenberg, 1993; Woon, 1993; Goksøyr, 1994). Friluftsliv is a part of Norwegian schooling, and the Norwegian curriculum (here referred to as K06) is the guiding document for educators. The following excerpt is taken from the general part of this curriculum:

#### ***The Joy of Nature***

*Education must also enkindle a sense of joy in physical activity and nature’s grandeur, of living in a beautiful country, in the lines of a landscape, and in the changing seasons. It should awaken a sense of awe towards the unexplainable, induce pleasures in outdoor life and nourish the urge to wander off the beaten track and into uncharted terrain; to use body and senses to discover new places and to explore the world. Outdoor life touches us in body, mind and soul. Education must corroborate the connection between understanding nature and experiencing nature: familiarity with the elements and the interconnections in our living environment must be accompanied by the recognition of our dependence on other species, our affinity with them, and our joy in wildlife.*

(K06, 2006, pp 154-155).

In the curriculum for Physical Education, friluftsliv-related activities are an important part. Through play and other activities, children will be able to experience and learn about nature and local friluftsliv traditions. For example, pupils on the intermediate stage should be taught

how to interpret maps and use the compass, apply first aid, interpret weather signs, and select suitable clothing (Ibid., pp. 154-155).

## **METHOD**

The present research is part of an ongoing project using a humanistic/hermeneutic approach. The aim has been to uncover the understanding of teacher views of 'friluftsliv' in the intermediate school stage. The presence and questions of the researcher, and the subsequent reflections of both investigator and informants, contribute to develop an understanding of the phenomena at hand. With this approach it is important to be aware that the researcher's background and perspectives on the issues will influence both the information that actually emerges, as well as that which does not come to light. However, in order to keep in purview the total setting, it was crucial that the investigator and the informants could also refer to a shared world, shared experiences, and common points of reference. The data collection was multi-pronged, based on conversations, questionnaires, and in-depth interviews of the two central teachers. Students of Tromsø University College assisted in the project.

Concerning interpretation, the hermeneutic method was applied whereby the process of understanding and interpretation is a recurrent interplay between the whole and the parts, where the parts are connected to the whole, and the whole is interpreted through the parts (Wormnæs, 1987; Gilje & Grimen, 1993). Respondent checks by the teachers of the inquiry's written material was carried out.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **The school and the teachers**

The school is situated in a densely populated area. Nevertheless, mountains, the sea, and the forest are within walking distance. The school educates pupils from 6 to 12 years with two parallel classes at each age level. The teaching staff is well educated, stable, and generally enthusiastic. Two of the well-skilled teachers, Mona and Rikke, are involved in the present longitudinal project. They have no specific education in friluftsliv *per se*, yet for Mona it is a main leisure pursuit. The reason for the choice of friluftsliv activities in this school was based on the school's favourable setting, the opportunities offered by the seasonal variations, and the skills of the teachers. The two teachers agreed to implement more friluftsliv, integrated in their interdisciplinary work (Frenning 2003). It is pertinent to note that last autumn Mona was appointed vice principal of the school.

### **What are the signs of success?**

Results from the data material show that there are four elements that have led to success in the implementation of friluftsliv at the school. The first element is the teachers. Mona and Rikke have been a consistent and enthusiastic driving force for the subject. Since they started their work at the school, they have taken the pupils into nature during all seasons, and they have also influenced their colleagues through the years to appreciate the value of friluftsliv. In this school friluftsliv has been implemented in all grades and is a subject on the same level of importance as mathematics.

The deep anchoring of friluftsliv among all colleagues at the school is the second element of success. By 2008 they were all in agreement that friluftsliv is an important subject in their school.

The third success element has been the policy of the school administration. Without a positive attitude from the Principal it is difficult to give priority to friluftsliv. Many teachers elsewhere with friluftsliv skills express frustration because they do not receive enough support from their administrations. In the present school the attitude towards friluftsliv in the administration has changed over the years in a very positive direction.

The fourth element of success is, of course, the pupils and their parents. Without their positive attitude and strong-willed sense of priority for outdoor equipment, the friluftsliv project would not have been successful. In totality, this school has been able to understand the positive influence nature has on pupils, and to ensure its place in all phases of its programmes .

### **CLOSURE**

In this paper the success of friluftsliv in one primary school in the province of Troms has been assessed. The first and main positive element is the teachers, Mona and Rikke. They are still (in 2008) the driving force behind friluftsliv, and it appears that it is due to their assertive spirit that friluftsliv has been implemented deeply in the school structure. This supports the general view that the culture in an organisation is very important for success. However, culture-building depends on the commitment of individuals, and if teachers have power, enthusiasm, and good colleagues, they can obtain impressive results (Hargreaves, A. et al., 1998). In the present inquiry it seems clear that the enthusiasm of Mona and Rikke has deeply influenced their colleagues and the school administration. Friluftsliv is interdisciplinary in its

character and can be very labour-intensive. If your Principal does not give you credit for your demanding friluftsliv-work, then it can be very frustrating (Dahlgren, L. & Starrin, B., 2004). The importance of the Principal for a school organisation has been well documented (Jacobsen & Thorsvik, 2007). In the present study, the answer of the teachers is clear. If we wish to give the pupils friluftsliv experience in school we need to focus on the whole school organisation. Perhaps we first of all must explain the value of friluftsliv to the Principal. And then we can look to the most important persons for the pupils; the good friluftsliv teachers!

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