

The importance of just being there – and how to just be there?

We often say that to be able to cope with the problems ahead of us, we must change our way of thinking – and change ourselves. Albert Einstein is very often used as a witness in this connection – and without doubt he was a relatively smart guy...

But if it is so that the western way of thinking and acting that has to be changed - it is probably so that it was here in the western world that the joyfulness of economic growth, better health, reduction of poverty and hunger etc. really started, but at the same time we have failed to see that this kind of development have had some dark side like pollution of different kinds and a society in disharmony.

Among many Sigmund Kvaløy Setreng thus preferred to characterize the situation as social-ecological crises. There are some dark clouds threatening the nature – which we are dependent of, but also the relationship between human beings is in danger.

But when we are focusing on the "thought" and a change in the way we are thinking we are very "western-ish" in our thinking. In other words are we once again using the same medicine to cure, which has caused the decease?

The way I want to look upon this has its background in the "ecophilosophical experiment" in Norway in the 70- and 80 -ties. The main point was that change mostly happens through practice. Inspired by Gandhi and Marx: "The most important and efficient kind of acknowledgement is to seek the center of the conflict")

This gathering – and others in the WP network has always had some kind of connection to practice. We have never been sitting in an auditorium and just receiving information. An important part of the WP gatherings have been the idea of sharing. A lot of things to discuss here – but we have to remember to not to be caught in either the theory- or practice trap.

But let us turn back to what was my starting point: The western thought. And as you know it has at least a 2500-year tradition.

(Thales from Milet 624 – 547 B C) If you choose to google “Western thought” you about 95 million Google hits

To draw a simple conclusion based on so many references/hits is very difficult, but it possible to find some keywords: deductive reasoning, rationalism, scientific method (observation, quantifiable, experiment, hypothesis and testing of hypothesis)

My favorite philosopher – Henri Bergson – writes in his essay about the philosophic intuition (The essay is called “Introduction to metaphysics”) that in spite of different opinions there are two main ways to knowing a thing. One is that you circle around the thing and the other one is that we enter into it. (It is only one way to get to know the river is – to jump into it!) The first way described is dependent of what symbols and point of view you have and the second way neither depends upon a point of view or any symbols.

To my mind it is the first one that most of all expresses the western way of thinking, we are circling around and using symbols to describe the thing. I like to call this a “space and time” - thinking and it is very typical especially in the natural sciences.

I will not go deeper into this way of thinking even if this way of thinking has been criticized from an environmental perspective, but I will not reject this way of looking upon the world – definitely not! (More later) The problem to my mind is that it dominating too much and claims to represent the truth. What we need – I think – is discussion around its values. The biggest and unpredicted harm is perhaps that we have got an alienation of the relationship between man and nature – and of course the idea that nature can be controlled like a machine

Let us now immediately turn back to the thread and idea from Bergson. I think that they can be used to recreate the relationship to nature – and away from alienation by entering into nature.

This means “that you are in harmony with” and helped by imagination and creativity to enter into nature.

In his own words: “I also imply that I am in sympathy with those states, and that I insert myself in them by an effort of imagination”

The didactical question is: “How do we develop imagination and creativity?” The idea of “free play”. Apparatus and devices we see outside schools and in parks do hardly invite children to “free play”. Some grown-ups have told them how to use these devices. Free play can only be practiced in nature. Research from all over the world tells us that free play in nature develops two main things: Creativity and Concentration

Bergson uses many examples to explain how he is thinking. One example is the character from a novel. The author can give the character all kinds of traits. But all these traits can never be a complete description of the character compared with that simple experience if I am able to identify with the character. Everything will then come naturally to me all at once.

Close connected to identification Bergson uses the word sympathy. We know the word empathy, which can be understood as a “feeling” for someone or something.

But Bergson chooses to use “sympathy” in the original etymological meaning of it. For Bergson sympathy then means to be “one with” or as SKS expresses it: “We are all the same wave”. SKS once said – and here he is inspired by Bergson – we do not have any strict borders in nature, there are always gliding transitions. The traditional time and space thinking does not exist in such a universe. The time and space thinking demands that something is delimited from something else.

The rational intellect – by using symbols – does not work to identify and be one with (sympathy) nature. For Bergson it is only by intuition, which is the kind of intellectual sympathy, one is able to be a part of the inner in a thing (nature) and to join with what is typical for it. In his own words: “It follows from this that an absolute could only be given in an intuition whilst everything else falls within the province of analysis. By intuition is meant the kind of intellectual sympathy by which one places oneself within an object in order to coincide with what is unique in it and consequently inexpressible”

If we now after this short introduction change our perspective and focus on how we can use identification/sympathy and intuition in a didactical discussion. For me one possible way would or could be the traditional Norwegian friluftsliv. But this also demands some deep changes in the education system and in society. The situation for the planet is so serious that we need radical changes. Friluftsliv in the

school system very often tends to be some happy events or stunts without being connected to the situation and without having any clear purpose and direction

There are a lot of meanings and opinions of what friluftsliv is or can be. We like to say that in Norway we have three main definitions: the commercial, the political and the thematic definition. Without going deeper into this now, I would like to focus on what I look upon as a core value in friluftsliv: Just being there! I think that “just being there” can be one of the most important contributions and create the conditions for sympathy, identification and intuition.

”To just be there does not mean to isolate yourself to dive into your own little or big bubble. Of course you can do so but there has to be some kind of interaction between the small and bigger Self. (AN). AN said once that we have to differ between “activity” and “activeness”. “Activity” is important, but very often the activity in itself comes into focus. In other words a kind of physical tournament and nature becomes a kind of “sparring partner” we have to defeat.

This is a very simple didactic but on the other hand very difficult. It can be very simple to give pupils or students the possibility but on the other hand a very difficult and slow process which is demanded that “just being there” can be a very meaningful experience.

I think that the Norwegian “Anti expedition” in 1970 had that same motive – “to touch the mountain and being touched by the mountain. To be in the mountains and to be among people and meet them.

Then some practical suggestions how to do this

As I said “Just being there” can be very easy for a teacher to organize. I guess there are more challenges connected to arguing why a teacher allow pupils or students “just to be there” and be given the freedom “to just be there”. For the youngest children it is not a problem because they always see opportunities to play. And in my country most parents look upon this as very natural. It is in situations like this you can talk about “free play” without any interference by a teacher or apparatus constructed by a teacher or some other grown ups which are “telling” the children what to do and how to play. Free play can only be done in free nature and this develops “creativity and concentration”.

For the older students it is also very important “to just be there” – as it is for us – and be given the possibility to be alone in the meeting with nature. All should of course be given the possibility to rational and logic reasoning – to pay attention, to wonder and reflect. But as important is to notice qualities in nature and the quality by being there and to have and be given the possibility to sympathy – to be a part of the same wave. This is a gigantic didactical challenge to supervise the students towards sympathy with nature and how intuition can bring you into this. One important thing to do is to share your experiences with others. And that can be done in many ways.

I suggested in the beginning that the rationality that dominate the thinking absolutely should not be given away. That kind of thinking can be an important “tool” for the intuition. What we see in the education system is that knowledge and information is more and more fragmented. We are education specialists but we need highly educated generalists. (Arne Næss) Highly educated generalists are probably able to see or discover connections by using intuition. (Nobel discussions) But the system has not allowed us to use intuition and we have not been able to give intuition the kind of tool rationality can be for intuition. This is not a process that can be controlled and prescribed but a free and creative process that has not been accepted even if we are using it and dependent of. We have denied it.

Neoliberalism cultivate even more the rational thinking and is not able to, and does not open for and does not allow the students – and teachers – to go on develop their “being”.

The concept of intuition is in itself difficult. This is perhaps because of rationality has demanded significant knowledge. (FoU – Research has become more and more important in education) But this is a simplifying of our knowledge. Everyone that has been doing some practical work knows that the analysis is very complicated and very often not able to describe reality. Have you ever seen written down an instruction how to learn cycling? Intuition is developed through experience and a holistic view upon the world.

Intuition is often defined as “a quick and ready insight or understanding immediately based on feelings rather than facts and it is a kind of holistic conceptions”. Bergson says, “Intuition is meant the kind of intellectual sympathy by which one places oneself within

an object in order to coincide with what is unique in it and consequently inexpressible

I understand Bergson that he defines intuition as a kind of “intellectual sympathy” for “something” (an object). This can be everything, but hopefully something living (vital) but not necessarily. Think about using bolts in rock climbing, construction activity etc. Bolts are one thing, but by drilling into the rock you are “hurting” the mountain. The mountains have also legal rights.

According to Bergson this “something” can also be memories and acts. The didactical challenge is to give the students as many complex memories and activities as possible. The more we get the more possibilities to an intuitive sympathy.

If this in some way can be working, the students have to be given the possibility to as many diverse and complex memories and activities as possible during their schooling and be given the possibility to fantasy and creativity to get as many “memories” as possible. The lonely meeting in nature will be a necessity - but it is also important to share with others.