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EUROPEAN LANDSCAPE CONVENTION**

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WORKSHOP 1

Landscape as a classroom – Landscape education in the primary and the secondary school

Mrs Sinikka Kunttu

Executive Director, Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE) Suomi, Finland

Education – teaching and learning – is always connected to the environment around it. There is no education that can be separated from it. The environment – and the landscape – has an influence on education, even if we are not aware of it.

When talking about landscape and its effects on education, it is important to remember how the European Landscape Convention defines landscape: *“Landscape means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.”*

The definition means that there is not just one and only landscape around us. The landscape is not the same for everyone, but is rather a personal experience: everyone perceives it differently. One can also think that, first, there is the environment, and when a person sees, feels and observes it, it becomes the surrounding landscape.

Then, when thinking about the landscape and identity, it awakens questions: *How does this landscape act as the building block of my identity? What is the landscape's significance to me? What is my place in this landscape?*

Palmer's Tree Model in landscape education?

There are strong similarities or connections between environmental education and landscape education. I see that many of the theories and activities used in environmental education are applicable to landscape education, particularly with children.

In environmental education, there is one famous and often-used theory called *Palmer's Tree Model*.¹ According to the theory, environmental education should be organised so that children are learning *about the environment, in or from the environment, and also for the environment*. Environmental education is not only playing and bird watching or learning from nature, but active work for the environment. This is the basic point of environmental education: to encourage us also to act!

As “the aims of this convention are to promote landscape protection, management and planning”, could there also be use for Palmer's Tree Model in landscape education?

Teaching and learning outdoors

When education – teaching and learning – happens outdoors, the connection to the landscape is essential. Landscape sets limits and opportunities for learning and play, and contributes to the culture and local identity. At the same time, it inspires!

The influence of the landscape can easily be seen when children leave the classroom and go outside for lessons. Then the landscape takes an even larger role: it is more than just “a wallpaper” or scenery. It has an influence on actions, thoughts and ideas. That is something that can rarely be reached inside a classroom. However, it also does not happen on its own, automatically just by stepping outside: it requires guidance, drawing the children's attention and teaching observation.

In recent years, outdoor learning has increased in popularity. According to research, outdoor learning improves children's health, engages them in learning and leads to a greater connection with nature. Outdoor learning also encourages teamwork and creativity. The nature and outdoors is both a calming and activating element.

Outdoor learning shows that almost any teaching and learning can be done outdoors. You can do the same things outdoors as in the classroom. Outdoors you can teach and learn not only biology and geography, but all school subjects. For example, in Finland in recent years, there has been a growing interest in teaching mathematics outdoors.

Case example: Outdoor Classroom Day

Then, how to get children out of classrooms all over the world? One good case example about teaching and learning outside is *Outdoor Classroom Day*, which is a global campaign to promote and inspire outdoor learning and play. On the campaign day, thousands of schools around the world take their lessons outdoors. Every school and kindergarten is welcome to take part!

Outdoor Classroom Day is a good idea to share which also could have possibilities to be used as part of landscape education. Outdoor Classroom Day is led from Great Britain by Project Dirt, in partnership with Unilever, as part of their *Dirt is Good* movement. The partners are working with local NGOs and *Dirt is Good* teams around the world.

1. Palmer J.A. 1998

This year, the campaign day in spring was 17 May. Over 1.7 million children from 113 countries took part. From Finland, over 20,500 children took part. The participants were mostly primary schools, but in Finland, kindergartens were also active.

So how does this campaign work? Just get involved!

1. Sign up your school (outdoorclassroomday.com);
2. Check out the resources and share yours;
3. Take your class outdoors on the day!
4. Share your experiences with us!

The great thing in Outdoor Classroom Day is that the campaign is both local and global at the same time. A map on the campaign website shows all the places participating in the Outdoor Classroom Day campaign. Sharing photographs, greetings and tips in social media is part of the fun. On the campaign website, you can peek at what learning outdoors looks like in different parts of the world. The website also has many useful resources and tips for learning and teaching outdoors.

“For some schools, this will be an opportunity to try learning outside the classroom for the first time. For teachers who regularly take students outdoors, the day will be a celebration of what they are doing already, and a chance to inspire other schools to get involved. For everyone, Outdoor Classroom Day will act as a catalyst for more time outdoors every day.” – outdoorclassroomday.com

If we come back to where we started, there is always the landscape behind all that happens. The landscape surrounds the school and the classroom. The pupils – or even the teachers – do not always acknowledge it, because it is such a familiar feature. A landscape that is familiar to us can be very exotic and interesting to someone on another continent. How well do we know our own landscape?