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School children´s special places in a forest garden in Sweden

Abstract

Outdoor places is an expanding research strand (see for instance Fägerstam, 2012; Cele, 2006; Lester, 2001) but there is still a lack of studies on how such places are experienced from the children´s perspective, despite the value of using the child's own experience as a point of departure (Johansson & Pramling Samuelsson, 2003). Änggård (2013) and Klerfelt & Haglund (2011) are among those who have investigated outdoor areas outside schools and educare centres from the children's perspective.

Outdoor places visited by school children can be schoolyards, school forests or the environment around their neighborhood. This study presents school children´s perspective on special places in a forest garden. Forest gardens are cultivated areas designed to produce complex and resilient systems that produce plants useful for humans, with a minimum input of energy, labour and other resources (Crawford, 2010).

The school children in the study were eight to nine years old and had visited a forest garden in the south part of Sweden on several occasions over a two-year period. The school children were involved in many different activities in the garden. The present study focuses on their special places (Sandberg, 2003; Green, 2012) in the forest garden. Talking about the pictures they had taken, the school children told us which activities they preferred and which places were especially important to them in the garden. These conversations provide insights concerning their recreation, play, feelings and how they developed

Data for the study was collected and constructed using the walk-and-talk method (Klerfelt & Haglund, 2014). The school children had iPads and took photos during the walks in the forest garden. They told us why they took the picture and what the picture meant to them. A qualitative analysis was made of the data, resulting in qualitatively distinct categories (Uljens, 2008).

In this presentation I would like to offer some analyses of the rich material we collected, discussing the pictures the school children took, especially looking at which places are special and important to the school children and why.