

HABILITATION THESIS REVIEWER'S REPORT

Masaryk University

Faculty

Procedure field

Applicant

Applicant's home unit,

institution

Habilitation thesis

Reviewer

Reviewer's home unit,

institution

Faculty of Education

Pedagogy

RNDr. Hana SVOBODOVÁ, Ph.D.

Department of Geography, Faculty of Education,

Masaryk University

Outdoor education in Geography: A specific education strategy

Ao. Univ.-Prof. Mag. Dr. Franz RAUCH

Institute of Instructional and School Development,

Alpen-Adria Universität Klagenfurt, Austria

Review text

Topicality of the theme

The habilitation thesis on outdoor learning addresses primarily the context of geography teaching in primary and secondary lower levels schools in the Czech Republic. In the first chapter the concept of outdoor education and its implementation in the school curriculum is presented. In addition to a brief discussion of the term outdoor education, the integration of outdoor education in the current Czech school curriculum as well as central aspects of the organization of outdoor education are presented and reflected in substance. The second chapter focuses on origins, strategies and definitions of forms and approaches of outdoor education in the context of Czech education.

In the following third chapter the author provides concrete considerations for the design of outdoor education in elementary schools. These statements refer to the core statement formulated at the beginning of this chapter: „The aim of outdoor education is to find answers for questions in the real environment, This takes place by working with primary and secondary data sources“ (p. 65). In the following chapters a multi-year empirical research project structured according to methodology, results and discussion is presented.

It can be stated that the author presents an up-to-date and comprehensive examination of outdoor education. In the context of current didactic discourses on inquiry-based learning and the social challenges of shaping the future sustainably (e.g. climate change, loss of biodiversity) especially, outdoor education is once again moving more into the focus of school-based learning.

Approach to solving and setting the issue into a professional (including international) context

The author writes, „that the publication is intended for both professionals and the teacher community, who may be inspired in preparing their own outdoor education projects and in incorporating outdoor education in the comprehensive system of elementary school education“ (p. 11). It is a challenge to address a broad readership in a scientific text. It can be assumed that the hope of the author, "that all readers consider the book as a valuable source of information and ideas (p.11)" will not remain without echo.

The text offers an interesting source for science communities, teacher education and school practice due to its broad embedding in conceptual discourses, a substantial conceptual theoretical and practical definition, analyzes of current curriculum developments in the Czech Republic, opinions of teachers, students and parents.

Although the current situation in the Czech Republic is at the center of the work, the author also embeds the term in an international discourse. This international discourse could, however, have been a bit more comprehensive. The author herself points this out in the chapter "Discussion".

Methodology

The empirical part of the work comprises the second half of the book and is based on a project funded by the Czech Science Foundation 2016-2018. The research process is presented according to the standards of empirical research. After an analysis of the research needs, the goals and the design of the research are clearly described. The overarching goal is formulated: "... to analyze the benefits of outdoor education for teaching geography and the development of motor skills of elementary school pupils" (p. 88). Sub-goals and hypotheses are formulated in a comprehensible manner. The research design is relatively complex and includes a content analysis of curricula, structured interviews with teachers, questionnaire surveys and physical activity measurements of pupils and a short questionnaire survey of parents. An important part for the quality of the research is some triangulation of the results.

The individual surveys are carried out in accordance with the scientific standards for qualitative research. Important for the quality of study is the consistent attempt to compare the data sets and the attempt to find out connections between outdoor education with pupils' physical activity is particularly innovative.

What could be criticized is the fact of the limited sample. This is also pointed out by the author herself in the discussion chapter, at least with reference to the small number of students surveyed and the problems with the use of ActiGraph. However, the study offers interesting insights and suggestions for further research and practice in the context of the two regions South-Moravia and South-Bohemia in the Czech Republic.

With regard to the presentation of the instruments, the questionnaires could have been included in the text (or in an appendix).

Quality, accuracy and originality of results

With reference to the methodology and methods used, the results correspond to the quality standards of empirical research. Comprehensive relevant literature is incorporated and cited. The core of the hypotheses (p.88) was confirmed. However, it was also possible to work out differences through the comparison in the context of triangulation: (1) SEP content versus conception of outdoor education realised by teachers, (2) Teachers view versus pupils views on outdoor education, (3) teachers views versus parents views on outdoor education (p.160).

Multi-perspective case studies are rare in the context of outdoor education (and also in education in general). The originality of the present study can therefore be attested.

The study contains numerous graphics and tables that clearly illustrate the concepts and results and make it easier to grasp the content. However, when presenting the empirical

results of the school teachers and pupils, a clear tabular presentation of the questions and results would have increased the comprehensibility (e.g. chapter 5.2.1; 5.2.3).

Applicability of results for the field development and further research, applicability of results in practice

The results offer a good current insight into the state of outdoor education in primary schools predominantly in the subject Geography. A more comprehensive implementation of outdoor education is still in its infancy in the Czech Republic, both qualitatively and quantitatively. The study offers suggestions and topics for both research and practice. This is also a declared aim of the author. The chapter "Discussion" reports on an ongoing follow-up project "Fieldwork Education System for Elementary Schools". As a further research the processing of video studies of outdoor education are mentioned in order to gain deeper insight into the realization of outdoor education. The results also offer concrete data and arguments to anchor outdoor education better and more sustainably in the curricula (SEP) as well as in pre-service and in-service teacher education.

Format and language of the work

The text is well structured, consistent and coherent in itself and very well laid out. The final chapters "Discussion" and "Conclusion" summarize the results well condensed and reflected. This also includes the limitations of the work and recommendation for further work. Numerous figures and graphics illustrate concepts and results. Lists of abbreviations, figures and tables round off the book. The text is written in good English.

Reviewer's questions for the habilitation thesis defence (number of questions up to the reviewer)

How would the author outline an in-depth research and development project based on this work? Which positive and negative experiences would she consider or avoid?

From the author's point of view, what impulses can the current social challenges of climate change and biodiversity losses expect for the further development of outdoor education in the Czech Republic?

In the Covid Pandemic, digital learning has come to the fore. How could digital devices be used to achieve the goals of outdoor education in the Czech Republic? What are the limits and dangers of using digital media in the context of outdoor education?

Conclusion

The habilitation thesis entitled "Outdoor education in Geography: A specific education strategy" by Hana SVOBODOVÁ **fulfils** requirements expected of a habilitation thesis in the field of Pedagogy.

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Signature: