

THESIS

**Adventure pedagogical principles in the everyday
routines of preschools**

Siiri Pirjamo

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ABSTRACT

Humak University of Applied Sciences
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Authors: Siiri Pirjamo

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The aim of this thesis was to develop the adventure pedagogical approaches of preschool forest groups in Vuores municipal kindergarten, Tampere. Although the kindergarten develops its general pedagogies systematically, the emphasis on environmental and adventure education specific to the forest groups has mainly been developed by individual educators over the years. Furthermore, the educators recognised a lack of knowledge and consistency in their adventure pedagogical approach. This thesis explored what is essential for meaningful and high-quality adventure pedagogy in early childhood educators' work, focusing on theories, approaches and attitudes.

Qualitative data for this research-based development project were gathered through semi-structured interviews with three Finnish early childhood educators who implement adventure pedagogy in their work. The interviews were conducted in September 2021 through an online video meeting platform. Data analysis followed the principles of thematic analysis. The interview data was supplemented with personal experience and incidental observations in the commissioning preschool during a practical training period in spring 2021.

The research produced information about and concrete examples of adventure pedagogical approaches in early childhood education. It showed that applying adventure pedagogical principles can be meaningful and motivating for both educators and children. The quality of their approaches was influenced by committed team members, situational awareness, and childrens' participation. The study provided principles for further improving adventure pedagogical approaches in the everyday routines of the forest preschool.

Keywords: adventure pedagogy, adventure education, preschool, early childhood education, pedagogical approach, principles

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1 INTRODUCTION

The honour of leading three lively and brave expeditions in Vuores preschool forest groups, Tampere, was bestowed on me in spring 2021. Earlier, the explorers had picked an egg from a dragon's nest by mistake and the expedition had survived by a hair's breadth. This time we had prepared well and journeyed through the mountains with great skill and care, avoiding mishaps. We truly did, although here in Finland the urban forests are bordered with ridges rather than mountains. Each expedition ended just in time for a warm lunch. The adventures went down in history as the last ones, because within a month the members of the expeditions become first-graders on their summer holidays. The experiences were irreplaceable but left me, a trainee adventure educator, puzzled. Could a one-off adventure have any educational impact? Within the context of preschool, what is adventure education, actually?

This thesis was an opportunity to further develop the issues provoked by the practical training. The study was guided by a question: Besides exercise ideas, what else does an educator need to apply adventure pedagogy in the everyday routines of a preschool? The educators in Vuores preschool forest groups were highly knowledgeable in outdoor learning and environmental education, but wished to integrate adventure education in their approaches, too. They reckoned this pedagogical approach could particularly help them enhance the team spirit and problem-solving skills in their groups. These objectives can in fact be addressed with the approach (Berry 2011, 63, 66; Ewert & Davidson 2017, 27).

Outside help and expertise were welcomed. Although the kindergarten develops its general pedagogies systematically, the emphasis on environmental and adventure education specific to the forest groups has mainly been developed by individual educators over the years. The situation with individual teachers and nurses having isolated experiments reflects the status of adventure pedagogy and early childhood education in Finland. In 2020, the lack of organised development work motivated the founding of adventure education network of early childhood education, Varhaiskasvattajien Seikkailukasvatusverkosto (2021).

My study identified adventure pedagogical principles, that can be used as guidelines for meaningful and high-quality approach in early childhood education. Based on these principles and information obtained from the literature, previous research, and experiences and incidental observations in the practical training, I produced improvement suggestions for Vuores preschool forest educators.

2 DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

2.1 Vuores Preschool Forest groups

The commissioner of this thesis is Vuores Preschool Forest groups in Vuores Kindergarten, city of Tampere. Our cooperation started with my last practical training period in spring 2021. The first school and kindergarten groups started in modern multipurpose Vuores-house in 2013, and now it is a place of daily education and care for over 900 children. In the kindergarten there are six preschool groups of which two are forest groups. (Tampereen Kaupunki 2021). The forest groups have operated since 2016. In the immediate vicinity of Vuores-house a patch of forest and kotas warmed with fire serve as classroom for them around the year. (Lindgren 2018, 20).

The teaching is based on the local curriculum of pre-primary education. In addition, the kindergarten and the school emphasize values like interaction and individual encounters, communality and participation of pupils and their families, sustainable lifestyle, and environmental responsibility (Tampereen Kaupunki 2021). These values are put in action with Green Flag sustainability program and certificate (Vuoreksen Vihreä lippu 2021).

Furthermore, the pedagogy of forest groups is directed with Taru Lindgren's (2018) plan for outdoor learning emphasized on adventure and environmental education. In the plan she produces evidence of justification, suitability and appropriateness of chosen methods and learning environment from the guiding documents of early childhood education. It includes safety plan for outdoor learning in Vuores-house and a few suggestions of pedagogical methods and further reading to start with.

Pedagogic documentation is continued with Maarit Närepalo's (2021) digital folder of accessible trip locations within walking distance from Vuores-house. The folder aims to promote outdoor learning in Vuores kindergarten (Närepalo 2021). The trip locations are all frequently visited by the forest groups. Exploring the surrounding environment is part of forest groups' everyday life and teaching.

2.2 Development needs and objectives

The development needs of Vuores preschool forest groups were identified during my three-month practical training period. They were both discussed alongside the everyday work and in

team meetings. Initially, the educators requested practical adventure educational tools to support goals like enhancing children's problem-solving skills and communality. In forms of exercises and program ideas, such request has been responded to in an abundance. Here are some examples suitable for beginners and goals such as problem-solving practice and community building. A method very typically used in adventure education is low-ropes courses (ToiMeen! 2017). Other methods, like forest trips and adventures with storylines can be found in thesis development projects of Linnea Hakanpää (2021), Hanne Leinonen (2015) and Armi Niskanen (2019). They all provide clear guidance for integrating adventure pedagogical exercises in early childhood education.

Even I instructed several exercises in the forest preschool that aimed to meet the needs mentioned above. Activity ideas are needed when an educator first starts to experiment with adventure educational pedagogy. But often they seemed like just another fun game and even far-fetched for the children's reality. These experiences led to long philosophical conversations with my training mentor. Beyond exercises, what is adventure pedagogy? How could it be applied in the everyday routines rather than spectacles and once-in-a-while curiosities? At this point it seemed irrelevant to concentrate on any specific goals or needs emanated from the group that spread out after the end of their preschool year in summer 2021. In autumn, new group would bring about new needs. Perhaps some deeper insight of adventure pedagogy could equip the educator for these changing needs, too.

There is very little guidance on how adventure pedagogical principles can be integrated in the everyday life of a preschool. Even though Vuores preschool has a plan of outdoor learning that provides some hints on implementing adventure education, the attention has been mainly on environmental education. Organisers of pre-primary education are responsible of systematically developing their pedagogies with involvement of educators, children and their parents (Tampereen Kaupunki 2016, 4-5). The development of pedagogies specific to the forest groups relies strongly on individual educators. Furthermore, the members of a four-person educator team change in short cycles which hinders them from establishing consistent pedagogies and operational models.

Typical to status of adventure pedagogy is, that even though the National Core Curriculums of Early Childhood Education and Care (Finnish National Agency for Education 2018) and Pre-Primary Education (Finnish National Agency for Education 2014) form an ideal base for ad-

venture and outdoor learning, there is no mention of these pedagogical methods in the documents. The pilot Core Curriculum of current Two-Year Pre-Primary Education Trial goes further with its emphasis on sustainable lifestyle and natural environments. It even flirts with concepts like leave no trace, modest consumption and nature reservation (Finnish National Agency for Education 2021, 51-52), as if as a hidden goodwill gesture to the focal teachings of adventure education. Commitment to UN's Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (Suomen luonto- ja ympäristökoulujen liitto ry 2021) and development of curricula on account of expert advice and newest research (Finnish National Agency for Education 2021, 7) prompt Finland to tackle the matter of sustainable development with fresh determination. The trial preschools are encouraged to do bold experiments on new modes of operation and develop school culture (Finnish National Agency for Education 2021, 24), an interesting opening for adventure education as well.

The goal of the thesis is to explore what is essential for meaningful and high-quality applications of adventure pedagogy in early childhood educators' work. I aim to encourage the forest group educators tap into adventurous learning as comprehensive pedagogical philosophy. I will interview early childhood educators who are experienced with adventure pedagogy. The interview data will be supplemented with theories, previous research and my incidental observations and practical experience in Vuores forest preschool groups. Drawing from these, I will provide development ideas and suggestions for implementing adventure pedagogy in the everyday routines of the forest preschool.

3 KNOWLEDGE BASE

In this thesis and its knowledge base, the term pedagogy is used to describe the educators intentional and conscious influence on a learner and how education is organised and implemented. In the context of early childhood education, it implies the believes, methods, thinking, intuition and responsibility an educator has in relation to a child's growth, learning and development (Kangas, Lastikka & Karlsson 2021, 12, 14).

3.1 Pedagogy in Pre-primary education

In Finland, pre-primary education links early childhood education and primary education. In 1998, pre-primary education became part of Basic Education Act, and the first National Core Curriculum for Pre-Primary Education was published in 2000 (Alila et.al. 2014, 13). Based on the standards set in both national core curriculums of Pre-Primary Education and Early Childhood Education and Care, each municipality is responsible of creating their own, local curriculum and implementing it (Finnish National Agency for Education 2014, 8). In 2015, attending to a preschool became obligatory for every child a year before they enter a primary school (Karila, Kosonen & Järvenkallas 2017, 62), whereas participating in other institutional early childhood education and care remains optional (Karila et al. 2016, 17).

In the core curriculum of pre-primary education, there is a great emphasis on values and standards that promote an inclusive, participatory, and socially sustainable learning environment. The main goal is to provide each child positive experiences as learners and as members of a community. Close cooperation with the child's caretakers is essential. Pursued transfer effects of the curriculum are to lay a foundation of life-long learning and enhance child's prerequisites for growth, development, and well-being. (Finnish National Agency for Education 2014, 12–16).

The teaching is based on a conception that children learn in interaction with others and their surroundings (Finnish Agency for Education 2014, 16). An educator's knowledge of development needs specific to the age group helps identifying pedagogical opportunities and goals as they appear (Salminen 2017, 136). Furthermore, warm, and respectful relationships between all members of a preschool community are focal for children's agency (Kangas, Lastikka & Karlsson 2021, 89-90; Kyrönlampi & Sirkko 2020, 46) participation (Kangas et al. 2021, 85-87) and development of academic and social skills (Salminen 2017, 141). At the moment, child-initiated

approach challenges the traditional, adult-led approach. The former encourages children to actively construct new information and ideas, whereas the latter enforces one-way interaction instead of dialogue. A skilful educator varies between these approaches each day and justifies their choice pedagogically (Kangas et al. 2021, 82-83; Salminen 2017, 137).

The educators have autonomy to use their expertise in planning educational content (Kyrönlampi & Sirkko 2020, 23). To create engaging learning modules, the educator combines children's topics of interests with suitable objectives chosen from the curriculum's five multi-disciplinary modules. (Finnish Agency for Education 2014, 30). Play and playfulness are intrinsic to children's learning in a preschool. Other experiential and activity-based pedagogic methods, like drama, arts and sport are used as well. Diverse pedagogical methods and learning environments are both means of learning and objectives themselves. The meaning of learning environments comprehends spaces, instruments, communities and practises. (Finnish National Agency for Education 2014, 28–30).

3.2 Adventure Pedagogy

Adventure pedagogy draws together knowledge from several disciplines, including psychology, sociology, philosophy, and educational science (Bunyan 2011). It integrates experiential education, i.e., promoting learning through direct experiences (Beames & Brown 2016, 56; Berry & Hodgson 2011, 24) and outdoor education (Ewert & Davidson 2017, 13). In practise adventure pedagogy means carefully designed activities and programs with pedagogical rationale that try to support learners' engagement (Beames & Brown 2016, 56; Solly 2015, 11) and their physical, intellectual, social, and emotional growth holistically (Ewert & Davidson 2017, 13-14; Solly 2015, 11).

Outdoor education is a form of learning that is multisensory, interdisciplinary, experiential and happens in outdoor settings. It is an umbrella term that connects environmental education and adventure education. (Ewert & Davidson 2017, 13). According to English Outdoor Council (2015, 10-11), core themes of high-quality outdoor education are participation, self-confidence and achievement, differentiation and progression, residential experience and balancing risks and benefits in the outdoors.

To achieve different learning goals, typically related to problem solving, communication skills and self-esteem, the learner is engaged in a process of actively reflecting upon their experience,

discovering the meaning of it, and conceptualising it. Furthermore, the learner should experiment on their findings in new environments and contexts. (Berry 2011, 63-67; Ewert & Davidson 2017, 14, 27). The forementioned process of direct experience, reflection, conceptualisation and further experimentation is referred to as Kolb's experiential learning model. It is criticised for dividing phases of learning in clear, separate sections, whereas, in reality, they occur simultaneously. However, the model underpins learner's focal role in constructing new skills and knowledge. (Berry 2011, 66-67).

Experiential education implies authentic decision-making with real outcomes central for learner's motivation (Berry 2011, 68-69). A sense of achievement can come from encountering a challenge that seems to just exceed competence, like Priest put it, "testing one's limits on the razors' edge" (Bunyan 2011, 11). Furthermore, tackling a feasible challenge can provide experiences of flow, i.e., satisfying deep engagement and focus described by psychologist Csikszentmihalyi (Solly 2015, 12-13). Defined, risk is a potential of losing something of value (Beames & Brown 2016, 66; Bunyan 2011, 10). The risk can be social, physical or psychological of nature (Lehtonen & Saaranen-Kauppinen 2020, 248). Challenge, in turn is outstretching one's competence without the involvement of possible risks (Beames & Brown 2016, 108). An appropriate level of a risk and a challenge is not the same for everybody (Beames & Brown 2016, 107; Bunyan 2011, 11-12). The educator is responsible for assessing the risks and creating safe learning environments where learners have genuine autonomy and educator's role can be de-emphasised (Beames & Brown 2016, 110, 115; Berry 2011, 69).

Although physically demanding activities like high-ropes courses are popular in adventure educational programs, Beames and Brown (2016, 29) argue the unnecessary of fabricated physical risk-taking for learning. Critics on posing intense, skill-focused outdoor activities as 'real adventures' gave way to the four dimensions of adventurous learning (Ibid. 67). The dimensions, i.e., authenticity, agency, uncertainty, and mastery, can be combined in different levels to answer the needs of each group and learning session (Ibid. 123). The idea of these dimensions is to bring meaningful experiential learning closer to learners' lives and applicable in their free time environments and communities. Thus, they could empower teachers without kayaking instructor certificates and participants from all socio-economic backgrounds to seize adventurous pedagogy more democratically (Ibid. 67).

In Finland, outdoor adventure learning has been strongly related to youth work and non-formal education since the early 1900's, but even more so after the growing interest of social pedagogy

in the 1980's. The roots of utilising outdoor adventure learning with pedagogical intentions are in German Erlebnispädagogik and British Outdoor Education and Adventure Education. These days adventure pedagogy is applied in the fields of therapy, education, recreation, and social welfare work. (Karppinen 2020, 30, 33). The National Adventure Education Network Advisory Board promotes and develops adventure education in Finland (Youth Centre Association 2021a). The Finnish Adventure Education Network, organised in sub-networks, brings actors from the field together. Both the Board and Network are coordinated by Finnish Youth Centre Association and the Network is financially subsidized by The Ministry of Education and Culture. (Youth Centre Association 2021b).

3.3 Characteristics and Values of Finnish Adventure and Outdoor Education

Characteristics and values of Finnish adventure and outdoor education is a Systemic Quality Model Suvi Widenius (2017) outlined for Finnish Youth Centre Association as her bachelor's theses development project. The model clarifies the quality criterion and common values of Finnish adventure and outdoor education field. The model provides guidelines for adventure pedagogical work but can be used as educational material when teaching about adventure education, too.

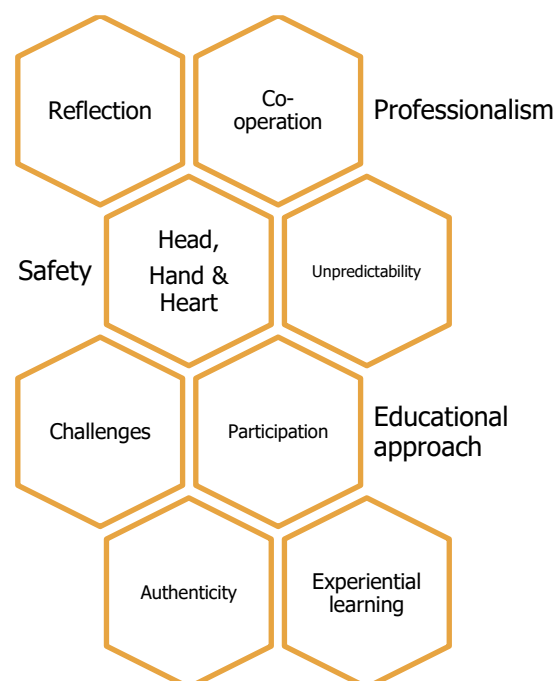


Figure 1. Systemic Quality Model based on Finnish Youth Centre Association (2021)

The common values create philosophical base for quality adventure education. Values of engagement and agency, life-long learning, respect, equality and justice, sense of community and valuing nature and sustainability can be seen as objectives of adventure pedagogical work. (Widenius 2017, 58).

Safety, professionalism, and an educational approach form the quality criterions. Professionalism refers to an educator's skills around safety, group management and pedagogy. An educational approach means adventurous activities are pedagogical and intentional. The learning objectives are sourced from a group and its individuals. Adventure pedagogy aims to holistic development and growth of these individuals. Safety encompasses aspiration to socially, physically and psychologically safe learning environments and safe groups, which embraces experimenting and learning through experiences. (Widenius 2017, 92).

Finally, the characteristics describe what adventure and outdoor education based on the fore-mentioned values and quality criterions can look like. Real phenomena, situations and environments are starting points for authentic adventurous learning. A purposeful use of environments and methods offer meaningful experiences. Experiential learning is multi-sensory and holistic. A participant is engaged emotionally, intellectually and physically to develop all aspects of their personality. They face concrete, exciting challenges that ask for problem-solving and physical activity. The participant can choose the level of challenge to match their competence. A sensitive educator ensures appropriate progression of the challenge. (Widenius 2017, 92).

Adventure education is always somewhat unpredictable. Adventurous learning processes are comprehensive and contain elements of novelty and surprise. An educator can't decide the outcomes in advance. Through participation and agency individuals steer their learning and explore their influence. Cooperation within a group is prioritized over an individual performance. Even so, everyone has a role in the group. Their skills and knowledge are equally valued. Reflection is part of the group's interaction. The experiences are processed with a genuine dialogue between the group members and educators during and after the activities. (Widenius 2017, 92).

3.4 Adventure Pedagogy in Early Childhood Education

The values of Finnish adventure education presented in Systemic Quality model (see Ch 3.3. Characteristics and Values of Finnish Adventure and Outdoor Education) are astonishingly aligned with the values Pre-Primary Education discussed earlier (see Ch 3.1. Pedagogy in Pre-

Primary Education). The possibility to develop local curricula with the principles of adventure pedagogy is not yet widely recognised, despite its potential positive impacts such as strengthening the ecosocial knowledge and values for sustainable lifestyle (Holappa 2020, 54-56). Furthermore, in kindergartens, the teachers are responsible of the pedagogy in their group, so their role in steering and supporting their team is focal to the pedagogical quality (Salminen 2017, 137). Finnish research on adventure pedagogy in early childhood education has been done mainly on bachelor's thesis level.

An extensive research review by Kuo, Barnes and Jordan (2019) compiles evidence of how experiences in nature promote academic achievement, personal development and environmental stewardship. Outdoor learning embraces opportunities for developing team-work skills, motivation, perseverance, and concentration (Knight 2011, 108; Kuo, Barnes & Jordan 2019, 3, 5). Children learn to deal with failures and develop resilience which again contributes to child's self-image (Solly 2015, 32-33). Each of these skills and qualities have a long-term benefit for learning (Knight 2011, 108; Solly 2015, 33) pursued by the preschool curriculum (Finnish National Agency for Education 2014, 12).

Developing children's relation to nature and knowledge of it are objectives in the preschool curriculum. Investigative learning brings children's empirical world and operational environment into the centre of teaching environmental education, technology, and mathematics. (Finnish National Agency for Education 2014, 35). With adventure pedagogy the educators can promote learning meaningful skills and knowledge in relevant contexts, e.g., children can learn to use real tools or explore natural phenomena outdoors. (Beames & Brown 2016, 76; Solly 2015, 26). Likewise, examining problems and testing different solutions in collaboration (Finnish National Agency for Education 2014, 36) are part of adventure and outdoor education's potential (Solly 2015, 30).

4 INTERVIEWS AND COLLECTING THE DATA

The main question of my research-based development project was:

What is essential for meaningful and high-quality adventure pedagogy in early childhood educators' work?

To deepen my understanding of the topic, I planned to organise a focus group for early childhood educators who apply adventure education in their work. Focus groups are conversations, where participants' informal interaction cumulates rich data of their views and experiences (Choak 2013, 93). I reached only a few suitable participants. Pressured by a tight schedule I took a conscious risk and agreed upon the date for a three person focus group session. Five minutes past the starting time of our focus group session it became clear that, by chance, I would have to interview one person instead of supporting a group conversation. Fortunately, the interviewee was enthusiastic and well-read in the topics at hand. Having only a draft of topics and questions for discussion didn't form a problem.

After the first interview, I let go of my focus group plan and followed the cue to interview two other professionals individually. Both were still interested to participate. It didn't seem realistic to find more participants in such short notice. The disadvantage of focus groups, i.e., difficulty to find a time suitable for all focus group members (Choak 2013, 93) is much less probable in individual interviews. Besides, I could take advantage of the first, less fortunate experience and revise my set of questions. This is part of the process in qualitative research, as unexpected themes addressed by interviewees can be used to develop the set of topics discussed in later interviews (Edwards & Holland 2013, 30).

So, I seized the chance and shifted from focus groups to interviews. According to Edwards and Holland (2013, 90) semi-structured, thematic interviews "can give insight into the meanings that individuals and groups attach to experiences, social processes, practices". Semi-structured interviews seemed suitable method, because it allows to explore chosen topics in a flexible, fluid manner (Edwards & Holland 2013, 3; Tucker 2013, 49). The goal of the interviews remained the same throughout the process. It was to provide further information on what the professionals regarded central for a meaningful and high-quality adventure pedagogical approach.

In this chapter I describe the design and conduct of interviews. Then I explain how the data were analysed. I end with discussing issues of validity and reliability.

4.1 Interview design and Data collection

To reach suitable interviewees, I received help from Varhaiskasvattajien Seikkailukasvatusverkosto, the adventure education network of early childhood educators. I was very generously handed a list of emails of persons who potentially matched my criteria. Also, an interviewee recruitment announcement was published in the network's Facebook group. I communicated clearly about the purpose of my interviews and that they would be organised online. Originally, I tried to conduct a focus group. However, due to scope of answers I received, I settled with individual interviews.

To ensure the transparency and an informed consent of the participants, I shared information of measures in place for data protection and anonymity. Finally, three persons read the privacy statement and the research information form and agreed to participate. They represented the field of early childhood education from both public and private institutions. The interviewees had diverse educational backgrounds and positions in working places, and their experience of adventure pedagogy varied from few to over ten years.

In September 2021 I interviewed each of the three professionals individually via Zoom video platform, which is online-based and free of charge. The interviews were recorded, and the recordings were only to be used for data analysis. I decided to use Finnish because it is the main language of the network. Also, I wanted to avoid possible misunderstandings or language barriers with assumingly Finnish speaking participants. Although I used a set of pre-determined questions as an interview guide (Edwards & Holland 2013, 54), I had scheduled enough time to engage with topics that emerged in the conversation. After the first interview, I edited the questions and refined the structure for more intuitive answers. I used a quote from Mikael Kokljuschkin's (1999, 65) book of adventure education for children to stimulate the conversation. The interviews took 45-75 minutes.

4.2 Analysis of interview data

I chose to follow the principles of thematic analysis for the collected data. The analysis consisted of different parallel and even overlapping phases, where data was organised, categorised,

and finally grouped under themes (Lester, Yonyoo & Lochmiller 2020). This aided me to recognise repeated topics, but also to pick up anything that seemed relevant.

I created a script of the recordings, transcribing parts of it in written form. I worked with the recordings and the script in parallel. With the help of listening the recordings over and over, I highlighted words and sentences in the script that seemed to answer the questions behind the interview. Next, I wrote these expressions on sticker notes and started to organise them in groups. Eventually the topics fell into two groups.

To give space to the voices of my interviewees, I translated some quotes that summarised or highlighted central ideas or experiences. Personality of the interviewees was a little lost in translation, but I tried to preserve the meaning of their words the best I could. I anonymised the data by deleting names of people and places as well as other recognisable information. Thus, in Results, I refer to each of them with a word Educator.

4.3 Reliability and validity

The ethical considerations have been described in earlier sub-chapters. I followed the ethical instructions of Humak which are based on ethical guidelines for UAS theses prepared by The Rector's Conference of Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences (Näreaho, Kettunen, Kärki & Päällysaho 2020). The instructions concerned, for example, processing personal data in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation or the Data Protection act and clarifying conflicts of interest. I have sought transparency by carefully describing the process and the results of the research.

As an unexperienced interviewer I was concerned how I might affect the interviewees and further, the data. For example, when I had finished my questions at the end of an interview, the tone of the dialogue shifted very subtly. It was partially because that was when I shared some personal, topic-related experiences or explicitly expressed my enthusiasm over the past conversation. That is, presented me instead of trying to remain in an objective role. In most cases this led to more juicy sharing and debate. Assuring, leading questions are not a concern of bias, as interviewees can correct your assumptive questions (Edwards & Holland 2013, 73-74).

Borrowing Brewer's words, validity is "the extent to which the data accurately reflect the phenomenon under study" (Tucker 2013, 38). When inspecting issues of validity, it is important to acknowledge findings of qualitative research can't be generalised or universalised to wider

population (Edwards & Holland 2013, 91-92). Especially considering the scope of my interviews, as there were only three of them. However, triangulating, i.e., contrasting and comparing collected data with previous research and literature will indicate how valid the findings are (Tucker 2013, 54). In chapter Conclusion, I will triangulate and analyse the findings of my interviews to see whether they are aligned and trustworthy.

Finally, true to the experimental nature of applied research, my interviews took another form than originally planned, as discussed in the beginning of Ch4 Interviews. The very first interview, intended as a focus group, did not follow the same formula of questions as the later ones. Still the same topics and issues were covered. Hence, I have decided to treat all the data equally and present it in Ch5 Results.

5 RESULTS

In this chapter, I present the results of the interviews. First, I show what the interviewees considered to be motivating and meaningful in adventure pedagogical approach for them and children. Next, I summarise the factors of pedagogical quality that were brought up. I have included some quotes translated from Finnish to English. To ensure the anonymity of the interviewees, educators are called E and differentiated with numbers: E1, E2 and E3.

5.1 Meaningful and Motivating approach

The educators brought up that adventure pedagogy and learning out of doors pose an opportunity to organise work in a way that supports their well-being and satisfaction. Implementing important values like creativity, and appreciation and wonder towards nature motivates them. One of the educators pointed out how outdoor spaces are more allowing than indoor spaces, as there is more room for noises and movement. This has resulted in a shift of educator's focus from restricting unwanted behaviour to encouraging the positive, which in turn has increased experiences of mutual delight.

One educator explained how co-regulating children's energy levels and emotions with the help of nature has improved her readiness to embrace individuals, of whom some might be seen too restless or vigorous in conventional classroom setting. Adventurous outdoor activities have proven many of these children with previous challenges that their personalities can positively contribute to the group's success. The educator continued that this has boosted her and children's self-esteem. Simultaneously, adventure pedagogy has helped the educators develop their professional identity, concretise their approach, and find their own place in the professional field, regardless of their skills and educational background.

“I am not a kind of wilderness-person, even though we are a kindergarten specialised in outdoor and environmental education. But we also have wilderness-persons here. I always say I don't need to have all skills myself, I don't need to be a scout, for I want to offer children the nature and environment and adventure. I don't need to be a master climber or anything, and I am not.” E2

The adults' open attitude towards nature and other beings was mentioned in each interview. Every interviewee stated that the adult's exemplary behaviour had a straight connection to the meaningfulness of the pedagogical approach.

“But if there’s one of us adults who, on a rainy day, sits on a tree stump and complains about the cold and wet, then yes, the children will catch that soon enough. So, our attitudes and behaviour play a significant role on how children experience the activities and how rewarding it all seems to them and how we can inspire them to whatever we do. So that if we [adults] have fun, then also the children have fun.”
E1

Likewise, values are passed on through examples. When going on a forest trip, for example, one educator told that valuable and noteworthy things happen all the time and not only after arriving to the destination. Instead of rushing from one place to another, the educators assure everybody can enjoy the journey by adapting the pace according to the slowest person. This way children’s observations and objects of interest are held in regard and truly enabled to shape learning.

Bringing children to the centre of their education at the core of implementing adventure pedagogy for every interviewee. First and foremost, the educator’s role is to assist, encourage and enable children’s agency. This is true for mundane things like dressing up for outdoors in winter as well as performing challenging adventurous exercises.

“I think also baking can be adventure pedagogical, when you let children really make something and try out. To be there as a back-up but stay back and let children do. That is important for children.” E3

Handing over the control to a child has been also difficult, as continued:

“But at times there are situations when you basically could do something for the child, but then you must step back and think, like, no, the child has to do this themselves. It is almost harder to help a child to do themselves than do it for them. You need to focus on it, really.” E3

Sometimes children’s activities, for example climbing around, have even caused an educator discomfort. Before interfering, the interviewee suggested, one could weigh the situation in their mind and consider whether they could allow whatever happens and why they’d do so. Or, optionally, could one create another strategy for this type of activity together with the children? It is an imperial skill to learn for an adventure educator: to be able to give in, to let go a little.

The following quote summarises how adventure pedagogical approach can be meaningful and motivating. It reflects the overall opinion of the interviewed educators.

“So yes, dialogue and listening to the children and the participation of the children are key issues. Also, in the sense that our activities remain meaningful. That is, if we adults told every day what we are going to do and where we are going to, those 5–6-year-old kids would quite certainly speak out and prefer to stay indoors and put

together puzzles. So, it has a major role that our activities remain motivating, and it is fun to go on our trips and adventures and they are appealing, and it's not like here we go again, somewhere adults have decided." E1

5.2 Pedagogical Quality

Planning was mentioned as a quality factor by each interviewee. One of the educators had a clear vision of how much planning different types of adventures need and who is involved. Bigger adventure programs like forest escape rooms presume careful plans and preparation, and were mostly adult led, leaving children the role of end users. Trips and visits to nearby locations, in turn, were described spontaneous and/or children were more involved throughout the process. The educators seemed to agree on one thing: the more one has work experience of early childhood education and adventure pedagogy, the less they need to keep planning just between the adults.

"When I used to work in a school, I, like, wanted to plan everything very carefully and in a way that I would be in control of situations all the time. But now somehow, since I have gone deeper into adventure pedagogy, I have realised it doesn't need to be so strictly planned." E3

"I wish it would be seen just like, like we just start from here and go there, and in between there happens plenty of things adults could never write on a paper. That there can happen so many unpredictable things." E1

"But beginners, they should write things down and plan very precisely, otherwise it could go down." E2

However the educator chooses to plan, they should be prepared to revise or change the plans in situ. Unpredictability was seen as an inherent part of adventure pedagogy. The educators have made good use of organisational and problem-solving skills complemented with creativity. The plans are always affected with the state of group, educators, and weather and environment. Recognising unplanned events as important learning opportunities supports the educators to take a step back from heavy planning typical to early childhood education. Nevertheless, the ultimate responsibility of bringing pedagogy in any situation is on the educator.

"Somehow it requires much more from me to trust my professional skills and go along children's plays and observe them, and to develop something from that, to trust that I got it, and I have something in the back of my mind I can draw from." E3

Tolerance for uncertainty and, at times, even adversity was asserted with the help of a team. For adventure pedagogical approach of good quality, the team's commitment was seen significant. This means a shared understanding of what adventure pedagogy is, why it is used, what are the goals and courses of action. For all the educators, assessing their success with reflection had become natural. Reflection happens during the workdays and in team meetings. One person mentioned they had started to document their pedagogies to see the connection between theory and practise, activities and what is learned through them. This had solidified the justification of their pedagogical approaches and made it easier to communicate about their work to parents and the kindergarten community.

In the end, the reasons behind each adventure pedagogical activity should be discussed with children. Two of three educators said that they openly communicate the goals to their group and reflect on them during and after the activity.

“Only instructing a spider web isn't enough, but the children need to understand why it was done and what they got out of it and learned from it; that takes it to an educational level.” E3

Reflection has also helped the educators learn about their group. They can better evaluate how safe children feel in the group and what kind of support or stimulation they need in the future. Group safety and cohesion were considered central goals in early childhood education groups, but they are instrumental for high-quality adventure pedagogy. The children need to feel they belong and that it is safe to opt out or negotiate their participation.

6 CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Product

“As educators we are all required to go on our own adventurous learning journey – a journey full of uncertainty, but one with a clear outcome: to do our best to engage with students in the present, so that they develop the attributes and skills needed to flourish as individuals, and participate fully, within a civil and just society.”
Beames & Brown 2016, 130

Here I will analyse the results of the interviews and summarise the product. The concrete output was an extensive PowerPoint -presentation with ideas and suggestions for improving my commissioners’ adventure pedagogical approach. Three out of four educators who were present during my trainee period continue to work in the forest groups. They all participated in an adventurous program I planned and executed as part of my practical training tasks. I decided to use this three-day small group mountaineering adventure as an example case in the presentation. The red line was to contrast the choices I made in the program design with solutions drawn from my study. The presentation was written in Finnish language and included photos from the adventure program. It consisted of a preface, a short summary of the example case, four chapters of improvement suggestions, an epilogue and a list of further resources.

The improvement ideas were gathered around four principles of adventure pedagogy in early childhood education: child-initiated, experimental, committed, and conscious & transparent. They are not exclusive or exhaustive but cover diverse aspects that were addressed significant by the professional interviewees. Moreover, the principles are relevant to Vuores preschool forest group educators in two ways: they validate the strategies already in use and guide the thinking further. The aim was not to produce completely new information, but to track adventure pedagogical theories, approaches and attitudes that have proven to be adaptable in early childhood education setting. Furthermore, they are all frequently discussed in professional literature and research. This speaks for the quality of Finnish early childhood education, as the educators had obviously done their homework. Likewise, it validates the results of my study to an extent sufficient to a bachelor’s thesis.

The improvement ideas were shaped with a few practical guidelines in mind. They should be approachable for someone who has a little or no experience of using adventure pedagogy in

their work. However, I have assumed the educator, or an adult who works with young children in some educational setting, has already the profound skills, knowledge and experience characteristic to their profession. Professional preparedness to reflection and critical inspection of one's actions is needed for implementing pedagogies. This kind of pedagogical thinking that can be enhanced with supplementary training and developing one's approaches through reflection (Kangas et.al. 2021, 14-15).

Child-initiated

The conception of child-initiated learning expressed by the interviewees matched with the one found in professional literature. For example, Turja and Vuorisalo (2017, 41) said the educator should be flexible about their plans and enabling children's agency and following their initiatives often conflicts the plans adults have made in advance. They continue by stating that the adults responsible in any given situation should trust both their skills of addressing unplanned opportunities together with the children and the children as agents (Turja & Vuorisalo 2017, 41), which was a difficulty recognised by an interviewee as well.

Two of the interviewees shared a view that when children are offered opportunities to challenge themselves outdoors, the educators must follow their instinct deciding whether to intervene or hold-back. This point of view is backed up by authors of early-age adventurous outdoor learning (Solly 2015, 11; Knight 2011, 76). The philosophy extends even further to respecting children's autonomy and possibilities to make relevant choices (Beames & Brown 2016, 69-70) and giving positive feedback on their experiments (Beames & Brown 2016, 74; Solly 2015, 54-55). Engagement and agency, two of the core values of Finnish adventure and outdoor education (Widenius 2017), should be carefully reinforced in the everyday actions of a preschool.

- What daily actions can children take responsibility of? E.g., Fetching the food, forecasting daily weather, preparing the classroom for an activity...
- Are there chances to for a child to practise autonomy? I.e., independent and critical thinking, focusing on what is relevant for them
- Are there opportunities for making choices outside the free play time? Are the options purposeful for learning and equally valued? E.g., no one is excluded as a result of their choice, options are not ultimatums
- When a child has a problem, how can you assist them in solving it instead of doing it yourself? Are there models or routines of peer support in your group?

- Do you give supportive feedback and encouragement? Do you call a child to express how they experienced a success or a failure?

Between the interviewees there proved to be a variety of approaches and opinions on planning adventure pedagogical sessions. The involvement of children in planning daily activities affected how motivating and meaningful the pedagogical approach was for the target group. Adventurous programs, where children are just participants, can be fun and immemorial (Beames & Brown 2016, 55). However, I suggest they should be used in modesty. This doesn't mean you can't organise spectacles – just think of how you can do it together and how the content is relevant to your group. Less planning is needed for a child-initiated exploration of a nearby outdoor location, as an example.

- How can you involve the children in creating routines in your preschool days? How about learning content?
- Do you practise varying between cooperating with the children and taking a more autocratic approach?

Experimental

Model resilience, thoughtfulness and willingness to listen to the ideas and opinions of others, to make mistakes and learn from them, to be a creative adult who enjoys learning something new. (Solly 2015, 55)

Experimenting means you don't know everything yet, but the possibility of a discovery outweighs the fear of a failure. Being prepared doesn't mean every possible problem needs to be solved in advance, but solutions are sought in collaboration with the group and, even better, the community of parents, other educators and local actors. With the words of Beames and Brown (2016, 130), you are as well starting a journey of adventurous learning. Don't start too complicated. Big program plans can become heavy and put a damper on your motivation. Especially if you are only at the beginning it is clever to keep the experiments frequent but light.

Perhaps problems with equipment, working hours or unconvinced colleagues or management appear. Being prepared doesn't mean every possible problem needs to be solved in advance. Help and support can be found, for example, in the Adventure education network of early childhood education or from another local actor.

Keep the experiment cycle short. Start with one activity or a visit to an outdoor spot. Observe and reflect. Learn from the experience and experiment again. Ask from the children for ideas or observe what kind of plays they have and utilise that. A theme that inspires the whole group can grow into unexpected dimensions and continue for weeks. The idea for my mountaineering program came from the children: they secretly climbed the steep ridge wall that borders the preschool area. They aren't allowed to do so, but they obviously enjoyed it. Looking back, I could have tested the idea before planning a program without the involvement of the children.

Here's what the process could have looked like:

1. Topic is recognised by observing the children's play
2. The idea is proposed to the group: "Your climbing was interfered because it broke our rules. Would you still like to climb there if we can make an agreement of it together?". Come up with a strategy. (Possible safety issues and rules should be addressed)
3. On agreed day, there is an adult present and children are allowed to climb around. Before starting, the agreements on safety issues and possible rules are checked.
4. The reflection follows the experience: Was it fun, was it safe? What arises from the group?
5. The adventure can be taken further if there are initiatives in the group to do so. Could be geological investigation of steep places and ridges formed by the ice age, climbing more, introducing a new technique like aid-rope to it or something else relevant to the group.

Likewise, any moment can turn into an adventure once you have adopted mindset for it. In the forest preschool, we went to look for branches that formed a letter Y for an Easter bunny hand-craft. Both groups went separately to the same area and our group started to play an ambush and hide from the other group. What was first, for most children, a boring task modelled by the adults, became a very intense moment of play with a little situational awareness of the educator.

- Stay present in the moment, stay tuned to your group. Adjust the activity accordingly.
- Welcome the unpredictable as an opportunity to learn.
- Elements to consider in an adventure: creativity, excitement, surprise, fun
- Go in different places: parks, forests, landmarks, yards, beaches, rainwater tunnels... and see what kind of pedagogy they provoke.

Committed

In order to inspire young children, their families and colleagues, an adventurous practitioner must show their commitment to being a lifelong learner. Practitioners need to develop a dynamic and outgoing manner. (Solly 2015, 43)

The interviewees were aware of the effect commitment has on the quality of their approaches. Especially the teacher of early childhood education can promote their team member's commitment by taking into consideration the special knowledge and skills inherent to each educator's educational background (Salminen 2017, 137). Like one of the interviewees stated, the team members can complement one another's expertise. There should be a shared understanding of what adventure pedagogy means and which principles are important to the team.

- Are the rules of your working place clear to every team member? How about the group rules?
- Do you have procedures or structures for addressing conflicts or development needs in your team?
- Have you discussed the expectations, prejudices and concerns of the team members in relation to introducing adventure pedagogy in your work?
- How involved each of you wishes to be with the pedagogy?
- Have you created an action plan or strategy for getting started? I.e., concrete actions, schedules, and responsible persons etc.
- If you decide to get supplementary training, think of how you can all benefit from it. I.e., organise a skill-share session, change working pairs etc.

The commitment concerns the whole process of experimenting with a new pedagogy. Experimenting doesn't need to be spontaneous or unorganised. Create a strategy together. It can help you actualising your ideas and is a reference point for assessing your success. Utilize tools like SWOT-analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats), and agree on a couple of simple targets to start with. For example, you can decide to start working with the principles presented here, or any other ones you find relevant and justified.

The preschool curriculum pinpoints that the learning environments should be safe socially, psychologically and physically (Finnish National Agency for Education 2014, 60). This wide understanding of safety is central to adventure pedagogy and a prerequisite for experiential learning (Widenius 2017; Lehtonen & Saaranen-Kauppinen 2020, 248; Ewert & Davidson 2017, 12,14). Thus, improving and managing the safety in your group is fundamentally important.

- Do you have a safe, genuine atmosphere in your team? How about your group?
- How can you improve the social and psychological safety in your team or group?
- Do you express delight and give positive feedback in your team? How about your group?
- How do you deal with mistakes or accidents in your group? Are they handled with dignity?

Conscious & transparent

The educator should be conscious of their role as an example, through which their values and attitudes become the ones of the group. For example, if togetherness is truly valued, no one is left behind or continuously forced to pace up. Instead, the actions of the educators demonstrate that each person is respected and valued equally, and there is a place for everyone.

- What is important in your activities, for example in forest trips – the destination, the journey, children’s observations, adult-led activities, timetables...?
- Have you tried pacing down to follow the rhythm of the slowest?

Time to time, it is valuable to stop and think. What kind of preconditions there are for the work, what sort of interaction should be intervened, are there needs for additional support in the group (Salminen 2017, 136)? Especially if new or unconventional pedagogies are implemented, active efforts are needed to connect practise with theory. Pedagogical documentation can help illustrating the connections of these and clarify the justifications of the work and should be included in your strategy.

Meaningful learning can be enhanced and recognised through reflection, as discussed earlier in the knowledge base. Wondering and asking questions helps processing information (Kangas et.al. 2021, 155-156). The clarity of reasons behind any activity and communicating about them

to the group before the activity and as part of a reflection session was highlighted by my interviewees. Especially if things didn't go according to the plans, it should be addressed in reflection honestly to an extent that supports learning from the experience. Reflection can offer plenty of information about the group for the educator (Ibid. 170), so it shouldn't be dismissed as a routine of checking whether the group had fun or not. It should however look like the group and allow the children to practise justifying their opinions honestly.

- Use creative methods like dancing, painting, pantomime, poetry etc.
- In a reflection discussion, use active elements like different voices, movement and objects
- Ask specific questions and be clear what aspects are reflected on, e.g., group performance, achievement of pre-determined goals or personal goals

6.2 Reflection

The main question of this thesis was what is essential for meaningful and high-quality adventure pedagogy in early childhood educators' work? Through the research-based development work I identified four principles, that can be applied as guidelines for adventure pedagogical approach in early childhood education. My approach to the topic was unusual, because it looked beyond single learning goals and program ideas. It aimed to convey a comprehensive understanding of adventure pedagogy. The results contribute to the field by gathering concepts, attitudes and policies proven to be meaningful and motivating in the everyday life of kindergarten and preschool groups. Eventually, the success of my product will be revealed when it is put into practice. The end of a semester is busy time in preschools and presenting the results of the thesis is scheduled in January 2022. I hope my contribution will encourage Vuores kindergarten to take even more determined and systematic actions to develop their forest preschool model.

All in all, I am satisfied with the process and the results that evolved during last twelve weeks, even though a tight schedule affected the scope of my interviews. At one point, I had an idea to make a methodical assessment of my commissioner's adventure pedagogical approach using the systemic quality model of Characteristics and values of Finnish adventure and outdoor education (Widenius, 2017) before offering improvement ideas. However, I soon realised this would double my workload and decided to utilise the model in my knowledge base. Besides, I had gathered enough information of my commissioner's sprouting adventurous approaches as

well as the principles applied by the educators during the three months we worked together. Although the intended focus groups were changed to be individual interviews on the fly, the research data withstood the triangulation and proved to be full of expertise.

The topic completely mesmerised me. There are interesting and timely openings in the intersection of adventure pedagogy and early childhood education. In their first action plan, the Adventure education network of early childhood education had chosen networking, publicity, and training as their targets (Varhaiskasvatuksen Seikkailukasvatusverkosto 2021). Simultaneously, the trial of two-year pre-primary education carried out in 2021–2024 (Finnish National Agency for Education 2021) offers a tempting framework to experiment with adventure pedagogy in preschools. In theory, also a local grassroots level interest could trigger a bottom-up development approach to a municipal curriculum. An organiser of preschool education can review and improve their curriculum based on results of development work and local needs (Finnish National Agency for Education 2014, 4).

The curricula of the Finnish education system have gone through tremendous reforms over the last decade (Kangas et.al. 2021, 11). Hence, the practical methods and approaches need to be critically evaluated and renewed as well (Koivula, Siippainen & Eerola-Pennanen 2017, 10–11). Due to the novelty of some pedagogical concepts, there is a lack of tools for, as an example, simultaneously taking into account children’s agency and participation, and actively supporting the individual and the group (Koivula et.al. 2017, 13). My study shows that adventure pedagogical approach can be a meaningful and successful method. Looking at the everyday life of a preschool through the glasses of adventure pedagogy can help an educator embrace the diversity of human and non-human actors around them. It can make education joyful for both the adults and the children. However, further academic research is required to affirm the status of adventure pedagogy in the field of early childhood education (Olenius 2020, 36).

From the very beginning until the end of my final thesis process, I felt overflowingly encouraged by whoever I dared to ask help from. It was delightful to commit to the work. Albeit I don’t foster grandiose expectations of job-offers pouring down my way the minute my thesis is published, I still think the experience itself has served as a rite of passage to the professional field. I want to thank my thesis supervisor Tero Lämsä for encouraging a philosophical approach on the topic and the dedicated Vuores preschool forest group educators. In addition, I express my gratitude to the three wonderful professional interviewees. And finally, I the Adventure education network of early childhood education for helping me generously.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Interview guide, questions

Kertoisitko omasta historiastasi seikkailupedagogiikan parissa? *Would you talk about your history with adventure pedagogy?*

Onko sulla joku koulutus, josta olet saanut valmiuksia seikkailukasvatukseen? *Have you participated in a training that has equipped you for adventure education?*

Mikä on nykyinen työtoimenkuva? *What is your present occupation?*

Onko seikkailupedagogiikka osa työpaikkasi pedagogiikkaa laajemminkin? *Is adventure pedagogy more broadly in use in your workplace?*

1.Kun olet alkanut integroimaan seikkailupedagogiikkaa työhösi, mihin olet erityisesti kiinnittänyt huomiota omassa toiminnassasi? *When you started integrating adventure pedagogy in your work, what were the aspects you paid attention to in particular?*

2.Onko seikkailupedagogiikka haastanut saamaasi ammatillista koulutusta tai aiempaa mallia työntekoon? *Has adventure pedagogy challenged you professional training or earlier modes of action?*

3.Entä täydentänyt? *How about supplemented?*

4.Jos arvioit omaa seikkailupedagogiikan hyödyntämistä työssäsi, niin mihin se sijoittuu välillä työväline – kokonaisvaltainen toimintamalli? *Can you estimate your adventure pedagogical approach on a spectrum from a tool to comprehensive model of operation?*

5.Lainaus Mikael Kokljuschkinin kirjasta Seikkailuun! vuodelta 1999:

Seikkailu ei ole sarja erillisiä temppuja eikä siten vaadi meiltä kasvattajilta erityistä teknistä osaamista.

An adventure is not a series of separate tricks and thus doesn't require an educator specific technical knowledge (Mikael Kokljuschkin 1999, Seikkailuun!)

Mitä ajatuksia herää lauseesta ”Seikkailu ei ole sarja erillisiä temppuja”? *What kind of thoughts does ”an adventure is not a series of separate tricks” provoke in you?*

Entä ”Eikä siten vaadi meiltä kasvattajilta erityistä teknistä osaamista.” Mitä se vaatii? *How about” and thus doesn’t require an educator specific technical knowledge”?* What does it require?

6. Eli mitkä ovat olennaisimmat asiat, jota seikkailupedagogiikan soveltaminen mielekkäästi nuorten lasten parissa vaatii? *So, what are the most essential things applying adventure pedagogy meaningfully with young kids require?*

7. Onko näkemyksesi roolistasi kasvattajana muuttunut seikkailupedagogiikan myötä? *Has your view of yourself as an educator changed along with the adventure pedagogy?*

8. Jos joku varhaiskasvattaja on saanut käteensä nivaskan harjoitteita ja käynyt hommaamassa telan köyttä hämähäkinseittiä varten, minkälaisia neuvoja hänelle antaisit, mitä haluat korostaa? *If an early childhood educator has gotten a grip of an exercise booklet and coil of rope for spider web (commonly used problem-solving exercise), what kind of advice would you give them? What would you emphasise?*

9. Haluatko vielä lisätä jotain lopuksi? *Would you like to add something?*