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Integrated learning in schools and leisure-time centres Moving beyond dichotomies

► About the author ► Key words

This article discusses the connections between formal and informal learning processes in the context of school and leisure-time centres for young school-children. The author criticizes the emphasis on formal learning and the prevalence of formalism in the education system. Leisure-time centres for young school children operate on the periphery of the education system and are built on a leisure-time pedagogy that is inherently experiential and child-centred. When exploring views towards the young learner, two main frameworks come to the surface: the traditional developmental framework that looks at children as vulnerable subjects, and the social framework that recognizes children as active subjects. The author delineates a new conceptual philosophy for learning, namely integrated learning, which rejects the above dichotomies between formal and informal, objects and subjects. Such a framework describes the learning trajectories of children and serves to guide interdisciplinary professional collaboration between schools and leisure-time centres.

Samþætt nám í skólum og frístundaheimilum: Að yfirstíga tvíhyggju

► Um höfund ► Efnisorð

Þessi grein fjallar um tengsl formlegs og óformlegs náms með tilliti til grunnskóla og frístundaheimila fyrir ung skólabörn. Höfundur gagnrýnir of mikla áherslu á formlegt nám og formhyggju í menntakerfinu. Á undanförunum áratugum hefur mátt greina aukna vitund um mismunandi námsumhverfi og hafa fræðimenn greint á milli formlegs náms (e. *formal learning*) og óformlegs náms (e. *informal learning*), og á síðari árum einnig hálf-formlegs náms (e. *non-formal learning*). Þessi þrígreining hefur mikið verið notuð undanfarnin ár til að draga fram ólíkar gerðir námsumhverfis og hefur varpað ljósi á mikilvægi óformlegs umhverfis í samfélagi þar sem formlegt nám hefur mest vægi. Hér eru færð rök fyrir því að framangreind þrígreining henti ekki vel til að lýsa eiginlegu námsferli barna þar sem þau beiti jafnt formlegum sem óformlegum leiðum til að til-einka sér hæfni og þekkingu. Mikilvægt sé að yfirstíga tiltekna tvíhyggju sem felst í því að stilla formlegu og óformlegu námi upp sem andstæðum.

Frístundaheimili fyrir ung skólabörn starfa á mörkum menntakerfa og byggjast á hugmyndafræði tómsunda sem einkennist af reynslumiðuðu námi og barnmiðuðri hugsun. Þegar lítið er til viðhorfa gagnvart börnum má greina tvo megin ramma; annars vegar hina hefðbundnu þroskakenningu þar sem lítið er á börn sem viðkvæma þolendur, og hins vegar hina félagslegu sýn þar sem lítið er á börn sem virka gerendur. Höfundur dregur upp nýja sýn á nám, sem hann kallar samþætt nám, nám sem hafnar fyrrgreindri aðgreiningu á hinu formlega og hinu óformlega, gerendum og þolendum. Slík sýn lýsir betur eiginlegu námi barna og styður þverfaglegt samstarf milli skóla og frístundaheimila. Nám höfundar jafnt til skynsemi sem tilfinninga, snýst um staðreyndir jafnt sem gildi, og getur verið skipulagt án þess að missa sjónar á því sem börnum er eiginlegt. Menntun þarf að taka mið af því að börn eru verur af holdi og blóði og þarf að efla jafnt hið líkamlega sem hið andlega. Efla þarf skilning á mikilvægi óformlegs náms, jafnt innan sem utan skólanna. Í samþættu námi er leitast við að auka sjálfræði nemenda og gefa þeim tækifæri til að nýta þá hæfni og þekkingu sem þeir hafa byggt upp með fyrri reynslu.

Nám er flókið ferli og líta verður á það frá mismunandi sjónarhornum. Stofnana-væðing menntunar hefur haft í för með sér þann alvarlega ágalla að lítið er á rökhusun og bókvit (e. *cognitive thinking*) sem æðra nám, á kostnað verk- og siðvits (e. *non-cognitive skills*). Hugmyndafræði tómsunda virðist, enn sem komið er, vera trú hinni barnhverfu uppeldisfræði og reynslumiðuðu námi. Ef og þegar frístundaheimilin verða hluti af skólakerfinu (eins og gerst hefur í Svíþjóð og Danmörku) skiptir miklu að innan grunnskólans verði skapaður jarðvegur þar sem hið óformlega nám getur dafnað. Þannig gætu skapast spennandi möguleikar til að þróa áfram námskrá og daglegt starf skólans. En það mun ekki gerast nema hugmyndir um samþætt nám verði viðurkenndar og nýttar.

Introduction

This essay addresses the lack of understanding of the importance of informal learning processes in the lives of children and youth, which is an issue deeply related to my field, leisure and youth studies. I have come to realize that a lack of recognition of informal learning processes goes deep into our understanding of education and learning. It reveals itself in many ways, but the case I will explore here is the connection of formal and informal learning processes as they appear in the (dis)connection between compulsory schooling and leisure-time centres for young school children. My fascination with the connections between formal and informal learning processes and institutions began when I started my career as a program director in a leisure-time centre for 6 to 9 year old children. The leisure-time centre was operated by the elementary school and was in essence a day-care program for the youngest school children. I was amazed at how separately and yet inter-connected school and leisure-time centres operated. In my doctoral research, I discovered the manifold views on the purposes of leisure-time centres from the perspectives of the society, the professionals and the children themselves (Pálsdóttir, 2012). Through my research, I came to realize that the children themselves valued the activities within in the leisure-time centre highly. Furthermore, I found that these activities were opportunities for learning experiences, yet the informal learning processes happening in the leisure-time centre seem to be of little or no consequence according to society and institutional perspective.

This article deals with our ideas of learning and explores the dichotomy between formal and informal learning. I am interested in finding answers to practical questions such as: What ideas of learning drive formal and informal educational practices? How can we maximize young learner's educational experiences in various settings? I will argue that the educator maximizes the learning opportunities by integrating formal and informal

educational practices. These are questions that I consider fundamental in education today, not only within informal or non-formal educational institutions, but also in formal educational institutions such as schools.

My motivation for writing this article is both practical and theoretical: Practical because I believe that understanding the importance of integrated learning is vital for different professionals working to educate children and youth in schools and out-of school programs. Theoretical, because I aim to contribute to the learning sciences by challenging the current distinction between formal and informal learning. Any theory about how people learn—how they acquire knowledge and develop new skills—is ultimately built on a philosophical viewpoint on what it means to be a human being.

My claim is that the prevalent view on learning is characterized by a dualistic thinking towards humans, which accentuates formal learning and the traditional developmental framework of children. I present the case of leisure-time centres that provide important learning settings for young school children and operate on the periphery of the school system, thus providing a vivid example of the fusion of formal and informal learning processes. I end by proposing modest steps to outline a theoretical framework or philosophy of integrated learning.

The learning sciences

Educational sciences are an interdisciplinary area that draws from many domains such as psychology, philosophy, and sociology. Within educational sciences, there exists a variety of fields of study, with each field developing distinct lenses to explore the educational endeavour. The concept 'learning' has a broad definition in the academic literature as it is rooted in different theoretical approaches, e.g. the developmental approach, behavioural approach, the cognitive approach and the constructivist—or the socio-constructivist orientations (Biggs, 1993; Long, Woode, Littleton, Passenger & Sheehy, 2011). I do not claim to provide an overview over the complexities of learning theories, but for the purposes of this article, I want to make a few remarks on the learning sciences. *The learning sciences* are a field that studies learning and learning processes in order to improve classroom teaching and learning. According to Sawyer (2006), "this is a new kind of science, with the goal of providing a sound scientific foundation for education" (p. 15). However, I am not convinced that this is a new kind of science, and secondly, it is far from clear what a "sound scientific foundation for education" would look like. The theoretical foundation for today's learning sciences traces all the way back to the Greek philosophers, Plato and Aristotle. Educational sciences have through the centuries been infused by philosophy, and in the twentieth century, by methodology moulded by the social sciences. Thus, this is a field of study of "blurred genres".

Two major methodological paradigms are at play in educational sciences, which in fact feed and underpin the gap between formal and informal learning. On the one side we have the *positivistic* paradigm, which claims that in order to understand the social reality, thoughts and activities of people; we need to apply scientific methods developed in modern sciences. On the other side, we have the *phenomenological* paradigm, which argues that to understand the social reality, thoughts and activities of people we need to explore the experiences and thoughts of individuals.

The former side claims that we should strive to achieve complete objectivity in our research and theories about human behaviour; the other side emphasizes that social knowledge is always subjective and situated within a specific culture and experienced by individuals. How do these different methodological viewpoints appear within education studies? They do so perhaps most obviously in the perceived gap between quantitative

and qualitative researchers, were the previous group uses statistical methods and deduction to discover trends, causalities, and provide an overview, whilst the latter group uses ethnographic methods, such as interviews and observations to understand the experiences of people in various social contexts.

It is beyond the scope of this article to dive into the philosophical and epistemological assumptions of those two methodological paradigms. However, I believe that this delusive binary thinking reappears in the division between formal and informal learning, and that too often academics as well as other professionals seem to situate themselves within a framework, whether a methodology or a theoretical perspective, without reflecting on the epistemology of their findings, or the philosophical assumptions of their knowledge claims. Behind some objective research and knowledge production is a false claim to truth and validity. What is of importance is that "... a choice of interpretative scheme is not just a choice of convenient laboratory equipment. Different interpretations express different emphases. They endorse different principles of selection. They determine what will be attended to" (Midgley, 1994, p.47). Therefore, the choice of method and the choice of theoretical frameworks lay down the base for the findings and the theoretical and practical claims that follow. This explains in part the need for boundaries between different academic and professional fields within education and is clearly evident in the current literature on formal and informal learning theories.

Setting boundaries

The educational discourse has for a long time centred on schools, where 'learning' is often used more or less synonymously with the term 'teaching' (Illeris, 2007, p. 3). It focuses on how the student acquires skills and knowledge that have been deemed appropriate by the educational system and are transmitted from teachers to students. This view of learning has also been called *instructionism* (Sawyer, 2006, quoting Papert, 1993). This problem of treating learning as synonymous with schooling has led a number of authors, especially those concerned with adult learning, out of school learning, or learning on the job, to distinguish between *formal learning* and *informal learning*. A third concept, *non-formal learning*, has also been suggested as a possible link between the two previous concepts (Eraut, 2000). *Table 1* gives an overview of these three concepts of learning and their distinguishing features, as most commonly construed in the educational literature (see Council of European Union, 2014; Colley, Hodkinson & Malcolm, 2002).

Table 1 – An overview of formal, non-formal and informal learning settings		
Formal learning	Non-formal learning	Informal learning
Within the educational system A organised and structured environment The presence of a designated teacher or trainer The award of a qualification or credit The external specification of outcomes	Planned activities Some form of learning support is present Learner control Learning through open educational sources Learning is context specific Outcomes may or may not be assessed	Daily activities No specific structure of outcomes No teacher involved Learning through daily life Learning is context specific No assessment

It is worth noting that this distinction between formal and informal learning is often presumed to describe *processes* of learning, not only *various settings*. However, we must distinguish between a learning *process* and learning *place*. The division of learning into formal learning, non-formal learning and informal learning has become extremely important and has encouraged policy makers and educationists to reveal and support the learning that takes place in non-formal as well as informal places. In fact, this division is mainly designed to make people realize that the external conditions for learning can range from formal to informal settings. Also, there is no reference to the *content of learning*. Non-formal and informal learning are most often associated with learning that offers “greater flexibility and freedom for learners” whilst formal learning is said to be connected to teacher control (Eraut, 2000, p. 247). Informal learning may be largely invisible and learners may even be unaware of their learning; but formal learning places, i.e. schools, are expected, first and foremost, to produce knowledge and skills that can be noted and evaluated.

This blurring of the learning place with the learning processes leads people to think that learning processes or styles are inherently different in and outside of school. The introduction of the non-formal learning setting which seems to draw from both ends of the formal-informal spectrum presented above unfortunately does not suffice to rectify this blurring. It can still be seen to draw from the simplistic dualistic thinking that *formal learning processes* and *natural learning processes* are fundamentally different. *Table 2* shows the apparent dichotomies that lay behind the distinction between formal and informal learning and surface in the educational rhetoric on both learning settings and learning processes. Although few would hold that learning is *either* designed/formal *or* natural/informal, but rather that these components work together in real life learning, it is important to draw out this dualistic schema.

Table 2 – The dichotomies behind the learning processes	
Formal learning – Designed processes	Informal learning – Natural processes
Reason	Emotions
Facts	Values
Conscious	Unconscious
Organised	Organic
Formal	Informal
Objectivity	Subjectivity

Learning which takes place in “natural” circumstances and without specific planning or directions is considered to be informal in nature, whereas designed learning that takes place in a specifically organized setting is labelled formal learning (Beard & Wilson, 2002). However, this distinction is not valid. When explored further, the lines between formal, non-formal and informal learning become blurred. Learning settings are not the same as learning processes, and it is important not to confuse the two. The relationship between the above dichotomies, such as reason/emotion, facts/values, and conscious/unconscious are complex; these are not opposites but interrelated components of the human condition. It is therefore impossible to support the claim that learning within a formal setting has to do only with facts, for it is always value-laden; such learning is both conscious and unconscious, as literature on the “hidden curricula” has revealed.

Moreover, learning can be simultaneously organized and organic. Dewey, for example, emphasized that teachers should use considerable energy for planning the experiential learning of their students (Dewey, 1938). Again, this argument may not be radical or even original, but needs to be constantly reiterated because of the strong tendency of educationists to situate themselves within certain boundaries and define learning from a specific narrow lens.

Thus, in formal settings, informal learning may occur and vice versa (Colley, Hodkinson & Malcolm, 2002). There are schools that emphasize student autonomy, social curriculum and rely less on formal assessment of academic progress. Within the structured education system, such as compulsory schools, there are vast opportunities for non-formal and informal learning, most specifically related to peer relationships in the classroom, cafeteria, during recess, and through after-school activities (Pálsdóttir, 2012; Rogoff, 2003). Even though the distinction between formal, non-formal and informal learning are helpful and even necessary in order to distinguish how learning is organised in different settings, these three-fold criteria of learning over-simplifies the discourse on learning processes and creates labels that may not apply to the lived experiences of students. Ultimately, the child doesn't ask whether the setting is formal or non-formal, before taking on a new learning task, whether drawing or doing math.

To conclude, we need to recognize that "...learning is predominantly determined by the complex social practices in any learning setting, which integrate what are sometimes termed formal and informal components. Thus, in all or nearly all situations where learning takes place, elements of both formal and informal learning are present. But the most significant issue is not the boundaries between these types of learning, but the inter-relationships between dimensions of formality/informality in particular situations" (Colley et.al., 2002, p. 39). Leisure-time centres and schools are very specific social settings in which children think, act, feel and learn. The challenge is that leisure-time pedagogues and teachers have little knowledge or understanding of each other's work, and perhaps feel that there is no specific reason for them to do so (Pálsdóttir, 2014). I argue that to support the education of children, we have to look beyond the institutional boundaries that formal, non-formal, and informal learning has made recognizable and begin to look at how learning is transmitted in and between those different learning environments. This can be a challenge in a culture that prioritizes formal learning.

The prevalence of formalism

There are many indicators that formalism is the prevalent force shaping educational literature and practice. According to Sawyer, instructionism reached an end-point, as learning scientists of the twenty-first century realized that "memorization of facts and procedures is not enough for success. Educated graduates need a deep conceptual understanding of complex concepts, and the ability to work with them creatively to generate new ideas, new theories, new products, and new knowledge" (Sawyer, 2002, p.2). However, I am afraid that Sawyer might be too optimistic. Even though no serious educationist would today favour instructionism in the aforementioned sense, the instrumental view of learning it has left behind continues to permeate the educational discourse. This can be seen firstly, in the emphasis on formal educational settings, and second in the apparent emphasis on formalism in teaching. Formal knowledge and qualifications attained in formal educational institutions are considered pre-requisites for career success. The possible educational impact of non-formal and informal learning settings is generally overlooked. There can be a variety of reasons for this: Policy makers and professionals do not recognize the learning outcomes of non-formal learning settings as formal knowledge. Rather, the possible outcomes of, for example, participating in a youth club, could be seen as supporting a healthy lifestyle of young people or as a means to prevent adolescent delinquency.

Strong evidence suggest that organized leisure activities within non-formal settings, such as youth clubs, leisure-time centres and other out-of-school programs, can and do support the overall well-being and academic success of children and young people (Leitner & Leitner, 2012). The value of non/in-formal educational settings seems most often measured in how much they benefit their prodigies within the formal educational system. Thus, the essential question always becomes: How do we support the formal education of our students, i.e. the academic knowledge and skills taught and evaluated within the school system?

The second argument that shows the prevalence of formalism is how formal the learning process has become. In an article on the need to rethink formalism in education, Nathan (2012) examines the belief in “formalisms first” in educational curricula and teaching methods. According to Nathan, the “formalism first” view posits that “learning and conceptual development proceeds first from knowledge and mastery of discipline-specific formalisms before learners can exhibit competency applying the knowledge to practical and clinical matters” (Nathan 2012, p. 125). His analysis of educational practices within mathematics, physics, professional education, social sciences and languages shows that most often teachers considered it vital to first introduce scientific theory, formal principles, and abstract generalizations to their students before involving students with concrete and contextual projects. Furthermore, schools are based on the strange stance that everyone learns the same thing at the same time, and that teachers transmit their expertise to students (Sawyer, 2006, p. 573). Teachers experience external pressure from curricula, legislators and parents to support mainly the academic skills of children, and teachers must use the tools available, such as text-books, teacher-based instruction, etc. (Einarsdóttir, 2010). Standardized testing and international student assessment, such as PISA, are considered the main tools to measure the quality of the education system. The technical/formal side of learning has thus been prioritised over the ethical and political side of learning (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005). The prevalence of formalism in education tends to objectify children and categorize their capabilities.

Children with minds and bodies

At this stage in the argument, we have to ask ourselves a very important question: Who is the person being educated? What characterizes the learner, the child? To sketch out an answer to such big questions within the scope of this article I consider it helpful to look at two major paradigms in the search for an understanding of childhood: each presenting a set of views towards children which are reflected within formal and informal learning environments.

The *traditional developmental framework* builds on ideas of children as vulnerable and immature individuals who need guidance. Through the centuries, children have been defined as more ‘natural’ than adults, more ‘irrational’, more ‘vulnerable’ and as ‘becomings’ instead of ‘beings’ (James & Prout, 1990). Development has generally been defined as a universal phase in which children move from one stage to the next on their way to adulthood. As vulnerable and irrational beings, children are thought to need supervision, control and stimulation to thrive and learn. During the twentieth century, the lives of children were managed through public schooling, scientific research and social theories. Children became the objects of developmental, educational, and social research, thus creating a framework of childhood where developmentalism and socialization theories were dominant (Woodhead & Faulkner, 2008). This is the framework, which feeds formal education and institutions.

The second framework, and in many ways no less influential, is what I choose to call *the social framework of childhood*. Its roots can be traced back to the writings of educational

philosophers such as Dewey and Montessori. It has been further supported by many contemporary educationists, for example Corsaro (2011) and Rogoff (2003). Writers who emphasize that children should be seen as active social participants who can be rational and regarded as contributing members of society, and not as 'future' participants (James & Prout, 1990; Corsaro, 2011). From this perspective, children are seen capable persons, and so school activities should involve children in the educational process in a variety of ways, from choosing a subject (Montessori, 1964), exploring by themselves and making conclusions based on their findings (Dewey, 1938). In this sense, children are subjects that make independent observations and decisions; they are doers rather than bystanders.

Obviously, in real life we view children as both vulnerable and capable, depending on the context and on-going activities; we have to protect children from harming themselves at the same time as we want our children to explore and learn by their mistakes. However, making this distinction between the two above frameworks becomes very important within the institutional settings. Many attempts have been made, and are being made, to empower children within school settings. Teachers and school leaders are often eager to create environments and teaching methods that give students both more power and responsibility for their studies. Nevertheless, evidence suggest that children generally do not feel empowered in schools; school culture is most often characterized by adult control that leaves little space for the children to think and act on their own initiatives (Einarsdóttir, 2010; Kaldalóns, 2015; Thomson & Gunter, 2009).

In recent years, critical psychology has pointed out the importance of the social context of development and that "... the personal processes of development must be placed in the personal life of a subject ..." (Højholt, 2008, p. 12). Therefore, it is crucial that educational researchers and professionals recognize that children form a personal repertoire of ideas, experiences, intuition and skills from the places of learning that they move through. Traditional social and psychological theories have overlooked the importance of the meanings and histories of knowledge that children produce through their participation in various settings.

Leisure-time pedagogy emphasizes the development of the child as a whole, instead of focusing on specific cognitive skills and formal knowledge as teachers in school are in practice required to do. In some sense, the traditional school environment focuses on formal learning processes and looks at the learners from a very narrow point of view, namely, as cognitive beings. Such a view creates a separation between the cognitive and non-cognitive skills of children and in doing so reinforces the Cartesian dichotomy of mind and body. Nathan notes that "... the split between the practical work of the "hand" and the intellectual work of the "head" is woven into the very fabric of people's thinking about science in the modern age" (Nathan, 2012, p. 144). This dualistic idea of humans does not correspond to real life experiences as we live and learn as whole persons. We must be reminded repeatedly that children have minds *and* bodies that are essentially connected, and it is unrealistic to work with one without the other. Formal education settings are important, necessary and should be well constructed; children, though, do not use formal learning processes but rather a complex mixture of formal and informal ways to acquire skills and develop their capabilities. Increasingly, out-of-school programs such as leisure-time centres have begun to replace homes and playgrounds as important settings for such informal learning.

The case of leisure-time centres

In the Nordic countries, after-school day-care is generally a service provided by municipalities with state support and regulation (Øksnes, Knutas, Ludvigsson, Falkner & Kjær, 2014). Leisure-time centres for school-aged children in the Nordic countries have multiple

purposes, including provision of care, informal learning and leisure (Haglund & Anderson, 2009; Pálsdóttir, 2012). The rapid development of such services within and on the borders of the school system provides an excellent venue to study our understandings of learning, and specifically the connections between formal and informal learning environments and processes of learning. Several key elements can be identified as essential components of the work of Nordic leisure-time centres: the idea of the child as a whole being, an emphasis on reciprocal interaction between individuals, creative activities, teamwork, and recognition of the rights of children (Moss & Petrie, 2002). These are all ideals of social pedagogy, which in turn are also strongly linked to the concept of leisure. In fact, leisure is included in the name of these centres in Sweden and Denmark, as they are referred to as leisure-time centres (i. *frístundaheimili*). According to the model described in *Table 1*, leisure-time centres would thus seem to be *non-formal* settings: there are planned activities, adult guidance, but still considerable learner control.

In the last few years, these programs in countries such as Sweden and Denmark, have been considered an integral part of the school and as such, have been integrated more with the school day. There is talk of the “schoolification” of leisure-time centres as they are no longer supplement the school, but have become an integral part of the school’s mission (Øksnes et.al., 2014). Leisure-time pedagogues in those two countries are expected to work in school together with classroom teachers as well as in the leisure-time centre. This cooperation has resulted in a change in the professional identity of these professionals as they are required to take on a more formal role in the education of children (Haglund & Andersen, 2009; Stanek, 2012). In Iceland there is also increasing emphasis on the integration of school and leisure-time centres (Pálsdóttir, 2010, 2012) and a recent survey showed that in most Icelandic municipalities leisure-time centres are operated by school authorities (Pálsdóttir, 2013).

Three principal points illustrate what leisure-time pedagogy contributes to the learning opportunities of today’s children. Firstly, the pedagogy of experiential learning that characterizes the work in leisure-time centres recognizes that children learn with or without adult control and regardless of whether they find themselves in a formal or non-formal setting. Leisure-time pedagogues generally seem to take on a more passive role than do teachers in school, as they emphasize that children should be allowed to explore and experience by themselves, thus learning by doing (Ackesjö, 2011). This sort of viewpoint acknowledges that learning is a natural process because the child is considered a learner by nature.

The second point of importance here is that the leisure-time centres have provided a balance to the prevalent formalistic view on learning in society and academia in which nurturing non-cognitive skills, such as social skills, well-being, friendship and self-control in leisure-time pedagogy are emphasized (Pálsdóttir, 2012). These are skills that are recognized as highly valuable in democratic society built on mutual respect and empathy (Aðalbjarnardóttir, 2011). A recent longitude study established significant associations between measured social-emotional skills in kindergarten and personal young adult positive outcomes across multiple domains of education, criminal activity, substance use, and mental health (Jones, Greenberg & Crowley, 2015).

The third and final point I want to make has to do with the view found in leisure-time pedagogy towards children as independent moral actors. Traditionally, leisure-time centres have encouraged and supported the freedom and responsibility of the learner, the child. In many ways, Nordic pedagogical discourse has built on the idea of the “competent” child (Kryger, 2004). Social pedagogy has incorporated a vision of children as agents in their own lives and development. Ideal pedagogical plans take into account

that children should be able to choose what to do when possible, and exercise autonomy up to a certain level. This rhetoric builds on a constructivist understanding of learning: children learn by experience and construct their knowledge in an interactive relationship with the environment (Dewey, 1938; Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978). Hence, the social pedagogy of the leisure-time centres places the child at the centre and the aim is to encourage *the overall development of the child*.

In conclusion, evidence shows that the leisure-time centres can provide important learning opportunities for children and that leisure-time pedagogy is an integral part in the education of our children. There is a real danger that integrating school and leisure-time centre will in fact mean that the prevailing formalism of school-learning will consume and override the informal and experiential learning integral to leisure-time pedagogy (Calander, 2000). I maintain that it is crucial that schools incorporate and create awareness of the endless possibilities of informal and experiential learning, which can be enhanced both within and outside of formal educational settings. Then, it will be possible to look at the young learners and recognize their abilities and skills as they travel through the various settings in their lives: school, leisure activities and home.

Towards a framework of integrated learning

Integration is a well-known method for enhancing learning opportunities, and is, therefore, not being introduced here as a new or original concept in the educational context. Integrated learning as a concept has been connected mainly to three areas in education: a) integrated learning through technology and innovation in education; b) integrated learning through subject integration, such as language and content; c) with professional and work-integrated learning. However, what I am proposing is not a method but a conceptual framework or a philosophy of learning that could be applied to both theory and practice. Such a framework of integrated learning is supported by the works of many educational theorists, such as Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, Maria Montessori, John Dewey, Paulo Freire and Howard Gardner, to name a few who have, each in their own way, made an excellent case for an integrated approach in education (Gnanakan, 2011). Further support comes also from Ken Gnanakan, an Indian educationist, who in his book *Integrated Learning* (2011), provides an overview of the historical roots of integrated learning and argues for a holistic and integrated approach to education in general, such as connecting learning to real life, integrated curriculum, a child-centred approach, education as a process, school as a community and the integration of moral intelligence.

I will now specify what I believe to be the main components of a philosophy of integrated learning. My aim is to create a platform for educationists from different fields, for researchers and practitioners alike, to start a dialogue that could have two results: both expand our knowledge on learning, and support the development of formal and non-formal learning settings that are ideal for children with minds and bodies that are naturally equipped for learning.

Interdisciplinary approaches. Firstly, integrated learning is informed and feeds from many research traditions. Integrated learning educationists know that learning cannot be understood from one perspective, but rather that we need to use bricolage to weave together as good a picture of learning as we can get from multiple evidence. Those who wish to regard learning sciences from the perspective of integrated learning recognize the contribution of different ways of looking at learning, from neuro-scientific brain-research to societal and institutional analysis.

Schools are multi-level institutions where socialization takes place and where children are supposed to develop skills that prepare them for future participation in society at large

(Rogoff, 2003). The traditional view is that schools are settings for formal learning. Even so, one of the overall public aims of the compulsory schools in Iceland is, after all, to support children in becoming independent and active participants in a democratic society (*Compulsory School Act*, no. 91/2008). In order to achieve this goal, we have to incorporate leisure-time pedagogy to the school to a much greater extent than is being done today. We also need to research further how non-formal educational institutions support the education and development of children. We have to develop a collaborative terminology that grants professionals access to each other's perspectives, and encourages mutual respect.

Rejection of dichotomies. Secondly, integrated learning links formal and informal educational practices by rejecting the dichotomy between reason and emotion, facts and values, formal and informal, the organized and the organic. From the integrated learning perspective, real life is not black or white, but filled with the whole array of colours. The simplistic view of dichotomies should be rejected, and instead we should consider how things relate to each other, connect, supplement, disappear, re-appear, and most of all, we should consider how reality surprises us. Watching children learn and develop is of course nothing less than a wonder, and most of it comes by naturally, not because it is planned. Informal learning takes place in formal settings, and vice versa. Formal knowledge is not only produced in formal settings; it feeds from the multifold spaces that young learners live and work in, such as home and leisure-time centres.

Education of mind and body. Integrated learning resurrects the Aristotelian notion of education as a development of the whole person. It recognizes that people are complex beings with minds and bodies (and hearts and stomachs!) and that education is a life-long process that begins and ends with the individual himself. This is not to say that people do not need instruction, encouragement, and guidance, but that a balance of these efforts is needed.

The importance of supporting informal learning processes. It can be argued that the oversimplification of learning into formal and informal processes feeds the false dichotomy between mind and body, where "the mind" (cognitive skills) can be trained in schools and the "bodily" qualities (non-cognitive skills) in leisure-time centres. The prevalence of formalism in education in general calls for a powerful response in support of non-formal learning settings, such as leisure-time centres, as well as the development of an integrated learning approach in schools. The division of learning into the two key paradigms, formal learning and informal learning (non-formal included) helps us recognize the various settings in which learning takes place but is not realistic in describing the process of learning from the perspective of the individual learner.

As leisure-time centres are increasingly seen as a part of the formal educational system the imminent danger is that leisure-time pedagogues start to control and objectify their learners in order to "teach" specific cognitive skills. The real danger is that young school-children who spend up to eight or nine hours a day in school and at the leisure-time centre will have even less space for flexibility, autonomy and children-control.

Learner control. As young learners, children need to be involved and active. This is not a new truth, but a truth that needs to be reiterated. Many would agree that formalism and an unrealistic belief in the power of instruction inhibit the real empowerment of children in their learning institutions. From an integrated learning perspective, it becomes essential to create spaces where young learners can exhibit their expertise and utilize their previous knowledge and experiences. That is the the best way forward to exercise learning by doing and improving learners "outcomes", to use a common phrase in education.

Children should have a lot to say about their activities, not only what they do in recess or when they have finished school assignments.

Integrated learning is thus a philosophy of learning, a pedagogy that recognizes that learning takes place in different social contexts, formal, non-formal and informal places of learning. Leisure-time centres as well as schools are important settings in the lives of children and within them both formal and informal learning processes take place. Integrated learning is an interdisciplinary approach that sets out to understand the learning process from the child's viewpoint. Such an undertaking requires that we bring together the features of formal and informal learning environments, and explore how they can complement each other.

Conclusion

I have now discussed the learning sciences and the helpful but unrealistic division between formal and informal learning. I have argued that there is a need to overcome the apparent dichotomy between formal and informal learning, as children are natural learners with minds and bodies. I provided an example of the leisure-time centre as a non-formal learning setting that now seems to be on the verge of entering the formal setting of the school, at least in the Nordic countries. Similar concerns have been raised about the 'schoolification' of the Icelandic pre-school, which increasingly uses concepts and methods formerly linked to elementary school (Gunnarsdóttir, 2014).

Furthermore, I shed light on two different frameworks of childhood that are operating within education and showed that within the institutional setting the traditional developmental framework that looks at children as objects overrides the other one which looks at children as subjects. What worries me the most is the tendency for academics and professionals to place themselves rather uncritically within a theoretical framework or a set of perspectives, and without reflection. Integrated learning challenges educationists to question that which they have taken for granted and encourages them to continue looking for answers and develop new ways.

Learning is a complex process, and as such, can be, and should be explored from a variety of perspectives. The institutionalisation of education has had one serious downside: it situates higher order cognitive thinking on the top of the scale and downgrades non-cognitive skills (Nathan, 2012). Formalism directs educational discourse in society and, more importantly, affects and moulds the school culture. I have argued that formal learning settings tend to treat children as objects, instead of subjects, as instruction techniques and assessment tools are developed to elevate student outcomes. Even though few would ascribe to the view that schools do nothing but transmit formal knowledge, there are strong societal and political forces at work which continue to bring formalism to the front, as education in modern society is expected to be efficient and with visible and measurable outcomes.

It is worth noting that in a sense there is a tension in my argument, as I claim that a) the distinction between formal, non-formal and informal learning places is helpful and necessary and b) that in real life it is impossible to distinguish clearly between formal and informal learning processes. Schools and leisure-time centres should provide different experiences and spaces for learning. However, teachers and leisure-time pedagogues can deepen their knowledge of how children learn by studying and sharing their learning trajectories. Such research will provide new and exciting opportunities to develop further the places of learning, whether formal or non-formal, including viewing the child from a holistic perspective, which takes into account that the power of learning comes from within.

Learning sciences are a vibrant field where academics and other professionals explore and expand knowledge about learning. There is no consensus on what is the main scientific base for education, and there remain conflicting views on what constitutes real knowledge in the field, or what is the best method to obtain such knowledge. The current dichotomy between qualitative and quantitative research is evidence of the conflicting views educational researchers hold. In order to explore the concept of learning, we must ask philosophical and epistemological questions that help us uncover how such knowledge could possibly come about. Educational researchers have to be critical towards their own methodologies and the theoretical frameworks they find themselves applying and reflect on the epistemological basis of their research findings: What kind of knowledge about learning are we in fact producing? What are the potentials as well as limitations of educational sciences?

At this time, leisure-time centre pedagogy seems to maintain loyalty to a certain child-centred pedagogy, a pedagogy of “learning by doing”—but leisure-time centres are operating on the periphery of the educational system. If and when they become a part of the school-system (as in Sweden), it is vital that the school, the formal setting, embraces and acknowledges the informality and the essence of leisure-time pedagogy. In fact, the integration of school and leisure-time centres for young school children could create possibilities for re-creating the curricula and activities within the institutional setting. But it will not happen without the recognition and implementation of an integrated learning framework.

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Keywords

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