

Outdoor Education to Develop Student Life Skills

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Abstract

The economic development in the Baltic countries is evaluated as unexpectedly fast, faster than it was predicted. At the same time we can see different unforeseen problems in Latvia. One of them is education in the conditions of a fast economic development. The graduates of secondary schools, also universities are not ready to the great competition in the Baltic labour market. The future development of Latvia will depend on how educated, creative, inquisitive and ready to take a risk a man will be. If we are able to see a person as a value and contribute to his/her personal development, then we will achieve that these individuals working together will give the country the well-being which we have described in our future visions. One valuable thing that an educator can do is to help students master their learning skills. Guided by the necessity to train human resources, we practice such outdoor education studies, which facilitate students to acquire not only academic knowledge and skills, but also the skill to learn and develop individually, thus increasing student ability to adjust to the dynamic changes in the labour market. In the presentation we will show the content of some education modulus in the summer and winter outdoor education which we are realizing now in Latvia.

Key Words: Outdoor Education, Learning Skills, Human Resources, Labour Market.

Introduction

The economic development in the Baltic countries is evaluated as unexpectedly fast, faster than it was predicted. At the same time, we can see different unforeseen problems in Latvia. One of them is education in the conditions of fast economic development. The graduates of secondary schools, also universities, are not prepared for the great competition in the Baltic and European labour markets. The future development of Latvia will depend on how educated, creative, inquisitive and ready to take a risk a person will be. If we are able to see a person as a valuable and contribute to his/her personal development, then we will achieve that these individuals working together will give the country the well-being which we have described in our future visions. One valuable thing that an educator can do is to help students master their learning skills and to learn necessary life skills.

Educational philosophy

The economic and social development in the world more and more depends on a person's knowledge, skills and attitude, therefore the role of education in society is continuously growing. To formulate the conception about education and learning in the future acceptable for the whole world, UNESCO formed an international commission early in 1993. Its work was led by the well-known French politician and social worker, the ex-president of the European Commission Jack Delor, and fourteen education specialists worked in the commission as well.

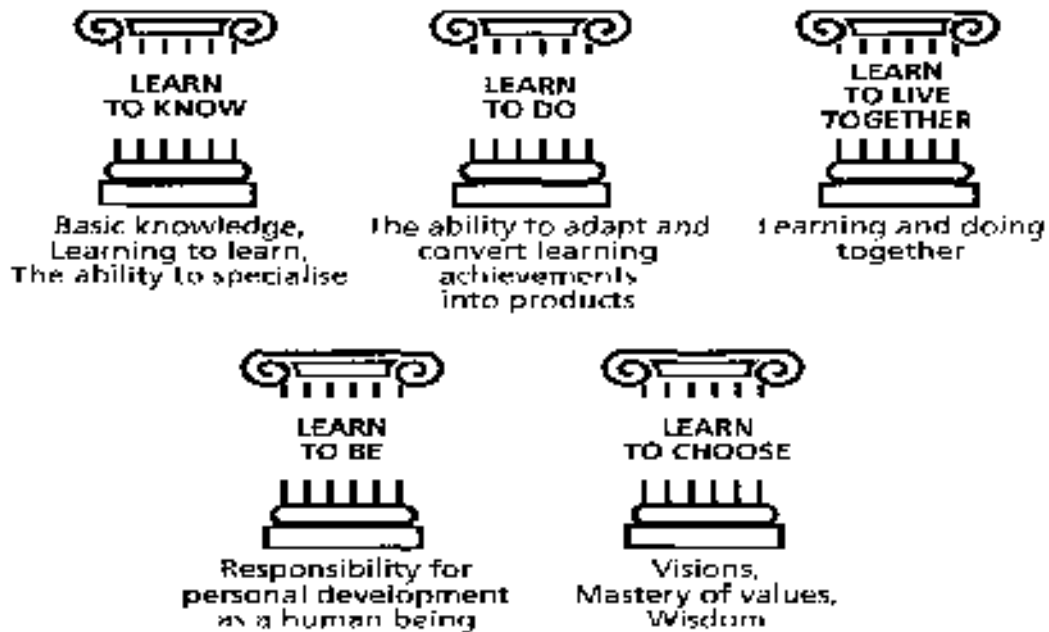
In the course of three years, the group worked out the report about education in the 21st century. The basic line in this document is that the most important process in education is *learning* (Delor, 2001).

To characterize the main tasks of education, the education experts allegorically compare knowledge to a building which is based on four pillars – fundamental ways of learning. They are - *learn to know, learn to do, learn to live together and learn to be*.

Professor Jussi T. Koski, from Helsinki University, thus complements the UNESCO report list by introducing an additional learning dimension that is connected to those above, and is highlighted as part of personal, skilful competence. It is *learning to choose* (Suurla, 2002). Undoubtedly, these five ways of knowledge, skills and attitude interface, cover and mutually interrelate and make one entity (Figure 1).

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Figure1. The Five Dimensions of Learning Required in the 21st Century (Suurla, 2002).



First, everyone must *learn to know*. This means internalising a sufficient elementary knowledge base, learning to learn, and an ability to specialise. In future, an expert will have an extensive knowledge base combining mathematics, science and technology, humanistic studies, economics and social sciences. Future experts will also be excellent generalists.

A sports pedagogue gives his/her students general knowledge about a person's physiological processes, movements, training methodology, different kinds of sport, etc, and having this basis the student is motivated to get more and specialized knowledge and go in for those sports where he/she could get not only the best results, but use the knowledge to have an active lifestyle and develop mental and physical work capacity.

A future citizen must *learn to do*. It means that people must have the ability to apply their learning achievements creatively to their own environment. Learning must not only remain theoretical, but they must learn how to convert knowledge into products.

In sport and recreation activities, various physical abilities and movement skills are acquired, social behaviour, and ethical skills are promoted when people participate in both organized and non-organized events and competitions to lead them and represent their teams on the national and international level.

Pedagogical experience and observation in Latvia show that the first two principles of education *learning to know* and *learning to do* have been realized and fulfilled more qualitatively. The last three of them – *learn to live together*, *learn to be* and *learn to choose* have been realized and implemented insufficiently.

Learn to live together means to accept and respect diversities of other people and recognize positive interdependence. This is learnt by carrying out projects and actions, solving problems, etc. In our opinion, this educational principle has been implemented with the help of successfully acquired social skills. It is important to realize that social skills are not innate; they are acquired and taught during life, improving and enriching gradually. Personal, skilful competence consists of developing the five dimensions of learning in a stable, harmonious fashion.

Pedagogues start to develop the basis of social skills in pre-school children, both in everyday life and sports classes, different games and other activities, and when these children at the age of 6-7 start to attend school they will continue to develop these skills. Social skills developed at primary and basic school, will be of the same importance as reading skills and computer skills.

Learn to be means that in education all potential aspects of a personality are equally important. It means the development of a human understanding about his/her own uniqueness, individuality, being aware of and respecting of his/her differences. A pedagogue helps to see one's own uniqueness, which is the result of his/her experience gained from belonging to definite culture, characterized by the basic values: family, religion, language and other aspects arising from them. Also sports and recreation activities are those which provide everybody with the possibility to participate taking away all prejudices.

Learn to choose means free being aware of one's possibilities and resources which results in a definite choice. The more choice possibilities are facilitated, the more promoted is one's sense of responsibility. A person becomes responsible for his or her choice. An athlete's action in competitions often depends on his or her resources as he or she is responsible for the result of his action. In sport, especially in competitions, there are many possibilities. How we use them it depends on the skill to choose and our level of responsibility.

It goes without saying that the five fundamental ways of learning explained above cannot be separated one from another, they also do not refer to only one age group. More or less it is one entirety that should be looked at in the context of lifelong education. Formal education systems in sport try to emphasize the development of physical abilities, acquiring of movement skills and abilities, as well as knowledge, but they do not pay sufficient attention to other kinds of skills and personality development tendencies. Taking these five fundamental ways of learning as guidelines, future sport and outdoor education development policy is being facilitated in Latvia.

What is outdoor education?

Outdoor education is described as a process of learning through experiences (practical activities), which takes place outdoors. This education and learning stresses the processes of personal development and growth, which is evoked by the means of applying outdoor activities and environmental education. (Neuman, 2004). The European Institute for Outdoor Adventure Education and Experiential Learning define outdoor education as comprising outdoor activities, personal and social development and environmental education (Figure 2).

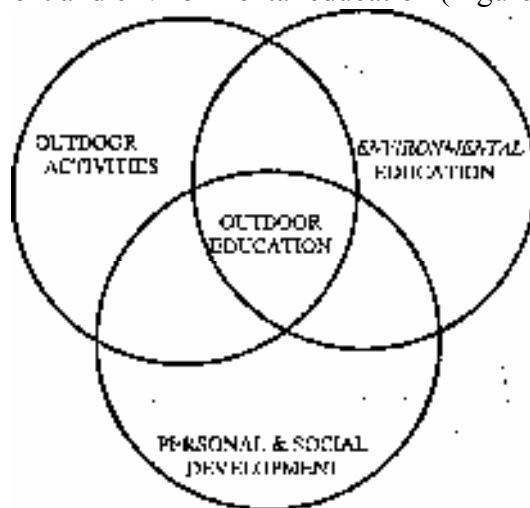


Figure 1. Outdoor education as comprising outdoor activities, personal and social development and environmental education [2].

Necessary skills for raising the quality of life and or its enrichment may be gained in various time intervals. Sometimes a few minutes is sufficient, sometimes we need days and weeks. The basic programs of outdoor education are prepared for all population groups (according to age, health, professions, etc.). We already know that other possibilities for the development of a person and society depend on the changes of the methods of education and learning. The topics such as cooperation, learning one's abilities, overcoming one's disabilities, solving problems, learning

about other people's needs, which occur in outdoor sports and education, will be applicable in the 21st century as well. At the same time, the modern society will have to renew its relations between human beings and the natural environment.

When we apply proper methods and approaches, we may find an educational potential for personal development. Outdoor activities have very wide range of application: from school physical education, to active tourism, sports, recreation and leisure time activities of various educational organizations.

The preparation of teachers is necessary for the further development of outdoor education. They should be able to use various techniques for creating and organizing programs; they should be interested in the various concepts of influence of outdoor sports, activities and tourism on the human personality.

Guided by the necessity to train human resources, we practice such outdoor sports education studies, which facilitate students to acquire not only academic knowledge and skills, but also the skills to learn and develop individually, thus increasing student's ability to adjust to the dynamic changes in the labour market. In the presentation we will show the content of some education modules in the summer and winter outdoor education which we are realizing now in Latvia.

Outdoor education modulus

We are describing three outdoor winter and summer outdoor education modules, which we are realizing in our institutions, following the directions of five dimensions of learning, and outdoor education items.

I modulus - Outdoor Winter Education – one day skiing tour.

In skiing education we can deal with different topics; one of them is observation of historical cultural areas around us. We can study culturally - historical sources, which we can see around us from the 18-20th century, planning of track from point A to B etc., take responsibility during the leadership of students group, at the same time to work as a good cooperative team, explaining cultural and historical facts, cover story during the tour, using the latest information technologies during the tour and after, presentation of the tour groups. By including readings of historical culture elements, the trip becomes a true exploration of nature, body, mind and spirit. These are few activities, which help students to learn life skills.

We forward the following goals for the module – skiing course:

1) Academic goals:

- # improvement of knowledge and skills of organizing a skiing tour (planning of a tour, pacing, equipment, ski preparation, clothing etc.)

- # improvement of motor skills (skiing steps, climbing, turning, descending et.)

- # improvement of physical conditioning

- # learning of culturally – historical aspects of the region

2) Social goals:

- # improvement of social interaction skills (asking for help, everyone participating, expressing support, criticizing ideas, not people, occupying the same space cooperatively, integrating ideas into single position, being responsible, following directions, celebrating success, resolving conflicts/problems etc.)

- # improvement of leadership skills

II modulus - Outdoor Summer Education – rope course

In the summer education program we are giving introducing to students to different outdoor activities, for example, hiking, canoeing, camping, cycling and two kinds of rope courses. Before we go out of the city to a wild wood with 5 days of overnight stay, students do about 30 hours of theoretical and practical exercises.

During the camp we – pedagogues organize the work of the studies in such way that students overtake responsibility, organizing the hike, cycling and boat trips, as well as rope course competitions themselves. The students are definitely trained enough before to be relied on

completely. The participation of pedagogues as observers and for the feedback is obligatory. Often the pedagogues give their students or groups of students (4-6 students in a group) different roles, for example, some students take part in rope course competitions, but others act as referees. After some time they change their roles.

We forward the following goals for the module – rope course:

1) academic goals:

improvement of knowledge and skills of the rope course

2) social goals:

improvement of social interaction skills

improvement of accountability, processing of academic and social skills

When teachers and students share the same goals, education becomes a teamwork effort with an “us” feeling. When students are highly motivated to learn, simply calling attention to a learning opportunity is sufficient. But in many situations, persuasion is helpful, to show the learners why they should want to learn what is being taught (Rusbult, 2002).

III modulus - Outdoor Environmental Education

The goals:

1) academic goals:

get acquainted with environmental education

management and marketing of environmental education

2) social goals:

improvement of social interaction skills

improvement of accountability

Making the second goal in this modulus more precise, we additionally acquaint the students with the possibility to sell a product. In this definite case the product is bird observation and counting, accompanied by a guide. In the past five years, this occupation is very popular among the nature tourists in Europe. During bird observation and counting tours in autumn, Latvia is visited more and more by tourists. In cooperation with the specialists of nature parks and reserves in Latvia we have worked out the modulus Outdoor Environmental Education – birds watching, and we acquaint our students with the modulus for students be able to learn knowledge and skills further on themselves and could later involve in giving this service. This is a good example how a teacher can educate his/her pupils of general education schools.

We developed these modules in outdoor winter and summer education with the purpose of acquainting students, future teachers, with different outdoor winter and summer education possibilities, which they will be able to use in their work at school.

Conclusions

It goes without saying that the five fundamental ways of learning explained above cannot be separated one from another, they also do not refer to only one age group. More or less it is one entirety that should be looked at in the context of lifelong education. Formal education systems in sport try to emphasize the development of physical abilities, acquiring of movement skills and abilities, as well as knowledge, but they do not pay sufficient attention to other kinds of skills and personality development tendencies.

There are many concepts in today’s outdoor sports and activities that stress personal and social development. We can also find different points of views about how to use outdoor activities.

In the article we presented some modulus which we were developing and implementing in the outdoor education, following the directions of five dimensions of learning required in the 21st century and outdoor education items. The questionnaires and observations show us the students’ progress in their improvement of social interaction and life skills.

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