

Beyond the boundaries of the classroom: rethinking places for learning

Eva Alerby, Krister Hertting & Susanne Westman

A (Western) school is among other things a building with its own spatial boundaries. The architectural formations can create expectations and be inspiring: they can create opportunities but also limitations of learning. However, an organized learning situation is not always within the boundaries of a physical classroom. In educational settings the place for learning is of significance, and given this, we want to explore the question whether the alternative formation of a learning place, by, for example, stretching the boundaries of the classroom, affects the teaching and learning situation. The aim of this paper is therefore to discuss learning places, which are beyond the physical classroom. The learning place, which is used as an exemplification in this paper, was under a tree on a beach in an Indigenous community in the remote far North of Australia.

We are going to discuss the issue of learning places, beyond the boundaries of the classroom, from a phenomenological life-world approach, in accordance with the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and, to some extent, that of Otto Friedrich Bollnow. Life-world ontology includes a pluralistic and integrative view of reality. World and life affect each other mutually in the sense that life is always worldly and the world is always what it is for a living being. In this way, life and world are integrated into a unity that cannot be separated. That the place influences living as much as living influences the place implies the need to illuminate the relationship between human and living places, in this case, places for learning.

Accordingly, a human is not only situated as an object in the place. The presence in a place is also followed by a certain attitude of mind. We can distance ourselves from the place or establish ourselves in it, we can feel lost or safe, in harmony with the place or foreign to it. The objective place, be it a classroom or a learning place beyond the classroom, is closely

connected to the lived place. By highlighting humans embodied connectedness to the place as a lived space, which in a way belonging to the person, we argue for rethinking places for learning beyond the boundaries of the physical classroom. Connected to education, this line of reasoning mean that we need to be situated in a place, which also makes knowledge situated through our embodiment and lived space.