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My place in the world

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Abstract

This paper reports and reflects on the outcomes of an interdisciplinary collaborative project. Inge-Marie Svensson works at the University of Malmö in the teacher education in the department of Nature, environment and learning. Gunnilla Welwert also works at the teacher education in Malmö in the department on Culture, language and media. The project has two different parts. One part is the Barbara Petchenik Award which is a drawing competition that is supposed to encourage children's creative description of the world in a graphic art. Through this competition they want to increase children's awareness about maps and protect the environment. The other part is about a enkätundersökning. In the autumn 2012 students in Malmö University asked 150 pupils in four different schools in Scania about their opinion of the concept place. Some other students asked pupils from seven different schools in Scania to draw a picture within the theme "My place in the today's world".

Changes in the society

Many new changes in society tend to influence the conditions for children's daily life. Trust and connection are not obvious for young people today. According to Sanderoth, Werner & Bååth (2009) many young people nowadays feel lost and rootless. They point out some reasons for that; globalization, migration, modern technology, the bolting world, the lost tradition bounding, confiscation of experiences and cultural release. The processes of globalization may lead to traditional patterns of life and culture departing. People feel anxiety and that their existence is splintered. Today many young people feel that they are in the middle of a crossroads. To move within a country or abroad implies consequences if you look at the identity, social network and safety. You can describe young people as cosmopolites who live their lives in a field of tensions between the local and the global.

The reality that comes from the media is more real than the reality itself. We have seen and experienced places before we have been there in real life. Time and room are released and the place has lost its meaning. Relationship becomes occasional both to people and places and that can cause insecurity. We demand that new safe structures grow. Today we often are removed from direct contact with phenomenon which has meaning for our lives. Therefore we miss the possibility to couple up our experiences with experiences that other people have got. That can make us feel abandoned. Today we are freer to create our identity if you compare with earlier generations. Young people do not take over the parent's ideal of education, patterns of life or identities. Migration implies swinging between different cultural environments.

According to Giddens' (1997) theory about a person's identity the importance is the biographic narrative you create about yourself. You design your identity which consists of conscious of the ego and the collected experiences from life that create your own personality. One important thing is that the conditions of your growth influence depending on if you have felt safe with plain borders against unrealistic demands. It is also important that a person's growing identity will be confirmed. Our identity is coupled up with belongings. Younger children seem to have various layers in their identity at the same time; one local identity, one regional and sometimes two national and one continental (Sanderoth, Werner & Bååth, 2009). The local you can refer to sense of place and the national to language and traditions of dish. People make meaning and connection in their existence when they allot facts and phenomenon import.

School as preparing for life has lost its craft. The work at school has to become meaningful now as the young ones are not motivated of using it later in life. One reason for that can be that the natural sources for inspiration are missing which means social relations and the inclination to learn and create. Children move between different arenas which are the home, the school and the free time. These are the places from which young people become their experiences. The child is the link between the different arenas and if it is possible to find and combine content from the different arenas it would help the child to become a broader reference frame. A good idea to make this possible is to let the children investigate the local place where they live. From that they develop a feeling and understanding for the place they live in. They can become a more safe identity and a feeling for connection.

To develop the identity through the importance of place is about place related learning. We are all spatial individuals. Even if the surroundings are well known we are conscious about it and react in harmony. If we interplay with others we become deeper experiences. This can develop a feeling of belonging. When young people navigate and create on a special place in the neighborhood they become aware of their local surroundings. Children who are immigrants can have more than one place. Their latest experiences are in the local place where they live and then they think of the place they have left filled with visual memories. The latter is more about relatives and cultural patterns. Studies of local environment changes earlier understanding. You learn new things. Learning is an important instrument in the children's lives and has the possibility to change spaces to places. Places which earlier have been neutral rooms change into rooms we become familiar with and also can estimate (Sanderoth, Werner & Bååth 2009).

The Swedish curriculum

In the Swedish curriculum for the subject Geography the concept of place was focused in the curriculum 1994 and the interplay between human beings and their surroundings should be studied in different landscapes (Lpo 94). In the Swedish curriculum 2011 the concept of place is still in focus and we will give some lines from the curriculum: *pupil's are supposed to make comparisons between places, regions and living conditions and what places in the surroundings can tell us according to childrens, womens and mens living conditions during different periods. The education are suppose to give the students knowledge about the map and inform about important names, sites and*

dimensionssons so the students are able to orientate and make conclusions concerning the nature and the urban landscape Lgr 11.

In the Swedish curriculum for the subject Art (which is called Bild in Swedish which means picture/image) we can find arguments for working with studies in the society in a visual way. We give you some lines from the curriculum:

Pictures and art give us unique possibilities studying and reflecting about people's way of think, create and take part in the surroundings in different times and cultures and that constitute an important part of the cultural heritage school ought to mediate.

The pictorial language is one of several ways to knowledge and personal development. When you work with pictures experiences are shaped and knowledge is produced which become visible, apprehensible and possible to mediate (Lgr 11).

Mental map

A mental map is situated in our imagination, a picture of how the surroundings develop without we are aware of it. We use mental maps to locate in life and we get an overall picture to understand the surrounding world. Our mental maps are drawn by symbols which are individual and depend on preconceived ideas, prejudices and experiences. Countries and people we know are valued in a more evident way than less known. Elements that affect/influence us are: TV, newspapers, magazines, radio, excursions, teaching in school and discussions/ talks.

As teachers we think the mental map is very important because the map shows a person's picture of the world. We have all different visions of what is periphery and central. It is a way to organize our world so we are able to orientate ourselves. We hang up our memories on it and it influences our attitudes. It is interesting to investigate the media handling of mental maps. In different media the scale is often missing, different symbols are missing and the north point of the compass is not marked. We think this is very bad because media is one element that affects us deeply.

We have found some typical signs for a mental map drawn in free-hand. Some signs are interesting to notice. The near to the home is often oversized and people often reduce unknown districts. A capital in a country is marked more often compared to other cities. A continent a person is descended / coming from is often oversized.

When you ask people which areas they remember the answers are areas with a special shape for example Italy and Island. What do we not remember? Countries situated in the middle of a continent or countries not having a coast.

The inquiry investigation

Six questions were put to 150 pupil's in four different schools in Scania during autumn 2012. Two schools, A and B, are situated in two middle-sized cities in Scania. School A, in this school's catchment area live families with homogeneous Swedish background and in School B's catchment area live families with homogeneous Swedish background mixed with families coming from other countries. Two schools C and D are situated in a bigger city in Scania and in these school's catchment areas live families that are coming

from other countries but most of the pupils are born in Sweden. The pupils are between 10 and 16 years old from 4th to 9th standard.

The questions

1. In what place are you born?
2. In which place do you live now?
3. In what province do you live in? Mark on the map.
4. What other provinces do you know? Mark on the map. Why do you know these?
5. Mark on the map of the world those continents you know.
6. Mark three countries outside Sweden. Why do you know these?

The result

1. Most pupils were born in the surroundings but a few were born abroad.
2. Most pupils lived close to the place they were born but there were one exception. It was an older pupil that lived both close to the school and in another part of the city.
3. Almost every pupil marked Scania on the map
4. Most of the pupils marked provinces that were close to Scania for example Blekinge, Halland, Småland, Gotland. Some marked Lappland, Ångermanland, Härjedalen, Östergötland, Uppland, Dalarna, Norrbotten.
Some pupils mixed provinces with cities, lakes and countries. One pupil marked Malmö in Lappland. One pupil marked Island because he was interested in volcanos and another pupil marked Italy because of the shape of the country – a high boot.
Some pupils expressed it like this “Because I have read about it, worked with it in school, I have been there. Lappland is the greatest province up north. Halland because the shopping-centre in Ullared. My sister’s boyfriend’s parents have a cottage there. We have gone skiing there. Went through going to...”
5. Here we got expanded answers such as all continents marked even Antarctic and Oceania (few), most continents marked, no continents marked, a mix between continents and countries.
6. Most of the pupils marked neighbouring nations to Sweden with the explanation we are neighbours. Few pupils marked Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania because they are small countries and are neighbours. Some marked Italy, Spain because of football or good food or I have visit the country. Many pupils mark countries because they are their home countries, they have relatives there, my aunt lives in... One pupil marked sixteen countries by the explanation I am well-informed. One pupil marked The Republic of Korea because I listen to Korean music. One pupil marked Norway by the explanation Anders Brevik (a man that shot many young people at Utöja) or France because it well known for

Discussion

Most of the pupils are born in Sweden no matter which school they joined. In school C and D some pupils are born in other Swedish cities and abroad. We think that these pupils and their families were immigrants and were located in places where the Swedish government had decided. After some years the families move to cities where their relatives live. Malmö is such a city that indicates for its cultural multiplicity. Most pupils lived close to the school except one pupil who was older he/she lived in both the neighbourhood and in another part of the city. It could depend on that the parents were separated and the pupil was old enough to take care of her/himself. Almost every pupil marked Scania on the map and marked the surrounding provinces because of the neighbourhood to Scania. Those pupils who marked other provinces made it because of their own experiences and put their experiences into a context. This was the explanation when they marked different countries too. Some pupils mixed provinces, cities, lakes and one pupil marked Malmö in Lapland. Pupils also mixed countries with continents. As a teacher I must ask how do these pupil's mental maps look like? It must be a mess in the head when somebody talks about Malmö as a city by the sea and another pupil has marked Malmö in the north of Lapland and its inland.

Concerning the concept of place, Knox & Marston, (1998, s 3) establish that "places are dynamic, with changing properties and fluid boundaries that are the product of the interplay of a wide variety of environmental and human factors. Places provide the settings for people's daily lives. It is in these settings that people learn who they are, and how they should think and behave". People experience a place in different ways and places have identities just as human beings and a place means a lot for people's development and identity. (Sanderoth, Ingrid, Werner, Margit, Båth, Sten (2009). In the thesis *Where you live you think is good* young boys and girls think their places are good even if the media picture of the place is the opposite (Van der Burgt, Danielle (2006). They have a place attachment. What role plays place attachment in a human being's life? It can give security, stimulans, remind you about your childhood and can keep a person's, group's or culture's identity (Sanderoth, Ingrid, Werner, Margit, Båth, Sten (2009). This is exactly what we can see in the results of the pupil's answers. Our identity is both given and shaped and is build by symbols which show where you belong. Younger children have many identities one local which is connected to the sense of place, one regional, one national connected to food, traditions, one continental as Southamerica or Asia. Those pupil's that belong to school C and D have probably several identities because they belong to several solidarities, the home, the place, Sweden and their homecountry. The literature talks about that these pupil's move in transnational rooms.

Children and visual expressions

When you talk about a place you often develop associations in your mind. The inner images can arise from different times but also be very close in time. You can look at the place as a spectator or you can act in the place. The investigation we have went through is about what we can understand from children's ways of expressing themselves from a special task. Instead of being interested in how skillfully the pictures are made or if the children show us pictures which have right content, we look for ways of solving this task and what that can mean. Therefore we have sorted the pictures into different categories depending on their main content and what is visible. As we know children work through

intuition and investigation. The context is deciding and instructions from the teachers have influences on the way every single pupil manage to solve the task. The pictures we have investigated are results of the children's experiences from nature and society and they have solved the task helped from intellectual, manual and social capacity.

We have looked at the collected pictures and found some interesting results which we present. First we want to present some categories which are obvious. The first are (1) a pictures which include some sort of map with addition of symbols. The second (2) is the child's own interests shaped of signs of hobbies, for example a foot-ball, a tennis-racket or an I-Phone on a background which can be similar a cattle-fish's arms or different roads. A third category (3) is the globe as a part of a bigger system. A forth (4) variant is to visualize social media in some way. A fifth category (5) is pictures in which the children tell us about their country of extraction. The younger the children are more interested in showing pictures with details from their homes, parents, sisters and brothers and grandparents and also the closest surroundings they reveal.

Semiotic analyze

An important part of increasing knowledge about visual representation is analysis. In the teacher education in Malmö University we use the semiotic analysis (Hansson, Karlsson & Nordström 2006). The method implies different steps; denotation, connotation, private association, context. In step one you describe the picture objectively with all its signs you can see and also in what way the signs belong to each other's. In step two you try to find out a cultural common meaning with others in the group. Step three is about the personal experience of the content and what you think about from your private life. Finally, step four is about in which context you meet the picture and what that add to the analysis

This is an analysis from a picture made by a pupil age 11. We have classified this picture according to a group we call a visual *map similar landscape*.

Denotation: X has painted an area that is similar a landscape existing of four parts divided through four different colors. The four parts are placed in northwest, northeast, southwest and southeast and the two upper, a brown and a green are a little bigger than the two lower, a blue and a pink. X has placed evident symbols in the center of the four parts. Up in the brown part you can see the flag of Norway on a light background and also the text: *When I lived in Norway*. Up to the left in the green part you can see a building sketched on light background. The façade is made of small pieces and there is a double door. Above there is a text, *Paletten*. Under the building X has written *Being at school*. Below in the pink part X has sketched a dummy and written *I was born 2001 8 July*. The fourth part has blue background and a heart in red. Perpendicular to the outline of the heart you can see smaller rectangular forms painted in yellow with dark contours. The text below says *My dream is that all children have alike as good as I have*. X has made an explanation about in what way X has used the colors; blue = dreams, brown = memories, green = present time and pink = in those times, the way of cycling. In the very center of the picture and where three of the four parts meet you can see a building, a house with a mansard roof, something on the roof, perhaps a chimney, two windows and a door with a vaulted upper part in the center. The roof is made of smaller pieces.

Connotation: Two of the parts, the brown one and the pink one are about time which has passed. X uses the Norwegian flag as a symbol for the time she has lived in Norway and also for the place. She also uses a symbol for birth; a teat and the pink color strengthen the feeling of a baby girl. The content of the green field is a drawing of the school where X goes. The heart in the blue field is in some way about the contemporary time. X is conscious about that she has a good life compared with other children. The heart constitutes a big area of the blue field and it beams as it wants to reach many people. The small house in the center could be about that X's home is stable and has connection to both her life in Norway and in Sweden. She has joined the different parts with lines and coupled it up with the small house which you can interpret as her home is in the center, perhaps also a secure place. The different places hang together. This is a child that feels satisfied and she shows a generosity against other children. In that way you can say that she is conscious about conditions outside her own daily life.

Context: This picture is made as a task at school and you have to know the conditions about in what way the task was presented by the teacher to say something about the context.

Discussion about the result of the pictures

One thing is very evident in our investigation and that is that children are often influenced of each other or of the teacher. Pictures from the same group often have similarities in some way. Perhaps the teacher has given the pupils instructions in some direction. It can also be about imitating a class maid you look up to because this person is more creative and skillful. As the visual language at school often is less worth than a text pupils are not so used to create narratives. More often they use symbols or other forms of simplifications. But if you ask a child for an explanation you will receive many words. The pupils who represent the globe in their picture often combine it in a symbolic way with their own hobby or initial letter of their name. This can be interpreted as the small individual in a big world. But also as a feeling of that this hobby unites many people. If you, like some pupils have done, show us signs for a hobby we can see it as a presentation of the person or an inviting to play or meet each other over the nation borders. Those pupils who involve social media in their pictures likely want to tell us about the possibilities of world-wide communication. The distance among people is reduced. The place in that way has lost its importance.

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