

## BOOK REVIEW

### Understanding the Danish Forest School Approach. Early Years Education in Practice. Second Edition

Jane Williams-Siegfredsen  
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## **Introduction**

This book review concerns the fully revised edition of *Understanding the Danish Forest School Approach – Early Years Education in Practice* by author Jane Williams-Siegfredsen. She is the director and consultant for Danish Inside-Out Nature, the Danish Forest and Nature Training School which aims to equip practitioners with the necessary knowledge and skills to develop their practice in the outdoor environment through consultancy, and training. The book locates itself in the field of outdoor education from a Danish point of view, particularly within the framework of early years education.

The target group of the book is rather wide: students; early years and childcare practitioners; teachers; other early years professionals; children's centre professionals; lecturers; advisory teachers; and setting managers. As a reviewer, I highly recommend this edition for educators, and students worldwide who are conducting, or plan to conduct learning outdoors.

## **Analysis and evaluation of the book**

The book is divided into seven different chapters, in addition to the introduction. Each chapter has its own perspective, in which the author deepens in the text. In addition, every chapter has a similar structure, starting with a short introduction, and finishing with key points entitled conclusion, reflections of practice, which enables the reader to reflect the reading into her/his own experiences and learning through questions, and finally references.

First, the introduction, where the motivation for writing the book is expressed through the author's personal narrative. In addition, the structure of the book is briefly introduced in this opening chapter. As a whole, the introduction is rather short (2 ½ pages).

The next chapter leads us to a chapter entitled 'Context' (11 pages). It aims to describe the geographical, historical, social, and cultural influences that have shaped the philosophy and pedagogy of early years settings in Denmark particularly from the Danish Forest School Approach. In effect, this chapter mainly presents the content of the book from chapter to chapter. Thus, I suggest that the content of the Context chapter would sit better in the first introductory chapter. The issues that are handled in the Context chapter are actually relevant to the Introduction. So, therefore it is confusing, to have a very short introduction, and then a second chapter which continues with issues that are suited for the introduction. It would be clearer, and better structured if the Context is included in the Introduction.

Furthermore, in the Context chapter there are some confusing, and unclear parts. There is a list of three phases of historical background to using the outdoors (page 6). My question is who has developed these phases? I would like to know the siting, for example whether it is designed by the author, or someone else. Also, the content of phase one is confusing, and unclear. I would prefer to see more precise writing, and a connection to other phases. I did not see the point of phase one in the current version.

The Theory and practice chapter is well written and structured (16 pages). It gives a professional and wide perspective into relevant pedagogics that Danish outdoor education is based on. In this chapter, I no Danish educational theorists are included. I would have appreciated the inclusion of some key Danish educational theorists in this chapter.

The Danish pedagogue chapter gives an insight into Danish pedagogues, meaning a person who is trained to work with children, young people and adults in a variety of different settings (14 pages). The chapter introduces the history, training and role of Danish pedagogues. The chapter is relevant, and well written. The content is interesting and provides practical information.

The Learning Environment chapter handled the meaning of learning environment in outdoor learning (19 pages). The chapter is stimulating, and well-structured. It contains both theoretical and practical knowledge. The outdoor learning setting is mainly viewed from a risk and challenge aspect. Here, the author deals with risky play from different perspectives, and risk management.

The Danish early years curriculum chapter covers learning processes and pedagogical content (9 pages). It is an important chapter, but currently rather laborious to read. The text would be improved by using less different fonts within the chapter. Also, less numbered lists would benefit the reader.

The Organisation of Danish early years settings is the longest in the book (28 pages), thus receiving the most attention from the author. The chapter gives information precisely about the Danish kindergarten system, and about different ways of conducting outdoor learning in the field of early years education. There are also some pictures which makes it enjoyable, concrete, and interesting for the reader. Theoretical parts are embedded throughout.

The final chapter provides insight into the future of Danish outdoor learning (8 pages). It covers the current need for outdoor learning, and includes statistics about outdoor learning in Denmark. It would have been useful to see some critiques here of outdoor learning in order to avoid drawing too romantic and positive a picture of outdoor learning. While it has been proved to have huge benefits, it would be good to get a picture of possible drawbacks.

## **Conclusion**

This book provides an important perspective in the field of outdoor learning. The Danish example of learning outdoors gives inspiration, and motivation to conduct learning outdoors. The book definitely has a place in the world. It has both theoretical and practical parts, thus delivering broad insights from this context.

It would have been helpful to have had a clearer introduction to the book. I still feel that I am missing information about the author and her input in the field. The Introduction would have been a great place to write about her contribution to the field. Chapter six, Organisation of Danish early years settings, was one of the best chapters in the book, since it gave both practical and wider insights into Danish educational practices. This is an interesting, fresh, and motivating book!