The Language of Nature

A research paper on the effectiveness of outdoor language learning

Ritgerð til BA-prófs í Ensku

Kristján Sigurðsson

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Abstract

This essay explores the credibility of the theory that outdoor education can be used to effectively teach language arts. I aim to show that the outdoor classroom is an ideal place to teach language arts if the appropriate requirements are met. The main questions of this paper will be whether or not outdoor language-learning has an impact on student motivation, if this motivation can help a student’s ability to learn a language and if outdoor language-teaching can be done effectively. Several methods will be used to answer these questions. Firstly, outdoor language-learning will be defined. Secondly, it will be shown how outdoor learning can motivate students to study their subject. Thirdly, it will be shown how outdoor education can be compared to recognized methods and philosophies regarding language-teaching. Fourthly, articles and essays will be looked over in order to demonstrate the theory in practice. And lastly, a lesson plan will be created to show an example of what an outdoor language-teaching plan would look like. The main results that were discovered in this research were, outdoor education in general has been recorded to be motivating for students that have trouble with the traditional classroom. Also, outdoor language-learning is consistent with many commonly used methods and philosophies including, Multiple Intelligence Theory, Desuggestopedia, The Grammar Translation Method, and The Direct Method. Furthermore, outdoor language-learning has been used in the past by a variety of researchers and educators including, Smith, Simpson and Gunnlaugsson. And lastly, outdoor language learning can easily be implemented into a lesson plan. The conclusion that this paper has reached is that outdoor language-learning is motivating, founded in theory, has been used before and can be used in a lesson plan.
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Introduction

When attempting to teach a language, it is important to consider the task from all sides, especially from a naturalistic side. As the world becomes smaller, through technological advances, various cultures receive opportunities to interact more than was ever possible. However, this blessing comes with a price due to the numerous linguistic barriers that human evolution has developed. It is for this reason that teachers and educators alike started to take interest in developing effective methods to teach their students different languages. However, teaching languages is a complicated process. One of the reasons for this is that there are many things to consider such as where ones priorities lie. A teacher can prioritize in vocabulary building, grammar, communication, spelling and other different factors that make up language-teaching as a whole. Due to these numerous important factors, this discipline is vast with much room for specialization and that is why it is so interesting to this author. One thing that language-teaching has in common, however, is its dependency on learner motivation.

Lack of motivation can be very detrimental to a language student. Because of this, further research needs to be done on the effects of outdoor education on the motivation level of the students that participate. The effects on the student’s motivation level within the context of language use is also something that bears investigation along with the efficiency of Outdoor Language Teaching. This paper will include a definition on what Outdoor Language Learning is, a section about the motivational benefits that it offers, how it has been implemented in the past, how it can be used in a lesson plan and the drawbacks to the method.

These are the questions that this essay will attempt to answer:

1. Can outdoor education be used to increase a student’s motivation?
2. Does this increase in motivation, if found, effect the process of language-learning?
3. Can the outdoor classroom be used effectively?

When all these questions have been answered, it will become apparent that outdoor language-teaching is an effective and beneficial teaching method for teaching language arts.
Outdoor learning

The first thing that needs to be addressed before delving deeper into the material is the definition of outdoor language-learning. Fellner, in his article "Outdoor language learning: A novel approach to language learning through outdoor education", describes it as a learner-centered teaching method in which the target language is used to achieve a certain goal in the outdoors (Fellner 3). He also refers to it as a holistic method that gives students an opportunity to experience new things that further promote the growth of their language skills (Fellner 4). Additionally, he calls it a combination of Task-Based Language Learning and outdoor education with some elements of experiential language-learning, learning through an experience rather than through class work, but it is not limited to only that (Fellner 4). However, to eliminate confusion later on, it is possible to categorize Outdoor Language Learning into two distinct, but related categories. The first category is Intentional Outdoor Language Learning. The defining quality of this category is that a lesson is conducted outside for the expressed purpose of enhancing the students’ lingual skills. This includes, taking the students to the zoo to help them learn the names of the animals, which is a method that will be used later on in this essay. The second category involves teaching students a specific vocabulary to accomplish a certain objective. This category will be called Unintentional Outdoor Language Learning. This includes, teaching students the names of the plants that inhabit an area in order to document them for a biology lesson. Regardless of these differences, both of these approaches contribute to the growth of a student’s lingual ability through their own ways and as such, for the sake of this essay, both of these approaches will be referred to as outdoor language-learning and examples of both will be given in this essay.

The second thing that should be noted is what the prerequisites are for maxing out entertainment and efficiency in outdoor language-learning. First, there is safety. A teacher needs to keep in mind numerous safety measures, such as ensuring that the students are properly equipped, to make sure no one gets hurt during the outdoor activities. However since this is a pedagogical essay, these safety measures will not be covered extensively. Secondly, a teacher needs to prepare the students properly for the outdoor activity itself. Outdoor education begins indoors so in order for the students to
be able to learn outside, context must be provided beforehand. For example, if the goal of the lesson is learning animal names, it is a good idea for the teacher to introduce the students to some of the animal names in class before going outside. Additionally, the indoor part of the lesson could be used to increase student motivation.

An additional factor that needs to be taken into consideration is the weather. For example, rain and wind prohibit the students from taking notes, looking at or making flash cards, or even use a camera. Windy rain can also be very distracting and aggravating for students that is detrimental to the learning process. Simpson, in his essay, "Outdoor education as a tool for immigrant learning: An action research study" provides a quote by Key which claims that outdoor education should be centered on a conducive weather condition (Simpson 23). Simpson also experienced the importance of weather conditions when conducting his experiment with immigrant learners. The main problem that the immigrant learners experienced was the cold weather in their new environment. More will be said about Simpson when his contribution to the field of outdoor language-learning will be brought up. To summarize this chapter, Outdoor Language-Learning can be categorized into Intentional and Unintentional Outdoor Language-Learning. Secondly, outdoor learning in general can be perilous and needs to be treated with caution. Lastly, an educator must consider the weather when planning an outdoor language-teaching lesson.

Motivation

Outdoor education can help motivate a student to advance their knowledge in the language arts. It is a widely recognized fact that motivation is vital to the success of a student’s learning experience. Fellner cites the work of McGroarty, who claims that motivation is the key to a student’s success (Fellner 5). A great deal of academic literature has been written on the subject, such as Motivation in Education by Pintrich and Schunk wherein they discuss the latest in motivational theory and research. This claim also makes sense when common sense is applied. I say this because I consider it is safe to say that an individual would do better at a task if they enjoyed it and saw its purpose. Due to the importance of motivation, a lot of research has been done on the motivational benefit that outdoor education offers and most of them have yielded positive results. For example, Peter Becker lists several reasons for why outdoor
education helps students and one of them is that nature can serve as an inspiring backdrop for activities and thus provide potential inspiration and motivation to learn. He also says that it can be very entertaining for students, which is another positive motivator (Becker 3).

Nevertheless, how can a teacher motivate students to study languages in the outdoors as opposed to other scholarly topics? Staley and Staley give some excellent examples of this in their article "Using the outdoors to teach language arts". Some of those examples include, instructing the students to read selected literature from known environmentalists such as Thoreau or Roosevelt and enacting plays that incorporate naturalist imagery (7). This method is also a good opportunity to help the students acquire the vocabulary in those works using The Grammar Translation Method. There will be further mention of that when we explore how outdoor education connects with other methods. Another way to motivate students to study languages outdoors is to show them a nature documentaries or by telling the students a story about the area that they will be visiting in the future.

Outdoor language-learning can also improve motivation among the students by tying the outdoor lesson with cultural history. For example, when working on a project about the outdoor education potentials of Ástjörn, I noticed that on top of Ásfjall, a nearby mountain, there was a cairn stone that people used for navigation in the time of the Vikings. The cairn stone could serve as an example of how people found their way in those days. Furthermore, cultural folklore can also be used to spark interest among students. An Icelandic example would be the trolls or the elves. By teaching them in this fashion, one can promote interest among the students in their cultural heritage and motivate them to learn. Simpson makes a valid point in his essay regarding outdoor language-learning and cultural assimilation. In countries such as Finland, where in which the study presented in Simpson’s paper takes place, there is a substantial emphasis on outdoor activity as a part of cultural identity, which would make it difficult for people to assimilate into their culture if they are afraid of the outdoor environment. In other words, implementing outdoor language-learning could help immigrant learners overcome any phobias they might possess regarding the outdoors while learning the language of the culture into which they are attempting to assimilate. As mentioned
earlier, Simpson’s students originally had issues with the cold in Finland. However, they quickly overcame that problem by persevering through their outdoor language-learning sessions (Simpson 30). Through these examples, we can see how outdoor language-learning, and outdoor learning in general, can have positive motivational influences on a student’s learning career.

**Relations to other theories and methods**

The theory that outdoor education is usable to teach English, as well as most languages, is consistent with other tried and true methods and theories regarding the teaching of languages. Most language-teaching methods can be used outdoors, however this essay will list a few to serve as examples. The methods and theories that will be exemplified in this chapter are, *The Multiple Intelligence Theory, Desuggestopedia, The Direct Method, The Grammar Translation Method, The Direct Method, The Content-Based Method, Experiential Language-Learning, The Task-Based Method*, and the theory of *Learner Autonomy*. The first example of this is a philosophy that has become prevalent in the pedagogical community. The theory in question is *The Multiple Intelligence Theory*. Howard Gardner introduced this theory in 1983 in his book *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*. This theory claims that different people respond to different forms of themes and stimuli. Furthermore, it argues that people have their own strengths and weaknesses and subsequently, benefit differently from different types of teaching methods since it is a good idea for a teacher to build up on what the student already knows. In her book, *Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching*, Freeman introduces the eight intelligences believed to exist. She also lists the activities that support each of them. The list is as follows:

- **Logical/Mathematical**- puzzles
- **Visual/Spatial**- videos and drawing
- **Body/Kinesthetic**- hands-on activities and field trips
- **Musical/Rhythmic**- singing and playing music
- **Interpersonal**- pair work and group work
- **Intrapersonal**- self evaluation and journal keeping
Verbal/Linguistic—note-taking and story telling

Naturalist—collecting objects from the natural world, learning their names and about them (Freemann 192).

All of these intelligences can be stimulated by using an outdoor education lesson plan as will now be demonstrated. First off is Logical/mathematical. Staley and Staley suggest using riddles to increase a student’s understanding of a word and how it fits in a sentence (21). In this case, riddles with a natural theme to them would be most appropriate. The following is an original riddle to serve as an example:

I am taller than you
And often green
Brown sometimes too
And rarely clean

ANSWER: tree (original riddle by Kristján Sigurðsson).

The Visual/Spatial Intelligence can be stimulated by allowing the students draw a picture of an outdoor environment and labeling the objects depicted there. They could label the grass, the trees and the animals in order to aid them in remembering their names. The students could also make charts on what animals and plants live in an area to compare it with another area. Body/Kinesthetic is somewhat self-explanatory. This writer makes this claim since outdoor education involves a great deal of walking and movement which would stimulate this intelligence. In addition, many of the games that are incorporated into an outdoor language lesson will require a lot of movement that would further provide the students that benefit from hands on activity with added benefits. The Musical Rhythmic Intelligence can also be incorporated into this lesson plan. Staley and Staley recommend using music with a naturalistic theme to motivate students (Staley and Staley 11). The Interpersonal Intelligence can be used by adding group work to the assignments. For example, organizing the students into pairs and asking them to come up with a vocabulary list of the things they perceived during the outdoor lesson. Having students pair up is another beneficial, although not exclusive,
advantage to outdoor language-learning which will be touched upon later in this essay when *Experiential Language-Learning* will be brought up. *The Intrapersonal Intelligence* is the same story. One option for a teacher is to have the students keep a journal of the thoughts they had on their trip as well as a vocabulary list. *The Verbal/Linguistic Intelligence* is the one that is most commonly associated with language-learning. In order to stimulate those students that are prone this intelligence, a teacher could have the students take notes on some of the animals and plants in an area. Furthermore, the students could be asked to write stories about the area, ones that involves the life in a day of an animal for example, or have the students engage in a debate about their favorite animals. *The Naturalist Intelligence* requires no explanation either since the whole lesson is centered on nature. asking the students to take home souvenirs from the trip to help them remember what they learned is a possibility. Therefore, all known intelligences can benefit from an outdoor lesson plan. These examples show that outdoor education can be used very well with the multiple intelligence philosophy.

*Desuggestopedia* is another idea that is well complimented by outdoor language-learning. Like *The Multiple Intelligence Theory*, it is more of a philosophy than a method. Freeman claims that this method was thought of by Georgi Lozanov. The reasoning behind this philosophy is that the process of language acquisition can be aided with appropriate methods. The reason that students use a limited amount of their mental capacity is due to perceived psychological barriers. Feelings of inadequacy are a good example of this since feeling inadequate can affect ones language performance, while ones language competence is actually better. Therefore, the solution that *Desuggestopedia* proposes is that these ideas need to be desuggested to the students. In other words, removing the idea that they might fail, in a weaker case, or even removing the idea that there is a lesson at all, in a stronger case (Freeman 71). Furthermore, Mustapić and Dankić claim that this method can help strengthen the trust between teacher and students (Mustapić and Dankić 218). An example of how the idea of a lesson can be desuggested to a student is asking the students to engage in an activity without telling them that they are being taught. *Desuggestopedia* relates to outdoor language-learning in the sense that the students are taken out of the classroom and into an environment that is, under the correct circumstances, free of stressors. In other
words, by taking students outside, the idea that they are being taught is being desuggested to them in hopes of breaking through the afore-mentioned psychological barriers.

_The Direct Method_ can be modified for use outdoors. Celce-Murcia claims that this method was first used in the 19th century as a viable alternative to _The Grammar Translation Method_ (Celce-Murcia 2). Freeman lists some characteristics of this method in her book, which includes, heavy usage of flash cards and asking the students to answer in full sentences, for example, "What is this? This is X" (Freeman 28-30). Implementing this method outside the classroom would be simple. For example, the teacher might start by pointing at various objects such as a mountain, if a mountain is in view, or a horse, if the trip is to the zoo. The teacher can then revisit these things later in the lesson. The best way to do this is to keep cycling through words, or objects. Nation claims repetition is important in order to remember a word and that spaced repetition is the best. That means that the time until the word is repeated should be short at first and then increase each time (Nation 76).

_The Grammar Translation Method_ can also be used in outdoor education, as was mentioned in the motivational segment of this essay. According to Freeman, this is a very old method. It was once called _The Classical method_ due to its usage in teaching Latin and Greek in the 20th century (Freeman 13). Freeman lists the goal of _The Grammar Translation Method_ as, teaching the student the grammar rules of a target language through direct reading of literature in said target language (Freeman 19). As the name suggests, the students are often asked to translate the texts as well. This would be best implemented in the indoor stages of the lesson. For example, as has been mentioned before, having the students read and translate poems and other works of literature in order to build their naturalistic vocabulary is a possibility. In other words, this method would be well suited for the preparation stage of the outdoor lesson.

Another method that this practice is compatible with is _The Content-Based Method_. Freeman describes this method as learning language through a different subject matter or content, such as chemistry or biology, where the focus is on the content and not the language (Freeman 131). In the case of outdoor education, the students could increase their English vocabulary by learning about the flora and fauna of the area that they are
visiting. Using *The Content-Based Method* is also useful in the long run. I say this because the students could use it to learn about the jargon of their desired future study subject as well as potentially help them discover said future subject.

Fellner describes outdoor language-learning as experiential. In other words, it is a method where the main objective is not learning to use a language but rather to just use it to accomplish an objective and to allow the students to absorb it more naturally (Fellner 4). This description is familiar to the method of *Communicative Language-Teaching* since its main goal is to train students to be able to use language communicatively rather than just learning about its grammar rules and other conventions. According to Celce-Murcia, this philosophy was started in the 1970s by Hymes and Halliday who were of the opinion that language was a communication tool above everything else (Celce-Murcia 6). One way a teacher can encourage *Communicative Language-Learning* in the outdoors is to organize the students in groups to have them accomplish a task.

The next method that can be used for outdoor language-teaching, in conjunction with other methods, is the *Task-Based Method*. In this method, according to Freeman, a teacher attempts to teach the students the meaning of words by giving them orders in the target language and having them carry it out if they understood (Freeman 149). This could be implemented in the outdoors with commands such as "pick up that rock". In fact, an entire game can be developed using this method. The game could consist of the teacher giving commands such as: "everyone in a red shirt raise your hand" anyone in a red shirt that fails to comply is out of the game. The same would apply to people not wearing red shirts that raise their hands. This could promote contemplating about the meaning of the words since the students need a minute to contemplate whether or not the instructions apply to them.

Outdoor language-learning can help enhance learner autonomy. Learner autonomy is a word that has yet to be universally defined. However, one of the definitions that have been given to it is: the students’ ability to take charge of their own education. In a sense, this is what teachers should strive for since it makes the student willing and able to master the skills being taught. So how can outdoor language-learning aid learner autonomy? As said before, outdoor language-learning is very
inspiring and fun for some students. If a student finds the activities fun, they will be more willing to participate. In addition, when outdoor language-learning is conducted in a familiar place, a local park or a zoo for instance, the student will still have access to it even after the lesson and therefore promote the growth of learner autonomy.

This particular phenomenon is not so much a theory or a method as it is an activity. The activity in question is using games as a teaching tool. A game can turn a restrictive and monotonous teaching session into a fun filled activity to which the students will look forward and at which they will try their best. The reason that this method is mentioned here because it fits extremely well into the outdoor classroom format, especially for younger learners. Dolati and Mikaili conducted a study on the effectiveness of playing games for vocabulary acquisition for Persian students of the intermediate level. This study was presented in their work "Effects of Instructional Games on Facilitating of Students’ Vocabulary Learning". The study involved assembling seventy students together and having them play games that were meant to increase their English vocabulary. What the study found out was that allowing the students to play instead of using conventional learning methods yielded much more positive results than the traditional approaches. The students were more motivated, happy and the more shy and reclusive students stood out (Dolati and Mikaili 1223). However, how does this translate into outdoor language-learning? Here are some reasons why playing games translates very well into an outdoor environment. The outdoors provide a larger and less constraint setting than a classroom would, allowing the students to move more freely and explore the area more. Some of the vocabulary building games that would be enriched in the outdoors include, scavenger hunts and charades.

In conclusion of this chapter. Outdoor language-teaching is compatible with The Multiple Intelligence Theory, Desuggestopedia, The Direct Method, The Grammar Translation Method, The Direct Method, The Content-Based Method, Experiential Language-Learning, The Task-Based Method, and the theory of Learner Autonomy. It has been shown here that using outdoor education to teach language arts has an empirical basis through its relations with these methods and when used properly, can enrich and influence a lesson while still having some empirical evidence to back it up.
The Theory in Practice

Despite earlier claims of its rarity, outdoor language-learning has been implemented in the past. There have been many of cases where it has been tried with mostly positive results. In this section, the academic literature on the topic of outdoor language-learning will be explored. This will be done by exploring research papers on the subject. In order to be counted as an appropriate research paper for the topic, these works of literature must meet certain criteria. Firstly, they need to be about the teaching of a language, both Intentional and Unintentional Outdoor Language-Teaching qualify. Secondly, they need to include an outdoor setting. Lastly, they need to be published sources.

One of the instances where outdoor language-teaching has been tried is with Purdie and Niel in 1999 where they tried to use outdoor education, a western philosophy, to try to teach students of Japanese descent. The work in which this was presented is called "Japanese students down-under: is Australian outdoor education relevant to other cultures?" The lesson plan was divided into several parts, however an English lesson was included which was designed to help the students understand some of the subject material and to teach them some English competence in general. The lessons were conducted in two half-day classes along with three full day classes every two weeks. The lesson turned out to yield results that were mostly negative. The authors themselves explain as to why this might have happened. Firstly, it could have been that the English teaching parts of the lessons simply did not mix well with the other parts. Another reason the authors list has to do with culture. They claimed that the outdoor education program was simply not optimal for those in the class. In fact, the closing word of the article is that outdoor educators need to be very mindful of their students cultural background in order to be able to use outdoor language-learning (Purdie and Niel 56).

Culin wrote about a concentrated effort to teach children biology in his essay, "Butterflies Are Great Teachers: The South Carolina Butterfly Project". However, it soon became apparent that this project could help students in other disciplines as well, including the language arts. This project was originally started in 1997 by a group of educators as a response to the low scores of children in American schools. Their
solution for this was to take their students outside to a butterfly garden to see if it would help them. The results were very effective in increasing student motivation. As stated before, this initiative was intended to be for teaching natural sciences, but the potential teaching language arts was soon discovered. They had the students write poems and stories about the garden and the insects that inhabit it. The students also did research about the creatures which increased their vocabulary (Culin 17). This project demonstrated the motivational benefits that outdoor learning can provide since its participants had low grades to begin with. This example shows that outdoor language-learning is extremely flexible and can be implemented as long as someone notices the potential for it.

Smith tried to teach students how to read by using outdoor language-learning which yielded positive results. The name of the article in which she documents this is "Outdoor Education as a Method for Teaching Reading". Her methods were essentially content-based with the content of the outdoor camp that they were situated in as content. The students were in the sixth, seventh, eighth and ninth grade where the students with low literacy scores were given priority of participation. The overall procedure started with a multiple choice test where students were tested in their vocabulary in the four subtopics of the program which were archery, forestry, boating and swimming. They were then told that there would be no failing or passing in this program, which hints at the use of Desuggestopedia as described by Freeman. During the outdoor class, the meaning of some words were discussed by the teachers and the students. For example, they discussed the pronunciation of the word conservation, the role of the prefix re-, as in the recurve bow, and the difference between breath and breathe. The outcome of this experiment was very positive. Here are the main results reported by Smith in her conclusions:

1. Outdoor education can be used effectively as a method of teaching reading, for it offers a relaxed situation and an opportunity to present material which is meaningful to the child in that situation.
2. Children learned that reading does not always have to be an experience, which can cause anxiety, or an experience, which is unrelated to life. It can be meaningful in a given life situation.
3. Attitudes toward reading were excellent. Little resistance, if any, was shown.
4. Comparable gains were made by both boys and girls.
5. Mean gains were highest for groups comprised of sixth graders. Second in achievement were seventh graders. Smallest gains were evidenced from eighth and ninth graders’ scores.
6. Gains were significantly higher for campers returning to camp for a second or third week.
7. It seemed that language gains were more noticeable than gains in reading skills, per se. (Smith 232-233).

It bears noting how Smith placed emphasis on discussing the words. Nation claims that, exploring different meaning of words will help students remember it better (Nation 69). Also, it seems that Smith’s research indicated that outdoor learning can increase a student’s motivation since her students had low grades. Considering, this seems that this was an example of successful outdoor first language-learning.

The next example of the theory in practice is the research paper by Simpson that has often been referenced in this essay. The main purpose of the research was to gauge student and teacher reaction to outdoor language-learning for immigrants in Finland. In order to accomplish this, he had four different groups of students based on their skill level, highest level in one group and the lower levels in their respective groups. He also had four teachers whom he classified as teachers A-D. The teachers each had a different amount of experience in teaching in the outdoors, A having the least and D having the most. The study was conducted in four lessons, each consisting of four to five activities. Some of those activities included, placing the names of facial features on the correct part of the face to familiarize the students with the names of these parts, singing the song head, shoulders, knees and toes to teach them about different body part names and finding an object that they liked in nature and explain why they like it. They even did something that was not done in any other lesson to be discussed in this essay, other than the lesson plan, which is to conduct a grammar lesson outdoors. For example, they would have the students line up in order from shortest to tallest or have them walk a different distance to explain the difference between comparative adjectives. The results
were extremely positive. Teachers saw the benefits in taking the language class outside and the students felt that it was a fun experience. One interesting thing was that the more quiet students became more vocal as if they were no longer afraid to speak. (Simpson 28-30). It was mentioned before that outdoor education had a great impact on students’ confidence and this is a good example of that. In the case of Simpson, we can observe that outside language-learning can help people learn a language of a particular culture while getting to know the natural part of said culture. Simpson also showed that motivating his students had a positive impact their second language development. This has been a good example of training by doing. By experiencing the natural side of the Finnish culture, the students learned better the language of the culture.

The next case is a native one, at least from an Icelander’s point of view. It is about the teaching methods of Björn Gunnlaugsson of Norðlingaskóli in Reykjavík. Norðlingaskóli is a school that has always held outdoor education in high regards and according to an interview with Gunnlaugsson, the school was forced to adopt this approach due to simple housing problems. However, Gunnlaugsson was the one who originally started using the method to teach foreign languages. He found it limiting to tie a lesson to a specific theme such as plants or animals so he merely taught the students in the outdoors the same way that he would teach them in the indoors. This might seem to be an act of taking the class outside simply for the sake of taking it outside, in other words, relying more on the method and less on the reasoning behind the method. However, he began to see a difference in the class once they were outside. There were those among the students that were less capable and less sure of themselves than the other students that benefited greatly from this change of scenery. This is similar to the point that Simpson made regarding the Finnish immigrants that also had confidence problems. Gunnlaugsson noticed this and decided to develop a way to eliminate test anxiety by taking the English exam outside the classroom. He devised a creative method of testing which was meant to test student’s reading comprehension. He organized the students into eight groups from those with the most competence in English and those with the least. He gave each of the groups a different text to read. The more advanced students got a more difficult text and the less advanced got easier ones. He then told them that these texts would be on the exam and that they would be asked questions about them during it. On the day of the test, they went outside and
Gunnlaugsson reshuffled the groups. He placed a member from each initial group into each of the new groups. He then told them that they needed to find the questions in the woods. The questions could have been from any of the texts given to the different groups. In other words, only one person from each group could know the answer. So even the least confident student got the feeling that each of them were responsible for the success of their group. Their knowledge was just as important as the knowledge of the students who had the greater experience. The outcome of the exam was mostly positive and gave many of the lower achieving students a chance to shine (Gunnlaugsson). The initiative that Gunnlaugsson took to teach his students English through outdoor education was a good decision based on the results that his students showed. Not only that, Gunnlaugsson showed that language arts can be effectively taught in the outdoors. This showcases that one must sometimes step out of convention if one is to discover something useful.

Tatarchuk and Eick wrote an article, which shows how they could teach students English and natural science at the same time through outdoor education. In other words, their method was Content-based Language-Teaching where the emphasis was just as much on the content as it was on the target language. At first this approach seemed questionable since it seemed to have a lack of focus and would cause students to be unsure of what was being asked of them to do. However after reading their article, "Outdoor integration: Looking to nature to accentuate science and language arts connections", this approach seemed more plausible. The first evidence they provide for this approach is that the processing skills that students use for scientific-learning and language-learning overlap in some areas. The skills that both disciplines use as listed by Tatarchuk and Eick are, predicting, inferring, comparing and contrasting and communicating (Tatarchuk and Eick 36). Tatarchuk and Eick then take the reader through a lesson in which they use this method by teaching the students about seeds. There are other lesson plans listed in their article, however going into all of them would take time and using one example should suffice. The lesson started in the classroom as is customary for outdoor language-learning. The students began by reading a book in English about the subject matter. The plan already has some element of language-teaching to it. They also made diagrams depicting the changes a seed goes through before becoming a tree. Additionally, they compared the names of the seeds they found.
This allowed them to learn more names of seeds and the adjectives that best describe them. Before heading out, students were asked to record their prediction regarding what sort of seeds they might find. If we look at this from the perspective of The Multiple Intelligences Theory, we would see that this activity supports the Intrapersonal Intelligence as well as gives the students a chance to practice their English writing skills. The students were then sent out to gather seeds and compare them with the seeds that other students found. The students then discussed the qualities of the seeds. One of the points brought up was that some seeds were hard and that they relied on animals carrying them. (Tatarchuk and Eick 36-37). In this lesson plan, and the others listed in the article, the students had a chance to learn both English and biology in the same lesson where outdoor education helped them immensely. Not only that, but it was also demonstrated how a student’s first language skills could be improved with outdoor learning.

Creating a lesson plan

Now that proper research has been done on how outdoor language-teaching works, it is time to create a custom lesson plan. In this plan, it is assumed that the students are 12-13 years of age, Icelandic and of varied competence levels. The theme of the lesson will be animals and animal related words and the goal will be to teach the students the English names of animals and other vocabulary that is associated with them. This goal will be achieved by offering a diverse lesson in order to reach as many students in the group as possible. From a Multiple Intelligences perspective, the goal would be to reach out to as many types of intelligences as possible. After this lesson plan, the students will be expected to know some basic vocabulary involving the Icelandic farm animals. Now that the group and goals of the plan have been introduced, the actual lesson can begin

As stated before, outdoor education begins indoors. Thus, it is important to have the students learn about the topic before the outdoor part of the lesson. For the sake of consistency, this part of the lesson shall be called the pre-lesson since it is in essence a lesson that comes before the actual lesson, or the outdoor part. Motivating the students during the pre-lesson can be done in a variety of ways. One of these ways is playing and
having the students sing songs that relate to animal such as Old McDonald. However, not every student is motivated by music. Because of this, the lesson will also include a story that relates to the subject matter. A good story for an Icelandic audience would be one of the many Icelandic fables and legends regarding animals. A good example would be the fable of the Nikur, a horse with its hooves backwards that drowned children who sat on it, or the story of the worm of Lagarfljót. All of these stories would be presented in English. The reason for picking these stories is so that the students can experience a demonstration of their own cultural heritage while learning another language.

The setting of the outdoor lesson will be the Icelandic national zoo. This area is a great place for students who wish to learn the names of animals to visit which we will find out more about later. The zoo is located in the Icelandic capital of Reykjavík and is easily accessible by bus, public or commissioned, so accessibility is not a problem. This lesson plan assumes that the weather conditions are acceptable. The outdoor lesson will be split into four parts. Each part will consist of a description and reasoning behind the approach.

The first part will encourage independent exploration and discovery. The students will be asked to explore the zoo and write down the English and Icelandic names of the animals they find. This is convenient for them since the zoo has the names of the animals written down in both Icelandic and English. This step of the lesson draws elements from *The Grammar Translation Method*. This is because the students are essentially translating the words they already know into English. The differences are that, instead of a dictionary they are using the signs posted around the zoo and that they are working with single words rather than a text. This way, the students can explore the names of the animals in a more interactive and less constrictive way than, for example, looking up the names in a dictionary. In addition, the students receive a chance to see the animals, which they are being asked the names of, up close which serves as a pleasant experience to help further motivate them. Lastly they will be assigned one specific animal each. They will be asked to write down its main characteristics such as size, colour or skin texture.

The second part of the lesson will, draw elements from the first part. This will be a presentation from each of the students on the animal that they were assigned. They
will be asked to describe the animal with as much detail as they can. Suggested topics will be the animal’s place of origins, feeding habits or appearance. Since these students are rather young, they would not be expected to form entire sentences about these characteristics. Some simple words such as big or hairy would suffice. These words will be important since the students will be asked to use them in the next exercise. The information is usually supplied by the zoo, which is another reason for why the zoo is such an ideal location for this lesson. The purpose for this is to attempt to make some of the shyer and reclusive students overcome their lack of confidence using the outdoors, similar to what Gunnlaugsson did when he noticed an improvement in student confidence. Another good reason for doing this is that the entire class is receiving verbal input.

The third activity will be a simple lesson in comparative adjectives, namely, the ones that they heard during their presentation part. For example, the students will be shown a picture of three animals and asked to give them the labels, small smaller and smallest and big bigger and biggest. The first reason for this is to teach the students about the comparative adjectives. The second reason is that Nation claims that explaining to the students the usefulness of a word and ask them to study it in depth will help them to remember it (Nation 63).

The last activity will be a scavenger hunt. The students will be organized into teams. The goal of each team is to find the clues about a certain animal of which the teacher has thought. The clues are placed near the animal signs in the zoo. For example, if the correct answer is a bull, a clue will be put on the cow sign saying that the animal has horns. The goal of this exercise is to influence the students to remember such words and learn a new word in the end. This is done mainly for the fun factor and the gives the students a unique experience, which will help to make the vocabulary more accessible in the future. After the lesson is done, it is important to evaluate the students. For this purpose, a quick exam will be conducted shortly after the trip to see how the students benefited from this lesson plan.

To summarize what this lesson plan has done. By asking the students to find the names of the animals, it has promoted self-exploration and possibly learner autonomy. In addition, if we look at this lesson plan from the perspective of Multiple Intelligence
Theory, this lesson plan promotes four of them. Those are, Body/Kinesthetic, by asking the students to walk around to seek their answers, Intrapersonal, by allowing them to work in pairs, Linguistic, by having them present their animal, and finally Natural, by immersing the students in a natural environment. By letting the students make a presentation, they receive opportunity to use the words that they have discovered and it also stimulates those more prone to the Verbal/Linguistic approach. The lesson on comparative adjectives will help the students find new uses for the words they discovered and hopefully see a pattern for how comparative adjectives work in the English language. If this lesson plan is successful, it should provide a fun filled and constructive experience of which the students will have fond memories.

**Drawbacks to the method**

There are, however, many drawbacks to outdoor language-teaching. Its greatest strength is its ability to help people who are having difficulties with other methods. In other words, some people can benefit from this method simply because of their genetic structure or temperament. However, therein lies its weakness. The fact that there are people who benefit greatly from this method must also mean that there are those students that would view the method as a waste of time and not benefit nearly as much from it. For example, let us look at a class composed of about twenty students. If half of the students would benefit from outdoor language-learning then the other half might not. This is why an outdoor language teacher needs to be extra observant to a student’s needs in the outdoors. Another flaw in this approach is that it is very limited when it comes to teaching grammar. One could make the argument that one could use the *Grammar Translation Method* in the pre-lesson in order to teach students grammar while informing them about the subject. The lesson plan even suggested using outdoor education to teach adjectives. However, the pre-lesson should not be the main focus of an outdoor language-learning lesson plan and thus does not receive adequate attention. In fact, it could be said that outdoor education and grammar are philosophically opposed to one another. Outdoor education is concerned with freedom and exploration while grammar is concerned with constraint and tradition. The next flaw revolves around the qualification of the teacher. In the example of Purdie and Niel, one of the
main reasons that their lesson failed was that they were not mindful enough of the needs of the students and because of that, their research provided negative results. This displays that teachers need special training in the outdoor lesson program in order to be effective in teaching it and since language-learning is not the primary objective of outdoor education methods, it is fair to assume that a lot of language teachers do not possess this training. The drawbacks to outdoor language-learning can also come from the outside as will be discussed next.

The next flaw has already been discussed in this essay. It is the fact that the success of the lesson is often predicated on if the weather is being cooperative or not. Lesson plans vary in how flexible they are and some of them need to follow a rigid time schedule. In these cases, a bad weather day can be the difference between success and failure. The last flaw has to do with location. Not every school has access to a location that would fit an outdoor language lesson. A school in a major city would be a good example of this. There could of course be bus tours scheduled, however that would take away a lot of the benefits mentioned in this essay such as, the students ability to revisit the site on their own time, the emotions that cultural ties can provide, and it would not be as cost effective. To summarize the flaws, outdoor education is simply not for everyone or for all aspects of language-teaching. Teachers are not always qualified to use the method. It is risky to assume a cooperative weather and not all schools are situated in places that would suit the method.

Conclusion

To summarize, outdoor language-learning is a great way to teach students about reading, vocabulary, the world around us and even the particular culture of a country. Outdoor education has shown that it can greatly motivate students, by providing them with inspiring imagery and emphasis on cultural heritage, to improve at the subject they are studying. Not only that, but it is also compatible with existing theories such as Multiple Intelligence Theory, The Direct Method, Learner Autonomy and Experiential Learning. It has been shown to have its merits in practical usage as was made apparent in the cases of Smith, Simpson, and Gunnlaugsson. On the other hand, Purdie and Niel made it apparent that in order for outdoor language-learning to work, a teacher needs to be aware and sensitive to a student’s needs as well as their cultural background. They
also discovered that outdoor language-learning is simply not for everyone. In contrast, Culin made it apparent that outdoor language-learning can be taught even if it is not what one intended to do in the first place. Additionally, it was made apparent in Culin’s article that sometimes students need the outdoor classroom to improve. In addition, Tatarchuck and Eick discovered that one can teach students not only one but two disciplines in one lesson. By observing what skills the students used, they were able to construct their lessons so that the students could use these skills to study two subjects at the same time. Smith showed us that it was possible to increase a student’s reading skills by taking the class outside. By giving students with lower test scores priority, Smith showed further that outdoor learning can help students that have trouble with the conventional classroom. Simpson showed that outdoor language-learning can be used as a way to immerse a student in the culture of the country in which the target language is spoken, particularly if the lesson is conducted in said country. It was also shown in Simpson’s essay that teachers need to be more familiar with outdoor education. Gunnlaugsson gave a great example of how outdoor language-learning can eliminate test anxiety and promote a sense of self worth. By constructing the outdoor exam in such a way that every student had valuable information, he was able to increase their confidence. Outdoor language-learning can be implemented in a variety of different ways as was shown with the lesson plan created for this essay. By creating a lesson plan with outdoor language-teaching in mind, it has been shown that creating such a lesson can be done by most people. Additionally, it shows that the methods and philosophies that have been discussed in this essay, such as Multiple Intelligence Theory, can work in a practice as well as in theory. We also delved into the weaknesses of the method, which was essential in order to understand it further. The weaknesses of any theory need to be observed just as much as its strengths if the theory is to stand the test of time.

Regarding the questions that were asked at the start of this essay, Smith’s research indicates that outdoor learning can help students who are less motivated since her test subjects were mostly ones with low test scores. This was also true in Culin’s article as it was centered around students with low grades as well. Simpson showed that this motivation can be helpful in learning a language with his immigrant group, and Gunnlaugsson’s outdoor exam and Tatarchuck’s and Eick’s lesson about seeds showed that outdoor language-teaching can be done in a effective manner.
In my opinion, outdoor language-learning bears further investigation. This essay could be seen as a compilation of works that explore this topic but I believe new studies need to be conducted. The scarcity of suitable work materials I experienced when working on this essay hints that this topic needs more coverage. To ultimately conclude this essay, outdoor language-learning is a fantastic method. But like all methods, it needs to be used correctly and in association with other methods.
Works Cited


Gunnlaugsson, Björn. Personal interview. 18.05.2013


