

A pedagogical model of exploration in education

Professor Elin Eriksen Ødegaard, based at the Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, has explored the pedagogy underpinning early childhood education. Through this, she developed a dialogic model which includes a concern for diversity and holism. Her early childhood educational dialogic engagement model proposes a collaboration between all stakeholders where child, teacher and the family's voices are heard and respected. The model encourages the incorporation of both local and global concerns where the need for sustainability is identified within globalisation, nature, and family.

Professor Elin Eriksen Ødegaard, based at the Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, provides a pedagogical model that can be used as a thinking tool to educate young children within a broad cultural-historical and sustainability framework. It offers a new culturally sensitive pedagogical approach to support human and non-human sustainable futures.

CULTURAL NOTIONS OF CHILDHOOD

Throughout history, shared knowledge and attitudes regarding infancy and childhood have changed as they are hugely dependent of culture. Local cultures' views of the very young have been explained and explored with a different focus internationally and across research disciplines (such as psychology, medical, education). International educational studies have focused on childhood cognitive and academic development whereas Norwegian educational studies traditionally follow a social pedagogical Nordic approach; however, over the last decade academic and language development have come

to the forefront of attention. In response to this trend, Prof Ødegaard states that culturally, within education and the family, in Norway, there are three deeply connected paths a young child needs to negotiate: society's ideals and expectations of them, their interaction with the physical world, and their sense and management of self in relationship to others and the world in which they live.

As part of this negotiation, the young child will need to understand through habits and experiences how to manage and participate in the world. They will need to know what artefacts to choose and use in diverse and unpredictable situations. They will need to know how to include others in their lives and activities and how to relate to non-human forms of life.

Prof Ødegaard aimed to explore how educational pedagogy needs to be structured to facilitate young children's development. She developed an early childhood educational model called 'exploration as dialogical engagement' to underline the demand for commitment

by leaders and staff in building cultures of exploration. Culture underpins all aspects of living with others and whilst it may feel strong and static, culture is always developing, it is dynamic.

CULTURE AND GLOCALISM

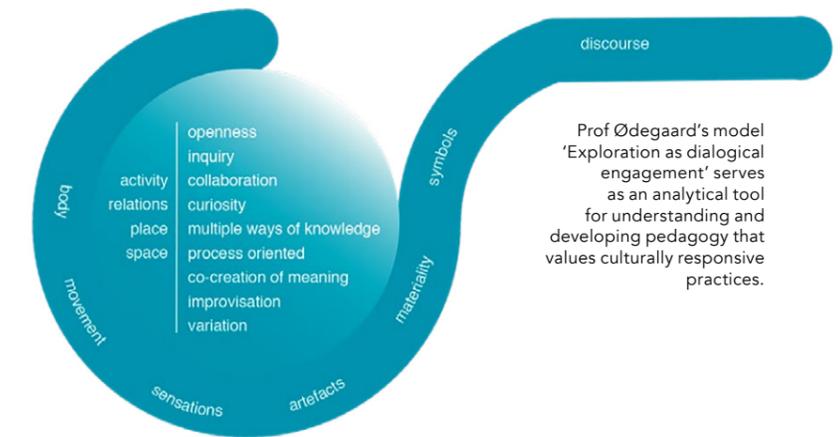
Culture impacts on the way a person perceives the world and their worldview; it is the outward expression of shared meaning which occurs within a particular time and place. Culture is glocal, both global and local: it can be experienced at a global level, a country or societal level, or even sub-culture level such as a racial or religious group. Glocalism provides an understanding that not all cultural experiences are influenced by global ideas. Instead, local history and traditions can offer additional richness to cultural identity. It underpins the idea that cultures can be blended, parts of it rise from local experiences and some from more global interactions. This also supports the idea that culture is dynamic, identifying it exists within a given time and space.

All cultures will, though, include a set of assumptions about the world which may be expressed symbolically through language, art, and ritual. Culture includes a knowledge or power base, behavioural norms and an ideology or belief system. Cultures of exploration are those where individuals and groups are curious, open to change and difference which can facilitate sustainability for people and nature.

EXPLORATION AS DIALOGICAL ENGAGEMENT

Prof Ødegaard presents a vision of children's exploration as a dialogical engagement providing the characteristics of explorative practices and how these interact with the central conditions of dynamic relations, activities, time and space. She argues that children's exploration and cultural formation are crucial in their creation of meaningful and compassionate lives. This is important for non-human and human worlds to ensure the survival of both. Exploration practices can be verbal, silent practices, driven by body, performance and doing. The concept of exploration entails a dynamic process and a positive 'doing'.

Exploration as dialogical engagement



Prof Ødegaard's model 'Exploration as dialogical engagement' serves as an analytical tool for understanding and developing pedagogy that values culturally responsive practices.

Exploration in education has been a focus of early childhood education since Friedrich Froebel, the German pioneering educationalist (1782-1852), influenced early childhood pedagogy around the world, and especially in the

and learning. This theory is gaining new impetus with policy developments such as the Norwegian framework plan which highlights that children learn through interaction, dialogue, and exploration. Policy makers in Norway go on to say

these facilitate critical thinking, ethical judgement, ability to resist and action competence.

DIALOGISM

While the focus of Prof Ødegaard's

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Nordic countries. He recognised that children had the urge to play and that the educator could support the child to discover the wonders of nature. Later, Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget focused on cognitive development and American philosopher John Dewey emphasised experience and problem solving. For Piaget and Dewey, experiential exploration was key to development

model is exploration, this is underpinned by dialogism. This is a move away from both child-centred and teacher-centred approaches in education. A child-centred approach which has been popular in contemporary Western cultures may be unsustainable as it places too much responsibility on the child, thereby ignoring the value of history and wider cultural influences. Teacher-centred



Prof Ødegaard's dialogical model moves away from both child- and teacher-centred approaches in education.

approaches to education, more popular in Eastern cultures, lack appreciation of what the individual child might bring to the learning environment. Dialogism falls under the educational pedagogy of complexity. The interaction between all stakeholders leads to a shared responsibility for learning, enabling an acknowledgement of historical knowledge and space for culture to develop. This should provide for a sustainable future for all. Sustainability is a contemporary global concern. Prof Ødegaard argues that it has a cultural and creative dimension which provides important content areas for early childhood education which include local heritage, arts, the diversity of nature, and indigenous culture.

Using a dialogism pedagogy, the teacher brings together all the diverse voices available to the classroom, raising awareness of the movement of cultural expressions and their dynamism. Spoken language, bodily language, position, and performative actions are all linked in time and space to these cultural expressions.

THE OPEN LOOP MODEL

Prof Ødegaard's model 'Exploration as dialogical engagement' serves as an analytical tool for understanding and developing pedagogy that values culturally responsive practices, and exploring practices and worldviews of sustainability.

In this model, culturally responsive and sustainable pedagogical practices include six primary characteristics. Three characteristics are collaboration with stakeholders and partners, openness towards the world, children's and family's experiences, and stories leading to co-creation of meaning and improvisation in everyday activities. The other characteristics are inquiry and curiosity towards multiple terms of knowledge, acknowledging emotional and performative, as well as academic knowledge, variation of cultural resources and topics through a process-oriented approach with a high awareness of possible new beginnings and manifestations.

For Prof Ødegaard, the use of a metaphor was useful to visualise her model. She chose a half loop stating: "The shape of what could be a loop, a halfway loop-hole or a spoon was chosen

to indicate dynamics, movement, process and change."

From this metaphor Prof Ødegaard offers a diagrammatic image of her model. The loop itself provides the components that child and teacher bring to the exploratory learning including discourse, symbols, materiality, artefacts, sensations, movement, and body. This occurs in a specific time and space, but these are always in a state of change – they are dynamic – and so they sit within the open loop alongside relations and activity. Another component of the model are the attitudes and states of mind that are brought to the learning which are openness, enquiry, collaboration, curiosity, process oriented, multiple ways of knowing, co-creation of meaning, improvisation, and variation.

The culture laid down by Prof Ødegaard can be used to address both global and local concerns for sustainability for all.

The model includes:

- Resources: discourse, symbols, materiality, artefacts, sensations, movement, and body
- Processes: Time, space, relations and activity
- Culture: openness, enquiry, collaboration, curiosity, process oriented, multiple ways of knowing, co-creation of meaning, improvisation, and variation



Educators can support children to explore and value nature, thereby developing worldviews of sustainability.

Resources refers to everything that can provide a learning platform: conversations (discourse), symbols (such as writing) as well as bodily experiences (including how something feels) and nonverbal communication.

The processes are the ongoing continuous part of the educational model. These processes can change their nature but are still ongoing: it was one o'clock, it is now two o'clock, time has changed but it is still ongoing. Space is another example: the space in which we learn today may be the classroom but tomorrow may be the home or the mountains. In sum, it describes the area in which learning and cultural formation can take place. The mental processes are embodied and ongoing processes. The same

is true for relationships: you are my mother at the moment, you hug me to educate me about care, tomorrow you may scold me for not doing the dishes – relationships are always a process and affected by behavioural change.

Alongside the 'things' and 'ongoing experiences' Prof Ødegaard's educational model as laid out above includes culture. Culture includes things and ongoing processes but also roles, expectations, and rules on a way of being in a world with others. The culture laid down by Prof Ødegaard is one which fulfils the expectations, attitudes and ideology of Norway, but she believes that it can be used to address both global and local concerns for sustainability for all.

A THINKING TOOL

This educational model has both social and environmental dimensions including global and local concerns within time and space. It provides for teachers, children, and families to support contemporary active citizenship which values diversity and nature. Exploration as dialogical engagement could be used as a thinking tool to develop and evaluate the implementation of culturally responsive practices and worldviews of sustainability.



Behind the Research

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Research Objectives

Professor Elin Eriksen Ødegaard has developed a thinking tool of relevance for policymakers and practitioners for early childhood education.

Detail

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Bio

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Collaborators

[Conditions for Children as Explorers](#)

References

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Personal Response

What inspired you to conduct this research?

Our time demands collaboration across fields and generations to solve huge problems. I believe that finding ways to ensure that we, as a global society, live sustainably is the top priority if we are to ensure that nature and the next generation are able to live in harmony on the planet. We must start with the youngest, but early intervention needs alternative models than the one of the teachers transmitting knowledge. I believe new knowledge is created in collaboration. I have always found pleasure and meaning in communicating with children and my experience as a teacher has told me that education is at its best when energy and engagement is brought into play and exploration.