I Learn Nothing!

-Voices of Visitors at Youth Clubs in Sweden

Lisbeth Lindström¹

¹ Department of Culture, Communication and Education, Luleå University of Technology, Luleå, Sweden Correspondence: Lisbeth Lindström, Department of Culture, Communication and Education, Luleå University of Technology, Luleå, SE., 97187, Sweden. E-mail: Lisbeth.Lindstrom@ltu.se

Received: May 3, 2012 Accepted: May 9, 2012 Published: June 1, 2012 doi:10.5539/jel.v1n1p84 URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/jel.v1n1p84

Abstract

The purpose of this article is first to make visible, examine, and illuminate the young generation's perception of what they learn and how they learn during their visits to youth clubs and similar meeting places; second, through visitors' own comments, interviews with visitors, and analysis of staff's diaries, to reflect on and analyze the unconscious learning that might have been visible; and third, to discuss how these particular contexts contribute to learning. The research was conducted using two questionnaires, staff daily notes in diaries, and through interviews with young people visiting youth clubs and similar meeting places. The results of the empirical study show that there is a gap between the youngsters' perception of what they learn or verbalize with the help of youth leaders and what they actually learn. To conclude, these meeting places can have a compensatory function to schools; a sort of expanded learning to help young people develop their citizenship. However, I shall take a critical view and argue that youth clubs and similar meeting places lack in making visible what young visitors actually can learn from their visits. To make it possible I suggest that the learning situations must be verbalized, discussed and made visible together with the youth leaders and the group of visitors or the individual visitors.

Keywords: youth, learning, youth clubs, citizenship

1. Introduction

In this article, the focus was on learning outside school where much learning takes place without systematic teaching. The analysis of the empirical data aims at making visible what is often invisible for, in this case, the youths themselves and their leaders took place. This research has been conducted in Swedish local councils in the environment of meeting places for youth. These meeting places can have different names such as youth club, house of all activities, the house of youth, or similar names. In most cases these meeting places are organized and managed by the municipalities but there may be other actors as well, such as different sports organizations, associations or the church--most of them funded by the local councils. Youth clubs and similar meeting places for youth are financed by taxes. They are free of charge for visitors, are open almost every evening, and you do not need membership as a visitor. Youth clubs and similar meeting places are informal institutions compared to schools where one can come and go as desired, with no demands for doing things; it is possible to just hang around with friends. But if you are interested, activities such as playing billiards, table tennis, parlor games, play cards or computer games, draw and paint, arrange excursions and so forth abound. The visitors may also start their own activities of interest, such as forming a film club, running a café, or making outdoor trips.

What we learn outside school is often seen as common sense, everyday knowledge, and social knowledge. However, as meeting places for youth are tax funded there are expectations from authorities--national, regional, and local--that these places shall contribute to the development of young people as citizens as well as to development their citizenship.

In the governmental policy for the youth, citizenship plays a central part. Hence it has been a highly prioritized issue for the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs for many years. Some objectives of the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs policy are set by the Swedish government. First, young people shall have possibilities to influence the development of the society in general, as well as their own lives and their local environment. Second, young people shall have real access to a good material, cultural, and social standard of living. They shall also be afforded beneficial conditions for good health and be protected from being subjected to crime and

different forms of discrimination (Ungdomsstyrelsen, 2008).

Svenneke-Pettersson and Havström (2007) argue that developed and well-functioning democratic methods have a lot to offer the visitors at the youth clubs. Young citizens will have a chance to develop their talents and interests, strengthen their self-confidence, and find fellowship. By arranging their own leisure activities and putting their mark on them, they develop their skills and self-esteem (ibid).

However, there have been some concerns with activities at youth clubs and similar meeting places. Laxvik (2001) discusses the "collective over-order logic" (kollektiva underordningens logik), where youth leaders put their own wishes before the visitors' needs and expectations. He argued that there might develop a culture where a sense of subordination can occur in visitors and a sense of superiority in the leaders of youth clubs and similar meeting places for young people. In a similar way Ellström (1996) claimed that learning need not necessarily be positive; we may, for example, learn destructive behavior patterns. Ellström (1996) even argued that it is possible to afterwards be conscious about the informal and unconscious learning and therefore people can reflect upon the learning situations that occur later in life.

1.1 The Concepts of Learning

It is argued that learning is a broad concept difficult to define, or if it is possible to define it at all (Säljö, 2000). Sefton-Green (2003) claimed that the concept informal learning covers too many areas of activity to be a very useful phrase. Although the concepts have been discussed and still are being discussed by researchers, one can conclude that learning is a part of human life processes and something that is ongoing (Williams, 2001). We learn things all the time; we learn things that we have planned to learn and we learn without thinking of it as a moment of learning. Nunes (2010) argues that learning outside school is learning in action by doing something with an aim that is different from learning itself, by participation in an activity where the learner has some responsibility. Outside-school learning is often guided, monitored, but not tested or given official recognition. Moreover, there is no explicit curriculum, no designated teacher, no explicit learning outcome, and no accreditation, concluding that all make the learning that happens outside school invisible to some extent. In several Swedish local councils are indeed developed programs, policies and aims for young people and their leisure time developed. However, these programs or investigations often lack evaluation of the outcomes of the fulfillment of aims for the programs and activities. (Granlund, 2009).

Sefton-Green (2003) noted that the fact that informal learning may not be a very useful concept but this has not stopped its popularity over recent years. The arguments for their conclusions are a number of reasons pointing at deficiency in the education system. Sefton-Green (2003) underlines the changing role of the market in education and a desire in many industrialized countries to look outside the school system for salvation from the seemingly intractable problems of their education system.

Similarly Colardyn and Bjornavold (2004) claimed that the knowledge-based economy, new technologies, and globalization, all influence the need to improve the skills and competence of the population and make a connection for validation of non-formal and informal learning in relation to the same. Validation of non-formal and informal learning is becoming a key aspect of lifelong learning policies as learning outcomes from different settings and contexts can be linked together Colardyn et al. However, Colardyn and Bjornavold (2004) state that as long as learning, skills, and competences acquired outside formal education and training remain invisible and poorly valued the ambition of lifelong learning cannot be achieved.

1.2 Aspects of Learning

Although concept learning has been found to be difficult or even impossible to define, the author will give some examples of how the concept and adjacent concepts have been defined and used in research during the years. Research undertaken in the area of learning is mainly school research. However, I have found this research useful even in environments such as youth clubs and other meeting places where young people meet and interact as individuals and/or groups of individuals of different ages, backgrounds, and experiences. In this meeting, the youth leaders are also a part of the interaction, which, to some part, can be compared with the teachers' role at school.

Grummell (2010) argued that informal learning is understood to be voluntary, open-ended, and active learning that is self-motivated, self-regulated, and embedded in social contexts. Furthermore, activities of informal learning in everyday life occur within a similar known space in which participants can critically reflect and understand their own world. Colardyn and Bjornavold (2004) employed a definition from the communication on Lifelong learning from the European Commission from 2001, defining learning as a result from daily life activities related to work, family, or leisure. It is not structured in terms of learning objectives, learning time,

and/or learning support. Colardyn and Bjornvold (2004) noted further that non-formal learning consists of learning embedded in planned activities that are not explicitly designated as learning, but which contain an important learning element. Formal learning consists of learning that occurs within an organized and structured context such as formal education and that is designed as learning and is frequently evaluated and assessed (Colardyn & Bjornvold, 2004; Sefton-Green, 2003).

Sometimes informal learning has been referred to as experiential learning (Colardyn & Bjornvold, 2004); similarly Simpson and Bourner (2007) postulated that action learning is a particular form of experiential learning. In Kolb and Kolb (2005) a brief summary of experiential learning theory is given. The theory is built on six propositions shared by scholars such as John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, Jean Piaget, and Paulo Freire. From these ideas and views emerges the opinion that learning is a holistic process of adaptation to the world. Moreover, that learning is best conceived as a process, not in terms of outcomes. Learning is the process of creating knowledge and results from synergetic transactions between the person and the environment.

Marquardt and Waddill (2004) remain very enthusiastic about action learning and argue its ability to solve complex problems and to significantly increase the speed and quality of individual, team, and organizational learning. It was argued that action learning principles, such as questioning/reflection can be applied at an interpersonal, within-group, between-groups, or organizational level. Simpson and Bourner (2007) described action learning as a problem that is explored through cycles of questions leading to a chosen course of action, observation, reflection, and conclusions. Pedler, Burgoyne, and Brook (2005) found in their research that action learning embraces action on real tasks or problems, learning happens from reflection on actions taken, and tasks and problems are individual rather than collective and chosen independently by individuals.

Niemi (2002) claimed active learning is one of the most important goals in the European scenarios, including the concepts of a learning society. She felt that the important characteristic of the learning society is the learners' own initiatives and responsibilities for their own progress. Moreover, that learning has been acknowledged in Europe as the very core of economic development. Referring to theories of learning it is argued that quality of learning depends on learners' abilities to steer their own learning orientation, to develop inquiring skills, and to learn to reflect on and control their own learning processes. Active learning strategies emphasize constructivist qualities in knowledge processing where cognitive skills are key concepts. Niemi (2002) declared that in active learning, the processing of knowledge also requires a problem solving orientation, a critical approach, and an evaluation of knowledge.

1.3 Cooperative Learning and Peer Collaboration

Learning through collaboration is not a new pedagogical idea. By Plato's writings, we know that Socrates had already taught the concepts of analytical dialogue, a dialectic conversation built around a claim and its contrast (Stensmo, 1994).

Cooperative learning is a variety of active learning (Keyser, 2000; Slavin, 1991). Keyser (2000) argued that cooperative learning is always active learning but not all active learning is cooperative. Cooperative learning means the use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and each other's learning. Moreover, that every student in a cooperative learning group should have a role or part to play in order to accomplish the task which is different form a group work. Casey, Dyson, and Campbell (2009) claimed cooperative learning emphasis on positive interdependence and the need for every individual within a group to achieve an acceptable level of success within a given task and argue that it is a shift from only individuals learning to share learning experiences with peers. The findings of Hijzen, Boekaerts, and Vedders (2007) confirm the notion that effective cooperative learning depends on a combination of student's goal preferences and the appropriate learning context. Moreover that social support, belongingness and mastery goals are related to the quality of cooperative learning.

The concept of "co-learning" has been used among researcher about children enrolled in leisure center or in preschool and school. Williams (2001) explained the concept of co-learning as slightly representing more than just cooperation and collaboration and including learning between people, within and between cultures and environments. He claims that learning takes place between a child regardless of friendship status or age, and that there is co-learning between individuals and the collective.

In the year 2003 Steinberg, Almeida, and Allen (2003) noted that a growing research base indicated that when young people have high-quality support and opportunities in the out-of-school hours, they do better and are better at avoiding problems (Stenberg, Almeida, & Allen, 2003). Similarly Irby, Pittman, and Tolman (2003) felt that schools are only one of a range of learning environments that share responsibility for helping students learn and achieve mastery. They argued that community-based organizations, libraries, museums, families, and so

forth are as well providers of basic services that ensure young people readily learn.

Almost ten years later Malone and Noam (2011) felt that expanded learning time and opportunities have emerged in recent years as viable whole-school and whole-child strategy that both honors academic goals and supports broader educational and developmental ones. Furthermore, that many schools are turning to community-based organizations that offer expanded learning opportunities, a school-community partnership to support broader student learning, and positive developmental outcomes. Malone and Noam (2011) stated this broader vision helps to incorporate socio-emotional health which promotes productive learning; for example, when serving students in resource-poor communities; meaning that there is no productive learning in an expanded day without socio-emotional well-being.

1.4 Theoretical Approach

This study was based on Vygotskij's theory (Vygotskij, 1978) and from a socio-cultural perspective (Säljö, 2000; 2010). The main theme of Vygotskij's theories and ideas is the importance of culture and social interaction of people's intellectual, emotional and other development. Vygotskij emphasized that learning takes place through the internalization of processes. For Vygotskij is the meeting between practical activities and the language of special interest. He means that intellectual development takes qualitative moves when different processes of knowledge converge. This can happen when we are in a new situation with new ideas or when daily and spontaneous concrete knowledge converge with scientific knowledge.

It is argued that constructivist learning has received considerable attention in the world of education because it has been perceived as a more natural, relevant, and productive and empowering framework (Bűyűkduman & Sirin, 2010). From constructivist perspective, learning is an individual process that involves linking new ideas and experiences with what the learner already knows (Demirci, 2010). In a socio cultural perspective, learning occurs through interaction. A fundamental assumption of constructivism is that learners construct understanding through interactions with the physical and/or social environment (Demirci, 2010).

A socio cultural perspective assumes that people and institutions of knowledge are created and maintained by the interaction that occurs in specific culture contexts. In interaction with others young people take their way of thinking, speak and perform actions which they are involved in. A general assumption is that the more knowledgeable person in a socio-culturally practice guides and supports those who are less informed in the current practice; in this case, youth clubs and similar meeting places for young people (Säljö, 2000, 2010).

It is argued that the core commitment of a constructivist position is that knowledge is not transmitted directly from one knower to another, but is actively built up by the learner (Demirci, 2010).

In a socio cultural perspective the interplay between the collective and the individual is in focus. The interaction and communication are central as they are seen as links for learning. Learning can consist in that individuals are in a context in which learning cannot be seen as separate from the context in which learning is evolved. This kind of learning is referred to as situated. In a socio cultural perspective learning is understood as a process which means to be a participant in a culture, with focus on the social environment which means the social context in which the members of the group participate. Säljö (2010) argues that the single most important human learning environment has always been, and always will be, the everyday interactions and natural conversation. Through interaction and the natural conversation we are formed as socio cultural beings and it is through conversation in situated social practices that we learn most of the interactive skills that we need in the future (Säljö, 2010).

2. Method

In this research, we used two questionnaires, interviewed thirty two young people visiting youth clubs and similar meeting places, and carried out a case study in a local council in the north of Sweden.

To collect information, the first questionnaire (Questionnaire 1; see appendix) was sent out in spring 2010 to ten of Sweden's 290 local councils. In total 3300 questionnaires were sent out to 110 youth clubs, and 1198 youngsters or 36.3 % answered the questionnaire. All ten local councils participated in the study but not all youth clubs are represented. Additional to the questions in the questionnaire the respondents were also asked to give their own written comments on two questions: What possibilities do you think you have as a visitor at the meeting place? And, what attracts you to spend your time here apart from meeting friends?

The second questionnaire (Questionnaire 2; see Appendix) was sent out in autumn 2010 to 265 youth clubs and similar meeting places all over Sweden. Each center was sent a package of 30 printed questionnaires and was asked to distribute these to the youths present on a chosen day. The researchers received 1061 questionnaires from 60 youth clubs, indicating that a majority of the centers did not participate. However, those responding

represent all parts of Sweden and any systematic bias does not look likely. In this study, apart from answering a range of questions, respondents also got a chance to express their own views of possibilities when attending these meeting places. They were also asked to answer two other questions: What aspects of your personality have you developed by being here at the youth club? And, what can you do here and what skills do you develop?

As a second step, and to find the answer of the research questions 32 interviews were conducted (see appendix). An interview guide was constructed with similar questions as those in the questionnaires. The interviewees were chosen from among the visitors to the youth clubs in the local councils participating in this study. Appointments were made for the interviews. The interviews were tape recorded and lasted for about one hour each; afterwards they were transcribed. The respondents were between 11 to 20 years old, most of them between 15 and 16 years. More than half of the participants in the study were boys visiting the youth club twice a week or more. The case study was conducted in an area which consists of thirteen local councils in the county council of Norrbotten in the north of Sweden. The choice of this particular local council was made due to its number of meeting places for young people and its location in the north of Sweden. The research encompasses the five youth clubs and one meeting place for youth in the particular local council.

To fulfill the purpose of the research it was also necessary to get a deeper understanding of the staff's owns experiences of young visitors at youth clubs and similar meeting places, to get the perspective of what, how, and with whom they learn. As staff at the youth clubs and the meeting places involved in this study wrote daily reflections in diaries and I also had the option to use these diaries, it was decided to collect the staff diaries and other material at each particular youth club involved in the case study. The research material covers notes kept in dairies during the year 2009. In this research I was interested in what was explicitly stated in the texts of the diaries (Kohlbacher, 2006).

2.1 Voices from Youth Clubs and Similar Meeting Places for Youth

The results of the empirical study as presented below are divided in two parts within the sub headlines, "Situations of learning" and "Young people's self development". Within these headlines are a collection of the youths' own answers to the four open questions presented in the questionnaires; hereby named Q1 and Q2. These questions were: What possibilities do you think you have as a visitor at the meeting place? What allows you to stay here apart from meeting friends? What aspects of your personality have you developed by being here at the youth club? And, what can you do here and what skills do you develop?

The results from the interviews as well as some quotations from youth leaders' daily notes in diaries have been presented in the appendix. To be able to recognize the respondents from the interviews they are coded with numbers (see appendix).

3. Results

Youth clubs and similar meeting places for the youth are more attractive to boys than to girls. In the research it was found that boys find the environment, facilities, and equipment more interesting than girls do. Two informants say it is mostly guys who visit the youth club, "...but on Fridays girls visit the youth clubs, the kiosk is open and then the girls come" (10), and "On Fridays when we are open longer, then a few girls come" (11). Other respondents also have the opinion that it is mostly guys who visit the activity hub (15, 16). This is also seen in the results of the both questionnaires were 60.1 % of the respondents were boys in Q1 and 57.9 % in Q2.

However, although that the boys are found to be in majority of visitors in the both questionnaires visitors anyhow think that both boys and girls have the same possibilities at their visits. In Q1 in total 66.1 % of the respondents answered yes to the statement do you think that boys and girls have the same opportunities here and in Q2 it was 62.6 % of the respondents who agreed in the statement. This perception is as well seen in the part of the questionnaires were respondents had possibilities to express themselves in an open question. One of the respondents wrote, "Girls have the same opportunities but they are seldom seen here" (Q2). Quite a few interviews gave the impression that both girls and boys felt that they had equal opportunities, "Boys and girls have the same opportunities here" (8; 9; 20a; 20b), and "Nice to be with the boys" (23).

Although the overall result reflected the opinion that visitors have equal opportunities when they visit the different meeting places, some divergent voices were heard. One of the interviewed girls who once visited another youth club in the local council did not like it at all, "The girls always sat in a corner and agreed with all that the boys said, and the girls got no attention what so ever" (20b). Another interview shows how different female visitors can think about their possibilities visiting the meeting places. One girl argues that, "I take the space that I need" (1a). When I, in one of the interviews, asked if there were special evenings arranged just open for girls, one of the respondents, quite surprised, asked, "Why?" (5).

Visitors to the different meeting places in this research are often regular visitors and unlike school they come there of their own free will; there is no demand on them to do things. They can stay with peers, talk to the youth leaders, or sometimes if they are interested, participate in activities or arrange activities or other programs such as concerts or outdoor trips. The fact that visitors often are frequenters are seen in the following quotations: "I have been here since I was 13-14 years old" (1a), "I'm here every day; I come right after school, and go home and eat and then back to the youth club" (4; 5; 6; 7; 14). "I am here almost every night" (8; 11; 12; 13; 24), "I am here until they close" (20a; 20b). Other answers are "I am here every now and then otherwise I am mostly at home" (16) or "I am here three nights a week, mostly on weekends" (10). One of the interviews reveals that some youths start going to the youth club at an early age, "I was 16 years old when I started to go to the youth club" (1b).

Some of the respondents talk about the status of the meeting places, "Some people think that it is "geeky" to visit the youth club" (19). One of the informants claimed that some young people believe that they will get a bad reputation if they visit the meeting places. To counteract this, the staff had put up signs on the activities and opening hours. Other voices might be interpreted to convey that you need some special skills to fit into the group or the groups' lifestyle. A comment in Q2 concluded that "We are like a family here", and one of the interviewed meant that "There are subgroups but we are like a big family" (18).

Visitors often have an expressive life style and it is not unusual that they mistrust the school system. "I use to play truant but it is fun to be here" (23). A respondent indicated that he had learned from older visitors that it is better to not play truant (24). Another respondent likewise claimed that, "It cannot be good to play truant...I have taught myself not to do so" (18). A girl suggests that almost all those visiting the youth centers skip classes, "...the older visitors tell me that I won't get any job if I play truant" (20b).

From visitors' own comments in the questionnaires it seems like the meeting place can be a place where you can do your homework and even get help with it.

A visitor doing homework at the meeting place comments, "I have learned to relax when I am here and can do my homework here" (Q1). Similar comments are seen in Q2, "Here it is possible to get help with my homework and to talk to some of the staff about it". Another respondent expresses similar thoughts, "I learn to share things with other visitors. I am getting better on my concentration which helps me in school. Here at the youth club I am getting better in the subjects, thanks to the youth leaders helping me." The ability with the meeting places in comparison with the school is also seen in this quotation, "I get a lot of friends and learn to talk and listen to people in completely different ways than, say, the school". One of the other comments seen in Q2 points more at the role to prevent young people's health that these meeting places sometimes can have. "This youth club is really good and you get all the help that you need; for example, with your homework, or support if you have problems at home. Instead of being out on the streets doing something that is not good you can come to the youth club; here you can find everything you want and a little more for us youths". One of the interviewees expressed it nearly the same way, "I do not like school, here I can meet my peers and have fun" (23).

Youth clubs and similar meeting places fit the visitors' lifestyle and seem to almost be the only place that can meet their needs and expectations. Many of the respondents observe that the visit to the meeting place is all they do on their leisure time. "I do not play sports and so forth" (19; 23), and "I just come here at the youth club" (17a; 17b).

At the youth clubs and the meeting places visitors often play billiards or table tennis; this is most often seen among boys. It is not unusual that this is the only interest for their visit and the only activity they participate in during their time there. Notes in the diaries are often seen about this, "There has been a lot of billiard playing" (Diary).

Also a couple of interviews showed that visitors even had stopped coming to the youth club because the billiard table were taken away—an action taken because of some misbehavior among visitors that ended in a part of the billiard table being broken. This was very frustrating for many visitors, especially for the boys, "All that we want is to have the billiard table back" (24; 25).

There is an ambition in all meeting places to have equipment that can attract and fulfill visitor's needs. The type of equipment often seen is TV-games, computer games, music room, TV sets, small theater or arrangements to see movies, to bake cakes, play parlor games, cards, and material for creative activities like graffiti and painting. Although young people are offered the option to take part in different activities or to organize themselves, there are a lot of young visitors who answer that they do not know their possibilities or have not reflected on them. In both Q1 and Q2, frequently seen comments reflect ideas like "Do not know", "I have no idea", "No comments", "Almost nothing", and "Type nothing".

Some of the interviewees gave the same answers on the question, "what do you learn when you stay here?" Many of them were silent for a long time before they answered the question. "I don't know (silence)—I do not learn anything in particular" (23), "A good question (silence); I have never thought about that" (25), and "(silence) that was a difficult question, communicate and talk to all here" (19). Other comments were, "Learning; I don't know; to have fun and meet new people" (24), "I can't think of anything much" (20a, 20b), "Never thought about it" (20b), "Nothing at all" (22a; 22b), "What are we supposed to learn" (22a; 22b) and "I don't know; nothing" (17a; 17b).

In Q1 the answers to the question "What attracts you to stay at the meeting place other than meeting friends" gave, to some extent, another picture, "There are a lot of activities that are fun here", "Much; I can develop my arts and aesthetics" and "I can learn to take on responsibilities when I work at the café". One of the respondents feels happy for the existence of the meeting place, "I think it is nice here and I think it is fun that this place exists."

Most of the comments in the questionnaires are generalized but some of the respondents are more concrete about what they can do and learn, "I can get help with my music interest," and "I have the possibility to work with movie and film project." From the comments it is seen that visitors at some of the meeting places have possibilities to learn to dance, "I dance and have fun". Two comments are made about having poesy as an activity, "Listen to live music and poesy", "Concerts and poetry slam and less time with nagging parents"; and one comment was also made about doing crafts, "I have opportunity to paint, paste and trim and"

In Q2 a similar picture is given when respondents write down their own comments. Their answers are interspersed between the questions about the skills they develop and what they can do on their visits.

On the one hand some participants were not enthusiastic, and replied in the vein of, "No comments", "Nothing special", and "Do not understand". One respondent wrote, "I do not get better at anything as I am already best in everything". Some of the respondents point out the importance of having fun, "I don't get so much better in anything but I have enormous fun". Another respondent claims that visiting the meeting place makes him or her happier, "You become better at socializing and talking to people; there are many people that you don't know and that makes me happy!"

On the other hand were more positive replies, "This place is a wonderful place", and "There are a lot of good possibilities, and there are a lot of things to do. And if you come with suggestions I am sure that it can be arranged. Everyone can talk to each other at the meeting place and the youth leaders are very, very kind". One of the informants thought that he or she could be better at everything, "I get better doing everything." From the comments it seems like one of the visitors spends all the time playing computer games and argued, "I get better at playing computer games because I do that all the time". One respondent saw the possibility to arrange quizzes, another commented that he or she could play football; some other respondent commented, "I can sing", and another that "I get fitter and in shape". Similarly some of the interviewees talked about prospects "to learn to play drums and guitar" (22a; 22b), and one of the girls talked about "learning to bake chocolate cake" (21a).

From the interviews the understanding of the respondent's possibilities were deepened from the more short formulated comments seen in both the questionnaires. One of the respondents in the interviews argued that, "Really you can learn everything here, here I can be social and talk to people" (18), and moreover "I learn how to treat people right; you get brought up here, it is like another home here" (18). The same respondent continued, "I get accepted as I am here, and I feel safe here" (18), "This meeting place is like a free place, they see me (here meaning staff and peers, my notes), and I do not need to ask if I can join the peers. I like to come here to get away from parents, school, and everything I must do" (18). It seems that visitors experience the meeting place as a safety place to go to; one of the interviewed boys expressed, "Here you can meet friends and just take it calm instead of being out on the streets and maybe turn into something stupid" (24).

This study shows that visitors are often invited to participate in activities or arrange activities but it is not interesting for all of them to be active and participate. Most of them visit these places just to "hang around" or talk to other visitors or/and staffers. At some of the meeting places youth councils are established. Two of the informants are active in the youth council. The answers vary about what is good about being in the youth council, "See what happens" (3b), "Plan what to do" (3c), and "Good that young people can be involved and decide for it is we who shall enjoy our stay here" (3c).

However, some of the interviewed show that visitors sometimes are not at all interested in participating and holding influence at the meeting place. They are satisfied if someone else takes the decisions for them. "No, it is not interesting for me. I used to come here and play billiards, sit down with peers and talk to them. I used to talk to the staff. They know me and used to ask where I have been" (2). Another voice of the respondents

experiencing work in youth council and similar forums for influence and participation as to being responsible, "I can't handle such a responsibility but I have been asked" (8). Others have not thought that much about why it would be interesting to be in the youth council, "No I have not thought much about it, it has not happened" (3a). "If I were asked I would say no. I do not know why. I do not want to take part in deciding a lot of things. I agree to what others say, there is no problem with that" (3a). In one of the interviews I asked the question whether it is important to take part in deciding and got the answer, "Not at all" (3a).

Sometimes activities are more like formal learning or expanded learning.

One of the interviewees remembered a youth leader who had made impression on him. "The youth leader wrote down famous quotes and we had to discuss and reflect upon them" (22b). And in one of the questionnaires one of the respondents noticed that "We often do things where you have to think a lot and doing that you learn to think much faster" (O2).

Some of the notes from the diaries bear witness to the possibilities used of youth leaders to overcome difficulties with dialogues, "Have been talking with the youths about racism and questions about discrimination" (Diary). The background is that the meeting places sometimes have visitors from countries all over the world. Some of these particular visitors are often boys coming alone from countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq, and Somalia.

At other times notes in diaries show that visitors and staff talks about values and norms, "Talked with the girls about sex and contraceptives & relationships" (Diary). Sometimes notes are made about discussions concerning how to behave or about being female or male and, "Discussions about homosexuality, inequality, indignity, discrimination, and so forth" (Diary) or "Discussed about racism and sexuality, active discussions!" (Diary).

One of the staff wrote about her initiative to invite a friend who had 'come out' as homosexual but was disappointed when none of the youths dared to ask questions, "I took the initiative to invite NN who is homosexual. Just to break the norm a little here tonight. Shame that no none dared to ask NN something" (Diary). Sometimes the discussions are even more philosophical and can be about young people's conception and philosophy of life, "As usual some deep conversion with some of the visitors" (Diary). "We had a serious talk about how to live our lives and about how to treat others the same way as you want to be treated yourself, wise words from the youths..." (Diary). These moments of more deep discussions or conversations were, on one occasion, found in the notes to be connected to the practice of values, "Very nice talk about being young, and discussed ethical issues & got a good conversation about boys & thoughts" (Diary). Some disappointments are as well expressed in one of the diaries when the visitors were not interested in engagement in the society such as joining in a torchlight procession. "No one wanted to join the torchlight procession; we think that is unfortunate..." (Diary).

3.1 Young People's Self-development Outcomes

Most of the comments made in both the questionnaires, Q1 and Q2, were about the respondents having developed their social competence as visitors at the different meeting places. The comments quoted here is from Q2, "The social part of me, I am more together with peers here when elsewhere", and "I have been more social and independent". Some of the respondents think that they have developed useful skills, "I develop my social skills, to talk to people that I do not know. I can use that everywhere". One of the respondents thinks that he or she will mature during the stay at the meeting place, "I grow as a person". One of the respondents even thinks that he or she developed the comical side of his or her personality. Similar comments are also made about happiness, "It is good to develop your ability to act. And it is terrible good mood here and you feel very happy here".

Some visitors travel far for the possibility to visit the meeting places "I feel happy and involved; it breaks the monotony of everyday life, helps in becoming more physically active; I get to know new people, learn to develop within the group I'm in (theater, dance). It becomes boring when I go from here. I live several miles from here, but I come here anyway!"

A respondent made comments about the ages of the visitors with connection to social development and concluded that it is positive to be with visitors of mixed age, "A pleasant, calm and stimulating environment. Good variation on the age which is good for the social development". Another respondent made a statement on equality, "I develop my understanding of people that don't have the same opportunities as I have". One of the respondents' answers reveals his troubles, "I developed my self-esteem, which affects my personality, which in turn leads me on to the right road ". Another one comments on values and norms sometimes discussed, and that the respondent learns from that, "You develop your own opinions and values every time you meet people".

One respondent makes clear that he or she even choose to stay at the meeting place in order to develop self

confidence, "I am here to get better self confidence. I know what is needful for me to develop. For example I try to speak more English as it is difficult for me". A member of a board-expresses its advantages with these comments, "I developed a vast social circle, while also getting the educational advantage. I'm on the board as well where you learn an enormous amount! I'm learning to become more social and I learn many theoretical things". Similar comments are made by a girl, "I can develop my self-confidence and myself as a person. I can have meetings, arranging girls' night to be with the girl group and be myself".

One respondent talks about learning to behave and about discriminating between right and wrong. "I have really developed my social skills. To realize what is right and wrong is something that I have learnt by being here. This place makes me a better person". The following comments are examples of voices of what visitors can develop when they visit the youth clubs: "I am getting better at standing up for myself because it sometimes can be crap so you learn to solve it the best way", "I develop by becoming more open and talkative", "To dare to talk more and take part in deciding" and "My social side of creativity and collaboration".

Several of the interviewees also bear witness to the same, and some of the respondents talk about the development of "Social relations" (20a; 20b), to be "social and talk to people" (18), and about the possibilities to develop their "Social competence" (22a; 22b; 21a; 21b).

To sum up, what has been clearly visible from the open questions in both surveys as well as from the youth leader's diaries and the interviews is that young people who visit the meeting places for youths indicate generally that they primarily develop their social skills. But it is not unusual for them to say that they do not learn anything at all during their visits. It is also visible in the surveys and in the interviews that respondents have had difficulty in expressing what they actually learn from their visits at the youth clubs and similar meeting places. The result shows that respondents have had difficulties to understand the open questions in the questionnaires. The youth have given mixed reviews, with both long and short comments about the same questions, as well as common comments on their experiences and thoughts as visitors. These are visible as written collected information within the questions presented in the questionnaires.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

Young people come to the meeting places regularly and of their free will which makes it both exciting and interesting. This study clearly shows that they visit these youth clubs and meeting places primarily to meet friends and the youth leaders and that the young do not want to be controlled; they want approval and to be listened to. The profession of a youth leader is all about striking a balance between the character of the meeting places as free and open for all and attracting all young people. The meeting places aim at supporting young people in their adulthood. They understand that if you come to close to the youths they might not come back.

The actual activities are of secondary importance although the billiard table seems to attract a little extra. Hence, its existence could be justified by the argument that it is probably easier to get in touch with the visitor through some sort of activity.

From research one can argue that young people learn things all the time; the learning could be planned or without thinking of it as a moment of learning. However, a few visitors are very conscious about coming to the meeting place in the hope to develop their self-confidence. Interviews and respondents own comments also show some concrete examples of what visitors mean when they say that visiting the meeting places makes them better. On the one hand the examples mentioned were playing billiards, table tennis, computer-games, TV-games, music, or baking cakes; while many of the respondents claimed they developed their social skills and ability to communicate with other visitors and staff. However, many of the respondents did not know what they learned, or meant that they did not learn anything at all, but this research shows that this is not the whole truth.

Referring to Säljö (2010), meeting places for youth are a human-learning environment where everyday interactions and conversations are continually underway and where visitors learn skills for their future. This is also seen in this research. For example, entries in the diaries show that certain activities or elements at the meeting place are like tutoring or bringing up of the visitors; that the young person's should be aware of their own attitudes and values and positions, know how to take a critical approach, take a stand and argue for their positions.

In research a gap is identified between what young people recognized by themselves as what they learnt or verbalized with help of the youth leaders and what they actually learn.

To conclude, these meeting places can have a compensatory function to schools, a sort of expanded learning to help young people develop their citizenship. However, I will argue that youth clubs and similar meeting places are unable to make visible what young visitors actually can learn from their visits. To make that possible I suggest that this must be verbalized, discussed, and made visible in cooperation with the youth leaders and group

of visitors or the individual visitors.

References

- Bűyűkduman, I., & Sirin, S. (2010). Learning portfolio (LP) to enhance constructivism and student autonomy. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences* 3, 55-61.
- Casey, A., Dyson, B., & Campbell, A. (2009). Action research in physical education: focusing beyond myself through cooperative learning. *Educational Action Research*, 17, 407-423.
- Colardyn, D., & Bjornavold, J. (2004). Validation of formal, non-formal and informal learning: Policy and practices in EU member states. *European Journal of Education*. *39*(1), 70-89.
- Demirci, C. (2010). Constructing a philosophy: prospective teachers 'opinions about constructivism. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *9*, 278-285.
- Ellström, P., & Svedin, P. (1996). Lärande i en temporär organisation: en studie av ett företagsinternt utvecklingsprogram för processoperatörer. [Learning in a temporarily organization: a study of a internal development program for process operators]. Linköping: Institutionen för pedagogik och psykologi, Univ..
- Granlund, E. (2009). Kartläggning av kvalitetsaspekter på fritidsgårdar och Ungdomens hus i kommunerna. *Mapping of aspects of quality at youth clubs and houses for youth in local councils*. Institutionen för Pedagogik och lärande. Luleå tekniska universitet.
- Grummell, B. (2010). Filtering informal learning in everyday life: invoking ordinariness and moving to civic engagement. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 29, 565-579.
- Hijzen, D., Boekaerts, M., & Vedder, P. (2007). Exploring the links between students engagement in cooperative learning, their goal preferences and appraisals of instructional conditions in the classroom. *Learning and Instruction*, 17, 673-687.
- Irby, M., Pittman, K. J., & Tolman, J. (2003). Blurring the lines: Expanding learning opportunities for children and youth. *New Directions for Youth Development, 97,* 13-27.
- Kohlbacher, F. (2006). The Use of Qualitative Content Analysis in Case Study Research. Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research, North America, 7. Retrieved from http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/75/153
- Keyser, M. M. (2000). Active learning and cooperative learning: understanding the difference and using both styles effectively. *Research Strategies*, 17, 35-44.
- Kolb, A., & Kolb, D. (2005). Learning styles and learning spaces enchaining experiential learning in higher education. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 4, 193-212.
- Laxvik, T. (2001). Bärande relationer: normativ rapport om förutsättningar för goda möten i öppen verksamhet på fritidsgård. Relations in a long term: normative report about the possibility of the good meeting at the youth club (1. uppl.). Stockholm: Fritidsforum.
- Malone, H. J., & Noam. G., G. (2011). Next steps in the expanded learning discourse. *New directions for youth development*, 131, 119-135.
- Marquardt, M., & Waddill, D. (2004). The power of learning in action learning: a conceptual analysis of how the five schools of adult learning theories are incorporated within the practice of action learning. *Action learning: Research and Practice, 1,* 185-202.
- Niemi, H. (2002). Active learning a cultural change needed in teacher education and schools. *Teacher and Teacher Education*, 18, 763-780.
- Nunes, T. (2010). Learning Outside of School. University of Oxford, Oxford.
- Pedler, M., Burgoyne, J., & Brook, C. (2005). What has action learning learned to become? *Action Learning: Research and Practice*, *2*, 49-68.
- Sefton-Green, J. (2003). Informal Learning: Substance or style? Teaching Education, 14, 37-51.
- Simpson, P., & Bourner, T. (2007). What action learning is not in the twenty-first century. *Action learning: Research and Practice, 4,* 173-187.
- Slavin, R. (1991). Synthesis of research of cooperative learning. Educational Leadership, 48(5), 71-82.
- Steinberg, A., Almeida, C., & Allen. L. (2003). Multiple pathways to adulthood: Expanding the learning options for urban youth. *New directions for youth development, 97.*

- Stensmo, C. (1994). Pedagogisk filosofi: en introduktion. Pedagogical philosophy, an introduction. Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Svenneke Pettersson, D., & Havström, M. (2007). Fritidsledares tysta kunskap. *Youth leaders silent knowledge*. Stockholm: Fritidsforum.
- Säljö, R. (2000). Lärande i praktiken: ett socialkulturellt perspektiv. *Learning in practice: a socio cultural perspective*. Stockholm: Prisma.
- Säljö, R. (2010). Lärande I praktiken: ett sociokulturellt perspektiv. *Learning in practice: a socio cultural perspective (2. Uppl.)*. Stockholm: Norstedt.
- Ungdomsstyrelsen. (2008). Swedish national youth policy. Retrieved from www.ungdomsstyrelsen.se
- Vygotskij, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: the development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Williams, P. (2001). Barn lär av varandra: samlärande i förskola och skola. Children learn from each other: coo learning in preschool and at school. Diss. Göteborg: Univ., Göteborg.

Appendix

The following people were interviewed:

```
Two girls aged 18 years = 1a and 1b
```

Young boy older than 20 years = 2

Three girls, two of them 15 years one of them 18 years = 3a, 3b, 3c

Girl 16 years = 4

Girl 16 years = 5

Boy 17 years = 6

Girl 16 years = 7

Boy 17 years = 8

Boy 13 years = 9

Boy 11 years = 10

Boy 13 years = 11

Boy 16 years = 12

Boy 13 years = 13

Boy 14 years = 14

Boy 14 years = 15

Boy 15 years = 16

Girls 13 years and girl 14 years = 17 a and 17 b

Girl 17 years = 18

Girl 16 years = 19

Girls aged 15 and girls 14 years = 20 a and 20 b

Two girls 17 and 18 years and two boys 17 and 16 years = 21 a, 21 b, 22a, 22b

Girl 14 years = 23

Boy 15 years = 24

Boy 15 years = 25

Questionnaire 1

_				_	
Eva	aSys	Enkät -Öppen fritidsverksamhet		◎ Electric Paper	
	·	Lisbeth Lindström		т	
Depart	tment of Education	Enkät -Öppen fritidsverksar	mhet	TERNISA	
Mark as		point pen or a thin felt tip. This form will be			
Correctio	n: Please follow the	examples shown on the left hand side to he	lp optimize the reading results.		
1. B	asinformation				
1.1	Är du kille eller tjej?				
1.2	☐ Tjej Hur gammal är du?	☐ Kille			
	☐ 12-14 år	☐ 15-16 år	☐ 17 år eller äld	re	
1.3	Hur ofta går du hit? Ofta, två gånger i veckan eller mer	☐ Minst en gång i veckan	☐ Några gånger	varje månad	
1.4	Tycker du att pojkar och flickor har sa	amma möjligheter här? □ Ja, oftast	☐ Tveksamt, ibla	and	
1.5	☐ Nej, nästan aldrig Egen kommentar om möjligheter:				
1.6	Vi har gårdsråd?	☐ Ja	☐ Nej		
1.7 1.8	Vi har ungdomsparlament? Vad ger det dig att vara här förutom a	☐ Ja	□ Nej		
1.0	vad ger det dig att vara har forutom a	att traita kontipisar!			
2. E	nkätfrågor				
		Instämme		Instämmer helt	
2.1	Jag känner att jag har inflytande på v	erksamheten	alls		
2.2	Jag känner mig delaktig i verksamhet	ten			
2.3 2.4	Jag lär mig att samarbeta med andra Jag får bättre självförtroende när jag				
2.5	Personalen lyssnar på oss	gart			
2.6	Jag blir sedd och bekräftad av persor				
2.7	Jag blir sedd och bekräftad av andra				
2.8 2.9	Jag har möjlighet att påverka planerir Det är mycket viktigt för mig att påver				
2.10	Jag har möjlighet att påverka aktivitet	terna			
2.11	Jag har tagit chansen att påverka så	mycket jag velat			
Frågorna fortsätter på nästa sida, vänd >>					
690U267	62P1PL0V0			07.01.2010, Page 1/2	
		▎▀▘▘▘▜▞▔▘▜▟			

EvaSys	Enkät -Öppen fritid	lsverksamhet	Electric Paper
2. Enkätfrå	gor [Continue]		
2.13 Jag lär 2.14 Jag lär 2.15 Person 2.16 Jag kär 2.17 Jag får 2.18 Jag tyc 2.19 Jag tyc 2.20 Här lär 2.21 Här lär 2.22 Här an 2.23 Här sp 2.24 Här må 2.25 Här lys 2.26 Här rec 2.27 Här su 2.28 Här sp 2.29 Här be	behandlad med respekt av personalen mig att diskutera samhällsfrågor mig att samtala om vardagliga frågor alen vet vad vi behöver nner att jag kan utvecklas när jag går hit ta ansvar för material och lokalerna ker att personalen är rättvis ker att personalen tar mig på allvar jag mig om demokrati jag mig om vad som är rätt och fel vänder jag ofta Internet ker jag pengar för olika aktiviteter lar och snickrar jag snar jag på musik ligerar jag musik far jag på Internet elar jag spel på Internet söker jag olika Communitys in jag vara med och ordna konserter	Instämmer inte alls	Instämmer helt

Tack för din tid & dina svar!

Questionnaire 2

EvaSys		Enkät -Öppen fritidsverksamhet				
			Enkät -Öppen fritidsverks	samhet H10	TERNINSA UNIVERSITET	
Mark as			l-point pen or a thin felt tip. This form will t			
Correctio			examples shown on the left hand side to	help optimize the reading results.		
1. B	asinfor	mation				
	☐ Tjej	ille eller tjej? mmal är du?	☐ Kille			
	12-1	4 år	☐ 15-16 år	☐ 17 år eller äldre		
		a går du hit? , två gånger i veckan eller	☐ Minst en gång i veckan	☐ Några gånger varj	e månad	
1.4	☐ Ja, a	du att pojkar och flickor har s alltid nästan aldrig	amma möjligheter här? □ Ja, oftast	☐ Tveksamt, ibland		
1.5		ommentar om möjligheter:				
1.6	Vilka si	dor hos dig själv utvecklar du	ı genom att vara här? Vad kan du	ı göra och vad blir du bra pă?		

Frågorna fortsätter på nästa sida, vänd >>

F997U33985P1PL0V0 17.08.2010, Page 1/2

EvaSys Enkät -Öppen fritidsverksamhet					© Electric Paper			
(20)	nkätfrå							
- . L	mama	901						
	Sätt kry	rss i lämplig ruta!						
			Instämmer inte				In	stämmer helt
			alls	_	_	_	_	
2.1	-	ner att jag har inflytande på verksamheten						
2.2	_	ner mig delaktig i verksamheten ner mig uppfinningsrik	R					
2.3	-	bättre självförtroende när jag går hit	H	H	H	H		
2.5	- 672	iag användning av min fantasi	H	H	H	H	H	
2.6		många möjligheter när jag går hit					\exists	
2.7		en person som oftast ser möjligheter	i i					
2.8		erkar planeringen här						
2.9	• .	jag förverkliga mig själv						
		erkar aktiviteterna	□					
		ofta övertygad om att jag klarar saker själv						
2.12	Här lär j förmågd	ag mig att bli mer medveten om mig själv och mina or						
2.13	Jag har	bra självkänsla						
2.14	Jag tänl	ker ofta på hur jag kan förändra saker här						
2.15	Jag har	bra självbild						
2.16	Jag kän	ner mig entusiastisk när jag är här						
	•	ner att jag kan utvecklas när jag går hit						
	_	ta ansvar för material och lokalerna						
	_	nyfiken av mig						
	_	bra självförtroende						
	-	ag kreativ och hittar på saker att göra						
	_	ofta nyfiken						
		éer och förslag blir oftast positivt mottagna						
		er jag pengar för olika aktiviteter		H				
		ar och snickrar jag per gärna till i fiket	H	H	H	H		
	V	ar ofta på saker som vi kan göra här	H	H	H	H	H	
	-	ofattar mig själv som initiativrik		H	ä			
		lar jag teater	H		ä	H	H	
		far jag på Internet		ä	H	Ħ	H	
		öker jag Facebook	ä	ä	ä		\exists	
		lar jag spel på Internet	i i		ă			
	1000 E	öker jag olika Communitys	Ē					
		jag vara med och ordna spelningar						
	Här erbj	juds jag många möjligheter att vara aktiv och						
	delaktig							
2.36	Jag är e	en person som kan tänka mig att ta risker ibland						
		på mig själv som nyskapande						
	-	bra förmåga för att fatta beslut						
		ker om när jag får vara kreativ						
		ker att jag tar initiativ						
		ner att mina idéer tas på allvar						
		jag uppnå mina mål	무					
2.43	Jag nar	lätt för att fatta beslut						

Tack för din tid & dina svar!

F997U33985P2PL0V0 17.08.2010, Page 2/2