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Play—the making of deep outdoor experiences

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To be outdoors and involved in adventures concerns the movement between safety and risk, the familiar and the unfamiliar. Deep involvement in activities and the seriousness found in play are essential in *Bildung*. Findings in this paper stem from ethnographic fieldwork conducted in a kayak community, between late autumn 2006 until the fall of 2008, with the aim of describing learning processes and experiences made outdoors. This paper examines a Norwegian kayak community, and uses two cases to illuminate the relationships between flow, peak experience, play, *Gebilde* and *Bildung* processes. The meanings produced by kayakers are seen in the light of ontological play. More particularly the possible relationship between *Bildung* and play is investigated by exploring how two situations can be seen as autotelic activities. The paper concludes that situations of lost control and of autotelic play can foster existential experiences that are more connected with the humanistic ideal of *Bildung* than with instrumental learning. A shift of focus from instrumental learning to play and adventure is seen as vital in the *Bildung* processes.

Keywords: *Adventure; Bildung; Gebilde; Friluftsliv; Kayak; Play*

This paper refers to two cases from the research project ‘Learning from *Friluftsliv*’ (Magnussen, 2008), which is an ethnographic study that examines adults in their outdoor learning and experiences. The project is based on the theoretical framework of learning-in-doing and ‘communities of practice’ (Lave, 1997; Wenger, 1998) apprenticeship and ‘learning landscapes’ (Kvale & Nielsen, 2003; Nielsen & Kvale, 1999, 2003).

To be out of doors, doing *friluftsliv*, either for recreation or seeking calmness of nature is a part of eight out of ten Norwegians’ everyday life (Vaage, 2009, p. 67). In this national survey non-motorized water activity, such as kayaking, is something that 19% of Norwegians between 16 and 74 years of age report that they have participated in more than once, and 11% more than three times in the last 12 months. Some

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aspects and considerations of these practices are concerned with different ways of perceiving and interpreting the activity of kayaking. One perspective is revealed when the kayakers say they will 'go play'. In this paper the expression 'go play' is investigated more closely, since the expression has obtained a central place in the language of the kayaking community and its ongoing practice. The word 'play', at least the way it is used by the kayakers, often refers to activity that lacks explicit telos and direction, as in the pedagogical objectives of a learning programme or a specific task like performing a particular kayak stroke. In analysing the research material a passage from an interview with 'Naomi' and 'Ken' stood out. They singled out some key elements in the experience of paddling in larger groups of 15 to 20 kayakers compared to smaller groups of only four to seven participants. Research participants in general, point at situations of play in moments of chaos and lost control when they are addressing the theme of learningful experiences. Drawing upon the making of photographs, videos, interviews and transcription this paper describes two situations with differences in group sizes, control and objectives. Examination of the two cases is made in the light of Gadamer's (1986) ontological perspective on play and the concept of adventurous activities (Becker, 2007, 2008a, 2008c; Rogoff, 1990; Steinholt, 1999, 2001).

Other than the short intermezzos of the wet-card courses, learning in the kayak community is informal since it lacks a specific syllabus. Practice, in the shape of adventures undertaken alone, together with friends, or on trips facilitated or organized by a paddling club, constitutes the informal learning that takes place in these outdoor communities. Data from other research projects based on learning in a non-scholastic environment suggest that this type of learning is engaged, not detached. Learning that takes place in a community of practice might also foster and develop vocational identity. Other research indicates that, when learning takes place without formal teaching, evaluation is an integrated part of the ongoing practice (Kvale & Nielsen, 2003; Nielsen & Kvale, 1999, 2003).

In order to interpret the kinds of experiences and meaning-making processes that adults undergo in their outdoor practice of kayaking, I will explore Gadamer's (1986) ontological concept of play. The intention is to relate this concept to sea kayak adventures, with a focus on the interrelationship between the community, the adventurer and the ocean. Two cases will be interpreted in the light of their fundamental conditions, aiming to see play as interwoven with seriousness (Gadamer, 1986, p. 124). I will also use Becker's (2008c) notion of the back and forth motion between the known and the unknown, between safety and risk, to examine how the adventurer is being played. This may also be seen as a circular hermeneutical movement, where one re-encounters the ever-changing ocean with new understanding, created and enriched by past experiences (Gadamer, 2008).

I intend, after the methodological description, to try to envisage different philosophical perspectives on play and adventure. Concepts of play and adventure are applied in the interpretations of two cases concerning one small and one larger group in an outdoor adventure. This paper is relevant to the outdoor field in the understanding on how breakdowns and 'just play' can, in an ontological perspective,

contribute to *Bildung* processes. Focus will be on two organized kayak trips or adventures. One of the cases represents a leadership misjudgement, the other case a change of involvement when the group aborted their plan. Towards the end of the paper there will be a shift from description and interpretation towards normativism, when relevance or pedagogical-practical implications of findings concerning outdoor leaders are addressed.

Research framework

This study has utilized the techniques of ethnographic fieldwork (Fetterman, 1998) and participation observation (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1987), using fieldwork techniques such as taking notes, photographs and videos. During observation, the author of this paper acted both as a full participator and, after increased kayaking competence, as more of an onlooker (Patton, 2002, pp. 265–267). The fieldwork and data collection in this project are done within sea kayak communities in the south-eastern parts of Norway in winter, spring, summer and autumn in 2006/2008.

Additionally, in-depth, semi-structured interviews of 23 ‘masters’ and/or highly proficient sea kayakers (16 of them male, and seven female) were conducted separately from the observations. The duration of these semi-structured (Kvale, 1998) interviews ranged from 24 minutes to one hour and 18 minutes. The average length was about one hour, conducted in the respondents’ homes, my home, my office and a diversity of cafés. The material also contains still pictures taken during fieldwork in 2006, video recorded from spring until autumn 2008 and some personal dictations (also on video). Diary notes also include some of the material the participants themselves publish on a variety of websites, blogs, and some email correspondence. The participants were recruited to be interviewed based on their reputation and their participation in the community in which the fieldwork was conducted. All of the interviewees were asked to name three other paddlers in the community who could contribute to the themes in the semi-structured interview. This functioned both as a control of my thoughts on whom to interview, but also to help select, on the basis of reputation, which of the more than 100 kayakers with different forms of engagement in the community should be interviewed.

Process of analysing the material

Of the 21 verbal interviews, nine recordings were fully transcribed by a hired typist. A problem with the transcriptions is that they do not always capture everything that was said—they are occasionally incomplete, missing important passages (Patton, 2002). To compensate for this, I have listened to all the interviews while reading the transcripts, finding minor inconsistencies, and readjusting names and jargon (i.e. vally to Valley). I listened to the remaining 12 interviews and transcribed sections of them. Following the transcription of the interviews, data were sorted using a general

inductive approach (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Thomas, 2003), leading to an investigation of two situations or cases where the elements of lost control and involvement were present.

Trustworthiness and dependability of findings

Besides the critical examination of the validity of transfer from audio to the typed results, validity refers to the plausibility of the interviewees' interpretations (Kvale, 1989). To assess the trustworthiness (Judd, Smith, & Kidder, 1991; Thomas, 2003) of the findings, two of the interviewees and participants have read this paper before submission.

As an observer I went from being somewhat overwhelmed by the curricula and exercises towards obtaining more distance from the field. One way of maintaining a distance was by holding a waterproof handy-cam, filming the activity and keeping up with the other kayakers at the same time. The other kind of distance arose from my increased skills and confidence as a paddler, and my growing ability to let swells and waves pass underneath my boat without tension in the hips. Here lays a possible paradox, between being 'one' with the kayak and increased 'distance'. By becoming an expert (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1999) I don't need to pay all my attention to the boat, allowing me to focus on the social practice. The movement is still one from peripheral legitimate participation, towards a complete membership in a community (Lave & Wenger, 1991), a possible necessity in order to conduct this research. In this there is a risk of being home-blind, but with the use of video recordings I am able to step back and re-live (Rønholdt, 2003) the ongoing practice with the distance of an onlooker (Patton, 2002, p. 265). In the presentations of the findings I will distinguish between interpretations and observations of the first order, and the more 'distant' or academically derived theories that are directed at overriding the participants' common-sense understanding of practice (Fangen, 2008, p. 173).

Ethics

The research relies on informed consent by the participants and anonymity in the use of the material. Anonymity is secured by coding of interviews, and keeping the list of names in a separate file on a password-protected server. Besides the oral information given in the first meeting with persons and/or communities, additional information was sent by me and published on three different websites: www.kajaknett.no, www.padling.no, www.qajaq.no. Finally, I paid the kayaking communities back for their help by acting as an instructor on their top end courses (Fetterman, 1998).

Being played—the autotelic experience in adventures?

'Mature manhood: That means to have found again the seriousness one had as a child—In play' (Beyond good and evil—Friederich Nietzsche, 1886). As Nietzsche

writes in the above quotation, play and a serious approach to life are intertwined. According to Gadamer (2004, p. 105), play has primacy over the consciousness of the player, and follows a ‘to and fro’ movement. This movement is a part of play, and it is without goals or objectives, but also without effort. I intend in the following to explore the term play and the philosophical concept of *Gebilde* (Gadamer, 1986). I will try to integrate these theories with Becker’s (2007, 2008a, 2008c) understanding of adventure in my interpretation of the two kayaking events. By the use of two cases, I hope to illuminate how play and adventure manifest themselves in the ongoing practice of sea kayakers and, possibly, in the outdoors more broadly.

Play as epigenesis

Play, according to Fagen (1981), refers to behavioural epigenesis and the learning practices in which specific behaviours prepare humans and animals for the struggles of survival and adaptation. Play or playful behaviour is recognized as a part of human behaviour, and it is found in various forms of animal behaviour, which raises the question of what makes this seemingly inconsequential activity so important that animals literally risk their lives to do it? Play develops adaptive behavioural flexibility and it may also accelerate development and stimulate brain growth. Additionally, it provides a foundation for cognitive and motor skills used in interacting with natural and social environments and also as an important factor in behavioural epigenesis as a central element in the gene-culture interaction.

From an ontological perspective, play is understood as a way for humans to relate to an alienated world, that allows humans to catch a sight of themselves in unexpected and unfamiliar ways (Gadamer, 1986, p. 130). In this sense kayakers refer to ‘going out to play’ on days when they are not intending to work on training in specific techniques, such as sweep strokes or eskimo-rolls. ‘Going out to play’ appears to state an intention to be opportunistic, to simply see what happens. This sort of kayaking is often referred to as ‘rockhopping’. Others try to diminish this by phrasing it as ‘just rockhopping’, or ‘just playing’.

Play and flow

Huizinga (1950) has explored the phenomenon as a cultural one, and thinks it should be seen as one. Play becomes, for Huizinga, a vital power in the human life-force and he describes a gap between play and other forms of human or cultural activities. Breivik (1996) points out the similarities between the concept of play and ‘peak experiences’ (Maslow, 1994) and the concept of flow and the psychology of optimal experience and happiness (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, 2008). Play may change an individual’s perceptions of a given situation and enhance a possible extended quality to the activities. It opens a room where flow and optimal experiences may be found:

To [cope with stress] successfully one must learn to balance the opportunities for action with the skills one possesses . . . To achieve involvement with an action system, one must

find a relatively close mesh between the demands of the environment and one's capacity to act (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008, p. 210).

Csikszentmihalyi's quote refers to a special type of optimal experience and flow. This is the feeling of happiness that is reported even in the harshest of situations. I 'sense' that I have both found flow and captured a peak-experience while paddling into several winter storms. These potentially dangerous situations force a kayaker to use all his strength and skills. In the kayak culture risk-situations are often discussed by other paddlers. I 'perceive' that crossing the Koster-straits, with two of the paddlers, led to my acceptance within the kayaking community. It acted as a sort of initiation rite. One must be devoted to paddling in order to become real and authentic, rather than a fair-weather kayaker, one who only goes out on calm waters and uses a kayak with a 'rudder'. The rudder often signals the novice or the fast-moving, long-distance recreationalist, the ones who have not measured their abilities in a full winter storm. The willingness to enter situations of lost or marginal control, where peak-performance and an experience of flow can be achieved, is the key to accessing the inner kayaking community. More than that, though, it can be the source of a deep inner feeling and an experience of what kayaking truly 'is'. Maslow (1994) describes this sort of initiation in terms of peak-experiences:

Until he has become aware of such experiences and has this experience as basis for comparison, he is a non-peaker; and it is useless to try to communicate to him the feel and the nature of peak-experiences. But if we can change him, in the sense of making him aware of what is going on inside himself, then he becomes a different kind of communicatee [sic] (p. 89).

Meaning created in play can be related to flow and peak-experiences and related to lost control, but also to an ontological perspective where one is being played by nature.

Being played—*Gebilde*

Steinsholt (1999, 2001) and Gadamer (1986), argue that play should be seen as a subject in itself. Children involved in play, or adults seeking a kayak adventure are not always aware that they are at play, but they may feel it when it has gone. This is similar to the way that the flow experience disappears when you direct your attention to it in action:

Just as a symbolic gesture is not itself but expresses something else through itself, so too the work of art is not itself simply 'as' a product. It is defined precisely by not being a piece of work that has just been turned out and can be turned out again and again. On the contrary, it is something that has emerged in an unrepeatable way and has manifested itself in a unique fashion. It seems to me, therefore, that it would be more accurate to call it a creation (*Gebilde*) than a work. For the word '*Gebilde*' implies that the manifestation in question has in a strange way transcended the process in which it originated, or has relegated that process to the periphery. It is set forth in its own appearance as a self-sufficient creation (Gadamer, 1986, p. 126).

More vivid than the *Gebilde* ('form' or 'shadow') that appears between the art and the spectator is the ocean. The same area of the ocean changes its appearance from winter to summer, big waves turn to 'flat water', and tides change or even disappear. This makes the ocean a subject in the experience of the paddlers, a subject that invites us to play. In a smaller group there is more room for the unexpected and a greater likelihood for play. There, nature is the artwork, the explorer is the spectator, and between them is a *Gebilde*, a subject by itself (Gadamer, 2004; Steinholt, 1999). *Gebilde* becomes an agent that plays the adventurer or child, who becomes immersed in the activity. Deep involvement and a transfer of attention from objectives towards activity that can be seen as autotelic, is a central part of ontologic play. The played cannot, 'enjoy the freedom of playing himself out without transforming the aims of his purposive behavior into mere tasks of the game' (Gadamer, 2004, p. 107).

In terms of seascapes, nature becomes both the agent and the object by itself, like a combination of the artist and the artwork, in connection to the audience. Gadamer (2004) uses the term *Gebilde* when he explains what art experience is about. *Gebilde* is self-sufficient and is something between the ocean and the kayaker. It plays 'the kayaker'. In this play the kayaker is being 'played with', and in this world the telos, the exercise agenda or the learning programmes cease to be of importance.

In relation to an educational perspective Becker (2008c) argues that the experience of encountering the unfamiliar is of the utmost importance and essential to the growth of the autonomous human. Pedagogies of the outdoors can [it is not always the case] thrive on meetings with the unpredictable, wild, sublime nature. When humans embark upon an adventure, they go from safety towards risk and back into safety. A to and fro movement (Gadamer, 2004), in and out of the seriousness of play. In the fieldwork this kind of activity has often been done in smaller groups, with a maximum of five paddlers, and on average two or three:

The new experience, which signals both dynamism and transformation at the same time, makes the adventurer's past appear in a different light. It shows that the past is not closed and finished with. It does not determine us [humans] forever. It contains hidden possibilities which are just waiting to be used or activated. (Becker, 2007, p. 83).

After a safe homecoming, I found that one is different, either in terms of having become more experienced, having made a conquest, having played or become flow-flushed. What's changed? Being a man in my forties, to master waves and wind becomes an affirmation of my ability to withstand (or survive) my meetings with nature; but it also becomes a reminder of my own core experiences, and cornerstones of my own outdoor trajectory, learning alpine climbing almost 30 years ago. Returning to the scene of play may engulf one in a circular and hermeneutic movement. Having been changed by the past experience, you revisit it with a changed perception, experience and understanding. At a group level, it is the fuel for another set of stories that glues the devoted ones more firmly together. A consequence of this is that you are among the ones that are called or receive a text-message on the next occasion, when the conditions offer themselves.

Adventure and *Bildung*

Adventure . . . [is looked upon with mistrust] because it promises everything the pedagogies of the age of philanthropism once feared and what many school teachers still fear today: surprises, disruption of routine, activation of the sense of possibility, which can complement reality and can change it (Becker, 2007, pp. 84–85).

Becker proposed that adventures prime the readiness to be played, and that *Gebilde* becomes a learning agent that may be found outside the worlds of pedagogy and facilitation. The term *Bildung* (Becker, 2008b, p. 50; Gadamer, 2004, pp. 10–11; Gurholt, 2008; Steinsholt, 1999, p. 124) refers to something more than education. *Bildung* refers to a pedagogical process where our existentially more or less accidental experiences in life are framed into a more complete and sorted existence. It is based on a humanistic ideal, and the term *Bildung* represents processes that might be seen as synonymous within a notion as enculturation and education (Gurholt, 2008, p. 131). In this tradition *Erfahrung* has connotation that are more deep and significant than experience [*Erlebnis*]. Adventures in nature, outside the contexts of usefulness and education, create *Erfahrung*, which is in turn, a part of the *Bildung* processes (culturation) of the individual. In nature *Gebilde* between the ocean and kayaker, becomes the ‘educator’ in autotelic play.

A seascape acts as a learning environment that anchors nature in the form of waves and wind as an object that the learner is about to conquer or master, but also as a subject that involves the learner in a play that demands his full attention. In this context, nature shows itself, and it also shows how structures such as group size and fixed plans can interfere with the experience of play and flow experiences. *Gebilde* becomes a subject in its own right.

Group matters!

Naomi: . . . So, but also, in a group you only try to reach the objective. There is no capacity to stop to play and explore.

I: The groups are goal oriented?

Naomi: The groups must make progress all the time.

Ken: It depends on who you are paddling with.

Naomi: I feel that way.

Ken: The bigger the group is, the more it focuses on its objectives.

Naomi: You just know that for every new member the group gets slower.

Ken: If we are fewer, more seems to happen.

The process of analysing this citation pointed towards the structure of the social organization as a mediator of the experiences that are made. In the kayaking community, group structures show themselves in different types of community; symposiums, which contain everything from different ‘low’ level wet-card courses up to ‘*aktivitetsleder*’ (level 3 coach—British Canoe Union), and more informal groups and workshops, i.e. the ‘kayak roll’ and or ‘rock-hopping’. There are also social happenings with a common ‘trail’ or itinerary: 25–30 km, camp at Ildverket with social

evening meal, return to starting point, 20 km more of paddling the next day. The last structure type is the day-tours organized by a paddling club, most often with a starting point and a loose plan or objective.

In order to investigate the theory suggested by Naomi and Ken, I will now describe two different but typical situations: (1) a club daytrip with five participants, and (2) a commercial weekend tour with 30 to 50 participants. The differences in the social structures create different forms of ‘clearing’ [an opening in the forest [Lichtung] (Heidegger, 1962, p. 215), where a phenomenon can be seen and understood]. The different ways that the communities organize their activities also form the expectations and the experiences of the participants. Using these structures as ‘clearings’ will hopefully help to objectify and provide understanding of the ongoing phenomenon in relation to the individual and its relations to the world.

Small groups and *Gebilde*

After an e-mail invitation from the local club on a windy Sunday, a group of five paddlers, including me, met in Sandoesund at 10 a.m. During the night there had been wind from the south. The plan was to paddle for two hours east and circumnavigate Faerder. The wind speed was about 12–14 m/s (43–50 km/h) from the southwest, water temperature 9°C. Engaging with the waves after 30 minutes of paddling made the group abort their plan and seek shelter behind some small islands in a northerly direction.

Our group abandoned its goal of circumnavigating an island 4 km from the main coastline, and was drifted, sheltered behind islands, looking for something to happen, knowing how but not what. The group drifted like a street corner society, searching for possibilities in the landscape. First we went in between Bustein Islands to rest a little, then returned and tried to catch the surfs that went thundering between the slabs, and gathered the group where waves were ebbing out in the shelter of the south eastern island. While continuing, paddling between the islands, we found rocks that were just visible above the surface before they again were covered by the waves. Behind Bustein there was no wind, just smaller waves and swells.

Rules of play

The rules of play on this kayaking adventure involved timing the surf, and avoiding being caught by the rocks [*skvalpeskjær*] while passing by ‘slabs’ either underneath or above the surface of the waves. A keen sense of timing marks the difference between the success of catching a wave and the failure of being stranded on a rock slab. An unspoken goal was the finding of new ways or patterns of play. These ‘rules of play’ were not part of an ordered itinerary set out at the beginning of the day’s paddle. They became valuable, however, as the ocean played with the group of paddlers, and made possible a feeling of flow and of experiencing something outside the pre-programmed, ordered in advance or inside a ‘learning box’ (Biesta, 2004). The rhythm of the

involvement, the back and forth movement of the group, was directed by the waves. In an adventure perspective, this to and fro motion represents the movement from being in control towards possible chaos. My own sensations during this session were of peace and control, being lulled by the rhythm of the waves and in tacit communication with the group as we 'were' played in the waves behind the islands. My memory of this day is in the form of flow-experiences. I filmed parts of the activity, being a researcher, but the deep traces of this situation are of being deeply involved, of being played in the relative safety behind the islet.

Play and seriousness interact, and our capacity to play is an expression of our highest seriousness. This seriousness may be a part of a tacit credo that kayakers go looking for in a breaking wave or when they watch the weather forecasts, hoping for perfect 'playing' conditions in the aftermath of a storm. *Bildung* in this sense becomes both a process and a result of the actor being played.

Despite the rewards of disorganized play, one must recognize that outdoor programmers fear chaos and misadventure. However, even though it can be a facilitator's nightmare (Becker, 2007), it is important to look at the deep and meaningful potential of structure failure, of getting more than you have prepared for, of the inner peace one can experience in the meetings with *Gebilde*, in play. For the fieldworker, many of the adventures and peak-experiences are facilitated by expert kayakers, scaffolding (Bråten & Thurmann-Moe, 1996; Rogoff, 1990) growth into the kayak society.

Simply by drifting along, being ready for adventure one can have valuable experiences. Each participant makes their own hypothesis of 'What would happen if' (Becker, 2007), and where the boundary between safety and risk lies. In my own experience, I notice that I tend to let the group initiate me into different adventures by letting go, thinking that someone else knows, and that somebody eventually will reach a decision. In this the group was leading the adventurers (or at a collective level, itself) into the potential abyss of adventure and into the arms of *Gebilde*.

Friedrich Nietzsche in *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft* (1966, p. 107) proposed that human beings must distance themselves from the grey reality and enter 'the childish and happy world', freeing themselves from pretending. Through art as 'childish' play we elevate ourselves over morality; we float over it, in play (Steinsholt, 1999, p. 137). Nietzsche's argument is relevant to the kayakers' attraction to 'just playing' or 'rockhopping', to be driven by something other than defined aims or the ambition to do something useful. It is the lure, the tacit attraction, or the call of the existential experience of being played. Embedded in this experience are also the emotional states and the vividness created by endorphins after encountering the powers of the ocean while trying to circumnavigate Faerder earlier that day.

The weekend trip

A weekend trip was announced on the website of a small kayak company, offering a weekend paddle of approximately 30 km on Saturday, camping and dinner, and around 20 km on Sunday, then returning home. We were travelling from Fjaerholmen, 50 participants, some with more than 30 years of kayak experience

and others with none. First we were divided into buddy-groups of two. While paddling, the two leaders (the organizer and his friend) were either at the front or at the back of the group. After lunch the group was divided in two, one of which paddled the in-shore route, the other was off-shore, alternatives that were presented before the division into ‘buddy groups’ of two. The challenge of the off-shore tour around Hollenderbaaen was advertised as involving additional paddling—in other words it would be longer, but not more adventurous or exciting. After rounding Hollenderbaaen, the increasing wind and waves created unexpected learning opportunities:

After circling around the lighthouse, the course was set straight south, into the waves and increasing headwind. (The course should have been held in a more westerly direction.) My partner expressed that this was a new experience to him (Community provided security). I think this was true for more than just my partner within the group of fourteen paddlers. After nearly four hours, we reached shore and campsite (Diary, August 18, 2007).

In this situation, the group objectives were oriented towards the trail, and following waypoints put up in advance. Going out on open water, meeting wind and waves, the group mentors or scaffolds the individual as he or she journeys into new experiences. This kind of experience (*Erfahrung*) falls outside of what systems of certification and legislation advocate. One of the participants made this reflection or evaluation afterwards:

In my opinion, in a situation of increasing wind and waves, [it is] extremely important to keep the group compact so that we can make a flotilla that enables us to rest and drink . . . Then even a challenging trip can be experienced as a positive experience (from a blog, August 24, 2007).

Gebilde and Bildung

In larger groups, ‘trails’ and nature become a framework for both the experiences and the adventure. Community provides security (not always experienced) but when the group moves in a target direction, fewer possibilities are open to individuals. The tacit implication of this type of learning is that learning in crisis (Becker, 2008a) should be avoided because it might be painful. *Bildung*, however, is the result of what happens outside the schedule, and outside the expectations of the individual.

By moving outside of him or herself during play, a participant in an activity realizes a potential which, without play, would be unrealized and impossible. In this perspective one can argue that the ‘trail’ as a social contract in larger groups, reduces the chance of being played with. The ‘trail’ is part of a game that does not demand the partakers’ full attention. Instead, they can focus on social chitchat concerning former meetings in the society, equipment or paddling styles.

Following a kayak ‘trail’ can of course, like a trail in the forest, lead to a quality experience and a sense of detachment or an experience of the greatness of nature (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1995). By being in nature one is, as the citation from a participant indicates, exposed to stimuli and experience that are not pre-ordered (Biesta,

2004) or included in the contract. In Gadamer's (2004) words; 'For play has its own essence, independent of the consciousness of those who play' (p. 105).

Another interpretation is related to small group versus big groups. My data suggest that big groups are more likely to be object and outcome driven, with reduced likelihood of creating deep playful experiences. By crossing 'the village borders', on the other hand, and on entering the wilderness beyond, something unexpected can happen. 'Adventures are practical examples of experiences that are normally prevented by everyday life' (Becker, 2008c, p. 173).

Challenges are met in a mode of 'structural optimism' (Becker, 2008a; Oevermann, 1999) or with 'basic trust' (Erikson, 1968), that makes us think that, despite the risk, everything will turn out well in the end. The concepts of play and adventure challenge the risk-reducing industry and society's need for security. This challenge might also contain experiences that are valuable to us, but may be lost in the pedagogical containment of facilitation and experiential learning.

Adventure is the aim and not the means of time spent in the outdoors, and true adventure and deep involvement in play enhance *Bildung* outside a formal pedagogical context. It is a kind of experience that educates us, free of the calculated outcome of facilitators of outdoor programming.

Conclusions

The analyses of two cases showed that engagement in adventures in kayaking creates new meanings and that deep experiences are involved when the participants are engaged in play. One situation demonstrated how a group of paddlers was forced to abandon its initial plan and, in the process, was 'educated' by *Gebilde*. The other situation illuminated how the participants suddenly found themselves in a situation of perceived risk and unexpected experiences. The situations were interpreted in light of the perspectives of play, flow, peak-experiences and adventure.

In relation with nature the kayakers interact in play, an experience that can create great personal change, both through a new connection to adventure and by altering one's emotional state. Being played in the schism between safety and risk promotes the '*Erfahrung*', and by that the *Bildung* of the individual, all outside the framework of formal education. If play is experienced, outside the borders of control and safety, the perspective shifts from just learning toward adventure. This move takes the kayakers away from a situation in which everything that happens has been planned by the educator in advance. It takes kayakers into the possible abyss of existential experiences where the interpretation is more connected to the concept of *Bildung* than to education. The combined nature of seriousness and play manifests itself on the border between risk and safety. There is a risk that too much planning may reduce the likelihood of play and improvisation in smaller groups.

By losing control, the leaders of the big group involuntarily created increased space for adventure and thereby revealed unexpected learning possibilities. *Gebilde* in play opens a room of deep experiences that creates meaning and fulfills a tacit credo of adventures. The findings of this study suggest that outdoor leaders should place less

emphasis on direct control of the group that is consumed in nature-related activities, and not interact when the learning goes astray, and welcome autotelic activities that not necessarily are addressing the specified or contracted learning outcomes. By reminding a deeply involved group about the learning tasks at hand, the essence of being played by nature may change when attention is drawn to it; and if a situation becomes out of control, there is a possibility of unpredicted experience and powerful, not expected, learning outcomes. Deep experience can be found. Unpredictability, risk, disorder and involvement will in a perspective of ontologic play represent the means to the ends of the *Bildung* processes.

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