

EDUC 3780

Part J: Field Trips and Guest Speakers

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Expanding the Classroom Learning Through Field Trips

The field trip is designed primarily to add a greater dimension to learnings normally presented in the classroom through reading, listening or looking at visual aids. Primarily it is an observational activity with specific objectives and purposes which must be carefully planned and evaluated.

The length of time or distance for the trip is insignificant. However, the broader objectives and the underlying techniques are basically the same for all field trips since part structure and design of the course cannot be accomplished in any other way.

Rationale for Field Trips

The field trip has been used as a significant tool over an extensive period. First hand experiences in many areas are often non-existent for students, thus, undergirding the need for first hand experiences in one's environment. These actual experiences provide a significant structure upon which a student can add greatly to those things which she or he has studied or will study by these more meaningful experiences. The life experience through first hand observation and participation add a dimension which would seemingly, otherwise, be lost or which the student would be unaware.

There are few courses in any curriculum that would not be enhanced by first hand experiences in the environment. To adequately achieve this for a student, proper planning seems self evident. Usually, if the classroom is to become alive and purposeful, field trips require some general guidelines. Check with your individual school district for the policy on field trips.

Checklist for General Preparation

Before going into the field, a number of arrangements must be made, in order to assure the benefits desired by a number of people, e.g., students, teachers, administrators, and parents.

Administration Is Involved. When students leave the classroom for an extended experience, cooperation and approval of the administration must be secured. There are legal and financial obligations that must be anticipated and accepted prior to taking a field trip. If the trip is not supplied by the school's or department's budget in the same manner as textbooks and/or as other equipment is provided, then the class must find its own way of raising money. Should this be the case the administration still must approve your procedures. As a teacher, you do not possess the right to seek funds without administrative approval.

Another area of concern in *scheduling* the field trip is that it often cuts across the teaching programs of several teachers. An hourly class schedule in the secondary schools, make it difficult to schedule a portion of the school day with other teachers.

However, when proper planning is assured in advance of the activity and the proper administrative approval has been granted, then a list of students should be circulated to all teachers several days ahead of the date for the field trip to ensure sufficient faculty planning time with the least amount of disruption. Normally, all students are excused when administrative approval has been granted. These are essential steps since teachers may find it difficult to complete a field trip within a 45, 55, or 90 minute block of class time.

Liability and Regulations. Liability for the teacher is the same as it would be in the general classroom. However, since students are moving under less supervision, teachers must be even more alert and concerned.

If vehicles are required for transportation, a public conveyance or a district bus is normally the only thing acceptable. You must not sanction transportation in private cars, even if the drivers are willing to accept full responsibility. Should transportation be required, the approval of the administration must also be obtained.

Written permission slips signed by parent(s), even though encouraged and helpful does not alleviate you of your liability. If your negligence is the cause of injury, the court will hold you accountable. The written permission slip conveys that the trip is taken with parent's approval and awareness and does not absolve you of responsible supervision.

Continuous and adequate supervision must be available. This can be assured by inviting parents, administrators, teachers, and other mature adults to be available, so you have one adult to every 7-10 students. A plan or disclosure statement of conduct and the behavior expected, regardless of whether students ride or walk, must be made in advance with students and adult supervisors. Safety precautions are only effective when given prior to the activity. If students are to work in groups, assign specific duties or tasks to these groups before going into the field.

Equipment. When specific equipment is required to be used in the field, assign particular students to be the caretakers of each piece of equipment. They should be responsible to see that it is not left behind and that it is returned to the school. Have a first aid kit(s) available on all trips. If poisonous plants or animals may be encountered, be sure students and adult supervisors can identify them and your first aid kits are adequate. Insect repellents are also frequently in order.

Keeping Track of Information. To provide consistency and uniformity, students should be provided with an outline to follow in recording data. Whether the trip be in science, social science or some other area of the curriculum, good field work requires precise notations properly organized and recorded. Essential reference data, i.e., name of trip, individual's name, location, date, time, etc., should be entered on each observation. This permits different observers to be able to compare observation notes and to identify these observations for latter analysis.

Collections. If collecting is desirable, be sure the area is one where collecting may be done. If special permission to collect is required, obtain that approval in advance.

Food. If lunch is to be taken, students should be reminded in advance. If at a restaurant, prior arrangements should be made.

Dress. Class discussion of the trip should include the dress proper for the day. Take into account the weather and the activities in which the students will participate.

In-the-Field Checklist. Gather students for a general orientation and review the geography of the site, activities to be done, and the time schedule. Develop a checklist to be used as you leave one site and enter another.

Organization and Procedures

It is essential to concern yourself with these salient points: (1) preparing for the trip, (2) conducting the trip and (3) evaluation of the activity.

Preparation for the field trip.

Preparing Objectives: Objectives for which the trip is being planned must be specific and precise. By answering the question, "how will the field trip contribute to the complete objectives of the particular classroom unit which you are teaching or planning to teach," is important. The objectives for the trip, however, should be quite definite and very limited in number, to provide significant insights on a classroom unit of study which will be undertaken or has just been completed. The objectives may be stated in terms of changes in student knowledge or behavior expected to result from the trip experience. Often, insight may be gotten from a discussion of the unit with the pupils and what they want to observe. A field trip should have significance for both teacher and students.

Preparing the students for the field trip. Obviously, the students should know what they will see, why they will see it, and how to observe it. What type of behavior is expected of them regarding safety and orderly conduct.

Students should be informed regarding dress and equipment needs. Observations and recording of observations need to be discussed to ensure their accuracy and seeming significance. Also, how they will report and evaluate the trip at its conclusion.

With preparation and attention to detail, this will ensure a highly productive learning experience. Without paying attention to detail, the trip may well degenerate into a frivolous activity that will make little or no contribution to student learning let alone your own personal emotional well being.

Making arrangements for the trip. Every headache in preparation is one less headache that you and your students will have on the trip, and it's much easier to deal with these headaches before making the trip, e.g., riding or walking should normally be interspaced with observations and talks. Yet, caution should be exercised not to have back to back talks if they can be avoided.

No stone should be left unturned, no detail is too small to merit your attention since negligence and liability should ever be pressing upon your mind.

Conducting the field trip.

Seemingly it has taken a long time to get this far which is the heart of the subject—how to conduct a trip. Only when the proper preparations have been made does the actual conducting of the trip seem straight forward. Again, you are cautioned regarding your responsibility to properly prepare students on how to conduct themselves safely on the bus, at the street corner, in the field, and all points of special hazards.

If you are moving from area to area, develop a checklist and use it before leaving each point of study. If traveling long distances on a bus, you should have a system to count and rotate students.

As the teacher and director of the trip, you should stay in the background using other adults to supervise yet being cognizant and alert every moment to give a minimum of instruction at the most effective time. Your major responsibility is to keep the whole trip moving easily and efficiently. If possible, keep students constantly involved in learning and not passive sightseers. On a field trip, we do not educate people. We set the stage or situation so they will educate themselves. Let students observe what is there and draw their own conclusions. Superficial observations or hasty and irrelevant conclusions can be ironed out in discussion periods after the trip.

Discipline is minimal when proper preparations have been made and students know what is expected of them. Incurable nonconformists should be sent home and left at home on the next trip (this must be part of the disclosure statement before your departure). Any unbecoming demonstrations/behaviors by students should be rigidly nipped in the bud when it starts. There is too much at stake with the reputation of the school and the safety of others. Through experience, you will come to greatly appreciate this.

Evaluation of the activity.

What happens when the field trip is over becomes extremely significant. The evaluation of the data obtained must be adequately processed to reinforce and increase the understanding of the field observations. Reports must be completed and specific use of the data with the on-going classroom unit should be carried out.

The effectiveness of the complete trip should also be evaluated. Questions should be asked. These include:

1. Were the objectives completed?
2. Was the supervision adequate?
3. Was it a safe trip?
4. What could have been done to enhance the field trip?
5. What should have been done that was not carried out?

DO NOT FORGET TO PROCESS THE TRIP WITH YOUR STUDENTS! What understandings did they come away with?

Using Community Resources in the Classroom (Guest Speakers)

Important educational resources in a community for areas of the secondary core curricular program are its people. Engineers, electronic technicians, repair persons, florists, gardeners, ornithologists, beekeepers, geologists, chemists, rock hounds, etc., are some of the most important resources you can locate. Since classroom budgets often have been reduced significantly and the concern for efficient use of instructional time of the teacher and the increased emphasis to return to the basics, human resources become extremely important and often eliminates the need for a field trip. Often the community resources can greatly help you as a teacher in giving an opportunity for your students to deal with their environment in another way.

Community resource people are considered to be invaluable to the teacher because these individuals can:

1. contribute specialized and firsthand knowledge from their field of expertise.
2. contribute to the career information for students by providing motivation and inspiration for pupils.
3. provide stimulation and enrichment for yourself about these careers.
4. provide an opportunity for possible contribution of materials, specimen, etc., for your classroom.
5. serve as guides and supervisors when trips are planned.

Each teacher should develop "Human Resource Files" on the community. These files may well include:

- Name and address of individual(s).
- When available.
- Time required or wanted before engagement.
- Subject(s) areas or special topics which can be treated.
- Time required or wanted for presentation(s).
- Evaluation of the source once you use the person in your classroom.

When to engage a specialist is important in planning your classroom unit. Should this individual be used to introduce the unit, add to the investigations that pupils are making, or as a culmination of the unit? These questions should be answered and incorporated into your plans and objectives for the unit.

Every effort should be made to accommodate the request for equipment and material which the guest present may want. It may also be feasible for the person to remain after the presentation and talk with interested students who may have further questions. Planning with your guest, so some time is available for student questions, is usually essential. Often, the informal approach of allowing students to ask questions during the presentation is most productive, provided the guest does not become too highly involved with this type of student input. You, the teacher, needs to continually assess

the situation and provide proper help and direction to keeping the person on the appropriate task(s).

If the resource person can receive a copy of your objectives for the unit, efficiency for pupil learning and motivation could be greatly enhanced. The more orientation and awareness of the resource person for what you are trying to accomplish with the unit, the more relevance the guest resource person will be able to provide.

Briefing the students for the visit.

- Before the day when you plan to use your community resource, you should take time to brief your students. In the briefing you could:
- Discuss some background on the specialist.
- Determine some specific questions or areas of concern that the specialist could help students on their present investigation or unit.
- Discuss what it is to have a guest into our school and our classroom and what one's behavior of conduct should be. Proper courtesy and consideration of a guest is a sign of maturity.
- Discuss what should happen should a student not be respectful of our guest.

After the presentation.

Following the presentation by the resource person(s), discussions should be held to help synthesize the experience. Points which were made or not clearly made should be discussed in light of the presentation. An evaluation of the experience should be also completed.