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The contribution of field trips to learning: Greek teachers' beliefs

Evaggelia Zotou: *Evaggelia Zotou, Directorate of Secondary Education, Ioannina, Greece*.

ABSTRACT: *The aim of this study is to investigate Greek senior high school teachers' beliefs as far as the contribution of field trips to learning is concerned and analyze their impact on learning. The findings suggest that trip fields are viewed as an important learning experience by teachers. Hence, school communities should promote their implementation by all means and teachers' positive attitude towards field trips certainly reinforces students' learning skills and motivation.*

Key words*: Educational visits, Experience, Field trips, Learning, Teachers, Teaching.*

1. Introduction

Field trips are educational visits of educational purpose, which take place at a certain context, are organized by the school community and aim at experiential learning (Krepel & Duvall, 1981). A field trip is an experiential learning opportunity in which students leave the traditional classroom setting to learn within their community. During field trips, K–12 students can participate in a wide variety of experiences to expand upon their current knowledge and to apply what they learn in school. Behrendt and Franklin (2014) pointed out that field trips cannot be replicated within the confines of a classroom; rather, they are experiences that occur within a natural and relevant context. By participating in these trips, teachers enable their students to use their knowledge in real-life settings. There are many different kinds of field trips that vary based on the subject matter being taught. They range from art museums to nature reserves and include both virtual trips and in-person excursions. No matter the location, students are invited to connect with the class content in a personal way (Behrendt & Franklin, 2014). They are one of the best tools that can be used to provide every student a real-world experience, contribute to better student outcomes and boost students' life-long success. Field trips offer real world learning, personal growth and learning impact, urging curriculums in education to adapt to the current reality and needs of experiential learning. Robson (2002) has also urged educational institutions to modify their higher education curriculum to incorporate more reflective thinking and critical analysis components. A way of learning by doing is through fieldtrips and school excursions, which has been considered an important part of school life (Cooper and Latham, 1989). Fieldtrips are very useful for theoretical courses to engage in experiential activities for a chance to reflect upon the fieldtrip experience and relate it to their wider reading and theoretical aspects of the course (Jenkins, 1997).

2. Kinds of Field Trips

Formal field trips consist of planned, well-orchestrated experiences where students follow a documented format. Museums, and businesses offer excellent formal experiential learning activities and programs, which are usually run by the venue's staff. One student's experience is essentially the same as any other student's experience. Teachers find such programs comfortable because the students are bound to a choreographed

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agenda. However, there are minimal opportunities for students to personally interact and connect to the experience (Rennie, 2007).

Informal field trips are less structured and offer students some control and choice concerning their activities or environment. When observing students interacting in an informal education setting such as a science center, teachers are often amazed by how much students know and which students possess the most knowledge (Rennie, 2007). Informal education is a legitimate cognitive learning model. "Informal science experiences – in school-based field trips, student projects, community-based science youth programs, casual visits to informal learning settings, and press and electronic media can be effectively used to advance science learning" (Hofstein & Rosenfeld, 1996). Students feel at ease in an informal learning environment. The focus may be individualized, activities are not competitive or assessed, interaction is voluntary and unforced, and social interaction is encouraged. Together, these qualities create an intrinsically motivated student (Rennie, 2007) that encourages students to examine their their connection to the local and global ecosystems (Krepel & Durral, 1981).

3. Traditional Lecture-Based Learning and Experiential Learning

Adopting traditional lecture-based learning is a major teaching methodology (Fry et al., 2003). Educators view traditional lecture-based learning as an effective method to transfer knowledge to students. However, there are limited opportunities for students to practice active learning (Exley and Dennick, 2004), as they are limited to passive learning through mainly note taking and listening. Nonetheless, traditional lectures are necessary (Light and Cox, 2001) as they serve as a platform for providing background information, basic concepts, and theories required by students before they embark on their independent learning journey and become effective participants in discussions (Rogers, 1983). Nevertheless, it is often necessary to include other learning methods such as experiential learning to compensate the limitations of traditional lecture-based learning.

On the other hand, experiential learning is an interactive learning method by doing (Gillis, 1992), in which students learn through direct hands-on action and carry that particular experience into future experiences (Dewey, 1997). One of the most influential models of experiential learning is presented by Kolb (1984) who proposed that an individual's learning process of knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. These concrete experiences and reflective observations are essential for learning (Dewey, 1997). This cyclical experiential learning process is widely known as Kolb's (1984) four stage experiential learning model: (stage 1) concrete experience – where the learner is actively experiencing an activity; (stage 2) reflective observation – where the learner is consciously reflecting back on that experience; (stage 3) abstract conceptualization – where the learner is being presented with a theory or model of what is observed or to be observed; (stage 4) active experimentation – where the learner is trying to plan how to test a model or theory or plan for a forthcoming experience.

Experiential learning is authentic, first-hand, sensory-based learning. Experiential activities explore, touch, listen to, watch, move things, dissemble and reassemble. Learning consists of grasping an experience and then transforming it into an application or result (Kolb, 1983). The Association for Experiential Education defined experiential learning as a methodology in which educators direct students to a specific experience, and then guide the students through reflection to "increase knowledge, develop skills, clarify values, and develop people's capacity to contribute to their communities" (Association for Experiential Education, 2012). Experiential learning is not restricted to a certain age levels. Infants, toddlers, and growing children develop all their skills and knowledge through experience. Kolb (1983) described experiential learning using a spiraling four step cycle. A student has an experience. Reflection occurs as the student talks about the experience, and abstraction occurs as the student thinks about the experience. The student plans a new experience to test the new ideas, and the new experience takes place, and the cycle continues. Each time a cycle is completed, some learning has taken place. Although experiential learning appears to be simple, there are caveats to be considered. The learning process is not instant. Time is required to analyze and then synthesize a concept that accommodates into an already established knowledge pool. Experiential learning is not one dimensional. A student with many connections concerning a subject will accommodate new knowledge faster and with greater clarity (Kisiel, 2006a).

Experiential activities illustrated that students who acquire hands-on, authentic experience may develop curiosity and interest, leading to a desire to learn more. Observation skills improve. Social skills develop as

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the students share perceptions and knowledge with others. Students may begin to look forward to classes and connect previous knowledge and experiences with the new concepts. A strengthened interest in science may lead the student onto a science related career path or establish higher quality scientific literacy. Teachers also gain many benefits. Students are interested and motivated, permitting the instruction to rise to new and higher levels. Students who are interested and alert in class will learn the concepts, thus standardized test scores may improve. When learning is discussed, it is most often assumed to occur in the formal classroom setting. Learning is contextualized, affected by motivation, expectation, prior knowledge, experience, prior interests, beliefs, control, and choice (NRC, 2009). Learning requires time to construct meaningful understanding (Kolb, 1983). According to Kolb's (1983) learning cycle, learning experientially requires the learner to have an experience and then reflect, analyze, and test the idea to develop knowledge and to create another experience. Teachers often use this learning format in the formal classroom through labs and projects. Informal experiential learning can be an equally powerful learning tool with unique virtues. Attendance and involvement are voluntary or free choice, the curriculum is varied, the learning opportunities are neither competitive nor evaluative, all ages may participate at any given time, and the effort is learner motivated (NRC, 2009; Rennie, 2007).

Field trips offer a unique opportunity for students to create connections, which will help them gain understanding and develop an enjoyment of learning. Students on field trips sharpen their skills of observation and perception by utilizing all their senses (Nabors et al., 2009). Students develop a positive attitude for learning, motivating them to develop connections between the theoretical concepts in the classroom and what has been experienced (Falk, Martin, & Balling, 1978; Hudak, 2003). Outdoor field trips provide an opportunity for students to develop increased perception, a greater vocabulary, and an increased interest in the outdoors (Hoisington, Savleski, & DeCosta, 2010). Developed interest stimulates curiosity, empowering students to ask questions, discuss observations, consider past experiences, or simply ponder the topic (Farmer, Knapp, & Benton, 2007b; NRC, 2009). Increasing awareness and care lead to increasing passion for the subject matter, no matter whether it concerns the environment, animals, or a social situation (Tal, 2004b; Tal & Morag, 2009; Variano & Taylor, 2006). With increased interest or passion, learning is promoted as students conduct deeper observations, give in to curiosity and conduct simple investigations, discuss the subject matter with peers and teachers, and construct more abstract connections (Falk and Dierking, 2000). The majority of field trips occur during the school day, but extended field trips provide another option. Overnight field trips promote social growth for participating students by encouraging positive interactions among the students, teachers, and chaperones. Students experience independence away from home and the classroom. Some students will develop with the freedom, but others may possibly need emotional support and well-defined limits (Pace & Tesi, 2004). Field trips, especially overnight experiences, also benefit teachers. Dillon et al. (2005) noted that teacher and student relationships develop or improve, and teachers may gain new perspectives and ideas of how to teach the subject matter in a more experiential manner. Benefits from field trips are not guaranteed. Field trips are not meant to be short term teaching instruments. Students may acquire short term learning, but without reinforcement from reflection or debriefing, the learning or interest development may only be temporary. Short term memory does not constitute learning (Dierking & Falk, 1997). In contrast, Farmer, Knapp, and Benton (2007a) suggested that one year after a well-orchestrated field trip experience, many A Review of Research on School Field Trips and Their Value in Education students remembered what they had seen and heard, and displayed a newly developed pro-science attitude.

4. Educators' and Learners' Roles in Field Trips

Educators play an important role in enhancing the students' learning experience. Experiential educators as "ministers of the light of understanding" because they are highly involved in the different stages of planning and organizing the fieldtrip Burger and Sakofs (1987). A three stage (pre-trip; on-trip; and post-trip) learning process in fieldtrips is recommended by Porth (1997). At the pre-trip stage, educators need to prepare students for learning during the fieldtrip by providing lectures or related assessments. During the on-trip stage, the educator should perform the role of a facilitator and allow students to perform active learning and independent participation. The post-trip stage occurs when the students return to the classrooms, where students reflect their fieldtrip experience to the theories studied in the pre-trip lectures. Several educators (such as Ap, 2005; Wong and Wong, 2008) have adopted a similar fieldtrip learning process when organizing fieldtrips.

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Regardless of the fieldtrip learning framework used, fieldtrips should demonstrate experiential learning outcomes through preparation, participation and reflection (Do, 2006).

Students are viewed as learners during fieldtrips, with the learning by doing approach, and taking some ownership of their learning experience (Joplin, 1981). There are certain essential roles that students perform during experiential learning, such as involvement in the pre-trip stage, and engaging in interactive activities during the -trip stage (Durian et al. (1990). Although providing support and feedback throughout the experiential learning process is essential (Otten, 1985), the students are responsible for their learning experience during the fieldtrip and not dependent on the educator (Burger and Sakofs, 1987).

5. Barriers and Negative Effects

Field trips that take place in museums for example, present problems that need to be recognized. Flashy exhibits and displays often obscure the real science within the exhibit. Displays may have poorly worded explanations that yield no learning potential. Science might be portrayed as easy and unproblematic, omitting any reference to failures and issues experienced by the scientists during research and discovery, thereby failing to communicate the scientific process or communication of scientific thought, and focusing on conclusions rather than the journey or process involved to make the discoveries (Rennie 2007). Michie (1998) identified seven barriers to successful field trips: 1) transportation; 2) teacher training and experience; 3) time issues such as school schedule and teacher's ability to prepare; 4) lack of school administrator support for field trips; 5) curriculum inflexibility; 6) poor student behavior and attitudes; and 7) lack of venue options. Finding time for the trip and making arrangements for students who cannot make the trip adds tasks to an already busy teacher schedule (Mawdsley, 1999; Scarce, 1997). Teachers need to determine the logistics to transport students. Large introductory classes present unique challenges due to the need of larger transportation facilities, safety issues, more student logistical planning, and time lost trying to organize the large group (Hudak, 2003). It is imperative that the teacher prepares the students for the field trip in order to maintain a level of control that will allow for learning to occur when the class arrives at the venue (Ewert, 2009). Kalvaitis (2007) suggested that often,a teacher's biggest fear is losing control of the students once at the field trip location. Field trips can stimulate new learning, increased attitude towards science, trigger interest development, and provide many rewards to both the teacher and the students (Scarce, 1997).

6. Challenges

While many recognize the importance of student-centered field trips, there are several obstacles that hinder teachers and school administrators from providing field trip opportunities including cost, logistics, and content preparation. Many schools are already on tight budgets, so adding expensive trips can be difficult. Even if the actual event is free, the price of transportation can cause educators to avoid planning trips altogether (Clarke-Vivier & Lee, 2018). Some school districts simply may not have access to events due to these issues of cost and extra transportation. Based on the location of the school, some may not have many field trip options available to them (Behrendt & Franklin, 2014). There may not be events or venues close by that offer the desired educational content. In addition, surveyed teachers named logistical planning as another obstacle to their success for these academic excursions (Clarke-Vivier & Lee, 2018). Teachers must coordinate with the field trip facility, organize transportation, and establish student safety measures. Some described the time put into planning field trips as "lost time" because they had to organize large groups and chaperones, which took away from time teaching the course content (Behrendt & Franklin, 2014).

7. Objectives, Data Collection & Expected Results of the Study

The main objective of the study is to analyze teachers' views regarding field trips and their contribution to experiential learning and learning in general, as well as to examine teachers' beliefs on the role of filed trips on students' mental growth. As a method of data collection, semi-structured interview was chosen, as it offers the choice of flexibility as far as question order is concerned and it also helps the study participants to freely express themselves during the interview (Verma & Mallick, 2004). The questions were open-ended, in order to assure a safe and pleasant atmosphere during the interview procedure. The data collection took place from March 2024 to June 2024 and 20 senior high-school teachers from Ioannina, Greece took part in the study. Qualitative analysis was chosen for data process and analysis of the study (Ιωσηφίδης, 2008). The significance of the study is depicted in the lack of research in field trips in the Greek context, despite their increasing

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demand on behalf of both teachers, students and parents. The present study was implemented in order to focus on the dynamic aspect which is entailed in field trip. In other words, educational visits form an exceptional way to learn and this could significantly be conveyed by the teachers' point of view and attitude towards them.

8. Data Analysis

The teachers who participated in the study were willing to help during the interviews, make their views clear and contribute to the promotion of knowledge regarding field trips. Specifically, the interview focused on the contribution of field trips on learning. Nevertheless, apart from the beneficial aspect of learning via field trips, the interviewees analyzed several aspects regarding the benefits of field trips, such as empirical learning, socio-emotional growth and subsequent academic success. In particular:

Teacher 1, pointed out that field trips promote real world learning. He highlighted the fact that his students are able to access tools and environments that are not available at school. This empirical learning promotes both their learning and their self-esteem. He also noted the significance of pre- and post- field trip stages of each field trip, so as to guarantee maximum learning results.

Teacher 2 remarked that no student is interested in the typical P-P-P outdated model nowadays. Thus, according to her: 'Teachers should be seeking ways to stimulate students' imagination, creativity and mentality. Educational visits are indeed the best option towards this direction.'

Teacher 3 expressed his opinion on field trips regarding Art. As for him, field trips on Art give students a chance to think about a topic or theme from a different perspective, enabling them thus to feel free and create through Art. According to him, all teachers should be trained to organize educational visits

Teacher 4 made specific reference to the fact that field trips make it possible for students to see and touch historical artifacts in person or make a presentation on a public stage among hundreds of other things. According to her, each experience solidifies learning. Thus, the school curriculum should be reformed by further promoting field trips.

Teacher 5 believes that educational visits should be made compulsory because they bring one dimensional lesson to life and create enthusiasm for a subject that is hard to replicate through other media. It is thus, teachers' duty to make that possible.

Teacher 6 supported that educational visits support important academic concepts in students' future lives. Therefore, they will have the advantage of higher academic achievements and better career opportunities. Moreover, parents' response to field trips is extremely positive.

Teacher 7 said: 'Students who go on field trips become more empathetic and tolerant. None of these high-level skills is taught in the classroom', while Teacher 8 showed a study conducted by the University of Arkansas, which pinpointed that student who participate in a field trip to an art museum show increased empathy, tolerance and critical thinking skills.

Teacher 8 states that: 'In each city or region, there are people and places that students can access that cannot be replicated by the Internet or in the classroom. Educational visits are an ideal process to 'establish' knowledge. I firmly believe that students are triggered by such type of experiences and can learn easier!'. Moreover, it is essential we have the freedom to implement field trips, as the Greek Ministry of Education promotes field trips.

Teacher 9 explained that educational visits are important because students are able to engage with content in a variety of ways, since concepts are presented through all different media and different modalities, so students who struggle with traditional learning can feel smart and confident. Nevertheless, according to her, there is no much time for pre- and post-field trip implementation, so students may not fully benefit from this type of learning.

Teacher 10 focused on the idea that students can learn holistically during educational visits. Moreover, when they return to school, the trip that they took can serve as a touchpoint for an entire unit. She also stressed out the fact that field trips lead to better student attitude and mentality in general, as they become more responsible and independent. She mentioned however, time limitation, as a disadvantage when it comes to field trips.

Teacher 11 pointed out the significance of Kolb's (1984) four stage experiential learning model and asserted that he endeavors to implement all four stages when he organizes field trips, so as to maximize the benefits for his learners. He supports that his learners learn more efficiently this way.

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Teacher 12 analyzed the value of experiential learning. However, he declared that the educational context may not be suitable for field trips and that this is a great disadvantage for the students, who cannot get a 'real feel' of the real world out there. *Then, he mentioned* Eleanor Roosevelt's quote to demonstrate the importance of field trips:

'*The purpose of life is to live it, to taste experience to the utmost, to reach out eagerly and without fear for newer and richer experience'.*

Teacher 13 focused on the lack of education on behalf of some teachers who take part in field trips. As a matter of fact, she insisted that many educators view field trips and educational visits as a means to escape classroom and do not regard them as a way of learning. On the other hand, these teachers take part in such field trips, so as to guarantee themselves leisure time and relaxation. According to her, this pathogeny must stop as soon as possible.

Teacher 14 supported that field trips should be more analytically dealt with by the people who design educational policies. As to her, they are major part of the learning process and should be made mandatory, so as to enhance learning and later academic results.

Teacher 15 believes that students should be allowed to choose whether they wish to participate in field trips and in this case, they should be allowed to organize these trips with their teachers. As for the students who do not want to take part in field trips, another type of experiential learning should be adopted.

Teacher 16 recognized the importance of field trips. However, she believes that there are several obstacles that prevent teachers and school administrators from providing field trip opportunities such as cost. According to her, this should change by providing sufficient budgets to school communities.

Teacher 17 is against field trips in the sense that in order to be successful in planning field trips, teachers need to find a trip that is applicable to their course content and then prepare students for the experiences that they will have. They may plan pre-trip or post-trip activities that require time away from the required curriculum for the school year. As to him, there is no time or will both by teachers and students, for such type of actions.

Teacher 18 supports that planning and implementng field trips is a real 'burden'. Nevertheless, when considering the major benefits of field trip experiences, it is important to note this extra effort from the teachers to both carry out the experience and ensure the students are sufficiently prepared.

Teacher 19 actively involves field trips in her teaching, so that students can experience a higher quality education and she can experience better classroom results. Beyond the classroom, students also experience social and emotional benefits when they have the opportunity to participate in field trips.

Teacher 20 claims that, while teachers do not have complete control over making a field trip happen, they can submit proposals to the powers that do decide. It is also important that these significant benefits are clearly communicated to the people who do make the decisions (administrators and school boards). Overall, he advocates that student-centered learning through field trips has many positive outcomes for students that far outweigh any challenges they provide and can be implemented in the classroom in a variety of ways. Nature-based, arts-based, or even virtual field trips will all provide the positive outcomes that teachers are looking for as they work to provide a quality education for their students.

9. Summary of Outcomes

Overall, survey responses indicated a positive view of field trip experiences, and teachers expressed a variety of rationales for visiting out-of-school settings. Answers revealed that a connection to the curriculum was an important reason for leading a field trip (Kisiel 2005). Despite the predominance of the connection to the curriculum, it is important to note that the teachers expressed multiple motivations for conducting a field trip, including exposing students to new experiences and fostering interest. In addition, interview data suggested that the level of connection between a field trip and the curriculum covered a range: from a fully integrated field trip, complete with pre- and post-visit activities that built on the experience and corresponded to state science standards; to a casual sense of implicit connection that teachers believed would be obvious to students without much discussion back at the classroom.

An important factor that should be taken into consideration, is the fact that most teachers reported they had freedom to choose the timing of the field trip (Kisiel 2005). Not being able to schedule the trip within the suitable time frame makes it much more difficult for the teacher to link the trip to the classroom curriculum. However, the limitation of cost, with transportation expenses being most commonly cited, 'sabotages' field

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trips in general. Time seemed to impact many of the strategies teachers utilized, or planned to utilize, for their field trip. With regard to pre-visit strategies, several teachers explained that they should have made time to visit for example a museum, prior to the field trip in order to familiarize themselves with the setting and its offerings. Follow-up strategies described in pre-visit interviews were not commonly employed as intended, often due to time constraints. In most of these cases, it seems that a shortage of time for employing either pre- or post-visit strategies was ultimately a reflection of curriculum prioritization at a level above the teacher.

In general, the study highlights the fact that in order to enhance Greek students' practical skills and employment competitiveness, field trips should be well maintained and sought in the Greek educational system. It is widely accepted among the study participants that children who experience holistic development during their school years, grow up to become global citizens. As for them, it is important that kids in school are taken on field trips. Giving equal weightage to both indoor as well as outdoor activities is what will make children well prepared for the real world. Hence, most schools should not treat field trips as a novelty, but as a necessity to a proper education.

10. Conclusion

Using a qualitative approach, the study established the following conclusion: While Greek education is rapidly developing, it faces numerous challenges. By further promoting field trips, reforming teaching methods, strengthening cross-cultural education, enhancing the quality of teachers and enriching teaching resources, field trips should be essential part of Greek school reality.

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