



The Benefits (and Challenges) of School Trips and School Camps

The Queensland Government Department of Education and Training policy documents state that *'School excursions ... aim to maximize students' learning experiences'*.

However, Orion (2010) puts it rather bluntly when he says that schools seldom view field work and school camp activities as an integral part of the curriculum. After reviewing the educational literature Orion recognised that one of the underlying reasons was that many teachers are ***unfamiliar with out of classroom learning environments***.

Part of the challenge to teachers lies in the diversity of field trips and school camp activities, and the need to tailor these activities to the abilities and aptitudes of the different types of learners. Nonetheless, part of the challenge also stems from the logistic limitations within schools.

Indeed field trips and school camps can range from observation (be there) to participation (be involved), and from dependency (staff led with allocated activities) to autonomous involvement (independent group project) (Kent, Gilberton and Hunt, 1997). The observational – dependency approach is comparatively easy to organise compared to the autonomous – participation model, but obviously will not serve the needs of all students or learning outcomes.

This sounds like a poor start to an argument for undertaking school trips and camps in a Newsletter developed by a school camp provider!

But the overwhelming evidence is of course that school trips and camps are very beneficial, especially when concrete learning experiences are combined with higher levels of cognitive learning (Orion 2010). Indeed we will explore examples of this in coming Newsletters.

Field trips and school camps can provide the following:

- Exposure of students to unfamiliar environments, and hands on real-world experiences (Michie, 1998)
- Assistance integrating theoretical and practical concepts (McEwen, 1996)
- Students can become more engaged (Gold, 1991) and more motivated (Hoffman and Fetter (1975)
- Abstract topics and higher-level concepts may be easier to teach (Kern and Carpenter, 1986)
- Improved socialisation between students, and between staff and students.

And the list goes on

We agree with Lonergan and Andreson (1988) that *'Effective learning cannot be expected just because we take students into the field'*. So we trust that this Newsletter compliments other tools available to teachers seeking to develop effective school camps and field trips.

In future issues we shall explore many aspects of field trips and school camps – especially the challenges. In the next issue we will explore how one subject discipline has seen a remarkable change in student perceptions and desires to engage as a result of school camps. In the subsequent edition we will explore reducing environmental novelty (or novelty space) – identifying relevant variables that affect (and reduce) student outcomes.

We look forward to serving you through this Newsletter and of sharing experiences beneficial to all.



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