



## Reducing Field Trip Novelty Effects

Rickinson et al (2004) reviewed the literature on outdoor activity and concluded that:

*“Fieldwork can have a positive impact on long-term memory due to the memorable nature of the fieldwork setting. Effective fieldwork, and residential experience in particular, can lead to individual growth and improvements in social skills. More importantly, there can be reinforcement between the affective and cognitive domain, with each influencing the other and providing a bridge to higher order learning”*

Whilst agreeing with Rickinson et al (2004) and other researchers, that fieldwork is beneficial, Cotton and Cotton (2004) nonetheless recognise that previous research also

*“...suggests that the novelty of being in an unfamiliar field environment can negatively, as well as positively, impact on the student experiences and learning”*

Visiting new environments may hinder student learning, a process known as the ‘novelty effect’ or ‘novelty space’. To a large degree the novelty effect is a result of uncertainty.

*“Research suggests that students who are familiar with a field site and proposed activities perform significantly better than those who are not” (Cotton and Cotton, 2004).*

Novelty space has at least four dimensions:

1. Cognitive novelty – is derived from unfamiliar concepts and terminology, not yet introduced through class.
2. Psychological novelty – new environments may promote apprehension, tiredness, coldness, and hunger depending on the activities. Apprehension is common at the start of a field trip and unpreparedness, with footwear for example, may cause other psychological novelty.
3. Geographical novelty – the exciting aspects of a trip to a new geographical location may override the educational benefits. Students achieve a memorable experience but not necessarily an effective learning experience.
4. Social novelty – refers to social opportunities, both positive and negative. Examples include difficulties of being away from home, working outside of class in group activities, or enjoying new social opportunities.

Research in the 70's and 80's on preparation for field trips and camps showed that students do carry out their tasks and assignments better once the novelty space has been reduced.

Adequate preparation for a field trip involves minimising novelty space, especially negative novelty space. Before departing on a field trip or field camp students need to be familiar with their assignment (cognitive), with the area (geographical), the kinds of events they will participate in (psychological) and with whom and how will they be working (social).

On the basis of this argument, taking students into the field as the first learning activity in a program may carry considerable novelty effects. Students may not be familiar with the site or environment, the materials or challenges they will encounter, the language of describing and presenting their findings, and so on.

Without adequate preparation for novelty effects, Orion (1993) argues that learning experiences turn more into adventure – social events.



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