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

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## Abstract

Although there have been numerous studies examining the impacts of fieldtrips, few studies have carefully examined Greek teacher's perspective toward these experiences The aim of this study is to investigate Greek senior high-school teachers' beliefs as far as the contribution of field trips to experiential learning is concerned and analyze their impact on student development. This study uses qualitative methods with semi-structured interviews of 20 teachers. The findings suggest that teachers view field trips as an important learning experience that facilitate and improve knowledge. The study concludes that field trips positively affect learning, empathy and critical thinking skills.

**Keywords:** fieldtrips, teaching, learning, teachers, experience Area.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Field trip sare 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). Afield trip is an experiential learning opportunity in which students leave the traditional classroom setting to learn with in 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). 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. In the Greek educational context, field trips could lead to adapting curriculums to the needs of experiential learning as a way to promote knowledge. 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). The aim ofthis studyis to analyze Greek senior high school 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 field trips on students' mental growth.

## 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'sstaff. 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 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, p.106).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 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. None the less, traditional lecturesare necessary (Lightand 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 oftraditional 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 processis widely known as Kolb's (1984) four stage experiential learning model: (stage 1) concrete experience – where the learner is actively experiencing an activity; (stage2) 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.

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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 level. 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 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 and 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 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. 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. The Greek educational context

Within the Greek educational Cross Thematic Curriculum Framework for Education (DEPPS), field trips are optional. Teachers, undertake actions pertaining to:

- Environmental education
- Health education
- Culture and arts-oriented issues,

The teachers for the development of the above educational programs utilize the "Guide for the development of interdisciplinary environmental education activities" and are supported in their work by the heads of environmental education, health education, cultural affairs and school activities, in collaboration with the pedagogical specialists of the relevant Environmental and Sustainability Education Centers (KEPEA).

In the framework of the implementation of the School Activities Programmes, the school units may:

1. cooperate with public organizations, local self-government bodies, HEIs, other governmental or non-governmental bodies, etc., which implement programs / actions,
2. utilize approved educational material of institutions,
3. Participate in thematic networks of environmental education, health education, cultural issues (local, regional, national, international), approved by the Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs and Sports.

The above programmes foster the empirical, interdisciplinary and team approach to knowledge, so as to help pupils develop their social skills and critical thinking and at the same time to encourage schools to open up to society. Teachers are encouraged to implement various optional educational programmes-activities within or outside the classroom through student participation.

## 8. 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 field 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: 247). 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. The participants were selected due to their experience and participation in field trips. 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 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 trips. 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. The 20 semi-structured interviews lasted between 20 minutes and half one hour. The questions covered all aspects of the visit: motivation to attend, preparation beforehand, class activities during and after the visit, information received and communicated to students, expectations, impact of the show, context of the visit, and so on. The interviews were taped, transcribed, and subjected to a standard content analysis (Mayring 1997).

## 9. 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, τhe teachers participating in the interviews gave multiple reasons when asked why they visited out-of-school learning environments in general. Curricular overlap was mentioned most often (30%), real-life and hands-on learning (25%) and the specific ability of

an out-of-school venue to present content (20%) also ranked high. Other reasons included the opportunity to learn "with all senses" outside the classroom, increased motivation of students, learning effectiveness, the benefits of an alternative instructor, and personal interest of the teacher. Overall, teachers provided a vast array of reasons besides curricular fit, an indication that they were generally aware of the rich opportunities that field trips can provide.

When the same teachers were asked more specifically why they implement particular field trips, 40% mentioned that their visits are simply part of a school outing, or done primarily to "leave school," though more than half of these teachers also said that they had intended to combine the outing with an educational experience.

A quarter of the teachers believe that field trips aid them in their teaching because students explore aspects of theory in practice. Half of them present a classroom-relevant topic more effectively during the field trips, while the others simply point to the general ability of field trips to visualize or present complex subject matter. Few of the teachers specifically choose field trips to fit into their curriculum or classroom unit. In fact, only two teachers reported specific goals that connect to their current classroom unit. One fourth of the teachers stated that they set specific goals for each visit. Teachers' answers indicated that some might "create" goals only after the visit, rather than first setting goals and objectives for a field trip. However, it appeared as if some of the teachers used a specific out-of-school educational experience opportunistically. While this outcome is directly tied to the situation in Germany—in which schools assign a school day for field trips for all students—field trips that are motivated by the venue itself might not be uncommon elsewhere. In the German case, the question was less why teachers chose the venue, and rather more how they used the opportunity of a field trip for learning and/or enjoyment.

More than half of the teachers did not generally share many field trip details with their students prior to the visit and only a few teachers informed their students about their goals of the visit prior to its implementation. While most teachers stated that the field trips met their own expectations, the majority of teachers were less certain whether their students' expectations were met. However, teachers on the whole were not overly concerned with their students' expectations. Three-quarters of the teachers stated that they conducted follow-up activities, though descriptions suggest they were generally brief and unsystematic; references to the visit made later on in the classroom, for instance, were counted as follow-up. While most of the teachers stated that they conducted some form of follow-up, about two-thirds of the students who completed a delayed-post written survey indicated that they did not experience any follow-up. When teachers reported follow-up activities on the written survey, more than a third of their students did not remember them.

Almost all of the visiting teachers recommended some form of preparation before taking the field trip, either by preparing the topic (40%), conducting some general preparation (20%), or addressing students' emotions, expectations, or prior knowledge (10%). Only a few teachers recommend that the visit be integrated into the curriculum or embedded in current classroom teaching. This stands in contrast to the opinions about curricular integration voiced by the same teachers earlier during the interview when more than one third of the teachers indicated that field trip experiences ought to be integrated into the curriculum. Follow-up was recommended by the majority of teachers (60%), mostly to clarify remaining questions, or as

a means for repetition and improved retention. All of the teachers who recommended follow-up also recommended preparation.

The majority of teachers' beliefs regarding school trips were summed up by a teacher who quoted Eleanor Roosevelt 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'.

As far as students' perspectives regarding field trips are concerned, 80% of them view field trips as very interesting and educational. Almost all of them believe that they gain invaluable experience when participating in field trips and that field trips boost their imagination, confidence, creativity and thinking skills. According to them, each experience solidifies learning. Thus, the school curriculum should be reformed by further promoting field trips. Moreover, many students believe that field trips should be made compulsory because they bring one dimensional lessons to life and create enthusiasm.

**10. 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. These results concur with Reid and Petocz's proposal that creative thinking in relation to education is seen as a "component of the environment" (Reid and Petocz, 2004).

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 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.

Subsequently, based on these findings it is wise that schools must consider providing more field trips for students and more opportunities to view real-life examples. These trips should be further promoted into the curriculum as the results of this study indicate that these visits are invaluable to learning and the development of creativity.

## 11. 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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