



Teaching Outside the WALLS

Why is it that we so often teach in the same way we were taught? As I look back to field trips in elementary school, they always came at the end—the end of the unit, the end of the quarter, the end of the year. I remember taking a field trip to the airport when I was in 4th grade. As we were drawing pictures after returning to school, one student remarked, “I wish we would have gone there earlier because I would have understood more when we studied it.” Quite an insight for a 10 year old. Although I am not sure why that comment stayed with me, it made sense when I became a teacher and was exploring ways to capture my students’ attention with meaningful learning experiences.

Technology continues to change our world on a daily basis. It offers many opportunities for teachers to be creative—to teach differently. One current practice that is gaining acceptance from lower elementary through graduate level is the flipped classroom,¹ in which students watch a video or study a lesson prior to discussing the topic in class the following day. The flipped classroom concept can be very successful when applied to an event that has traditionally come at the end of a unit—the field trip.

Susan Kovalik, creator of the Highly Effective Teaching Model and founder of The Center for Effective Learning (theCenter4Learning.com), suggests changing the age-old name of field trip to “Being There Experiences.” She expounds on the benefits of correlating learning experiences with meaningful



curriculum and community involvement.² Every time I venture out of the classroom with students, I observe how much they not only enjoy the experience, but also learn from it. Field trips provide students with the opportunity to see something different and to benefit from the experience. These experiences can also be seen as great equalizers because all students are placed on equal footing.³ Kovalik explains that after 30 minutes in a location, it doesn't matter which student reads better or more, or which ones have had more life experiences; they are all learning something new by being there.

Other experts, such as Salvatore Vascellaro, share compelling reasons for taking students out of the classroom and into the world in which they live.⁴ Ellen White, too, stresses the importance of children spending time outside. "As they look on a beautiful landscape, ask them why God clothed the fields and woods with such lovely and varied hues."⁵ When students find specimens as simple as rocks and leaves to bring back to the classroom, their interest is heightened because they found the items themselves. "Examine under the microscope the smallest and commonest of wayside blossoms, and note in all its parts the exquisite beauty and completeness. So in the humblest lot true excellence may be found . . ."⁶

What students notice may not be what the teacher originally planned as the goal of the experience. While I was

taking my students on a walking field trip through downtown Walla Walla, Washington, we were caught in a sudden downpour. Along with exploring the statues and sculptures located throughout the town, the students walked for blocks in the rain. As we debriefed and discussed the learning experience, more than a few students were fascinated with walking in the rain. No one could have guessed that would be a high point of the trip. Reflecting on the experience, I realized that students often go directly from a car into a building, but that day they had a different experience. They could look at the world from another perspective and discuss what it must be like for those who don't have cars.

The field trip stimulated other observations as well. As they gathered around one sculpture, several students pointed to the graffiti on its pedestal. "Mrs. Veverka, when we get back to school, may we write letters to the city to let them know that if they don't stop that, the next time someone could damage the statue?"

This field trip led to a variety of lessons in several areas of study. In social studies, it supported a lesson on the study of government. In language arts, it prompted a lesson on the value of effective communication and letter writing. In science (and social studies), it led to lessons about the importance of caring for a city's resources. An afternoon stroll through town thus gave additional meaning to several aspects of the curriculum.

With so many school districts cutting field trips because of budget constraints, authors Jay P. Greene, Brian Kisida, and Daniel H. Bowen conducted a study measuring the value of field trips. Among the benefits were the development of two very important traits in today's world: historical empathy and acceptance.⁷ These traits help students to understand the past and relate to the present as responsible citizens.

While most of us recognize the importance of extra-classroom experiences, often they can seem daunting to an already-too-busy teacher. The limitations and roadblocks may seem overwhelming, causing one to dismiss the idea before even looking into the possibilities. A list of concerns and pitfalls that might stand in the way might well exceed the space allowed for this article. For example, consider the following:

- How can one find field trip opportunities in a small town or rural area?
- What if students have already been to the location of the field trip?
- Do businesses allow students to tour their facilities anymore?
- How can a classroom budget afford even one more expense? Will it be feasible to ask parents to cover the costs?
- We have so much to cover, how can I afford to give up the time?
- The parents all work; how can I

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meet the ratio of adult chaperones to students?

- Does the school need extra insurance to cover the liability?

The list could go on and on. But first, let's examine the benefits of field trips. We'll deal with solving the challenges later in the article.

Let's begin with the importance of introducing students to a world that is larger than their campus: the world of work. Young people learn best when they can see purpose in what they are studying; and when they see the skills they are learning put to use in the workplace, many become more motivated. Because each student learns differently, one cannot predict what will impress or stimulate interest. Businesses and the people who work for them have stories; they have histories and interesting skills. When students have the opportunity to be inspired by originality, perseverance, or by stories of others who have overcome difficulties, this can change the course of their lives. While on a field trip, students can observe employees demonstrating a work ethic, helping others, and working efficiently.

Where can teachers find field trip locations? The answer is *anywhere and everywhere!* In the early grades, my favorite field trip was to the Cal-Ray Cookie Company. Back then, people touring the plant were permitted to walk along the assembly line. At the beginning of the trip, we each were given a large paper grocery bag with instructions to help ourselves to the broken cookies found in drums at the end of

each assembly line. Naturally, that was a favorite destination.

Students can benefit from field trips to various types of businesses as well as to churches/synagogues/temples, local missions/food banks/soup kitchens, city offices, parks, museums, and government agencies.

Grandparents, community members, or parents may have collections of artifacts they are willing to share. For many years, I took students to my parents' home. One year, my dad would share some of the specimens from his rock collection, and on the alternate year he showed Native American dolls, rugs, baskets, and pottery from his other collections. One day, a student suggested that we go on a field trip to his grandfather's garage. What a treasure trove of antique tools and fascinating gadgets we found, all displayed in such a neat and orderly way! As we left, we were invited to return to see the basement where the student's grandmother stored spinning wheels and antiques that would have been used inside the home many years ago. And all of this was less than a block from our classroom!

What about taking a trip on local public transportation? While this is commonplace for some students, many others may have never ridden on a bus, trolley, train, or subway. In some areas, public transportation, including ferries, are available at extremely reduced fares for school groups. Be sure to check with your legal counsel or conference office of education for guidelines and any special safety concerns. The Adventist Risk Management Website has a number of forms and helpful guidelines.⁸

Steps to Field Trip Planning

1. *Identify field trip opportunities.*

The first step is to review your curriculum and brainstorm about what might be available in your area that would dovetail with the scheduled topics. If you think outside the box, you will be able to identify many science-related field trips. Are there businesses that use robots? Assemble automobiles or farm equipment? Consider what outdoor learning experiences your area might offer. Are there large trees, historic houses and farms, or wildlife areas? Browse the telephone directory or online to identify possible places to visit. Talk with trusted church or board members to glean ideas. Are there colleges or universities nearby? What resources do they have? They may be happy to share something from their music or art department, or provide a tour through their science facilities.

2. *Begin making contacts.* Contact business owners, artists, or government representatives, and tell them what you are studying. Ask if they might be able to help.

3. *Arrange transportation and supervision.* Follow guidelines set up by your conference or district. Be sure to obtain driver profiles, verification of insurance, and background-check information prior to the activity or trip. Transportation can take time and must be arranged in advance to allow for processing paperwork required by the conference. Remember that public transportation can also be an answer if routes are near the school.

4. *Plan for safety.* Before planning an off-campus trip, consult insurance pol-





icy guidelines and any safety materials provided by your school or conference. Preparation helps minimize risk.⁹

5. *Create a budget.* How much is this learning activity going to cost, and how are the costs going to be covered? Fundraising events may need to be planned to support field trips. Perhaps someone can write a grant proposal requesting funds to enhance learning. Talk with your building administrator (in a larger school) or school board chair (in a small school) to see if there are any funds that might be allocated. Here is a good opportunity to get creative and look for ways to raise money that can be reserved for educational adventures. Consider holding a fundraiser or special program from which proceeds will be dedicated to a field-trip fund.

6. *Identify chaperones.* More is better when it comes to chaperones. Plan for at least one additional person above what is required so that you are still covered if a chaperone cannot attend. Adult-to-child ratios vary with the age of the students. Be sure to check your conference recommendations. Completion of *Shield the Vulnerable*¹⁰ is required by the North American Division (NAD) for anyone working or volunteering with children in NAD schools or churches. If parents work, consider inviting grandparents or church volunteers. Sometimes parents from previous years are willing to volunteer.

7. *Finally, plan for the unexpected.* Anticipate anything that might happen. Take a few moments to brainstorm about problems that may arise during the field trip. Make a list of any students who have health issues or aller-



gies. Assemble itineraries and consent forms. Prepare students by discussing some of the things they will want to look for and detailing what behavior will be expected. Go over possible scenarios and role play what students should do in those situations. Practice polite greetings and “thank you’s” with your students.

If Going Off-Campus Is Not a Possibility, Consider the Alternatives

If taking students off campus is not a possibility some or all of the time, there are alternatives. Presenters can come to school. Why not plan an on-campus or in-house field trip? To create a new space, rearrange the classroom to make it seem like a different venue. Firsthand experiences are best, but simulations are also an excellent choice. Consider “virtual field trips” to locations like museums and other venues that offer live feed, virtual tours, or videos. For example, <http://adventistheritage.org> has virtual tours under the heading “Heritage Sites.” If you are studying a location that is too far away to visit, why not organize the classroom to mimic the events of a cruise? Plan a meal reflecting the cultural heritage of the destination(s) and have students share their findings while they play the part of tour guides.

Following the Field Trip

After returning from a trip, make sure to provide time for review and debriefing. As students share what they

have learned, this will trigger learning by their classmates. Students can also write papers, keep a field trip journal, or illustrate some of the activities of the day. Be prepared for diverse students to return with different impressions about the event. Be sure to follow up on your visit by providing students with the opportunity to write thank-you letters. Excerpts from the writing assignment or journals can be shared in the letters.

Field trips, “Being There Experiences,” “Live Learning” or any other name you prefer involve work. Yet the benefits to students make it all worthwhile. Involve other teachers and take turns planning. Draw on the expertise of parents, grandparents, and local church members, as well as other members of the community. If you teach in a small school, why not partner with other schools to make planning and budgeting more efficient?

But most importantly, teach outside the walls. Make learning more than the textbook. Explore what is available and create the richest learning experience possible. Doing so will provide students with greater opportunities to see and appreciate the world around them. ☞



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NOTES AND REFERENCES

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2. <http://www.thecenter4learning.com/html/resources/hetmodel.htm>.
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4. Salvatore Vascellaro, *Out of the Classroom and Into the World: Learning From Field Trips* (New York: The New Press, 2011).
5. Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publ. Assn., 1903), p. 119.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 114.
7. <http://educationnext.org/the-educational-value-of-field-trips/>.
8. Field Trip Forms (English, Spanish, and International): <http://www.adventistrisk.org/prevention-resources/risk-control-plan/risk-control-forms>.
9. Travel Safety Brochure and Videos: <http://www.adventistrisk.org/prevention-resources/safety-topics/travel-and-mission-trips>.
10. Child Protection Resources for Seventh-day Adventist Churches in North America: <http://www.adventistrisk.org/prevention-resources/safety-topics/child-and-youth-activities/child-protection>.