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The Benefit of Field Trips

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The Benefit of Field Trips

An Honors Thesis Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Honors in
The College of Education.

By
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Under the mentorship of Dr. Meca Williams-Johnson

ABSTRACT

Episodic memory is commonly described as a person's unique recall of a specific event (Joordens, 2012, p. 105). Episodic memories can be triggered from senses such as sights and smells. People have been known to have detailed episodic memories, allowing them to remember extremely specific details from witnessed or experienced episodes in their lives. If episodic memory can be so strong in helping people remember given information, it is thought that they may be able to help people retain specific information when learning about new subjects. If this is the case, it is reasonable to wonder whether or not helping to create episodic memories could help young students learn about new topics. This current research project explored the episodic memories created on field trips that might help students relate to the curricular information that is intended from school field trips. Throughout the study "The Benefit of Field Trips," the researcher completed a review of related literature to gain a better understanding of what episodic memory is and how it may relate to field trips. Using a qualitative research design, the researcher interviewed five pre-service teachers and five veteran teachers regarding their previous experiences with field trips and their perspectives on the benefits of Field Trips. Data was analyzed using a thematic approach. The results suggest that field trips can have a profound impact on students as they can expose them to new environments, may enhance their social skills, and serve to enhance the information developed in the curriculum.

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Introduction

Excitedly speaking the words “field trip” commonly brings to mind fun days of learning and socializing with others. Perhaps if one is reflecting on days past, he or she may reminisce about a fourth-grade field trip to the planetarium. If he or she is a current teacher, the mind may go to the planning and preparation of organizing a field trip for students. In my case, I think of two different situations. The first instance I think of was a field trip that I went on when I was in elementary school. Students in my class traveled to downtown Savannah to visit the Telfair Museum; a trip we went on every year. However, this trip is prominent in my mind because we viewed “The Tiffany Lamp Exhibit”, and we created our own lamps. To this day, any time I see a stained-glass lamp of a similar style, I automatically think of the Tiffany Lamps that I learned about so many years ago.

The second instance that comes to mind was a recent trip that I took with a first-grade class in which I conducted observations. On this trip, the students had the chance to visit the Old Freeman Family Farm. Here, they were able to learn about different farm animals and animal products, find their way through a corn maze by answering different questions about the United States, and explore a pumpkin patch. Watching the students’ excited reactions to these experiences was extremely rewarding. However, the most rewarding aspect of the trip was listening to the students continue to expand their knowledge about the subjects before, during, and after the field trip took place. Because these students were actually able to experience the farm rather than just reading about it in a book, I feel that they will be more likely to remember this information years from now, just as I have with the Tiffany Lamps.

Many others agree with this view. In her article “Trail Mix,” librarian Pat Scales (2012) reflects fondly on her fourth grade year: “the year of field trips” (p. 40). She is

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able to recall all that she learned on said field trips, and she advocates for the use of field trips in the modern-day education setting. However, Scales does point out that for it to be beneficial, a great deal of planning must take place so that students are prepared for the field trip. Scales (2012) also warns: “Field trips are worthwhile only if students understand their value. No school trip should be viewed as a day away from learning” (p. 40).

Coughlin points out that the lived learning that occurs through the use of field trips “is optimized only when teachers actively integrate the content of the field trip with the curriculum” (2010, p. 200). Therefore, it seems that field trips can be an important part of education, as they allow students to learn through an alternative method. However, it is important the field trip is viewed as a learning experience that incorporates the curriculum in order for the activity to be truly beneficial.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to investigate episodic memory through elementary level field trips. While many studies explain how episodic memory stores information from experience, this study seeks to explore what people retain and how it has impacted their learning about the subject matter. This study will investigate teachers’ and pre-service teachers’ episodic memories of school field trips and practical knowledge gained from the experiences.

Research Questions

- What memories do teachers and pre-service teachers recall when describing an influential field-trip experience?
- In what ways do teachers apply knowledge gained from field trip experiences?

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Terms Defined

- Field trip: “any learning experience that occurs outside a classroom” (Krakowka, 2012 , p. 236).
- Episodic memory: “memories of specific, individual events, as opposed to general knowledge” (Joordens, 2012, p. 105).
- Episodic foresight: thoughts about what may happen in the future, based on past experiences found within the episodic memory (Martin-Ordas et. al, 2012., p. 209).
- Spatial navigation: cognitive maps of places and events (Martin-Ordas et. al., 2012, p. 209).

Review of Literature

Reviewing literature, including articles related to both education and memory, revealed several facts connected to the research questions at hand. To begin, it was revealed that teachers value the field trip experience a great deal. This is evident in articles such as “Trail Mix,” in which librarian Pat Scales (2012) reflects fondly on her past field trip experiences and advocates for the continued use of such alternative learning methods. It is also noted in a few different sources that planning plays a crucial role in any field trip process. Teachers put a great deal of time and effort into planning field trips for students, in order to make them as meaningful as possible. The following review of literature will discuss both the use of episodic memories as they pertain to field trips and the preparation that goes into field trips.

Episodic Memory

The use of episodic memory is perfectly illustrated in Scales’ article as she describes her trip to the “Little White House,” a train ride, and weekly trips to a new school that was under construction during “the year of field trips” (2012, p. 40). Additionally, Scales (2012) remarks that she can “still remember” these alternative learning experiences because they stand out as exciting school memories, even decades

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later. Because she learned so much from these experiences, Scales (2012) is a huge advocate for the use of field trips in the educational setting. However, she does point out that it is important to relate field trips to the curriculum so that students do not see such experiences as simply a break from learning. Rather, the students should be prepared for the experience through different classroom-based lessons and activities that introduce the information to them before the field trip. After the field trip, follow-up activities should be completed to tie everything together. Planning a field trip is labor intensive for teachers; however, research and collaboration can make planning much more manageable.

Just as the library may be used as a resource for planning future field trips, Coughlin (2010) points out that collaborating with outside sources can be beneficial for planning these “lived learning” experiences. Other points made by Coughlin further state that “learning is optimized only when teachers actively integrate the content of the field trip with the curriculum.” This can be done through “careful planning and collaboration on the part of teachers and the sites they visit” (p. 200). Such planning is especially important when “school administrators demand that field trips have a curricular connection” in order to address state standards and meet curricular needs (p. 200). Coughlin’s (2010) study dealt with the planning and implementation of a history lesson in the Lutz-Franklin Schoolhouse. Follow ups showed that episodic memory allowed students to remember many things from the field trip (which will be described more in-depth later in the review). For example, “the vast majority of recollections were embedded within descriptions of the physical and social setting, often in relationship to some statement of feeling or attitude” (Coughlin 2010, p. 207). Coughlin also states that

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“hands-on activities during field trips enabled students to recall information” from this episodic memory.

Furthermore, “students were able to distinguish between the past, present, and future events” (p.208). Being able to distinguish between past and present events is a pretty typical effect of episodic memory. However, being able to distinguish future events is a phenomenon that Martin-Ordas et al., (2012) refers to as “episodic foresight” According to their study, “thinking about and imagining the future are highly adaptive capacities . . .,” so it can be assumed that field trips can also foster a level of higher thinking making them a “valuable teaching tool” (p. 209).

There is much evidence available showing the benefits of field trips. For example, Bevan, Vitale, and Wengreen (2012) advocate for the use of field trips to farms, stating that based on research, students’ knowledge may be enhanced about growing vegetables after a farm field trip that offers experiential learning and vegetable-tasting opportunities. Pugh and Bergin (2005) also assert that more interactional, alternative education methods lead to a higher level of school-to-real-world transfer as evident in their statement:

Learning that involves the development of deep-level, connected knowledge structures and metacognitive knowledge in relation to the subject matter is more likely to be accessible in novel contexts and when solving real-world problems than learning that is superficial and disconnected (p. 16).

Thus, it can be concluded that experiential learning methods, such as field trips, can be more beneficial to students’ holistic learning than worksheets and other day-to-day tasks.

Another advocate of field trips is Krakowka (2012), a geography teacher who feels that field trips are a great way to help students “internalize the information” (p.

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236). She states that “informal discussions with [her] students several years after they have taken [her] class suggest that what they remember most are the field trips” (2012, p. 236). Krakowka (2012) then goes on to describe that “field trips include any learning experience that occurs outside a classroom” (p. 236). Kolb’s experiential learning theory was emphasized, supporting Krakowka’s (2012) belief that “learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (p. 237). Krakowka (2012) suggests that field trips are a form of active learning and students get valuable added experience when seeing things for themselves.

While some of the research reviewed discusses how beneficial field trips can be, evidence also emphasized how vital the process of planning the field trips can be, especially if the field trip is to be successful. As mentioned earlier, Scales (2012), encourages teachers to use resources such as the library in order to plan for pre-field trip lessons. Coughlin (2012) also advocates for the pairing of teachers with outside resources in order to develop appropriate materials to be used before and after the visit. Doing this can ensure that the information given on the field trip will be better received and also that the curricular standards are fully achieved. According to Wong and Wong (2009) ,

The educator/teacher plays a very important role in enhancing the learning experiences of students on a field trip. He or she has to be actively involved in the different phases of organizing the field trip and also has to perform different roles and functions. In the pre-departure phase, the educator/teacher needs to carry out careful planning and preparation; this might include the matching of the subject’s

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syllabus, learning objectives, and outcomes with all of the activities on the field trip (p. 25).

Upon studying past field trips in relation to current and upcoming field trips, Krakowka (2012) has discovered that “certain techniques work better than others in terms of how successful a learning experience a field trip is” (p. 236). For example, when field trips are followed by classroom activities, an increase in student learning may occur as a result of the experience. Thus, it is possible that incorporating these techniques in the planning process is beneficial.

How does Krakowka remember which techniques work best for her students on field trips? The answer can more than likely be found in the study of episodic memory. According to Knapp (2000), researcher Endel Tulving theorizes that “episodic memory is ‘involved in the recording and subsequent retrieval of memories of personal happenings and doings’” (p. 3). Shepherd (2012) states that this is “our most powerful kind of memory in terms of capacity,” as “there are ‘episodes’ in our lives that we can recall clearly no matter how long ago they may have occurred” (p.1) . He then goes on to relay that “this is an incredibly powerful kind of memory, and skillful educators make the best use of it” (p. 1).

Teachers may use episodic memories in their classrooms on a day-to-day basis without even trying. This would be known as “involuntary” or “spontaneous episodic memory” (Berntsen, et al., 2012, p. 1). According to Berntsen, Staugaard, and Sorensen (2012), involuntary episodic memories are, as the name implies, “memories of events that come to mind spontaneously, that is, with no preceding retrieval attempts” (p. 1). These everyday memories are typically emotionally positive and are brought on by some

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overlap of cues in the current situation and the remembered event. Shepherd (2012)

asserts that even the experience of the same emotion that we experienced during an event can trigger the episodic memory. The implication of this knowledge is that experiences, such as field trips, from a teacher's childhood could influence the way that he or she teaches in the classroom. Perhaps, sometimes without even realizing it, teachers are reminiscing on field trips of days past and incorporating the knowledge gained from this experience into a lesson.

Preparation for Field Trips

Even more importantly, teachers may use episodic memory to focus on the positive and negative aspects of field trips that they have been on or perhaps even those that they have facilitated in the past. Farrell's (2012) definition of episodic memory gives an even better connection to how teachers may use their memories in the field trip planning process. He states that "episodic memory refers to our ability to mentally revisit the past and re-experience past episodes and events" (2012, p.223). However, it should be noted that episodic memories are simply summaries of events, so they are "experience-near and correspond to experience but they are not literal records of experience" (Conway, 2009, p. 2305). Allowing for such re-visitation can allow teachers to place themselves in a past situation in order to reflect on what he or she liked about the experience as well as what he or she would change. Thus, teachers' episodic memory can aid in planning of future field trips for their students. For example, a teacher may reflect on his or her visit to the beach and aquarium. Perhaps this teacher remembers that the lessons taught inside the neighboring aquarium were very beneficial. However, the time of year increased the chance for the resulting cold, rainy day, preventing the students

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from learning very much on the beach itself. This teacher could take the knowledge from this memory and decide to keep the aquarium aspect of the field trip, but perhaps he or she would plan for a better time of year or have a “back-up plan” for the students in case of rain. Thus, the teacher will have used episodic memory in order to plan a field trip.

The teacher has also used the “episodic foresight” discussed earlier in the review, using a “core brain network” that is activated when people remember their past, imagine their future, take the perspective of others (i.e. theory of mind), and also use some forms of spatial navigation (Martin-Ordas et al., 2012). In thinking about the past, the teacher has reflected upon his or her previous field trips. By imagining the future, the teacher may consider lesson plans leading up to the field trip, the actual day and logistics of the field trip, and the concluding lessons to be implemented upon return from the field trip. When taking on the perspective of others, the teacher may try to look at the field trip through the perspective of the participating students or maybe even from the perspective of any liaisons or guides that will be helping with the trip. Finally, by considering “spatial navigation,” the teacher may take into consideration any logistics involved with traveling and accommodations. Overall, he or she will have to take many factors into consideration when planning and implementing the field trip. Although planning a field trip will never be a “simple task,” with the help of episodic memory and episodic foresight, it may become more fluid over time.

In conclusion, it is important to realize just how beneficial field trips can be to the learning environment. However, field trips can only be beneficial if they have been properly planned to incorporate the needs of the students and the goal of meeting curriculum standards. In planning field trips, teachers may incorporate the use of episodic

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memory in order to reflect upon past experiences as well as to think ahead to the future, in a way that is beneficial to their students. Through the knowledge gained in this study, the evidence for whether or not field trips are truly beneficial will be enhanced.

Methodology

This study seeks to understand teachers' experiences and perspectives on field trips and student achievement. I am interested in further understanding what teachers expect from the field trip experience as well as what we retain from previous field trip experiences. To examine this, a variety of pre-service and current teachers were interviewed in order to learn about their experiences with field trips. Therefore, this is a qualitative research study in the tradition of phenomenology, conducted by using individual interviews to collect data.

Participants and Site

To conduct this research, interviews were conducted with ten teachers in elementary schools in one mid-size county in the Southeastern region of the US. The group of teachers consisted of five pre-service teachers that were preparing to enter the education field, as well as five veteran teachers who have been teaching in the schools for several years. The veteran teachers ranged from kindergarten to fifth grade and also included one instructional resource professional that formerly served as a teacher.

Data Sets

For this study, a qualitative approach was used by selecting participants who have extensive field trip experience. The pre-service teachers had taken numerous field trips during their primary school experiences, and the veteran teachers had planned and executed at least five field trips with their students. Interviews were conducted with each

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participant individually. A list of questions were developed prior to the interviews by the researchers.

Data Analysis

Each interview session was recorded and later transcribed by an unbiased third party. During the review of the transcripts, the researcher utilized Creswell's (2013) data analysis spiral as a guide for coding the data. In the initial review of the transcripts, the \ key statements were identified, including the researcher's notes on the interview protocols, to aid in identifying significant statements and common patterns that emerged to develop themes. In subsequent analyses, the researcher continued to narrow the focus and code the participant statements into categories and sub-categories.

Findings

Background and Demographics

The interviews were conducted in the spring of 2014. Interviews with the veteran teachers were held at their school, while interviews with pre-service teachers were conducted in more informal settings, such as meeting up a few minutes before class.

Demographics for both groups can be found in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographics of Participants

Name	Teacher/Pre-Service Teacher	Years of Experience	Grade-Level
Ms. Gomez	Teacher	8	Kindergarten
Ms. Tapley	Teacher	10	First Grade
Ms. Brooks	Instructional Coach (former teacher)	16	All (taught kindergarten)
Ms. Parrish	Teacher	25	Kindergarten
Ms. Thompson	Teacher	24	Fifth
Ms. White	Pre-Service Teacher	2*	Fifth
Ms. Repasy	Pre-Service Teacher	1.5*	Fifth

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Ms. Lancaster	Pre-Service Teacher	1.5*	Third
Ms. Cook	Pre-Service Teacher	<1*	Second
Ms. Hobbs	Pre-Service Teacher	2*	Kindergarten

* The “Years of Experience” are from the Teacher Education Program in which students were enrolled.

Themes

Based on the interviews conducted, there appeared to be several recurring themes. These themes included the “Impact or Importance,” “Social Skills,” “Exposure,” “Ties to the Curriculum,” and “Days of Escape.” The “Impact or Importance” theme encompasses how the teacher feels about whether or not the field trip has an impact on students or is important to their learning. “Social Skills” refers to a few different teachers’ comments about field trips exposing students to social settings which they may not otherwise be exposed to, thus helping them to develop social skills that may help them at other times in life. “Exposure” refers to several teachers’ comments about the fact that some students may never be exposed to the things that are done, or the places that are seen on field trips, making this is an opportunity for them to learn more about the world than they would have otherwise. “Ties to the Curriculum” is in reference to whether or not teachers feel that field trips can tie into the curriculum, thus promoting the desired learning goals. Finally, “Days of Escape” relates to the view that some teachers or pre-service teachers held that field trips have been in the past, or currently are, just a “fun escape” from the daily classroom. The bases for these themes were pulled from several quotes from the participants. These quotes can be found in Appendix A.

Analysis

When reviewing the interview transcripts, it seems that the overarching theme is that teachers are advocates of field trips. They believe that field trips may be beneficial in

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helping students learn the designated curricular standards and skills for life beyond the classroom. Evidence for this can be found in the quotes about how teachers emphasize the importance of planning field trips for their students in their own classrooms.

However, it is also important to note that many teachers and pre-service teachers were able to recall field trips from their days as students, using episodic memories.

Field Trips as Recalled Through Episodic Memories

As previously discussed, episodic memories are “memories of specific, individual events, as opposed to general knowledge” (Joordens, 2012 p. 105). Such episodic memories were displayed from teachers and pre-service teachers throughout each interview, as they talked about experiences on field trips that they had as students. For example, Ms. Repasy could vividly recall a field trip that she had been on to a planetarium, describing how it “was really cool to see the star formations and things like that. It kind of helped [her] picture things, put it in context . . .” (M. Repasy, personal communication, May 01, 2014). Ms. Lancaster also discussed a field trip that she remembered in detail as she stated: “We went on an overnight field trip to somewhere in Alabama. And they did an Underground Railroad walk-through at night. And we were slaves and we had to be quiet. And we had a leader and there were bad guys trying to catch [us]. It changed my view because we were the ones in danger. It was kind of exciting” (M. Lancaster, personal communication, May 01, 2014). As one could tell during this interview, such an experience helped to change the viewpoint of the respondent and even helped the student to remember what it felt like to be in such a situation. In another conversation, a pre-service teacher, Ms. Cook, was able to recall the specific days that things were done on a weekend-long science field trip she attended in

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middle school, describing how the students were able to learn about different water types and levels as they attended “classes” on Thursday and Friday, and were later able to apply the information gained on a “fun” trip to the beach on the Saturday of the trip (M. Cook, personal communication, May 07, 2014).

Based on the descriptions that these participants gave, field trips can have a profound effect on the viewpoints and memories that students create and carry into their adult lives. The students were able to recall these events using episodic memories and were then able to describe the impact that it had on them, both as students and as future educators. This shows a clear positive correlation between field trips and the creation, as well as the recall, of episodic memories.

However, episodic memories can be made up of any memory, even memories that may not necessarily be deemed “important” to one’s life or knowledge. Therefore, it is important to note that while a relationship exists between field trips and the creation of episodic memories, there are also important factors that go into making field trips *meaningful*. Throughout the interviews, the veteran and pre-service teachers gave some insight into what can make field trips meaningful and more beneficial, as opposed to *just* a “fun escape” from the daily classroom.

Meaningful Experience or “Fun Escape?”

Based on the interviews conducted, the teachers and pre-service teachers generally came to the consensus that, when they were students, they saw field trips as more of a “fun escape” from the daily routine of the classroom. However, now looking back, they see that their field trips were actually beneficial. One teacher even went as far as to say, “As a kid, I thought they were just a fun escape honestly, but I mean of course I

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did learn something . . .” (M. Tapley, personal communication, April 30, 2014). Another felt that students may still view them as “fun escapes,” even when teachers view them as meaningful (M. Thompson, personal communication, April 30, 2014). While most of the respondents felt this way, there were a few that disagreed. However, those that disagreed and still saw their personal field trip experiences as just “fun escapes” now see the field trips that they plan or observe as beneficial and meaningful.

Most teachers advocated for field trips, one teacher specifically stating that they could be “both fun and meaningful” (M. Gomez, personal communication, April 30, 2014). Ms. Gomez then went on to describe that “that’s the reason [she] always plans field trips . . . because [she] knows how fun they are and . . . how much the kids enjoy them because [she] remember[s] enjoying them when [she] was younger . . . the kids get to experience those fun things . . . hands on things.” Another teacher, Ms. Brooks, explained that “escape” is not exactly the right word to use, because field trips do not really allow for an escape from anything, rather they provide a chance for “learning on the road, in a different learning environment” (M. Brooks, personal communication, April 30, 2014).

Overall, veteran teachers and pre-service teachers feel that while field trips can be, and often are, fun, they should also be meaningful. One pre-service teacher who had the opportunity to plan a field trip during one of her practicums explained it like this: “I want to make sure that I continue to plan meaningful field trips to maximize their learning experiences and to help them see real life applications. However, I don’t think a “fun” field trip would hurt from time to time.” Still, most teachers try to get the best of one field trip, making it both fun *and* meaningful.

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The Meaning of “Meaningful” Field Trips

The term “meaningful” often denotes something as being important in one’s life or experiences. However, experiences can be meaningful in a variety of ways.

Throughout the course of the interviews, a few different themes arose involving the capacities in which field trips could be meaningful. Teachers and pre-service teachers alike all seemed to feel that field trips could be meaningful in terms of three different aspects: helping students develop social skills, exposing students to different situations, and creating connections to the curriculum.

HELPING STUDENTS DEVELOP SOCIAL SKILLS

A few of the teachers seemed to place a great deal of emphasis on the fact that field trips could go beyond teaching students things that pertain to the classroom, but they also help students in developing their social skills. One teacher described how something as simple as going to a restaurant after the “curricular” part of the field trip was sometimes meaningful for students by saying, “. . . but then there’s also a lot to be said for learning how to behave in a social situation, you know, I’m with a large group, this is my behavioral expectation . . . Sometimes maybe we stopped at a restaurant afterwards . . . this is how I eat . . . when I would go out to eat, some of the kids had never been into restaurants like that” (M. Brooks, personal communication, April 30, 2014).

A pre-service teacher discussed how a particular field trip had helped her to better understand how to behave in a more uncommon situation by describing how her teacher had reviewed with the class how they should act in a theater when they were going on a field trip to see a play (M. White, personal communication, April 30, 2014). Another pre-service teacher described how she feels about the impact field trips can have on students’

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social skills by explaining: “I know that I want my students to participate in field trips and have that ability, not just for content, but for social aspects, like they learned how to act in public and how to get along with one another in new settings. I think that is super important. I think that is one of the main things they need to learn in elementary school, is social context and things like that” (M. Repasy, personal communication, May 01, 2014). Thus, many teachers seem to feel that field trips can help students better understand how to act in various social settings.

EXPOSING STUDENTS TO DIFFERENT SITUATIONS

When on a field trip, it is important to realize that students are in the process of being exposed to different situations to which they may never otherwise be exposed. Many of the teachers interviewed viewed this as another meaningful aspect of the field trip experience.

Ms. Gomez explained that she views field trips as being important and meaningful because for “. . . some of them, it’s the only time they go to different places and get to learn these new things and see these things . . . the kids get to experience those fun things, hands on things” (M. Gomez, personal communication, April 30, 2014). Ms. Brooks further made this point by stating she thinks “that they [students] were able to see things that they may or may not ever have the opportunity to go back and see again” (M. Brooks, personal communication, April 30, 2014). For instance, in the past, she had taken students on a field trip to the beach. While many middle- to upper-class people have had the opportunity to go to the beach and may even have taken the opportunity for granted, some of Ms. Brooks’ students (lower-class students from a rural setting) had never been to the beach. Ms. Brooks explained that, if you asked these students about

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field trips as adults, that would more than likely be a meaningful trip for them and one they would remember (personal communication, April 30, 2014).

Ms. Repasy, a pre-service teacher, also felt that field trips could expose students to situations that could be life changing for them. She listed the college setting as an example, explaining “A lot of students don’t necessarily have parents pushing them to go to college and they maybe don’t have the same views but maybe going to a college and seeing it might help put that idea in their head” (M. Repasy, personal communication, April 30, 2014). This shows that students that take trips to new environments can be positively impacted, illustrating a relationship that Ms. Hobbs is very much in favor of, as she has learned “the value of the community in teaching students” (personal communication, May 30, 2014). Therefore, field trips can be very important in exposing students to new situations and helping them to grow beyond what they would in the typical confines of the classroom.

CREATING CONNECTIONS TO THE CURRICULUM

While fostering the development of social skills in students and exposing students to different situations are both very important, meaningful aspects of field trips, there is also an increasing need for field trips to relate to the curriculum. As the nation is moving closer and closer to a unified curriculum, driven by common goals, standards, and standardized testing, it is more important now than ever for teachers to be able to justify the use of certain activities. That being said, whereas teachers used to go on field trips simply to expose students to different things (for example, Ms. Thompson described how her teacher used to take her class to the Coca-Cola Factory or the symphony, simply because they lived in Atlanta and had access to those venues), teachers now need to be

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able to explain how the field trip will benefit the students' learning (M. Thompson, personal communication, April 30, 2014).

While access may restrict some of the trips that teachers are allowed to plan, it also helps to make the field trips more meaningful, as related to the curriculum. Now, teachers look to find things that they could do in their areas and match them up to the units that they are teaching (M. Brooks, personal communication, April 30, 2014). According to Ms. Thompson, this helps to make the field trips more meaningful.

Of course, supplemental learning must also exist if students are to get the full effect of the experience. Ms. Brooks explained that this learning could be done before or after the trip, depending on the situation. When referring to a field trip that her own daughter had taken to New York, Brooks explained:

. . . they had the learning before and that [the field trip] was sort of the culmination of it . . . [with places of historical significance] I think to have the learning ahead of time so you're going into it with some education, you get more from it than going and building after the fact. I think there are times when after-the-fact is appropriate, like you use that as your launching point, but I think sometimes it's more beneficial to have had your learning first and then kind of bring it to life at the end of the trip" (personal communication, April 30, 2014).

There are many different ways in which teachers can use field trips to build on curricular standards. For example, Ms. Tapley explained that when she brings students back from a field trip, she tries "to talk about it or do some type of writing activity about it just to kind of help them reflect on the field trip . . . to make sure that [her] kids reflect

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on why [they] went, what [they] learned . . .” (M. Tapley, personal communication, April 30, 2014). Sometimes, “designated learning,” or the learning done with the intention of meeting curricular standards, is also done on the field trip. For example, when Ms. White went on a field trip in one of her practicum placements, there were four different “stations” set up at the Botanical Gardens, where students would learn about different science and social studies concepts and then apply what they had learned to an experiment or activity. Ms. White explained that these learning stations were very helpful as the site coordinators had done research into the standards in order to make sure they matched up with what the students needed to learn (M. White, personal communication, April 30, 2014).

Regardless of whether the “designated learning” is before, during, or after the field trip, it is important for learning to occur in order for the field trip to be more meaningful. However, across the board, teachers seem to feel that field trips are a very important aspect of learning. This statement can be summed up in Ms. Brooks’ viewpoint: “I am very much for field trips. I think students need to get off of campus and see learning in their environment around them. I do think it should be tied to the curriculum, it should be purposeful, not just a trip away . . .” (Brooks, personal communication, April 30, 2014).

Conclusion

In conclusion, it seems that field trips may indeed be beneficial. Research shows that people are able to recall specific events based on the recall of episodic memories. Such episodic memories can help people remember more than just general knowledge, as

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they likely can remember exact details of how they perceived things when the events originally occurred.

Through the use of several interviews with veteran and pre-service teachers, it has been determined that field trips can create strong episodic memories. Through the use of episodic memories, many of the respondents were able to recall field trips in which they took part as children, in some cases, even decades afterwards. These teachers and pre-service teachers were able to describe one if not more of the field trips in which they took part, and many were able to describe what they “took” from the field trip, whether it was curricular learning or something else that was meaningful, such as an appreciation for the arts.

While field trips can create strong episodic memories, they are only truly beneficial if there is some sort of meaningful aspect. Meaningful aspects of field trips can vary. Three common themes were found among the aspects that teachers feel create meaningful field trips. These aspects were: the field trips’ capabilities of helping students develop social skills, exposing students to different situations, and creating connections to the curriculum.

When students go on field trips, they may be put into different social situations in which they may not otherwise be placed. For example, students may be going to a restaurant for lunch as a part of a field trip. This would expose them to a situation in which they would need to be able to use their manners in a large group setting. Thus, the field trip could be meaningful in helping the students develop social skills, as Ms. Brooks described during her interview (personal correspondence, April 30, 2014).

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Students may also be exposed to situations that could have positive long-term effects on their lives. For example, one pre-service teacher described how a field trip to a college could allow students to be exposed to a college for the first time, sparking their interest to pursue a degree (M. Repasy, personal correspondence, April 30, 2014). This would make the exposure made on a field trip meaningful to the students learning and even life.

Of course, there is always a need for field trips to relate to the curriculum, so that students may gain and retain any information they learn on the field trip, in order to be able to apply it to their classroom knowledge. Field trips, such as these that draw students in with fun activities in order to help them relate the concepts discussed on the field trip to curricular standards, are being developed at an increasing rate, as everything teachers plan and do is now being driven by state and national standards.

Research compiled from other's data collection shows that if field trips are well-planned, they can create strong episodic memories that relate to the desired curriculum. This, in addition to the positive correlation between field trips and episodic memory described in the interviews completed with local teachers and pre-service teachers, makes it clear that field trips can indeed be beneficial to students' learning and long-term memory.

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Appendix A

Quotes Supporting Themes

Impact or Importance	<p>-Gomez: “Both fun and meaningful.”</p> <p>-Gomez: “. . . It has made me realize how much the kids get out of a field trip.”</p> <p>-Tapley: (When talking about a field trip to a dam) “. . . That really helped me to understand what it was . . . I didn’t know what a dam was. The field trip helped me to understand what it was.”</p> <p>-Tapley: “As a kid, I thought they were just a fun escape honestly, but I mean of course I did learn something . . .”</p> <p>-Tapley: “As a teacher, now I think about how I can plan field trips that my students will gain something from and that are meaningful.”</p> <p>-Tapley: “I guess to make them meaningful and . . . We do try . . . As a teacher, I try to when we come back from the field trip, to talk about it or do some type of writing activity about it just to kind of help them reflect on the field trip so . . . I guess to make sure that my kids reflect on why we went, what we learned . . .”</p> <p>-Brooks: “. . . it just made it more relevant, more real life for them.”</p> <p>-Parrish: “I think I saw them as learning experiences.”</p> <p>-Parrish: “You do feel more of a connection with those things.”</p> <p>-Parrish: “I think it makes me realize how much young people appreciate the field trips and how much they mean to them. They’re really worth the extra effort . . . I mean, field trips are a lot of work for teachers and it makes me feel like they are definitely worth it.”</p> <p>-Thompson: “You want them to be meaningful. You want them to . . . Number one you want children to have experiences, especially for the students that are less fortunate. You want them to get out of their town to see other places. You want them to be meaningful. Since our field trips are now based on our standards, I feel they are more meaningful than when I was in school.”</p> <p>-Repasy: “We went to the planetarium when I was in elementary school and that was really cool to see the star formations and things like that. It kind of helped picture things, put it in context I guess.”</p> <p>-Repasy: “I think at the time, when I was a student, I more saw them as fun. I didn’t really connect as much, I didn’t see I was learning as much as I was. Looking back, I think I learned a lot from them, but at the time, I more saw them as something fun.”</p> <p>-Repasy: “I guess I have always pictured that when I want to teach, I always picture teaching that context in the same way. I</p>
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	<p>always picture teaching it in the same way I learned it. I would like to give my students the chance to experience the same thing. Like be able to go to a planetarium and be able to connect things through field trips and really see it firsthand.”</p> <p>-Lancaster: “I think it showed me that hands on activities are a lot more beneficial to students than not hands on.”</p> <p>-Lancaster: “I think it’s important to plan field trips if your school allows it. And even if they don’t then I think teachers need to find a way to get kids out of the classroom and do things outside.”</p> <p>-Cook: [Referring to a “Get into Reading!” program in which students went outside to read] “They were more engaged because they weren’t in the classroom. They thought it was something special because they were outside.”</p> <p>-Cook: “The ones I went on were definitely worthwhile. I learned stuff on them. It wasn’t just go for the day and do whatever. We learned stuff on most of the ones I went on.”</p> <p>-Cook: “I think that when I am a teacher I will definitely do field trips because I think they are worthwhile and they allow students to learn in a different environment and kind of help you realize you can learn anywhere and it’s not just in a classroom where you learn.”</p> <p>-Hobbs: “In this particular case it was very much meaningful and I think almost necessary to give the young learners the concrete examples they needed. But, I have been on field trips (the other two) that while technically educational, were really just a fun escape. I think it just depends on the trip and on the teacher.”</p> <p>-Hobbs: “I want to make sure that I continue to plan meaningful field trips to maximize their learning experiences and to help them see real life applications. However, I don’t think a ‘fun’ field trip would hurt from time to time!”</p>
Social Skills	<p>-Brooks: “. . . but then there’s also a lot to be said for learning how to behave in a social situation, you know I’m with a large group, this is my behavioral expectations, this is. You know sometimes maybe we stopped at a restaurant afterwards . . . this is how I eat . . . you know when I go out to eat some of the kids had never been into restaurants like that.”</p> <p>-White: [In reference to her field trip to a play] “I think she [the teacher] just went over behavior expectations, like how you should behave in the theater and what exactly we were going to be seeing.”</p> <p>-Repasy: “I definitely think it has strengthened my desire for field trips in my own classroom. I know that I want my students to participate in field trips and have that ability, not just for content, but for social aspects, like they learned how to act in public and how to get along with one another in new settings. I</p>

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	<p>think that is super important. I think that is one of the main things they need to learn in elementary school, is social context and things like that. I definitely think that trips like that where they go to a new setting where they have never been helps, especially if it is in a college setting. A lot of students don't necessarily have parents pushing them to go to college and they maybe don't have the same views but maybe going to a college and seeing it might help put that idea in their head. And with content, being able to see things hands on helps them."</p>
Exposure	<p>-Gomez: ". . . How some of them it's the only time they go to different places and get to learn these new things and see these things."</p> <p>-Gomez: ". . . the kids get to experience those fun things . . . hands on things."</p> <p>-Brooks: "I think that they were able to see things that they may or may not ever have the opportunity to back and see again."</p> <p>-Brooks: ". . . a lot of the kids had never been to the beach and that's things when its commonplace to us we take for granted, but it's things that . . . should you ask them as an adult a question like that [what they remember about field trips], they would remember."</p> <p>-Parrish: ". . . I think you see things differently when you're with your classmates and your teacher than if you visit somewhere like that with your family. So, it was just very exciting."</p> <p>-Thompson: "[In reference to field trips she had been on when she was a student] I don't think at the time I appreciated those things, but later on, I realize how important they were . . ."</p> <p>-Thompson: "You want them to be meaningful. You want them to . . . Number one you want children to have experiences, especially for the students that are less fortunate. You want them to get out of their town to see other places. You want them to be meaningful. Since our field trips are now based on our standards, I feel they are more meaningful than when I was in school."</p> <p>-Repasy: "I definitely think it has strengthened my desire for field trips in my own classroom. I know that I want my students to participate in field trips and have that ability, not just for content, but for social aspects, like they learned how to act in public and how to get along with one another in new settings. I think that is super important. I think that is one of the main things they need to learn in elementary school, is social context and things like that. I definitely think that trips like that where they go to a new setting where they have never been helps, especially if it is in a college setting. A lot of students don't necessarily have parents pushing them to go to college and they maybe don't have the same views but maybe going to a college and seeing it might help put that idea in their head. And with content, being</p>

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	<p>able to see things hands on helps them.”</p> <p>-Lancaster: “We went on an overnight field trip to somewhere in Alabama. And they did an Underground Railroad walk-through at night. And we were slaves and we had to be quiet. And we had a leader and there were bad guys trying to catch us. It changed my view because we were the ones in danger. It was kind of exciting.”</p> <p>-Hobbs: “I learned not only the direct benefit of the field trips, but also the value of the community in teaching students.”</p>
Ties to the Curriculum	<p>-Gomez: “I don’t remember reviewing it, but I’m sure we did. I don’t know how it was used in our class either . . . But I’m sure she did it . . . You know, it has to relate somehow. We were so young then . . . I don’t remember.”</p> <p>-Tapley: (When talking about whether or not teacher reviewed the details of the field trip to the dam) “I don’t remember, but I’m sure she did.”</p> <p>-Tapley: “I guess to make them meaningful and . . . We do try . . . As a teacher, I try to when we come back from the field trip, to talk about it or do some type of writing activity about it just to kind of help them reflect on the field trip so . . . I guess to make sure that my kids reflect on why we went, what we learned . . .”</p> <p>-Brooks: “. . . We looked at things around the area that we could do and matched them up to units.”</p> <p>-Brooks: “. . . they had the learning before and that was sort of the culmination of it . . . [with places of historical significance] I think to have the learning ahead of time so you’re going into it with some education, you get more from it than going and building after the fact. I think there are times when after-the-fact is appropriate, like you use that as your launching point, but I think sometimes it’s more beneficial to have had your learning first and then kind of bring it to life at the end of the trip.”</p> <p>-Brooks: “. . . so it gives kids something to look forward to, it enhances the curriculum.”</p> <p>-Brooks: “I am very much for field trips. I think students need to get off of campus and see learning in their environment around them. I do think it should be tied to the curriculum, it should be purposeful, not just a trip away, but I think there should be a purpose to it to tie in, like I said, to either kick off a unit of study or to wrap it up.”</p> <p>-Thompson: “I work with a fabulous team and so together we determine the field trips. A lot of the times they are based on, well . . . all the time they are based on the standards. A lot of times, they are social studies based. We have been to the Mighty Eighth Museum in Savannah because we study World War II in social studies.”</p> <p>-Thompson: “Today, I think when we select field trips, they are</p>

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	<p>based on our standards so they are more meaningful now. Back then, it was we live in Atlanta, we can go to the Coca-Cola Factory, the Fernbank Science Center, the Atlanta Symphony, this is where we go. But now it is really based on standards and I think the kids are able to relate what they experience on field trips to what we are learning in the classroom.”</p> <p>-Thompson: “You want them to be meaningful. You want them to . . . Number one you want children to have experiences, especially for the students that are less fortunate. You want them to get out of their town to see other places. You want them to be meaningful. Since our field trips are now based on our standards, I feel they are more meaningful than when I was in school.”</p> <p>-White: “In middle school, when I was in the gifted Language Arts program, we read a bunch of plays and then went to see them performed at a theater . . .”</p> <p>-White: “It was fun. It was nice to get away from the actual school building. It did relate to what we actually did in class, so it wasn’t completely random.”</p> <p>-White: “The field trips I have done with my fifth graders have been way more valuable than the one I did when I was a student. Like when we went to the Botanical Gardens everything we did was related to the standards. There was social studies and science. We had four stations. There were two social studies stations and two science stations. They had looked at the fifth grade standards and all of the activities actually applied to the standards. Yeah, they were a lot better here than anything I remember in elementary school.”</p> <p>-Lancaster: “We went on an overnight field trip to somewhere in Alabama. And they did an Underground Railroad walk-through at night. And we were slaves and we had to be quiet. And we had a leader and there were bad guys trying to catch us. It changed my view because we were the ones in danger. It was kind of exciting . . . Yeah, we did a project over the Civil War and Reconstruction and all that right after we got back.”</p> <p>-Lancaster: “I think then it was a fun escape but looking back, we learned stuff that went along with what we learned in class.”</p> <p>-Cook: [Referring to a field trip to Driftwood] “. . . It put us in a different situation and allowed us to have more fun while we were learning that stuff.”</p> <p>-Cook: “The ones I went on were definitely worthwhile. I learned stuff on them. It wasn’t just go for the day and do whatever. We learned stuff on most of the ones I went on.”</p>
Days of Escape	<p>-Gomez: “Both fun and meaningful.”</p> <p>-Gomez: “That’s the reason I always plan field trips . . . Because I know how fun they are and I know how much the kids enjoy them because I remember enjoying them when I was younger.”</p>

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	<p>-Gomez: (When discussing why some teachers do not like field trips) “. . . It is, you know, a hard day’s work.”</p> <p>-Gomez: “. . . the kids get to experience those fun things . . . hands on things.”</p> <p>-Tapley: “As a kid, I thought they were just a fun escape honestly, but I mean of course I did learn something . . .”</p> <p>-Brooks: “From the teacher perspective of taking kids on the field trips, it was an escape from, well I don’t know if escape is the right word, it was learning on the road in a different learning environment.”</p> <p>-Thompson: [Answering interviewer’s question “So now you think they [field trips] have meaningful experience as opposed to just being fun?”] “Yes, yes, I do. But that is my viewpoint as a teacher. If you interview a student, you may hear a different take on it.”</p> <p>-Thompson: [Referring to how she feels about field trips she had been on as a student] “Everything else was just fun, a little escape. It was something different instead of sitting in the classroom.”</p> <p>-White: [Discussing her field trip to a play] “That one was just more of a fun escape.”</p> <p>-White: “It was fun. It was nice to get away from the actual school building. It did relate to what we actually did in class, so it wasn’t completely random.”</p> <p>-Repasy: “I think at the time, when I was a student, I more saw them as fun. I didn’t really connect as much, I didn’t see I was learning as much as I was. Looking back, I think I learned a lot from them, but at the time, I more saw them as something fun.”</p> <p>-Lancaster: “I think then it was a fun escape but looking back, we learned stuff that went along with what we learned in class.”</p> <p>-Hobbs: “In this particular case it was very much meaningful and I think almost necessary to give the young learners the concrete examples they needed. But, I have been on field trips (the other two) that while technically educational, were really just a fun escape. I think it just depends on the trip and on the teacher.”</p> <p>-Hobbs: “I want to make sure that I continue to plan meaningful field trips to maximize their learning experiences and to help them see real life applications. However, I don’t think a ‘fun’ field trip would hurt from time to time!”</p>
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