# Field Trips

, ,

A field trip is an experiential learning opportunity in which students leave the traditional classroom setting to learn within 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). Overall, field trips are a student-centered approach in which students put their learning into action outside the classroom.

## Student-Centered Approach

A student-centered approach is just as it says: it is centered around the students rather than centered on the teacher giving instruction (Pearce & Lee, 2021). Field trips embody being student-centered by giving students more autonomy in their learning. As Pattacini (2018) said, “A student-centered learning and teaching approach implies greater involvement of students… They are given many opportunities to voice their opinions and share their experience. Throughout the module, the students are adopting different roles…” (Rethinking Student Roles section). In contrast to the traditional teaching style of lecturing in the classroom, field trips provide a plethora of opportunities for students that they otherwise could not have. Pearce and Lee (2021) stated that field trips "allow students to discover different learning environments, provide enrichment opportunities, and respite from the daily school routine” (Field Trips section). By implementing this student-centered approach, field trips provide countless positive outcomes for students that go beyond just academic success.

## Outcomes

The objective of field trips is to provide a variety of opportunities for students to grow both academically and affectively. The benefits extend beyond the traditional classroom setting and have been linked to increased engagement and motivation in school, higher test scores, enhancement of critical thinking skills, and better understanding and retention of content. Not only do field trips provide academic benefits, but they also promote affective learning, such as historical and cultural appreciation. In addition to developing cultural awareness, field trips can magnify students’ emotional well-being and foster positive attitudes towards their communities.

### Academic Outcomes

Field trips have been used as an educational tool for many years to provide students with hands-on learning experiences outside of the classroom. As a result, student engagement in learning has increased. In a study by Florick et al. (2021), several groups of fourth and fifth grade students were invited to visit the Woodruff Arts Center and their art partners in Atlanta, Georgia. The purpose of this study was to examine the benefits of multiple field trips as compared to only one field trip throughout the school year. To conduct this study, some groups of students were selected to participate in several field trips while other groups of students attended only one field trip. The results of this study showed that those who participated in multiple field trips were more engaged in learning and had a better attitude towards school, as they demonstrated fewer absences and behavioral violations (Florick et al., 2021).

Furthermore, field trips can improve academic achievement, such as test scores. In the same study mentioned above by Florick et al. (2021), after attending either one or multiple field trips, both groups of students were administered their end-of-year exams, and it showed that the students who participated in multiple field trips scored higher on their exams than those who attended only one field trip (Florick et al., 2021). Whitesell (2016) also analyzed the effects of field trips on middle school students’ standardized test scores in science and found that students who went on a museum field trip scored higher on their science achievement test than those who did not attend a field trip. These studies suggest that field trips can have a positive impact on academic engagement and achievement.

In addition to increased student engagement, field trips can enhance critical thinking skills and improve retention of details. A study conducted by Greene et al. (2014) explored the outcomes of field trips by inviting groups of local K–12 students to the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in Bentonville, Arkansas. After each museum tour, students were given surveys to assess their art knowledge and critical thinking. The survey results illustrated that students who participated in the art museum tours were better able to recall details about the paintings they saw. Additionally, these students also demonstrated higher levels of critical thinking skills when they were shown unfamiliar paintings and were able to analyze and discuss these new paintings. Furthermore, Das (2021) shared findings from a study that asked K–12 students to gauge whether field trips increased their knowledge following their participation in a virtual field trip. The findings showed that as students engaged in virtual field trips, they had a better understanding of the content being taught in the classroom (Das, 2021). Field trips bring the curriculum from the classroom to life and teach students how to apply it to their lives.

### Affective Outcomes

The benefits of field trips are not only limited to academic achievement, but they also expand to positive affective outcomes, such as social and emotional benefits.

Field trips provide an opportunity for students to build social connections and learn in a collaborative environment. According to Greene et.al (2014), K–12 students who participated in the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art tours learned about various artworks and demonstrated higher levels of historical tolerance and cultural empathy. In other words, they learned how to understand and appreciate others’ perspectives on history and culture. Moreover, the same study found that field trips can promote a sense of belonging, particularly for students from disadvantaged backgrounds who may have limited opportunities to engage in extracurricular activities (Greene et al., 2014). By attending field trips, these students were able to connect with other students and their communities at a much deeper level.

Not only do field trips yield social benefits, but they also provide a much-needed break from the structured and sometimes stressful environment of the classroom, offering students a chance to connect with their emotions and develop positive associations with learning. In a study conducted by Heras et al. (2020), a group of 11- and 12-year-old students in Spain participated in a nature-based field trip and were asked about their perceptions of field trips and nature-based activities following the field trip. These students were chosen because they attended a school program focused on raising environmental awareness and helping their students appreciate the natural and cultural heritage of their community. Based on student responses, the researchers concluded that nature-based field trips can significantly impact students’ emotional well-being. The students reported feeling relaxed, happy, and more connected to nature after their field trip; they also recalled positive memories from their trip.

Similarly, Musselman (2020) described how elementary students found a sense of wonder and curiosity while exploring scientific topics in their community. During a field trip, students had hands-on experience learning about the effects of wind and water on landforms and how sea barriers prevent coastline erosion. As a result, students gained firsthand understanding of the relationship between humans and nature, as well as an opportunity to make a positive impact in the world. Field trips can enhance the overall learning experience and contribute to students’ holistic development.

## 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. Depending on the trip, the cost can be a key deterrent. 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). These kinds of cost analysis decisions require both teacher and administrator approval. 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). In order to be successful in planning field trips, teachers need to find a trip that is applicable to their course content and then prepare students for the experiences that they will have. They may plan pre-trip or post-trip activities that require time away from the required curriculum for the school year. When considering the major benefits of field trip experiences, it is important to note this extra effort from the teachers to both carry out the experience and ensure the students are sufficiently prepared.

## Conclusion

As educators continue to actively involve field trips in their teaching, students will experience a higher quality education and educators will experience better classroom results. Beyond the classroom, students also experience social and emotional benefits when they have the opportunity to participate in field trips. While teachers do not have complete control over making a field trip happen, they can submit requests and proposals to the powers that do decide. It is also important that these significant benefits are clearly communicated to the people who do make the decisions (administrators and school boards). Overall, student-centered learning through field trips has many positive outcomes for students that far outweigh any challenges they provide and can be implemented in the classroom in a variety of ways. Nature-based, arts-based, or even virtual field trips will all provide the positive outcomes that teachers are looking for as they work to provide a quality education for their students.

## References

Behrendt, M., & Franklin, T. (2014). A review of research on school field trips and their value in education. International Journal of Environmental & Science Education, 9(3), 235–245. https://doi.org/10.12973/ijese.2014.213a

Clarke-Vivier, S., & Lee, J. C. (2018). Because life doesn’t just happen in a classroom: Elementary and middle school teacher perspectives on the benefits of, and obstacles to, out-of-school learning. Issues in Teacher Education, 27(3), 55–72.

Das, A. (2021, November 9-11). Virtual field trips and impact on learning [Conference presentation]. Innovate Learning Summit 2021, Online, 85–89. https://www.learntechlib.org/p/220274/

Florick, L., Greene, J. P., Levenberg, R., & Pogue, R. (2021). The benefits of multiple arts based field trips. Phi Delta Kappan, 102(8), 26–29.

Greene, J. P., Kisida, B., & Bowen, D. H. (2014). The educational value of field trips. Education Next, 14(1), 78–86.

Heras, R., Medir, R. M., & Salazar, O. (2020). Children’s perceptions on the benefits of school nature field trips. Education,48(4), 379–391.

Musselman, S. (2020). Connecting with community. Science and Children, 58(1), 43–47.

Pattacini, L. (2018). Experiential learning: The field study trip, a student-centered curriculum. Compass: Journal of Learning and Teaching, 11(2). https://doi.org/10.21100/compass.v11i2.815

Pearce, M. K., & Lee, T. (2021). Comparing teaching methods in an environmental education field trip program. Journal of Interdisciplinary Teacher Leadership, 5(1). https://doi.org/10.46767/kfp.2016-0037

Whitesell, E. R. (2016). A day at the museum: The impact of field trips on middle school science achievement. Journal of Research in Science Teaching, 53(7), 1036–1054. https://doi.org/10.1002/tea.21322

Read this online at <https://open.byu.edu/student_centered/field_trips>