



Fieldwork – an essential part of a geographical education

Fieldwork makes geography come to life, puts everything into context in glorious 3D and helps students really grasp how geography literally shapes the world around us.

Kate Humble, BBC “Springwatch” presenter

Why do fieldwork ?

For decades, **fieldtrips** (whether local, residential or international) have been an integral part of the geography entitlement for students in both **primary and secondary** schools. Over the years, increasing pressure has been placed on teachers to vary or reduce the experiences they are able to offer students. Increasing administration and risk assessment, which is of course of paramount importance, have added to the time pressures in an increasingly congested and competitive curriculum, and to this have now been added budgetary constraints and trade union requirements.

Despite this, and further internal school priorities, fieldwork in geography must not become a casualty. It is a **vital and valuable** component of the compulsory phase of every student’s school experience. This document provides a few examples of resources which could be used to add weight to discussions on the need for continued fieldwork, including residential experiences when discussing the matter with school leadership teams. There is no ‘blanket’ policy which has been adopted for the whole of the UK due to the potential for local, and school-level agreements.

Fieldwork – that is, learning directly in the untidy real world outside the classroom – is an essential component of geography education. There is no substitute for ‘real-world’ learning.

OFSTED is perfectly clear about the value of fieldwork: “Schools should recognise the value of fieldwork for improving standards and achievement in geography” (OFSTED, 2008)

From ‘A Different View’: the Geographical Association’s ‘manifesto’ for Geography (April, 2009)

Benefits that fieldwork brings

The value of fieldwork is not simply the 'geographical' value of experiencing landscape features, busy urban streets, unfamiliar cultures, extremes of weather and the journey to the venue itself which helps ground the pupils' local environment in the context of the global. It aids motivation and self-development.

Research on the outcomes of residential experience has pointed out not just the social benefits of spending time working together, but also the added benefit of the development of cognitive and affective learning. There is also a chance to demonstrate progression of skills, and the development of participants as 'geographers'. The outcomes also offer further opportunities for personalisation of the learning, and it is well recognised that a more sensory experience aids memory and meta-cognition. The mental 'anchoring' in the memory of coastal work which is actually done on the coast is an example of this. Wading out into the sea and 'feeling' the swash and backwash, hearing pebbles rattling as the waves break and bending to watch sand grains saltating across the beach surface on windy days are sensory experiences. Similarly, a child from a rural school should be 'experiencing' busy urban centres.

The **Geography Teaching Today** website is the main website to support the DCSF funded "**Action Plan for Geography**". It has a dedicated area for fieldwork resources which identifies the value of fieldwork experiences, and also suggests some examples of good practice which would be appropriate to refer to when required.

"Learning outside the classroom is about raising achievement through an organised, powerful approach to learning in which direct experience is of prime importance. **This is not only about what we learn but importantly how and where we learn.**"

Learning outside the Classroom Manifesto, DCSF, November 2006

Geography without fieldwork has been described as being like science without experiments. The practical skills that are gained are important in connecting the theory of processes, systems and interconnections are vital in connecting

'2D' textbook resource with the '3D' and often 'messy' real world outside the classroom.

“Substantial evidence exists to indicate that fieldwork, properly conceived, adequately planned, well-taught and effectively followed up, offers learners opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills in ways that add value to their everyday experiences in the classroom.”

Rickinson et al, 2004

The recent **OFSTED** report on Learning outside the Classroom, published in October 2008 features a useful analysis of the value of fieldwork, and would be a valuable source of further 'evidence' of the importance of these events. A geography department that has no fieldwork should expect some questioning on this if inspected, probably by the students themselves let alone an HMI. Remember the importance of these experiences when students make **options** choices as well.

Fieldwork is also valuable for the **teacher** as well as the learner. A school's most valuable resource is its teaching staff, and time spent talking to students is vital in forming the relationships that are important in the classroom. It is also no surprise that the Royal Geographical Society's '**Learning and Leading**' initiative has a focus on fieldwork as the framework for developing teacher confidence through shared experiences and a 'concentrated' experience.

Teaching is also about relationships, and these are best built through these shared experiences. It's also the best vehicle for facilitating the extended conversations with students that are the best method of identifying the higher level learning and thinking that is taking, or has taken place.

Geography fieldwork reinforces the importance of the **specialist** geographer, who should be able to make a case to senior leadership teams for continued specialist experiences being made available to students. These are discussions which are unique to every school's geographical and financial circumstances.

A final point about fieldwork is that it provides, perhaps more than other classroom based work, an opportunity for students to be creative, and to have a personalised outcome which gives them a sense of ownership of the learning process.

In terms of the cost issue, the potential addition of up to £200 per day / per teacher for cover cost, would render most trips uneconomical to offer, and schools should avoid passing on costs for curriculum-based trips in this way. Money could be set aside from school budgets to support this important curriculum element.

This is a time for schools to be creative with curriculum development, and the place of learning outside the classroom. With the possible impacts of climate change, it could even be argued that more learning will take place outside in the future, and that creating more outdoor 'learning spaces' would be a more sustainable in the longer term, as well as being more comfortable and inspiring places to work.

Finally, there is also the philosophical view of Tim Brighouse: **“One lesson outdoors is worth seven inside”**.

Some guidance on possible strategies

Key areas to consider include Staffing, Timing, Budgets and Transport

- Ensure that the fieldwork you are aiming to do has been fully planned in advance so that you are aware of all the costs and benefits, and have the agreement of all colleagues involved and there are no 'nasty surprises'. The **OFSTED** report refers to the value of fieldwork that has been “planned and implemented well” having a particular impact
- Discuss the situation with trade union representatives – are they aware of the possible impacts on some curriculum subjects ? Are they aware of any recent union advice on possible local solutions ? The phrase used is rarely cover, not **never** cover...
- School budgets will not cover the cost of fieldwork and cover (however much we might like them to), but it's worth having a discussion in advance with the senior leadership team and **negotiating** with respect to the financial implications
- Fieldwork should not be taking place during school holidays, which is one option that might be offered, but it may be possible to negotiate a

time which extends beyond the school day, so that fewer lessons are affected by a local field visit e.g. returning at 4.30pm rather than at the 'normal' end of school

- Consult with other schools locally to see what has been decided in response to the 'rarely cover' directive, and also consider joining up for some fieldwork experiences.
- Consider certain days of the school year which are specified for out of classroom learning across the school – 'creative timetabling' is one suggestion that OFSTED have made as a possible response to the situation
- Consult with other departments and consider the possibility of a joint trip to an area with two drop off points e.g. a London theatre visit might provide the chance to do three hours of central London urban fieldwork
- Consider public transport: group train and bus tickets may well be cheaper, and more convenient, than coach hire and reduce overall cost
- Explore the possibility of internal 'caring and sharing' arrangements within the Humanities area – this is a situation which will impact **all** subjects offering out of school experiences.
- Identify aspects of data collection which could perhaps be done over a weekend in advance of the field visit. Preparatory work could be done in this way, and if communicated to senior leadership team would suggest that the geography department is contributing to reducing the impact of any external visits
- Group work for older students with, for example, central contact points in a city centre may reduce the numbers of teachers involved. Some fieldwork may not require all adults to be full-time teaching staff or TAs. Explore the possibility of using adults other than teachers (AOTTs) to support trips where possible (this may have other cost implications with CRB checks, or the new Home Office Vetting and Barring scheme)

Bear in mind that fieldwork is a **compulsory** element of all GCSE geography specifications. The GCSE criteria are clear on this:

GCSE specifications in geography must require learners to:

- **identify relevant geographical questions and issues, and establish appropriate**

sequences of investigation incorporating geographical skills, including enquiry skills

- carry out fieldwork and out of classroom learning

WEBLINKS & OTHER RESOURCES

<http://www.geography.org.uk/adifferentview> - the lead subject association for teachers of geography in England, with a mission to “further the learning and teaching of geography” – read the new manifesto for school geography

<http://www.geographyteachingtoday.org.uk/fieldwork> - Fieldwork section of the APG2 website

<http://www.geography.org.uk/resources/fieldwork/> - link to a series of resources and Think Pieces

OFSTED Report : “Learning Outside the Classroom. How far should you go ?” HMI 070219 (2008):

<http://bit.ly/ofstedfieldwork>

Rickinson, M., Dillon, J., Teamey, K., Morris, M., Choi, M. Y., Sanders, D. and Benefield, P. (2004). “A Review of Research on Outdoor Learning”. Preston Montford, Shropshire: Field Studies Council.

Geography programme of study – Key Stage 3, curriculum opportunities, QCA

Royal Geographical Society website: <http://www.rgs.org/OurWork/LandL/LandL.htm> - Learning and Leading programme

Learning outside the Classroom site: sign up to the manifesto and use the toolkit:

<http://www.lotc.org.uk/>

National Association of Field Studies Officers website: <http://www.nafso.org.uk/> - the Journal for 2009 contained a very useful article by Leszek Iwaskow which provided inspiration for some of the content of this document.

For further support and guidance, visit the Learning outside the Classroom Group on the GA’s NING network: <http://geographical.ning.com/group/lotc>

Details on the cover agreements:

<http://www.tda.gov.uk/remodelling/nationalagreement/cover.aspx>

<http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/remodelling/rarelycover/> - the text of the ‘rarely cover’ agreement

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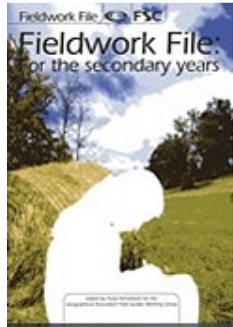
Secondary Curriculum Development Leader, Geographical Association

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Contact Alan on aparkinson@geography.org.uk with any relevant outcomes

New GA Resource to help with Secondary Fieldwork planning

Secondary Fieldwork File



Available from the GA Shop: £22.99 for GA members (£32.99 non-members)

Other GA resources include:

Primary Fieldwork File

£17.99 for GA members (£27.99 non-members)

Beyond the Bikesheds

Theory into Practice: New approaches to fieldwork

plus

Articles in 'Primary Geographer' and 'Teaching Geography'