

As the term suggests, field studies are learning experiences outside of the classroom. Field studies allow students to gather their own (primary) data, provide opportunities to extend classroom learning through direct observation and experience, and allow for scientific research through field experiments. Field study trips can range from short walks in the schoolyard or nearby neighbourhood to vehicle excursions over some distance for several hours to a full day.

Whatever the destination, the purpose of the field study trip should be to address specific outcomes in the curriculum. Field studies should be designed as learning experiences that are integral parts of a unit or theme being studied in the classroom. From the pedagogical perspective, field study trips should be viewed as any effective learning experience that includes Activating, Acquiring, and Applying Strategies. Thus, students should be involved as active participants in learning rather than as passive spectators on a trip. An effective field study requires careful planning for meaningful learning experiences before, during, and after the field study trip.

Preparation: Teachers must plan the educational rationale and objectives as well as the logistics of the field study trip well in advance. As stated, the field study should complement the learning in the classroom and should be undertaken to address specific outcomes. Teachers should prepare questions to be answered and/or develop specific guidelines on what students should observe or what information should be gathered during the field study. Specific expectations and active student participation will result in effective learning while on the field study trip.

Logistics involve scheduling; administrative and parent consultation and permission; organizing the means of transportation; planning the route; preparing materials and equipment; contacting land owners or arranging guides if applicable; planning safety and emergency procedures; and addressing matters related to student expectations during the field study trip. Teachers should ensure that all school division policies and procedures relating to field excursions are followed.

During the Field Study: The field study trip should focus on the activities prepared in advance, and students may need prompting to begin making observations or to gather information. Working with a partner or in small groups gives students opportunities for interactive learning. Scheduling should allow adequate time for expected tasks as well as for dealing with questions students may have during the course of the field work. Photographing students in action in the field may provide additional motivation. More importantly, photos are relevant components of field work as they provide a visual record that can be included in follow-up discussions and reporting in the classroom.

Follow-up: Since field studies are planned as parts of units or themes studied in the classroom, immediate follow-up is critical for maximizing the learning experience. Observations made and information collected should be discussed, processed, and incorporated into the broader learning experience. Student experiences should be discussed and connections made to prior knowledge or related experiences. Field studies may provide opportunities for extending learning and shaping future investigations that students undertake as part of the inquiry process.

Additional resources for planning field excursions:

- SFAL 9.3, 9.4: Learning Experiences Outside the Classroom
- SFAL 9.5: Teacher's Planning Sheet for Learning Experiences outside the Classroom
- Local School Division: Policies and Procedures for Field Trips