

Conducting  
Fieldtrips  
pp. 353-357

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## Social Studies in Elementary Education

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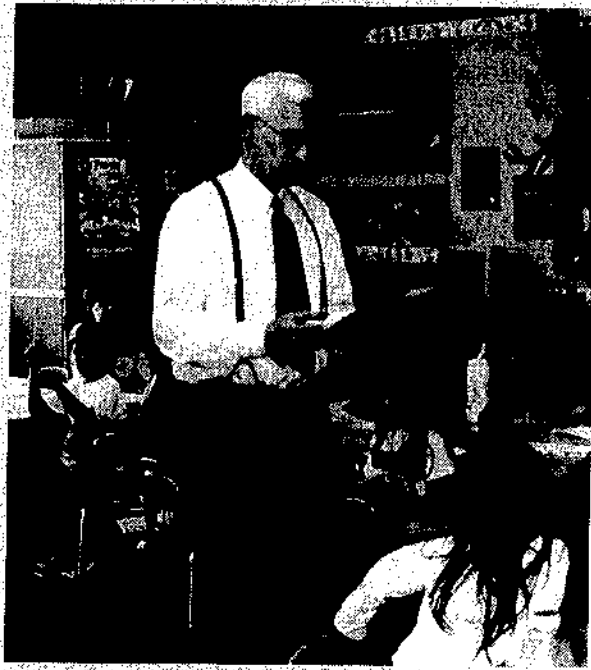
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Attorney David Wolowitz visits with second graders in Concord, N.H. "I find the children's enthusiasm to be infectious and their candor refreshing," he says. (Courtesy of *Law Matters*, American Bar Association Division for Public Education.)

### After the Visit

After the visit, the information and experiences are reviewed and organized and a full report is published—whether prepared in cooperative teams and published in the classroom newspaper or written individually and placed in student portfolios. A follow-up committee writes a thank-you letter telling of the class's plan to publish a report on the guest's visit and promising to send a copy when it is completed.

### FIELD TRIPS

Field trips are different from simply going somewhere as a class. Field trips are educational adventures. They are connected explicitly to the planned curriculum, and students are active learners when on a field trip—actively pursuing an instructional objective.

As a matter of principle, it is advisable to take elementary school children into the community only for experiences that cannot be duplicated in the classroom. For example, it is usually better to arrange to have a person bring photographs of early life in the community to the school and speak to the children there than it is to take a class of 20 or 30 children to

a home. On the other hand, the process involved in canning fish or cranberries or tomato juice cannot be observed in the classroom; the children must be taken to the cannery if this process is to be observed firsthand. There they will see vivid examples of the economic concepts they are forming and refining in class: production, distribution, division of labor, and cooperation. The same can be said for museums, memorials, monuments, government offices, the water treatment plant, and so forth.

Whenever children are taken off the school site, the teacher must attend to several important details. As with guest speakers, attention must be paid to the three phases of a field trip: before, during, and after.

Adequate planning will help the teacher anticipate some of the problems that may arise in connection with the field trip and will help make the trip educationally worthwhile. Poorly planned field trips are worse than none at all, for they lack purpose, may jeopardize the safety of the children, and may cause poor public relations between the school and community. Although the field trip should be pleasant for everyone (including the teacher), it is first of all an educational experience, and its primary objective is not that everyone have a joyous outing, but that everyone have an educational one. Good planning will ensure that the trip will be both a pleasant and an educational experience. The suggestions on pages 353-356 will be helpful in achieving that goal.

### ***Planning a Field Trip***

#### **Preparing for the Field Trip**

1. Clearly establish the purposes of the trip and make certain that the children understand the purposes, too. The excursion should provide opportunities for learnings that are not possible in the classroom.
2. Obtain administrative permission for the field trip and make arrangements for transportation. As a matter of policy, it is better to use a public conveyance or a school bus than it is to use private automobiles. In using private cars, the teacher is never sure if the driver is properly insured, is competent behind the wheel, or even has a valid operator's license.
3. Make all necessary preliminary arrangements at the place of the visit. This should include the time for the group to arrive, where the children are to go, who will guide them, and so forth. It is recommended that the teacher make the excursion prior to visiting with the children. This will alert the teacher to circumstances and situations that should be discussed with the children before leaving the classroom. Make sure that the field trip guide is aware of the purposes of the field trip.

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4. Delve into informative resources on the subject. No teacher should approach a field trip unprepared. This knowledge will later be valuable in helping prepare children for the field trip and in initiating follow-up and study activities.
5. Obtain written permission from each parent or guardian for the child to go on the trip. Do not take children who cannot or do not return signed permission slips. Although this action does not in itself absolve the teacher of responsibility or liability in the event of an accident, it indicates to the teacher that the parent or guardian knows of the field trip and approves of the child's going. Most schools have forms for this purpose that are filled out by the teacher and sent home with each child for the parent's signature.
6. Prepare the class for the field trip. The easiest way is to conduct a KWL activity: "What do you already Know about this? What do you Want to find out?" And afterward, "What did you Learn?" A more ambitious preparation is desirable, however, something that will help children observe more keenly, question more knowledgeably, and absorb more thoroughly the whole experience. It is helpful, therefore, if the field trip fits into an inquiry the class is conducting or provides a rich example for concept formation. A trip to the airport, rather than merely a sight-seeing visit, becomes an example to be studied thoroughly in a unit centered on the concept *transportation*. A trip to the dairy farm or to a grocery store becomes a data chunk (as in the *Titanic* inquiry example) in an inquiry on the question, Where does our food come from, and who and what are involved? Accordingly, in place of or in addition to KWL's "What do you want to find out?" we have "What hypotheses are we testing?" and "What questions do we want to be sure to ask the guide?"

Through careful planning and preparation the teacher helps children to be more observant and makes a genuine research activity out of the field trip. The children probably will be taken to places to which many of them have been before. Depending on the economic class of the students you are teaching, most of them have been to the airport, some have been to the harbor, and all have been to a filling station. Why, then, should the school take children to such places on field trips? The answer is that different purposes exist for the field trip than for incidental visits. The children are prepared to look for things they would not otherwise see. Discuss with the children how they will record the information obtained on their trip. If they are to take notes, teach the needed note-taking skills. Will each of them

need a clipboard? (A class set of clipboards, which are brought out only for such occasions, are aids to note taking and question asking, and they have a symbolic value as well: they symbolize that field trips are a special way to learn.)

The class should establish standards of conduct for the trip before leaving the school. Children are quick to accept the challenge that the responsibility for a good trip rests personally with each member of the group. Time spent on this part of the preparation for the excursion will pay dividends when the trip is under way. Nothing is more embarrassing for the teacher, more damaging to school-community relations, or more devastating to the educational purpose of the field trip than a group of rude and unruly children. This situation often happens when the children have been inadequately prepared for the trip.

7. If the trip is to be long, make arrangements for lunchroom and restroom facilities. Take along a first-aid kit.
8. Have an alternative plan in case the weather turns bad or something interferes with your plans.

### Conducting the Trip

9. Take roll before leaving the school grounds and "count noses" frequently during the trip to make sure that none of the children have become lost or left in some restroom along the way. It is a good idea to put young children in pairs because a child will know and report immediately the absence of a partner. To assist with supervision of the children and to help ensure a safe trip, the teacher should arrange for other adults to accompany the group. Teachers can usually count on parents to assist in this way, but should plan to meet with them prior to the trip to explain the purposes, standards of behavior, route to be followed, and other important details. The adults accompanying the children must be prepared for the excursion also.
10. Arrive at the designated place on time, and have children ready for the guide. Be sure to introduce the guide to the class. Supervise children closely during the tour to prevent accidents or injury. Before leaving, check again to make sure all children are with the group.
11. Make sure that time is allowed for answering children's questions.
12. Make sure that each child can see and hear adequately. Be sure to summarize the experience before the trip is concluded.

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### Evaluating the Trip

- 13.** Engage the class in appropriate follow-up activities. This should include writing a thank-you note to the place and to the adults who accompanied the class. In the primary grades, the children should dictate such a letter to the teacher, who writes it on the chalkboard or chart. Individual children then copy the letter, and one may be selected to be sent, or in some cases, they may all be sent. If the host has an e-mail address, the children's letter can be sent using this medium.

The teacher and children will also want to evaluate carefully the extent to which the purposes of the trip have been achieved. "Did we accomplish what we set out to do? Did we get the answers to our questions? What did we learn that we didn't know before? What are some other things we will want to find out?" Finally, the teacher and children will want to evaluate the conduct of the class in terms of the standards set up before the trip was made. This evaluation should always include some favorable reactions as well as ways in which the group might improve on subsequent trips. A list of these suggestions for improvement may be saved for review just before the next trip.

- 14.** Discuss enrichment projects in which children may engage for further study, such as construction activities, original stories, reports, dramatic plays, and diaries. Survey other resources available in the community for study.
- 15.** Use opportunities to draw on information and experiences from the field trip in other subjects taught in the classroom.

Every community has places that can be visited by classes and thereby can contribute to the enrichment of history, geography, and all of social studies. These will differ from place to place, but any of the following could be used:

State historical society displays	Aquarium
Historical sites, monuments	Library
Floodplain, eroded areas, dam sites	Refinery
Razing of a building	Fish hatchery
Hospitals	Museums
Weather bureau	Public health department
Warehouses	Local stores
Airports	Legislative bodies in session

Railway station	Art galleries
Assembly plants	Fire station
Post office	Newspaper printing facility
Television or radio station	Bakery
Courthouse	Observatory
Factories	Canal locks
Farms	Harbor
Urban planning commission	Police station
Docks	Cannery
Dairy	University
Shopping center management office	Water purification plant

## Computer Resources

Let's turn from actual field trips to virtual or electronic field trips using computers and the Internet. Then we will examine other computer resources: museums, newsgroups, civic discussions, biographic material, and simulations. But first, some general comments about computers in social studies education are necessary.

The use of computer technology in education has been promoted vigorously. Today, the absence of computers in a classroom or school is thought by many to symbolize poor education. In the eyes of the community, computers in the classroom have come to symbolize a school curriculum that is up-to-date and instruction that is benefiting from the latest technology. This is, of course, a silly leap of faith. Both curriculum and instruction can be very good indeed without the latest technology and, conversely, the presence of computers in no way indicates good curriculum or good instruction. The quality of the intellectual work students are helped to accomplish, the importance of the subject matter they are asked to study, and the power and reach of the understandings they are helped to construct are far more important criteria than the presence or absence of this or that hardware or software. In brief, the presence of computers in the classroom is widely misunderstood as an end, when in truth computers are means.

In the social studies, as in other curricular areas, the challenge to the teacher is to adapt the use of this technology to the ongoing instructional goals of the classroom. The emphasis should be on using computers to assist teaching and learning of social studies subject matter—democratic citizenship, ideas, facts, issues, and skills drawn from history and the social sciences, and the inquiry process.

In the social studies, the contribution of computer-assisted instruction falls into the following three categories: knowledge construction, skills application, and communication (see Figure 10-2).

1. *Using the Computer to Build Knowledge*—to Gather Examples Needed in Concept Formation and Evidence Needed for Inquiry. There is a growing number of electronic databases, many of which are relevant to social studies. Databases can be purchased on