

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

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Introduction

Holding teachers accountable for student achievement is a high priority for many education stakeholders (Cochran-Smith, Piazza, & Power, 2013; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Ginsberg & Kingston, 2014; Good, 2014; Wilson & Youngs, 2005). With new content standards and new statewide assessment systems, however, it can be challenging for inservice teachers to meet the needs of all students within this high-stakes accountability climate without appropriate professional development opportunities (Borko, 2004; Desimone, 2009; Garet, Birman, Porter, Yoon, & Desimone, 2001; Garet et al., 2008; Ingvarson, Meiers, & Beavis, 2005; Marrongelle Sztajn, & Smith, 2013; Penuel, Fishman, Yamaguchi, & Gallagher, 2007; Starkey et al., 2009; Supovitz & Turner, 2000; Yoon, Duncan, Wen-Yu Lee, Scarloss, & Shapley, 2007). Despite the plethora of studies that highlight findings from researcher-developed interventions, we posit that out-of-school learning opportunities, such as academic field trips, can supplement

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and extend the ways in which teachers enact their content and pedagogical content knowledge, thereby improving student outcomes.

Utilizing Field Trips as a Vehicle to Improve Student Outcomes

When appropriately structured, field trips can provide powerful experiential learning opportunities that impact cognitive skills, and social and cultural experience, while developing disciplinary knowledge and interests (Behrendt & Franklin, 2014; de Freitas & Bentley, 2012; DeWitt and Storksdieck, 2008; Matthews, 2014; Rapp, 2005; Rawlinson, Wood, Osterman & Sullivan, 2007). Although qualitative research studies have consistently demonstrated these findings over time (see above), quantitative research has more recently demonstrated that field trips can improve student outcomes. More specifically, increased exposure to science and art museum programming can improve critical thinking skills (Bowen, Greene, & Kisida, 2014; Kraybill, 2014) and academic achievement on standardized measures (Whitesell, 2016). Furthermore, prior research suggests that elementary school teachers understand the potential benefits of out-of-school learning on student outcomes. In his 2005 study, Kisiel found that elementary teachers' motivations for planning science field trips centered around eight themes. Field trips could (1) Connect with school curricula, (2) Provide a learning experience, (3) Encourage students' lifelong learning, (4) Bolster student motivation, (5) Increase student interest in science, (6) Expose students to novel experiences, (7) Support student enjoyment, and (8) Meet school expectations for out-of-school learning. In other words, teachers are motivated to provide out-of-school learning experiences for students because they can benefit students in social, cognitive, cultural, and disciplinary ways.

Despite these potential benefits, however, teachers often do not plan and implement out-of-school learning experiences for their students (Anderson, Kisiel, & Storksdieck, 2006; DeWitt & Storksdieck, 2008; Gupta, Adams, Kisiel, & Dewitt, 2010; Michie, 1998). In a large-scale survey of informal science institutions, approximately 75% of those surveyed reported offering field trip opportunities and supports for schools, teachers and students, but many of the institutions' programs were still under-enrolled (Phillips, Finkelstein & Wever-Frerichs, 2007). Given the complexity of planning out-of-school learning experiences, low participation rates do not seem surprising. In order to take students on an out-of-school learning experience, teachers must obtain administrative support, secure funding, and justify curricular connections (Armaan & Lane, 2016). Doing so requires both knowledge of school resources and the ability to access those resources, skills that may not be explicitly

taught within teacher preparation programs (Tal & Morag, 2009). Also, best practices for out-of-school learning include pre-planning activities (e.g., a field trip site visit in order to connect content to school learning objectives) and post-visit wrap-around activities (Anderson, Lucas, & Ginns, 2000; Jarvis & Pell, 2005; Davison, Passmore, & Anderson, 2010), which require time and can add additional pressure to adhere to timelines related to school reform efforts (Kenna & Russell, 2015; Yenawine, 2013). Finally, school economic and budgetary constraints may shift school monies away from extracurricular and enrichment activities such as field trips. Given the increased shift to higher-stakes educational accountability benchmarks and low participation rates in out-of-school learning contexts, it is important to replicate and extend Kiesel's (2005) study to understand more about the facilitators and barriers that influence teachers in planning and implementing out-of-school field trips.

Purpose

We used the following question to guide our inquiry: *How can we best understand the factors that may influence the extent to which formal educators plan and implement out-of-school learning experiences for their students?* In conjunction with our community partners from several area museums, we developed a survey in order to answer the following research question: *What are the factors that may aid or limit formal educators in planning and implementing out-of-school learning experiences for their students?*

The purpose of this research was twofold. Our first goal was to aid our museum partners in understanding the experiences, beliefs, and motivations of teachers in the surrounding communities, with the ultimate goal of developing more productive and nuanced curriculum and outreach plans. As educational researchers and teacher educators, our second goal was to use this improved understanding to extend the body of knowledge and its existing literature, especially in ways that aid other researchers in advocating for curricular changes that include these experiences in teacher preparation programs.

Methods

The study was conducted in two phases. Phase One included the design of a survey instrument, with input from a focus group of local museum educators. The focus group included eight educators from four local museums, two children's museums, one university art museum, and one regional art museum; it took place during two two-hour meetings

that were audio recorded and transcribed. In the first meeting, researchers engaged participants in completing the Teacher Belief Q-Sort (TBQ) task (Rimm-Kaufman, Storm, Sawyer, Pianta, & LaParo, 2006) and a cognitive interviewing exercise aimed to evaluate the survey instrument's construct validity. The second focus group included a review of the TBQ task results and the survey draft, with a facilitated, open-ended group discussion about participants' general response to the survey. The primary goal of the second focus group was further clarification of the survey's construct validity (see Vivier & Lee, 2015). This article's primary focus is Phase Two of our research study, which was the dissemination and analysis of a collaboratively designed survey instrument to PK-8th grade educators throughout the Northeast U.S. region.

Participants

We compiled a list of approximately 8,500 PK-8 public school teachers from counties in coastal Northern New England. Approximately 7,000 teachers were emailed a link to participate. Additionally, museum partners from Phase One were invited to share the survey link with their listservs and teacher mailing lists. Participants were provided the option to enter a drawing for one of 25 \$15 online gift cards.

Out of the approximately 7,000 formal educators who were sent the link, 309 teachers completed the survey (4% response rate). The demographic characteristics of the respondents were similar to regional and national averages for both the general and teaching populations: 99% non-Hispanic white, 91% female. Teachers were evenly distributed across current PK-8 teaching assignments and number of years teaching. Over 70% of participants held at least a Master's degree (see Table 1).

Instrument

An online survey instrument was developed and piloted with museum education collaborators (Vivier & Lee, 2015). The survey consisted of four major sections: teacher background information; a modified Teacher Belief Q-Sort task (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2006); items related to teacher confidence in planning informal learning opportunities; and open-ended response items related to teacher beliefs about the benefits of, and obstacles to, informal learning. The teacher confidence scales and open-ended response items are explored in the following analysis. Participants were recruited in three waves. On average, the survey took participants approximately 25 minutes to complete.

Data Analyses

To answer our research question, “*What are the factors that may aid or limit formal educators in planning and implementing out-of-school learning experiences for their students?*”, we focused our analyses on Likert-scale items related to teacher confidence in accessing resources needed to plan informal learning opportunities and items related to teacher beliefs about the benefits of, and obstacles to, informal learning. Also, for open-ended items, we used first-round in-vivo coding (Saldaña, 2015) and highlighted teachers’ direct words and short phrases; a second round of focused coding yielded salient themes from the first round’s most frequently cited and theoretically significant responses.

Results

Participation in Out-of-School Learning Experiences

Of the 309 respondents, 19% reported never taking their students on a trip to a museum, science center, historical site or similar out-of-school learning experience in the previous year, while about 25% reported taking one trip. Just over 50% reported taking their students on two or more out-of-school learning experiences in the previous year. There

Table 1
Teacher Background Information (n = 309)

Gender	Female 91 %	Male 9%	Other 0%		
Ethnicity	Hispanic/Latino 1%		Non-Hispanic White 99%		
Race	Caucasian/White 98%	African American/Black 1%		Asian/Pacific Islander, American Indian or Alaska Native 1%	
Years Teaching	0-5 13%	6-10 18%	11-20 30%	21-30 26%	30+ 13%
Education	Bachelor’s 9%	Bachelor’s + Master’s 24%		Master’s + 43%	CAGS/PhD 4%
Preservice Visits to Informal Learning				Yes 35%	No 65%
Preservice Discussions of Informal Learning				Yes 32%	No 68%

was no statistically significant difference between the frequency of trips and teacher demographic variables, including level of teacher education. Also, when asked to reflect on their teacher preparation courses, about 65% of teachers said they had not discussed or visited informal learning settings during that time. Chi-square analyses indicate a statistically significant relationship between teacher preparation experiences with informal learning settings and frequency of school visits, suggesting a meaningful connection between teachers' participation in informal learning settings during their teacher preparation program and the likelihood that survey respondents conducted out-of-school learning experiences for their students.

Teacher Perspectives on the Benefits of Out-of-School Learning

Teachers described numerous benefits for out-of-school learning. Major themes have been categorized as academic extensions and non-academic extensions.

Academic Extensions. Many teachers cited benefits related to the academic extensions of out-of-school learning experiences, including the deepening and diversification of the curriculum through the authenticity of these types of experiences. For example, about 20% of our PK-8 educators described out-of-school learning experiences as anchoring, supplementing, expanding, and deepening students' in-school learning experiences. They cited practical curriculum uses for out-of-school learning, such as providing a jumping-off point for new curriculum units or being a catalyst for a unit's concluding summative activity. They also reported that out-of-school learning experiences could provide a central experience for students to relate diverse curriculum concepts throughout the school year. Additionally, some teachers noted that out-of-school learning experiences provide opportunities to "bring the curriculum to life" (Teacher 70) and help them present "material in a more vivid way that traditional classroom learning can" (Teacher 16).

Furthermore, teachers value these types of experiences for their authenticity, particularly as that authenticity extends to processing students' school learning in applied and real-world contexts. Authentic experiences were characterized by rich context, access to primary sources, artifacts, and content experts. Similarly, teachers explained the benefits of hands-on and active learning; it foregrounds the multi-sensory and experiential nature of informal learning that is often difficult to replicate in classroom settings. One teacher stated that a

benefit is that the learning is right there in actual time. Kids don't need to form a visual image that may be incorrect. They make better con-

nections, and often hear the docents/museum teachers echo what they have heard in class. Field trips make the learning real and anchored in their minds. (Teacher 296)

In essence, participation in out-of-school experiences helps students develop an extended definition of learning. One teacher noted, “out-of-school learning experiences provide examples of how a child should not just learn in a classroom, but in everyday life in all they explore” (Teacher 31).

Non-Academic Extensions. In addition to academic benefits, 16% of teachers cited non-academic benefits of out-of-school learning experiences such as increased student engagement, curiosity and interest, as well as exposure to memorable experiences. For example, some teachers indicated that these opportunities provide students with new ways to interact with knowledge, allowing them access to personal meaning through exploration and personal challenge. Similarly, some teachers cited positive social benefits, such as opportunities for students to transfer and apply social skill development from the classroom to the community. Further benefits included students experiencing settings with social expectations outside of their school or home environments and norms. Other teachers also cited the shared social experience as a benefit, stating that it can promote a sense of belonging, classroom cohesiveness, and an opportunity for team-building amongst students and teachers.

I feel that the students benefit from out-of-school learning experiences because they are broadening and change is stimulating to students. Even when a student has been to the same place, the experience with the class and guided by the teacher is a whole new and expanding experience. (Teacher 307)

In addition to these non-academic benefits, approximately one third of teachers believed a central benefit of field-trip experiences was their ability to provide exposure to the wider world for students. Teacher responses indicated a differentiation between the idea of exposure and the notion of novelty of experiences outside of the classroom.

The idea of novelty overlaps with the concept of exposure for some teachers. Yet, most cited the major benefit and primary advantage of field trips as providing experiences that students would or could only access through the school. Exposure was described as seeing new places and alternative ways of life or cultures. This was true for rural, suburban, and urban teachers. Many respondents cited the benefit of exposure as significant for their students from marginalized groups (English language learners, students living in poverty, students attending rural

schools, and students without parental support). Additionally, exposure was often described as particularly important to students new to the United States. This coincides with New England's recent, rapid demographic shifts that are largely related to refugee resettlement efforts (Glick Schiller, Boggis, Messenger, & Douglas, 2009).

I teach students who are new to the United States. The benefits of out-of-school learning experiences are immense. Without these opportunities, my students are at a disadvantage [compared to] the experiences and background knowledge native-born students may have experienced. The real life connections to the content help all students gain knowledge and skills at a depth far greater than they are able [to] in the classroom. (Teacher 265)

The idea of novelty of experiences outside of the classroom diverges from exposure in some notable ways. When teachers cite novelty as a benefit, its contribution to student learning centers on active learner participation in a new experience or setting. While exposure, we argue, assumes a lack of experience or deficit on the part of the student, novelty assumes no such deficit: teachers who describe novelty claim that people like and benefit from new experiences, regardless of prior experiences. Informal learning experiences provide novelty benefits insofar as they provide new learning environments that offer distinctive differences from school environments; they challenge students to work under unfamiliar circumstances that can level the playing field for all students, sometimes "in a new and unique setting for all students" (Teacher 88). One teacher stated, "Students are able to experience something out of the ordinary for most of them. This has the potential to radically shift their perceptions and understandings of reality and possibilities for the present and future" (Teacher 220).

Teacher Perspectives on the Obstacles to Out-of-School Learning

Three hundred and two teachers provided open-response answers to the question "What are some obstacles to including more out-of-school learning experiences for your students?" (See Table 2).

When describing obstacles to out-of-school learning, teachers cited a narrow set of barriers surrounding preparation and planning for the experience. For teachers, planning and executing an out-of-school learning experience requires flexibility, resources, and support from a diverse group of collaborating partners. Teacher responses fell into two interrelated categories: logistical planning and curriculum planning.

Logistical Planning

Perhaps not surprisingly, teachers described the difficulties in securing funding and organizing transportation as major obstacles to out-of-school learning. Teachers most often cited primary costs related to the trip, such as transportation and admission. The cost of transportation was overwhelmingly prohibitive, as school policy often requires the use of buses rather than chaperone or teacher vehicles, even when traveling short distances. Teachers also shared concerns about secondary costs

Table 2
Teacher Perspectives on Obstacles to Out-of-School Learning (n = 302)

<i>Obstacle</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Percentage of Sample</i>
Funding	Cost of transportation and admission; school budgetary constrains; lack of access to parental financial support.	70%
Logistics	Complexities of organization and scheduling for trips; accessibility of out-of-school resources; time required for planning (relative to amount of time of experience); time away from other school activities.	40%
Transportation	Cost of transportation; predictability of transportation cost; availability of transportation; distance.	28%
Curriculum	Finding experiences that link to curriculum and standards; pacing and rigor of in-school curriculum; pressure of high-stakes assessment.	21%
School Support	Difficulty securing support from school administrators or colleagues; school policies that limit opportunities or choice.	20%
Parent Support	Ability to find appropriate chaperones; parent financial support.	8%
Student Learning and Safety	Ability to find experience that will maximize student interest/engagement, minimize students' challenging behavior.	8%
School Size	Balancing school size with quality and accessibility of learning experience.	4%

such as hiring substitute teachers to provide classroom coverage for students who aren't able or willing to attend, and hiring nursing staff to provide care for students with medical needs.

Cost of out-of-school learning experiences was often mentioned in context of work with students living in poverty. One teacher said, "I work in a very low income district (90% free and reduced lunch) where funding for such trips is not available from either the school or the families" (Teacher 63). Another teacher further explained this challenge:

Frankly it boils down to money. We are only budgeted one trip per year and that is paid for by the parent association, not the school. We live in a rural setting with lower income families so there is little support in funding from that avenue. (Teacher 67)

About 20% of teachers cited general concerns with scheduling complexity, planning, time, and accessibility as obstacles. One teacher summarized the logistical difficulties of many participating teachers:

At our school, the field trip process is cumbersome for teachers. We have to collect the money, fill out deposit forms, organize transportation, and maintain communication with the out-of-school site. Our bus company also requires us to return to school before the end of the day, shortening our trips and limiting our ability to select sites. These obstacles keep us from planning more trips. (Teacher 39)

The time required to organize these experiences is often at odds with the desired length of visits for student experience. In addition, finding time within the school schedule, which often contains date restrictions for field trips, further constrains planning efforts.

Teachers' logistical concerns partially relate to out-of-school site accessibility. Some concerns center on finding high-quality resources within reasonable distance to their schools. For many teachers, however, accessibility related to finding locations that were kid-friendly, age-appropriate, and welcoming to the students with whom they work.

Curriculum Planning

Several themes emerged amongst the respondents who directly cited curriculum as an obstacle to out-of-school learning: making connections with the given curriculum, meeting pacing and coverage expectations, and assessment. Teachers describe matching the out-of-school learning experience to the curriculum as a critical component of planning, especially since these connections are key to securing permission from school administrators. Several teachers described a tension between availability and access to sites where these curricular connections are

made. Two illustrative examples include finding, “reasonably priced opportunities that cover what we are learning” (Teacher 30) and, “[l]ocating venues that will support [these] standards and having to justify sites to administrators” (Teacher 67).

Teachers also described out-of-school learning experiences as being at odds with the fast-paced and extensive K-8 curriculum, particularly in relation to high-stakes testing. Meeting pacing and coverage expectations means that informal learning opportunities, “[take] them away from the material in curricula that is expected to be taught for standardized testing. Additionally, pulling students from other classes can be challenging because they are missing material from classes missed” (Teacher 6). The curriculum is described as difficult to complete without substituting instructional class time for field trips. Several teachers cited managing the pacing expectation across colleagues as an obstacle, “The biggest obstacle is resistance from other teachers. If I plan a day trip for my subject, all other teachers lose instructional time and that puts constraints on their ability to deliver their prescribed curriculum” (Teacher 16).

Pacing and coverage expectations were also linked to administrative support and funding. One teacher stated, “Currently, funding is limited, and due to CCSS [Common Core State Standards], administration is hesitant supporting out-of-classroom experiences, and [prefers] supporting more in-class instruction”¹ (Teacher 261). Another teacher shared that, “Money and the common core is now dictating everything we do. We are feeling extremely pressured to cover huge amounts of curriculum in small amounts of time” (Teacher 211). Also, this teacher explained that, “Our curriculum and the funds from parents are two major factors. The curriculum is pretty rigorous that taking the time away from it seems to be frowned upon” (Teacher 118). Finally, this teacher summarized the tension by stating that

This concern is particularly salient for teachers who instruct elective courses, such as art. I teach Art to [students in] K-6 school. Bringing a class [on a field trip means], I would have to coordinate with teachers and align it to their core. Art museum [visits] for my students would be a wonderful opportunity many will not ever take part in. (Teacher 181)

In linkage to time and curricular pacing, along with expectations to cover curricular material on a proscribed timetable, teachers expressed the current emphasis on testing and outcomes related to assessment of the Common Core State Standards as an obstacle to including more out-of-school learning experiences in their teaching. One teacher’s comment summarizes this demand well:

Time is the biggest obstacle. If we take students out of the classroom,

we “lose” a day on core curriculum. In an age of standardized testing, each day is precious. Most of the field trips centered around nature, science and the arts. While I value these experiences, Smarter Balanced does not test these subjects. (Teacher 88)²

For teachers, curriculum-planning obstacles extend beyond the classroom and require support from administrators and policy, as well as from colleagues. Teachers noted that administrator preferences for use of instructional time and attention to data-driven decision making could be at odds with out-of-school learning opportunities. One teacher noted that

[m]ajor obstacles would include funding and administrative support. Administration is often more concerned with teachers teaching the standards and meeting objectives than hands on and real life experiences that don't easily connect to [recordable/measurable] student growth in content areas. Even though we know these experiences are beneficial it is hard to easily show the connection they have to student outcomes with concrete data. (Teacher 27)

Related to issues of logistics and curriculum, many teachers cited insufficient support from other teachers as an obstacle. Given the complexity of planning out-of-school experiences, teachers encounter the barrier of limited support from colleagues in managing necessary logistics. This is particularly true for teachers working in interdisciplinary teams. Collegial support in planning is only one dimension of this challenge: teachers also voiced tension between competing curricular commitments and needs. Colleagues must often justify why their curriculum requires more time than what is already scheduled while also creating an experience that connects all of their students' subject areas; they may find it “difficult to obtain the ‘blessing’ of the other content-area teachers when we take ‘their’ students out of their classes” (Teacher 201).

Other Factors

A small number of teachers cited concerns with securing parental support, both through funding and chaperoning out-of-school trips. Funding concerns were related to working with students in high-poverty areas. Meanwhile, concerns about chaperoning related to finding volunteers that were willing to attend, as well as able to appropriately fulfill teacher expectations while on the trip. A small number of teachers (8%) cited concerns with lack of student engagement or participation, particularly surrounding student inability to employ appropriate behavior in new learning contexts. Finally, a small number of teachers cited school or class size as an obstacle to planning out-of-school learning experiences (4%). Where indicated, concerns related to the

management of a meaningful experience for students in large classes or from large schools.

Teacher Confidence

We asked teachers how confident they were in garnering the necessary permission and support for planning out-of-school learning experiences. Three hundred and fifteen teachers completed a 4-point scale, ranging from “not at all confident” to “very confident.” Although teachers were primarily confident in working with parents and students in preparation for and attendance at the experience, they were slightly less confident in making curriculum and instruction connections between school and informal learning. Teachers were substantially less confident in working with school administrators to secure permission and funding for out-of-school learning. In fact, 30% said they were “not at all” confident about securing funding from school administrators. In addition, only about a quarter of teachers reported feeling “very confident” about securing funding from parents/guardians. Both of these findings suggest that curriculum planning and administrative support are experienced as obstacles to out-of-school learning.

Discussion

By asking a large sample of New England PK-8th grade educators about their experiences planning out-of-school learning experiences, this study presents data that highlight teacher voices and contributes to understanding the complexity of both motivations for, and obstacles to, out-of-school learning. Our findings replicate and extend previous research on teachers’ motivation for informal learning, particularly Kisiel’s study on teacher field-trip motivation (2005). In addition, our findings introduce important voices and perspectives into the museum education literature, as well as extend and complicate widely held beliefs on what drives teacher participation in informal learning experiences.

Teachers described numerous benefits for out-of-school learning, some of which resonated with previous research studies. For example, Kisiel (2005) found that elementary science teachers were motivated to plan field trips because they were connected to the curriculum, provided novel learning experiences, supported student engagement, and exposed students to new ideas. Our respondents cited benefits of out-of-school learning as extending both academic and non-academic skills. By deepening and expanding student engagement with curricular concepts, extending student conceptions of learning, and providing opportunities for new social experiences, teachers view out-of-school learning experi-

ences as greatly benefiting a wide variety of students across contexts. Teachers were very confident in connecting with out-of-school institutions that would support these beneficial outcomes, with preparing students and chaperones for these experiences, and with managing the site visit logistics of the trip.

Additionally, by providing relevant information about student characteristics and context, survey respondents deepened the notion of *exposure* as a major learning benefit, and provided insight into the potential differences between *exposure* and *novel experiences*. More specifically, teachers articulated a definition of exposure potentially linked with deficit-based thinking about student experiences. Though this emergent theme necessitates further exploration, its contribution to the literature on teacher beliefs about out-of-school learning is critical, especially since the distinction between these two themes lacks clarity in previous research and could greatly impact issues of field trip design and implementation.

Furthermore, teachers reported the complex and overlapping school-level obstacles to out-of-school learning experiences. Both logistical and curricular concerns emerged as barriers to out-of-school learning, reinforcing previous research that highlights how administrative support; opportunities for teacher collaboration; and a disconnect between school curriculum and the resources that an informal learning site can provide, interfere with teachers' abilities to plan and implement out-of-school opportunities for their students (Anderson et al., 2006).

There are some limitations to our findings that should be noted. Primarily, our low response rate (4%) makes it challenging to generalize our study's results to samples beyond the ones surveyed. We largely attribute our low response rate to the survey disbursement's timing; we emailed educators towards the end of the academic year which is typically not ideal for teachers who are completing report cards and preparing for end-of-year events. Finally, though open-ended survey responses provide rich data, further qualitative research is necessary to explore how teacher education can facilitate teachers planning and implementing out-of-school learning experiences for their students (Dewitt & Osborne, 2007).

Conclusion

There are numerous benefits to planning and implementing field trips. This research suggests, however, that there are also specific barriers that hinder teachers from taking their students outside of the school building. Given research that suggests teacher education can improve preservice teachers' knowledge related to field trip learning (Morentin

& Guisasola, 2015), how might the field of teacher education facilitate teacher engagement with out-of-school learning, in the hopes of preparing teachers to persevere through field trip roadblocks?

One approach is to embed discussions on the merits of out-of-school learning within teacher preparation courses, so that out-of-school learning experiences become an integral component of the preparation and continuing professional development of educators. Another approach is to explicitly teach strategies for integrating school curricula with out-of-school experiences. Developing specific lessons that are standards-based with clear learning objectives that bridge these instructional contexts can be infused into various teacher preparation courses. Complementing the curriculum-focused strategies, teacher development should include explicit preparation for the organizational and logistical challenges of out-of-school learning. This preparation might also address effective communication about the merits of field trip experiences with administrators and other educational stakeholders. Finally, teacher educators can model how to plan and implement authentic out-of-school learning experiences by incorporating more field trips within teacher preparation courses. Preservice teachers can experience field trip benefits as students, and are more likely to overcome obstacles once they are in the field.

Although scholarly research is not a panacea for what we understand to be a much more complex problem related to time, curriculum, and resources, we believe that encouraging teachers to plan and implement academic field trips, especially in this high-stakes accountability climate, can supplement and extend the school curricula and help improve student outcomes.

Note

¹ The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are a set of educational standards for English language arts/literacy and mathematics currently employed by 42 states in the US. (<http://www.corestandards.org>).

² Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) is an annual achievement test aligned to the Common Core State Standards. (<http://www.smarter-balanced.org>).

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