Evaluating Class Trip as a Part of an Upper Elementary Program



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Background

Going out of the classroom to experience the world directly is a central part of Montessori philosophy (Montessori, 1999) which is supported in upper elementary programs by class trips. Class trips provide students with educational experiences which enhance students' mastery of ecological concepts, outdoor education, teamwork, and social skills. Montessori-oriented student field experiences should offer direct experience, opportunities for independence and social development, as well as chances to integrate their knowledge across subjects (Montessori, 1999). For maximum knowledge gain, field trips should offer students active experiences, learning activities transparently related to the subject, and advance classroom preparation (Farmer, Knapp & Benton, 2007, Knapp & Poff, 2001).

Evaluation Questions

- What costs, income streams and other financial factors influence the class trip?
 What are the philosophical underpinnings of class trips and how do they match with current research literature?
- What value do students and parents find in class trip experiences?

Methodology

This evaluation study followed Stufflebeam's (Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 2007) CIPP model of evaluation. This evaluation model considers Context, Input, Process and Product and serves the needs of decision makers. Values identification sets evaluations apart from research studies. The values thresholds for making decisions based on the data were derived from discussions with two groups of decision makers, the teachers and the Head of School. After examining the data, these decision-makers determined the levels of acceptability for the four areas of this evaluation.

Many different kinds of data were collected and analyzed. Twelve years of budget data were easined to provide information on context and input concerns. Data on the program's process, or implementation, was gathered from the review of the literature plus a focus group with teachers, providing a basis for addressing the philosophy question. The effects, or products, of class trip experiences were explored through open-ended email surveys of Montessori graduates and their parents using snowball sampling, which allowed me to talk to "information-rich key informants" (Patton, 2002, p. 237) A total of 18 surveys were submitted, nine from former students and pine from parents

This evaluation study addressed trustworthiness in several ways (Merriam, 2009). I gathered multiple forms of data as a means of achieving triangulation. The responses from the former student and parent surveys went through informal member checks with teachers and other parents to see if the responses were on target. Adequate engagement was accomplished by my attendance on six class trips and leading or co-leading three of those trips. I also engaged the other teachers at my level in weekly peer debriefing during our faculty meetings. Finally, the original report contains several pages of thick description about the school, the program itself and its history.

Implications, Limitations, Future Research

Overall, the evaluation affirmed the value of the trip for the administrators, teachers, parents and students. This evaluation was limited by the single-case approach, though this approach did allow for the examination of deep knowledge associated with class trips. It was also limited by the study's design, and could have been improved by increased attention to the design of the qualitative data collection and attention to trustworthiness issues. Future research should examine the knowledge gains associated with class trips and should explore a possible typology of upper elementary class trips focused on developing a best-practices model.

References

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Fundraising Recommendations: The 60/40 Rule

- On average, the budget has been in the black for those years in which fundraising did not exceed 40% of the per-student cost of the trip; therefore the trip fee should be raised in order to reflect this proportion.
- Successful fundraisers have averaged more than \$1000 with a profit margin of more than 40%; therefore, fundraisers in the future should be selected based on these profitability standards.



Students are actively engaged in learning about Texas history during a museum visit.

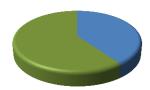
Student Survey Recommendation: Socialization

 Surveys of Montessori graduates indicated that students find personal and social benefits to participating in class trips; therefore, teachers should ensure that adequate preparation is achieved, that time is allowed for social connections to be made, and that varied challenges exist for students of all abilities.



A student and teacher work together to identify Texas wildflowers.

Fundraiser Net Income > \$1,000





Minimum acceptable profitability standards for any class trip fundraiser.

Philosophy Recommendations: Stay on Course

- In a focus group, Upper Elementary teachers independently articulated more than 80% of Maria Montessori's educational objectives for these kinds of educational experiences; therefore, teachers should continue to discuss the educational objectives for the class trip annually.
- A review of current literature on field trips and outdoor education revealed multiple techniques promoting effective field experiences; therefore, teachers should collaborate with field educators who teach in class trip settings to promote hands-on, active learning in those settings.







The leader (left) prepares a fire while students observe. Could they have helped?

Parent Survey Recommendation: Preparation

The survey of parents indicated that they find value in their children gaining
personal and self-management skills as well as self-confidence; therefore,
teachers should continue to offer lessons in packing and money management
which parents stated contributed to their children's travel skills.