

**Enhancing Place Based Learning through Montessori Going Out experiences in an Elementary Classroom.**

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### Abstract

Place Based Learning utilizes community resources specific to the place surrounding a school. It is an educational strategy which, by definition, will look different in any school that provides learning experiences based on what is available in the area. Utilizing these resources helps children to connect with their community and grow academically, socially, emotionally, and through civic engagement. Place Based Learning is a natural fit for a Montessori setting, as students ages six through twelve engage in the Going Out process. Going Outs are student planned individual or small group outings to further the learning of the child. The purpose of this action research project was to enhance Place Based Learning using Montessori Going Out experiences. Research was conducted in a urban public charter Montessori school. It took place in a combined Lower and Upper Elementary classroom that housed forty-two students in first through fourth grade. The researcher used confidential student surveys, staff surveys, and observations to analyze the effects of Place Based Learning on Going Outs in a Montessori Elementary classroom. This project determined that Going Out experiences are well worth the time and effort, and Place Based Learning provides new opportunities for students to grow and connect with their communities.

*Keywords:* Place Based Learning, elementary, Montessori, nature, Social Justice, outdoor education, student led

## **Introduction**

A few years ago while at a NAMTA Conference I participated in a session on Place Based Learning. We learned how to take advantage of the local resources we have and learned the importance of students connecting to their community. One activity we completed was to draw a map of the area around our school. We were asked to start small, just within a mile of the school. We were told to write down local businesses, government buildings or hospitals, natural areas, and any places of historic or cultural significance. As my coworker and I began this process, it quickly became evident just how much was truly available to us in our community within walking distance. The presenter then challenged us to consider extending our map to within two miles, or within reach of the public transportation system. By simply stopping to think about our resources, we were buzzing with new ideas of how to engage our students.

In my five years at a Montessori school, I have worked in multiple classrooms and in different roles. I have run an After School program, provided reading and math interventions in the classroom, team taught with a Montessori Lead Teacher and become the Montessori Lead Teacher in my own classroom. Through these varied experiences, I have witnessed different Going Out processes across the building. In each classroom, the goal has been for as many students as possible to get this enriching, independence building experience. It is a goal at our school that all Elementary students participate in a Going Out, but we are far from reaching this goal.

Through this project I hoped to use Montessori Going Out experiences to harness that same momentum and positively impact Place Based Learning at my school. To facilitate this goal, I addressed the primary research question, “How do Montessori Going Out experiences enhance Place Based Learning?” While tackling this topic I addressed several sub-questions. What barriers keep students from participating in Going Out events? What benefits do students receive from Going Out? What resources become available in the area using Place Based Learning?

## **Review of Related Literature**

### **Definition and History of Place Based Learning**

There have been many definitions of Place Based Learning and they come out of multiple related instructional strategies and educational beliefs. However, they all wrap around the basic idea of

committing to root student experiences within the local community. The student engages in learning that is rooted in the local: unique history, environment, culture, economy, literature and art of a particular place. It is “linking learning with phenomena immediately available to their senses and lives (Gruenewald, 2008, p. 1).” The goal is to address the disconnect between school and community by “grounding learning in local phenomena and students’ lived experience (Smith, 2002).” A focus on local issues links students with their communities in ways that are improving the lives of their families and neighbors. Most Place Based Learning encompasses four main characteristics: it is community based, provides unified and authentic learning, is student centered and collaborative, and action oriented.

Place Based Learning is both old and new. It has some of its roots in Dewey with his constructivist approach and his belief in connecting school to the child’s everyday life. Dewey discussed the disconnect between schools and the outside world, and this is just as relevant today. Prior to the “common school” of the Post-Industrial Revolution era, all school was Place Based and had a local curriculum (Smith, 2002, p. 594). Place Based Education also has deep roots in environmental education, but also includes cultural journalism, ecological education, local entrepreneurialism, and service learning. Place Based Learning and geography go hand in hand, one can feed and enhance the other.

Place Based Learning has continued throughout the ages and across the world. For example, early 20<sup>th</sup> century French educators had students study their own villages. Other examples include the 1970s the Foxfire project in Georgia which started a movement to document regions across the country, and, in the 1980s, a large oral history project was completed to document Native Alaskan cultural practices.

There has been recent rebirth in valuing and including local education. Most traditional education today focuses more on knowledge from other places and other people. Curriculum focuses on national and international perspectives. European American perspectives dominate most school curricula, disregarding many individual local cultures.

### **Going Out and Montessori Philosophy and Pedagogy**

This project seeks to connect the idea of Place Based Learning with Maria Montessori's Going Out. Montessori believed it was important to have two environments for the Elementary (6-12 year old) child: the prepared environment (classroom) and the outside community. "When the child goes out it is the world itself that offers itself to him. Let us take the child out to show him real things instead of making objects which represent ideas and closing them in cupboards" (Montessori, 1973, 18).

A Going Out is planned, organized, and eventually executed by the child. A Going Out is different than a field trip. "Since life outdoors differs from life in a closed environment, a guide and an aim are necessary. In short, to go out, one must be ready for it" (Montessori, 1973, 15). In the Going Out, the role of adult is only to make sure child is safe; the child should do all problem solving. Afterwards, the child prepares a report or a speech to reflect on the experience and share with students and the community.

In her 2011 *Green Teacher* article, Joyce Nett demonstrated the benefits of simply getting out of the building, if only for unstructured nature time, rather than the afore mentioned student run Goings Out. Nett referred to Montessori's teaching that getting out of the classroom builds independence, growth, self-confidence and creativity. She committed to going out of the classroom every Friday, and through this unstructured time outside she observed increases in preparedness among students, spontaneous observations, responsible behavior, students choosing to work on science, accuracy in measurement, their use of the scientific method, a connection to place and ownership of their outdoor space, and civic engagement.

While Place Based Learning is a natural fit with a Going Out, it inherently has other connections to Montessori education. The idea that children must connect and see value in their work aligns with Cosmic Education as students ask themselves what is their cosmic task. Montessori states that the elementary child is seeking to find their place in the universe, asking "Who am I?" "Where do I come

from?” and “Why am I here?” In connecting with a child’s place they are asking and answering the questions “Who am I in a place?” and “How do I live where I am?” (Lim, 2010, p. 336). Both Place Based Learning and Montessori education align with constructivist ideas, that children experience, interact with and make sense of their surroundings by engaging in hands on authentic experiences. These environmental experiences lead to feelings of competence and confidence. Barriers, including parental restrictions and interventions, lead to less competence and confidence (Lim, 2010, p. 329). Again, linking to Montessori, the child must be allowed to do for himself as much as possible guided by an adult. The adult should not do for the child what the child can do for himself. “We must help the child to act for himself, will for himself, think for himself; this is the art of those who aspire to serve the spirit.” (Montessori, 1946, p. 69).

Place Based Learning gives merit to the study of students and their families, giving them worth in their study. It does, however, align more with the traditional teaching model of starting at the self, working out into the community, and then to a more global setting rather than the Cosmic Education idea of starting with the universe and working back towards the individual. Creating more engaged citizens also connects to Montessori’s Peace Education as students find their voice and sense of justice. One of the key goals of Place Based Learning is that children are motivated intrinsically rather than extrinsically, as with Montessori education. There is also a strong case for cross-curricular work in Place Based Learning, which again melds well with Montessori’s Cosmic Education.

In Social Studies, Place Based Learning can become a real-life application of Geography concepts and theories. Students are able to not only learn about but experience examples and therefore deepen their understanding and appreciation. There are also Social Justice implications of Place Based Learning. The study of Place can help a child to develop an understanding of Social Justice and his or her individual connection to their community (Israel, 2012). In addition to the direct curricular benefits, children also benefit from regularly connecting with the same place and their community.

### **Need For and Benefits of Going Out Experiences and Place Based Learning**

There are many reasons to implement Place Based Learning in the classroom, and many documentable benefits for both students and their communities. Dewey said that the school is isolated from life and vice versa, and that children prefer to work with actual phenomena rather than ideas about said phenomena (Smith, 2002, p.594). Children want to feel that their work is connected to their life and valued by society. Students become creators of knowledge through this method, rather than empty vessels filled by teachers. When students are able to impact their local community, they are more likely to believe and have confidence that they can impact the world on a larger scale. Place Based Learning connects the child with their natural and social world through the study of place. The goal is for students to use this connection to become engaged in society and want to become an agent of change. This differs from traditional models of education which prepare children for future civic engagement; rather, Place Based Learning invites students to participate in the present. These types of activities can be both academic for the child and valuable to the community. Place Based Learning not only impacts the children, but enhances the social and natural environments in which they live.

Children today are growing up in a world that is less connected to the environment than ever. Maya Newell discussed how students interact more with technology than nature in her 2015 *Practically Primary* article “The Imperative for Place-Based Learning”. Many of the students’ experiences occur through manufactured safe zones by adults, and do not encourage students to think for themselves, take risks, or deal with natural consequences. This “nature deficit disorder” has resulted in social and ecological negative effects, including a disconnect with the need to protect the environment. Every individual has an “Ecological Identity”, or their connection to the environment, which is formed by exposure to nature at early ages. There is also an “anthromorphism” in children, in which they see human like qualities in nature. When a child develops this sense of connection they are more engaged with the natural world and empathize with the need to save the environment. Place Based Learning has been seen as a solution to the disconnect with nature (Newell, 2015).

While children today, particularly in urban areas, may not have as much access to the natural world they can still develop a sense of place in their neighborhood. Children have a desire not only to know, but be known, and can build connections through familiarity with physical spaces and the people within them. Children have a natural desire to be active explorers of their environment. This connection with space can be described as insideness, an inside knowledge and understanding of a place. This sense of place is ongoing and ever changing, and affects not only the child's current view of his/her place in the world but his/her future role in the world (Lim, 2010, pp. 2-3).

Another main purpose of a Going Out and Place Based Learning is to increase life skills in Elementary children and to build off of their growing sense of morality. Children are empowered through many learning opportunities, including real world experiences; Going Out provides an opportunity for Montessori Grace and Courtesy lessons, math practice with money and time and practice with maps to determine location. The child develops responsibility, independence, and a feeling of satisfaction in their work and contribution.

### **Preparing for Varied Types of Place Based Learning**

#### **Types.**

Place Based Learning cannot be packaged and disseminated. It depends on the creativity of educators creatively connecting learners with possibilities in specific places. However, there are five overarching patterns within place based learning: cultural studies, nature studies, real world problem solving, internships and entrepreneurial opportunities, and induction into community processes (Smith, 2002, p. 594).



**Logistics.**

Because Place Based Learning will look different in every place, there is no cookie cutter approach to setting up a program in a classroom. However, there are many well documented examples of successful Place Based Learning projects from which to gain wisdom; these projects provide tips and tricks which can be applied to a variety of situations.

For the purpose of this project, a Going Out station was created in the classroom. The five main areas of Place Based Learning are an excellent way to organize the types of opportunities students may seek out, and a way to ensure that teacher and student alike are balancing opportunities. A teacher may lean more towards cultural studies and real world problem study opportunities, and can sometimes forget about internship and entrepreneurial opportunities or vice versa. These areas are also an important topic to share with parents as they plan children's time outside of school; efforts could be made to offer opportunities for families to experience going out together in each of the areas. There also needs to be practical materials to scaffold the experience for a child, which could include informational materials from local Visitors' Bureaus, bus routes, and Going Out procedural packets.

**Participants and tasks.**

When it comes to who can participate in a Going Out, different schools and teachers have different viewpoints. In some schools, Going Outs are mostly made up of sixth graders. In her 2016 *Montessori Life* article, Stephanie Pullman gave the example of her Going Out program for students in a fourth through sixth grade classroom at Montessori Greenhouse school in Garden Grove, CA. In her program it was only sixth grade students who participated. It is a structured activity that meets once a week in order to plan some large outings. The students plan outings based on their interests and current studies. The outings were either service learning projects, educational outings, or involved studying a career with the goal of increasing life skills and building off of their growing sense of morality. In some

other schools, Going Out experiences are available to all children age 6-12 who are ready for the responsibility of planning and executing an outing. This includes the child being responsible for details such as purpose, transportation, financial needs, securing an adult supervisor, and returning a parent signature in a timely manner.

Prior to each going out children are guided through research on their excursion, and how to act/ behave in this social situation using role play. While on the Going Out, students act as the guides and decision makers. After the Going Out, students create thank you notes and document their outing in a Scrapbook (Pullman, 2016). The Scrapbook has a dual benefit of being a culminating activity for the child who went on the Going Out and providing inspiration for future students as they may decide to make a plan.

### **Local Connections.**

People of all ages naturally connect to their location and setting, even small children. As they are beginning to make sense of their world, they are recognizing and making connections to the places around them. In a 2008 article in the *Early Childhood Education Journal*, Jennifer James, a mother and early childhood educator, wrote about the experience she had with her daughter when moving and the role of place for young children. She wrote that “young children develop a sense of identity and belonging... these understandings contribute to their ideas of membership in a community and how context and culture shape those understandings” (James, 2008, p. 413). They begin to pick up on where their house is located in their neighborhood and how to get to their library, school, local park, or houses of family members. These are both physical and emotional connections. Children in Montessori’s First Plane of Development are in a Sensitive Period for observing their surroundings and recognizing patterns. Frequently exploring the same place aligns with the repetition and sense of order seen in the child age three to six. In James’ example, she encouraged her own daughter and her students to make maps of places they frequented. The

emphasis was not on the accuracy of the maps, but in how students see and understand their world (James, 2008). The evolution of these maps as students grow in familiarity, skills, and age reflect their connection to the place.

By its nature, then, there is no one set Place Based Learning curriculum as it must be reflective of a local setting. Each individual school and location should and must develop its own sense of place based on its surroundings. One suggested activity to start this process is to begin a map of the area around an individual school. Identify businesses, attractions, libraries, museums, factories, parks, etc... within a one mile radius of the school. In this process there may be many more resources within a short walking distance and opportunities for connection. Then expand to a two mile radius, or further. Consider access to public transportation and which areas of a school's town or city are accessible within a reasonable time frame for students to travel.

There are many similar locations which would differ from place to place, but could be universal as applied here. Going Out options could include:

- Museums
- Farm, botanical garden, orchard
- Zoo, aquarium
- Grocery store
- Local news station, radio, or newspaper
- Landfill, recycling center
- National, state, or local park
- Local landmarks, historical sites
- Orchestra, theater or other fine-art performance
- Vet, doctor, or dentist office
- Craft, hobby, or home improvement store
- Utilities: wastewater, electric plant
- Factory or other manufacturer
- Bakery, candy maker, chef

## **Conclusion**

To summarize, Place Based Learning and Montessori Going Out experiences are a natural fit for each other. They have similar educational goals, both are engrained with the idea that the child should become a part of the community, and that children should become actively involved now rather than

waiting for the future. The child needs an opportunity to strike out on his or her own to demonstrate responsibility, gain independence, and feel satisfaction in his or her work. In order for this to happen the teacher needs to support the child with appropriate scaffolding of real world skills, Grace and Courtesy, but only as much help as the child needs in order to be independent.

### **Procedures and Gathering the Data**

Prior to beginning this research, the researcher sent a letter home to classroom parents informing of the study and asking permission for students to participate (See Appendix A).

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this research project is to enhance Place Based Learning through Montessori Going Out experiences. In addition, this research addressed several sub-questions. What barriers keep students from participating in Going Out experiences? What benefits do students receive from Going Out? What resources become available in the area using Place Based Learning?

### **Materials Used**

The following materials were used to implement this project:

- Going Out Station
  - Basket to organize and hold materials
  - Copies of Going Out Procedures and Contract Packet (Appendix B)
  - Local bus route information
  - Binder with information on local opportunities for Going Outs
  - Access to camera during Going Outs
  - Scrapbook for students to document their Going Outs
- Student Going Out reflection surveys (See Appendix C)
- Teacher Going Out tracking/reflection form (See Appendix D)

**Participants**

The participants were children in a combined Lower and Upper Elementary classroom, including forty-two students: eleven fourth graders, ten third graders, seven second graders and fourteen first graders. Twenty were boys and twenty-two were girls, all coming from diverse racial and socio-economic backgrounds. Nine students have Individualized Education Plans and two additional students are in the process of Special Education referrals.

**Setting**

This study took place in an urban public Montessori school. The school has over four hundred students ranging from a Toddler Program through eighth grade in the Adolescent Program. This classroom is a combined Lower and Upper Elementary classroom that currently houses first through fourth grade. The classroom is a large combined space, having removed the wall between two existing classrooms. Students in the Lower and Upper Elementary have shared materials and spaces, and the freedom to work and move throughout the space. There are two lead Montessori co-teachers, one classroom assistant, and one one-on-one Special Education assistant.

The school is located approximately one mile west of a Midwestern downtown city. Within a one mile distance there is a major private four-year university, a large public library, a public museum, large city parks and many businesses and government buildings. The students have access to public transportation which opens larger areas in the city up for Going Out travel.

**Procedure**

- 1) For six weeks the researcher collected preliminary data. The researcher documented attempted and completed Going Out experiences and kept anecdotal notes about their process and outcomes.
- 2) In week seven, the researcher gave lessons to students on the Going Out process. Students were given copies of the Going Out Checklist to prepare for Going Out experiences, shown examples of previously filled out forms, and shown the Going Out binder. Future Going Out options were discussed in each of the five major areas of Place Based Learning.
- 3) In weeks eight through fourteen the researcher kept anecdotal notes about Going Out experiences, their process and outcomes. Upon return from a Going Out, students documented their experience in a classroom Going Out scrapbook. They had the option to include photographs, tickets, mementos, memories, or tips for future students while creatively responding. Students also completed a Student Going Out Reflection Survey, which asked the student to identify the highlights and challenges of their experience, what they learned, how their experience related to their classroom learning and lessons, and what tips they would have for future students going on the same Going Out. The staff member who chaperoned the Going Out also completed a reflection survey, identifying which students participated in the Going Out, the purpose and educational value, and highlights and challenges of the experience.

## **Results**

### **Preliminary Findings**

During the six weeks of preliminary research, there was very little action in the classroom regarding Going Out experiences. This six-week period was during the time directly after returning from Winter Break. Students were very excited to be back at school and were motivated by materials in the classroom. It is a period of time with great adjustment while getting back into everyday classroom routines. It also began the Winter standardized testing window, which meant that individual students were testing on a regular basis in both Reading and Math. This took away from instructional time and the availability of adults to participate in a Going Out. Because this period of time was winter, the weather also played a large factor in determining the interest and practicality of planning a Going Out. Many nature related and outdoor Going Out options were not available, and logistics were limited due to weather. If the temperature was below 10° F, it is school policy for students not to be out for recess, and thus not to be waiting at a bus stop. Snow also affected walkability and the reliability of public transportation.

While there were scheduling and weather concerns, students did attempt to plan Going Out experiences during this time. Student A, a female 4<sup>th</sup> grader, made the most attempts at planning a Going Out during this time period, but was not successful in executing her plans. Student A frequently plans trips out, but often exhibits self-sabotaging behaviors as these events come close. She will often forget to get her permission slip signed, lose materials, or have negative behaviors/outbursts in the leadup to a trip. It is our policy that students must demonstrate responsible behavior inside the building before being trusted with the responsibility

of trips outside the building. One of the failed attempts was not in her control; she had planned a Going Out to a bakery but on the day of the Going Out found that the bakery had malfunctioning equipment.

After the Going Out lessons, during weeks eight through thirteen, there were five Going Out trips executed. Three related to nature studies; students went to a local public museum to study the rock cycle, a private museum to study fish, and went to a local nature center to go bird watching. One trip was an example of culture studies; students went to a private museum to attend an exhibit on the history of electric guitars. The last trip was both culture studies and real world problem solving: the students were following up on a lesson about nutrition and food in other cultures, and then completed the real world tasks of grocery shopping and baking.

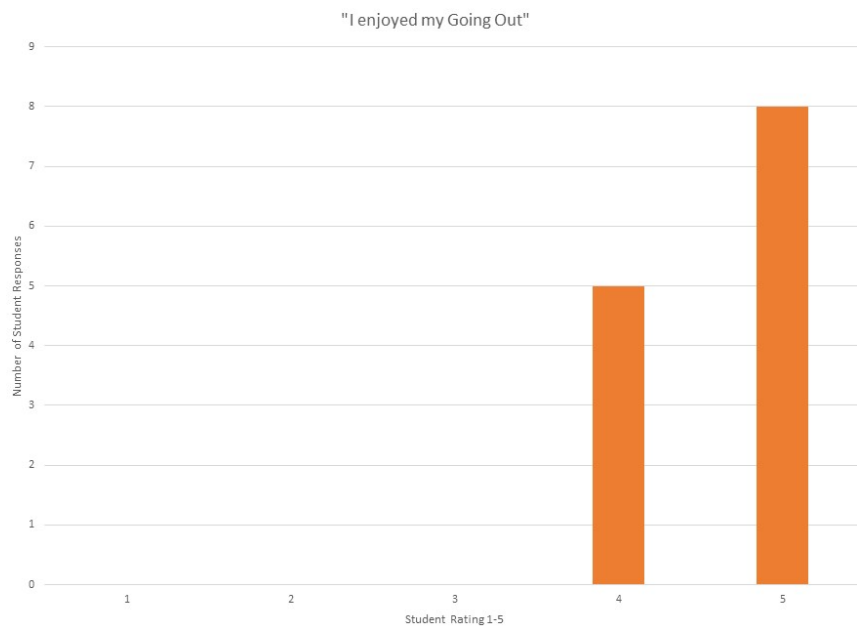
### **Student Responses**

Overwhelmingly, students responded that they enjoyed their Going Out experiences and that they would like to go on another Going Out in the future (Figures 1-4). There was however a wider range of responses when children reflected on their own learning. In response to the prompt, “I extended my learning,” only five out of thirteen students responded with a four or five. The students’ responses overall showed that they had not learned anything new, rather had confirmed facts they already learned in lessons. The chaperones overall rated the student learning higher, which was as expected. The adult had the outside perspective of watching the child as they had their experience, and the adult perspective of what actually is learning. The students were often not aware that they were demonstrating new knowledge gained, or that they had more to share.

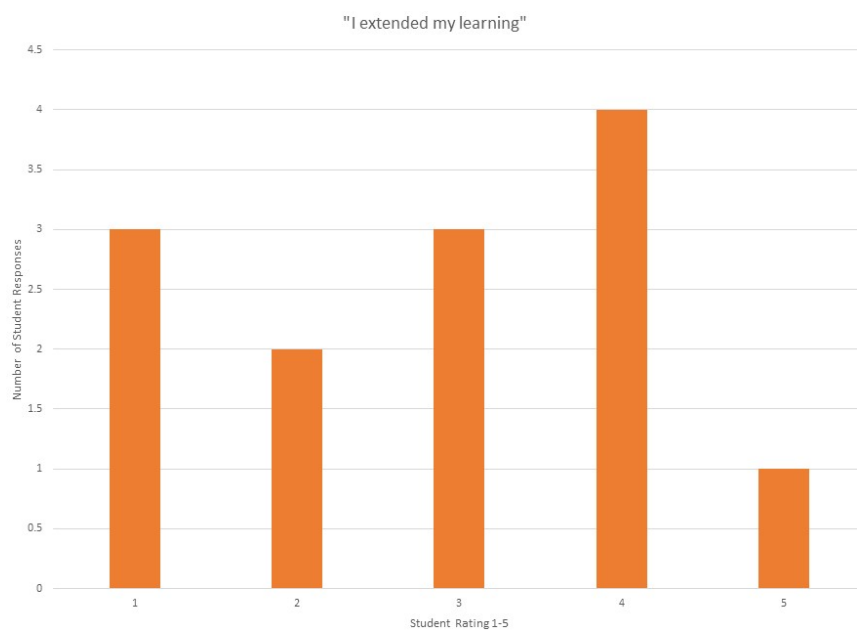


The students also demonstrated their knowledge gained during the Going Out both in their excited conversations with peers upon return and in making their Going Out scrapbook pages (Figures 5-8). On their reflection surveys, the students were more focused on their overall experiences than on specific learning targets. Only two students rated over a three when prompted “I have new information to share with the class.” When given the open-ended question, “What did you learn?” students responded with specific facts they found interesting or experiences they had, but often these were not related to the topic of the Going Out. On the fish trip, the students participated in a “Make and Take” craft activity in which they made boats that could float. This was not directly related to the topic of their Going Out, but the chaperone allowed them to participate. Each student commented on their reflection survey the advice to “never touch the tip of a hot glue gun!!” as one student unfortunately did on the trip. The highlight for a student on the rock cycle Going Out was catching a butterfly in the live butterfly exhibit at the public museum. Many of the comments also revolved around their needs being met on the trip; students were tired from the walking, hungry because they did not bring snacks, or had to wait too long for lunch.

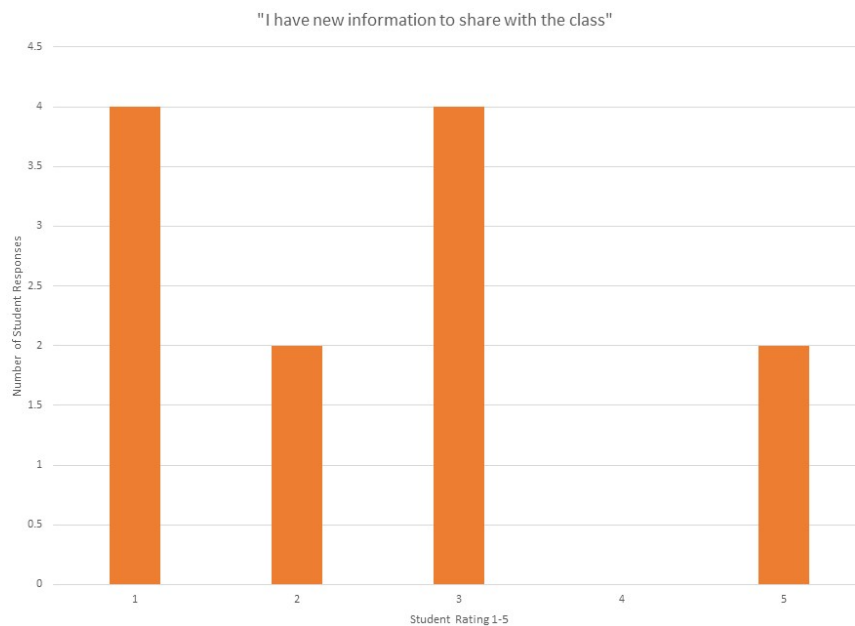
Students responded that their biggest challenges were in planning and executing transportation to the Going Out and ensuring that they had enough snack for their trip. Most Going Out experiences happened during the morning hours, during which time the students normally have a snack provided by the school. Many reported also wanting more time for their Going out experience. Many of the highlights reported by students were not specifically related to their learning or the Going Out experience, but truly displayed the beauty and innocence of childhood: “seeing cardinals on the walk”, “being trusted in public”, “spending time with friends,” and “enjoying a walk.”



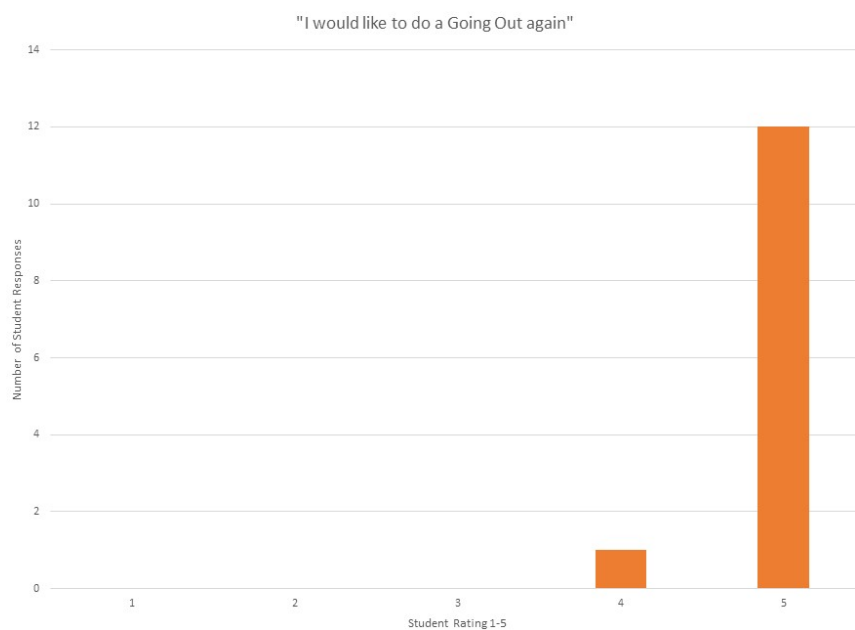
**Figure 1. Student Response: "I enjoyed my Going Out"**



**Figure 2. Student Response: "I extended my learning"**



**Figure 3. Student Response: “I have new information to share with the class”**



**Figure 4. Student Response: “I would like to do a Going Out again”**

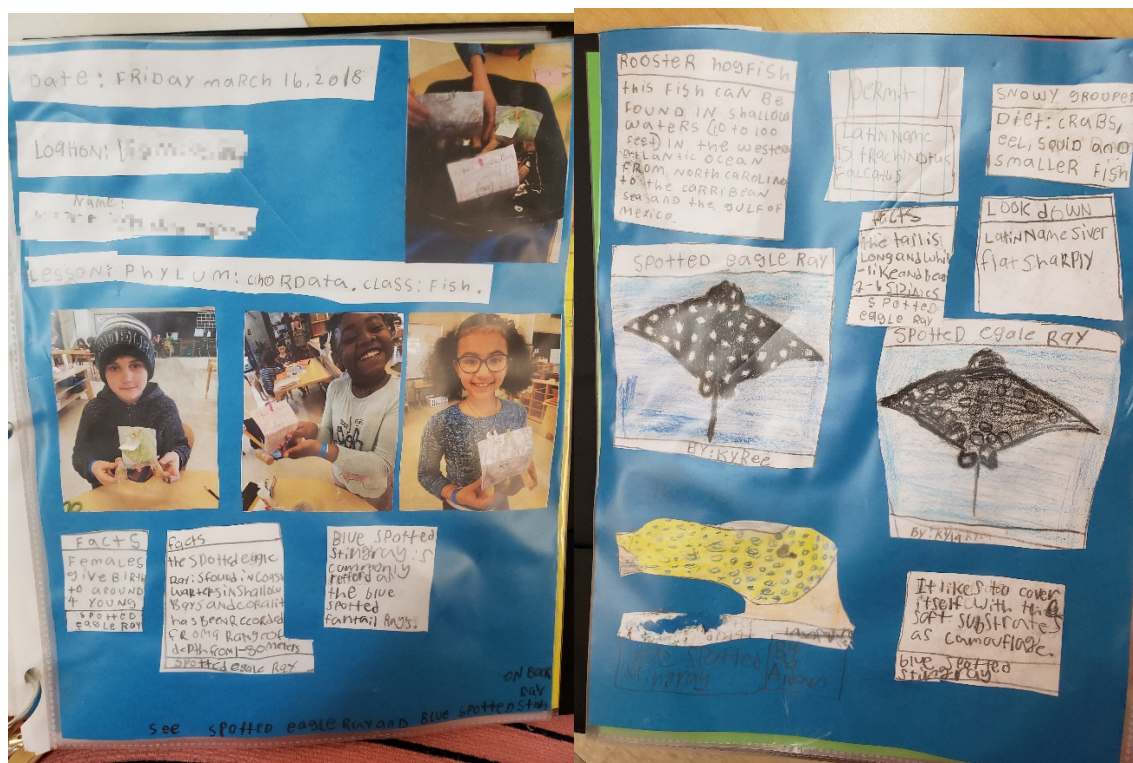


Figure 5. Student Scrapbook (names/identifying locations blurred)

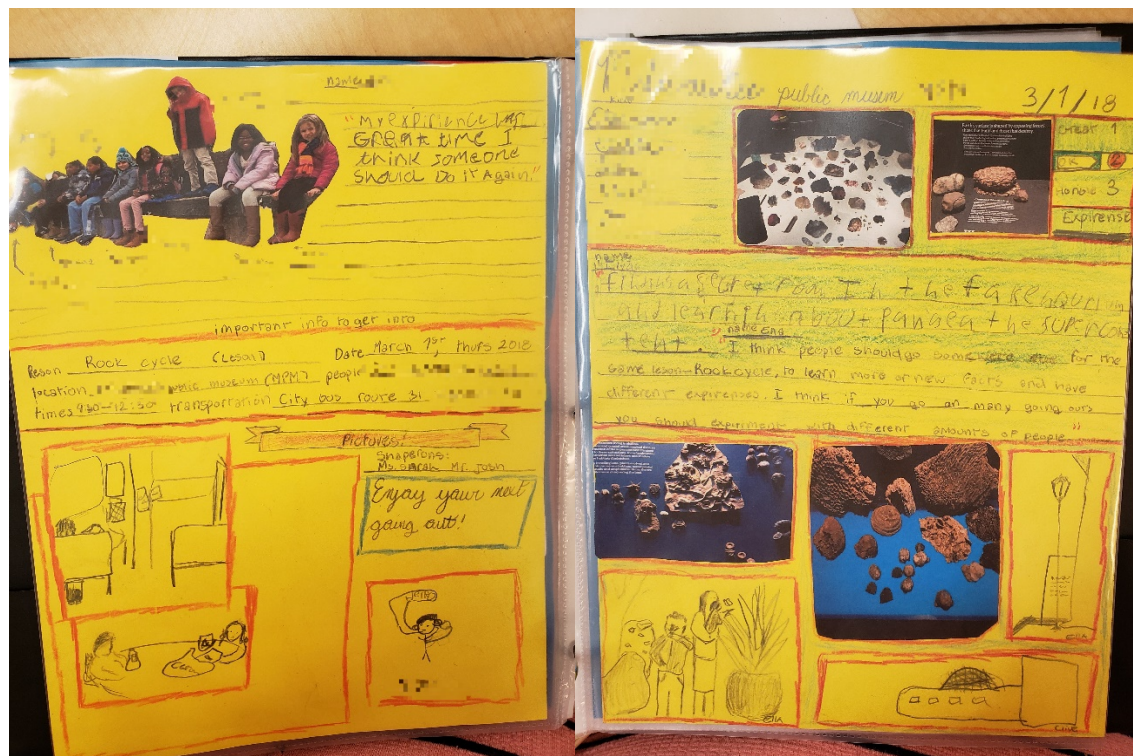


Figure 6. Student Scrapbook (names/identifying locations blurred)



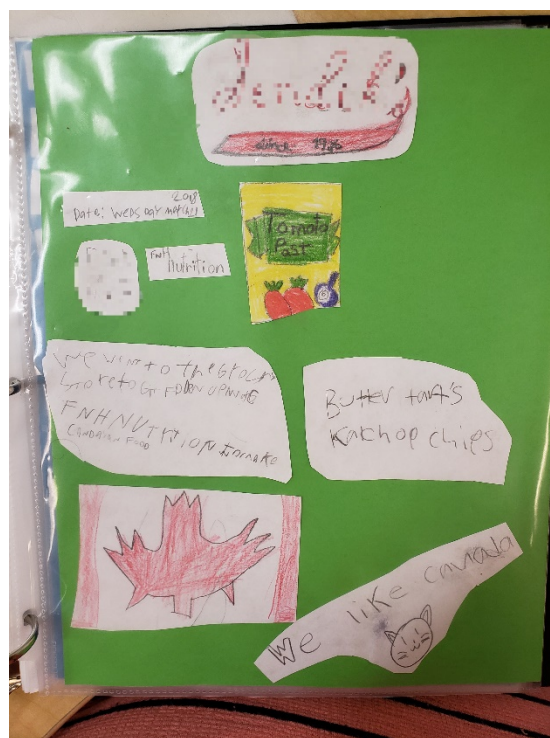


Figure 7. Student Scrapbook (names/identifying locations blurred)

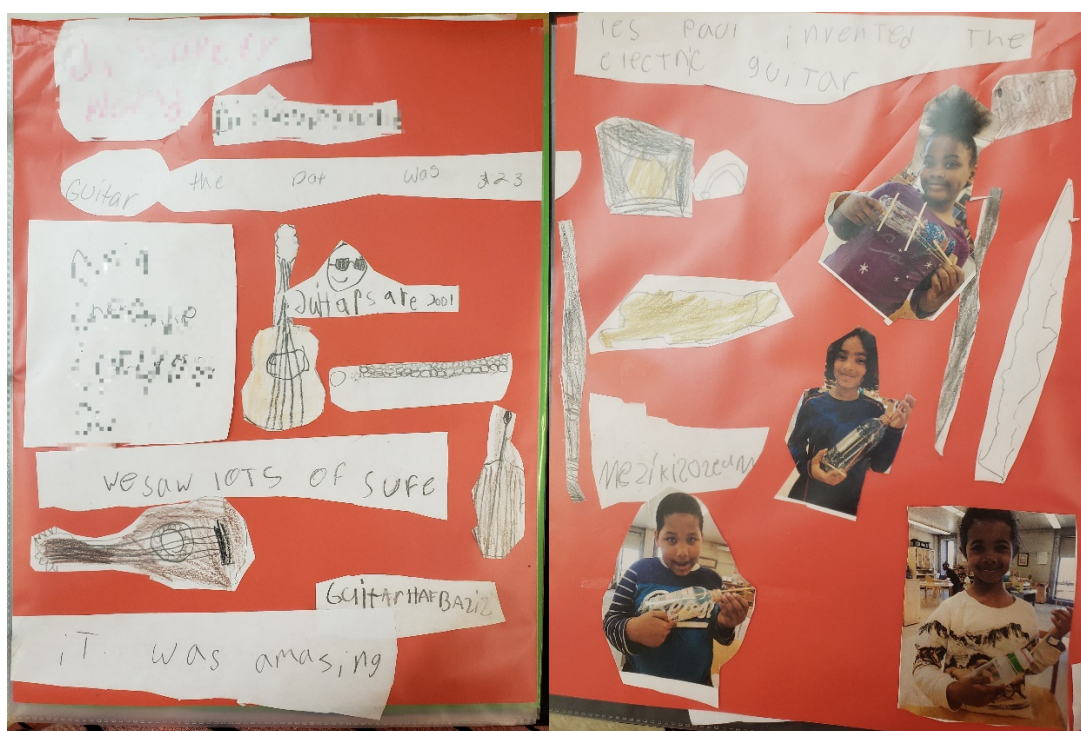


Figure 8. Student Scrapbook (names/identifying locations blurred)

### **Chaperone Responses**

Compared to student responses, chaperones had much more positive views on student learning. They highlighted individual student comments and experiences and related similar concerns: navigating public transportation, ensuring students had a snack, and possibly offering more time for the trip. The chaperones highlighted the comradery and teamwork evident on the trip and the students' collective experience. One chaperone stated, "The children did a great job organizing the trip and communicating with each other. They made up games while waiting for the bus and on the bus it was fun quizzing them on the cardinal directions." Another shared, "It was great seeing them work together to come to agreements, taking turns, and sharing information."

### **Limitations and Action Plans for Future Research**

Time was a large limitation in this work, as it takes a great deal of time and effort for students to plan and execute a Going Out. It can take weeks to find an appropriate time and place for students to go on a Going Out and make it work with classroom and staffing schedules. If this research were to be repeated or continued, a longer period of time for data collection would be beneficial. The time of year also made a difference as discussed in the preliminary findings; as such a wider time frame or different time of the year may give more detailed findings. A more extended time frame for a study, following the same group of students over a period of years, could also give more insight into the long term effect on students, potentially in the areas of socio-emotional growth, responsibility, confidence, and academic learning. It also would be beneficial to repeat this study controlling for or looking at different student variables including socioeconomic status, IEP status, grade, gender, or previous Going Out experience.

Staffing was a limitation throughout the period of this research. While this classroom is lucky to have multiple adults in the classroom and often be able to spare a staff member to partake in the Going Out, there were frequent staff outages due to illness or their child's illness. In previous years, parents were used as chaperones for Going Out experiences but liability issues prevent this at the school policy level.

Next year my classroom will grow to include first through fifth grade, and the following year will have the full Montessori Elementary first through sixth grade. This will continue to affect Place Based Learning and Going Out experiences as students will be older and able to tackle more challenging outings, as well as have past Going Out experiences to draw on. It is my belief that these two combined will lead to more and better Going Out experiences. The older students will also be able to assist younger students in both planning and executing Going Out experiences, which again should have a positive impact.

### **Conclusion/Reflection**

#### **What barriers keep students from participating in Going Out events?**

Barriers could be classified as student related, adult/school related, and situational. Student related barriers mostly surrounded the planning process. Students are expected to initiate and plan their Going Out with limited adult interference. Depending on their age, the amount of help varies but in general students are expected to fill out their planning packet independently, get it signed by staff and parent, and then return these forms and be prepared on the day of the Going Out. The idea is that the students are displaying responsibility in the classroom to show

their readiness for going out into the community. However, the question remains how much scaffolding should be provided to get a child into a Going Out experience so that he or she has an opportunity to grow in their responsibility; Montessori teaches to give a child only the help they need and adjustments need to be made for different ages and different individual students. Extra adult support up front to encourage the experience may prove to be what the child needs to be able to grow through a Going Out.

Adult schedules and staffing provide barriers to students participating in a Going Out. There were multiple instances where a trip had to be rescheduled or postponed due to adult schedules. Another concern was which adult chaperones the Going Out. It has been the school policy to send an assistant on a Going Out unless absolutely necessary to have the Lead Teacher. This leads to some challenges as most assistants are not Montessori trained and can offer too much support to the children. More communication between adults is necessary if the Lead Teacher is not acting as chaperone to make sure that expectations are set and carried out, including time and travel logistics, limiting the scope of the Going Out to its intended purpose, and activating appropriate academic content while on the Going Out.

Situational barriers occur due to the nature of outside connection. Hours of operation at museums, bus routes, weather, costs, and other anomalies must be accounted for. Flexibility is necessary, and adult chaperones must be able and willing to think on the fly. As much as possible, students should be supported and encouraged to solve problems but in the end the adult is responsible for the safety of the child.



**What benefits do students receive from Going Out?**

There are many direct benefits for students who go on a Going Out. When the topic is related to a lesson, students are able to further their learning on a specific topic. This can include having a hands-on experience that the child could not get in the classroom. As mentioned earlier during this research students studied a much larger rock collection at the local Public Museum following a rock cycle lesson, got to touch sting rays and other fish at another local museum as follow up to a Chordata-fish lesson, and experienced a large exhibit on guitars at a local museum following a lesson on different types of musical instruments.

The students also gain real world experience from a Going Out. For instance, a group of students wanted to cook and bake Canadian food after their Fundamental Needs of Humans – Nutrition lesson. In order to complete their work, they needed to plan an outing to a local grocery store. They used their recipes to determine what materials they needed, how much of each they needed, and then had to determine the cost and availability at this grocery store. The students determined their total cost, and then divided the cost among their participants. For most of the trips in this research the students also needed to use bus route maps to determine which bus route would get them to their destination, and practice bus riding etiquette on their trips.

**What resources became available in the area using Place Based Learning?**

Place Based Learning provided a structure and framework to organize and instruct students on Going out opportunities. Given the five main areas of Place Based Learning, new opportunities for outings arose.

- Cultural Studies

- Local heritage organizations, museums, libraries, festivals, concerts and performances
- Nature Studies
  - Local parks, nature preserves, environmental studies departments at local universities, greenhouses and farms, museums
- Real World Problem Solving
  - Food and homeless shelters, neighborhood cleanups, grocery stores
- Internships and Entrepreneurial Opportunities
  - List of parents and their careers willing to have visitors/job shadowing
- Community Processes
  - Government buildings, nonprofit organizations

During this project, students went on Going Out trips for the purpose of Cultural Studies, Nature Studies, and Real World Problem Solving. The lessons provided during Week Seven opened students up to a more clearly defined Going Out process and many more opportunities. This dramatically increased the quantity of Going Out trips in the short time, and it is my belief will continue to expand the quantity, particularly if lessons are given to all students at the beginning of the school year rather than mid-year. The greater the frequency of Going Out trips, the more adults and students can learn and adapt to increase their quality. As we learn from past mistakes and feedback, kinks in the systems can be worked out. The student scrapbook will also serve as inspiration for future students along with advice for how to better plan a trip. It is the findings of this research project that Going Out experiences are well worth the time and effort, and Place Based Learning provides new opportunities for students to grow and connect with their communities.

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## Appendix A

Dear Parents,

This year I am finishing my Montessori certification and Master's Degree in Education through the University of Wisconsin – River Falls. As a part of this program, I am completing an Action Research Project in our classroom.

As many of you know, I love to learn about Milwaukee History and love getting children out and about Milwaukee. I have decided to study and implement how to use Place Based Learning to increase the quantity and quality of Going Outs in our Montessori classroom.

A Going Out is an activity offered to Elementary children who are ready for the responsibility of planning and executing an outing. Many of your children have already participated in a Going Out; headed to the fish store to purchase supplies, going to the Art Museum to study Scottish artists for the Cultural Celebration, or headed downtown to search for parallel and perpendicular lines.

Place Based Learning is the idea of utilizing the resources in your area to enhance learning in the classroom, and building a connection with your local area. This can be through cultural studies, nature studies, real world problem solving, internships and entrepreneurial opportunities. Milwaukee has so much to offer our children, and it is my goal to increase their connection while increasing responsibility, problem solving, Grace and Courtesy, and of course academic learning.

With this project, I will create and implement a new and improved Going Out station in the classroom with the hopes that more children will complete a Going Out, and that they will have quality experiences to connect their community with their classroom. Through the project I will collect data on the types and quantities of Going Outs, along with reflecting on each child's experience. All names will be changed to protect the students' privacy, and if you change your mind you can withdraw your child at any time. My hope is that you will consent to me using the data I collect pertaining to your child for this project, and if so please sign and return this form. Results will be shared with my University if Wisconsin River Falls Montessori Education Program and the Research Committee, and made available to you upon request. If you have any questions, please feel free to email me at [mgeddes@xxx.org](mailto:mgeddes@xxx.org), call the office (xxxx-xxx-xxxx) or stop by the classroom before or after school. You may also contact my University Supervisor, Melina Papadimitriou at [melina.papa@uwrf.edu](mailto:melina.papa@uwrf.edu) with any questions. I would be more than happy to talk about my project before, during and after, as I am so excited to complete it!

Sincerely,

Megan Geddes

I agree to allow \_\_\_\_\_ to participate in Megan Geddes' Action Research Project.

Parent Name and Date (Printed): \_\_\_\_\_

Parent Name and Date (Signature): \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B

**Going Out Permission Slip and Contract**

Student's name: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Where are you going?

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2. What is your purpose for going there?

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3. What date(s) are you going?

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4. What time will you leave school?

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5. What time will you return to school?

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**6. How will you be getting there?**

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**If you are taking the bus, what bus route are you taking?**

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**What time will you get on the departing bus?**

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**What time will you get on the returning bus?**

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**7. What adult is going with you? (Remember to get that adult's permission before you write her/his name down!)**

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**8. What other students, if any, are going with you?**

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**9. What materials are you going to bring?**

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You're almost done...now show all that you've written down to your teacher. If your teacher thinks you are ready, she or he will ask you to bring this slip and contract home for your parent to sign!

## Going Out Contract

I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to adhere to the Going Out Rules and Regulations:

- **I will stick to the plan I have outlined in this packet.** This means that I will not try to pick up souvenirs, go buy snacks, or decide to go somewhere different in the middle of the trip. Once I have accomplished the goal of my Going Out, I will return to school.
- **I will be responsible for my own trip.** My group and I will keep track of bus tickets, money, and other supplies. I will make choices that are safe and keep my group safe as well. I will plan ahead and be sure to have already secured the needed materials and supplies.
- **I will return to school on time.**
- **I will continue to be a positive role model within the classroom.** I will work hard each school day, clean up properly, and treat adults and my classmates with kindness and respect.
- **I will bring back this form, signed by my parent, at least 24 hours before the trip happens.**

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Student's signature

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Parent's signature and daytime phone number

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Teacher's signature

### Appendix C

#### Going Out Student Reflection

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_\_

Destination of Your Going Out: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Lesson or Topic Related to Your Going Out: \_\_\_\_\_

Rate your Going Out experience:

Not at all

Definitely

1. I enjoyed my Going Out	1	2	3	4	5
2. I extended my learning	1	2	3	4	5
3. I have new information to share with the class	1	2	3	4	5
4. I would like to do a Going Out again	1	2	3	4	5

What was the highlight of your going out? Why?

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What was the most challenging part of planning and executing your going out? Why?

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How did this Going Out extend your learning? What did you learn?

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What would you do differently if you planned this Going Out again? Why?

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What advice would you give to another student planning a similar Going Out? Why?

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Any other information I should know about your Going Out?

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## Appendix D

### Going Out Chaperone Reflection

Students Participating, Name and Grade:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.

Destination of the Going Out: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Lesson or Topic Related to the Going Out: \_\_\_\_\_

Did this Going Out relate to:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cultural Studies<br><input type="checkbox"/> Nature Studies<br><input type="checkbox"/> Real World Problem Solving<br><input type="checkbox"/> Internships | <input type="checkbox"/> Entrepreneurial Opportunities<br><input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ |
|---|--|

Rate your Going Out experience:

Not at all

Definitely

1. The students increased their academic learning	1	2	3	4	5
2. The students increased responsibility	1	2	3	4	5
3. The students engaged in problem solving	1	2	3	4	5
4. This students demonstrated Grace and Courtesy	1	2	3	4	5
5. This was a successful Going Out	1	2	3	4	5

What was the highlight of the Going Out? Why?

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What challenges did students face planning or executing this Going Out? Why?

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**How did this Going Out extend the students' learning? What did they learn?**

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**What should the students do differently if this Going Out is planned again? Why?**

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**Any other information I should know about your Going Out?**

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