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PLANNING FIELD TRIPS AS A TEACHING AND LEARNING STRATEGY IN LEGAL EDUCATION: SOME POINTS FOR CONSIDERATION

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ABSTRACT

Field trips can be a valuable tool in making learning more engaging and provide unique opportunities for learning certain concepts, including legal concepts by putting them into a more realistic and relevant context. Research studies have shown that there is a significant increase in participants' factual knowledge and conceptual understanding after participation in a well-designed field trip. However, due to differences in academic disciplines, elements which constitute a well-designed field trip vary according to the learning objectives of the field trip. Thus far, in legal education, there has been a dearth of both theoretical and empirical research into the elements necessary in the planning of field trips as a successful pedagogic tool. Therefore, in this article, the authors seek to analyse the important elements that should be emphasized in designing a successful field trip for legal educators. Drawing upon literature from other disciplines, the article concentrates its review on Myers and Jones' field trip planning model in the determination of the elements that should be present in a well-designed field trip. Some thoughts and considerations in the application of the model into planning field trips for legal education are also discussed and recommendations are made appropriately in adapting the model.

Keywords: *learning design, field trip, elements, teaching and learning strategy, legal education*

INTRODUCTION

The use of educational field trips has long been a major part of teaching and learning strategy. Krepel & Duvall (1981) consider a field trip to be a school or class trip with an educational purpose, in which students interact either with the setting, displays, or exhibits to gain an experiential connection to the ideas, concepts, and subject matter. Field trips take students to locations that are unique and cannot be duplicated in the classroom.

Research studies have shown that there is a significant increase in participants' factual knowledge and conceptual understanding after participating in well-designed field trips, including in higher education (Behrendt & Franklin, 2014; Greene, Kisida, & Bowen, 2014; Kennedy, 2014; Leatherbury, 2011; Nabor *et al.*, 2009; Tal, 2001). Several surveys conducted by Shakil *et al.* (2011) in different universities in Pakistan, found that respondents in their research claimed that educational field trips are not only helpful in effective learning but also in promoting the qualities of leadership, discipline and self confidence among the students. Therefore, field trips can provide an integral part of the learning experience if they are planned well.

In fact, field trips have been regularly encouraged as part of teaching and learning strategy in legal education (Behrendt & Franklin, 2014; George, Lim, Lucas, & Meadows, 2015). Higgins *et al.* (2012) stress that law is a reflection of the norms of society, and it cannot be studied separately from interaction with the subjects, enforcers and creators of the law. Law schools regularly employ a wide range of pedagogical techniques and strategies which facilitate experiential learning, such as clinical programmes, moot courts and field trips. Visit to courts, prisons and other legal institution, including parliaments and tribunals are conducted as part of the common form of field trips for law courses. However, field trips' planning and usage in legal education as part of teaching and learning strategy are rarely systematically discussed. Notably, these trips are mostly conducted on an ad hoc basis, outside the official curriculum with little or no research to support their planning and the efficacy of the field trip. In other words, although field trips can be a useful teaching and learning tool, but its effectiveness can never be fully materialised if planning is also done on an ad hoc basis.

Thus far, there has been a dearth of both theoretical and empirical research into the elements necessary for planning a well-designed field trip as part of a successful teaching and learning strategy in legal education. Nevertheless, field trips could be a valuable pedagogical tool in making learning more engaging and provide unique opportunities for learning certain legal concepts by putting them into a more realistic and relevant context. This article, therefore seeks to analyse the important elements that should be emphasized in designing a successful field trip for legal educators.

Strong models for a field trip design do not appear readily in the literature. One particular model deliberated by Myers and Jones (2015) provided a helpful outline of a well-designed field trip. Several other models reviewed, including Orion's (1994) and Tal's (2001) model mainly addresses scientific field trip in a natural environment, while Brett, Atchison, Feig, & Stokes' model (2015) specifically concentrates on designing field-based learning requirements which caters for students with disabilities. Some other field trip designs focus only on the role of teachers and improving their function for the field trips (Alon & Tal, 2017; Morentin & Guisasola, 2015). Compared to these models, Myers and Jones' model specify elements that may be applied to most academic disciplines, including law but cover sufficiently aspects that should be present in a well-designed field trip. The model is certainly not exhaustive, but serves as a good starting point for teachers to consider when planning experiences for their students. Many of the elements are explored further below. Some points for consideration in the application of the planning model into field trips for legal education are also discussed and recommendations made appropriately in adapting them.

MYERS AND JONES' FIELD TRIP PLANNING MODEL

Several studies have documented that the key factor to a well-designed and eventually a successful field trip is planning (Kennedy, 2014; Krepel & Duvall, 1981; Myers & Jones 2015). Evidently, field trips must be carefully planned so that they support the curriculum and most importantly achieve the objectives for which they were intended for.

According to Myers and Jones (2015), organisers planning a field trip must focus on three important stages: pre-trip, trip, and post-trip as shown in Figure 1 below.

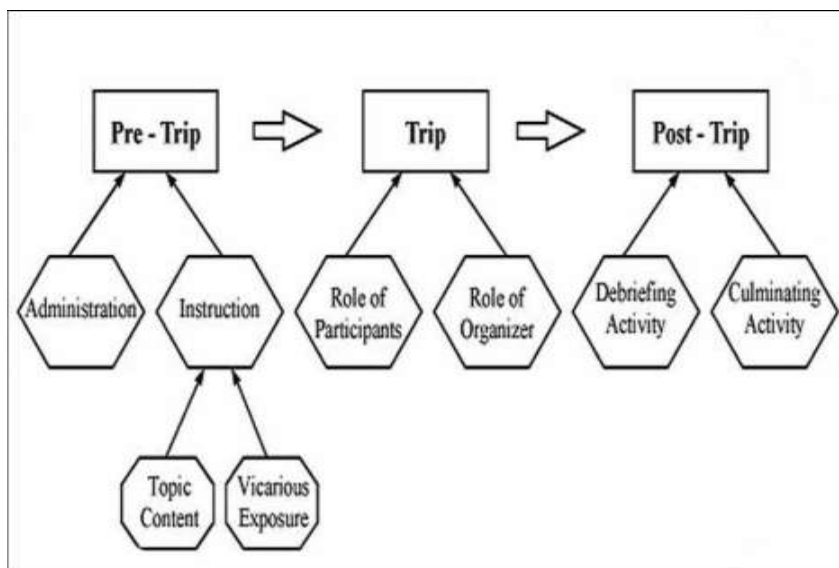


Figure 1: Field Trip Planning Model (Myers & Jones, 2015)

PRE-TRIP STAGE

This stage involves two major elements: administration and instruction. The administration element usually involves all of the steps taken by the field trip organiser to arrange the logistics of the trip, including securing permission from the relevant authorities, organising transportation for the field trip, and contacting the field trip location to verify the schedule and activities.

However, Myers and Jones (2015) argue that, many organisers are too concerned with the administrative aspects during the pre-trip stage, that most would neglect the instruction element of the pre-trip stage. The instruction element of the pre-trip stage actually plays an important part in ensuring an educationally successful field trip. This element focuses on prepping the mind sets of the participants for the experience. Myers and Jones (2015) acknowledge the importance of this element due to the fact that participants may experience high levels of anxiety, especially when visiting unfamiliar settings or locations, which may then hinder the learning process. Therefore, in order to overcome this concern and increase overall trip effectiveness,

the field trip organisers need to make participants feel comfortable and safe at the location of the field trip, for example by providing participants with ‘vicarious exposure’ (Myers & Jones, 2015) to the field trip site as part of pre-trip instruction. Such exposure could involve merely showing the participants photographs, drawings, or a video screening of the site to be visited or suggesting reading important field trip information of the location on the Internet prior to the event.

The field trip organisers should also focus on reviewing, as part of instruction issues involving the safety and behaviour rules and expectations, and the ‘content topics and concepts’ (Myers & Jones, 2015) that participants will be investigating during the field trip. Such pre-trip instruction, according to Myers and Jones (2015) makes it easier for participants to focus on the educational goals of the trip. For a more effective learning strategy and activity during the field trip itself, small groups of two to three participants should be assigned at the pre-trip stage.

TRIP STAGE

Two elements should be emphasized during the trip stage itself: the role of the participant and the role of the organiser. Myers and Jones (2015) maintain that the role of the participant during the field trip should centre on a field trip agenda and having this agenda and the field trip objectives shared with all participants. They suggest a three-phased agenda for a field trip.

Phase one of the agenda should start with a brief amount of free time for participants to explore the field trip site on their own. Although, this open exploration may not be appropriate in all locations but it allows participants to get comfortable with their surroundings and prepare participants to be better focus on the content topics to be learned.

Phase two of the agenda is often comprise of a whole-group guided tour. It is during this point of the agenda that specific items that relate to the educational goals of the trip should be pointed out by the organiser or tour leader. Opportunities should also be provided for participants to ask any questions they may have developed during their phase one exploration time.

The third phase of a suggested field trip agenda should include a small group learning activity, whereby pre-assigned groups of two to three participants are given some tasks to complete, which should clearly relate to the educational goals of the field trip.

Myers and Jones (2015) also highlight the importance of the role of the organiser during the trip stage. Mostly, the organisers should play an active role, acting more as facilitators or guides, in order to increase student interest and learning.

POST-TRIP STAGE

The final stage of a well-designed field trip is the post-trip stage. This stage also contains two elements: debriefing and a culminating activity. According to Myers and Jones (2015), both activities should be conducted as soon as possible after the trip.

Debriefing activity involves encouraging all the participants to share and discuss their experiences during the field trip. As noted by Myers and Jones (2015), this session could include sharing and discussing data or results of the assigned small group activities during the trip stage, as well as sharing feelings about specific aspects of the trip, including highlighting any problems encountered during the field trip or overall thoughts.

A culminating activity involves granting the participants opportunity to apply the content knowledge learned during the field trip and tie them together with the content they covered in regular educational program sessions. Culminating activities can be conducted as a whole group or small group experiences sessions.

Clearly, planning and organising a successful field trip involves a great deal of work for the organiser. However, much can be learned from Myers and Jones' Field Trip Planning Model (2105), which could be of useful assistance in the design of a well-developed field trip plan.

SOME POINTS FOR CONSIDERATION: PLANNING FIELD TRIPS IN LEGAL EDUCATION

Myers and Jones' model (2015) although not exhaustive, serves as a good guide of the elements that should be looked into by organisers in planning a well-designed field trip. The elements of the model are presented in a simple three stage approach – Pre-Trip, Trip and Post-Trip Stage, which made for a non-complicated application of the planning model.

The model's pre-trip stage focuses on two major elements: administration and instruction. The administration element usually encompasses steps taken by organisers to arrange the logistics of the trip, including securing permission from the relevant authorities, organising transportation for the field trip, and contacting the field trip location to verify the schedule and activities. For legal educators, the choice of the settings and locations of field trip, especially involving legal institutions may include certain other restrictions, including the number of participants and time allocation. Therefore, organisers when planning such field trips must not only consider settings or locations that can best achieve the learning objectives but also settings or locations that may accommodate the number of participants planned for the educational field trip.

While the administration element involves mostly logistics issues, the instruction element is concern with preparing students for the field trip experience. Myers and Jones emphasized the importance of this element in order to reduce the levels of anxiety that may be experienced by the participants, especially when visiting unfamiliar settings or locations, which may then hinder the learning process. In field trips involving a formal setting or locations as in the case with most trips organised for law courses, this is especially true. Field trips commonly conducted for law courses include visits to parliament, courts, tribunals, prisons and other legal institutions. These legal institutions often come with their own sets of formalities and regulations to be adhered to by visitors. For most participants, field trips to such settings or locations would be their inaugural visit. Understandably, participants would be overwhelmed by a high level of anxiety due the unfamiliar settings or locations and probably even apprehensive of the protocols and formalities involved.

Myers and Jones (2015), therefore, proposed that in order to overcome this concern and increase the trip's efficacy, the field trip organisers need to make participants' comfort and safety assured of at the location of the field trip. Participants should also be provided with 'vicarious exposure' to the field trip site as part of pre-trip instruction. Vicarious exposure could involve showing the participants photographs, drawings, or a video screening of the site to be visited or suggesting reading important field trip information of the location on the Internet prior to the event. Notably, in case of field trips to legal institutions, we are also of the view that participants should also be briefed of the protocols, formalities and regulations involved when visiting such institutions by the organisers as part of the pre-trip instructions. In other words, part of the pre-trip instructions should include not only issues involving safety, but also behaviour rules and expectations of the participants to adhere to the protocols, formalities and regulations of the chosen field trip's site.

As part of the pre-trip instructions, field trip organisers are recommended to focus on the 'content topics and concepts' that participants will be investigating during the field trip. Such pre-trip instruction, which may include assigning small group learning activities, according to Myers and Jones makes it easier for participants to focus on the educational goals of the trip. We opined that in terms of designing activities and experiences involving the content topics and concepts the location and time constraint must also be taken into consideration so as to ensure the feasibility of the activities planned for the participants especially for field trips to legal institutions.

In the trip stage itself, two elements are considered in the model, i.e. the role(s) of the participant and the role(s) of the organiser. Myers and Jones maintain that the participants and the facilitator should know their roles, in ensuring a smooth flowing trip. This may be done by providing and sharing with all participants a clear agenda and objectives of the field trip.

Myers and Jones' three-phased agenda for a field trip involves briefing and open exploration phase, guided tour phase and small learning activity phase. This three-phased agenda may be readily applicable into field trips at a general and informal setting or locations. However, for legal education we believe that some part of the suggested agenda may need to be amended

or adapted depending on the location of the field trip and the allocated timeframe. Organisers may also need to be prepared with some alternative plans (which may be included in the third phase) when visiting such places in order to ensure that the learning objective of the field trip is achievable. The third phase agenda of a suggested field trip, i.e. having small groups learning activity should not be an issue to be implemented. Myers and Jones also insisted on the importance of the organiser's role during the trip stage, being active in acting more as facilitators or guides, in order to increase student interest and learning.

The post trip stage of the model involves planning for two elements: debriefing and a culminating activity that should be conducted as soon as possible after the conclusion of the trip. Debriefing involves participants reflecting, sharing and discussing their experiences from the field trip. As for culminating activity, it is where everything experienced during the trip is shared and discussed, as well as experiences and lessons related back to the curriculum. Any form of assessments and tasks, including activity, assignment, or project used as a form of continuum of the lessons learned during the experience, and provide for further reflection on the subject and experience.

A successful and quality field trip requires preparation and interaction, yet often educators are not equipped to, with all necessary supports to make them prepared for a successful field trip. Myers and Jones' model, grants educators some guide into the elements that is necessary for a well-designed field trip, even for law courses. Myers and Jones' model also allow organisers to anticipate some of the challenges that the organiser may face during the field trip. To a certain extent, the model gives us, legal educators some solutions and guidelines to prepare ourselves for the field trip and the alternative plan if the initial objectives of the field trip are compromised.

CONCLUSION

The use of short-term experiential learning techniques, such as field trips, has long been recognised as an important tool for education in the social sciences, providing significant benefits for both students and lecturers. The use of field trips in legal education is commonplace but both theoretical and

empirical research into the elements necessary for planning a well-designed field trip in legal education have rarely been systematically discussed. Evidently, effective use of field trip as a form of teaching and learning strategy in legal education requires careful planning and consideration especially when the field trip's location involved formal visiting procedures, for example courts, prisons, tribunals, Parliament and other relevant legal institutions. Planning and organising such fields' trip can be a great deal of work for the organiser. However, Myers and Jones' Field Trip Planning Model, although not exhaustive may provide useful assistance in the design of a well-developed field trip experiences for students. Field trip organisers should give emphasis amongst others to pre-trip instructions' vicarious exposures and learning activities to avoid any field trip to merely become a day of lost learning. Although planning and organising a successful field trip involved a great deal of preparation, it would definitely benefit participants and should be made an integral part of teaching and learning strategy for legal education.

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