14 Anything can happen out there: a holistic approach to field trips

Alessia Plutino[1]

Abstract

This paper looks back at an academic-led language field trip project, now in its third year, involving ab-initio students of Italian at the University of Southampton. It considers the role of academic-led field trips in Modern Languages (ML) and it explores the underlying pedagogical approaches that were adopted to enhance students' engagement, participation and collaboration during the trips and beyond. It also investigates the opportunities that Web 2.0 brought to teachers and learners and how these were adapted for a field trip where technology and social media make learning more inclusive and engaging. The project also sought to develop students' employability skills by introducing the role of the 'student-assistant' working closely with the academic in charge of the trip. The paper will describe the robust pedagogical reflective process employed during the project and how it influenced project design. It will conclude by suggesting that ML departments would benefit from innovative approaches in field trips.

Keywords: trip abroad, ab-initio language learning, cultural awareness, Web 2.0, social media, student employability.

1. University of Southampton; United Kingdom; a.plutino@soton.ac.uk

How to cite this chapter: Plutino, A. (2016). Anything can happen out there: a holistic approach to field trips. In C. Goria, O. Speicher, & S. Stollhans (Eds), *Innovative language teaching and learning at university: enhancing participation and collaboration* (pp. 113-120). Dublin: Research-publishing.net. http://dx.doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2016.000412

1. Introduction

Field trips run by academics with the aim to expand and deepen learning outside the classroom environment have been used in many disciplines at all levels in education.

At university level, the attitude towards them is of a mixed nature, with funding issues as well as administrative workloads having a negative impact.

There is evidence that field trip outcomes result in both cognitive and non-cognitive learning (for a review see Dewitt & Storksdieck, 2008) and research has also shown that:

- exposure to a variety of new contexts and experiences allows field trips to become a way to widen students' interest and engagement (Bonderup Dohn, 2011; Kisiel, 2005);

- field trip dynamics enable a more positive student's attitude towards the subject (Csikszentmihalyi & Hermanson, 1995; Nadelson & Jordan, 2012);

- they are formative experiences with both short and long-term outcomes (Falk & Dierking, 1997; Salmi, 2003; Wolins, Jensen, & Ulzheimer, 1992).

In ML, however, field trips appear to be in decline as there are many independent opportunities to practice a foreign language abroad without the need of an accompanying tutor. The growing importance of intercultural understanding means that more guided and structured tasks are needed in order to fulfil cultural understanding and integrate it into language learning.

In this paper, through a short case study within ML, I will look into the value and the benefits of academic-led field trips for both learners and leading academic staff in this specific discipline. In particular, I will focus on whether or not field

trips can enhance students' engagement, participation and collaboration amongst all participants, academic staff included. To discuss this, I will use evidence gathered during a three-year project.

2. Background

I teach an Italian language Accelerated 1+2 course, an ab-initio course devoted to able linguists who already have one or two foreign languages at intermediate level. This is a fast paced course and students complete two years in one.

In 2013 I arranged a first informal field trip for a small group of students. This took place during the Easter break and we visited a small town in Le Marche.

I gathered strong evidence on the learners' enthusiasm and sense of achievement as well as their spontaneous wish to share experiences with fellow students who could not join the trip. I therefore started to investigate and evaluate some teaching and learning theories which could support a more collaborative and networked acquisition of knowledge to be adopted in future field trips.

My intention, as a proactive user of technology for teaching myself, was to integrate and make the most out of Web 2.0 opportunities.

3. Implementation of a pilot scheme

In 2014, an analysis of students' course evaluation feedback highlighted a lack of opportunities to experience Italian culture, lifestyle and everyday life, the knowledge of which is required to fulfil the intercultural aspect of such a fast paced language course. A trip to Italy was becoming a recurrent request on feedback forms. I therefore decided to give the trip a more formal structure, taking into consideration specific advice emerged from research into the field (Stronck, 1983).

The research shows several things: guidance and support received during field trips enable students to investigate in a more personal and relevant manner, avoiding an overly rigid classroom instruction approach (Griffin & Symington, 1997; Jensen 1994). It also emerges that students who are left to face the challenges of field trips without appropriate preparation, might experience a negative learning outcome (Orion & Hofstein, 1994).

DeWitt and Osborne (2007) emphasise the core concept of 'joint productive activities', as "the purpose is to motivate students' discussions with each other and an adult facilitator using their personal interests and curiosity as a starting point" (p. 690).

I successfully applied to the University of Southampton 'Student Opportunity Fund' and set up a pilot scheme aimed at the development of a sustainable and replicable framework for a ML field trip. Its name, 'Italy DIY', underlined the importance of students actively engaging in their own learning.

The main features of the scheme were that:

- students would visit places and engage in practical activities (experiential learning; Kolb, 1984);
- students would focus on a particular aspect in which they are interested (curiosity, independent learning).

Other important aspects were that students should:

- observe, discuss, reflect, compare, share knowledge (dialogic learning: collective, supportive, reciprocal, cumulative, purposeful; Alexander, 2010);
- students design content/resources (oral/written/video) for sharing their experiences and interests (as open resources, or via social media: use of technology, networked learners);

- implement a trip blog (www.blog.soton.ac.uk/italydiy) and develop digital literacy;

- develop and publish Open Educational Resources to form a growing repository of learning and teaching materials that could inform future trips.

In terms of students' autonomy, the pilot scheme aimed at:

- developing multidisciplinary independent learning and engagement with authentic topics and resources;

- implementing the Student Assistant role (appointed via a formal job interview, all trip expenses paid).

The Student Assistant role would allow a student of Italian with a higher level of spoken and written language, to plan the trip in collaboration and under the guidance of the leading academic. They would be involved in a series of activities before, during and after the trip, thus enhancing their employability skills by acquiring organization, decision-making and planning skills, and by taking risks and working in a team. The ideal Student Assistant has an interest in teaching as he/she will co-lead activities to improve group understanding of cultural issues as well as facilitating language related tasks.

4. Outcomes of the pilot scheme

As a result of the pilot scheme, the learning and teaching outcomes of the 2014 field trip were more structured and tangible. For example, students had to produce collaborative projects in the target language at the end of the trip and a reflective piece in English on the experience. Having been exposed to a vast amount of stimuli, students produced projects which were extremely diverse in nature and included a variety of topics, covering areas such as art, religion, history, architecture, local food, etc.

Students used a variety of tools and formats (writing, video, etc) to produce their projects, showing their own individuality and creativity. The leading academic's and Student Assistant's task was to foster collaboration during experiential learning (new role of educator=guide, co-investigator) and at the same time find strategies for learners to engage directly with the rich environment so that they could take charge of their own development (holistic education; Miller, 2004). In such a way, learners' interests were activated by curiosity for the new environment/culture (Networked learners). The trip blog served as a learning and teaching platform and also acted as a dissemination tool as students began to act as 'ambassadors', running sessions about their experience at various in-house events.

5. Evaluation

The analysis of learners' feedback and reflective writing so far has shown new ways in which learners and academics can interact in dynamic learning communities. A more spontaneous teaching and learning experience fosters students' engagement and enhances learning and teaching by providing multiple learning modalities in which learners' interests can develop and flourish. As a result, learners rediscover their own discipline but more importantly, embrace interdisciplinary areas.

My personal gain, as leading academic staff, has been to rediscover my own country and culture through my students' eyes. The questions they ask about what they experience in situ helps me reflect upon my own biases and insider/outsider paradoxes, informing my future teaching.

6. Conclusion

There is need to do further research into the benefits and most effective implementations of field trips in ML, but this can only be done if tutors start thinking 'outside classroom walls'.

The project has shown that if leading academic staff uses their expertise to suggest learning paths in the world at large according to learners' preferences, then truly, 'anything can happen out there'.

The ML department at Southampton was so pleased with the outcomes of the pilot project that in 2015 they agreed to subsidise an extra week-long language course following the field trip.

Future developments include the Student Assistant taking a more leading role and eventually become in charge of trip activities and extending the scheme to other languages in ML.

References

Alexander, R. J. (2010). *Dialogic teaching essentials*. University of Cambridge. Retrieved from http://scholars.nie.edu.sg/files/oer/FINAL%20Dialogic%20Teaching%20Essentials.pdf

Bonderup Dohn, N. (2011). Situational interest of high school students who visit an aquarium. *Science Education, 95*(2), 337-357. http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/sce.20425

Csikszentmihalyi, M., & Hermanson, K. (1995). Intrinsic motivation in museums: why does one want to learn? In J. H. Falk & L. D. Dierking (Eds.), *Public institutions for personal learning* (pp. 67-77). Washington, DC: American Association of Museums.

DeWitt, J., & Osborne J. (2007). Supporting teachers on science-focused school trips: Towards an integrated framework of theory and practice. *International Journal of Science Education, 29*(6), 685-710. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09500690600802254

Dewitt, J., & Storksdieck, M. (2008). A short review of school field trips: key findings from the past and implications for the future. *Visitor Studies, 11*(2), 181-197. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10645570802355562

Falk, J. H., & Dierking, L. D. (1997). School field trips: assessing their long-term impact. *Curator: The Museum Journal, 40*(3), 211-218. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.2151-6952.1997.tb01304.x

Griffin, J., & Symington, D. (1997). Moving from task-oriented to learning-oriented strategies on school excursions to museums. *Science Education, 81*(6), 763-779.

Jensen, N. (1994). Children's perceptions of their museum experiences: a contextual perspective. *Children's Environments, 11*(4), 300-324.

Kisiel, J. F. (2005). Understanding elementary teacher motivations for science fieldtrips. *Science Education, 89*(6), 936-955. http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/sce.20085

Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential learning: experience as the source of learning and development*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc.

Miller, R. (2004). Educational alternatives: a map of the territory. *Paths of Learning, 20,* 20-27.

Nadelson, L., & Jordan, R. (2012). Student attitudes toward and recall of outside day: an environmental science field trip. *The Journal of Educational Research, 105*(3), 220-231. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00220671.2011.576715

Orion, N., & Hofstein, A. (1994). Factors that influence learning during a scientific field trip in a natural environment. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching, 31*(10), 1097-1119. http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/tea.3660311005

Salmi, H. (2003). Science centres as learning laboratories: experiences of Heureka, the Finnish Science Centre. *International Journal of Technology Management*, *25*(5), 460-476. http://dx.doi.org/10.1504/IJTM.2003.003113

Stronck, D. R. (1983). The comparative effects of different museum tours on children's attitudes and learning. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching, 20*(4), 283-290. http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/tea.3660200403

Wolins, I. S., Jensen, N., & Ulzheimer, R. (1992). Children's memories of museum field trips: a qualitative study. *Journal of Museum Education, 17*(2), 17-27. Retrieved from: http://www.jstor.org/stable/40478925

Research-publishing.net

Published by Research-publishing.net, not-for-profit association
Dublin, Ireland; Voillans, France, info@research-publishing.net

© 2016 by Cecilia Goria, Oranna Speicher, Sascha Stollhans (collective work)
© 2016 by Authors (individual work)

Innovative language teaching and learning at university: enhancing participation and collaboration
Edited by Cecilia Goria, Oranna Speicher, Sascha Stollhans

Rights: All articles in this collection are published under the Attribution-NonCommercial -NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) licence. Under this licence, the contents are freely available online as PDF files (http://dx.doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2016.9781908416322) for anybody to read, download, copy, and redistribute provided that the author(s), editorial team, and publisher are properly cited. Commercial use and derivative works are, however, not permitted.

Disclaimer: Research-publishing.net does not take any responsibility for the content of the pages written by the authors of this book. The authors have recognised that the work described was not published before, or that it was not under consideration for publication elsewhere. While the information in this book are believed to be true and accurate on the date of its going to press, neither the editorial team, nor the publisher can accept any legal responsibility for any errors or omissions that may be made. The publisher makes no warranty, expressed or implied, with respect to the material contained herein. While Research-publishing.net is committed to publishing works of integrity, the words are the authors' alone.

Trademark notice: product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

Copyrighted material: every effort has been made by the editorial team to trace copyright holders and to obtain their permission for the use of copyrighted material in this book. In the event of errors or omissions, please notify the publisher of any corrections that will need to be incorporated in future editions of this book.

Typeset by Research-publishing.net
Cover design and frog picture by © Raphaël Savina (raphael@savina.net)

ISBN13: 978-1-908416-31-5 (Paperback - Print on demand, black and white)
Print on demand technology is a high-quality, innovative and ecological printing method; with which the book is never 'out of stock' or 'out of print'.

ISBN13: 978-1-908416-32-2 (Ebook, PDF, colour)
ISBN13: 978-1-908416-33-9 (Ebook, EPUB, colour)

Legal deposit, Ireland: The National Library of Ireland, The Library of Trinity College, The Library of the University of Limerick, The Library of Dublin City University, The Library of NUI Cork, The Library of NUI Maynooth, The Library of University College Dublin, The Library of NUI Galway.

Legal deposit, United Kingdom: The British Library.
British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data.
A cataloguing record for this book is available from the British Library.

Legal deposit, France: Bibliothèque Nationale de France - Dépôt légal: janvier 2016.