

Learning from a Community Festival or Reenactment

In the early twenty-first century, in a Lafayette, Indiana, elementary school, students selected topics that interested them and planned their itinerary for attending a reenactment. They spent one day in the fall attending a community festival, plus class time to prepare and debrief from that event. Students attended the Feast of the Hunters' Moon (<http://www.tcha.mus.in.us/feast.htm>) depicting the international fur trade in the 1700's, an annual rendezvous between Indians and French Traders. Global trade networks brought people of differing ethnic backgrounds together in mutually advantageous economic contacts. Students learned knowledge about who was involved with the trade and how it worked when they visited the festival.

The English and the French . . . liked beavers for top hats and so . . . they came over here so that they could trade what they had with the Indians to get what they had which was the beaver skins so they could take it back over to Europe so they could make hats and get a lot of money. (Calib, 4th grade)

Students discerned from the events in the festival, storytelling, and reenactment including how telling about events and daily life compared between multiple groups in the area at the time. Students got an ethical sense of events as they evaluated for themselves what they thought was good for society.

I think it was unfair for most of the people because a lot of people took their land because they thought they could not do anything about it . . . soldiers or people who needed new land took the Indian's land. (Kendra, 5th grade)

Students met and made connections between Scots, Irish, and Indian populations who had all been despoiled of their lands. Students attended this event to learn more about

colonial content, decision making skills, evaluating programs, and establishing priorities. Students planned the educational events and activities of their day and then acted on their plan when they practiced consensus building, negotiation, finding common ground, and compromise in making decisions.

Why a Community Festival?

Community festivals allow students opportunities to meet key contact people and investigate local resources. Further the excitement of the social festival is infectious; it encourages learning among people of multiple ages in a common area. Festivals serve to define the community, transmit culture, and allow the community to participate in education (Knapp 2001, Pahl 1994, Kridel 1980). The meeting of specialized resource people such as re-enactors, who are content experts in their field, is always an advantage of the event. Students work with these experts in the field to conduct a research situation. The field trip is a research activity where students gather information to be shared in the classroom with their peers (Scarce 1997). This research is directly connected to their community and their sense of place. Finally, the experience of being surrounded by a cadre of dedicated experts and seeing another type of community is exhilarating. Students learn with and from members of the community when they experience festivals.

Traditionally students exercise no choices but passively move through rotations between tour stops (Gabella 1994, Jensen 1994). Students learn lists of facts, stringing together isolated and disjointed information to be memorized and later repeated verbatim. Most of the time students are the recipients of information rather than being actively involved in the constructors of knowledge. While students may make connections to their class work if their teacher is present, a teacher- directed interpretation of the site

remains dependent upon the role of the teacher to modify the experienced through their interpretation. These students became involved with question generation that they then can discuss with their teacher, but students lacked adequate preparations and background knowledge for what they were seeing. Student experiences with visual, verbal, or tactile field trip lessons are poorly prepared (Bellan & Scheurman 1998, Cox-Petersen & Pfaffinger 1998). Students encountered few, if any, controversial issues, and they moved through the feel-good history sites with less than critical eyes. Prior preparation is needed to make students aware of the questions they need to ask and the issues they need to explore on site.

In addition to the detriment of taking time from class and paying for both transportation and the gate fee, students spent time at the trader store purchasing souvenirs, then stopping for concession drinks and snacks. The result of these compounding costs totaled a very expensive day for both students and teachers. In an ever-tightening economy, members of a school community need to find field trips that meet educational needs and maximize time at a low cost to teacher and students. More and more school districts are cutting field trips to balance their diminishing educational budgets (Higgins 2004). Teachers need to realize that the role of the field trip is to expose students to what they have not experienced before and to what they are not likely to learn with members of their family. The teacher acts to create a learning environment in and out of the classroom where students learn and explore while expanding their horizons.

Many field trips are very teacher-planned,- directed, and -led, but teaches who let students plan and execute their own field trips are more likely to provide their students with inquiry experiences. Inquire is a process in which students define a problem and

then seek to find a solution to that problem (Glassman 2001, Wade 1995). This means that there will be ambiguity and doubt; it will be open ended, and students will "own" the problem. As students seek answers they will investigate and reach a conclusion. The teacher's role is to help gather resources for students and to work with them, but neither the teacher nor the students know exactly the resolution of an inquiry when they start.

Student Engagement

Students make decisions about what and how they learned in this introductory inquiry experience based on democratic citizenship. For this particular class field trip students determined where they went, what they learned, how they budgeted their time, and how they shared what they learned with others in their class. Students in this inquiry experience took control of their learning because they had power over it; it was their questions for which they sought answers. Many different events occurred on the site of the festival, and students made wise decisions with their time to learn from the event. By getting the opportunities to make decisions they practiced important citizenship skills.

This teacher previewed the daily schedule and an example arena schedule for the students by highlighting what was available to see and do while stressing events they valued (figures 1 - 7: Children's Activities <http://www.tcha.mus.in.us/children.htm> and Programs <http://www.tcha.mus.in.us/programs.htm>).

Figure 1: Children's Activities Schedule

Site	Activity
122	Making Music Booth
138	TCHA Storytelling Booth
143	Pottery
145	Candle Making Booth
150	Children's Bead Booth
210	Tomahawk Throw
219	Children's Costume Try-On
220	Children's Trade Blanket
221	Wigwam Village
223	Children's Gifts
224	Toy Demonstration
339	Native American Stories
350	Woodturning
351	Cross Cut Sawing
360	Rope Making
376	Osage Orange Catapult
457	Rope Making

Figure 2: Programs on Grounds Schedule

All Day	Exhibit & Traders House	Blockhouse
9:15	Cannon Demonstration	Artillery Park
10:00	Opening Ceremonies	Flagpoles
11:00	Landing of the Voyageurs	Boat Ramp
11:00	French Stories	Wigwam Village
12:00	Flintlock Reliability Contest	Artillery Park
1:00	Tomahawk Throw	Tomahawk Range
2:00	Canoe Races	Boat Ramp
3:00	Cannon Demonstration	Artillery Park
3:00	Native American Stories	Wigwam Village
5:00	Closing Ceremonies	Flagpoles

Figure 3: Voyageur Stage Schedule

10:30 Colonel Webb's Band of Musick

11:30 Trois Canards

12:30 Barb Kotula Szeszycki

1:30 Northland Voyageur Choir

2:30 Hogeye Navvy

3:30 Wild Geese

Figure 4: Landing Area Schedule

- 9:00 Dr. Theodpulus Von Gerlach
- 9:45 Sperreng Fiddlers
- 10:45 Native American Hand Games
- 11:15 Voyageur Ancient Fife and Drum
- 12:00 First Michigan Fife & Drum Corps
- 12:45 Janesville Fife & Drum Corps
- 1:30 Great River Fife and Drum Corps
- 2:15 River Valley Colonials
- 3:00 Tecumseh Fiddlers
- 3:45 Strolling Singers

Figure 5: Military Drill Field Schedule

- 9:00 Theatiki Fife and Drum Corps
- 9:45 LaCrosse Demonstration
- 10:45 42nd Royal Highlanders
- 11:15 Old Guard Fife & Drum Corps
- 12:00 Tippecanoe Ancient Fife and Drum Corps
- 12:45 French Fashion Show - Forces
- 1:30 Tactical Demonstration - Forces
- 2:15 Northwest Territorial Alliance Fashion Show
- 3:00 Highland Games
- 3:45 Massed Field Music

Figure 6: River Arena Schedule

9:00 Oxen

10:45 Hoosier Ladies Aside

11:30 Bush Family Dancers

12:30 Madam Cadillac Dancers

1:30 Iroquois Singers and Dancers

2:30 Calumet Ceremony

3:15 Spirit Wind Singers and Dancers

4:00 Heritage Musik and Dance

Figure 7: Block House Schedule

10:30 Bittersweet & Briers

11:30 Father, Son & Friends

12:30 Dean Shostak

1:30 Bent Nickel Dance Band

2:30 Traveler's Dream

3:30 Highland Reign

4:15 Newfoundland Program Dogs

At this time the teacher provided a purpose for celebrating the annual trading meeting between cultures at the event, why the teacher wanted to take the students to see this, and why the students needed to learn decision-making and negotiation skills. The teacher wanted the students to have enough information to make informed decisions and shared her priorities, but she did not expect all the students to follow her lead. As the students heard about events that interested them, they felt led to go their own directions; the daily events schedule listed all events that involved the entire site. The teacher allowed students to set their own priorities for learning within the context of the time period, because the teacher trusted her students to make meaning from the site. As co-constructors of the learning experience, the students determined the parts of the program that interested them the most.

Students formed groups of three, and in these groups they prepared, experienced the site, and debriefed together. Using the schedules, students individually prioritized all the events to determine what interested them the most (see figures 1 - 7: <http://www.tcha.mus.in.us/children.htm> & <http://www.tcha.mus.in.us/programs.htm>). The teacher provided the schedules of events for the day, including multiple concurrent events and some whole site events. In addition, she included one-time events, repeating events, and continuous events. The site also included traders, campsites, musical groups, educational activities, and military groups. Representatives presented many educational events from a variety of nations, including English, French, Indian, and Scot.

Preparation

After students individually prioritized the events they most wished to attend, they met with their two peers and, as a group of three, took turns comparing their lists and planning their day (see figure 8: student schedule). They determined what interests they shared in common and on what events they immediately agreed. Students needed to use all of the arena schedules to plan how to spend their day, and they used their arena schedules to find events they wished to attend, such as Kevin Stonerock's first person presentation of a pioneer trader. They determined what interests they shared in common and on what events they immediately agreed. First, they established what they all wished to attend by consensus. Through negotiation and compromising, they next found common ground to determine what they wanted to do as a group. They traded sites; "I will go to yours if you will go to mine." They yielded to another student's desire, or they yielded to the interests of a majority of the two students. After negotiations they made three copies of their plan for the day. Next, the teacher reviewed the map of the reenactment site including natural features, boundaries, meeting sites, and where students could find the events listed in their plans (see figure 9: site map).

<http://www.tcha.mus.in.us/images/large/mapcurrent.jpg>). Students evaluated their plan to see if it were possible to do all of the things they had planned after seeing the maps.

They made changes before giving the teacher a copy of their final plan, but each student also kept a copy of the list and map for themselves. With this plan their group navigated through the site attending to the events that interested them the most. They started practicing negotiations and decision making in the classroom, established a plan for their learning, and evaluated their plan.

On Site

On the site the teacher reminded the students of the procedures necessary for making the day run smoothly. Each student had a watch, knew how to tell time, and agreed when to meet at the end of the day. Each student assumed responsibility for being prompt and avoided having others waiting for them. The teacher reminded the students of the fenced site boundaries where the students may go. The teacher also pointed out areas that the students needed to avoid such as the river and the steep banks; the students assumed responsibility for staying within the boundaries and avoiding hazards. Once on site the teacher and the students established a common meeting site, and adult chaperons took turns staying at this station so there was continuous coverage at this point. Students knew they could meet an adult here at any time if they needed assistance; this provided a safety net for the students so they knew aid was always close at hand. All of the students stayed together all day; if they did become separated, they immediately went to the meeting area so that they could reunite. Students could not get lost or stay lost this way, and they therefore did not wander the grounds by themselves. Teachers reminded the students of reenactment etiquette, which required that if a tent were closed to give it a wide berth, but it was alright to peer in and examine it if it were open. Students were also advised when talking to participants that they should refer to historic clothing rather than costumes. At that point students followed their schedule for the day at the Feast of the Hunter's Moon.

Potential Problems

The most pleasant day at a community festival can look dark if an unforeseen event emerges; a change in the weather can make the day uncomfortably cold and windy,

rainy, or hot. Dressing in layers and being prepared to be outside can prevent weather from becoming a disaster. Minor first aid may be needed for insect bites or stings, scraped knees, or sun burn; check the site map to locate the first aid stand. Students have been known to lose a quantity of money or personal belongings. Carry an extra sack lunch so that no student is hungry during the day; direct the students to the lost and found station at the end of the day as the need arises. When a student is missing at the end of the day the student is usually fine, but the teacher tends to panic. Remember, as the crowd departs and thins, it become progressively easier to search and find a student. While it seems calamitous, they will turn up in less than thirty minutes. The most common problem is, because of height, students cannot see nor hear, but students tend to move through crowds until they can see and hear. Students need to remember, though, that they share the festival with others.

Debriefing

Students successfully navigated through the site charged with their own learning, and they seemed eager to share the results of their day. When the students returned to the class, they evaluated the experience through three questions in small groups and through individual journal writing. The three questions that guided their day were: “What was missing?” “What was inaccurate?” “What did they get right?” Students were also eager to comment on what they enjoyed, what they saw, and what they did. The teacher asked the students to move beyond the superficial and the fun aspects of the day and comment with a critical eye about what they had learned. This critical perspective allowed them to sort their impressions of the day into facts, concepts, and generalizations about life in that time and place.

Students were surprised not only with what they saw but also with what they did not see at the Feast. Their comments about the Feast noted what was missing from the event that they would have predicted they might have seen. “We did not see that many Indians” (Cole, 5th grade). Cole realized that at that time there would have been many more Indians at the event than Europeans. Students commented about the lack of controversial issues concerning exploration in an event. They also notice the lack of animals and animal waste, necessities at that time but offensive to the twenty-first century visitor and banned by modern health ordinances.

Back then they did not have cars and they have cars here. I think they would have horses. When Mrs. J. took us to go see the Indian tribe down there I bet we would have seen horses like the animals they had back then. (Calib, 4th grade)

Students commented on the lack of transportation to get all of these people to an event of the time. Even fairly young unsophisticated students could determine a representation of uncritical history. “Well, they had boats there, but I thought they would ride horses” (Destiny, 5th grade). Students also mentioned the purportedly good health, good teeth, cleanliness, lack of odors, and lack of smallpox scars in the participants at this festival. Students even commented on missing people and their stories which they did not hear at the festival. In sum, students questioned their experience by discussing what they thought they would have seen at this site.

As students evaluated inaccuracies they found at the site; they mentioned trash cans, fresh water sources, and waste removal. While none of these services were authentic, twenty-first century participants and health regulations demand them. Students also mentioned historic clothing.

They were not that strict on your costume so there's like a lot of people who were not in the correct time period clothes. A lot of the booths need workers so if your costume wasn't exactly accurate they weren't [quite] that picky . . . some of the events they do are not period like the tomahawk throwing. (Chelesse, 5th grade)

Once the students started questioning historic clothing, they started questioning events they saw. The students noticed a difference in dress between the people they deemed to be experts and others on the festival grounds. "I think it might have been a little bit different because the people dressed differently; there are not many people wearing things like Mrs. J. [the teacher] or the volunteers" (Willey, 4th grade). The participants have a subculture uniform, complete with their displayed multiple year Feast participant pins. Students also called attention to housing that raised questions in their minds. "I really did not expect as many teepees as we saw" (Greg, 4th grade). A teepee would have been an abnormality in the eastern woodland tradition. Students questioned inaccuracies on the site due to twenty-first century sensibilities and sloppy reenactment.

Students also evaluated what the event did right and why this is a high-quality event that has been successful for decades. First, the students looked at the structures and majority of the period clothing. "The way they dressed and the way they had their things built I think from what Mrs. R. taught us they got pretty accurate about the houses" (Destiny, 5th grade). On the whole, the festival set the scene correctly, and they agreed that the festival interpreted a river transportation and commerce gathering well. Students carried away the idea of an international trade network based on beaver skins and river trade. "I did not really know if I would find any canoes and I found them here" (Harinie, 4th grade). Water transportation was the easiest way to get around and the students got

that idea from the site. Students then summarized and discussed their experiences, how their plans worked, how they made decisions, and how they evaluated the success of their plans. They also evaluated the success of negotiations in satisfying all of their group members. "It is kind of celebrating the day in history. The students enjoyed the choices that they made and enjoyed all of the crafts they got to see demonstrated. They made good plans and even though the negotiation was sometimes difficult they agreed that they made good decisions. It is a day when we can all dress up and be . . . 18th century people" (Greg, 4th grade).

Conclusions

Of course, not everyone will concur with this method of teaching. Some educators will resist the ideas of students having input into their education, while others will resist the teacher giving up direct instruction with the students. Parsons (1995) argues for heavy chaperone involvement for preschool-aged groups to make field trips more like family visits with parent-child interaction, and also rejects assignments that make the museum more like school. Perhaps the age of the students and the developmentally-appropriate nature of students who are ready to cut more strings from parents and adults would make this type of autonomous learning more appealing for older rather than younger students. Older students certainly are ready to strike out in small groups to investigate. Although a festival is a good way to integrate inquiry methods into student field trips, it is not the only way to take a field trip and other types of sites would require different methods.

Social studies educators do need to promote inquiry to encourage students to hold problems as their own. Students need suggestions and limits set by teachers on where to

go, what to do, and how to do it. The students connected their prior knowledge with new learning (Deal & Sterling 1997). Students are able to take what they learned in preparation from the classroom and connect it to what they have learned at a festival. By giving students some latitude in selecting an assignment that motivates them, teachers encourage decision-making skills through this event. Students are required to make a number of choices prior to engaging in the field trip, and students must think on their feet as the day unfolds. Students are required to do history, not to just passively receive it when they are involved in inquiry-based projects (Foster & Padgett 1999). They apply a critical lens to the festival to evaluate what they are seeing and experiencing. As students make choices about what they will learn at a festival, they are conducting research experiences as they gather information to bring back to the classrooms from the event.

When students work in small groups, the members of their peer group modify their research project as they plan and attend the festival. By working in a group and staying in a group on a festival site, students practice finding common ground for solving problems through negotiation, compromising, and reaching consensus. Inquiry requires students to raise questions, use logical reasoning, and conduct research (Martinello 1998). The environment of a festival requires students to raise questions about what they are seeing, use logical reasoning to determine conclusions, and conduct research on the site to gather information. In their groups, students must raise questions about the sites they are seeing at the festival, use logical reasoning to determine if their plan is working at the festival, and conduct research about how their particular group worked while it was at the festival. While at the festival the students used democratic problem-solving skills to

negotiate organizing and carrying out a plan that required compromise that allowed all members of the group to feel good.

NOTES

1. See <http://www.tcha.mus.in.us/feast.htm>.
2. C. E. Knapp, "Teaching the 3 R's through the 3 C's: Connecting Curriculum & Community," *Thresholds in Education* 27(3 & 4) (2001): 7-9; R. H. Pahl, "Forsooth! An Exploration into Living History," *The Social Studies* 85(1) (1994): 21-4; C. Kridel, "The Play Element in Culture and the Use of Festivals in the General Education Curriculum," *Journal of General Education* 32(3) (1980): 229-39.
3. R. Scarce, "Field Trips as Short-Term Experiential Education," *Teaching Sociology*, 25(3) (1997): 219-26.
4. M. S. Gabella, "Beyond the Looking Glass: Bringing Students into the Conversation of Historical Inquiry," *Theory and Research in Social Education* 22(3) (1994): 340-63; N. Jensen, "Children's Perception of Their Museum Experience: Contextual Perspective," *Children's Environment* 11(4) (1994): 300-24.
5. J. M. Bellan and G. Scheurman, "Actual and Virtual Reality Making the Most of Field Trips," *Social Education* 62(1) (1998): 35-40; A. M. Cox-Petersen and J. A. Pfaffinger, "Teacher Preparation and Teacher-Student Interactions at a Discovery Center of Natural History," *Journal of Elementary Science Education* 10(2) (1998): 20-35.
6. L. Higgins, "School Outings: Fewer Students Get to Go on Field Trip as District Budgets are Squeezed," *Detroit Free Press*, April 14th, 2004.
7. M. Glassman, "Dewey and Vygotsky: Society, Experience and Inquiry in Educational Practice," *Educational Researcher* 30(4) (2001): 3-14; R. C. Wade, "Encouraging Student Initiative in a Fourth Grade Classroom," *The Elementary School Journal* 95(4) (1995): 339-54.

8. Parsons, "Field Trips can Enhance Family Involvement," *Dimensions of Early Childhood* 23(4) (1995): 16-18.
9. D. Deal and D. R. Sterling, "Kids Ask the Best Questions," *Educational Leadership* 54 (1997): 61-3.
10. S. J. Foster and C.S. Padgett, "Authentic Historic Inquiry in the Social Studies Classroom," *The Clearing House* 72(6) (1999): 357-63.
11. M. L. Martinello, "Learning to Question for Inquiry," *The Educational Forum* 62 (1998): 164-71.

Figure #8: Student Schedule

Time	Location	Event
9:45	LaCrosse Demonstration	Military Drill Field
11:00	Landing of the Voyageurs	Boat Ramp
12:00	First Michigan Fife & Drum Corps	Landing Area
1:30	Tactical Demonstration	Military Drill Field
3:00	Cannon Demonstration	Artillery Park

Figure #9: Map of Site

