

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF FIELD TRIPS AS A TEACHING AND LEARNING STRATEGY: A CASE STUDY OF FIELD TRIP TO THE PARLIAMENT

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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. Several important elements should be emphasized in designing a successful field trip. This paper initially discusses those elements and then reports on an investigation into a field trip to a Parliamentary Dewan Rakyat (House of Representatives) session in November 2015 for students enrolled into the Malaysian Legal Principles course. The report has two main objectives: to review the overall design of the field trip and to determine whether the trip has achieved its main objectives through reports written by 41 of the students' participants. The findings suggest that although important elements in the design of the field trip were present, several other elements during the pre and post trip stages were not emphasized upon. However, responses from the students' report confirmed that most of the students' initial view of the Parliament's role and importance has changed due to their observation of the session. This paper advocates that although planning and organizing 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.

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

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1. Introduction

The use of educational field trips has long been a major part of teaching and learning strategy. Krepel and Duvall (1981) considers 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. However, its usage in legal education as part of teaching and learning strategy is rarely systematically discussed. Nevertheless, field trips could be a valuable tool in making learning more engaging and provide unique opportunities for learning certain concepts by putting them into a more realistic and relevant context (See, e.g., Krepel and DuVall, 1981; Leatherbury, 2011; Orion, 1993)

Field trips can provide an integral part of the learning experience, including in legal education if they are planned well. Research studies (See, e.g., Nabor, et al., 2009, Kennedy, 2014; Tal, 2001) have shown that there is a significant increase in participants' (including the instructors') factual knowledge and conceptual understanding after participating in well-designed field trips. For the purpose of this paper, Myers and Jones' *Field Trip Planning Model* (2015) is heavily drawn upon in determining the elements that should be present in a well-designed field trip.

The following discussion examines these elements and proceeds with a review of a field trip to a Parliamentary *Dewan Rakyat* (House of Representatives) session in November 2015 for first-year Faculty of Administrative Science and Policy Studies bachelors-degree students enrolled into the Malaysian Legal Principles course. The article later presents the findings from written feedback by the students' participants on their experience from the field trip.

2. Field Trip Planning Model

Several studies (Myers and Jones, 2015; Krepel and DuVall, 1981; Kennedy, 2014) have documented that the key factor to a well-designed and eventually a successful field trip is planning. 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. In fact, field trips have been regularly encouraged as part of teaching and learning strategy in legal education.

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 is 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 materialized if its planning is also done on an ad hoc basis.

Notably however, 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. Strong models for a field trip do not appear readily in the literature. However, one particular model deliberated by Myers and Jones (2015) provided a helpful outline of a well-designed field trip. Compared to other models, for example, Orion's (1994) which, mainly addresses scientific field trip in a natural environment, 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 will be explored further below. According to Myers and Jones (2015), organizers planning a field trip must focus on three important stages: pre-trip, trip, and post-trip.

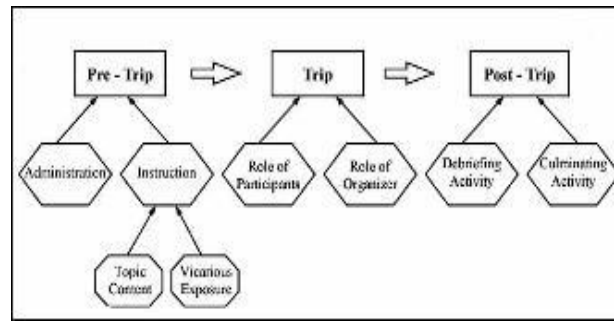


Figure 1- Field Trip Planning Model (Myers and Jones, 2015)

2.1 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 organizer to arrange the logistics of the trip, including securing permission from the relevant authorities, organizing transportation for the field trip, and contacting the field trip location to verify the schedule and activities.

However, Myers and Jones argue that, many organizers 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 mindsets 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 increases overall trip effectiveness, the field trip organizers need to make participants feel comfortable and safe at the location of the field trip, for example by providing participants with ‘vicarious exposure’ (Myers and 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 organizers should also focus on reviewing, as part of instruction issues involving the safety and behavior rules and expectations, and the ‘content topics and concepts’ that participants will be investigating during the field trip. Such pre-trip instruction, according to Myers and Jones 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 2-3 participants should be assigned at the pre-trip stage.

2.2 Trip Stage

Two elements should be emphasized during the trip stage itself: the **role of the participant** and the **role of the organizer**.

Myers and Jones maintain that the **role of the participant** during the field trip should centers 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 starts 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 comprises 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 organizer 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 2–3 participants are given some tasks to complete, which should clearly relate to the educational goals of the field trip.

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

2.3 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, both activities should be conducted as soon after the trip as possible.

Debriefing activity involves encouraging all the participants to share and discuss their experiences during the field trip. As noted by Myers and Jones, 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 organizing a successful field trip can be a great deal of work for the organizer. However, as can be seen in the preceding discussion, Myers and Jones' *Field Trip Planning Model* provides simple steps in each of the pre-trip,

trip, and post-trip stages, which could be of useful assistance in the design of a well-developed field trip plan.

The next segment of this paper will now review the field trip to a Parliamentary Dewan Rakyat (House of Representatives) session conducted in November 2015 for first-year Faculty of Administrative Science and Policy Studies bachelors-degree students and examines its design elements and to determine whether the trip has achieved its main objectives of granting students the exposure of the manner and process of debate of motions or bills in Parliament.

Case Study: Field Trip to the Parliament

2.4 Background of the Trip

The Faculty of Administrative Science and Policy Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), located in Seremban Campus offers two main undergraduates' programmes, one of them being the Bachelor of Administrative Science degree. Part of their curriculum involves students enrolling into several law subjects. The first legal subject offered for the first year students is 'Malaysian Legal Principles' which is identified by the code: LAW445. The LAW445 course is designed to give an overview to the students of the various sources of law applicable in Malaysia. A major element of the syllabus includes an understanding of the role of the Malaysian Parliament as a legislator and part of an important institution in the Malaysian constitution.

The idea for the field trip has long been mooted by the Seremban Campus' Law Department's lecturers as part of the teaching and learning activity. But it was only taken up officially in September 2015, which coincided with the new students' enrolment for the LAW445 course and also the sitting session dates of the Malaysian Parliament. The field trip to one of the Parliamentary Dewan Rakyat (House of Representatives) sessions was then planned by the course instructors with the main objective of providing opportunities for students enrolled in the LAW445 course to gain exposure and direct observation of the manner and process of debate of motions or bills in Parliament.

A date was set for the trip in November 2015 and approval was sought from the Faculty of Administrative Science and Policy Studies and also the Chief Administrator of the Parliament of Malaysia. All the necessary documentations were submitted in October 2015 and the approvals from both were swift.

Once approvals were confirmed, transportation was arranged for the students. The students were informed of the field trip date and given information regarding their dress-codes and code of conduct. They were also given an agenda for the planned trip and some briefing on the trip's objective. The initial agenda for the field trip includes a tour of the Parliament's grounds and briefing on the historical background of the Parliament by the relevant officers. However, these agenda became unfeasible because the Parliament's building was still going through a massive renovation and refurbishment construction. The time and duration for observing the session were specifically allocated and fixed to only an hour because of the sheer number of daily visitors that the Parliament received and the limited seating available in the public gallery.

On the trip day itself, students arrived early at the location but were not allowed to explore on their own due to security and safety concerns. Students were summoned into the public gallery at the allocated time and the briefing given by the relevant officer was

only regarding the code of conduct while observing in the public gallery. No opportunity was given to the students to ask any questions or queries either by the officer or the lecturers, mostly because of the time constraints and also the formalities involved before entry into the public gallery. The students entered the gallery while the House's Speaker was explaining some House Rules to the Members of Parliament present on the day and left the gallery in the midst of a debate.

A week after the field trip, the students' experiences were discussed in the classroom. Students were then asked to provide a written feedback on their experience during the field trip, with special focus on whether the trip has achieved its main objective, i.e. granting them the exposure of the manner and process of debate of motions or bills in Parliament. 41 written submissions were received. A content analysis of the submissions, involving extracting themes from the information and connecting them with the research objectives were carried out. The whole content analysis process generally includes an analysis of the similarities and differences in the feedbacks. They were later categorized into themes and coherent categories. Findings from the feedbacks however, were not shared with the students.

2.5 Review Findings

Observational self-review of the field trip to the Parliament found that, although, important elements in the design of the field trip were present, several aspects of the elements during the pre - trip and trip stages were either not emphasized upon, not feasible or not evident. The following Table 1 illustrates the results of the review.

Table 1 Comparison of the Field Trip Planning Model and the Case Study of the Field Trip to the Parliament

Stages	Field Trip Planning Model		Case Study: Field Trip to the Parliament
Pre – Trip	Administration		Review of the trip shows that the Administration element was present and well established
	Instruction	Vicarious Exposure	Review of the trip shows that the Instruction element in regards to providing participants with Vicarious Exposure as part of the pre-trip instruction was not evident
		Topic Content	Review of the trip shows that the Instruction element in regards to providing participants with the Topic Content as part of the pre-trip instruction was not evident

Trip	Role of Participant	Phase 1 Agenda	Review of the trip shows that the Role of the Participant element in regards to the Phase 1 Agenda was considered but not feasible to be achieved due to the constraints of the trip's location
		Phase 2 Agenda	Review of the trip shows that the Role of the Participant element in regards to the Phase 2 Agenda was considered but not feasible to be achieved due to the constraints of the trip's location and time restraints
		Phase 3 Agenda	Review of the trip shows that the Role of the Participant element in regards to the Phase 3 Agenda was not evident
	Role of Organizer		Review of the trip shows that the Role of the Organizer element was considered but not emphasized upon due to the constraints of the trip's location and the formalities' involved
Post – Trip	Debriefing		Review of the trip shows that the Debriefing element was present
	Culminating		Review of the trip shows that the Culminating element was present

2.6 Feedback Findings

Three common themes emerged from the analysis of the written feedbacks in response to the main research concern: whether the trip has achieved its main objective of providing opportunities for the students participating in the field trip to gain exposure and direct observation of the manner and process of debate of motions or bills in Parliament.

The themes reflected the thoughts and views of the participants on:

- (i) the overview of the role of Parliament
- (ii) the role of the Members of Parliament
- (iii) the suggestions for better future learning experience

Overview of the Role of Parliament

The findings indicated that, despite some of the missing elements in the design of the field trip, the responses received from the participants' feedback were very positive. The participants had enjoyed the experience and their day out of the classroom. Although some of them were not able to comment fully on any specific aspects, but most of the responses reported that their initial view of the Parliament's role and importance has either been improved, confirmed or altered due to their observation of the session.

Participants that reported that their initial view of the Parliament's role and importance has been improved commented that they now *'have a clearer picture of how the Parliament works'*, while another commented, *'I also realise this is an important part of the government in making the law and to amend it'*.

Most of the participants that reported confirming their initial view of the role of the Parliament and its importance were those that had been exposed to the information about the Parliament from other sources, including through watching televised Parliamentary sessions. One of them made the following remarks:

'It (the session) does not change my views of the Parliament because I have always thought that the Parliament was always hectic and chaotic as seen on the television.'

A majority of the participants reported having their initial view of the Parliament's role and importance altered by their participation in the field trip. They were surprised at how *'informal'* the Parliament could be. Most of them expressed disappointment at the manner and process of the debate during the session they observed. Some of the participants were of the view that the Parliament *'is a debating place for the people's right and need'*, so they were disappointed when certain issues that they considered as important *'people's issues'* were being rejected to be debated by the House's Speaker. Some others were frustrated that the time given to the Members of Parliament during their debate session were not appropriately use to discuss these issues, evoking comments including, *'the issues that they debated stray far from the original issue they had intended to discuss'*(sic).

Role of the Members of Parliament

Some participants acknowledged the parliamentary roles of the Members of Parliament and their difficult task as the *'representatives of the citizens' thoughts and voice'*. One of the participants noted: *'They (MP) need to have a high level of patience'*.

However, a considerable number of the students express astonishment and frustration over the unruly conduct and behaviour of the Members of Parliament during the debate session. They used terms, for example, *'childish, selfish, rude, bullies, quite amusing, talking nonsense'* when commenting about the conduct of the Members of Parliament.

The following comments sum up aptly the majority of the participants' thoughts:

'...how unintellectual the politicians were especially when they're screaming off at each other's face just to voice out their opinion. It was rather selfish if I might say.'

The Parliament should be a medium for debate and suggestions and they should know better.'

Suggestions for Better Future Learning Experience

It is also apparent from the feedbacks that despite some of the frustrations indicated about the role of Parliament and the Members of Parliament, most of the participants were eager to learn more of the functions and activities of the Parliament. They suggested frequent and extended future trips in order to experience amongst others, *'the process of how a bill actually becomes law'*, *'the effects to the Members of Parliament if they are being rude and disrespectful to the Speaker'*, *'how the secretary (of Parliament) arrange the sessions of each member (of Parliament)'* and *'how decisions are made when it is so difficult for every member to agree with each other on almost every issue'*.

Participants were of the view that these queries could have also been answered if some briefing was given before and after observing the session. Some other suggestions include, giving participants opportunity to raise their own issues during the session and to be able to interact with any of the Members of Parliament.

3. Discussion and Conclusion

The review findings of the overall design and implementation of the field trip to the Parliament found that several elements during the pre and post trip stages were either not emphasized upon, not feasible or not evident. The field trip organizer has failed to document providing participants with 'Vicarious Exposure' and 'Content topics and Concepts' as part of the pre-trip instructions. Inclusion of such pre-trip instructions would have made for a more effective learning strategy.

These pre-trip instructions are even more significant when the role of the participant and the organizer during the trip stage became rather restrictive due to the constraints involving the time allocation and the formalities of the trip's location, as can be seen in this case study. Admittedly, the pre-trip instructions should be clearly emphasized upon in ensuring an educationally successful field trip. These instructions could prepare the participants for the experience, regardless of the time spent during the trip stage. The participants would then have some basic exposure of the settings and could better concentrate on the contents of the debates during the session.

During the field trip reviewed, the limited time allocated for the session's observation and the inability for the participants to familiarize themselves with the settings would not have helped in reducing the participants' level of anxiety. Prepping the participants through 'Vicarious Exposure' as part of the pre-trip instructions will definitely make participants feel comfortable and safe at the location of the field trip and prepare them for proper learning. In addition, as part of the pre-trip instructions, formulating learning activities which concentrate on certain content topics and legal concepts in observing a Parliamentary debate session would provide better focus for participants' learning.

Nevertheless, despite some of these missing elements in the design of the field trip, participants generally maintained that they have gain considerable exposure of the Parliament's role and importance from their observation of the session. The field trip had also managed to evoke increasing interest in the minds of the participants of the Parliament's members, functions and activities.

This paper therefore advocates that, although planning and organizing 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 even for legal education. However, 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, including the Parliament or the courts. Field trip organizers 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.

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