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# Learning from an educational visit: Some concern of pupils, teachers and their hosts

## Introduction

At the request of the Director we agreed to monitor the planning and outcome of a visit to the Kuruman Mission by children from two Cape Town schools, which took place in August 1990. Our aim was to collect information which would be useful in developing the Mission as an educational resource.

## The planning stage

We met on two occasions with the teacher who was co-ordinating the visit, and she between times consulted with her colleagues.

We agreed with the teachers that a successful visit requires a carefully planned timetable incorporating a variety of activities and taking into account the developmental and educational levels of the group concerned. The teachers, who had considerable experience of educational visits, felt that some advance preparation (ideally not more than two weeks before a visit) was helpful, but warned against overpreparation which could reduce the impact of "the real thing". These teachers took it for granted that they would be responsible for discipline and mentioned that they valued explicit information about acceptable behaviour and any special rules at a particular place. They would request this information if it were not supplied.

Together with the teachers we established the following guidelines for planning:

- in the weeks prior to the visit the children would be reminded of relevant aspects of their history syllabus, told the story of Livingstone and shown extracts from a video about the Mission;
- a general interest in the area would be fostered, not only the historical aspect of the Mission itself;
- the children should, in a variety of ways, be active participants in their own learning. This might involve them in listening, reading, drawing, talking, com-

pleting or creating worksheets, writing stories, dramatizing, engaging in practical activities, etc, either individually or in groups; there would also be time for reflection;

- the time available would be structured in advance, but in such a way as to allow flexibility;
- the children would not be expected to listen to input without any break or opportunity for interaction for more than 10-15 minutes at any one time;

The teachers devised a timetable which suited their own pupils and their own purposes. We noted that the aim of a visit might vary from a general broadening of learners' experience to specific information that a teacher hopes her/his pupils will remember. At times the quality of an experience may be the most important thing to remember; at other times accuracy may really matter. Practical constraints on the time available may also influence the choice of aims.

## Details of the visit

A total of 43 children (28 girls from standards 4 and 5 and 15 boys from standard 6) from two schools in Cape Town visited the Mission for two days in August 1990. They were accompanied by three teachers.

Their programme included an informal talk about the Mission and its history, a tour of the Mission buildings, a time to make worksheets in groups and some time specifically set aside for individual reflection and creativity (quiet time). The evenings were devoted to social interaction and/or community singing, plus the opportunity to view the drawings, poems, etc. they had produced. On the second day there was horseriding, followed by a tour of the town, including the 'Eye' and a service in the Mission church before leaving for Cape Town. Despite this fairly full programme the children did have some free time each day as well.



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## **Data collection**

We planned to collect data about the visit and its effects in the following ways:

- discussion with teachers about their observations and comments;
- written feedback from pupils immediately after the visit;
- consideration of the worksheets made by the children.
- questionnaires completed by pupils approximately 10 weeks after the visit;

## **The findings**

### *Feedback from teachers*

- a group size of 20-30 was considered ideal; larger groups would benefit from being split up;
- a safe and attractive outdoor environment is an asset for any visit;
- there needs to be ongoing flexibility and sensitivity – it can never be taken for granted that a particular activity will be successful as groups vary and the same group may vary over time;
- the “quiet time” arranged as part of the programme was very successful;
- the idea of making worksheets for other children to use was very successful; the children enjoyed it and worked hard;
- imaginative reconstructions of the past (for example, sitting in a wagon pretending to make the journey from Cape Town to Kuruman) worked well; this aspect at the Mission could fruitfully be expanded.

### *Immediate feedback from the children*

On their return to Cape Town twenty one girls completed a Field Trip Evaluation Form devised by their teacher.

*Responses to the first question, “What did you enjoy most” were as follows:*

the Moffat Mission	14
bus, talking and singing	3
riding the horses	2
Kimberley mine museum	2
learning about past	2
talking to boys	1
eating sweets	1
playing games together	1
being with friends at the Open Mine Museum	1
Big Holc	1

*The second question asked the girls to list the things they had learned about themselves; their discoveries are summarized below:*

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awareness of increased sociability and social skills, eg “like to mix”, “can communicate”, etc. 10

awareness of greater ease with boys, eg “don’t have to be scared of boys”, “can have fun with boys”, etc. 7

recognition that to be alone is sometimes pleasant, eg “don’t have to be with a group all the time,” etc. 3

awareness of eating and sleeping habits, eg “can do without junk food”, “adore chocolate”, “a fussy eater”, “can’t sleep easily with others making a noise”, etc. 13

various positive indicators, eg “can be independent”, “can be organized”, “not a bad rider”, etc. 9

various negative indicators, eg “messy”, “must learn to get up early” etc. 5

new interests, eg “I enjoy going round museums”. 1

unclassifiable, eg “you must be grateful for what you get”. 1

*Reported feelings during the ‘quiet time’ at the Mission were as follows:*

– peaceful	11
– glad to be alone/angry when disturbed	7
– relaxed, rested, unworried	7
– close to, appreciative of, nature	4
– “closer to God”	1
– “as if the farm belonged to me”	1
– “like working on a poem”	1
– “liked the time to think”	1
– “sad”	1
– “lonely”	1
– “cold and damp” (in church)	1
– sense of the past (in church)	1

*Comments on the value of a history field trip:*

– good to ‘see for self’/can learn because can picture/important to be there	8
– learn a lot, difference from trips with parents noted as positive for learning	6
– fun	4
– get to know teacher	1
– learn about self	1
– “nice to see who was there before us and how it affects us”	1
– good for those who like history but other do not pay attention	1



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The Kuruman Moffat Mission was by far most frequently mentioned as having been enjoyed most. The reasons for this become clearer in the light of later responses.

The self-discovery items highlight some developmental issues for this age group, ie the importance of sociability with peers, uncertainties about relating to the opposite sex, growing interest in, and appraisal of, the self. It is important for educators to be aware that concerns in these areas are much more salient to young people than most educational aims, and that this is "normal". Moreover, like adults, children are very conscious of the more physical aspects of living (eating and sleeping are important). Unlike adults, they will not often attempt or pretend interest that transcends these needs.

The feedback on the quiet time at the Mission reveals that most of the children needed and appreciated a break in the pace of their activities. For some it promoted creativity; many just liked to relax. When primary school children report so favourably, one noting with apparent relief "my thoughts went away" one cannot but wonder about the pressures under which these children live. Successful education requires restraint as well as mediation from adults.

The beliefs of educators that children need to experience and 'see for themselves' and that variety is important for learning were vindicated by the girls' remarks about the usefulness of field trips. It was interesting that they implicitly acknowledged that some structure was necessary for effective learning – when they contrasted the school trip with a visit with parents.

#### **The worksheets made by the children**

The children were told that the task was to make a worksheet about any aspect of the Mission which might be used by other children who visited there. We were able to inspect seven of the worksheets made by the groups (the ones the teacher thought were most successful).

As might be expected, each worksheet contained a substantial number of questions with specific factual answers, eg "how many people can the church seat?", "how old is the house?", "under what type of tree did Livingstone propose to Mary?" etc, and requests for facts, eg "name two diseases that animals or people could get", "name three of the members of the London Missionary Society Board", etc. Some slightly more open questions and tasks sometimes appeared, eg "what is the purpose of a Mission Station?", "write a few lines about the windows".

It seemed that the children had been given a great deal of

new information, rich in detail, and enjoyed showing that they remembered it.

Six of the worksheets also contained, however, requests for personal opinions and feelings, eg "what do you think of the Mission Station?", "how would you feel about living in an oxwagon most of the time?", "describe one room of interest to you", "would you like to live in this house? – give reasons for your answer". Six contained pictures, either with requests for comments or simply as illustrations. Four provided brief written input which would help with answering the questions set, and three offered some form of word puzzle in addition to straight questions. One gave a drawing task and one a practical task, namely "find and make a rubbing of the plaque on the bench dedicated to Mary Moffat".

The worksheets represent the work of the most capable standard 4 and 5 girls from a small and privileged school where the children are obviously used to high quality teaching and, together, are most impressive.

The overwhelming impression was that the girls had faithfully, and sometimes very skilfully, reproduced the kind of worksheet with which they were familiar. Setting the worksheet, rather than answering it, appears to have provided them with a challenge. It also revealed the type of information they most readily assimilated and their assumptions about what was educationally appropriate. It may be significant that the worksheet which revealed the greatest sense of narrative content and empathy was, unlike the others, based on a dramatized experience of the reality of the journey to Kuruman.

It was originally thought that the worksheets might be corrected where necessary and photocopied for the Mission to use as material for other visitors. On reflection it was decided to leave the errors uncorrected. One educational aim of an experience at the Mission might be to teach that errors are an acceptable, indeed essential, part of learning. Each party of children might make worksheets, and complete, correct and/or improve those made by their predecessors. This activity could introduce a discussion of the role of errors in learning, ways of dealing with mistakes, feelings of "failure" etc.

#### **Delayed feedback from the children**

Approximately two and a half months after the visit twenty seven girls and fifteen boys completed a questionnaire (included as Appendix B) devised by us. Their responses are summarized in the Tables 1-5.

The horses and riding were noticeably salient in the memories of both boys and girls. This may have been partly a recency effect as the riding happened on the last day of the visit. But it also draws attention to the developmental importance for this age group of physical activity involving a sense of competence and control. Far behind, but next on the list, came the Moffat garden and their quiet time, both also outdoor memories. The findings are limited, but they do tend to confirm gender stereotypes. Girls more often remembered the quiet time and the church, both relatively passive experiences. Five



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girls and no boys mentioned friendly people, i.e. were sensitive to social atmosphere and possibly field dependent; five boys and no girls mentioned Reverend Butler, i.e. remembered a specific, active role model. (Table 1).

**TABLE 1**  
**CHILDREN'S SPONTANEOUS MEMORIES AFTER 10 WEEKS**

Item	Number of mentions		
	Boys	Girls	Total
Horses	9	16	25
Moffat garden	4	8	12
Quiet time	1	10	11
Church	2	9	10
Singing	3	6	9
Nice food	3	6	9
Kuruman Eye	3	5	8
Fun/games/campfire/running	3	3	6
Nice accommodation	3	3	6
Surroundings (general)	3	2	5
Friendly people	0	5	5
Reverend Butler	5	0	5
Old buildings/houses/ Mission Station	0	4	4
Hamilton House	0	2	2
Talks and tour	0	2	2
Spiders (in the dorm)	2	0	2
Reality of past/story of place	0	2	2
Wagon house	1	0	1
Worksheets	0	1	1
Size of fish in Eye	1	0	1

We had speculated that being surprised would suggest assimilation or accommodation of new input. There were almost twice as many girls as boys; yet even allowing for this, the girls appeared more easily surprised, or more ready to admit surprise, or more willing to make an effort to please. Many of the responses have a naive, concrete quality that one tends to associate with younger children. This is in line with observations of intra- and inter- individual variation in level of cognitive maturity in early adolescence. (Table 2)

When assigning ratings, girls tended on the whole to be more generous than boys. A very large proportion of girls rated every aspect of the visit highly (Table 3). Their supreme accolade was for the food and their least positive response was to the talks. Boys, on the other hand, were more inclined to rate leisure activities highly

and were least satisfied with the accommodation. (This surely cannot have been on account of the twice mentioned spiders?) The girls seemed to find the visit very helpful in gaining an understanding of the past but this was not true for the boys. This could be because most of the girls had a more field dependent style of processing information, or it might simply be a question of motivation.

**TABLE 2**

## INDICATIONS BY THE CHILDREN OF WHAT THEY FOUND SURPRISING

Of the fifteen boys, nine recorded that nothing surprised them during the visit. The others mentioned:

the colour of the Eye	1
the size of fish in the Eye	1
how rural/back to nature the Mission was	1
church different from expectations — made of clay	1
less people at Mission than expected	1
being "right there" where Livingstone was married	1

Of the twenty seven girls, six recorded that nothing surprised them during the visit. The others mentioned:

quality of accommodation and food	8
nicer, less boring than expected	3
horses	3
friendliness	2
everything "as it was or would have been"	2
"oasis", beauty (expectation was dry, scrubby, like Kimberley)	3
quietness	1
church made of mud not concrete	1
tree trunk still there	1
amount of water produced by Eye per day	1
size of fish in Eye	1

**TABLE 3**

## CHILDREN'S PERCEPTIONS OF QUALITY OF EXPERIENCE (expressed as percentages)

Rating	Rated Low (1 or 2)		Rated High (4 or 5)	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Aspect				
helpfulness in understanding past	14	0	40	92
food	7	0	67	100
accommodation	54	0	27	93
talks	7	0	60	67
leisure activities	0	0	73	92

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**TABLE 4**

**CHILDREN'S PERCEPTIONS OF FACILITATION  
OF LEARNING**  
(expressed as percentages)

Rating	Rated low (1 or 2)		Rated high (4 or 5)	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Activity				
Worksheets	14	0	7	81
Quiz	27	15	40	63
Drama	53	11	34	71
Songs	60	11	14	59
Quiet time	13	11	40	78

**TABLE 5**

**CHILDREN'S PERCEPTIONS OF PERSONAL  
ENJOYMENT**  
(expressed as percentages)

Rating	Rated low (1 or 2)		Rated high (4 or 5)	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Activity				
Worksheets	35	7	28	47
Quiz	35	14	35	56
Drama	41	7	50	67
Songs	42	7	28	78
Quiet time	14	4	50	89

The worksheets, the quiet time, and drama (in this order) were rated by both sexes as helpful in facilitating learning. In terms of enjoyment, both sexes most frequently gave the quiet time a high rating. In fact the quiet time was the one activity which was given a high rating by nearly all the children for both enjoyment and facilitation of learning. The worksheets, despite the evident involvement at the time, were remembered as facilitative of learning, but not particularly enjoyable. (Tables 4 and 5)

**Summary and conclusions**

It is difficult to specify the precise criteria by which an educational visit may be judged successful.

Teachers might list the following: a sense that the visit offered what they had hoped; indications of pupils' enjoyment and interest; indications that selected information had become part of pupils' store of usable knowledge; indications that pupils' thinking was broader and more flexible; indications of greater pupil self awareness and sensitivity to others.

From the point of view of the host there is a need for a sense of being valued and given feedback; opportunity (if desired) to share in educational planning and input; adherence to ground rules and manageable numbers; clarity re teachers' expectations and mutual responsibilities.

Our study suggests that, although learners may well have a meaningful educational experience (as the worksheets indicate) and even recognize that some structuring facilitates effective learning, they also have other agendas. For this particular group these fairly salient developmental and personal needs included a sense of physical comfort and security (probably enhanced by relatively familiar catering and accommodation), plus opportunities to explore and expand the self and to develop social skills. If such needs are not taken into account they may interfere with, or even negate, any educational goals set by teachers.