Informal Education in Low Socioeconomic Communities: Teachers’ Lived Experiences in Planning and Leading Field Trips

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Informal Education in Low Socioeconomic Communities: Teachers’ Lived Experiences in Planning and Leading Field Trips

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To young children everywhere exploring
to find their place in the world.
Acknowledgments

To my dear family, friends, and Godmother who ensured that I experienced the Spiritual gifts to the world, to Drexel’s Sacramento Education Department who provided the best possible educational experience and, last but not least, to my amazing husband Leo who stayed by my side throughout this doctoral journey.
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Abstract

Informal Education in Low Socioeconomic Communities: Teachers’ Lived Experiences in Planning and Leading Field Trips

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Drexel University, May 2015

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Experiential learning is “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience” (Kolb, 1984, p. 41). Teachers have planned and led field trips as a form of experiential pedagogy and an important role in student learning and development. Well-planned field trips in surrounding communities help broaden children’s concepts of the world around them. In spite of the research that supports the value of field trips, there appear to be fewer field trip opportunities in low socioeconomic schools. Data were collected from 12 teacher participants to gain a deeper understanding of their field trip planning and leading experiences.

The purpose of this study was to add to the existing knowledge of institutional and individual pre-kindergarten–fifth grade teachers’ practices in planning and leading field trips. The following research questions guide this study:

1. How do teachers describe their experiences with field trips for children in a low socioeconomic school?
2. How do teachers describe what happens when support for field trips is reduced?
3. How do teachers respond to these situations?

Through in-depth qualitative analysis of teachers’ lived experiences of planning and leading field trips, four themes emerged: teachers’ actions, overall perceptions, challenges, and potential support. The findings along with their sub-findings were explored in relationship to three significant areas of informal learning as offered in the literature: experiential learning, education in low socioeconomic communities, and field trips. Four results of this study emerged and were offered with interpretations by the researcher: (a) field trips integrate and move theory and practice into the real world, (b) field trips afford teachers the rare opportunity to observe their students in society, (c) moving content knowledge into context enhances social and cognitive development, and (d) teachers’ collaboration increases the opportunity to plan and lead effective field trips. This study concludes presenting collective perceptions of the participants and recommendations to public school teachers for best practices planning and leading field trips in low socioeconomic schools.
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Research

**Introduction to the Problem**

Exploration of the natural world appears to be significant in children’s lives. When youth explore natural environments, opportunities to increase curiosity, wonder, imagination, and a natural sense of connection with society and nature happen (Louv, 2008). Isenberg (2002) specifically noted that in early childhood, nurturing activities that engage the five senses have lifelong influences on the nerve cells and neural pathways of the brain. Those children who do not have enough opportunities for this form of exploration may not be able to make the permanent neurological connections necessary for learning (Isenberg, 2002).

Child development theorists beginning with Piaget have long suggested that these experiences are vital for essential cognitive development (Kirova & Bhargava, 2002; Piaget, 1952). When interacting among peers in natural environments, most children become unconscious social constructivists trying to make sense of the world in which they live. They naturally move away from conventional learning and embrace experiential learning. In the outdoors, they effortlessly explore, describe, and explain their discoveries or ideas with others (Gergen, 2001).

Experiential learning is “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience” (Kolb, 1984, p. 41). Field trips are a form of experiential learning that has played an important role in student learning and development. Taylor, Morris, and Cordeau-Young (1997) noted that well-planned field trips in the surrounding
community serve as a tool that helps broaden children’s concept of the world around them. In spite of the research that supports the value of experiential learning and field trips, there appear to be fewer field trip opportunities in urban elementary schools.

Isenberg (2002) noted that sociocultural theorists believe young children’s attitudes, as they relate to outdoor recreation or adventure, are influenced by the attitudes of their parents, educators, and society as a whole. In the present milieu, parents and other caregivers spend more time away from home due to longer work hours, traffic congestion, and other outside-the-home responsibilities. In these challenging environments, and when the children are frequently left on their own, parents believe their children are safer indoors. As a result, urban youth often become more deeply engrossed in the media culture (Louv, 2008).

Louv (2008) noted the words spoken by a San Diego fourth-grader who said, “I like to play indoors better ‘cause that’s where the electrical outlets are” (p. vii). He suggested that more inner city youth are distancing themselves by interacting with outdoor activities even in their own communities. Spending time on a computer, a tablet, an iPod, or other device usually requires the person to be detached from their surroundings. This type of interaction leaves very little opportunity for the direct experience of the outside world to inspire and inform the participant.

Vygotsky’s (1978b) constructivist theory introduced the zone of proximal development and stressed the importance of active participation by the teacher in integrating experiential activities. He noted that with the assistance of experienced adults or other more experienced peers, children become able to grasp concepts and ideas that they cannot comprehend on their own. Given the urban environment and parents’
increased time away from home, the role of the teacher in facilitating this learning for children is growing. Recognizing that experiential learning develops critical thinking skills and improves retention, educators may be missing significant opportunities to utilize field trips as a learning tool (Greene, Kisida, & Bowen, 2013).

Statement of the Problem to be Researched

Teachers have offered students experiential learning through field trips; however, when support for field trips in low socioeconomic schools is reduced, it is unclear how teachers respond.

Purpose and Significance of the Problem

Purpose

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore how teachers in low socioeconomic schools perceive or respond to the decreased support for field trips available to children.

Significance of the Problem

Research suggests that field trips provide an important opportunity to deepen student learning. According to prior research, connecting to the outside world situates learning, facilitates knowledge transfer, influences student learning attitudes, and develops students’ interests and motivation (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000; Eschach, 2007; Hofstein & Rosenfeld, 1996; Louv, 2008; Nadelson & Jordan, 2012). Nadelson and Jordan (2012) found that field trips allowed students to take content learned in the classroom to context into real-life experiences away from the school site. Bransford et al. (2000) concluded that this cognitive transition opened the possibility for greater comprehension and retention of knowledge. They suggested that students
participating in field trips are in a better position to transfer, utilize, and retain
knowledge. Hofstein and Rosenfeld (1996) concluded that this process of connecting to
the outside world warrants the use of field trips for learning. In a related study, Eshach
(2007) suggested that field trips provide situated learning in new topic-related
environments by introducing students to different learning conditions that cannot occur in
the classroom. For example, while teachers can bring sea life into the classroom for
students to examine, a field trip affords students and teachers the experience of the
natural habitat of sea life where they acquire a more comprehensive understanding.
Research has further suggested that when students’ interest levels are high, they are more
focused and demonstrate an increased level of participation around the topic; therefore,
learning increases. Capturing the full attention and participation of students may be
accomplished by affording new contexts that demonstrate the significance of classroom
learning and supports students to apply their perspective (Nadelson & Jordan, 2012).

While there are extensive studies on the topic of field trips and student learning,
few have explored how teachers change their practices in response to diminishing
opportunities and support for this pedagogy. Deeper insight into how teachers respond to
these circumstances may serve educational leaders and staff.

**Research Questions**

These questions guided research and framed the methodology for this study:

1. How do teachers describe their experiences with field trips for children in a low
   socioeconomic school?
2. How do teachers describe what happens when support for field trips is reduced?
3. How do teachers respond to these situations?
In alignment with the descriptive questions, a phenomenological research design approach was taken to explore the teachers’ lived experiences in planning and leading field trips seeking to understand how these activities affect student learning.

**The Conceptual Framework**

**Researcher’s Stance**

On a personal level, my passion for field trips began in the 1960s when I was a young girl in Huntsville, Texas and attended Sam Houston Elementary School, which today would be a Title I school. In the 1960s in the South, there were many restrictions for African American youth in terms of where we were allowed to attend school or gather for educational or social activities. We were primarily limited to our neighborhood schools and churches. Those community experiences were wonderful; however, I always wondered about the areas we were not allowed to access.

It was not until our school would take us on field trips that I discovered firsthand some of the answers to my questions about the surrounding communities. On these trips, I felt safe and was able to explore emerging ideas and gain new experiences with people I trusted and respected, including my peers and teachers. The teachers were happy to receive questions about the expeditions. Parents volunteered and helped plan and serve as chaperones. Rare as they were, field trips connected me to an unknown world. They unleashed a desire to explore natural environments, museums, science fairs, and what society had to offer in safe learning surroundings.

I currently work at a Title I school, and I have been a preschool teacher for 26 years. Throughout that time, my desire to participate in field trips has not been extinguished. Over the years, I have learned that young children are eager to extend what
they have learned in the classroom to the communities outside their school. I continually experience my students’ enjoyment in exploring and discovering answers to their questions. The students, parents, staff, and I enjoy planning and implementing field trips for my classroom so that what is learned in formal settings is extended to non-formal settings. To implement these experiential learning opportunities, grants are researched to identify scholarships and other forms of sponsorships. Repetitive and time sensitive paperwork must be completed and submitted. In addition, there is the need to solicit parents to participate as chaperones and to help raise funds for transportation and admission fees. I am curious about the commitment of other teachers who plan field trips for students. In this study, I sought to understand their perception of field trips, their experiences in planning and implementing them, and the value they ascribe in this form of experiential learning.

Figure 1 illustrates the assumed connection between formal and informal learning and the outcome based on my own previous formal and informal learning experiences as a student and classroom teacher. It is my desire to explore others’ expectations through this research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formal learning + Informal learning = A Lifelong learner</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(in the classroom)</td>
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<td>(outside of classroom)</td>
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Figure 1. Formal and informal learning.
I conducted this phenomenological research by taking a social constructivist approach and utilizing an epistemological philosophy, wherein the interaction between the participant and the activity is the phenomenon. It is a partnership with no one true or valid interpretation (Thorleifsdottir, 2008). My epistemological stance demonstrates my role as a constructivist, understanding that there is extensive and meaningful data relevant to the study (Creswell, 2007). I spent time in the field collecting information as a means to capture the essence of the participants’ lived experiences. The morals, values, and ethics of care shared between the participants guided the description of their lived experiences of the phenomenon. Given the shared understanding between the participants and myself as researcher, an established process as it relates to the nature of people, their abilities, their relationship with the world and with each other was the impetus for the researcher’s position as a social constructivist (Gergen, 2001, p. 115).

**Conceptual Framework: The Research Streams**

To research this topic, the researcher identified three streams of theory, research, and practice to inform this work. The following three streams guide this research: (a) experiential learning, (b) field trips, and (c) education in low socioeconomic communities. Figure 2 shows the interplay of the three streams.
Experiential learning. It is essential to this study to explore the breadth of the theory, research, and practice on experiential learning. The foundation for experiential learning emerged from research and theory introduced by Dewey (1916, 1938), Piaget, (1952), and Vygotsky (1978a). Dewey, known as the modern father of the experiential education movement, stressed the unity of educational theory and practice (Wojcikiewicz, 2010). Dewey framed the initial theory on this subject in several books on education and philosophy, including *Democracy and Education* (1916) followed later by *Experience and Education* (1938). He founded and participated in the “laboratory school” for children associated with the University of Chicago. The laboratory school later became the Dewey School. Dewey (1938) insisted that education required a
foundation grounded in a theory of experience. Dewey was adamant in this position and this early work is the most comprehensive account of his work in education.

Dewey believed that neither traditional nor progressive education was adequate alone, rather both were necessary and should be applied with aspects of a well-developed theory of experience. His approach to education allowed for a system that respected and incorporated all types of experiences and provided meaningful learning opportunities that were both historical and social, as well as organized and dynamic (Dewey, 1938). In short, Dewey’s focus was to reform formal education to what he termed as “an educative experience” (Dewey, 1938, p. 11).

Dewey’s work has many similarities to that of Piaget, a Swiss developmental theorist, who believed children’s thought processes were different from adults and that their development advanced in four stages. Piaget (1952) suggested that the four stages of a child’s development included: (a) the sensory motor stage from birth to two years, when children use their physical motor skills and senses to explore their world; (b) the pre-operational from two to seven years, when children are less focused on senses and physical motor skills and unable to think logically; (c) concrete operations from seven to 11 years, when children have more logical thinking and require more concrete materials to support comprehension; and (d) formal operation from 11 years and over, when youth are capable of thinking abstractly and solving problems in their heads. Piaget’s representation of development is one of the foundations that has informed experiential learning in public education.

Vygotsky, a Russian psychologist, also saw children’s thinking developing in stages. His focus, however, was on the social and cultural influences of children’s
learning, and his sociocultural theory addresses both cognitive and social development. He developed his theory about the significance of relationships between children and more knowledgeable peers and adults, also known as Zone of Proximal Development. This concept defined the extension of skills a child is able to accomplish with the assistance of an adult or more experienced child (Vygotsky, 1978b). In contrast to Piaget, Vygotsky did not perceive the child as a solitary initiator of knowledge, but instead as an active partner learning within communicated social constructs. He stressed the role of language in cognitive development. Like Piaget, Vygotsky stressed the significance of language development, learning, and teaching for the child’s cognitive development. In Chapter 2, the theories espoused by Dewey, Piaget, and Vygotsky are further analyzed and related to this study.

Field trips. It is critical to begin this research by clearly understanding how scholars in the field of education define field trips and other out-of-classroom activities. This process enables teachers to determine their value as an effective educational tool. Eshach (2007) defined field trips as learning activities in informal or non-formal settings. Taylor et al. (1997) saw field trips as tools that enhance students’ background knowledge. They suggested that field trips serve to promote parental participation and concluded that well-planned field trips in the surrounding community serve as a tool that helps broaden children’s concept of the world around them.

Melber (2008) asked the question, “How do we make field trips effective learning experiences for young students?” Her findings suggested that the best way to learn about science is through manipulation of authentic objects and real specimens. Additionally, Melber (2008) suggested that traditional museum settings might ignite critical thinking
and increase dialogue on a higher level amongst young children. Taylor et al. (1997) and Melber (2008) both concluded that field trips spark and broaden children’s learning about the world around them.

Knapp (2007), Tal and Morag (2009), Zoldosova and Prokop (2006), and Fjortoft (2001) concluded that well-planned field trips have a meaningful impact on learning. Knapp (2007) conducted a phenomenological study to investigate the longitudinal retention of participants who participated in an out-of-school science field trip. He found two major themes that related to the participants’ recollection of the field trip and concluded that the episodic nature of field trips makes it difficult to investigate how students learn science. Tal and Morag (2009) employed an interpretive methodology to investigate how teaching out-of-classroom experiences and reflection influence teachers’ practices and perception of non-formal learning. The authors concluded that teachers do not effectively teach in out-of-classroom environments because their training does not support or include the appropriate learning. Their study suggested that teachers require training in the area of teaching in non-formal environments to effectively extend what students learn in the classroom to real-life experiences. Zoldosova and Prokop (2006) conducted a quantitative approach to investigate informal science education in a science field center. The authors concluded that field trips to science centers may be one of the most effective methods to motivate students’ interest in science. Finally, Fjortoft (2001) conducted a quasi-experimental study finding that the natural landscape appeared to have a functional impact on children’s behavior and play and offered increased opportunities for learning. This research, and more, is discussed further in Chapter 2.
**Education in low socioeconomic communities.** Schools in low socioeconomic communities generally are a part of the Federal Title I program. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2010), the Title I program is designed to provide financial assistance to local educational agencies (LEAs) and schools with elevated percentages of children from low-income families. Its goal is to aid in ensuring that all children have the opportunity to meet challenging state academic standards (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). An important component of meeting these academic learning standards might include experiential learning opportunities through field trips. Researchers have documented field trip planning challenges in low socioeconomic communities and suggested ways to avoid them (Cooke-Nieves, 2011; Eshach, 2007; Rebar, 2009). This research is reviewed in detail in the Chapter 2.

**Definition of Terms**

**Experiential learning**

Experiential learning is “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience” (Kolb, 1984, p. 41).

**Field trips**

Field trips situate learning and enable knowledge transfer by expanding opportunities to enhance students’ learning attitudes, interest, and motivation (Nadelson & Jordan, 2012).

**Knowledge transfer**

Knowledge transfer occurs when field trips create opportunities for learners to apply what they have learned in formal academic settings to informal and non-
formal settings. Students take what is learned in the classroom to real-life experiences outside the classroom to apply or extend their knowledge (Eshach, 2007).

**Situated learning**

The students’ learning takes place in the natural setting of the subject (Nadelson & Jordan, 2012).

**Assumptions and Limitations**

**Assumptions**

Having worked in the field of education for approximately 26 years, the researcher brings certain assumptions to the study based on her tacit experiences. The researcher primarily believes that students excel academically, socially, emotionally, and physically when exposed to both formal and informal learning. Teachers’ pedagogical strategies and student learning that take place in the classroom are extended and applied to relevant opportunities that prepare students to become lifelong learners. As an educator and social constructivist who advocates for both formal and informal education for all students, the researcher’s primary intention was that this study will add to the existing body of literature that addresses the educational benefits of informal and non-formal learning. She assumed that exploring the subjects’ lived experiences to extract the essence of the phenomenon would provide deep, rich data to this arena of scholarly research.

It was assumed that the selected teachers would understand the language and concepts in the semi-structured protocol for the interviews and that teachers participating in the study would respond to the interview questions openly, sharing their lived
experiences of planning and leading field trips. It was expected that these descriptions of shared experiences would provide a sense of teacher satisfaction and accomplishment with this pedagogy. Finally, it was assumed that field trips are diminishing in low socioeconomic communities as a result of decreasing funding, parent participation, and administrative assistance. While the assumptions of the researcher may impact the interpretation of the data, using bracketing (epoché) allowed for the representation of the findings that accurately reflected the perceptions of the respondents (Moustakas, 1994).

**Limitations**

A limitation is how well the participants in the sample group represent the greater population of teachers in low socioeconomic elementary schools. Since the participants in this study are all from a single school site, their experiences and responses to field trips may be different when compared to other school site populations. However, their experiences may be indicative of experiences of other teachers at similarly located low socioeconomic schools in urban minority communities.

**Summary**

This study investigated how teachers perceive, value, plan, and implement educational field trips for pre-kindergarten–fifth grade student learning in a low socioeconomic community. The research asked how this form of education influences learning, and if it leads to a loss of opportunities for students, to take what is learned in the classroom to real-life experiences. This study employed a phenomenological qualitative research methodology with the intent of developing a meaningful understanding of the essence of the experiences described by teachers who are planning and leading effective field trips.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

**Introduction to Chapter 2**

Research has shown that out-of-classroom learning activities enhance student knowledge and create a context for social development (Pace & Tesi, 2004; Taylor et al., 1997). This study explored the goals and perspectives of pre-k–5 teachers related to their planning and implementing field trips as an effective tool for teaching and learning in a low socioeconomic community. A qualitative approach was taken to understand teachers’ experiences in this process.

Without teacher initiatives, field trips generally do not occur in public schools. A growing body of research has documented that fewer teachers are making efforts to develop informal learning opportunities because of the barriers they face (Lei, 2010; Melber, 2008). Louv (2008) noted that young children are spending less time outdoors enjoying and exploring the natural environment and suggested that outdoor experiences allow students to transfer text and dialogue to real-life experiences.

**Conceptual Framework**

The three streams of theory, research, and practice reviewed in this chapter are shown in Figure 3.
Figure 3. The conceptual framework with the three research streams.

**Literature Review**

The literature review presents research, theory, and practices that focus on the value of experiential learning and specifically field trips in low socioeconomic communities. The theory, research, and practice discussed offer a foundation to better understand the phenomenon explored.

**Experiential Learning**

Experiential learning emerges from the theoretical representations of Dewey, Vygotsky, and Piaget.
Dewey. Dewey (2002a) questioned the inauthenticity of uniform or standardized training and suggested that it lacked social purpose. He believed the formal process of teaching and learning in elementary schools was absent of supporting the child’s interests. He called for a shift in focus to experiential learning. Dewey (2002a) noted:

When we experience something we act upon it, we do something with it; then we suffer or undergo the consequences. We do something to the thing and then it does something to us in return: such is the peculiar combination. (p. 163)

Dewey suggested that the nature of experience is comprised of an active and passive element. In the active sense, experience is trying, a term synonymous with the term experimenting. In the passive sense, it is undergoing (Dewey, 2002a). Dewey (2002a) gave the example of when a child explores fire and places a finger into the flame. He did not consider this action to be an experience until the action was connected with a precise consequence; in this case, the consequence was pain. Understanding the results of the action taken is the process of experiential learning that connects the child to the physical and social world around them.

Dewey (2002a) stressed that life at school should be structured to organize itself on a social foundation and discipline, to grow out of the natural experiences and necessities of community life as it is naturally experienced by the children. In this way, Dewey (2002a) suggested that self-regulation would develop from the things children desire to do because they would find that this type of structure supported the realization of their intentions, needs, interests, and wishes and provide direct purpose and meaning to the student.
Dewey (2002a) suggested that teaching and learning must have purpose and meaning for the students. He used the logic that the child already knows something about the topic the teacher is trying to teach. The most advantageous method uses this experience as a springboard to scaffold the child’s background knowledge of the topic. Dewey made the point that everything a child learns before going to school has some direct influence on his or her life (Eshach, 2007; Piaget, Gruber, & Voneche, 1977; Veer & Valsiner, 1994). Dewey proposed that the answer to education was not reading books nor listening to the description or details of the nature of the growth of a flower or birth of a baby chick but instead experiencing the planting of a flower seed or observing the hatching of the chick (Dewey, 2002a).

**Vygotsky.** Vygotsky (Veer & Valsiner, 1994) believed children learned more if they were learning in a social setting. He addressed children’s developmental processes, noting they learn “the items of cultural experience, the habits and forms of cultural behavior and cultural methods of reasoning” (p. 57). He stressed the importance of distinguishing between what is learned and what is developed naturally. The natural development of conduct is directly connected to the child’s normal organic growth and maturation.

Vygotsky’s (1978a) work suggested that psychological functions improve the child’s ability to reason and understand the appropriate behavioral patterns. Vygotsky (1994) described the impact of maturation on learning, noting that an older child has better recall and remembers more than a younger child because the older child had more time to mature naturally and experience memorizing during a longer period of growth.
Vygotsky (1978b) explained there was a difference between the level of learning a child can achieve studying alone and the level they can achieve by working with a teacher or a more advanced peer on the subject matter at hand. His work established the theory of the Zone of Proximal Development:

It is the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. (Vygotsky, 1978b, p. 86)

Vygotsky (Veer & Valsiner, 1994) referred to McCarthy’s (1930) study of preschool children to demonstrate that what a child can perform with assistance today the child will be capable to perform independently tomorrow. McCarthy (1930) stated that two types of functioning were evidenced among children between the ages of three and five: (a) the functions that the children already have and (b) those functions they can execute under supervision, in groups, and while in collaboration with one another. The latter group, however, had not mastered these functions independently. Her study found that the functions being learned and supported with supervision were at the actual developmental stage of five-to-seven years of age. The Zone of Proximal Development provides educators with a theory that supports the internal course of development and suggests a teaching approach to best support learning.

**Piaget.** Piaget, a Swiss biologist, philosopher, behavioral scientist, and genetic epistemologist also studied the development and maturation processes of children in stages (Piaget et al., 1977). His work in cognitive psychology focused on developing a common theory of knowledge development, how a child develops knowledge of the world, and the role of biology in this process. His work has been discussed in two parts:
(a) his theory of adaptation and the process of using cognitive schemes and (b) his theory of cognitive developmental stages from birth to adulthood.

Piaget (Piaget et al., 1977) suggested that intelligence was represented by how an organism interacted with its environment through mental adaptation. They indicated that how an individual uses mental models or structures to control this adaption then shapes his or her perception of the world. This perception is driven by biological impulse to sustain balance (equilibrium) between those mental models or structures and the environment.

The first segment of Piaget’s (2001) stage theory begins with the knowledge that infants are born with reflexes that enable them to interact with the environment. These reflexes are soon replaced by mental models or structures that enable the infant to interact with and adapt to the environment. This adaptation process occurs in one of two different ways (through the process of assimilation or accommodation). The adaptation process is a vital component of constructivism and is based on the theory that the building of knowledge is a continuous process of self-construction; as a child moves through and interacts with the environment, learning is constructed and shaped into cognitive systems.

When aspects of the environment do not agree with an individual’s mental models or structures, either the perception of the environment can be modified so new information can be coordinated with existing structures through assimilation or the cognitive structures themselves can be modified as a result of the interaction through accommodation. In either circumstance, the process of assimilation or accommodation allows for adaptation of the individual to occur (Piaget, 2001). Piaget’s theory suggested that the learning process is built on the connection between the mind and society.
Piaget explained the second part of his theory, in four stages of cognitive development. Piaget’s (Piaget et al., 1977) first stage of cognitive development is the sensorimotor stage. During this stage, infants and toddlers (birth to two years of age) acquire knowledge through sensory experiences and manipulating objects but exclude the use of symbols. The second stage of cognitive development is the preoperational stage. In this stage, children (approximately two years of age to about seven years) learn through pretend play but still are challenged with logic and understanding the point of view of others. This stage is recognized by the demonstration of intelligence through the use of symbols, primarily the use of language. The third stage of cognitive development is the concrete operational stage. Children (approximately 7 years to 11 years) begin to think more logically; however, there is little flexibility in their thought patterns, which causes their thinking to be quite rigid. The fourth and final cognitive developmental stage that Piagetian theory suggested is the formal operational stage. At this stage, individuals (seven years and upward) are able to increase in logic, have the ability to use rational reasoning and make sense of abstract concepts.

**Informal learning opportunities, an application of theory.** In addition to the theories of Piaget (Piaget et al., 1977), Dewey (2002), and Vygotsky (Veer & Valsiner, 1994), the study of experiential learning continues to be researched by others who study informal learning opportunities for young children in the form of field trips. DeWitt and Storksdieck (2008) drew upon Dewey’s (2002b) theory of experiential learning and suggested that teachers tend to agree that the best use of field trips includes an understanding of the students’ background knowledge, interest in the topic, structure of the field trip, social context of the trip, teacher’s objectives, and the before/during/and
after the field trip preparation. This methodology appears as the normal and appropriate method of extending teaching and learning.

Lentini (2008) investigated the purpose and effectiveness of informal learning settings to enable children’s cognitive growth and development in the areas of curiosity and meaning-making behaviors. The study documented the activities and thinking of 16 children, ages 1-11 years, while playing in a museum’s rice boat exhibit. According to Lentini (2008), the closer the correlation between the child’s instinctive curiosity and the teacher’s inquiries, the longer the child engaged in the activity and greater potential for meaning making. Lentini’s (2008) research reinforced Vygotsky’s (1986) conclusions that learning occurs when there is interaction between adults and peers who are more knowledgeable. Lentini (2008) concluded that teachers need the ability to interpret children’s needs and thinking through their patterns and trends of behavior. In this way, teachers may take an instrumentalist perspective, taking the form of Dewey’s (2002b) doctrine of instrumentalism. This view enables the teacher to better understand how children’s thoughts and ideas transform into action, which determines their truth. In addition, Lentini found that the same stimuli that inspires curiosity and seeks meaning in informal settings may exist in a formal setting as well.

Nespor (2000) employed an ethnographic study in other informal settings to explore transformations in public spaces and the school’s part in bringing children to those spaces. Nespor (2000) described a field trip whose purpose was to learn about art, visit the city’s history, and become aware of spatial borders and boundaries established by society through the discovery of local regions unknown to young students in modern times. Nespor (2000) concluded, as did others (Dewey, 2002b; Piaget et al., 1977;
Vygotsky, 1994), that field trips frame or structure how children fit in and makes sense of the surrounding environments. Nespor’s study found that urban youth want to move beyond the boundaries of their urban communities to explore and participate in new environments that are not part of their daily experiences. These opportunities expand their knowledge base, imagination, creativity, and their desire to engage and connect to a broader community. His study underscored Dewey’s (2002b) and Vygotsky’s (1994) theories that the education of young children should take place in a societal setting. It demonstrated the need for children to adapt through the assimilation or accommodation process to create and sustain equilibrium with the environment as explained by Piaget (Piaget et al., 1977).

**How the stream informs the research.** Dewey (2002) and Vygotsky (Veer & Valsiner, 1994) had different perspectives on how children learn, yet they came to the same conclusions as how they should be educated. Dewey took an instrumentalist approach and Vygotsky took a Marxist social theory approach. Their conclusions related in several ways. Both opposed teacher elitism. They were against teachers who taught as if they were all knowing and better than their students. They believed teachers should be innovative and practical in their approach to teaching, maximizing opportunities for students to think independently.

Piaget (Piaget et al., 1977), Dewey (2002a), and Vygotsky (Veer & Valsiner, 1994) believed that education should be taught in a social context and that students should learn how to think and not just memorize and repeat information. Dewey concluded that students need to participate in real-life activities that fostered creativity and working cooperatively. Similarly, Piaget (Piaget et al., 1977) concluded that learning
is centered around the correlation between mind and society. Vygotsky’s “Zone of Proximal Development” demonstrated that there was a difference between the level of learning a child could achieve on their own and a level they could achieve while working with a teacher or a more advanced peer. Together, they advocated learning in a real-world setting that provided meaningful academic and social learning opportunities.

When relating their research to the use of field trips as a basis for experiential learning, all three theories have a strong influence on the process. Dewey (2002a) stressed that education should be a combination of vocational and academic activities. Vygotsky (Veer & Valsiner, 1994) might have the teachers and/or more experienced peers as guides to support the students with hands-on learning in real-life experiences. Piaget (Piaget et al., 1977) likely would encourage teachers to provide field trips in different social contexts to allow for students to adapt to their surrounding society. Collectively, the researchers’ theories and methodologies suggest the importance of using field trips and other experiential learning options as learning tools for children.

**Field Trips**

Numerous studies have recognized the influence of field trips on cognitive development for students whether the purpose was to introduce or extend an educational concept (Eshach, 2007; Farmer, Knapp, & Benton, 2006; Hurley, 2006; Melber, 2008; Pace & Tesi, 2004; Taylor et al., 1997). Several researchers conclude that teachers should plan and implement field trips that will foster retention of the experience and enrich the student’s overall cognitive development (Farmer et al., 2007; Melber, 2008; Pace & Tesi, 2004). Field trips support social development in young children and have been found to be a significant factor in building an understanding of structure in their
immediate environment and their surrounding world (Fjortoft, 2001; Hurley, 2006; Lei, 2010; Taylor et al. 1997). These researchers have demonstrated that teachers value field trips, which provide cognitive, social, and emotional development in young children preschool through fifth grade.

Field trips and cognitive development. Several studies have described the influence of field trips on students’ cognitive development (Eshach, 2007; Farmer et al., 2006; Hurley, 2006; Melber, 2008; Pace & Tesi, 2004; Taylor et al., 1997). Researchers have concluded that teachers should plan and implement field trips that will foster retention of the experience and enrich the student’s overall cognitive development (Farmer et al., 2006; Melber, 2008; Pace & Tesi, 2004). Field trips have been consistently found to support social development in young children and be a significant factor in building an understanding of their immediate environment and their surrounding world (Fjortoft, 2001; Hurley, 2006; Lei, 2010; Taylor et al., 1997).

Eshach (2007) defined field trips as learning activities in informal or non-formal settings. He concluded that personal, physical, social, and instructional factors influence learning in non-formal environments and that each of these factors include both cognitive and affective elements. Similar to Taylor et al. (1997), Eshach (2007) concluded that out-of-school learning can be extremely effective in helping students learn to value and build a positive attitude toward an identified topic. He recommended that in planning field trips, teachers first need to determine whether their objective is to introduce a topic or to motivate students to go deeper into a particular subject. Eshach’s study offered insights regarding how to define the purpose and goals to assure effective field trips.
Like Eshach, Farmer et al. (2006) also studied the level of student engagement and cognitive development through recollection. Farmer et al. (2006) used a phenomenological approach to investigate students’ recollections of a field trip experience 12 months after its occurrence. Their field trip was designed to provide insights into the themes of overcoming prejudice and poverty. It included a 45-minute walk on the Carver History Trail at Carver National Monument. A related classroom visit at the site involving a lecture on growing soybeans, the opportunity to explore exhibits, using microscopes and computer terminals, as well as participating in an interactive experience to make peanut milk, were included in the experience. Farmer et al. (2006) found that (a) remembrances were influenced by events that consisted of action and engagement and (b) content material was recalled by all students who participated in the study.

Taylor et al. (1997) sought to answer: “Can field trips embrace and expand what is valuable in the classroom; do field trips expand children’s concepts of the world around them; and can field trips serve to promote parental participation?” (pp. 141-142). They found that an appropriate and well-planned field trip into the immediate community builds a positive attitude as well as fosters a better perception of the world. Taylor et al. concluded that field trips are effective tools to enhance cognitive development and increase student knowledge. Through cognitive development, students may build background knowledge that affords them the opportunity to personalize firsthand experiences of the environment.

**Field trips influence learning retention.** A case study that researched the retention of field trip experiences was conducted by Pace and Tesi (2004). The purpose
of this study was to explore how eight adults between the ages of 25 and 31 remembered school field trip experiences from kindergarten through 12th grade. Pace and Tesi found that hands-on activities appeared to have had a positive effect on adults recalling information learned on educational field trips. Additionally, their findings suggested that the participants described social benefits that occurred in relationships with their peers. Pace and Tesi (2004) concluded that field trips can be an effective educational and social enriching experience for students, particularly when they incorporate hands-on activities.

Knapp (2007) conducted a study on student learning retention as it related to science field trips. Knapp investigated the learning retention of 23 fifth grade students who participated in a single geologic history field trip to Shenandoah National Park in the fall of 2004. Similar to the prior findings, Knapp found that (a) recollections were strongly impacted by actions taken by the students and (b) the science program topic and content were remembered by all of the students in varying degrees. Knapp (2007) concluded that action-based science experiences may establish episodic recall that potentially supports the development of semantic retention and leads to direct knowledge.

Melber’s extensive (2008) research, based on data collected at various natural history museums in the U.S., suggested that the best way to learn about science is to include authentic objects and real specimens for student manipulation. Melber (2008) concluded that traditional museum settings may ignite critical thinking and increase dialogue at a higher level among young children. She recommended that in planning field trips, teachers focus on what is interesting to children and provide time for them to enjoy the experience while making the visit memorable. The research discussed in this
sub-theme suggests that there is value in well-planned field trips that embody children’s interests and incorporate tools and other artifacts to add richness to the learning experience for children (Eshach, 2007; Melber, 2008; National Research Council, 1996). This can lead to retention of learning across time and distance.

**Benefits and drawbacks of field trips.** Pace and Tesi (2004) and Melber (2008) found that well-planned field trips can be an effective learning tool, while Taylor et al. (1997) demonstrated that teachers who teach in low socioeconomic communities can accomplish the same results with a well-planned and executed field trip for young children. Focusing on teachers’ planning of science field trips, Rebar (2009) conducted a study to investigate teachers’ planning and implementing of field trips seeking to explore: (a) how teachers employed strategies to link classroom curriculum and students’ field trip experiences, (b) how the trips were documented and background knowledge described that supported teachers, and (c) how teachers reviewed and summarized research on effective pedagogical strategies for field trips. Participating teachers were required to have scheduled field trips to Oregon Coast Aquarium (OCA) during a two-month period of time during the beginning of the school year. Rebar (2009) found that curriculum-linking strategies were apparent in all three phases of the field trip, and he concluded that field trips provided benefits that are not achieved in the classroom.

Thompson’s research drew on a geo-interpretative walk for fourth through sixth graders along the Oregon Coast Range. Thompson (2010) offered a vivid description of how this kind of activity should embody the following components: “the hook,” which is the message you want the participants to grasp on the trip; the “so-what,” which provides the response of the reason for the topic; and “being memorable” is what the participants
will take away and the core of a program is the essence of the message. Thompson (2010) concluded that children typically enjoy field trips and it is the opportune time to allow them to learn about the natural environment and experience firsthand aspects of their world. He suggested that these experiences provide permanent recollections that can inspire ongoing learning and exploration for students. The combination of a trusted teacher and an interpretative experience is a powerful method of practice that has been found to have a profound and lasting effect on students.

Kasper (1998) employed a mixed-methods approach to research the opinions of teachers and principals about outdoor field trips. Kasper (1998) limited the scope of the survey to 145 principals and 370 teachers chosen from elementary public and private schools in close proximity to Wild Basin Wilderness Preserve. Kasper found that public school principals with less experience with field trips thought field trips should be extracurricular activities, and public school teachers who did not foster field trips saw administration as an obstacle. Kasper’s research did not identify any significant differences between the opinions of teachers who participated in field trips and those of teachers who did not participate.

Regardless of the socioeconomic status of the community and how well the trip is planned, some of the negative aspects with which teachers are confronted include cost, the amount of time spent, special accommodations for physical disabilities, and unsuitable weather conditions (Lei, 2010). Kisiel (2007) identified another negative aspect of field trips as he researched teachers’ collaboration with informal educators. Kisiel found that informal educators’ perspectives do not align with teachers’ practices.
This is a real concern with teachers. Informal educators must be open to different means of supporting teachers to maximize learning experiences offered by field trips.

**The value of collaboration.** Two studies used the lens of collaboration between site coordinators and teachers (Coughlin, 2010; Nabors, Edwards, & Murray, 2009). Nabors et al. (2009) conducted a national survey of 60 field trip site coordinators attaining a 38% response rate. They (a) solicited feedback regarding successful students’ visits, (b) collected data on the opinions of site coordinators on the topic of effective field trips, and (c) provided teachers with ideas on how best to organize and lead successful field trips. They found that site coordinators suggested children needed to be prepared to engage in the activities and ask questions about the topic. When addressing teacher behaviors that favorably impacted field trips, site coordinators noted that teachers needed to request pre-visit information and review it with the students, introduce the field trip logistics, and connect the curriculum with field activities. They suggested that students needed to demonstrate good behavior, have fun and enjoy the experience, and be knowledgeable of site safety rules and follow them. When asked what benefits the students received, the site coordinators responded that students received real-life experiences with a different way of learning in a different environment. Nabors et al. (2009) concluded that teachers need to develop stronger relationships with site coordinators who can serve to inform teachers of how their students learn in site-specific venues and how effective their pre-planning has been.

Coughlin (2010) described the collaboration of a historical society, a university professor, and a local school district to organize a field trip to a historic one-room schoolhouse. The students received a pre-visit lesson and a post-visit assessment after
their field trip to a historical schoolhouse in Pennsylvania. The pre-visit consisted of two lessons, one with artifacts and the other with the children reviewing the timelines of the history of the school. During the field trip, the students explored the furniture and bookcases, they learned how water was brought from the nearby creek, they participated in a scavenger hunt, and each child was given a true story to read.

The post-visit work included discussions and reports that were prepared by the students. The study revealed that the teacher’s curriculum module was relevant to the learning needs of the third grade students. The materials and artifacts were helpful in the planning and preparation. The students’ knowledge increased and they became more appreciative of their community and its history. Coughlin (2010) concluded that field trips were a valuable tool that can be enhanced with purposeful planning and evaluation by teachers working in collaboration with site coordinators. These two studies demonstrated how schools work with community sites to develop an integrative field trip that provides worthwhile learning experiences for children.


Tal and Morag (2009) employed an interpretive methodology to investigate how teaching out-of-classroom experiences and reflection activities influence teachers’ practices and perception of non-formal learning in Haifa, Israel. The participants consisted of first, second, third, and fifth grade students; teachers were from a public
magnet Arab school and eighth graders from a Jewish middle school. Based on the data, the authors concluded that teachers did not effectively teach in out-of-classroom environments because their training did not support or include the appropriate learning. This study suggested that teachers require training in the area of teaching in non-formal environments to effectively extend what students learn in the classroom to real-life experiences.

Zoldosova and Prokop (2006) conducted a quantitative study with two groups of students: a control group of 365 students and an experimental group of 153 students. The experimental group experienced a five-day field trip in a science field center in Slovakia while the control group did not have this experience. After finishing the program, a survey was administered to rate student interest in science. The experimental group favored book titles that represented the science center, and the control group did not show an interest in these same books. The authors concluded that field trips to science centers may be one of the most effective methods to motivate students’ interest in science.

Another international study proved the enhanced value of field trips in natural environments. Fjortoft (2001) conducted a quasi-experimental approach with 46 kindergarteners, five to seven years of age from one school in Telemark, Norway. The experimental group of 17 kindergartners used the forest for free play daily for one to two hours over a nine-month school year. The reference group of 29 kindergarteners used their school’s fenced outdoor play yard for one to two hours daily and visited natural sites on limited occasions. Both groups had the same equipment on the play yards including sandboxes, swings, a seesaw, and other play equipment.
A pretest was administered at the beginning of school in September. The treatment lasted for nine months and ended with a post-test in June, the end of the school year. Fjortoft (2001) found that the natural landscape appeared to offer increased opportunities and development for learning. All the children were given a motor fitness test, which revealed that children using the forest to play performed better in motor skills than the children who were only in the school’s play yard.

**How the stream informs the research.** The researchers discussed in this stream have shown how field trips can be a valuable tool for teacher practices and student learning; they have a positive influence on learning retention and strengthen students’ ability to build and sustain background knowledge. Descriptions of the benefits and drawbacks of field trips were highlighted to understand how teachers plan effective explorations. Research has suggested that collaboration between teachers and site coordinators paves the way for a rich learning experience for students. Through theory, research, and practice, researchers throughout the world have explored experiential learning and informed teachers about the process, results, and value of planning and leading educational field trips in low socioeconomic communities. The third stream considers the importance of pedagogy and learning as a basis for fostering equity through education in low socioeconomic communities.

**Education in Low-socioeconomic Communities**

**Freire’s work provides a theoretical framework.** Freire (2005) believed in an educational pedagogy where schools were the agents of change for low socioeconomic communities. His theories saw education as providing the creative tools to open students’ minds to greater levels of consciousness that connected them to the real world
rather than as depositories for information to support an existing oppressive society.

Freire (2005) described how traditional teaching practices were instituted in poor communities and referred to this process as a “banking concept of education.” In this concept, knowledge was given in the form of a deposit from teacher to the student.

The teacher presents himself to his students as their necessary opposite; by considering their ignorance absolute, he justifies his own existence. The students . . . accept their ignorance as justifying the teachers existence – but . . . they never discover that they educate the teacher. (p. 72)

Freire (2005) suggested that the outcome of the traditional “banking concept of education” was that the more students stored the deposits delivered to them by the teachers, the less likely they were to develop critical thinking skills and become citizens equipped to change the world.

Freire (2005) emphasized the need for dialogue between the teacher and the students in low socioeconomic communities. He saw this interaction as the essence of education and pedagogy for freedom. He believed dialogue could not exist without a profound concern for the world and its people. An ethic of care is the foundation of dialogue. Dialogue in the classroom can provide the opportunities for teachers and students to build background knowledge that leads to cooperation, unity, organization and cultural synthesis that can be effortlessly transferred from the classroom to the community by a range of informal learning methodologies.

**Funding for schools in low socioeconomic communities.** Low socioeconomic communities have local educational agencies (LEAs) and schools with elevated percentages of children from low-income families. A major source of additional funding in these communities is federal Title I funds. According to Sanders (2008), Title I funds
originally went directly to assist those students identified as living in low socioeconomic communities and attending public schools.

Title I programs were originally influenced by the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision, which initiated society’s interest in educational equity. After the *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez* (1973) decision, a paradigm shift from an “equity” to “adequacy” perspective framed the availability of Title I funds. The focus shifted to ensure that every child received an adequate education. Further implications of this shift were the establishment and acceptance of standards-based reform with a focus on establishing testing criteria to meet these minimum standards including the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB; 2002).

Sanders (2008) discussed Title I schools and the implications of NCLB (2002). He stated that the implementation of NCLB with its structure of rewards and progressive punishments “may actually inhibit educational opportunities for the very population it was designed to serve—low income students” (p. 589). In its efforts to ensure accountability, the act puts in place a system of rigid testing criteria that all schools must follow. Schools that consistently fail to meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) goals are subject to restructuring efforts that may have included supplemental educational programs, replacing staff and administrators, installing new curriculum, a takeover by the state, being converted to a charter school, or closing the school. Sanders contended that these options negatively affected low-income students and limited the low-income schools’ ability to improve.

Since low-income schools are more likely to be affected by these sanctions, quality teachers and administrators tend to avoid lower performing schools that have a
higher probability of instability for employment and the teacher’s ability to control the content of their curriculum. Sanders (2008) recommended a demographic shift and a redistricting of school boundaries. He recommended an equitable share of both low-income and high-income students in schools. His findings agreed with Heise’s (2007) where one of the primary indicators of a student’s success was whether he or she attended a school with a high concentration of low-income students. Sanders believed that rezoning school districts in this way would provide better student outcomes and reduce the number of schools that are sanctioned by NCLB.

Weckstein (2003) discussed school accountability as it related to the mobile student under Title I of NCLB (2002). He described a mobile student as being difficult to academically assess or be accounted for in state mandatory reports. Additionally, their family mobility makes it difficult for the students and their parents to satisfy Title I requirements and receive the benefits the program provides for them. These mobile students are faced with three potential risks. The first is that the mobile student may not be counted in two significant areas: (a) they may not be assessed to determine their academic needs and (b) they may not have been counted in determining the school’s academic progress as it relates to the school’s accountability under NCLB. The second possible risk is there is the potential that lower-scoring mobile students could be moved from one school to another to bypass the school’s accountability to acknowledge the student’s lack of achievement. The third risk is that the student’s mobility makes it difficult for them to receive the educational assistance they may need to improve their academic performance.
Weckstein (2003) noted that Title I schools may choose to implement a comprehensive school wide program to address their academic deficiencies or they may choose to focus their improvement strategies on those students who are failing or at a greater risk of failing. This study provides a picture of the challenges that students, families, teachers, and administrators face in addressing the requirements of NCLB and providing a quality education for all students in a Title I school.

**Parental involvement in low socio-economic communities.** Giglio (2010) used a qualitative approach to explore how fathers participated in their children’s education at school and at home. Ten fathers (seven African Americans, two Hispanics, and one Caucasian) whose children attended Title I schools were participants in the study. Giglio found that these fathers believed their interests were not adequately represented when schools prepared parent programs and activities. Giglio concluded that her study reflected a current national trend that indicated men’s desire to engage with other men to discuss male issues and concerns regarding work, raising and educating their children, and caring for their families. This study emphasized the necessity for Title I school administrators and parent organizations to take a closer look at how their school and parent partnerships address the involvement of fathers.

Conley (2012) explored parental involvement and supporting the school community’s cultural wealth at three Title I urban schools in central Arizona. The purpose of the study was to investigate the principal’s views of guidelines and plans for parent participation. Conley (2012) found that each principal had a clear vision of their preferred parent participation program even if they were not able to fully implement their desired program. He concluded that parent participation in urban schools has been
identified as a vital part of school reform; when developing school-community relations, it is important to collaborate with diverse families and communities.

Van Velsor and Orozco (2007) studied school counselor strategies for involving parents from lower socioeconomic communities, finding less parent participation from low-income parents than from parents of higher income. “Parental involvement in the schools is associated with student improvement in a variety of areas including academic performance, attitudes and behavior, attendance, school adjustment and engagement, and graduation rates” (p. 17). They identified several barriers to low-income parent engagement in the schools including: demographic barriers relating to work inflexibility, transportation problems, language barriers and a lack of resources; psychological barriers including parents’ lack of confidence in their intellectual abilities, perception of racism and mental effects of poverty; and school climate barriers including the schools that do not encourage parent engagement and schools that do not address the families in a language or method that they can relate to or understand. These barriers were found in the study communities that had a high incidence of poverty.

**Gifted education in low socioeconomic communities.** Ford (2011) focused on culturally and linguistically gifted diverse students in urban settings. She recognized that gifted education faces critical challenges, as low socioeconomic communities are increasingly diverse. With this growing diversity, she identified the need to adapt many school practices to adequately address this student population. She makes the point that it is not just the need to increase the representation of students of color but also to more effectively respond to the academic needs of gifted students who are diverse. “Gifted programs represent the most segregated programs in public school; they are
disproportionately white and middle class” (Ford, 1996, p. x). She stressed that to improve the school environment and adapt to the diversity in the classroom, teachers must change their pedagogical approach.

Other research by Ford, Grantham, and Harris (1996) and Ford and Harris (1999) identified and emphasized the significance and the need for infusing multicultural education into the gifted education pedagogical practices. They maintained that multicultural and gifted curricula combined support strong possibilities that meet effective teaching practices and cultural and learning needs of gifted students of color in low socioeconomic communities.

Ford and Harris (1999) described a multicultural gifted education framework utilizing the existing models of Banks (1993) and Bloom (1956). Their model intersected with what had been “parallel curricula models” in education (p. 127). When a teacher-directive approach is taken, students are required to listen to facts, recall information, and asked to apply knowledge to what they have learned in a narrow way (e.g., chart the events). This method limits the development of the student’s imagination and initiative. Ford and Harris (1999) considered this level to be convergent thinking. Higher levels of teaching require students to explore, examine, critique, and synthesize their learning experiences aligning with the tenets of experiential learning. Child-centered methods motivate students to theorize or calculate and develop creative abilities in their drive to find solutions or reach their goals. This approach is more indicative of divergent thinking.

**Poverty and education outcomes.** van der Berg (2008) took an international view and described poverty as entailing more than a lack of financial resources. He
defined poverty as a multi-dimensional circumstance that is derived from the lack of an individual’s ability to function effectively in society. He noted that poverty negatively affects initial enrollment in schools in developing countries as well as the ability to move forward to higher education in developed countries. Most often, social exclusion is a factor for the underprivileged in rich countries. van der Berg stated, “Educational research has consistently found home background (socioeconomic status) to be an important determinant of educational outcomes” (p. 10). He stressed that a quality education reduces poverty in developing and developed countries. “Better educated people have a greater probability of being employed, are economically more productive, and therefore earn higher incomes” (p. 3). He suggested that there appears to be a limitation to what schools can do alone to improve the conditions of education in low socioeconomic communities.

In prior research, van der Berg (2007) noted that one must consider two distinct components of poverty. “Absolute poverty” is the nonexistence of financial resources needed to sustain a stated minimal standard of living, whereas “relative poverty” is understood as poverty that is partially determined by the society in which that person lives (p. 2). Both absolute and relative poverty are significant to education. Such individuals are likely to experience social marginalization, limited education, low income, poor communication skills, poor health, and other factors that create barriers to integration into mainstream society. People in low socioeconomic communities often feel excluded from the local school community, and the local community may feel excluded from the greater society. This sense of exclusion diminishes their ability to receive the complete benefits of the educational system and the associated community
services. Additionally, low socioeconomic communities have schools that are lacking adequate financial resources.

van der Berg (2007) found that at the low-income schools he studied, an average of only 8.7 of 22 desirable resources for teaching were available. He also found that in schools where public resources were distributed equitably, good teachers tend to avoid poor schools because of the greater difficulty of teaching underprivileged children. He noted that in developing countries, it is difficult to get good teachers to teach in rural areas, and in rich countries they avoid poor schools. These schools also hurt from having fewer resources because of budget limitations or inequitable resource allocations among schools. Additional resources are vital to improve innovative teaching practices and informal learning opportunities.

van der Berg (2007) stated, “for schools to assist children to escape poverty requires a mixture of special interventions and favourable economic circumstances” (p. 20). He documented that a diverse array of interventions have been implemented to negate the harmful consequences of low socioeconomic communities globally. These interventions include “remedial education measures, nutritional support, social work in the community, attempts by school authorities to involve poor parents in their children’s education, adult literacy campaigns, and anti-poverty policies, to name a few” (p. 20). Early childhood development efforts are seen as significant measures that give young children a healthy start in education and foster their growth and development.

Levin (2004) reviewed US data finding that “sustained improvement over time in high-poverty schools is rare, despite claims by studies of exceptional schools” (p. 47). His more recent meta-analysis supports the findings of the Coleman Report (Coleman et
al., 1966), which suggested it is difficult for schools to recover from the effects of having high populations of students with deprived home backgrounds.

Raffo et al. (2007) conducted a study on the relationship between poverty and education. They found there was no single reason why disadvantaged children perform less than equal to their counterparts in education. They concluded that “multiple factors at different levels play a part” and that “there are no ‘magic bullets’ that will enable such learners to perform as well and derive the same educational benefits as their more advantaged peers” (p. 50).

**How the stream informs the research.** Freire’s (2005) research provides a theoretical framework for teaching practices most commonly used in education settings in low socioeconomic communities. Instead of the traditional framework based on teacher-directed pedagogy, known as the banking concept of education, he stressed the need for an educational pedagogy by which schools open minds and are the agents of change for their communities.

Federal Title I funds are earmarked for public schools that had elevated percentages of children from low-income families. The intention was to support students in meeting state and federal academic standards. Two landmark cases spurred a paradigm shift in funding these schools. In 1954, the Federal Government was charged to ensure “equity” for all students in public schools and in 1973 the government changed from “equity” to “adequacy,” which then called for all public school students to receive an adequate education. The later shift shaped the availability of Title I funds and supported the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act and an increased reliance on standardized testing.
Researchers have suggested that low-income parents’ support for their children in school is sometimes not fully invited or welcomed by school staff and administration. Respect for parent involvement is a vital component to successful overall student achievement (Ladson-Billings, 1999; Sato & Lensmire, 2009; Van Velsor & Orozco, 2007).

An international perspective of education in low socioeconomic communities was provided by van der Berg (2008). He defined poverty as a lack of financial resources and a multi-dimensional circumstance that consists of the inability to function effectively in society. In developing countries, poverty negatively affects initial enrollment in schools and decreases the ability to advance in higher education in developed countries. Most researchers agree that better educated people have a greater chance of achieving employment, being economically more productive and earning a higher income (van der Berg, 2007). Exploring education in low socioeconomic communities offers a clear view of the challenges teachers face when planning and leading field trips.

**Summary**

The literature review presented research, theory, and practices in education that focus on the value of experiential learning and field trips in low socioeconomic communities. The literature review provided insights into the challenges and opportunities pre-k–fifth grade teachers face in teaching in low socioeconomic communities, the need for experiential pedagogy and dialogue to foster critical thinking, and the role of field trips in enhancing learning.

Field trips may create purposeful and meaningful connections to society for students and their families. Field trips have been shown to support students in many
areas including sustaining retention, cognitive and social development, and creating and sustaining background knowledge. This form of experiential learning requires the need for collaboration and cooperation among teachers, parents, site coordinators, and school administrators to adequately organize and implement these explorations. Successful field trips require respect for and acceptance of the diversity that exists in urban schools and communities. The challenge of conducting field trips in low socio-economic communities is that funding for Title I schools has diminished over the years and this means that teachers who seek to enrich curriculum with this form of experiential learning frequently must find their own source of funding for out-of-classroom experiences.
Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to add to the existing knowledge of pre-kindergarten–fifth grade teachers’ practices in planning and leading field trips designed to enable students to take content to context and build background knowledge. The researcher explored teachers’ lived experiences with the incorporation of experiential learning into their curriculum planning and design, with a goal to inform teaching pedagogy.

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do teachers describe their experiences with field trips for children in a low socio-economic school?
2. How do teachers describe what happens when support for field trips is reduced?
3. How do teachers respond to these situations?

This chapter introduces the research design and rationale, followed by a description of the population, site, and considerations regarding access to the site. Next, a list and description of the precise methods used to collect and analyze data are presented. Finally, a discussion of ethical considerations relevant to this study ends this chapter.

Research Design and Rationale

Introduction to the Research Design

The researcher conducted this study using a phenomenological approach to qualitative inquiry. The goal of phenomenological research is to inform the research
questions with gathered data that enables the researcher to understand the essence of
the studied phenomenon. In this case, an inductive process of inquiry was implemented
to study pre-kindergarten through fifth grade teachers who had planned and implemented
educational field trips in a low socioeconomic community (Merriam, 2009; Moustakas,
1994). The intent of phenomenological research is to gather data and explore and
understand the essence of people’s lived experiences. In this process, the participants
described the phenomenon as the researcher utilized an inductive procedure of inquiry to
make meaning of their descriptions (Merriam, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). The
phenomenologist seeks to “understand the perspectives of those involved, uncover the
complexity of human behavior in context, and present a holistic interpretation of what is
happening” (Merriam, 2009, p. 25).

The researcher has significant experience in planning and leading field trips for
pre-k–fifth grade students. In planning this research design, the researcher reflected on
her own experiences with a goal to become aware of assumptions and prejudices she
embodied in her approach to the study and then used epoche to limit these biases from
influencing her analysis. This process enabled the researcher to “bracket” her personal
experiences and investigate the teachers’ lived experiences of the phenomenon through a
fresh view and the closest eyes (Moustakas, 1994). As Merriam (2009) suggested, “We
are [closer] to reality than if an instrument with predefined items had been interjected
between the researcher and the phenomenon being studied” (p. 25).

The research design of this phenomenological study consisted of in-depth, semi-
structured one-on-one interviews, a review of related artifacts, and field notes drawn from
observations of participants during the interviews. This method allowed for triangulation
of the data, enhancing the validity of the findings. Data analysis of interviews, notes, and artifacts was conducted drawing on Moustakas’s (1994) model of horizontalization.

Moustakas (1994) recommended utilizing horizontalization of the phenomenological reduction phase when the researcher brackets the open-ended questions. The researcher takes every statement from the participant at equal value (Moustakas, 1994). Later in this process, statements irrelevant to the questions and the subject, as well as repetitious ones, were removed. Textual descriptions and solid elements of the phenomenon emerge from the reduction and lead to identification of significant themes and patterns. The researcher focuses on what the descriptions offered by the participants have in common and how they lead to the identification of findings. Figure 4 provides a visual representation of this process.

Adapted from Creswell (2007, p. 159)

*Figure 4. Stages of data collection.*
Site and Population

Population Description

The participants in this study were 12 of 22 current pre-k–fifth grade credentialed teachers, including an assistant teacher, who had planned and led field trips at Bridges Academy at Melrose Elementary School in the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD). All the participants taught at Bridges Academy for a minimum of five years. The teachers and assistant teacher met California requirements to teach and perform in OUSD pre-kindergarten and elementary schools.

The sample size for the interview population consisted of 12 teachers, including one pre-k assistant teacher, three kindergarten teachers, two first grade teachers, one second grade teacher, one third grade teacher, two fourth grade teachers, and two fifth grade teachers. All the teachers had a history of teaching young children a minimum of five years and experience planning and leading field trips, but had no formal training in field trip planning.

In terms of the demographic data of the population for this study, only broad demographic data across all employee groups were obtainable (OUSD, 2014). Nevertheless, it is common for the participants to mirror the demographic traits of all employee groups in the Oakland region. OUSD demographic data suggest that the majority of the employees in OUSD are residents of the City of Oakland or neighboring cities in the Bay Area. An estimated 38% identify as Caucasian descent, 30% as African-American, 25% Hispanic or Latino, and 18% as Asian. The percentage over 100% is due to the multiple counting for mixed-race identity.
Site Description

The participants in the study were from Bridges Academy at Melrose Elementary School, located in a low-income urban community in the Eastside of Oakland, California. The school is one of 53 public elementary schools in Oakland Unified School District. Currently, the District has an enrollment of 38,000 pre-K-12 students. Bridges is one of the smaller Title I schools with student and teacher populations of 350 and 22, respectively. The surrounding area is a low-income urban community with a mix of residential and small businesses. The student population consists of 94% Hispanic or Latino, 3% African-American, 2% Asian, and 1% Caucasian. One hundred percent (100%) of the student population qualifies for the free lunch program (Oakland Unified School District, 2014). Parents are involved, filling two primary roles, as described by Conley (2012). One is a decision-making role and the other is a supportive role. In the decision-making role, parents have a position on the school site council while in supportive roles, parents may volunteer in the classroom, at fundraisers, or for other school programs.

Site Access

As an on-site teacher at Bridges Academy, the researcher was ideally positioned to expediently gain access to the site, participants, and artifacts. She was aware of the school grounds, procedures, and scheduling as well as with the principal, teachers, and staff, allowing her to approach site access procedures with a high degree of confidence. Because no student was involved in the study, only the permission of the principal was needed for site access. The researcher reviewed her research proposal and gained the principal’s formal approval.
Research Methods

Description of Methods Used

Moustakas (1994) stated, “Descriptions keep a phenomenon alive, illuminate its presence, accentuate its underlying meanings, enable the phenomenon to linger, retain its spirit, as near to its actual nature as possible” (p. 59). In alignment with the research protocol, the research questions were analyzed through a methodology of triangulation including: (a) one-on-one semi-structured interviews; (b) field notes, including observation records; and (c) artifact analysis. The following are methods and procedures of the data collection process.

**One-on-one semi-structured interview protocol.** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 individual adult participants (protocol in Appendix A). The interviews were 45-60 minutes in length. The researcher asked participants 10 open-ended questions in a comfortable and private setting. Based on initial responses, the researcher asked probing questions to more deeply understand the participants’ descriptions of the phenomenon. A template was utilized to notate interview time and location and to record observations of the participants’ non-verbal communication (see Appendix B). The interviews were voice recorded using two devices and transcribed. Observations were added to transcriptions before they were analyzed.

**Instrument description.** Ten open-ended questions to invite discussion initiated the interview (see Appendix A). These questions were designed to encourage deeper dialogue that provided opportunity for the researcher to capture the essence of the phenomenon. The questions focused on the participants’ experiences of leading and
planning educational field trips in a low socioeconomic community, the value they placed on field trips, and their descriptions of student learning that emerged from the experience.

**Participant selection.** Selection consisted of pre-k–fifth grade teachers who were teaching at Bridges Academy at Melrose Elementary who had personally experienced planning and leading field trips. Those who met this requirement and responded to an email invitation were accepted on a first-come, first-included basis into the study. Additional information given to the participants included the goal of the study, and a time and location was established for review of the consent form and the interview. At that time, a consent form was presented and verbal consent was attained from each participant prior to the interview commencing (see Appendix C).

**Identification and invitation.** The researcher emailed an invitation to participate (see Appendix D). This letter informed teachers of participation requirements, interviewing procedures, their rights, time frames regarding the scope of the interview as well as the policy regarding confidentially of their involvement. The researcher contacted those who volunteered, reviewed information on the study, and established a time to meet where the consent process was reviewed and participant’s consent received. This was followed by the interview.

**Data collection.** Data were collected through the use of the researcher’s notes, two audio recordings, and word-for-word transcription. The one-on-one semi-structured interview protocol was followed for each interview. Additional questions allowed the researcher to probe initial responses for understanding and to assure rich, thick description. The interviewer took notes reflecting observations of participants’ body
language, attitude, and personal stance on planning and leading field trips experiences. After the interviews, the audio recordings were transcribed by an online transcription service. Observation and field notes were included in the transcriptions. The data were saved and stored in alignment with Drexel University’s data storage policy.

Observation. “To seek the essence of perception is to declare that perception is, not presumed true, but defined as access to truth” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. xvi). Observation is vital to capturing and understanding the essence of the phenomenon. In conjunction with the one-on-one interviews and the artifact analysis, observing each participant provided a deeper and richer perception of their lived experience of organizing and implementing field trips.

Instrument description. The observation took place throughout the course of the interview. The interviewer observed the participant in an agreed upon quiet and comfortable setting where there were no interruptions. The interviewer took notes during the interview to describe the participant’s nonverbal actions and gain deeper insight into the phenomenon.

Participant selection. Each elementary school teacher who met the criteria and served as a participant was observed during the interaction between the interviewer and interviewee with the intention to collect data by observing nonverbal actions.

Identification and invitation. The observations of the participants were a natural byproduct that emerged from the interview process.

Data collection. Field notes reflecting the observation of the participant’s nonverbal actions were taken by the researcher during the interview. Ultimately, the
observations reflected the face-to-face, electronic, and phone communications. The observation notes were recorded in the researcher’s journal.

**Artifacts.** The researcher gathered artifacts pertaining to the participant’s steps taken before, during, and after the field trip experience (see Appendix E). These artifacts included documents detailing District field trip policies and procedures and teachers’ written narratives of descriptions, purposes, and goals of field trips. With the consent of the participant, the researcher reviewed relevant artifacts assessing content and descriptive analysis to consider in light of the themes that emerged from both the interview and observations.

**Instrument description.** Artifacts were collected from each participant. The researcher reviewed and analyzed the artifacts in conjunction with the data gathered from the interview and observation notes. A deeper understanding of the teacher’s experience of planning and leading field trips, how they describe what happens when support for this pedagogy is reduced, and how they respond to these situations emerged.

**Participant selection.** Participants were requested to share relevant artifacts. These time-sensitive documents consisted of District field trip forms and applications, which included parent participation and insurance policies, transportation and event fees, a list of approved agencies licensed to transport children, safety precautions, and teachers’ roles and responsibilities including specific purpose and goal to be attained.

**Identification and invitation.** Prior to each interview, the researcher requested relevant artifacts that portrayed District field trip policies. Artifacts were from each participant collected at the interview.
**Data collection.** After the researcher collected, reviewed, and documented what was heard and seen in the data, she coded the data by rearranging themes to allow for connections and inform a narrative analysis. The data were organized by utilizing spreadsheets and Word documents.

**Researcher’s journal.** Since this is a qualitative study, the researcher maintained a journal throughout the study. The journal served to allow the researcher to accurately reflect on actions taken during the research to ensure the highest ethics of care and assist her in bracketing personal biases and perceptions.

**Data analysis**

Transcriptions were reviewed in detail. The researcher took every statement from the participants at equal value (Moustakas, 1994). Later in this process, statements irrelevant to the questions and the subject, as well as those that were repetitious, were removed. Textual meanings and solid elements of the phenomenon emerged from the reduction and led to identification of significant themes and patterns. Transcriptions and coding were maintained on a flash drive without Internet access and stored in a locked cabinet by the researcher.

**Coding**

The data collected from each of the 12 participants were aggregated through the descriptive coding process and their main themes and patterns were summarized into key words or phrases. Graphing and rearranging themes allowed for comparisons throughout the research methods. These strategies should be “planned (and carried out) in order to answer your research questions and address validity threats” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 96).
Thematic Data Analysis

A deeper analysis of the coding provided the emergence of themes and patterns. Themes described and organized the researcher’s data. This process allows for common themes to develop into theoretical constructs. “The write-up would then discuss each one of these constructs and how they integrate or relate with each other” (Saldana, 2009, p. 143). This procedure validates the interpretation.

Purposeful sampling was done to identify teachers who had led field trips within the last three years and to ensure researcher biases were not evident in the recruitment of participants. In an effort to not bias the study, the researcher bracketed her assumptions, allowing her to review and code the transcriptions while suspending her personal experiences relevant to the research.

Observations and field notes were retained on a drive without Internet access and maintained in the researcher’s locked cabinet. Individual interviews were transcribed to identify and gather significant statements of field trip planning and leading experiences. This stage, referred to as horizontalization, positioned significant statements to allow for emergent themes in the data. Together, the statements and themes were used to write a textual description of what was written and said of the participants’ experiences while staying true to their voices. This process was followed by the structural description of the environment relevant to how the teachers experienced the phenomenon. The structural description provided background to the experiences in the textual description. For the last step in gathering the data, the researcher used the structural and textural descriptions to write a composite description introducing the essence of the phenomenon. The composite description emphasizes the participants’ common experiences.
Data Interpretation

The interpretation of the written observations, field notes, and voice recordings created descriptive context to the content offered by the participants during the interview protocol. Horizontalization, a segment of the phenomenological reduction process, was used with the written observations, significant statements of the participants, and artifacts relevant to the study analysis and led to emergent themes, textural descriptions, and structural descriptions (Moustakas, 1994, p. 95).

Validity. A variety of perceptions and conflicting data emerged and were studied through the use of triangulation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The outcomes of the study were reviewed with the existing studies in the literature. All concerns regarding the validity of the study and reliability of the findings were analyzed. Additionally, any potential threats for research bias were reviewed.

Stages of Data Collection

The first step was to obtain Drexel University IRB consent. Once consent was approved, participants were invited to participate and selected on a first-come, first-included basis. The following timeline details the schedule for data analysis and reporting.
Table 1

Proposed Timeline for Data Analysis and Reporting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Development of research proposal</td>
<td>June – August 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral committee review and revisions</td>
<td>August 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposal defense hearing and approval</td>
<td>August 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRB Certification-Drexel University</td>
<td>September 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment of participants</td>
<td>September 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field research – Interviews and Focus Groups</td>
<td>October – November 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field research – Artifact review</td>
<td>October – November 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data analysis</td>
<td>November – December 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Draft chapters 4 &amp; 5 findings and discussion of findings</td>
<td>January – February 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submission and defense of dissertation</td>
<td>March 2015</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ethical Considerations

Pre-k–fifth grade teachers were the participants and primary sources of the narrative data in the research. The institutional research board (IRB) consent was requested and approved from the sponsoring institution, Drexel University. The researcher received a letter of permission from the site, Bridges Academy at Melrose Elementary, where research occurred. Consent was requested and explained as part of the protection plan. Permission was obtained from all interview participants through verbal consent with the clarification that participation was voluntary and each participant had the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Research commenced after the
validation of the IRB consent. It was necessary to inform participants that the researcher’s role in the study was different, separated, and unrelated to the researcher’s primary role as a prekindergarten teacher since this was a backyard and action research study. The researcher had to take a fresh eyes approach to the study.

Every reasonable measure was taken to protect the confidentiality of the participants in the study. Participants were arbitrarily given pseudonyms as an additional measure of protecting their identity. Recordings will be kept on a drive without Internet access and maintained in a locked cabinet during and after the dissertation process. Transcripts and other data that protected the confidentiality of the participants are maintained in a locked cabinet and on a secured drive in the principal investigator’s office, according to IRB standards.
Chapter 4: Findings, Results, and Interpretations

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of prekindergarten through fifth grade teachers in planning and leading field trips in a low socioeconomic school. Findings were obtained by analyzing thick, rich descriptions from interview transcripts, observation notes, and artifact reviews. In this representation, pseudonyms are used to maintain the participants’ confidentiality. Four themes emerged from the analysis of the data, each with related subthemes. Four results are presented from consideration of the themes and interpreted as they relate to existing literature, theory, and practice. This chapter concludes with a brief summary of the key points presented in this chapter.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this phenomenological study:

1. How do teachers describe their lived experiences in planning field trips for children in a low socioeconomic school?

2. How do teachers describe what happens when support for field trips is reduced?

3. How do teachers respond to these situations?

Findings

This phenomenological study involved a total of 11 teachers and one assistant teacher from levels of prekindergarten to fifth grade in a Title I School in the Oakland Unified School District in Northern California where the researcher is employed.
Certified teachers and assistant teachers in the school who had experience in planning and leading field trips were invited to participate. Participants were selected on a first-come, first-included basis. One prekindergarten assistant teacher, three kindergarten teachers, two first grade teachers, two second grade teachers, two third grade teachers and two fifth grade teachers participated in the study. All participants had taught for five years or more in the included location. Eight of the interviews were conducted in the participants’ classrooms, two were conducted in homes of the participants, one was held in a tea garden establishment, and one was in a small conference room of a private business firm.

Table 2

*Participant Descriptions. All Teachers have taught more than five years.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Pre-kindergarten</td>
<td>Assistant Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Second Grade</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Fifth Grade</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Third Grade</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Second Grade</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Second Grade</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data were collected from one-on-one semi-structured interviews, observations of the 12 teachers within the interview setting, and artifacts that were related to the teachers’ actions in planning and leading field trips at the school. All artifacts were reviewed from a binder stored in the principal’s office, which consisted of a field trip application packet completed by a teacher requesting field trip permission. The packet included the teachers’ requests and plans taken before, during, and after the field trip as well as approvals by local and District administrations.

Each interview was held in December 2014 and ranged between 45 and 60 minutes in length. Observation field notes taken during the interview were documented to enrich transcribed dialogue and to deepen meaning using information on the participant’s body language and expressions of emotions. Each of the 12 participants was assigned an identification number according to the numerical order of the interviews. For example, the first participant who scheduled a time to be interviewed and completed the interview process is referred to as Participant 1 or P1. The last participant who scheduled and completed the 12th interview is referred to as Participant 12 or P12. The interviews were recorded using two digital voice recorders; the secondary voice recorder was used.
as a backup in case the primary voice recorder should have defaulted. The interviews were sent to an online transcription service to be transcribed. Transcripts were coded manually by the researcher.

Four major themes emerged from the data analysis: (a) the teachers’ actions planning and leading field trips in a low socioeconomic school, (b) the overall perceptions of field trips in a low socioeconomic school, (c) the challenges planning and leading field trips in a low socioeconomic school, and (d) the potential support for planning and leading field trips in a low socioeconomic school. Each finding contains sub-findings and these are detailed in Figure 5. Both findings and sub-findings are described in full detail in this chapter and supported with thick, rich descriptions.

Figure 5. Findings and sub-findings of the study.
Finding 1: Teachers’ Actions Planning and Leading Field Trips in a Low Socioeconomic School

Each participant described his or her actions when organizing field trips. All the participants shared that a grade level approach was taken with this task. Each grade level team in this school consists of two to four teachers. The participants described that working together to create a systematic approach strengthens their purpose and learning outcomes. Participant 5 emphasized this in her description of collaboration amongst the third grade teachers.

In the past, I’d use field trips to collaborate. I collaborate with the third grade teachers when possible. We plan field trips that correspond with what we’re studying in class, typically. In January we’ll go to the Chabot Space & Science Center because we’re studying the solar system. We’ll go to the Oakland Museum because we are studying Oakland history, or we’ll go to the beach and Alameda because we’re studying adaptations of sea animals. I use them as a way to make real what we’re studying in the classroom.

Collaboration is the driving force that shapes their actions to organize field trips successfully. Their approach focused on three main components: (a) linking formal classroom education to informal education in the form of field trips, (b) actions taken to organize field trips, and (c) parent involvement in support of field trips.

**Linking formal and informal education.** Participants identified that topics taught or related activities in the classroom were often linked to field trips to enhance or extend students’ learning. Participant 7, a kindergarten teacher reflected on early actions taken to connect classroom content to context in the real world:

We try to organize the field trips and relate it to some of the subjects. Some subjects for example are science, social studies, and physical education. The most important part of this is that we try to connect the reality with some school subjects.
The participants acknowledged that students in low socioeconomic communities were more likely unable to deepen knowledge by visiting educational institutions such as history and art museums, science centers, and natural environments. They reported that for their students to visit such educational institutions, teachers would create learning opportunities in the form of field trips. Participant 1 said:

> Usually, how it happens is the teacher plans for the field trip according to the topic the children are learning. We brainstorm with the idea . . . inform parents to let them know that we are thinking of how to extend the knowledge of the children by going on a field trip.

This response was echoed by Participant 4 as she recalled connecting the curriculum to field trips:

> The kindergarten team for years has done two units of study with two field trips. One is a unit on farm animals and the other is a unit on zoo animals, but it is a study of animals in different habitats. For years and years we’ve gone to Tilden Park and to the Oakland Zoo.

In reference to teamwork and establishing pre-knowledge for k–5 students, a first grade teacher, Participant 10, simply stated, “We haven’t had money for field trips in many years. When we did, we started as a school planning out where we were taking our kids so that they would have various experiences in k–5.” Participant 2 spoke with passion about her experiences years earlier teaching fourth grade California history. At that time, public transportation was more accessible and there was more funding for field trips.

> I think the field trips that I’m really proud of are ones that I took when I was a fourth grade teacher teaching California history. There was more money for field trips back in the 90’s - I would say a lot more money for field trips. We had a lot of opportunities to go to different places. I took my fourth graders on a lot of really great California history trips, learning about California native peoples. We went to Coyote Hills and the Oakland Museum a lot. It got to the point where the
people at the Oakland Museum recognized my name because I was always taking my kids. (P2)

She affirmed that it was much easier to connect content to context when funding for these was more readily available.

As participants shared their experiences of connecting and extending classroom curriculum to out-of-classroom learning opportunities, Participant 8 touched on how a trip to the zoo, provided a natural setting to introduce animals with camouflage.

We have always been limited here budget-wise which field trips we can take because of the cost. Just recently, I arranged for a field trip to the Oakland Zoo, which I did as well last year. It relates to our unit that we are going to be starting in January on animals in camouflage. On our trip to the Oakland Zoo, a presentation is given on animal adaptations and animal features and characteristics, which go well with our curriculum on animals with camouflage.

Participant 9 reflected on differences he had experienced in previously teaching in a non-profit after-school program located in a low socioeconomic community.

When I worked in a non-profit after-school program in Oakland, we did not have to connect an educational component to the field trips. But here at ‘B’ it is required to make this connection in the paperwork that is provided to both the District and the Oakland Zoo outlining what we’ll do on the field trip, its connection to what we’re teaching in the classroom and the post activity to reinforce it.

Universally, the participants noted that the teachers at each grade level collaborated as a first step in developing a field trip that linked to a specific grade’s curriculum. Participant 5, a third grade teacher, detailed how working together can benefit teachers and students as they plan and participate in field trips.

If some people get a grant for just one class to go someplace. . . . We can squeeze two classes on a bus typically, so we sometimes will share a bus. That enables us to collaborate, bring those classes together and share the cost.
Participant 3, at the fifth grade level, highlighted:

At my last school I just took field trips on my own, but here pretty much everybody-the whole grade level will go on a field trip, which saves money. The field trips that we are planning are a lot more science-focused. A lot of experiential science stuff that they wouldn’t ordinarily get in the classroom. Participating in certain experiments or just being out in nature are learning experiences. I know for a lot of kids just seeing a squirrel is exciting. It is good to take them out and have these types of experiences.

Recalling her past participation as part of the school’s fourth grade team,

Participant 12 expressed that she was fortunate to be part of an experienced group that had planned their field trips in advance. These trips were selected to follow California Standards mandated for the classroom. She articulated that deeper research shaped the team’s planning before, during, and after field trips. Participant 12 stated:

You had to prove that your field trip was standards based and related to academia . . . we came up with a long log of basically the field trips, when it was going to take place, and how it was going to fit into the curriculum and try to space them out so that they would coincide with the unit that we were teaching in the class.

Participant 11, a third grade teacher, described the value of social interaction that provided fun new experiences and enabling her students to feel comfortable in new environments:

Honestly, the journey to and from the destination is probably more fun for me. The last field trip a couple of weeks ago, we went to the Exploratorium a couple of weeks ago. I had the bus drop us off early at Pier 39. The most memorable part of the field trip for me was walking around pier 39 seeing the sea lions, looking through the telescopes and taking a photo in front of the big park. They posed in front of the Christmas tree. We sang La Bamba and put on a little performance.

The participants shared how they implemented their primary steps in planning field trips by linking their classroom curriculum to informal learning experiences for their students. With emotion, many of the teachers described their commitment to making
sure they each understood the value of field trips and worked together to ensure the
field trips were appropriately linked to the classroom curriculum with a goal to deepen
the children’s learning as well as meet the district and state requirements. As stated by
Participant 1, “Usually, how it happens is the teacher plans for the field trip according to
the topic the children are learning.”

**Adhering to district protocol.** Commonly, participants shared that they could
not implement field trips without completing the Oakland Unified School District’s field
trip procedures. This was also evidenced in the artifacts housed in the principal’s office
used as primary artifacts in the study. Participant 6 described actions taken by the
kindergarten teachers as:

> We follow the protocol that is established by the Oakland Unified School District. We divide up the work among the team members, so one is in charge of the phone calling, one is in charge of the fees, another one does the paperwork, another one is in charge of typing up all of the letters and forms that are sent out to the parents. That’s pretty much what we have been doing for 17 to 18 years.

Participant 1 recalled a first step was seeking funding in the community to assure
that the cost of the field trip would be covered before field trip requests were presented to
the District. She expressed that in the past, the District provided funding for k–12 grade
levels and not preschool. It is important the preschool teacher locates funding before
approaching the District. Participant 1 shared:

> We reach out to the community. The teacher usually knows where funding can be found. Possible funding can be requested from the East Bay Regional Parks Office, the Oakland Zoo or other organizations to see if fees can be waived or reduced for admission so that the field trip can be affordable. We complete the application and submit it to the administrators for processing.

Participant 2 described the early stages of planning field trips for first grade:
All of the first grade teachers get together and decide on where they want to go for the field trip. Next, a teacher makes arrangements with the destination on their own time. The reservation has to be made in advance which takes time to schedule between the school and the field trip site. The District paperwork has to be completed at least a month before the trip. When the District is paying for the trip, the payment process can be difficult because most places want to be paid in advance but the District’s procedure is to make payment after the trip is completed. However, when you arrive at the venue, sometimes you must pay them upon entering and request reimbursement from the District.

Fifth grade teacher, Participant 3, explained that the District’s forms appear to have become more challenging.

Actually the forms have gotten a lot more complicated over the years. Now it has links with allergies. . . . When somebody at another school, a few years ago drowned on an eighth grade field trip, now there’s a thing about my child must know how to swim.

The form continues to have more items to check off, although it has to be submitted a month before the trip. Participant 3 added, “If it is something that requires District money, it just has to be that advanced so that they can get a purchase order.” Participant 9 reinforced comments made by Participant 3.

Ten to fifteen years ago the District application was only one page but now it’s a packet. The packet contains information on how to prepare the kids for the trip, the dos and don’ts for parents and chaperones, the child and adults ratios and a series of other instructions.

Kindergarten teacher Participant 4 made the point that if it were not for the support and friendly consideration of some designated venues, many of the field trips would not be possible. She described with emotion, “The East Bay Regional Parks is great! I think they’re very generous with providing transportation!” Universally, due to the economics of the community, the participants must consider cost before completing field trip documents. Participant 7 recalled:
Since the families are low income we have to organize activities that may minimize the cost we have to pay for transportation, food and admission fees. We also look to do walking trips and other activities that don’t require expensive transportation. These trips are planned as a kindergarten team effort.

Participant 8 echoed what Participant 1 shared:

It’s become more difficult, like I said, currently there is no budget for field trips. As teachers, we have to really get creative and look at programs that offer free admission or support, scholarship, bus transportation for Title I schools, which we are, which basically means that its students of low income communities of poverty.

Participant 10 described, “We start planning the field trips in the fall. This was done to start the process early because many organizations are slow to respond and difficult to contact.”

Third grade teacher Participant 11 gets an early start with taking her students out on field trips. She likes to conduct a field trip in the beginning of the school year. She stated, “I am not afraid to do it as soon as the year starts, but usually the parents might like a couple of weeks to get comfortable with leaving me with their babies.” This is particularly true for field trips.

Participant 12 offered similar comments as Participants 3 and Participant 9 in that over time, the District application became a more formal and complex process. Participant 12 shared:

I remember it being a lot simpler on mimeograph sheets but now you have to download the latest field trip forms, which now include insurance and made the process more complicated. We had to make sense of the application and if any portion was filled out incorrectly, the field trip would be compromised.

Participants commonly described working as a unit on each grade level to ensure they met all the requirements of the District and the selected field trip venue. It is important to complete and submit this primary step of providing the District paperwork to
receive necessary approvals to move forward with completing the field trip process.

Participant 7 shared her experience of following protocol working as a team and dividing the responsibilities:

Fortunately, this time, my kindergarten team is very efficient. One of the teachers is very good at writing letters, contacting the venues, and organizing all the documents. The other teacher knows a lot of places and organizations that can support the field trips for kindergarten. Most of the work we do related to writing, scheduling the venues, preparing the documents and talking with the principal are done by these two teachers. The other two teachers organize permission slips, meet with parents and divide the rest of the work.

**Parent involvement.** While participants commonly noted that parent involvement is valued at their school, mixed perceptions about parents as chaperones on field trips were shared. Parent involvement was described as including roles as committee members, fundraisers, chaperones, and advocates for education. Participant 1, a preschool teacher, values parent participation during field trips, not only for the primary reason of safety for the children but also for parents to be a part of the informal learning with their child. She stated:

We like for the families to participate on field trips. They also learn how their children interact with the subject studied during the field trip. The parents become aware of how and when to engage with their children and complement the learning and teaching by extending knowledge into the home. The parents are valued as an active part of the preschool program.

Participant 2 emotionally voiced her concerns about parent participation on field trips:

Generally in my experience there is much needed parent participation on field trips. However, there can be an issue when parents want to bring their whole family on the trip. Trying to educate parents that this is an educational field trip for the classroom students and not a fun family outing is an ongoing issue. It can be fun but some parents want to bring the whole family, which includes younger children, grandparents and others. Additionally, I have to impress upon all of the parents that their role as chaperones is to supervise the students in the classroom and not just their child.
Participant 9, a second grade teacher, saw parent participation differently. He expressed with emotion that:

Parent participation on field trips could be problematic for the parent if they are unable to bring their other children on the trip. This is because they would have to pay for a babysitter or childcare while they participated as chaperones. The majority of parents in this low-income community cannot afford the expense. If they bring their other children the parents cannot help to supervise other students in the classroom when they must take care of their own children. Additionally, the lack of English proficiency was also an impediment to the parents’ ability to fully engage and support their children’s learning. When information and trainings are only provided in English, it limits many parents’ ability to understand and participate in field trips.

Participant 4 touched on other aspects of parental involvement as they pertain to field trips. She described with emotion that:

To me getting adults to interact more with their children and to have field trips be a source of behavior change or changing parents understanding of how they can talk with kids and interact with them. I don’t think actually we have or we are making progress on that. I think it’s hard to do. I am amazed that even though I talk with them beforehand about what I want them to do, many of them just sit there and they watch their kids wander around. They feel it’s the teacher’s responsibility to show their children books or something.

Participant 3, a fifth grade teacher, echoed some of the same concerns regarding parent participation on field trips. She stated:

it’s a little challenging . . . we’ve had the discussion about how sometimes they just want to monitor their own child, . . . you actually need help . . . other kids. . . . For a lot of them, they go to hang out with their kid. It’s understandable.

Conversely Participant 7, a kindergarten teacher, expressed that parent involvement was valuable and a much needed component on field trips. She recalled, “When we agree about the actions, we can organize parents and have meetings for organizing the dates, the money, places and all the supplies that we need . . . they like to support the school and they want to participate too.” Participant 8 also perceived parent
participation as valuable and necessary. She shared her experiences working with parents on field trips:

Parents are very supportive. They support field trips but sometimes are limited. Many of our parents do not have a valid driver’s license or automobile insurance. Usually there is only one bus and three classrooms with more than twenty students per class. Space on the bus is first open to students, then teachers and lastly parents.

Participant 10 echoed what many of the other participants have expressed, adding an explanation for involvement differences at different grade levels.

The kindergarten has a policy where they take all of the parents on field trips. When they come to first grade they expect the same policy to be in effect and to their surprise it isn’t. We have to limit the number of parents that can come on the trip with us because of the limited seats on the bus. This has frustrated the parents and therefore they are frustrated with us. Parents want to bring their younger children and this goes against District policy.

Participant 12 touched on several points made by the other participants and added insight into how she communicates with parents seeking their involvement and where they need training to better chaperone.

I got the parents involved in the beginning of the school year by sending an introduction letter regarding what to expect in fourth grade. The letter includes information on field trips we anticipate for the school year. The parents are invited to inform me if they have an interest in participating. When a field trip is finalized and the permission slips are sent home, parents can indicate whether they want to be chaperones. If we are taking a bus and there aren’t enough seats for all of the parents who want to attend, they must set up their own transportation. On the issue of children supervision, parents should supervise multiple children and not just their own. A little over half of the time parents don’t follow through with that directive. I don’t think it’s because they don’t want to, but rather they just don’t know how. They should receive training on how to supervise children on field trips.

Participants made clear that when planning and leading field trips at this school, they were purposeful about linking formal and informal education. They assured that planned field trips met California Common Core Academic Standards. The participants
invited parents to participate as chaperones, enabling them to experience their child’s and his or her peers’ experiential exploration.

**Finding 2: Overall Perceptions of Field Trips in a Low Socioeconomic School**

Study participants shared their overall perceptions of planning and leading field trips at their school. All the participants found, in their experiences, that field trips are a valuable teaching tool that can increase background knowledge and improve learning. Universally, participants felt it necessary to create field trip opportunities for their students that they believed students would otherwise probably not experience due to their families’ socioeconomic status. Primarily, throughout the entire field trip planning process, participants remained focused on their students to ensure that the field trip benefited students’ social and emotional needs as well as academic needs. Addressing these needs appears to be their primary goal in planning and leading field trips.

**Social development.** As the participants described their experiences, they frequently emphasized the value of field trips for the students’ social development. They acknowledged that schools in low socioeconomic communities provided fewer opportunities for students to connect socially outside of their communities compared to students attending schools in affluent areas. Participants oftentimes stated that exposing students to different and unfamiliar environments gave them the opportunity to build confidence and trust as new connections were made. They observed that after engaging in social settings such as museums, zoos, natural environments and science centers, the students were more understanding of other cultures and demonstrated improved interactions with their peers and adults.
Participants commonly described how during the planning phase of field trips they were able to develop partnerships and sustain relationships as they worked long periods of time finalizing dates and times with key people at the field trip destinations. With the understanding of the challenges schools face in low socioeconomic communities, participants were inspired and encouraged by the venue representatives to return yearly with their students. Participant 2 expressed with excitement, “It’s been really fun to expose kids to new experiences, especially the kids that we work with. Because these kids have such limited experiences for the most part. It’s great to expose them to new stuff.” Participant 3 shared a similar experience:

It’s interesting for the kids to go out and see what’s in the community and experience different things they might not otherwise have access to. The fourth grade teachers took the kids on a field trip to the Redwood Regional Park. Some of the students were not aware that this popular park was in Oakland a few miles away from their community.

Participant 5, a third grade teacher, remembered how field trips impacted the social connection students made with their community:

In the guise of studying birds, we went to Lake Merritt. This lake is a civic institution in Oakland—something that people should know and be proud of. Again, most kids had never been to Lake Merritt before. Even if they’re not getting the science content, maybe they’ll just remember that they played on the play structure at Lake Merritt or they ran around or something silly happened. These experiences are not only memorable for me but for students and parents as well. I have been here long enough to know that when kids come back to visit even after they’ve been away from the school three or four years, they’ll say, “Oh, I remember when we went to the lake. It is such an important experience.”

Participants clearly understood the value of field trips as they pertain to social development. Participant 6 stated:

If you were learning about animals but didn’t have a real animal, then go to Tilden Park where you are going to see the real thing. That’s when you link whatever you learn in the classroom to the real thing and also introduce them to a
different environment. The people in our community are pretty much from the same place and have the same culture. When they are taken to a place where the kids are different racially, economically and geographically, you are basically opening their eyes to a new world.

Commonly, participants found that the children really enjoy field trips.

Participant 7 stated with emotion:

What I really like about field trips is the connection the children make with the materials and the topic at hand. They are face-to-face with the subject and they can see, hear, and touch. Kindergarteners need to know many things and they are new on many subjects. Moments during field trips are memorable and they never forget these times. Field trips are very good tools to practice social skills that they need to interact with adults and other children and how to be in new environments.

Participant 4 passionately offered insight into the participating parents’ social growth during field trips:

I think one of the reasons we try to get parents to go on field trips is not just to see the place, but also to learn about talking with their children more. To have a high level of interaction about what you’re saying, what you’re talking about, or talking about the animals. A phenomenon in this school is that kids come in with not knowing their colors, they can’t count and they don’t have basic vocabulary that comes from interaction with adults. We have never been able to make a dent in that fundamental issue, so I think we must physically get them there. It is important to get the adults to interact more with kids and to have the field trips be a source of behavior change. We must help parents to change their understanding of how they can talk and interact with their kids.

Participant 11 shared:

As for the children, to help see themselves in the world and to see the world is an amazing experience. A lot of them don’t leave the neighborhood. They’re afraid. I have kids who have never been on Bart or on a ferryboat.

**Foundational knowledge.** All study participants described their experience of developing foundational or pre-knowledge with students in low socioeconomic communities as a reason for field trips. Participants universally felt that their students did not have real-life experiences with many of the subjects taught in the classroom.
Oftentimes, topics appeared to be misunderstood or new to students. Participants explained that their students were behind and would fall further behind if this situation was not addressed. The lack of students’ foundational knowledge of subjects taught in the classrooms motivated these teachers to create real-life experiences through field trips. Participant 1 passionately spoke about the value of field trips as it pertained to establishing foundational knowledge.

Field trips are directly linked to what is taught and learned at school. The last topic in the lesson plan was about life on the farm. We went to the farm to learn about farm life during past and present years. The students planted seeds, harvested produce, observed the birth of animals and so much more. As preschoolers, they are acquiring background knowledge and will have a better understanding of farm life for discussion and deeper insight as a kindergartener.

Participant 2 shared her perception of how young students can build foundational knowledge. When going to the Academy of Arts and Sciences, she observed, “Butterflies alighting on them, feeling the heat of the rainforest, they really get a feel for what rainforest means by experiencing that.” Participant 3 shared:

This school is more science focused than the schools of my past. We go on more science field trips that provide experiences that they would not necessarily get in the classroom. Certain experiments are simply being out in nature. Just seeing a squirrel is really informative and exciting for a lot of the students. Taking them out in a local place is supportive in their learning.

Due to the lack of the students’ cultural experiences, Participant 5 compared his students’ experiences to his own children and expressed his perception of the importance of building students’ foundational knowledge.

We like to build up their prior-knowledge in low socioeconomic schools. I think at this school, compared to my own kids, they have far fewer experiences in museums. There’s a very rich set of opportunities to go to the museums in the Bay Area, however you must have transportation and money and the knowledge of those things as part of your cultural package that you get from your home life.
I think that these kids don’t have that. Whereas my kids have been to the Lawrence Hall of Science, every rainy day when they were four or five years old, and that’s a pretty normal middle class thing to do. That’s not a thing that kids in this school will do.

In the urban area, even though it’s not far away, Chabot Space & Science Center is at the top of the hill, and it costs the same as going to the movies. But I’ll bet people go to the movies a hundred times before they’d consider going to the Chabot Space & Science Center.

There is a cultural lack of experiences, which contributes to an overall lack of prior knowledge. It doesn’t mean that they can’t read, but they miss out on those experiences in real life places like the Exploratorium in San Francisco or the Lawrence Hall of Science or the Chabot Space and Science Center.

We have to build up their prior knowledge. I like to build up their prior knowledge so that they get more out of the experience. If you go to Chabot Space & Science Center, you can just go and play with some levers or you can go and see that the lever is simulating a lunar lander, but you have to know what a lunar lander is to know what you’re simulating.

We time our field trips to go at the end of a unit after kids have been studying about lunar landers or lunar craters and we try and take advantage of classes, if the museums offer them. (P5)

Continuing the discussion of the value of gaining background knowledge in the early years through field trips, Participant 6 stated:

I think that in low socioeconomic communities, it is really nice to expose the kids to different environments that they are not familiar with and that they could benefit from. For example, taking them to places where they can experiment with the subject we are working on is absolutely fabulous. I think it’s good for them to be exposed and become aware of their environment in their early stages of life.

Participant 7 excitedly expressed her thoughts about the effects of field trips in building background knowledge for kindergarten students.

As the result of field trips, the children have been able to relate their out-of-the-classroom experiences to any subject: language arts, social studies, science, and art. I plan field trips whenever I can. I enjoy this form of teaching practice. When teachers implement field trips with kindergarteners in low socioeconomic schools, the concept is new and they can take away memories that help to sustain their learning. This makes field trips worthwhile.

Participant 8 spoke about the role of the teacher in creating the opportunities to build foundational knowledge through the use of field trips. She avidly described:
It’s simply about teachers being interested in and motivated to giving a field trip event to their students to experience something outside of the classroom. This is a learning opportunity that is connected to the curriculum currently happening in the classroom. Students in low socioeconomic communities don’t get this form of experiential learning to build up background knowledge.

Participant 9 recalled his second grade students’ lack of foundational knowledge as it related to their immediate neighborhood. They were unaware of major physical and cultural landmarks in their local community. He shared:

There are some field trips that we’ve taken such as Lawrence Hall of Science and Tilden Park in the neighboring city of Berkeley where students and their parents had no knowledge of their existence. I have known for years that when I am talking with the students about Lake Merritt, they ask, “What is that?” Teachers find that kids sometimes don’t venture out to their own neighborhoods and they don’t know other parts of Oakland.

Participant 10 intensely expressed that her first grade students should enjoy learning and noted that teachers need time to incorporate the element of fun in the curriculum. She explained:

Ironically, whenever I go on field trips in the Bay Area, there’s mostly a white middle class group of kids taking field trips. I took my kids to an art museum downtown because I wanted them to experience a new environment while using different art tools and methodologies taught by an art teacher. Teaching art in our classroom is not the same as being able to go to a museum and being taught by an art teacher.

I think a lot has been locked out in our public education system. When I reflect on our classroom and what I am expected to do, there is very little fun in learning for students. There is not a lot of time to build joy of learning because it’s all very high stakes.

Participant 11 offered an interesting perspective about creating foundational knowledge for her third grade students. She described that field trips can help meet the students where they are with learning the subject at hand. Her belief is that it is appropriate to implement field trips at any time during the course of teaching or learning the subject. She recalled:
Sometimes they transfer knowledge and sometimes it’s something we haven’t learned yet or haven’t learned well. Maybe it’s something I intended to teach, but time got away so it’s like the beginning of the unit. The field trips can introduce the subject matter through real life experiences or deepen their understanding. They are building anticipation of what we are going to learn. They come back with questions and want to do inquiries and learn more. (P11)

Participant 4 indisputably made clear the importance of gaining direct foundational knowledge for students in low socioeconomic communities. She explained how these young students are not given field trip opportunities in Title I schools and compared these students to students in more affluent schools. She described:

A lot of kids who are from low socioeconomic schools can learn discreet skills or literacy in kindergarten and first grade. Then they are unable to tackle more comprehensive texts as they enter third grade, fourth grade and fifth grade. There is a pattern of kids doing ok until third grade then dropping in their skills. This situation is mostly related to comprehension. Comprehension is based on the breadth of background knowledge or content knowledge that kids can bring to the texts and their vocabulary. In kindergarten and in every grade it’s really important that we try to work hard on areas of broadening the background knowledge of kids. This is really well researched with kids in low socioeconomic families.

They have a profoundly different and narrower range of experience than middle class kids do in the summer for example. Some people say that the discrepancy is mostly due to the difference in their summer experience. Middle class kids come back to school from the summer having gone to their astronomy programs, their family trips, and art programs, etc. They come back with improved content from their summer experience that can be heard in their vocabulary. Poor kids come back just having slipped quite a bit. They come back lower in September than they were in June. Field trips place students in a better position as it relates to the ability to transfer and use what they’ve learned in the classroom and maintain the knowledge and recall the experience. (P4)

In this finding, participants described that although challenging, they were successful in organizing and implementing field trips that increased social development and foundational knowledge. They recalled that improvement in the area of social development was demonstrated in students’ ridership to the field trip venues. As first-time passengers, the students appeared quiet, frightened, or slightly uncomfortable. On
the return trip back to school, students appeared to be more relaxed and talkative. They engaged in conversation with their peers, teachers, and parent chaperones. In their discussions, participants noted students’ use of new vocabulary related to the field trip topic. Participant 11 stated, “There’s a lot of resistance. There’s a lot of outside of the zone and it can often be uncomfortable, especially with new concepts. Then it gets more comfortable. Then we start a new concept and it’s uncomfortable.” This appeared to be confirmation that field trip experiences were positively influencing students’ foundational knowledge and social development in a short time span.

Finding 3: Challenges Planning and Leading Field Trips in a Low Socioeconomic School

Study participants recognized the intensive nature of many common challenges they faced planning and implementing field trips at their school. These challenges were found throughout the process and included identifying times within their work day to contact field trip venues for scheduling purposes, completing District and transportation documents, written communication to parents to obtain signed permission, soliciting parents as effective chaperones, fundraising, and transportation. Universally, participants expressed that the only way they could achieve these goals was to work before, during, or after their school hours as a team (times that were unpaid). Specific tasks were agreed upon and accomplished by grade level teams. Although the participants worked in grade level teams, to plan and implement field trips, they still faced barriers with fundraising for admission costs and transportation. It was also a struggle to find time to plan and organize all the elements required to ensure a safe and effective learning opportunity in the form of field trips.
Time intensive nature of planning field trips. Participant 7 passionately recalled, “Teachers have difficulty finding the time to organize field trips.” Participant 11 similarly shared, “Getting all of the paperwork completed and turned in on time is a major challenge. It also takes a lot of time and effort to do fundraising.” Participant 3 explained, “Actually the forms have gotten a lot more complicated over the years. . . . I think as the years have gone by, the legal department has put in more requirements.” Participant 5 expressed his concerns as he experienced challenges finding the time to schedule and plan trips and to meet location deadlines for special access:

Getting started on a field trip means you must have time. There are very few places where you can call and get somebody on the line with the first call. Typically it means calling multiple times and leaving messages. When they call back, it’s during work hours and I am teaching class. Since I can’t respond to the call while I am teaching, I have to call back and there is a lot of back and forth time that is wasted before any real connection is made. Even when we communicate by email, this back and forth process takes place.

Additionally, the free admission programs have specific deadlines that must be met in order to be considered for their program. Due to the difficulty in meeting their timeframes, I sometimes miss out on those opportunities.

Contacting field trip venues. After identifying venues that offer opportunities to extend foundational knowledge or create new knowledge, participants must contact the venues. By starting early, teachers have a better chance to be considered for scholarships or special programs designed to help schools with admission costs in low-income communities and to schedule preferred dates for the trip. They noted that usually more than one date is requested to coordinate with the availability of transportation and gaining District approval.

During the course of the school day, the teachers’ role requires their full attention on their students and the implementation of the curriculum. There is no structured time
to make or receive phone calls to or from venues. Participant 10 summed up the concerns of many in describing her experiences contacting organizations, noting that this was the hardest part of the field trip planning process. She stated:

Many times it’s very difficult working with organizations. They are very slow to respond. In fact, I had one organization that I had to call over 30 times before I received a response. I want people and organizations to know that when they are contacted by a teacher, the teacher’s time is sacred and I would love the courtesy of receiving a response in a timely manner. I have received phone calls from venues representatives at 9:30am. I asked the question, “why are you calling a teacher at this time. Obviously, I am busy.”

Perhaps, venues can develop technology to book these field trips online. If they had an online calendar, you could click on your desired date, see if it’s available and either book it or choose another date. After your selected date is made, the venue can send a confirming email. This would speed up the process tremendously.

Participant 5 echoed similar experiences contacting field trip venues. He described his frustrations:

I was just talking about one experience that just happened where I tried the Lawrence Hall of Science. I went through their process on their website, sent the email and my proposal for the dates. Those dates did not work for them, so she called me back. I got a message in my box. I tried calling her back. She is gone by the time I called her. She calls, she calls and she calls. Finally, she called two weeks later. I took the phone call in the class with the rest of the class going on because they patched me through. That’s the only way I could deal with it. Even then, the dates did not work out so we didn’t get that field trip in the fall that we really wanted.

**District timelines.** Oakland Unified School District’s timeline requires that teachers complete the field trip application packet 30 days before consideration for approval. All participants acknowledged that when the District protocol was followed, with the completion and timely submittal of the application, approval was granted. They also agreed that the principal was always supportive, the first to receive the final document, and the administrator who moved the paperwork forward. However, the
participants found the paperwork to be time consuming, lengthy, complicated and redundant. Participant 11 shared:

Its repetitive writing. I try to keep my documents from the previous years so I don’t have to re-find the standards that make this trip applicable to third grade. I just keep the documents, change the dates, and change pertinent information.

**Transportation.** One of the next steps after confirming a date for the field trip is arranging for transportation. According to the participants, the cost of transportation is one of the most expensive aspects of a field trip. Study participants noted that arranging transportation is one of the most time-sensitive elements and needs to be scheduled immediately after the field trip date is selected.

Universally, participants identified that the safest mode of transportation is door-to-door service when transporting their students. Door-to-door service requires that the chartered bus pick up students from the school site and transport them to the venue destination. Charter buses meet the requirements for safely and efficiently moving school age children to and from the destination. The District has to identify and approve all charter bus services that are permitted to transport their students. Participant 5 spoke about her frustrations with the cost of transportation.

When I went on those field trips as a kid, the school district had its own buses. Now they don’t have their own buses. Each bus costs $800.00 each time you want to go someplace. Without a budget, I can’t do it very well. I can hustle for a handful of field trips that are free or minimum cost. At a low income school there is a further challenge, which is you are not to ask parents to contribute money, although some teachers do. I think there should be funds available for field trips. It creates hardship for people. It creates noticeable inequality in the sense of who has it and who doesn’t have it.

Participant 10 has faced many challenges when organizing transportation for field trips. She described an additional transportation problem; the largest bus available does
not have enough seats to accommodate all three first grade classrooms, teaching staff, and chaperones. She noted that this requires them to either purchase an additional bus, which is cost prohibitive, or reduce the number of passengers that can travel on the bus. It is one of the biggest challenges teachers can face when planning the trip. Participant 10 explained:

As a first grade teacher I can’t take my younger students on public transportation. Although there are some free field trip locations and the District can sometimes provide free tickets to ride the public bus, it is too difficult for large groups of young students to navigate the public bus system. The major transportation challenge is the cost of the largest charter bus and getting all of the passengers on one $800.00 bus. The chartered buses are more expensive but they are safer because you receive door-to-door service.

Living and working in the San Francisco Bay Area, teachers desire to introduce the students to their community and surrounding cities. Participant 9 shared his concerns about transporting students via multiple modes of transportation to San Francisco and the logistical challenges that previously impacted their journey.

A few years ago we took the students to Pier 39. The plan was to leave the school and go to Jack London Square where we would take the ferry to San Francisco. Unfortunately we missed the ferry. We then had to call the buses back to pick us up and take us to San Francisco to Pier 39. We would then take the ferry back to Jack London Square where we were picked up and returned to school. Due to the logistical complications with both modes of transportation, we no longer use two methods of transportation for transporting the students.

Participant 2 explained an additional concern about different modes of transportation with alternatives to chartered buses. These include Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) and parent drivers.

Transportation is a big issue for field trips. There are a lot of opportunities for great things to do with kids but you must have money for the charter buses or be close to a BART Station. It is easy to use BART with older students, but now that I have second graders it is much more difficult to use the Rapid Transit System. It’s hard to depend on parents to drive because some of them don’t have legal
licenses or adequate auto insurance. The District requires paperwork to confirm that parents’ have these documents before they can drive the students. This is a problem with transporting students on field trips in low socioeconomic areas, whereas, middle income community schools can depend on parent drivers to meet the District’s requirements.

**Parents as chaperones.** Parents as chaperones are necessary on field trips. Without additional adult supervision, field trips are not permitted. Generally, the adult/child ratio depends on the age and number of students participating, as well as the field trip destination. The majority of the study participants indicated that younger students require more parent chaperones. One participant, who taught older students, had a different opinion. She found that older students were more daring and ventured out more on their own and as a result, needed more adult supervision. When a large group of students participated on field trips, more parent chaperones were required as well.

As a rule, when teachers take their students to natural environments near lakes, ponds, or other large bodies of water, more paperwork is required to identify students and adults with or without the ability to swim. Although parent chaperones are necessary for field trips, study participants sometimes viewed parent participation differently.

Participant 4, a kindergarten teacher, expressed her pleasure with having an abundance of parent chaperones. She recalled:

We say to parents that we need ten parents to come. It’s roughly one adult for every two kids. Usually we get more because parents are either worried about their kid’s safety or they themselves wanted to go to the event. So usually we get more parents. We say that parents can bring younger siblings if they bring them in their own cars, that we can’t put them on the bus. This usually means that parents are then tied up with their own kid and younger siblings. In fact that’s ok because usually we have enough parents. If we don’t, the teacher can supervise a larger number of students.

Generally it works out. I think our view is mostly that we want parents to do more with their kids, or to know that there are places with very easy access, low cost and that they can take their kids. We want them to know that it actually
does not take that long to get to Tilden Park from here and certainly to the Oakland Zoo. Many kids haven’t been there, so we do want parents to go. Participating on the trip makes it really concrete to them. “This is where Tilden Park is and what you and your kid can do here. This is where Oakland Zoo is located. It is a very friendly zoo and easy for little kids to be there and not feel overwhelmed.” (P4)

Participant 2 had a different opinion of parents as chaperones on field trips. She faced many challenges and described her experience:

In my experience of field trips, sometimes at this school there can be an issue about the parents wanting to bring the whole family along. It has really always been an issue in trying to educate the parents about their role on field trips. It’s not an outing. It’s not a fun outing. It is a fun outing, but some parents treat it as a trip to bring the whole family along, their younger children and the grandparents. We say to them, no you’re actually helping me supervise all the children, not just your child. Because a lot of parents think I am coming to accompany my child and will watch my child. Actually, trying to train the parents to say you are helping me supervise a group of children, not just your own child, is challenging.

Bringing younger siblings along is first of all not allowable, supposedly. Some parents still try to sneak by because at this school the kindergarten classes allow siblings to come along on field trips. In first grade, I have to train parents to accept that no siblings are allowed because if you are taking care of your child and a young sibling who needs a lot of supervision, you’re not helping me and you’re not really allowing the educational part of the trip to take place in the most positive manner.

Parents need a lot of training and they get mad sometimes because they can’t bring along their children. They’ll say in kindergarten we brought our kids on the trip. I have to tell them I’m sorry, that is the first grade policy. We are enforcing this policy at least from first grade up. (P2)

Participant 3 pointed out that parents enjoy going on field trips. However, she also remembered the frustrations that can happen with including parents. She stated:

Parents at our school definitely like to come along on field trips. We encourage them to drive separately if they own a car. Sometimes it’s a little challenging because we have had discussions about their desire to just monitor their own child. We need help with all of the children. I usually have one or two parents who come along on the trip. I know that in kindergarten, they do a special field trip and they get grant money. They try to have each child bring a parent so that they can have an experience at the venue together. We simply don’t have the money to pay for a large bus or buses for that many people. Unlike the
kindergarten grade level, we cannot allow that many parents or siblings to participate on field trips.

Participant 10 agreed with Participants 2 and 3; she discussed the policy differences regarding parent participation at the kindergarten grade level and the upper grade level.

She explained:

The kindergarten policy set parent expectations that are contradictory to the upper grade level policy. Another concern is about parents who want to bring their younger siblings. This goes against District policy and brings about another frustration for the parents. Our principal is working to reinforce that message to the parents. We as a school are sending mixed messages, which cause confusion and frustration for parents.

Participant 8 faced similar challenges with parents on field trips. She echoed, “Parents are very supportive and anxious to participate on field trips. However, due to the limited space on the bus, parents are restricted as to how many can participate as chaperones.” When Participant 11 faced the problems of chaperones, she sought and found a workable solution. She stated:

I don’t think everyone understands the purpose of each role as chaperones on field trips. Sometimes I feel parents just want to come and have fun. For me, it felt like another child or two to manage. They are not attentive or helpful. I wrote a letter to hand to the parents. It stated, “I’m looking for chaperones who can be attentive, respectful, and helpful to the students. We are just here to help the students. You will be asked to supervise . . . the students. All cell phones are to be turned off during presentations.” Writing the letter and handing them out to parents has helped a lot.

Participants reported that to honor their contracted hours, they were not able to work on field trips during instruction time. This situation required them to work before and after school or during lunch. This regulation made it more complicated to research, organize, and synchronize all the field trip components within a short timeframe. By working together, participants discovered ways to overcome the obstacles. Participants
drew from available resources and acquired cooperation from parents and other advocates to reach their goal of successfully planning effective field trips to enrich students’ learning. In this struggle, both the participants and the school climate became stronger and more resourceful to confront the challenges they faced.

**Finding 4: District Support**

All study participants described their experience of planning and leading field trips as requiring more support in all areas of the process. They identified a need for support in fundraising, identifying, and scheduling the field trip destinations and the mode of transportation to transport students, staff, and chaperones. Universally, the participants acknowledged that the completed field trip applications that were aligned with District protocol were generally approved, and, therefore felt that the District supported them with their field trip requests. However 8 of the 12 participants strongly suggested that the District could do more to promote and sustain field trips in schools located in low socioeconomic communities. They felt the District was in a position to improve field trip policies, allocate more funds for field trips, and value field trips as a necessary educational component to teaching and learning.

**Field trip policies.** Participant 1 acknowledged that the elementary school principal has been very supportive with field trips that meet District policy and serve as learning opportunities for preschoolers. The principal at this school was described as taking on a leadership role in advising the teachers’ field trip planning and aiding in expediting application approvals. The principal taking on additional responsibility for the preschool program is a direct result of preschools being relocated to elementary school sites, and the principal’s actions indicate a new level of support.
Participant 2 suggested areas where the District can improve policy that supports teachers in planning and implementing field trips. She explained:

Once you receive a reservation to the venue, it has to be at least thirty days prior to your trip. When the District is paying for the cost of transportation or entry fees the payment process can be problematic. Oakland Unified School District’s policy is to pay expenses after the trip is completed. However, for access to the field trip venue payment is due upon arrival. Many locations do not want to wait for their money. As a result teachers often pay. We submit for reimbursement and generally have to wait several months to receive it. It is to everyone’s advantage for the District to revise its payment policy to enable a smoother transaction plan.

Participant 7 offered insights on how the District can support teachers with organizing field trips.

I would like to see the District give teachers more support with field trips. It would be nice if they could create a new department of teachers and administrators who were experts in organizing field trips. This way the department could advise all of the teachers with planning trips. Teachers could spend more time with teaching their students.

Participant 8 would like to see the District place more value on the outcomes of field trips: “Field trips are very educational and I think the District needs to prioritize them as more valuable to the children’s experiences at school. Just the connections they make…that’s hands-on learning experience for them.”

Participant 3 described how the paperwork for field trip approval has become more challenging. She suggested one of the best ways the District can support teachers is to streamline the paperwork and place it online: “The paperwork. That’s the thing actually that keeps me from…That’s the hardest right now. I don’t remember it being this bad when I first started teaching. It’s so many pages.” Participant 11 echoed Participant 3.
The packet is so annoying and it changes frequently. I believe the current one is to fill out a field study request form, which is repeating a lot of the same information over and over again. It’s almost 15 to 20 pages. Why can’t it be automatized?

**Field trip funding.** All the participants identified a shortage of funds for planning and implementing field trips at their school. Participant 2 exclaimed, “Show me the money.” Participant 1 recalled:

> There has never been a budget for field trips in the Early Childhood Education Department to help with transportation and admission costs. These two primary expenses are our greatest challenges to overcome. Approximately two years ago, Food Services announced that preschoolers would no longer receive lunches for field trips. This increased our expenses. Aside from the principal, the only support we receive from the District is an approval to go on field trips.

Participant 1 stated, “We don’t get any money. Maybe at least if they pay for one field trip per year, that will be something.”

Participant 2 expressed her frustrations with not having enough funds to schedule additional field trips. She mentioned, “It’s really great to expose kids to something new and something that’s really educational. You need money, money for the bus. That’s what we need and for admission.” Participant 3 got right to the point about what she thought the District could do to increase support for schools in low-income areas. In five words, she stated with emotion, “More money from the District!” Participant 4 agreed and said, “I think the main obstacle is cost.”

The District doesn’t allocate any special funding for field trips. It comes from each individual school site budget. The site budgets have been cut over the past several years. As a result, field trip budgets were cut or eliminated as the site budgets were slashed. (P4)

Participant 8 concurred regarding a lack of funding for field trips. However, she believed that once the concerns reach the District level, it may become more of a priority.
Once the District office is involved, funding is more likely to be provided. As long as the trips are educational and they support the learning that takes place in the classroom the trip has a greater chance of being supported. The teachers work very hard to make field trips happen, but much more can be done if the District acknowledged the value of field trips.

In regard to funding field trips, participants spoke of a mandate for teachers to raise funds for field trips. Participant 6 shared:

I am not very good at raising funds. I feel very uncomfortable asking for money. For wide events such as the raffle we had last year, we raised a lot of money, but the teachers were so burned out, they didn’t want to know anything about fundraising, including myself. It sounds bad but it is something I don’t like to do.

Participant 12 echoed P6’s views on teachers and fundraising. “The fact that we personally have to fundraise to get these things done, I think that’s wrong. I think that’s morally and ethically wrong.”

**Parent chaperone policies.** While parents as chaperones have been discussed previously in this sub-theme, parent involvement is revisited as it relates to policy.

Participants 2, 3, 4, and 9 expressed their concerns regarding parent chaperone policies. Their primary complaint centered on the parents’ desire to only be responsible for their child during field trips and not chaperone other students. This situation was experienced as being an unsafe environment for students. Participant 2 stated, “The parents need a lot of training.” She continued to make her point:

Parents get upset when they can’t bring their [other] children. They said that they have done it in previous years, but we tell them that it is our policy from first grade up that chaperones cannot bring siblings on field trips. We want them to clearly understand that this is an educational opportunity for their child and the students need the full attention of the chaperones to maximize the learning experience as well as keeping them safe.

Participant 9 recognized that many parents cannot participate in field trips without bringing the younger siblings because they do not have anyone to babysit their children.
or funds to pay a caregiver. He was concerned about a different aspect of parent policies regarding field trips. He focused on how parents conducted themselves while chaperoning students at the venue. During a field trip presentation at the Oakland Zoo, he described:

Most of our parents speak Spanish only. When the presentation was given in English, the parents were disengaged and many left their post as chaperones. They went outside of the room where the students were listening to the presentation and began to socialize and talk on their cell phones. As a result, they were not chaperoning the students and they were not benefiting from the experience.

Participants 2, 3, 4, and 9 suggested that the District should consider establishing parent field trip policies that outline who can participate in field trips and under what conditions and detail their roles, responsibilities and how they should conduct themselves throughout the duration of the field trip.

Streamlining paperwork. Participant 1 made the recurring point that the field trip application packet is time consuming. She reflected, “It takes a lot of paperwork to turn into the District, it’s like a booklet.”

At our school, we are the only preschool classroom. Unlike the other grade levels, there is no grade level team approach to planning or implementing field trips. Generally, between the two of us, the teacher organizes all aspects of the field trips including the completion of the voluminous amount of paperwork. During this time, I assist with monitoring the children in the classroom. (P1)

Participant 3 appeared to be primarily concerned about the complexity and the increase in the amount of paperwork needed from the teachers for approval for field trips. She expressed it this way:

Over the years, the forms have gotten more complicated. Now, they include information that includes allergies, and other medical conditions that were not prevalent in the past. The District’s legal department has added new requirements
as a result of incidents or injuries that have occurred during field trips at other schools or other school Districts.

Participant 11 suggested the District take a more active and supportive stance that demonstrates advocacy for teachers planning and implementing field trips in low socioeconomic communities. She explained:

She recommended the development of a form or website designating the best locations for field trips and listing resources to enable schools to transport pre-kindergarten thru fifth grade students. We can save a tremendous amount of time researching by utilizing one primary source that contains all of the pertinent information for field trips that are linked to the Common Core Curriculum. With our classroom profile in the District’s database, we can reduce an incredible amount of paperwork and it can all be processed online. (P11)

**Summary**

Participants clearly stated that to improve the process of organizing meaningful field trips for their students in low socioeconomic communities, the District should consider that the needs are greater in these communities than in more affluent communities and take on a greater role in experiential education. Relevant agencies may consider developing stronger collaborations with teachers. Docents, guides, naturalists and the like may enrich the field trip experience for students through systematic collaborations and stronger relationships. With clearly written and applied mandates, parents would have a clear understanding of their role and responsibility as chaperones and their stance as advocates for field trips. With these components in place, it is likely that organizing field trips will become less challenging, the school climate will improve and the teachers will be able to provide a wider array of experiential experiences for their school.
Results and Interpretation

The findings from this phenomenological study of the lived experiences of prekindergarten through fifth grade teachers’ planning and leading field trips in a low socioeconomic school emerged from the participants’ shared experiences. Extracting from the themes discussed, four findings are offered: (a) field trips integrate and move theory and practice into the real world, (b) field trips afford teachers the rare opportunity to observe their students in society, (c) moving content knowledge into context enhances social and cognitive development, and (d) teachers’ collaboration increases the opportunity to plan and lead effective field trips. The findings may offer public school teachers, administrators and school districts a greater understanding of the best practices for planning and leading field trips in low socioeconomic communities.

Result One: Field trips integrate and move theory and practice into the real world

Participants sought to implement the most appropriate and effective practices in low socioeconomic communities for their students’ learning. The teachers, who were the participants in the study, universally expressed that formal teaching and learning in the classroom when joined with informal teaching and learning outside of the classroom created a powerful learning experience. This concept enabled teachers to deepen the purpose of their actions and the understanding of how experiential education influenced student learning. The participants demonstrated that they valued informal learning particularly in the form of field trips.

Whether participants were introducing or extending concepts, field trips influenced cognitive development. These experiences aligned with the findings of Melber (2008) who suggested that teachers should plan and implement field trips that
will foster retention of the experience and enhance the student’s overall cognitive development. Participants purposefully connected curriculum and selected venues to enrich students’ learning experiences in the real world. Their efforts were focused on building foundational knowledge and developing social skills as students connected to natural environments and society. The findings coincided with the findings of Louv (2008), who concluded that when youth explore natural environments, opportunities to expand upon their curiosity, wonder, imagination, and a natural sense of connection with society and nature happen (Louv, 2008).

The teachers’ rationales for choosing specific field trip locations aligned with Gergen’s (2001) conclusions that there is value in informal education in the form of field trips for students in low socioeconomic communities. He noted that in natural environments, most young children become unconscious social constructivists trying to make sense of the world in which they live. In the outdoors, they effortlessly explore, describe, and explain their discoveries or ideas with others (Gergen, 2001).

**Result Two: Teachers are afforded the rare opportunity to observe their students in society**

As participants shared their experiences in planning and leading field trips, many expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to observe the students from a different perspective. It was rare for the participants to watch their students engage in discussions and presentations hosted by docents in natural science and history museums or be guided by naturalists on shorelines and in botanical gardens, forests, and farms. The experiences afforded students lifelong learning activities as they explored different environments with their teachers, peers, and parents. Field trips offered parents as chaperones a different
way to deepen the interaction with their child, and teachers observed their students in
this multifaceted educational excursion. The participants’ experiences reflect research
findings by Vygotsky (1978b) regarding constructivist theory and the zone of proximal
development. Vygotsky emphasized the importance of active participation by the teacher
in integrating experiential activities. He noted that with the assistance of experienced
adults or other more experienced peers, children acquired the ability to grasp concepts
and ideas that they cannot comprehend on their own. The current research suggests that,
given the urban environment and parents’ increased time away from home, it is
increasingly the teacher’s role to facilitate this type of learning for children, and field
trips provide an environment that fosters this interaction.

**Result Three: Moving content knowledge into context enhances social and cognitive
development**

Participants recalled that students, particularly in low socioeconomic communities
tend to learn specific skills such as writing their names, the alphabet, and math easier in
kindergarten and first grade. However, when they enter third grade, their cognitive
development begins to decrease. The current research suggests that a lack of contextual
experience with content knowledge may be limiting the children in comprehension and
vocabulary.

Young children in Title I schools have a lower probability of expanding their
range of experience than children in more affluent schools and participants shared that
may mostly be due to differences in summer experience. In addition to their family trips,
middle class children come back from summer after frequently having attended academic
and social enrichment summer programs. They return to school with noticeable
improvement in content vocabulary. Students in low socioeconomic communities return from summer break having decreased significantly in content vocabulary. The findings in this study align to Bransford et al. (2000) who concluded that cognitive transition opens the possibility for greater comprehension and retention of knowledge. Participants clearly stated that students from low socioeconomic schools who participate in field trips are in a better position to transfer, utilize, and retain knowledge.

As a solution to this concern, participants collaborated and worked diligently to broaden the foundational knowledge of their students in the form of field trips. A well-planned field trip bridges content knowledge to real-world experiences that are age appropriate and guided by their teachers, more experienced peers, and interest vested parents. In return, students gain knowledge through their experience. This validates Kolb’s (1984) definition of experiential learning as the process in which knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Participants commonly acknowledged that field trips are a form of experiential learning that plays an important role in student learning and social development. Taylor et al. (1997) noted that well-planned field trips in the surrounding community served as a tool that helped broaden children’s concepts of the world around them. As young children are guided to make connections to unfamiliar settings, they become more social as they expand their foundational knowledge, build confidence within themselves, gain new perspectives within society, and see themselves in the world. When teachers see these results, they appreciate the value of field trips.
Result Four: Teachers’ collaboration increased the opportunity to plan and lead field trips

Universally, participants repeatedly made the point that without grade level collaboration, field trips may not take place at their school to advance their students’ learning. Teachers gathered to discuss every aspect of planning and leading field trips as they recognized the many challenges they faced in a low socioeconomic school. By working as a team, they identified each other’s special interest and talent within the scope of work and tasks were assigned accordingly. Although, there were many barriers, participants motivated and inspired each other and together created an experiential learning force that continued to move forward even when faced with many challenges.

Some of the primary challenges participants identified were that the District’s field trip application process was time consuming, there was a lack of funds for field trips, parents did not understand their role as chaperones, it was difficult to communicate with field trip venues due to instruction time with students, unpaid hours for participants to work on field trips before and after school, and the high cost of transportation. Grade level teachers divided the scope of work among each other. For example, the paperwork was completed by one teacher, scheduling with field trip venues and transportation agencies was allocated to another teacher, and one teacher was in charge of printed and verbal communication with parents. Given the lack of funds for field trips, teachers, students, parents, and school site staff worked together to raise funds for designated field trips. Participants demonstrated that they became stronger and more innovative and effective as related to field trips through collaboration. This collaborative effort created a significant change in the process that participants used to plan and organize field trips.
This process established an experiential learning force that galvanized the school community regarding increasing the frequency of school field trips. Their experience follows the theory of Freire (2005). He called for an educational pedagogy by which schools become the agents of change for low socioeconomic communities. His educational theories saw education as providing the creative methodologies to open students’ minds to greater levels of consciousness that connected them to the real world.

Summary

From the data collected, this phenomenological study of the lived experiences of 11 teachers and one assistant teacher in a public pre-k–fifth grade school explored how they planned and led field trips in a low socioeconomic community. Four themes emerged: (a) teachers’ actions while planning and leading field trips in a low socioeconomic community, (b) overall perceptions of field trips in a low socioeconomic school, (c) challenges planning and leading field trips in a low socioeconomic school, and (d) potential support for experiential learning practices. A synthesis of the themes with significant research from the literature review offered four findings with interpretations by the researcher: (a) field trips integrate and move theory and practice into the real world, (b) teachers are afforded the rare opportunity to observe their students in society, (c) moving content knowledge into context enhances social and cognitive development, and (d) teachers’ collaboration increases the opportunity to plan and lead field trips. The interpretations offered here are the sources for the conclusions and recommendations presented in the following chapter.
Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore how teachers in low socioeconomic schools perceive or respond to the decreased support for field trips available to children. The research questions that guided the research and framed the methodology for this study were:

1. How do teachers describe their lived experiences in planning field trips for children in a low socioeconomic school?
2. How do teachers describe what happens when support for field trips is reduced?
3. How do teachers respond to these situations?

Eleven, pre-k through fifth grade, teachers and one assistant teacher in a Title I school located in Oakland, California, participated in this phenomenological study. Data were collected from one-on-one interviews, observation field notes, a review of artifacts, and reflections of the researcher. Taking a qualitative analytic approach to the data, four themes emerged: teachers’ actions, perceptions, challenges, and support. These themes from the participants’ insights were offered with extractions from the one-on-one interview transcripts, observation field notes, and artifact review elements. Findings were presented and interpretations were offered and synthesized with relevant literature.

The four findings related to the calculated actions taken by the teachers to plan and lead field trips, teachers’ perceptions of the field trip process, the challenges they faced during the process, and the support teachers desired in their efforts. Conclusions
from this study of public elementary school teachers in a low socioeconomic school
draw from a synthesis of the literature review, field research, and qualitative analysis of
the data. The following is a discussion of the conclusions and responses to the research
questions. This chapter concludes with recommendations for best practices and further
research.

**Conclusions**

This study of teachers planning and leading field trips was explored through the
phenomenon of their lived experiences in a low socioeconomic school as observed and
described by the participants. The conclusions to the three research questions are drawn
from the combination of their shared experiences.

**Research Question One: How do teachers describe their lived experiences with
planning field trips for children in a low socioeconomic school?**

To comprehend the phenomenon of public elementary school teachers in a low
socioeconomic school, it is critical to distinguish the differences between the community
served by the participants in this study and a more affluent community. A typical
affluent community consists of parents with higher incomes and businesses with higher
revenues. Both are in better financial positions to sustain their community wealth base.
They are also in a better financial position to support their children’s school projects such
as field trips. A low socioeconomic community consists of a high rate of unemployed to
underemployed low-income parents and struggling small businesses with low revenues.
Neither is in a financial position to support or create a strong financial community wealth
base or offer financial support to local schools. These conditions provide the setting in
which the study participants plan and implement field trips for students. These
conditions require the teachers to be more determined and creative to develop the most effective field trip experiences for their students.

Individually and together, the teachers developed an understanding that experience cannot be taught; however, through experiential learning in the form of field trips, teachers can provide opportunities for students to gain their own experiences. When teachers applied theory to practice, they created stronger connections between the curriculum and informal learning. As a result, their students engaged in a deeper, more enriched and meaningful learning experience. In multiple ways, these teachers and their students reaped benefits from each field trip experience. Teachers could take a balcony perspective and assess the influence of field trips on the growth and development of students’ social, emotional, and academic abilities. The field trips offered personal experiences that allowed the students (and sometimes their parents as well) to develop a wealth of new foundational knowledge.

Teachers followed District protocol throughout the field trip planning process and developed methodologies for effectively planning field trips while working collaboratively to meet all District requirements. In this way, they became more efficient in the application and approval process. This approach allowed lesser experienced teachers who were inspired to organize field trips to have a more defined methodology in place and to move quickly through the District bureaucratic processes. Taking a team approach encouraged these teachers to include informal education in their curriculum.

By engaging the community, teachers sought out parents to support as fundraisers, chaperones, and advocates. In low socioeconomic communities, parents are the most valuable resource the community has to offer. By increasing parent
involvement, the teachers bridged the gap between the home, school, and community and strengthened the students’ foundational knowledge and educational path.

Teachers who value field trips understood the influence that this type of experiential learning has on their students’ foundational knowledge. This understanding encouraged them to create as many well-planned field trip experiences as possible for their students. Teachers who visit the sites and engage with the venue’s representatives before a field trip are making an effort to ensure that their students, staff, and chaperones will have the most positive learning experience during the field trip. By providing appropriate information about the school and the students, the venue’s representatives can prepare appropriate activities for the students. This allows for a setting where social development and foundational knowledge take root. Field trips improve social development as a direct result of students interacting with other adults and peers from various communities and cultures. By working cooperatively, the teachers are able to overcome obstacles and develop field trips that foster social and cognitive development for students in low socioeconomic communities.

Research Question 2: How do teachers describe what happens when support for field trips is reduced?

Teachers in low socioeconomic communities described the effects of what happens when field trip support decreases. Without field trips, there are fewer opportunities for rich cognitive development experiences for students. Understanding the value of experiential learning, teachers band together and maintain the vision of providing field trips for their students. Aware of the challenges they will face, teachers perceive that they must search for and identify other sources of assistance that can be
beneficial and help them stay committed to their goals. These sources include negotiating admission fees with venues, researching and submitting grant requests, pursuing more District support and seeking appropriate parental participation. These actions are intended to build and sustain a solid foundational support base for teachers planning and leading field trips.

When support for field trips is reduced, teachers research other ways to provide experiential learning. Due to the lack of financial support, they often provide fewer field trips and in rare cases, they are unable to provide any field trips. Without a strong base of support, some teachers repeat the same field trips year after year. These repeat trips meet their academic standards, provide an enriched learning experience for students, and fit within their budgetary limitations.

Since teachers understand the value of field trips, when support for field trips is decreased, they increase their efforts to provide field trip experiences to ensure that students receive additional cognitive development opportunities. Teachers realized that field trips can be an invaluable tool for their practice and student learning. They believed that field trips have a positive influence on learning retention and strengthen students’ abilities to build and sustain foundational knowledge.

Teachers in urban public schools comprehend that when support for experiential learning decreases, generally field trips do not occur without teachers’ initiatives. Fewer teachers in public schools are making the efforts to develop informal learning opportunities because of the challenges they face. Teachers in low socioeconomic schools work harder to provide field trips to allow for social development for students. In this way, students’ social development can naturally progress from an authentic
experience by the students. An experiential teacher realizes that students must have their own purpose and meaning of the experience rather than the teacher imposing his or her perspective of the phenomenon. Teachers who recognize and embrace this concept can maximize opportunities for students to think, speak, and act independently as they expand their social realm in society.

**Research Question 3: How do teachers respond to these situations?**

In their response to reduced support for field trips, teachers collaborated to fully understand the impact on field trip planning in low socioeconomic schools. The teachers met to strategize and determine the best methods as a response to the decrease in support. Teachers engaged these resources by negotiating with field trip venues, seeking grant and scholarship opportunities, garnering additional District support, and increasing parent participation.

Teachers who are resourceful communicated with venue representatives to enlighten them to the schools financial limitations. They requested and negotiated admission fee reductions for students, staff, and chaperones. They also inquired about existing field trip programs to determine if their school qualified for certain scholarships or grants for Title I schools. Informed teachers also inquired about memberships for teachers that enabled them to have more in-depth information through private lessons, tours, and lectures that benefit both teachers’ practices and students’ learning during field trips.

Teachers were committed to finding solutions to the decreased financial support, and spent a great deal of time before, during, and after school researching charities and sponsorships outside of field trip venues. They utilized technology to explore
applications and applied for private and public institutions that offer field trip assistance. These teachers shared information with their colleagues to encourage them to apply as well while strengthening the school’s field trip culture.

Teachers were determined to continue planning and leading field trips in the best interest of the students in spite of diminishing financial support. They garnered additional District cooperation to sustain their efforts. These teachers recommended that the District streamline paperwork to reduce the amount of it and the repetitive nature of the questions and answers for each individual trip that would then reduce the time and effort needed to complete and process the field trip application. To address the time it takes to file the application and receive approval, the teachers make efforts to start this process early in the school year and ensure their paperwork is submitted at least a month in advance to meet District protocol.

Teachers valued experiential learning, struggled with declining support, and understood the value of parental involvement in the field trip experience. By educating parents about the ways they could participate in this process, the teachers gained additional advocates and active participants. The active participation of parents helped alleviate some of the challenges that occurred with reduced support for field trips.

Teachers’ actions speak to their commitment to the value of field trips and its influence on student learning. Even with diminishing support, they continue to find creative ways to maintain rich informal learning opportunities for their students. Their work demonstrates their understanding of the significance of field trips in educating the whole child.
Recommendations

As a result of the findings of this study, four recommendations are presented to prekindergarten through fifth grade teachers as they seek to plan and lead field trips in a low socioeconomic school: (a) build a school culture committed to experiential learning, (b) seek professional development to plan and implement effective field trips, (c) establish and sustain supportive partnerships, and (d) educate parents about their role in and the value of field trips.

Build a School Culture of Experiential Learning

The findings of this study warrant the recommendation that teachers who plan and lead field trips in a low socioeconomic school create a culture of experiential learning to engage students, staff, parents, and community. Given that teachers are the primary initiators of field trips, they should lead the charge for this culture change. To create this change, administrators, other teachers, staff, parents, and community should collectively be included in the early conversations to enlighten, energize, and establish a systematic approach to support teachers as they organize and lead successful field trips. Simultaneously, given the full picture, stakeholders can understand teachers’ challenges and determine how to position themselves to give their best support to their children and the teachers.

As this school culture of experiential learning takes form, it draws from an informed community wealth base that is invited to give workable solutions to teachers’ challenges. For example, a local printing shop may not be in a position to donate funds. However, they may be willing to donate labor by printing t-shirts with the school’s name at little or no cost. This interaction encourages the teachers to implement field trips and
gives the business owner an opportunity to connect with the school. The school climate should invite and encourage participation from the business community. This participation should be acknowledged and highlighted by the school to encourage more businesses to interact with experiential learning activities. With a culture of experiential learning, teachers will find that advocacy, materials, and financial support may be more easily accessible.

This research demonstrates that by working collaboratively at each grade level, teachers are able to plan and implement field trips more efficiently than by working alone. By working collectively they can draw upon their individual strengths and as a team, they are more effective in their efforts to structure a school culture of experiential learning.

**Seek Professional Development to Plan and Implement Field Trips**

Study participants stressed that they did not receive any formal training in best practices for planning and leading field trips. Teachers must obtain the latest information on the methodologies that are most appropriate for organizing and implementing field trips for prekindergarten through fifth grade students in low socioeconomic schools. Their training should include the latest national and international research and theories that will enable teachers to provide the best teaching practices and learning opportunities with the highest ethics of care. This would entail providing teachers with a definition of experiential learning, a brief history of the concept, an explanation of why informal learning is important, and examples of how to effectively implement well-planned field trips.
Teachers must strategically align field trips with their school curriculum to enrich students’ learning opportunities. They should establish a time at the beginning of the school year to target field trip venues for each grade level team. This places the school site in the best position to receive first consideration for transportation, grants, special programs, and preferred scheduling. Providing professional development that outlines the appropriate steps to follow would improve the process for experienced teachers and provide clear guidelines for teachers new to experiential learning in the form of field trips.

**Establish and Sustain Supporting Partnerships**

Teachers who plan field trips in low socioeconomic schools depend on field trip venues, transportation agencies, and the District administration for support to ensure the best learning experiences for students. Establishing meaningful relationships with members of these institutions will ensure that teachers will more easily organize and implement experiential learning for their students. These relationships should be developed on a first-name basis. In addition to learning about the venue, transportation, and District requirements, teachers should also know the key people who are the decision makers that can affect the school’s ability to implement the field trip.

By having a long-term sustained relationship with the supporting institution and its key people, it is more likely that teachers and/or their schools will be in their database and on their list to contact. Profiles of the schools are held by the institutions and those schools that are more visible and accessible become eligible for current and forthcoming programs for low socioeconomic schools. Having this school information allows the institutions to contact the teachers and schools directly when they have availability for
trips or special programs that can ease the burden on schools. With a strong relationship between the institution and the school site, these opportunities can increase and enable teachers to plan and implement a greater number of field trips for their students.

Study participants consistently identified transportation cost as the most expensive component of field trips. As teachers plan field trips, the cost is a financial burden and it is a struggle to acquire the funds for the cost of transportation. Innovative teachers who develop the framework for partnerships that are supportive should consider establishing and sustaining partnerships with public transportation agencies that offer different modes of transportation services that are local and accessible. Mass transportation systems’ peak times are the hours directly before and after school as they transport people to and from work and school. Their slowest periods are during the hours that school is in session. This is the ideal time for teachers and public transportation agencies to work cooperatively to safely transport students on field trips.

Teachers who establish and sustain relationships that are relevant to planning and leading field trips should implement a practice that includes a “thank you” to the key people who represent the institutions. This shows appreciation for the care and consideration that was given and experienced by the school through the children, parents, and teachers.

**Educate Parents about Their Role in and the Value of Field Trips**

The study participants frequently stated that parents were unaware of their roles as chaperones and required more information on how to best assist the teachers and students during field trips. There just are too many children to manage, too many activities to
coordinate, and too many transitions to supervise for teachers to successfully accomplish all of these tasks alone. This study supports the need for parents to become fully educated regarding how to more effectively position themselves on field trips.

Educating parents, the child’s first teacher, allows them the ability to extend their child’s learning from the classroom to the field trip where the parent participated and to the home, where the parent can continue the informal education process. Participant 4 stated, “To me, getting adults to interact more with kids and to have the field trips be a source of behavior change or changing parents understanding of how you can talk with kids and interact with them.” It is important the parent becomes knowledgeable about how to engage with their child both on field trips and at home to broaden and enrich their child’s learning.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

Although there have been many studies on the effects of field trips, few have studied the phenomenon of teachers’ experiential practices in low socioeconomic schools. In light of the challenges teachers faced as a result of budget cuts, lack of time to organize trips, and limited resources to pay for the costs of the trips, further research in the field of experiential learning in the form of field trips in low socioeconomic schools may develop a deeper understanding and direction for educators. This qualitative and phenomenological approach to this study has expanded knowledge of the phenomena. For a deeper understanding, further research should be considered.

The following research is recommended to expand prekindergarten through fifth grade teachers’ knowledge and understanding of experiential teaching and students’ learning. Suggested research entails the study of the challenges teachers face in planning
and leading field trips in low socioeconomic schools, the study of the influence of
field trips on prekindergarten through fifth grade students’ learning in low socioeconomic
schools, and a study on professional development to establish best practices for teachers
to plan and lead field trips in low socioeconomic schools.

The first recommendation is for future research to examine more deeply the
challenges teachers face in the field trip process. All the study participants pointed out a
number of challenges and barriers that they encountered. Additional research into the
cause and effect of these challenges and how they differ from more affluent public
schools can lead to identifying the source of the problems and the main issues that need
to be addressed. Ideally, this can open the way for an array of workable solutions to the
challenges.

The second recommendation for further research is to study field trip influence on
prekindergarten through fifth grade students’ learning in low socioeconomic schools.
This research would focus on how to most effectively plan field trips for students’
learning and inform best practices for teachers. A study to establish best practices in low-
income schools may significantly impact the teaching and learning acquired from
informal learning practices.

The third recommendation is to study programs and organizations that support
experiential learning at low socioeconomic schools. The study would explore the
institution’s requirements for supporting these schools and determine the qualifications
the schools must meet. An in-depth study of these institutions to identify their mission,
goals, and community involvement may add to the understanding of how low
socioeconomic schools can acquire significant support and resources for their experiential learning programs.

Since teachers are at the core of field trip planning, a study of their professional development needs is critical to the success of the school’s experiential learning culture. With diminishing field trips and the many challenges teachers’ face in organizing field trips, research with the intent of improving professional development programs and establishing best practices would be extremely important for teachers and their school community.

**Summary**

This phenomenological study explored how prekindergarten through fifth grade teachers planned and implemented field trips in a low socioeconomic school. This offered four key findings from the collective lived experiences of 12 study participants. These findings showed that teachers who plan field trips face multiple challenges that are distinctive to low socioeconomic schools. Given the results of the findings and the research from the literature review, four recommendations were developed from this study: build a school culture committed to experiential learning, seek professional development to plan and implement effective field trips, establish and sustain supportive partnerships, and educate parents about their role in and the value of field trips.

As I reflect on the journey afforded me through this research, I am taken back to memories of my childhood. My interest in field trips began as a young girl attending public school in a low socioeconomic community. It was during field trips that my peers and I explored much of the immediate surroundings by connecting with natural environments and guided by my teachers with care. A seed was planted in how young
students could learn through what I later understood to be experiential learning. In my role as a phenomenological researcher, I practiced the theory of epoche and set aside my biases for the study. This allowed me to go deep within the study and capture the heart of the phenomenon of teachers’ lived experiences of planning and implementing field trips in a low socioeconomic school.

As a prekindergarten teacher in a low socioeconomic school, I have improved in my practices of organizing and leading field trips and have observed the positive influence that field trips have on students. This study has increased my interest in connecting children to natural environments and fueled my passion for experiential learning in the form of field trips.
List of References


Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Informal Education in Low Socioeconomic Communities: A Phenomenological Study of Teachers’ Lived Experiences in Planning and Leading Field Trips

Time of Interview:
Date:
Location/Setting:
Interviewer: Lottie Lynch
Interviewee:
Position of Interviewee:

Before Interview is conducted:
• Thank the interviewee for agreeing to be a participant in the study.
• Introduce the purpose of the study.
• Inform the interviewee approximate length of time of the interview (45-60 minutes).
• Inform the interviewee that the interview will be audio recorded (two voice recorders).
• Inform interviewee that participation is confidential, their name will be unmentioned.
• Inform interviewee that their participation is voluntary and they have the choice to end the interview at any time and withdraw from the study.
• Ask interviewee if there are any questions regarding the interview process.
• Confirm the interviewee’s participation in the interview.

Open-ended interview questions:
1. Tell me about yourself, what led you into the field of education?
2. Tell me about the actions you have taken in planning and leading field trips at your school.
3. What is the school District’s protocol for planning and approving field trips?
4. What are the costs incurred with organizing and implementing field trips?
5. Tell me about the challenges you have experienced in organizing field trips.
6. Where does the support come from to plan this form of experiential learning?
7. What ways do you wish to be supported in your efforts to plan and lead field trips?
8. Have you taken any formal classes in planning and leading field trips?
9. What have you learned by participating in field trips?
10. What else do you want to tell me about this experience?
Appendix B: Observation/Field Notes Protocol

CONFIDENTIAL

Teacher Participants
Participant No.: _______    Date: _______   Time: _____-

Co-researcher: Lottie Lynch

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Appendix C: Consent Form

Drexel University
Consent to Take Part In a Research Study

A. 1. Title of research study:
Informal Education in Low Socioeconomic Communities:
Teachers’ Lived Experiences in Planning and Leading Field Trips

B. 2. Researcher: Dr. Kathy Geller, Primary Investigator

C. Lottie Lynch, Doctoral Candidate, Drexel University, Sacramento Campus

D. 3. Why you are being invited to take part in a research study

We invite you to take part in a research study because of your role as pre-k through fifth grade teacher and your experience planning and leading field trips in a low socioeconomic school.

E. 4. What you should know about a research study
- Someone will explain this research study to you.
- Whether or not you participate is up to you.
- You can choose not to participate.
- You can agree to participate now and change your mind later.
- If you decide to not participate in this research no one will hold it against you.
- Feel free to ask all the questions you want before you decide.

F. 5. Who can you talk to about this research study?
If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think the research has hurt you, talk to the researcher Lottie Lynch at 510-599-4803 or ll489@drexel.edu. Additionally you may also contact Dr. Kathy Geller who is supervising the study at 916-213-2790 or kdg39@drexel.edu.

This research has been reviewed and approved by an Institutional Review Board (IRB). An IRB reviews research projects so that steps are taken to protect the rights and welfare of humans subjects taking part in the research. You may talk to them at (215) 255-7857 or email HRPP@drexel.edu for any of the following:
• Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
• You cannot reach the research team.
• You want to talk to someone besides the research team.
• You have questions about your rights as a research subject.
• You want to get information or provide input about this research.
G. 6. Why is this research being done?

The purpose of this phenomenological research is to explore the challenges and experiences of pre-k through fifth grade teachers’ informal teaching practices in the form of field trips. By focusing on the experiences told by preschool and elementary school teachers about planning and leading educational field trips, this research seeks to explore how teachers change their practices in response to diminishing opportunities and support for this pedagogy.

H. 7. How long will the research last?

We expect that you will be in this research study for a one-on-one semi-structured interview lasting approximately 60 minutes. Interviews are planned to be conducted between October 5th and December 2014. The analysis of data and research report presented as a Doctoral Dissertation will be completed by March 2015.

I. 8. How many people will be studied?

12 pre-k through fifth grade teachers who plan and lead educational field trips in a low socioeconomic school (Oakland Unified School District) will participate in the research.

9. What happens if I say yes, I want to be in this research?

- You will receive an email describing the interview information and a proposed time and date for the interview along with a request to provide a convenient phone number to finalize the interview. You will also receive this “Consent to Take Part In a Research Study” document for your personal review. These emails will be followed by a call from Lottie Lynch who will setup a date and time for the interview. The date, time and place for the following interviews will be decided at the end of previous interviews.
- Prior to the start of your participation, the researcher will review this form with you and gain your consent to participate in this process.
- You will interact with Lottie Lynch, Doctoral Candidate at Drexel University School Of Education.
- The interviews will be at your place for your convenience.
- The interview is planned to be conducted from October 5th to December 2014.
- You will be in this research study for a one-to-one semi-structured interview lasting approximately 60 minutes. Two digital recorders will be used to assure a verbatim record of the questions and responses. Observation notes will be taken during the interview by the researcher. You will also be encouraged to share any artifacts related to your experience planning and leading field trips in the Title I School of your employment. Photos of the artifacts will be taken and the artifacts will be returned to you at the end of each interview session.
To maintain your confidentiality, you will only be identified by a pseudonym throughout the study on the recordings and in any transcriptions, analysis or reporting by this label. Information from the artifacts will also be represented with pseudonyms and faces in any photos used will be blacked out.

J. 10. What are my responsibilities if I take part in this research?
If you take part in this research, it is very important that you:

- Follow the investigator’s or researcher’s instructions.
- Tell the investigator or researcher right away if you have a complication or injury.

K. 11. What happens if I do not want to be in this research?
You may decide not to participate in the research and it will not be held against you.

L. 12. What happens if I say yes, but I change my mind later?
If you agree to participate in the research now, you can stop at any time it will not be held against you.

M. 13. Is there any way being in this study could be bad for me?
There is no inherent risk to participation in this research study including physical, psychological, privacy, legal, social or economic risk to the participants.

N. 14. Do I have to pay for anything while I am on this study?
There is no cost to you for participating in this study.
15. Will being in this study help me in any way?
There are no benefits to you from your taking part in this research. We cannot promise any benefits to others from your taking part in this research.

O. 16. What happens to the information we collect?
Efforts will be made to limit access to your personal information including research study records, to people who have a need to review this information. We cannot promise complete secrecy. Organizations that may inspect and copy your information include the IRB and other representatives of this organization.

Following the completion of the study, the primary investigator will maintain in a locked cabinet in her office for a period of three years the following original records: Correspondence, research proposal, data collection instrument, data and results, audio tapes, protocols, Drexel IRB submission, approved informed consent form, training certifications, and any other documents required by regulations. After that time, if there is no further use for it, data collected for this study will be destroyed. If additional publications are in process, the data will be maintained in the locked cabinet in the primary investigator’s office.

We may publish the results of this research. However, we will keep your name, organization and other identifying information confidential.
P. 17. Can I be removed from the research without my OK?
No. The researcher does not anticipate any reason to terminate participation.

Q. 18. What else do I need to know?
This research study is being done by Drexel University. There is no inherent risk to participation in this research study including physical, psychological, privacy, legal, social or economic risk to the participants.
**Signature Block for Capable Adult**

Your signature documents your permission to take part in this research.

**DO NOT SIGN THIS FORM AFTER THIS DATE**

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Appendix D: Letter of Inquiry and Follow-up Email

(Date)

Dear_____________,

I am writing to request your participation in a doctoral dissertation study entitled Informal Education in Low Socioeconomic Communities: Teachers’ Lived Experiences in Planning and Leading Field Trips. The purpose of this study is to add to the existing knowledge of institutional and individual pre-kindergarten-fifth grade teachers’ practices in planning and leading field trips. This study is designed to enable students to take content to context and build background knowledge. This research is conducted as part of the dissertation requirement for my Doctoral Degree in Educational Leadership and Management at Drexel University under the supervision of Dr. Kathy Geller, Assistant Clinical Professor, School of Education.

If you agree to participate in this study, I request to conduct a one-on-one interview for approximately 45 to 60 minutes. Since the purpose of the interview is to collect data, I ask that I be allowed to voice record the interview and document handwritten notes during the process.

As a participant in this study, please be aware that all participation is voluntary, confidential and you will only be identified by a pseudonym. It is your option to choose not to participate or end the study at any time without any repercussions. There are no known risks or discomforts related to this study.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me for more information. I can be reached at 510.599.4803 or by email at lynchlottie@yahoo.com. Also, you may contact the Principal Investigator, Kathy Geller, Ph.D., Drexel University (Sacramento Campus), School of Education, 916.213.2790 or by email at Kdg39@drexel.edu.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to your response.

Respectfully,

Lottie Lynch
Co-Investigator
Doctoral Candidate
Ed.D. in Educational Leadership and Management
Drexel University, School of Education
510.562.9898
lynchlottie@yahoo.com
Follow-up Email to Participants

(Date)

Dear __________,

I am writing to thank you for your response and request your participation in my doctoral dissertation study entitled *Informal Education in Low Socioeconomic Communities: Teachers’ Lived Experiences in Planning and Leading Field Trips*.

The purpose of this study is to add to the existing knowledge of institutional and individual pre-kindergarten-fifth grade teachers’ practices in planning and leading field trips. This study is designed to enable students to take content to context and build background knowledge. This research is conducted as part of the dissertation requirement for my Doctoral Degree in Educational Leadership and Management at Drexel University under the supervision of Dr. Kathy Geller, Assistant Clinical Professor and School of Education.

If you agree to participate in this study, I request to conduct a one-on-one interview for approximately 45 to 60 minutes. Since the purpose of the interview is to collect data, I ask that I be allowed to voice record the interview and document handwritten notes during the process. I will also ask that you bring any related documents to your field trip experiences that may serve as artifacts. At the end of the interview I will take photos of such documents and return them to you.

As a participant in this study, please be aware that all participation is voluntary, confidential and you will only be identified by a pseudonym. It is your option to choose not to participate or end the study at any time without any repercussions. There are no known risks or discomforts related to this study.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me for more information. I can be reached at 510.599.4803 or by email at ll489@drexel.edu. Also, you may contact the Principal Investigator, Kathy Geller, Ph.D., Drexel University (Sacramento Campus), School of Education, 916.213.2790 or by email at Kdg39@drexel.edu.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to your response.

Respectfully,

Lottie Lynch,
Co-Investigator
Doctoral Candidate
Ed.D. in Educational Leadership and Management
Drexel University, School of Education
510.562.9898
ll489@drexel.edu
Appendix E: Artifact Review Protocol

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