

GUIDED SCHOOL FIELD-TRIPS IN PRIMARY EDUCATION: THE NORTHWEST OF THE PROVINCE OF ZAMORA

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The aim of this paper is to elaborate a guided school field-trip that could help the daily work of the Primary Education teachers when they want to work with their pupils in their nearest environment. We have elaborated a trip throughout the northwest of the province of Zamora (Spain), including natural references of the relief, the landscape and the natural vegetation that are included in the current Primary Education curriculum.

1. INTRODUCTION

At present, guided school trips seem to give us many educational possibilities, despite of the fact that they are considered traditional and ancient teaching and learning resources. Guided school trips could be defined as the group of activities that takes place far away from the school and which allows pupils to be in contact with the environment. Guided school trips also promote an active and participative learning, where pupils can develop experiences that would be difficult to do if they stay in their classroom, like they usually do in the traditional education process.

They are not a new teaching and learning resource. In fact, every single refreshing pedagogical movement throughout the History of Education in Spain has promoted these activities as a priority element in the teaching and learning of different disciplines. We find the first reference to this methodology in the Spanish education in the *Institución Libre de Enseñanza* and in the movements of pedagogical renovation developed in the last decades of the 19th century (López, 2006). Concretely, Francisco Giner de los Ríos and Manuel Bartolomé Cossío did the first guided school trip with the *Institución Libre de Enseñanza* in the Sierra de Madrid in 1883 (Jiménez-Landi, 1984).

Guided school field-trips are included in the teaching and learning process of many disciplines because they contribute to promote different capacities among the pupils, such as observation and comprehension, and to communicate certain values that contribute to create a significant knowledge using the local or the regional environment (Wass, 1992). With these capacities and with an adequate development of didactical strategies, students can achieve to connect the contents that they usually work with in the classroom with these other elements that the teacher should select to work with during the guided school trip (Morales, 2014).

Educational trips are developed in a different context from the daily classroom instruction, making easier to the pupils to acquire and consolidate concepts or ideas for understanding and appreciating the landscape and its signification (García 2004; Mínguez, 2010). In a pedagogical way, during the field-trips students can work with theoretical and conceptual aspects through discovery and experiential practices, verifying the concepts that they have learned in the classroom in order to consolidate them and deep in learning. The implementation of this method gives to the pupils all the prominence in the knowledge process by promoting direct observation of the phenomenon and by creating a critical spirit at the same time that they understand the reality as a whole (Gómez, 1986).

This paper aims to provide a designed guided school field-trip through the northwestern part of the province of Zamora (West of Spain). The planning of the field experience is based on the objectives and contents that appear in the subjects of Social and Natural Sciences during the last two courses of the Primary Education period (10-12 years old). From this starting point, we have selected five locations with good didactical possibilities and with a good accessibility in order to study different aspects concerning the landscape, relief and region's natural vegetation.

2. THE DESIGN OF THE GUIDED SCHOOL FIELD-TRIP

The one-day designed field-trip includes five stops or points of interest following a route from the city of Zamora to San Martín de Castañeda, a small village located in the northwest of the province. At this village, students should go on foot by the *Senda de los monjes* path till Ribadelago Viejo, crossing one of the lateral moraines of the ancient (Quaternary) glacier and going through an oak (*Quercus pyrenaica*) and a river surrounding the Sanabria Lake, which constitutes the largest natural lake in Spain.

The trip was designed for pupils of the 5th and 6th courses of Primary Education (10-12 years old) due to the fact that the concepts that we are going to work with are very complex and abstract. The spatial thinking, the complexity of the time-space scale and the difficulties that usually appear in the *Senda de los monjes* path, make us

focus our attention only in the pupils from the last two levels of the Primary Education. Nevertheless, the itinerary can be adapted to other educational levels modifying the different elements of the curriculum that teachers are going to explain. In this context, we could maintain the planned stops and travel by bus from San Martín de Castañeda to Ribadelago, instead of going on foot throughout the path. During this little trip that surrounds the lake, several stops can be made in one of the different beaches located in the east side of the lake.

It is very important to prepare the trip before visiting natural spaces. We strongly recommend motivating pupils in order to achieve the didactical goals of this experience. In this process, pupils should take part not only in the dynamic of the trip, but also when we fix the objectives.

3. OBJECTIVES

The main objectives that we have considered are:

- To know and to appreciate the diversity of the environment of the northwest of the province of Zamora (Spain).
- To promote the knowledge, the investigation and the curiosity for the environment among the students.
- To use techniques and to put in practice procedures from Social and Natural Sciences that are included in the Primary Education curriculum.
- To promote respectful behavior with the environment and with the others.

4. A GUIDED SCHOOL FIELD-TRIP IN THE NORTHWEST OF THE PROVINCE OF ZAMORA

The province of Zamora is located in the northwest of Spain, in the autonomous community of Castile and Leon. The vast majority of its territory is flat, but a group of high mountains appears in the northern and northwestern limits with peaks over 2.000 m of altitude. The natural forests of this territory are composed by evergreen oak (*Quercus ilex* subsp. *ballota*), due to the fact that this region has a warm-summer Mediterranean climate (*Csb* in the Köppen climate classification). In the western sector of the province of Zamora, where the precipitations are higher than the east sector, we could identify big forests of oaks (*Quercus pyrenaica*). And in the mountains of the north and northwest of the province, we find typical vegetation of the Mediterranean mountains with some influences of the Atlantic climate.

From a geological point of view, the eastern part of Zamora belongs to the continental Duero Basin (Cenozoic), which is mostly composed of siliciclastics (conglomerates, sandstones and mudrocks) and minor limestones and evaporites. In general terms, siliciclastic sediments represent fluvial and alluvial fan systems developed along the periphery of the basin, whereas carbonates and evaporites are interpreted as lacustrine environments deposited in the center and eastern parts of the basin. The western part of the province of Zamora belongs to the Iberian Massif, which mostly consists of metamorphic (shales, quartzites, gneisses) and igneous (granites) rocks (Precambrian and Paleozoic) originated and deformed during the Hercynian orogeny.

The guided school trip goes throughout the two mentioned geological domains and has five main stops. Every single stop has been selected because the characteristics of the landscape allow teaching different aspects of relief, geology and climate, and their influence in the distribution of the vegetal species. The names of the villages or territories where we are going to stop are: Montamarta, Puente de la Estrella, Tábara, San Martín de Castañeda and Ribadelago.

The designed field-trip could be classified as field-trips with guided observations, according to Del Carmen and Pedrinaci's (1997) classification. Nevertheless, most of the planned stops allow students to make some observations of the key features independently, and many of the designed activities aim to make a participatory fieldwork in order to engage student's attention and deepening the learning experience. There are a wide range of activities that teachers could develop during the trip because there could be different approaches when the itinerary is planned. In this paper we have chosen some activities related with Social and Natural Sciences such as field hypothesis generation, orientation with maps, location of cardinal points using shadows and the compass, drawing sketches of fluvial and glacial geomorphical landscapes, collecting minerals and rocks, sampling of herbarium specimens...

5. CONCLUSIONS

Guided school field-trips have a long history in the Spanish education. They constitute excellent pedagogical resources because they promote basic scientific formation and have a valuable role as a vehicle for the integration on many theoretical and practical concepts. There are no doubts about their educational role, despite to the fact that they are ancient and traditional activities: they active the synergies with the environment and make easier to develop specific, active and collaborative methodologies. Guided field-trips are focused on the active investigation, experimentation and direct action of the pupils, and at the same time, field experiences allow students to develop some attitudes that are very difficult to work with school-based instruction. Pupils become the

protagonist of their own learning using this methodology because they use a discovery learning method. However, despite to their potential, field trips still are underused as learning experiences. In order to obtain all their pedagogical potential, these activities should be part of the Primary Education curriculum and should be included in the Educational Project of the School.

We have designed a guide to Primary Education teachers in order to make easier the organization of a guided school trip throughout the northwest of the province of Zamora (Spain). We have included key elements related to relief, geology, climate and vegetal landscapes that give its personality to the territory, including some references to the human footprint in the environment. The planning of the field experience is based on the objectives and contents that appear in the subjects of Social and Natural Sciences in the current curriculum. With this proposal we hope to encourage the valorization of the natural spaces of our region, inspiring pupils to take care of nature.