

Student Journals and a Geography Fieldtrip in Costa Rica.

An assignment for the 'Issues of Concern in
Geographic Education' Module

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Introduction

One of the most interesting aspects of the 'Issues of Concern in Geographical Education', MA module at the Institute of Education, has been the role of fieldwork in enhancing geographical learning in recent times. It is strongly argued that "Fieldwork is central to the ethos, culture and pedagogy of Geography" (Jenkins, 1997; Clark, 1996) and I believe its role and purpose in aiding geographic learning should be carefully considered when planning such activities. That fieldwork contributes to geographic learning is evidenced by the fact that in the UK, observations of OFSTED have indicated clearly that high achievement in geography in schools is linked to a high profile for fieldwork in the curriculum (Smith, 1997). It is these observations that have encouraged me to integrate and make efforts to vary fieldwork within my geography teaching.

The meaning of the term 'fieldwork' can vary considerably and it derives its own meaning according to the perception of the individual, yet I feel that it is best defined as "activities where learning can take place via first hand experience outside the constraints of the classroom setting" (Lonergan and Andresen, 1988). By helping young people apply their knowledge, utilize their discovery skills and "gain first hand experiences" across a range of challenges outside the classroom, learning will be enhanced as recognized by the DFES (2006) who produced a curriculum changing manifesto based on the premises that "learning outside the classroom builds bridges between theory and reality, schools and

communities, young people and their futures." Quality learning experiences in 'real' situations have the capacity to raise achievement across a range of subjects and to develop better personal and social skills (DFES, 2006). This manifesto strongly supports the importance, value and purpose of geography fieldwork in education and indeed is a useful argument for overcoming barriers to undertaking geographical fieldwork in schools.

It would be expected that the use of geography fieldwork to enhance geographic learning varies considerably across UK schools and there are many reasons for this. Dalton (2001) recognises "the high level of diversity relating to the amount of field study experienced" when questioning students who had decided to pursue the subject further in higher education. I am sure that this can be due to many variables, not least the nature of staff within a geography department in the school, as noticed by Job et al; (1999) who discovered that "within each geography department, different teachers may attach different priorities to fieldwork, hence the geography teacher is an important part of the experiences." Geography teachers will vary in terms of experience, ideas and enthusiasm for fieldwork. Thus, with fieldwork being an effective tool in engaging students in Geography, I believe that "Effective planning, management and a commitment to the educational and personal benefits of fieldwork, geography teachers can ensure that it remains as one of the most significant learning experiences that pupils have during their school careers (Job et al; (1999). Other influencing

factors, which could provide further areas of study as to their influence on the undertaking of fieldwork, could well include the socio-economic, background demographics of the students, which when listening to students and parents has increasingly played a part in the affordability of some fieldwork experience for students of comprehensive backgrounds; and the ethos and bureaucracy within a school environment, which when listening to colleagues, I am sure has played a significant part too. It is interesting to note that I have experienced similar problems in setting up fieldwork in my department such as those noticed by Allender (1999) in the USA where he determined that "it is expensive, there are legal liability worries, virtual reality fieldwork seems more cost effective and there is a lack of skilled instructors."

'Purposes' of Geography Fieldtrips

There has been a growth in the number of overseas field experiences over the last few years. Almost every week I receive a brochure at school from a private company, detailing the rich variety of overseas fieldwork opportunities and experiences on offer to teachers and students. Although research remains limited on the purpose and learning benefits of international trips, Job et al; (1999) recognise the value of residential trips when considering "the opportunities of fieldwork away from the school and home locality." They state that the attractions and benefits include such key features such as: "allowing students to experience a novel milieu, the motivation which comes from learning together in

a contrasting environment, the social aspects of a residential field course, and the aesthetic and emotional experiences of being in fine landscapes which can form the inspiration for a lifelong interest in Geography.” It is with this learning experience in mind that, this essay aims to reflect upon these key features as to the purposes of fieldwork on a recent school trip that I set up to Costa Rica in February 2007 (See Appendix (Fig. 3) for Costa Rica 2007 Tour Itinerary).

The table below as constructed by Job et al;(1999) – shows ‘a summary of fieldwork purposes identified by geographical practioners’ (See fig 1) that will be a useful discussion point for me to consider and then evaluate these purposes by using student’s viewpoints as to the effectiveness of the purpose of the trip.

Broad Educational Purpose	Related Fieldwork Aim	Examples of specific fieldwork objectives
Conceptual (knowledge and understanding)	Supporting the Geography curriculum through promoting geographical knowledge and understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reinforcing geographical terminology through tangible examples • Identifying and defining geographical questions, issues and problems • Understanding relationships between sets of geographical factors • Understanding the processes underlying geographical patterns in space and time
Skills Related	Developing organisational and technical aptitudes relevant to both Geography and the world of work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning a geographical investigation or enquiry • Developing geographical skills which can be transferred to individual enquiries, coursework and employment • Practising and applying technical skills

		<p>(including ICT) in a real world context</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing skills in locating, retrieving, analysing and interpreting information
Aesthetic	Developing sensitivity to and appreciation of landscapes and the built and natural environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing a sense of place • Developing an ability to 'read' a landscape • Encouraging emotional responses to environments • Expressing preferences about environments • Recording and interpreting the experience of landscape through creative activity
Values Related	Developing awareness of a range of viewpoints in relation to the social, political and ecological concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognising and respecting the values of others • Clarifying and justifying personal values • Seeing the wider social and ecological effects of changes in the environment
Social and Personal Development	Promoting self confidence and an ability to work co-operatively	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing co-operation and communication skills through participating in group work • Encouraging a sense of adventure • Building confidence and resilience through offering challenges • Promoting camaraderie and social fusion through participation in a common endeavour

Fig.1 – A summary of fieldwork purposes identified by geographical practitioners (Job et al; 1999 – Beyond the Bikesheds)

Experiential Learning

Gerber and Chuan (2000), when considering the power of fieldwork, encapsulated a similar vision that I indeed had for an experiential learning geography fieldtrip to Costa Rica in 2007. They stated "Let us imagine that we are located in an environment of our choice. The weather is excellent with warm balmy breezes wafting over the sun-covered landscape. Very few clouds are dotted across the sky and the surrounding environment beckons us to enter, explore and enjoy. The pressure of time is not crucial at the moment and the enthusiasm of the members in our group is matched only by the diverse sounds of bird and animal life in the nearby fields. We are ready to do Geography!!" (Gerber and Chuan, 1999) This indeed is the perfect imaginative picture that in fact existed for the Costa Rica trip 2007.

The carefully planned Costa Rica Trip would provide a setting to re-engage learners and provide experiences, in which, as outlined by the DFES (2006), "much has been learnt in recent years about how the brain works and the different ways in which we prefer to learn." Research suggests the need to re-engage learners with the world as they actually experience it. This is often called 'experiential' or 'authentic' learning." Kent and Foskett (1999) observed that "research within the field of educational psychology suggests that there is a strong link between experiential learning and improved learning outcomes." The concept of this 'meaningful learning' (Ausubel, 1968) emphasises the gains that

derive from 'discovery' learning' rather than rote learning. Hence, this supports the value of geography fieldwork.

Origins of the trip

The creation of such a trip came through my own 'experiential learning' where I lived and worked abroad as Head of Geography on the Caribbean Island of Grand Cayman between 2000 and 2003. As Costa Rica was relatively near to Grand Cayman, diverse in natural environments, relatively affordable to the students at the school, there were less legal liability worries on the island and I considered myself to be a skilled instructor, in tandem with a native Costa Rican guide who would be with us at all times; I planned to give the students the chance to experience something completely different from what I would consider to be the 'normal' of their lives. Teaching abroad for myself proved to be 'a breath of fresh air' as I was away from the somewhat limiting factors, restrictions and bureaucracy of the UK that had somewhat knocked my confidence to experiment with and I had previously faced in the UK. The curriculum approach in Grand Cayman seemed to be a viewpoint common to many places abroad where "Curriculum reforms stress life-wide learning, i.e., exposing students to learning opportunities in a milieu of formal and informal environments: the school, the classroom, home, community, workplace and the physical environment" (Curriculum Development Council – Hong Kong, 2000). This represented a reformed vision of curriculum that is emerging which requires that

“school learning should be authentic and connected to the world outside of school not only to make learning more interesting and motivating to students but also to develop the ability to use knowledge in real-world settings” (Shepard, 2000, p. 7).

Contextual Background

Planning started over a year in advance of the trip with an initial letter to parents to gauge interest and then a parent's information evening that involved a powerpoint presentation, photos, videos and answered any questions that parents may have had. The cost of the trip for each student was estimated at £1195 which was to include all costs (flights, accommodation, insurance, all activities, food and spending money.) Within this amount, there was a contingency budget of approximately £100 per student as with overseas residential trips exchange rates fluctuate, flight prices change and there are more risks involved. The trip was offered to Yr 10 and Yr 11 Geography students studying Geography GCSE at Vyners School, Ickenham, London. There was an uptake from 26 students (aged 15/16 years old, mixed sex and of varied abilities) who were accompanied by 4 members of staff, 2 male and 2 female (3 geography teachers and 1 history teacher). There was no selection process as to which students were allowed to go, much depended on the student's (or rather their parents) ability to afford the trip. Much preliminary paperwork and administration was required which involved letters to parents (see fig.3 & fig. 4

for a sample), governors and LEA approval, a staggered money collection programme, passport and visa details, medical details and activity consent forms. Responsibilities for the collation of each aspect were delegated out to members of staff going out on the trip. Delegation greatly reduced the burden on the trip leader. As a collective group we also decided to undertake fundraising activities to help reduce the cost of the trip and to raise money for a local school that we had previously visited. These activities helped bond the group of students, parents and teachers through activities such as a quiz night, a shopping evening, car washing, carol singing, Christmas shopping wrapping and cake sales. We also canvassed local businesses for sponsorship gaining free products for a raffle (e.g. meals, haircuts, wine, chocolates) and sponsorship from a finance company called 'ING' for custom made t-shirts (of which you can spot the Vyners students and teachers in the picture below wearing matching tops) and baseball caps (See fig.2).



(Fig 2– A group photo at the local Costa Rican school - 'cultural interchange')

Producing a journal through experiential learning

The purpose of the field trip to Costa Rica from London was to support learning based around the Geography GCSE OCR Syllabus C, as noted by Job et al (1999) who stated that "Fieldwork supports the geography curriculum through promoting geographical knowledge and understanding." Students were to learn through experience. The guidance that students were given to this task was to 'reflect on their geographical experiences' in whatever form they chose to, some chose a written and/or visual journal (some brought camcorders, used dialogue

and would edit on return). Each evening, before being allowed free time, students often sat together in groups and reflected on their experiences in a communal area, at times asking a teacher for clarification. Students recorded their findings by using a rich vocabulary of text, pictures and video clips. Whilst this initially started as an evening activity, students soon realised that they wanted their own free time in the evening, hence rather than just reflecting at the end of the day, the journal writing became a more immediate process as they experienced events, and much was written in transit on long coach journeys. This reflection would formulate the basis for the students own journal/diary of the Costa Rica trip due to be submitted 3 days after our arrival home, whilst it was still fresh in their heads. My intention was not only to discover the learning opportunities that had occurred in comparison to the purposes of fieldwork (See Fig.1), but also to provide a memento and souvenir for both parents and students of the 'geographic trip of a lifetime.'

The Purposes of Fieldwork applied to Costa Rica

For a detailed view and itinerary of the experiential learning that the students experienced, see the Costa Rica Tour Itinerary 2007 (Fig. 3) in the appendix.

This needs to be read first to understand the following discussion of the journals in relation to 'purposes of fieldwork' (See Fig.1). Also, it may be useful to read an account of one student's fieldwork experience as posted on the Vyners School website - <http://www.vyners.hillingdon.sch.uk/>

1. Conceptual (Knowledge and Understanding)

Job et al (1999) noticed that 'Fieldwork supports the Geography Curriculum through promoting geographical knowledge and understanding. A point to consider was how the Costa Rica trip was "Re-enforcing geographical knowledge through tangible examples. After some extensive reading and analysis of the journals, the student's reflective journals clearly have linkage to many of the concepts learnt in class ranging from physical features such as volcanoes, rivers and the tropical rainforest to human features such as the contrasts that exist within a developing world city. This was particularly pleasing as various studies have also reported that field trips are often treated as isolated events that are dissociated from classroom learning (Lai, 1999) and I was very keen from the outset for this not to happen. Reference throughout the GCSE course, in build up meetings and reflections at the end of the day had been made to features and concepts based in Costa Rica. I was keen to buck the trend where "Teachers typically neglect the indoor components of fieldwork, i.e., the briefing and debriefing stages in the classroom" (Lai, 1999; Pearson, 1985). Continual careful planning and integration was an important part as "Such dissociation may affect students' ability to transfer learning as many of them are unable to use fieldwork experiences to support assertions made in their examination responses"

(McPartland & Harvey, 1987). On many occasions the journals contained 'text book' diagrams that they had remembered from class to explain the features and concepts that they had experienced e.g. whilst white water rafting, a student explained why they capsized and lost balance due to the fastest flow being on the outside of the bend! Many of the Year 11 students who had learnt about the Tropical Rainforest through a 'resource booklet' dealing with the issue of 'Deforestation and Sustainable Rainforests', in preparation for a mock decision making exam in November 2006, commented on the re-enforcement of geographical knowledge that a 'canopy zip line' visit to the rainforest had on them, "It reminded me of all the things we learnt about in the DME on rainforests, and I could look and say "Oh look, a liana!" This somewhat concurs with Kent and Foskett's (2000) observation that "an expedition approach focuses primarily on the exemplification of classroom based work in the field whilst adding some element of physical challenge to the process," and Boardman's (1974) study as to the viewpoints of the objectives of fieldwork of "to comprehend in the field concepts learnt in the classroom." I also noticed that within the student journals, there was much new knowledge acquired through students being resourceful in acquiring knowledge and reflecting upon the learning experience that had occurred during the course of the day. The students were able to make their own connections between the geography of the environment that they encountered on the field trip and the uses to which these features might be put (Gerber and Chuan, 2000).

It was also useful to consider whether students engaged in “identifying geographical questions issues and problems.” Whilst the nature of the trip did not require students to generate ‘titles’ problems or questions to investigate further for a study, as most 14-19 courses require from fieldwork (e.g. OCR GCSE Syllabus C and EDEXCEL GCE B), there was much thought provoking content and I noticed an automatic increase in self-generated questions occurring, based on the student’s observations in the many wonderful places that we had visited. A few questions, often of a high level of thinking, were sometimes posed in the student’s reflective journals such as, “It made me really upset when I saw people my age in the shanty towns and I wondered what made me be born into such a lucky position and them into such a bad one.” Yet, the vast majority of questions occurred at the point in time itself and then were written up as fact by the student upon discovering the answer.

Another point to consider was the effect of “understanding relationships between sets of geographical factors”. Students were able to link together a variety of different factors and were able to explain how they were interlinked as they witnessed the occurrences; hence there was an understanding of the processes underlying geographical patterns in space and time. Comments such as, “We came to a town at the bottom of a volcano with a lot of tourist shops.... as it was their main way of getting money. The volcano is one of the most visited places in Costa Rica and the locals exploit this and get a lot of money from tourism,”

reflect this understanding. Also, on a visit to the local coffee plantations students saw how geographical factors could be related to each other, "We learnt that Costa Rica makes really nice coffee because of the hot climate. The fertile soil from the volcano helps to grow the coffee as when the volcano erupts; the ash is blown out of the volcano and creates a fertile layer of soil."

2. Skills Related

Developing organisational and technical aptitudes relevant to both geography and the world of work (Job et al, 1999) was another important feature of the trip. Whilst there was no formal geographical investigation to plan, many lines of enquiry and possible topics of investigation were generated through the students self generated questions and if necessary, a range of project titles could have been generated. As Job et al (1999) suggested, students were however able to "develop geographical skills which could have been transferred to individual enquiries, coursework and employment." From reading the student journals, it was clear that students learnt photo analysis, field sketching, numerical and literacy skills, presentation skills, data collection and analysis skills. They also learnt many social skills and a greater understanding of other cultures. Students learnt how to describe (what they saw) and explain (give reasons for) geographical features. These skills gained through activities somewhat contradict the viewpoint of secondary teachers, and a statement that I disagree with, that

suggests “there is no substantive reference to transferability in the skills and knowledge required” (Boardman, 1974).

Students also became more proficient in practising and applying technical skills (including ICT in a real world context) as suggested by Job et al (1999). I noticed that students used their digital cameras to great effect and with a sense of purpose by interweaving these pictures into their journals to help them describe and explain geographical features. Mobile phones and in particular the camera and videoing facilities were also used to take pictures and video footage with. This was evident in the integration of these features in their reflective journals. Some students used their own personal laptops that they had brought with them and some decided to construct a video diary to recount events and form the basis of a future assembly to the rest of the school. The use of email and MSN also enabled students to contact friends and family back home. Whilst Lawler (1986) recognised “the ways in which the use of computers helped GCSE students analyse their fieldwork data through the ‘rapid handling of data’,” whilst the ICT activities before/during and after the Costa Rica trip did not require as much analytical packages, I would argue that the ICT skills were an important enhancement to the engagement and reflective process. Students were also able to develop skills in locating, retrieving, analysing and interpreting information. Students conducted an activity where they had to collect 10 items in a Treasure Hunt around San Jose city and then present the information in the evening.

3. Aesthetic

A key feature of the trip was students were able to “Develop sensitivity to and give appreciation of landscapes and the built and natural environment” (Job et al, 1999) hence developing their awe and wonder. I was able to see that students clearly developed a sense of place through comments such as “We reached the central town square and admired the theatre which was one of the main attractions of San Jose. It was incredible and was built in the 1890s. I felt very honoured to be there.” Another indicating comment on viewing Volcano Poas for the first time was, “I looked down at the floor, before looking up, but when I did it was stunning. Almost unreal. There was a grey lagoon in the centre of the caldera which was surrounded by the cloud forest. We were at an altitude of 2574m and the sulphur was visible because of yellow stains on the rocks. On horseback riding through the rainforest a student noticed “We rode our horses along a rough road and then into the tropical rainforest. This was a magical moment for me because it finally clicked for me that I was in the actual rainforest and the sheer immensity of it all.” “In the forest all the elements I had learnt about were present, for example, lianas and emergents. It is exactly how I imagined it to be.” This somewhat supports Mackenzie and White’s (1982) work with pupils in Australia which suggests that memorable episode’s enhance learning and improve long term knowledge retention. I was most surprised by

how many students commented on the 'amazing' aesthetic beauty of the country which somewhat contradicts the low priority viewpoint that secondary school teachers have for the senses as our objective of fieldwork (Boardman, 1974). Comments such as "Mr. Lobo kept telling us how amazing it would be (speaking about Volcano Poas), but I did not expect it to have the huge impact that it was about to have on me" really showed the wonder and awe that they felt for the landscape.

Developing an ability to 'read' a landscape was somewhat minimal as students had limited opportunity to navigate their own way through Costa Rican landscapes, largely due to my own fears for student safety. Whilst I believe in discovery and would have loved to have given the students more time to explore more of the natural landscape, student safety was foremost in my mind.

A very strong feature of the trip was "Encouraging emotional responses to environments." I was very interested in the emotional responses from students and in particular, I noticed that there was a very emotive response from the students upon a visit to a shanty town in the 'Pavas area' of San Jose, Costa Rica. A student commented - "Rubbish was dumped at the end of each street, bars had been placed on windows, residents were watching us pass by. It felt awful driving by in our plush coach, with our flashy cameras and wallets stuffed full of dollars. I just felt like I was intruding, like I shouldn't have been there. I

almost felt like I was exploiting the poor people for my own enjoyment, although I did not enjoy it. It just made us all feel so lucky that we have what we have. Depressing, but very thought provoking” “I felt really bad about the whole experience of visiting the Shanty town. I was intruding in their lives and some other students were taking photos. I was intensely embarrassed and slightly upset that the idea had been suggested in the first place. We were not there to help them, we were there to gawp and be nosey, for example, if a bunch of millionaires drove past me in my home, village and life – taking photos, I would feel deeply offended and used.” These comments reflect the strong emotions and feelings that the students had. I have to say that I was somewhat surprised by the students criticism of my planning of this excursion, but recognised that I had achieved some degree of success in my goals as it had given the students a different perspective on the lives of others and their own.

Students were also able to express preferences about environments. On hiking to the top of Volcano Poas, a student commented “as we got closer to the volcano we could smell the sulphur, it smelt like someone has shoved a rotten egg in my face. But it was worth it just for the amazing view that I saw, like nothing I could ever imagine. I could see all the layers of ash from the past eruptions and there were lots of colours, most of it was grey but there were patches of reds, yellow and green colours – simply beautiful”

Another strong feature was the “Recording and interpreting the experience of landscape through creative activity (Job et al, 1999)” Whilst the ‘activity day’ was camcordered by the ‘professionals,’ due to safety requirements, on reflection a student commented about her horse back riding experience through the Tropical rainforest – “We went down a dirt road surrounded by high trees from the canopy, then joined a muddy uphill path through the rainforest. Lianas hung down and brushed our faces and huge, vine-like buttress roots protruded from the ground and tripped up the horses. These buttress roots were above ground to gain as much water from the surface as possible as the water fell from the drip tip leaves. On the ground was decaying leaf litter because the heat of the rainforest is so intense, the plant remains decay rapidly and turn into nutrients for the soil. Looking up you could see the canopy and the emergents peeking through, competing for light and on our right was a deep gorge with the River Sarapiquí running through.” This to me was a very perceptive comment and showed that there was a considerable amount of learning at a deeper level.

4. Values Related

Developing awareness of a range of viewpoints in relation to social, political, and ecological concerns (Job et al, 1999) was evident in the way students recognised and respected the values of others. On a ‘cultural exchange’ (where students

from both schools gave presentations in their own language, swapped gifts, sampled each other's national foods and played a game of football) with a local Costa Rican school, a student commented, "As we drove up to the school, it was quite a weird feeling.....I was expecting to be quite depressed and sad, but it was the opposite; it was really uplifting because even though they have pretty much nothing, they were still so happy....simple things like balloons, which we take so much for granted " On a visit to a local market place in the centre of San Jose a student expressed her opinion and feelings about the locals "They were all looking at us and I finally understood how foreign migrants must feel in England. I knew they had nothing against us, but as we were different we were something to look at. It was almost like racism. I almost felt like I was in the way of everyone all the time. We had a challenge to complete, but I wasn't very keen on doing this as I didn't feel safe at all. I felt that they could turn on us at any minute and abuse us until we left. There was so few of us compared to them. This is what I imagine racism to be." This to an extent indicated a clarification of and justification of personal values. "For most geographers, fieldwork is a key component of their enthusiasm for the subject and one of their own personal biography (Foskett, 1997)" It was pleasing to see students think about the wider social and ecological effects of changes in the environment.

5. Social and Personal Development

Promoting self confidence and an ability to work co-operatively (Job et al, 1999) was at the heart of this trip. Students developed skills such as co-operation and communication through the participating in group work. A student recognised that whilst they were a diverse group of students in terms of age and ability, the group had "bonded and developed friendships through completing a series of fundraising activities, mainly to give money to the children at the school that we shared a cultural interchange with, activities such as a Costa Rica Quiz night, cake sales, Christmas wrapping in a local shopping centre, the collection of second hand football tops, a Christmas shopping evening and washing teacher's cars!" "As we were all wearing our named tops, loads of people asked us if we were a soccer team or hockey team." The wearing of similar tops developed a sense of team spirit and camaraderie.

The whole trip was also built around encouraging a sense of adventure and excitement within the students. In anticipation of an activity day that included horse riding, canopy zip lining (where students glided through levels of the rainforest suspended on a rope) and white water rafting, a student commented, "I had so been looking forward to this day as I had never done activities as exciting as this" "The actual rafting was amazing, I was a little apprehensive at first, but once we got going it was great, the rapids were really strong and we

got soaked!" Smith (1999) noticed that of 'outdoor pursuits' such as this that "the emphasis is also strongly in the field of psychomotor development. Experiencing personal physical challenge and enhancing practical skills contributes to such development, but also links strongly to affective development in terms of personal development."

It was also pleasing to see students building confidence and resilience through offering challenges. A student built her confidence and resilience whilst going on the rainforest canopy zip wires, "I was really scared because the thought of one wire holding me up above the rainforest really worried me. However, I got attached to the zip wire and went. I was screaming so loud and towards the end I was going extremely fast, I panicked and thought I would crash into the stand thing (platform) at the end, which really petrified me. I landed on the stand thing and was so relieved it had finished, although ahead of me was another zip wire. The man asked me if I wanted to turn back, but I decided to stay and conquer my fear. After the first two, I got the idea of it and wasn't so scared; I even ended up enjoying it!"

A strong feature of the trip as reflected in the student journals was the camaraderie and social fusion of a rather diverse group. Once I had decided that I would run the trip as a bi-annual event rather than a yearly event, I offered the trip to all those students who had opted for GCSE Geography in both Year 11

and Year 10. It was my intention that the students would, by preparing, fundraising and learning more about the country, be taken on a journey that would last over a year, rather than just go on a 10 day holiday. I wanted students to see the purpose and benefits of having a common goal as a group and to the power and learning experience that was there for both staff and students before the trip actually happened. Through a series of fundraising activities which I had delegated responsibility to two accompanying members of staff; both staff, parents and students gelled together, developed friendships, contacts and mutual respect through hard work in the organization and planning of fundraising activities. Through my experience, "Activities have to be carefully planned and well taught. They should extend learning before and after the event." (DFES, 2006) After the event activities included the final completion (within 3 days of their return) of their reflective journals with pictures, and also the construction of a visual and auditory DVD (where students utilized and practiced their technical skills (Job et al; 1999)) to present kinesthically in a whole school assembly. This also promoted the growth and enhancement of skills of co-operation, teamwork, and understanding of other pupils and teachers (Smith, 1999).

Conclusion

In conclusion, I found that the purpose and objectives of fieldwork (Job et al; 1999 – See Fig.1) have varying roles within the Costa Rica trip. My objectives were for students to learn more about and gain a greater understanding of the geographical features and concepts as featured in the GCSE course studied at Vyners School and apply this to Costa Rica. I wanted to see whether the fieldwork that I had planned and the experiences of the students, as outlined in their reflective journals, could be applied to the fieldwork purposes as identified by geographical practitioners (Job et al; 1999). I do believe that with careful planning, the objectives as stated by Job et al (1999) are valid and were apparent on the Costa Rica trip. Evidence from the student journals as outlined previously suggests that students benefited considerably in knowledge and understanding conceptually (e.g. Issues concerning the Tropical Rainforest), they developed many skills (e.g. data collection and photo analysis), had an appreciation of the aesthetic environment (e.g. volcanic landscapes, shanty towns), developed their own values (e.g. the school visit - cultural interchange) and improved their own personal and social development (developing of friendships). On return, a few months later, Year 10 students who went on the Costa Rica trip, performed better in a Year 10 GCSE Mock Exam and in their GCSE coursework in comparison to their peers who had not gone on the trip and according to their predicted grades based on CATS tests, hence showing the value of fieldwork as noted by OFSTED. The power of residential trips was clearly

apparent in Costa Rica and supports the DFES (2006) view where they state that
“Staying away for a few days or more is a powerful way of developing key life
skills, building confidence, self esteem, communication and team working.”

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Appendix

Figure 3 – Costa Rica Trip Itinerary

VYNERS SCHOOL COSTA RICA 2007 TOUR ITINERARY	
<p>LETTER CODES: (B) Breakfast, (L) Lunch, (D) Dinner.</p>	
<p>Day by Day Itinerary</p>	
<p><u>Day 1 - Wednesday 14th February 2007</u></p>	
<p>Arrive at the International Airport 'Juan Santamaria' in Costa Rica. Meet & Great by our tour guide and Transfer to Hotel Country Inn & Suites and Check In. Rest and relax after the long journey.</p>	
<p><u>Day 2 – Thursday 15th February 2007.</u></p>	
<p>SAN JOSE CITY TOUR (B).</p>	
<p>Visiting: San Jose, University of Costa Rica, San Pedro, Principal buildings as National Museum, National Theatre, Congress, Yellow House, Plaza de la Cultura, etc. Residential areas and principal Malls. On this tour we will have the opportunity to see the contracts between the High Class and very low class in Costa Rica.</p>	
<p>Lunch will be taken at the food court of Terra Mall and Dinner at a nearby restaurant to the hotel.</p>	
<p><u>Day 3 – Friday 16th February 2007.</u></p>	

The Best of Costa Rica - Visiting. Braulio Carrillo National Park, Poas Volcano, La Paz Waterfall Gardens and Sarapiquí River. (B, L, D).

6:30 am. Breakfast at the hotel.

7:30 am. Departure to the tour:

9:00 am. Poas Volcano. (Bring jacket and rain gear) Hike to the crater. Visit to the local museum and video presentation about the National Park and the volcano. Free time for go shopping at the Nature Shop.

11:00 am. Arrival to La Paz Waterfall Gardens. Nature walk to the Waterfalls.

Visit to the Butterfly Garden (The Largest one in the world), visit to the Laboratories where the students will learn about how to reproduce butterflies for exportation. Visit to the Hummingbird Gallery, the Orchids Garden the frog pond, the Snakes garden and the Typical House.

1:00 pm. Buffet Lunch at La Paz Waterfall Gardens.

3:00 pm. Transfer to Hotel Selva Verde in Sarapiquí. Overnight and Dinner. (This hotel has an ecological concept and it is located beside the river.

Day 4 – Saturday 17th February 2007.

SARAPIQUI COMBO TOUR. (B, L, D). Full Day Adventure with our special COMBO ADVENTURE TOUR.

The ADVENTURE COMBO is the most natural way to experience the beauty of Costa Rica, while actively participating in some wonderful soft adventure tours. We will visit wilderness areas at the same time as we enjoy various special tours, all in full contact with nature. This journey will submerge us into the great diversity of

natural activities available in Costa Rica, making the adventure and wildlife observation an album of experiences not soon to be forgotten.

The Costa Rica adventure tour starts with a 15 minutes bus ride to La Virgen de Sarapiquí town, located on the Caribbean lowlands of Costa Rica . Arriving by 9:00 AM to Hacienda Pozo Azul, we will start our adventure with a horseback riding trip into the rain forest, where the Zip Lines are waiting for you. After this, we continue our trip on the tree tops of this beautiful and unique place. Ending after enjoy the longest cable, that cross the Sarapiquí River, a delicious buffet lunch will be waiting for us. In the afternoon, the whitewater rafting trip (class III) will end this SUPER COMBO TOUR, the best way to experience the real adventure of Costa Rica.

Dinner at Selva Verde Lodge.

Day 5 – Sunday 18th February 2007.

SARAPIQUI – ARENAL VOLCANO. (B, L, D).

After breakfast, at 8:30 AM, Boat trip on the Sarapiquí River.

After the tour Cultural Interchange with the local School of Calle la Lucha.

(Activities from 10:30 AM till noon).

Lunch at Selva Verde Lodge.

After lunch: Departure to our next destination: Arenal Volcano.

By mid afternoon, arrival to La Fortuna Town, Check In at Hotel Las Cabañitas.

At 4:30 PM: Boat trip in Arenal´s Lake.

Evening, from 7:00 PM till 10:00 PM: Visit to the Hot Springs. Free time for enjoy the facilities. Dinner included.

Day 6 - Monday 18th February 2007.

ARENAL – JACO BEACH. (B). Early morning, breakfast at the hotel. At 8:30 AM. Departure to the beautiful beaches of Jaco on the Pacific slope. Overnight at HOTEL Best Western Jaco Beach. Free time for enjoy the beach during the afternoon. Lunch and Dinner on your own. (Many options available in town).

Day 7 – Tuesday 19th February 2007.

JACO BEACH. (B). Jaco Beach. Morning: Optional tours.

- 1- Nature Walk into Carara National Park. (only entrance fee: \$ 8)
- 2- Crocodile Safari. \$ 25 per person.

Free time at leisure. **Note:** This hotel is located right on the beach and have great swimming pools, tennis court, Beach Volleyball, Gym, Beach chairs and umbrellas, entertainment staff and the area offer many lovely great places to visit or take optional tours. Lunch & Dinner on your own.

Day 8 - Wednesday 21st February 2007.

JACO BEACH – SAN JOSE (B). Jaco Beach. Free time at leisure. Afternoon land transfer to San Jose. Check in at Hotel Contry Inn & Suites. Lunch & Dinner on your own.

Day 9 – Thursday 22nd February 2007.

GOODBYE (B). Transfer to the International Airport according to scheduled flight and good bye.

Hotel Information

(Please look up the hotel websites and note contact details)

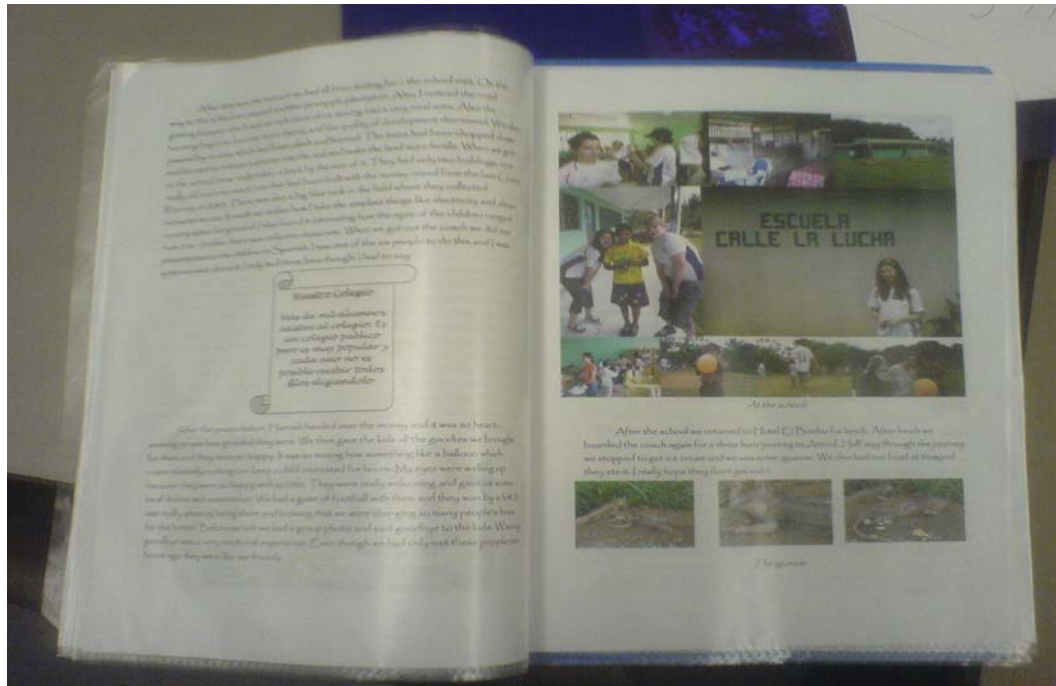
	HOTEL NAME	CATEGORY	ROOM TYPE
SAN JOSE	COUNTRY INN & SUITES	TOURIST	STANDARD
SARAPIQUI	SELVA VERDE LODGE – http://www.selvaverde.com/	ECO LODGE	STANDARD
ARENAL	LAS CABAÑITAS	TOURIST	STANDARD
JACO BEACH	JACO BEACH – www.bestwesterncostarica.com/locations_jaco.html	TOURIST	STANDARD

NOTES:

* Rooming based in Quadruples for the students.

Appendix

Figure 4 – Photos showing the finished version of student journals



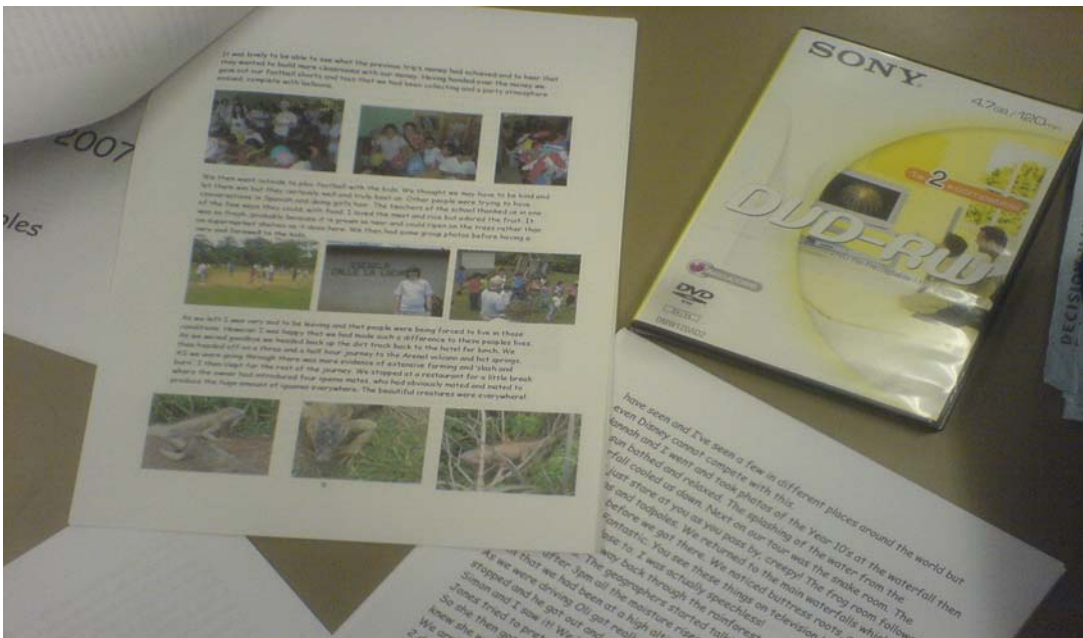
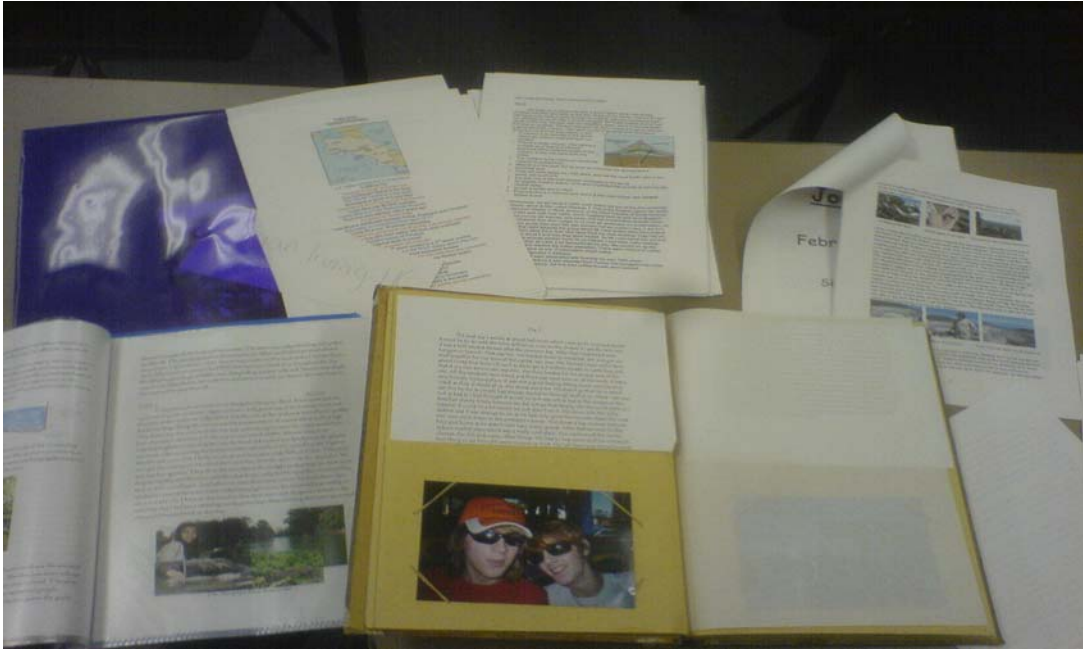


Figure 5 – Initial Letter to Parent's to gauge interest in the trip

Dear Parents and Students

After the success of the 2005 trip, I am pleased to announce that I have made initial plans for the 'Geographical Trip of a Lifetime' - a joint Yr10/Yr11 GCSE Geography Fieldtrip to Costa Rica departing on Wednesday 14th February and returning Friday 23rd February 2007. Whilst plans are still tentative at this stage, flight reservations and logistics in Costa Rica have been made to take a party of 30 people (26 students and 4 teachers).

I would like to invite both parents and students to an information evening between 5:20p.m. -6:00 p.m on Wednesday 28th June 2006 in the school hall. It is vital that at least one parent and your son/daughter attends as this will be an important meeting for all concerned to gain information about what exactly the trip entails, a payment plan, passport/medical details, fundraising schemes and also it will provide a chance to ask any questions that you may have. If you are unable to make this meeting and would still like your son/daughter to be considered for the trip, please contact me at school by speaking to me directly.

Based on costings from the Costa Rica Trip 2005, current confirmations from British Airways, the logistics in Costa Rica and current exchange rates, I estimate the cost at this stage to be £1195 per student (all inclusive). This is the maximum amount I envisage and indeed, previously I have been able to refund money after the trip returned. I do also hope that a successful fund-raising campaign (to be discussed at the meeting) by all concerned will help further reduce costs and will raise money for a locally deprived school in Costa Rica.

To gauge initial interest in the trip, I would be grateful if you could send in a refundable deposit cheque for £100 made payable to 'Vyners School Pupil Fund' as soon as possible, before the evening. Students will be recorded in order of receipt. If undersubscribed the trip unfortunately will not take place and all monies will be returned, however, if oversubscribed a selection procedure and reserve list will then occur. Parents will be asked to bring a further £100 cheque to the information evening so that deposits can be made on bookings.

Finally, for an alternative perspective with regards to this trip, please see under the 'news' section on the Vyners school website, a student account from the Costa Rica Trip 2005 or indeed the display board in the Geography Department.

Yours sincerely

Mr. Lobo
(Geography Teacher)

Figure 6 - Letter to parents that included Itinerary as listed above (Fig.4)

18th September 2006

Dear Parents

Further to the information evening at the end of the summer term, I am pleased to be able to finalise most of the plans for the Costa Rica Trip 2007. I can confirm that the flights are booked and deposits have been placed with both British Airways and the local contact in Costa Rica. In this detailed information pack, please find enclosed the following forms and information:

- 1) The Proposed Itinerary whilst in Costa Rica and a Packing List from Mr. Lobo
- 2) A payment plan letter from Mrs. Fahmy.
- 3) A letter which includes a Personal Details /Medical Details / Information Form /Consent form from Mrs. Fahmy

Please can you read all information here very carefully with your/son daughter and return the required forms to the relevant teacher by Friday 6th October 2006.

Flight Timings

The flight timings and flight numbers have been confirmed by British Airways and are as follows:

Departure Date: Wednesday 14th February 2007

Departure: Meet at the British Airways Counter at Terminal 3 London Heathrow at 07:15

London Heathrow (BA 207) 09:40 and arrive at Miami International 14:25

Miami International (AA 2141) 19:10 and arrive in San Jose Juan Santamaria 20:55

Return Date: Thursday 22nd February (Arrive Heathrow Friday 23rd February 2007)

San Jose Juan Santamaria (AA1700) 08:13 and arrive at Miami International 11:55

Miami International (BA 206) 17:05 and arrive in London Heathrow 06:20 (Friday)

Please find attached a detailed itinerary and keep this somewhere safe! As indicated previously, all students should be dropped off and picked up at Heathrow airport - Terminal 3 promptly. Due to the early departure times, I would strongly encourage car-sharing (which parents can arrange individually). Please also watch the take-off and landing times for the return flight in particular as it is important to be aware of any delays.

It is also important that you read the packing list very carefully, as only one manageable suitcase and a daily rucksack is brought per student. We will of course watch developments at Heathrow airport with great interest as this may well affect the items we take.

Finally, over the next few weeks, Miss. Jones and Mr. Coulter will be organising find-raising activities for both a local Costa Rican school and the 'general price of the trip' fund. This is an essential part of the trip and I hope all parents will support their son/daughter in these activities.

After reading the following information, if you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact myself or the relevant teacher at school during the school day.

Yours sincerely,

Mr. N Lobo
(Head of Geography)

Figure 7 – Final letter to parent's before departure

6th February 2007

Dear Parents

It is with great pleasure that I write to you for the final time with regards to the Costa Rica Trip 2007. Planning started in April 2006 and a trip that at one stage seemed so far away, is now less than 2 weeks away. The flights have now been paid for and confirmed by British Airways. Thankfully the threatened BA Cabin Crew strike is now over and a smooth journey should now take place. All the logistics in Costa Rica are as stated in the 'itinerary letter', with only a minor accommodation upgrade at the first hotel we stay in on arrival in San Jose. Please find enclosed emergency contact telephone numbers for each hotel, these should only be used in an absolute emergency. I am sure you will realise however, that risks will be continually assessed and that decisions will need to be made on relevant days according to day to day conditions.

Students have attended regular meetings at school in which important information has been given out and hopefully has been passed on. I am very pleased and impressed with the enthusiastic, organised, fundraising support and efforts that have occurred from both parents and students with the help of staff. This in itself has been a great learning experience for all involved and has brought cohesion to a very diverse group. I am sure you will be delighted to know that these students have managed to raise over \$2500 for the school in Costa Rica and have collected 162 football tops for the children that we will be visiting. I am sure that you will agree that this is a superb effort and I would like to congratulate all involved.

Please note the following final reminders and important pointers for the trip:

- All students are to meet and 'sign in' with myself just outside the British Airways counter at Heathrow Airport, Terminal 3, at 7:20 a.m on Wednesday 14th

February wearing their Costa Rica tops! At this point, students will need to declare with me, in confidence, how much GBP (£) and US Dollars (\$) they have brought with them, for insurance purposes. (Remember that the trip is all inclusive and it is recommended that very little additional spending money is actually needed)

- In the case of an emergency or delay, I have set up with the students a contact tree where Hannah Hughes - 07766887352 has kindly agreed to be the student point of contact for notification as we cannot miss departure. Hannah in turn has my mobile number to contact me should the need arise.
- Students are encouraged to bring their own mobile phones (perhaps with some international credit), but should also have email/internet access and be able to purchase cheap rate phonecards to call home at some stage during the trip.
- Please also remember that you will be required to pick up your son/daughter from Heathrow airport at 6:20a.m. promptly on return and car sharing is recommended. Please also check online or via teletext to see if the flight is delayed as this often happens due to air traffic on arrival in London.
- Please can you also check again that all Passports are Machine Readable (See BA Website) and the following weblink is scanned
http://www.britishairways.com/travel/askbainter/public/en_gb?p_search_text=hannah+luggage with regards to carry on luggage.

A packing list has already been provided to all students, however, at the end of the day, it is each student's individual choice as to what they actually bring as they are responsible for looking after all their own belongings at all times.

Students have also been forewarned of the work to be completed – a video diary or a souvenir brochure that reflects on their geographical experiences, and time will be allocated on each day to complete this, hence it is vital that the correct equipment is brought to ensure this happens.

Finally, if you have any final questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at Vyners School during the school day or indeed early on Wednesday at the airport. I look forward to a fantastic learning experience ahead and would like to thank you all for your continued support.

Yours sincerely,

Mr. Lobo
(Head of Geography)