



First Surveys and Research Perspectives

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Abstract

The article emphasizes the lack of empirical studies on the relationship between philosophical education, out-of-school places of learning and formats of experiential education. At the same time, an attempt is made to systematize previous experiences in order to create a basis for the exploration of further questions.

Keywords

Validity · Evaluation · Overview · Exploration

Out-of-school places of learning and the cooperation with experiential education offers have been repeatedly tested in philosophy and ethics classes. However, there is a lack of valid studies on the acceptance, relevance and efficiency of such formats. Quantitatively robust and socially representative cohorts, pre- and post-testing, as well as comparison and intervention groups would be required. In addition, numerous confounding variables, such as teacher personality or the affinity of classes for experiential formats, will be difficult to address.

Nevertheless, there are empirical values that can be used to mirror subsequent studies. Over the past 15 years, I have conducted and evaluated corresponding excursions with pupils, students and teachers from Hamburg, Mainz, Berlin and Saxony. The tested experience formats and learning locations were as diverse as the

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topics of philosophy. They ranged from easy-to-organize night hikes to excursions lasting several days to other German states. Purely observational tasks, such as studying football fans in Mainz and Pegida marches in Dresden, alternated with visits to memorials and juvenile detention centers, as well as outdoor activities, such as canoeing on northern German lakes or climbing in Saxon Switzerland. The emotional quality of the encounters was also varied. They ranged from team building in a climbing garden to visits to a hospice. The type of cooperation partners ranged from martial arts trainers to professional memorial site educators. To illustrate the limited replicability, I will take the liberty of mentioning the most impressive seminar in this series. In the summer semester of 2015, my students and I enjoyed the privilege of accompanying and mentoring survivors of the Sachsenhausen concentration camp for 3 days on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the liberation.

Unfortunately, no uniform evaluation instrument was used to evaluate all of these trials. In the first years, students awarded points according to the target model. Later, the classic teaching evaluations of different universities were used. A specially tailored evaluation model was not developed until the dissertation of Ms. Helena Graf. Nevertheless, it was always asked whether the repetition of the excursion was recommended, whether the excursion was seen as a personal gain and whether the excursion was also seen as a professional enrichment. The approval rate for the three categories was between 65% and 100%. It is noticeable that the first two categories (repetition and personal gain) generally received higher levels of agreement than the question about professional added value. The former ranged between 85% and 100% while 65–95% of the respondents confirmed a professional added value.

Two interpretations seem worth examining:

1. The personal added value is *de facto* higher than the professional philosophical added value.
2. The subject-philosophical added value exists to the same extent, but is not realized to the same degree by the respondents.

In addition, reference must be made to the low validity of the surveys and the only limited comparability. The size of the cohorts was as varied as the emotional and intellectual challenges of the excursion sites. Sometimes there were eight, sometimes 54 participants. Control groups pursuing the same questions at the same time without a field trip were not used, nor were pre-/post-tests. Numerous field trips were used as entrance points to specific problem areas, or to apply previously developed specified knowledge. It seems obvious that the participants in these formats would have a lower appreciation of the added value of specialized knowledge than those who worked on specialized philosophical content on site. All these biases should be minimized in subsequent studies. Nevertheless, some confounding variables, such as teacher personality or current events, will be difficult to neutralize.

The following table provides an overview of previous cooperation experiences. All listed examples fulfil the following criteria:

1. Active testing with students and/or pupils
2. At least 65% of the participants saw an added philosophical value in the excursion.
3. At least 85% of the participants saw a personal added value in the excursion.
4. At least 85% of the participants recommend the repetition of the course.
5. There are elaborated concepts in which the extracurricular learning place or the experiential education intervention is integrated into a unit of ethics or philosophy lessons lasting several hours.

| Cooperation partner/ learning location | Number of excursions attendees | Thematic integration ^a | Integration into the teaching unit | | |
|--|--|---|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| | | | Problem opening (grasping) | Problem solving (discussion) | Problem localization (judging) |
| Canoe hike (Schleswig-Holstein) | 2 N = 32 or 28 students | Does nature have a value in itself? | | X | |
| Karate-Dojo (Hamburg) | 2 N = 18 or 23 students | What is violence and why can it feel good? | X | | |
| Overnight stay in the forest including cell phone withdrawal (Schleswig-Holstein) | 1 N = 23 pupils | What is happiness? | X | | |
| Drug counselling centre (Hamburg) | 1 N = 26 pupils | Freedom or happiness: which counts more? | | X | X |
| Planetarium | 1 N = 26 pupils | What is infinity? | X | X | X |
| Obstetrics (Mainz) | 1 N = 22 stud. | Is man a tabula rasa? | X | X | X |
| Christl. cemetery (Mainz) | 2 N = 28 and 21 stud. | What is beautiful? What is death? Is transience a good? | X | X | X |
| Observation: football fans (Mainz) | 1 N = 28 stud. | Is there freedom in the masses? | X | X | X |
| Animal shelter (Mainz) | 1 N = 28 stud. | What rights do animals have? | X | X | X |
| Climbing garden (Berlin) | 2 N = 18 and 32 stud. | What are true virtues? What is bravery? What is free will? | X | X | X |
| Hospice (Berlin) | 4 N = 21 and 22, respectively, 18, 31 stud. | Is death an evil? Does a right to suicide exist? | | X | X |
| Library (Berlin) | 1 N = 28 stud. | What is knowledge? What is wealth? | X | X | X |
| Prison (Berlin) | 3 N = 21 and | What is just punishment? | | X | X |

(continued)

| Cooperation partner/ learning location | Number of excursions attendees | Thematic integration ^a | Integration into the teaching unit | | |
|--|--|--|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| | | | Problem opening (grasping) | Problem solving (discussion) | Problem localization (judging) |
| | 18, respectively, 31 stud. | Does punishment have to be? | | | |
| Court (Berlin) | 2 N = 21 and 22 students, respectively | What is justice? When is resistance legitimate? | | X | X |
| Memorial Sachsenhausen | 1 N = 12 stud. | Forgiveness: error, necessity or grace? | | X | X |
| Memorial Stasi prison Hohenschönhausen | 2 N = 21 and 18 students, respectively | What is total domination? When is resistance legitimate? | | X | X |
| Topography of terror (Berlin) | 2 N = 21 and 31 students, respectively | How does blind obedience come about? Is evil radical? | | X | X |
| Jewish cemetery (Dresden) | 1 N = 13 stud. | What is culture? When does discrimination begin? | X | X | |
| Orthodox church (Dresden) | 1 N = 13 stud. | What is sacred? | X | X | |
| Slaughterhouse (Saxony) | 1 N = 14 stud. | When does cruelty begin? Who is a dignitary? | | X | X |
| Concentration camp memorials Buchenwald (Thuringia) | 1 N = 22 stud. | How does total obedience come about? What is power? | | X | X |
| German emigration house (Bremerhaven) | 4 N = 32 and 28, 21, 20 stud. and 6 ref. respectively | What does strangeness mean? Is cosmopolitanism a naïve hope? What rights and obligations shape migration? | X | X | X |
| German hygiene museum (Dresden) | 2 N = 22 and 28 students, respectively | What is beauty? Do we share a reality? | X | X | |
| War museum (Dresden) | N = 22 stud. | What is a just war? | X | X | |
| Residence palace (Dresden) | N = 8 stud. | What is propaganda? What legitimizes rule? | X | X | |
| State theatre (Dresden) | 2 N = 8 or 14 | What is art? When does responsibility begin? | X | X | X |
| Climbing (Saxon Switzerland) | 2 N = 24 stud. | What is performance? What is risk? | X | X | X |

(continued)

| Cooperation partner/ learning location | Number of excursions attendees | Thematic integration ^a | Integration into the teaching unit | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|---|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| | | | Problem opening (grasping) | Problem solving (discussion) | Problem localization (judging) |
| | N = 22 SuS, 12 Sud. | Does nature have a value in itself? | | | |
| Hiking (Saxon Switzerland) | 1 N = 12 students and 24 pupils | What is nature, what is an artifact? Does nature have value in itself? | X | X | X |

^aDuring numerous excursions, the participating students developed numerous thematically very different teaching units

SuS pupils, *Stud.* Students, *Ref* trainee teachers

On the basis of these surveys, it can be stated first of all that there is a high level of acceptance on the part of the learners and teachers for the inclusion of out-of-school places of learning and experiential education interventions in ethics and philosophy lessons. In addition, it was possible to design teaching units for the above-mentioned excursions that met the standards of the curricula and framework plans, as well as the current requirements of subject didactics. Furthermore, state exam theses are available which confirm this assessment through their didactic concepts and small, empirical surveys. The efficiency and sustainability of such cooperations have not yet been clarified due to a lack of comparative studies. The same applies to the question of whether the value of cooperation is subject-specific or varies with regard to the age and social structure of learners.

Can an increase in differentiation and judgement be measured? And if so, does this increase relate only to the context of the respective project or does it point beyond it? This opens up an interesting field of activity for subsequent studies. In the context of her dissertation, Helena Graf has begun to examine the relationship between experiential education and philosophical education more closely and to analyse it on the basis of structured empirical surveys. We should look forward to the results.