

Towards a New Conceptualization of Field Excursion Learning

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Educators have for decades claimed that the potential for learning through combined research- and field disciplinary learning activities is extraordinarily high, and that learning outcomes encompass knowledge content, practical skills, and personal development (Kent, Gilbertson, & Hunt, 1997). In particular, these benefits can be fostered through student-active methods, such as authentic research activities in the field (Behrendt, 2014; Kent et al., 1997). Learning experiences such as problem-solving also address developments in job markets, where education must encourage skills computers are less likely to develop and that are transferable to other areas, like creativity, collaborative skills, abstract thinking, and the ability to adjust plans when unexpected things happen (European Commission, 2011). Furthermore, many employers value these skills more than specific knowledge content (Hole et al., 2016).

Concurrently in the last decades, there have been advances in understanding of situated learning - that is, moving learning towards the primacy of individuals' engagement with context (e.g., Eraut, 2010; Lave, 1997). Situated learning is one of the principal strengths of field-, lab, and research-based approaches to higher education, as students learn as they construct their own knowledge. However little research is done on students' situated learning in fieldwork. We suggest that situated learning can increasingly be implemented to understand field excursion learning, and that this perspective also enable a better understanding of how field excursions contribute to important learning.

The University Centre in Svalbard (UNIS) offers a unique possibility to investigate how intersection between research experiences and field work influence learning. Most courses at UNIS have a field component, and students are frequently involved in authentic research activities like student driven research projects or contribution to staff research. This pedagogical affordance is founded on a situated conception of learning, where the movement of students into specific contexts is important for their learning. In a study performed at UNIS during fall 2015, fieldwork was investigated to see how bachelor students' engagement with fieldwork practices influenced their development of biological knowledge (Hole, 2018). Learning was studied as a sociocultural activity with short-term ethnographic techniques to investigate the effect of fieldwork on situated learning.