



Community based Experiential Education - The Financial Implications

The learning experience of children should involve

1. **participation** in civic society so that they can positively contribute to cultural development and social progress.
2. **exploration** of the natural world so that they become conservation conscious on the basis of their own experience of the issues as opposed to learning these things from educational formulae or the manifestos of environmental organizations.

Background

We have noticed that when evaluating extracurricular activities and/or excursions, educators tend to assess each event as a discrete exercise and place great emphasis on its affordability to parents. This happens whether the proposal relates to a one-hour trip to an environmental exhibition at a local museum (2 leva per child) or a summer green school - in Dryanovo, say- lasting 3 days (140 leva per child). Thus, school outings are largely determined by the options provided by commercial service providers or external event organization on which basis the pattern of activity across a school year is entirely ad hoc.

Exactly what is the benefit?

Why did the school feel obliged to send a group of 4 classes (say 120 pupils, yielding 240 leva to the exhibitors) to the museum when there was nothing to prevent the children attending the exhibition with parents and siblings?

Did the organizers of the green school hesitate to consider the amount of "dead cost" included in the financial offer made to the students' parents? Transport,

food and accommodation needed to be paid before the educational component could even start to happen. And what of those children whose parents chose not to have their children attend the green school because they could not spare the cash or who perceived the excursion as a low priority because it yields little experience beyond that which their family has already shared? Why should they feel alienated because the green school represents a decision foisted upon them by the educators of their children?

EQ would like to see projects and excursions undertaken within a system of green schooling that extends throughout the academic year, employs local non-pedagogical service providers and dovetails with the academic curriculum.

Incremental Contribution to Educational Experience

Equilibrium argues that the validity of green schooling activity or, for that matter, any school excursion rests in its **INCREMENTAL CONTRIBUTION TO THE EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE (ICEE) OF THE PARTICIPANTS AS PART OF A STRUCTURED PROGRAMME**. The issue of financial cost needs to be balanced against this central concern. We also argue that there is great scope for achieving more locally and *within the curriculum* - too large a proportion of schooling has the status of quasi-formality because it is extra-curricular and dependent on parental spending power. Despite their being charged, parents are rarely properly consulted about the proportion of the educational package for which they pay.

The Financial Model that takes account of ICEE

Equilibrium found out the cost of a trip for 28 Ruse school children and 3 adult supervisors that included transport to the region of Dryanovo, two nights accommodation, food and excursions to the monastery, Bacho Kiro's cave and the museum village of Bozhentsi. It would work out at 90-140 leva per person depending on the standard of services provided.

Lets keep it simple - 31 people at 100 leva - total 3100 leva. This is mostly dead cost relating to services with no educational value.

What could a Ruse school achieve with 3100 leva spent in the local community over the course of a year? The parents and siblings of the students have skills, talents and a variety of enthusiasms. The city's museum has skilled personnel. Local tour guides are experts in the informal interpretation of history, ecology and culture and they are unemployed when there are no tourists around. The

Rusenski Lom natural park is a playground for a wide range of people with myriad skills. The region abounds with craftspeople and artists. In itself, a community is a massive educational resource. By the same token, the city's trees, the rock formations in the Rusenski Lom or the region's waterways yield a vast range of educational experiences from multiple perspectives.

The same applies to any community.

An Upside Down Pyramid

Think of a pyramid turned upside down so that it balances precariously on a single point. This is a good way of picturing the financial model that supports green schooling activity involving excursions into the community or exploration of the natural environment.

The solidity and integrity of the school's programme depends on the suitability of the initial undertaking - the first activity or trip that represents the single brick at the foot of the reversed pyramid.

Where does the activity lead in terms of the structuring of a programme that extends across the school year? It is important that there is a line of continuity joining the respective projects and that each venture is assessed in terms of the ICEE and in terms of overall educational structure.

Questions to consider

- What are the dead costs (those expenditures that must be incurred before the actual educational component can even be started)?
- How does the total dead cost compare with the cost of that educational component?
- Can the educational activity be undertaken without incurring any of the dead costs? What is avoidable? What can be substituted by a cheaper alternative? Ask yourself whether this or that particular activity actually merits the related expenditure. Would the school achieve a greater *educational* return by spending its money locally on an alternative venture?
- What is the potential for using approved volunteers and making use of donated goods and services? (Get to know parents and siblings - their skills and capabilities. These are valuable educational resources.)

Avoid reacting to the magnetic attraction of certain destinations or traditional options.

- It **absolutely has to** be Etera for a mix of culture and recreation.
- We **must** take the children to Tsaravets so that they come to understand the glory of the Second Kingdom.
- This particular hotel on the Black Sea has traditionally catered for school parties, we **must** design a programme in its vicinity.

The sense of obligation built into the above statements is utterly false. Such ventures are not imperative, they're expeditious - obvious and easy options containing a lot of dead cost. An imaginative assessment of the educational potential of the community surrounding the school and those natural phenomena in its immediate environs can provide novel perspectives and new experiences that are highly stimulating and that can be associated with classroom themes.

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