

The Block in the Field: Intensive Out-of-Classroom Experiences

Laura P. Straus^a, Michelle Prawer^b, Thomas Yeager^b, Christian Gilde^c

Corresponding author: Laura P. Straus (laura.straus@umwestern.edu)

^aEducation Division, University of Montana Western, Dillon, MT, 59725, USA

^bFirst Year College, Victoria University, Melbourne, Australia

^cBusiness and Technology Department, University of Montana Western, Dillon, MT 59725, USA

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to examine the extent to which block field trips constitute authentic generative learning opportunities for students and effective curricular choices for instructors. The field trips featured in this research are situated within the context of work integrated learning (WIL) (e.g., Sachs et al., 2016). The theoretical frame used in this study is the WIL Framework developed by Campbell et al. (2019) whose four domains of practice are the student experience, curriculum design, institutional requirements, and stakeholder engagement. Case study methods are used, supported by the interpretivist approaches used in phenomenography. Four types of field trips provide case studies which are analysed according to their contexts, strengths, challenges, opportunities, and risks. Results of this research reveal that for field trips within the block model, faculty preparation, disciplinary accessibility to field excursions, administrative expectations, student commitment, and user-friendliness of field trip sites must be considered.

Keywords: Field trips, intensive learning, quality work-integrated learning, the Block model

Introduction

University educators continually grapple with the problem of how to genuinely engage students in learning (Collaco, 2017). Like any struggle, this one occurs in a context of additional challenges, not the least of which is that students and families increasingly approach higher education with doubts about value, effectiveness, and relevance (Remmen & Frøyland, 2014). For decades, the use of field trips has been seen as one way to address those doubts and foster engagement (Marcy, 1941). Yet field trips take many forms. In fact, it is precisely the varied forms, contexts, approaches, and durations which the authors of this paper embrace and interrogate. For this paper, the working definition of a field trip is “any journey taken under the auspices of the school for educational purposes” (p. 110, Larsen et al., 2017). While the value of using field trips in higher education is well established, the roles field trips play in an intensive scheduling model—referred to here as a *Block model*—are less clear and less well-researched. Ashley (2021) noted the following, regarding a 1991 self-study group convened by Colorado College to study its pioneering Block Plan (adopted in 1970): “The group considered small classes, block breaks, field trips, and curricular flexibility as strengths” (p. 211). Yet the contribution field trips can make within an intensive, block-schedule model has not been broadly studied. The authors of this paper are all faculty members at institutions of higher education which employ a Block model, and it was this commonality which led the authors to explore four widely-varied field trip types, all occurring within the framework of “The Block.” The aim of this paper is to examine the extent to which field trips constitute authentic generative learning opportunities for students and represent effective curricular choices for instructors, in the context of Block scheduling. The two institutes of higher education (IHEs) represented here are universities which promote experiential learning within the one-course-at-a-time model of Block delivery. Administrators and faculty at both institutions strongly promote field trips and assume that such trips conform with the goals of experiential learning. However, the strengths, challenges, and risks of undertaking field trips within the Block model are not well-established and require further study.

The following research questions guided this exercise:

1. What are the high-quality educational affordances provided by field trips in the Block?
2. What challenges and/or obstacles do instructors encounter in the Block with regard to field trips?

Conceptual Framework

Unlike traditional approaches to pedagogy, which situate the instructor at the centre of the learning experience, social constructivism emphasizes the agency of learners. Working in collaboration with their instructor, learners build and attain knowledge through actively constructing meaning as they interact with the world (Vespone, 2023). This lens aligns well with an examination of field trips in a university course, since it focuses on the way the learner embraces the various experiential learning tools within field-based learning. Here too, learners are called upon to be active sense-makers. The constructivist learning process is complex, challenging, and engaging. Writing about constructivism, Fosnot and Perry (1996) noted: “Rather than behaviours or skills as the goal of instruction, cognitive development and deep understanding are the foci; rather than states being the result of maturation, they are understood

as constructions of active learner reorganization” (p. 10). On a field trip, participants build knowledge through seeing, hearing, and experiencing information within rich, authentic contexts.

Additionally, the conceptual framework of constructivism provides a seamless link to the application of principles of *work-integrated learning* (WIL) (Wilson & Novak, 2024), which is simultaneously an educational goal, a pedagogical concept, and a set of practices designed to improve learning at the tertiary level. Australia’s *National Strategy on Work-Integrated Learning in University Education* was launched in 2015, based on a goal of workforce development and improvement, and enhancement of graduate employability (Sachs et al., 2016). Campbell and his colleagues (2019) define WIL as “student experiences of work within curriculum, undertaken in partnership, through engagement with authentic and genuine activities for the industry, business, or community partner, which are assessed” (p. 1). Field trips and various modes of field work can be viewed as demonstrably constructivist-based examples of WIL, even when the field experience is of short duration. In fact, the need for greater variety and duration of WIL experiences, was recently noted as vital to higher education, given that traditional approaches to WIL, generally lasting from 3 to 12 months, are resource intensive (Kay et al., 2019). Shorter-duration WIL experiences can be offered more frequently and are generally thought to be more accessible to international students and/or students with disabilities, who may need additional support within the WIL placement (Dollinger et al. 2022; Pham et al., 2018). Thus, an effort to better understand the role of field trips—particularly within intensive-model, Block-schedule contexts—is a compelling project.

Background

Field Trips: A Brief Overview of the Literature

Field trips are viewed as crucial components for teaching students the knowledge and skills needed in their chosen area of study. An overview of key works is provided here, to contextualize the current study. Holgerson (2021) examined a foundational question, asking how instructors can help students see the connections between theory and practice in the context of field trips, claiming that field trips “have the potential to decodify theory and make it easier to understand” (p. 362). Additionally, instructors frequently seek to help students sharpen their observational skills, and field trips are generally considered a means to this end. Larsen, Walsh, Almond and Myers (2017) claimed that observational skills are rarely explicitly taught, and that field trips help support the development of these important skills, leading to an increase in active, deeper learning. The immersive and often multi-sensory nature of a field trip is one reason that field trips strengthen students’ observational skills (Nabors, 2009). Holgerson (2021) asserted that field trips improve students’ observational skills and increase their abilities to apply theory into lived contexts. Because field trips are sustained, multi-faceted out-of-class events, they challenge instructors to make explicit to students the “important relations between the theoretical education in the classroom and the empirical focus on the field trips” (Holgerson, 2021, p. 361). In the Block model, the frequency and duration of class meetings makes it easier for instructors to address this challenge.

Rohlf (2015) observed that field trips intuitively appeal to students and instructors alike, raising the following questions: “What are students learning? More to the point, what *kinds* of learning are supported by the field trip? And finally, do field trips have measurable long-term impacts

beyond the course itself?” (p. 518). The answers to these questions focus on the importance of ensuring students view the field trip as at least the equivalent of a laboratory experience. Instructors must attend carefully to the pre-trip, during-trip, and post-trip phases, thinking critically throughout the experience, and incorporating time for reflection and self-directed learning. These steps maximize the likelihood that learning is retained in long-term memory. Numerous authors claimed that field trips led to richer learning outcomes borne of relationships formed among peers, and between the students and the instructor(s) involved (Boud et al., 1999; Houser et al., 2011; Larsen et al., 2016; Rohlf, 2015; Stern & Powell, 2020). The novel experience of being out of the classroom and in an immersive, often unfamiliar environment may well engender more reliance on each other and their instructor, as well as greater appreciation of the relevant community (Mukuria, 2022; Nabors et al., 2009).

Work-integrated learning (WIL)

The Australian government recognizes the importance of work-integrated learning (WIL) as a key component of a student’s undergraduate experience. WIL is seen as an essential means of fostering deeper learning, building workforce capacity, and improving the employability of college graduates (Drysdale & McBeath, 2018). Definitions of WIL vary, but Sachs et al. (2016) note that “two particular characteristics of WIL pedagogy—‘integration’ and ‘intention’—are prominent in the literature” (p. 10). Kay (2019) and colleagues claim that WIL opportunities serve diverse students, foster engagement, and equip students with workplace skills. The various types of field trips used in higher education are easily situated within the context of WIL and—when well-integrated into a course—help to foster the goals of WIL (Sachs et al., 2016).

McRae and Johnston (2016) proposed a global WIL framework, selecting the following key attributes: (a) experience in a workplace setting; (b) curricular integration which includes both workplace and academic learning; (c) student outcomes which lead to employability; (d) reflection (McRae & Johnston, 2016, p. 342). In contrast, Campbell and colleagues (2019) developed a four-domain framework for high-quality WIL which is supported by a guiding principle for each domain, and where each domain is temporally divided into timeframes of “before, during, and after” (p. 4). The four domains of the authors’ framework consist of (a) the student experience; (b) curriculum design; (c) institutional requirements; (d) stakeholder engagement. The authors noted that this framework was intended to serve as a useful tool for collecting and evaluating evidence related to WIL within and across institutes of higher education. For this reason, it is the latter of these two frameworks which is used for the purposes of this paper.

Methodology

Phenomenography

This investigation is grounded in the case study method, which Lucas et al. (2018) describe as a “sound methodology that can reflect the variability of research contexts and enables a flexible approach to address a wide range of research questions that are relevant to the evolving nature of WIL” (p. 215). Furthermore, this study is supported by the interpretivist method used in phenomenography. At its heart, phenomenography focuses on things as they appear to participants (Orgill, 2012). Hajar (2021) contends: “The main purpose of phenomenographic research is to discern different ways of understanding a given phenomenon” (p. 1422).

Participants can experience a phenomenon in a variety of ways, and their awareness of a phenomenon can change over the course of time. As Skocpol and Somers (1980) explain: “Above all, contrasts are drawn between or among individual cases. Usually, such contrasts are developed with the aid of references to broad themes” (p. 178). Themes and questions may serve as frameworks for emphasizing differences among cases, even as they also elucidate the commonalities found across the cases being studied.

Two Universities/Four Cases

The four cases used in this paper are drawn from field trips conducted at two universities which utilize the Block model, emphasize experiential learning, and use constructivist approaches to instruction. Victoria University (VU) is a large metropolitan university located in the western suburbs of Melbourne, Victoria, Australia. The University of Montana Western (UMW) is a small regional comprehensive four-year university in Dillon, Montana, in the United States; it is the only public university in the United States which uses a Block scheduling model. The four cases examined here represent four different types of undergraduate field trips, two from each of the two universities. Block durations at UMW are 18 days, while blocks at VU run for four weeks. Each field trip was designed, led, and reflected on by a different instructor. All four instructors/authors have spent many years as educators and have extensive experience teaching in intensive Block model settings. The first and third cases originate from VU, while the second and fourth cases originate from UMW.

All four cases are discussed in terms of the following attributes: (a) context; (b) strengths; (c) challenges; (d) opportunities; and (e) risks. Analysis is also presented, using the dimensions of the *Framework to Support Assurance of Institution-Wide Quality in WIL* described by Campbell et al. (2019). The four framework domains are: (a) student experience; (b) curriculum design; (c) institutional requirements; (d) stakeholder engagement. For each of those domains, instructors’ written reflections, notes, and other instructor-generated course artifacts were analyzed as data sources, using an iterative phenomenographic process (Hajar, 2021; Sin, 2010), which occurred in several stages. Individual instructors/authors summarized their materials in tabular form, and those summaries were read several times and discussed by the four authors, to establish familiarity with all content. A more focused series of readings/discussions ensued, with the purpose of identifying similarities and differences in the texts produced by the instructors (Sin, 2010), noting themes and central ideas which emerged in relationship to the four domains of the selected WIL framework. Those themes were then re-examined and refined via continued evaluative discussions (Akerlind, 2023) by the author/instructor group.

Case Descriptions

Case 1–Victoria University: Visit to the Australian National Measurement Institute

Context

Students undertaking *Skills for the Scientist* (Bachelor of Science) are eager to learn more about their chosen field but have little to no practical experience in their future profession. To begin addressing this issue, an annual day-long field trip is organized by three VU faculty members for approximately 35 science students. The site is the Australian National Measurement Institute (ANMI) in Melbourne, Australia. Students are first given an overview of the work

done at the location. Next the students are given a tour of the institute's various areas, including microbiology, allergen testing, vitamin and trace elements analysis, physical metrology, analytical services, and trade measurements, among other areas. Throughout the day, students talk with numerous scientists about their roles, learning about the benefits and challenges of the many positions at the site.

Strengths

Students see and experience a state-of-the-art functional science facility, while learning about pathways to attaining positions at the ANMI. Since many VU alumni are employed at the Institute, students readily envision themselves as future employees there. Additionally, students gain motivation to persist when they observe real-world employment opportunities from the degree stream they are pursuing. Upon returning to the classroom, student understanding of the *Skills for the Scientist* course and its role in preparing them for future positions in the sciences is greatly improved.

Challenges

The ANMI field trip is not mandatory, and this poses a significant challenge. Students realize the trip is not formally assessed, and a small minority choose not to participate. Instructors have no alternative they can offer which mimics the real-world experience. Another challenge is transportation, which the students themselves must organize, a fact which is exacerbated by the ANMI's difficult-to-reach location. Finally, instructors are challenged by the need to ensure the ANMI is sufficiently resourced on the day of the visit to accommodate the influx of students and their instructors.

Opportunities

Students are able to replace their "Hollywood notions" of scientist in government testing laboratories with authentic first-hand knowledge. They interact with industry professionals who provide advice regarding job prospects, and they gain real-world WIL which underscores the need for taking future classes, such as chemistry and statistics. Students and instructors alike benefit from the partnership bond fostered for more than 20 years by the ANMI field trip.

Risks

The ANMI trip does not entail substantial risks to stakeholders, but there are some risk-based elements to address. Students could sustain injury commuting to or from the ANMI on their own, so they are encouraged to travel together. In addition, there is a great deal of expensive laboratory equipment and if some were accidentally damaged during the visit, that could be costly. The field trip day can feel lengthy to some students, and involves substantial standing, often while wearing personal protective equipment (PPE). Occasionally, students become faint due to these unfamiliar physical conditions, and it is up to all involved to be vigilant to avoid such occurrences.

Case 2—University of Montana Western: Two-Course Block Trip to Seattle, Washington

Context

Three UMW education faculty members offered two four-credit education courses in an urban location far from the university's rural setting during one Block. Eleven students enrolled, and the group stayed in a residential hotel for three weeks of immersive educational experiences in

Seattle, Washington. During the day, all students were placed in public school classrooms for a field experience which began with observations of their mentor teachers, followed by gradually increasing responsibilities for teaching the students in those rooms. Afternoons and evenings were occupied with trips to cultural and religious institutions, which often included the sharing of meals provided by hosts at those sites. When there were no cultural excursions, students met with faculty members for informal evening lectures and discussions. Supervised work time was also scheduled for lesson planning, research, and completions of course assignments.

Strengths

Students experienced a rich array of place-based field experiences in a setting unlike any they could encounter in Montana. The two-course experience consisted of a multicultural education class focused on diversity, ethics, and global education along with a course which provided 14 days of immersive teaching in a K-12 classroom. Students reported the experience was immensely beneficial and transformative. The visits to religious and cultural centres also offered experiences which were unattainable in the UMW region. Students commented that these visits afforded them learning opportunities which they would otherwise have been unlikely to experience.

Challenges

The Block model supports immersive, experiential learning which does not come in conflict with other university-scheduled classes, labs, or other activities, and this is a noteworthy advantage. However, this Seattle-based field trip strongly tested the limits of the model by incorporating *two* Block courses into one eighteen-day Block period. Students stated the experience was extremely challenging, requiring careful planning and time management. Another challenge resides in the fact that the schools in which the students were placed were all selected not only for their diverse student populations, but also for high levels of poverty and potential social inequity. This was an intentional challenge within the design of this field trip, and students embraced this reality. Finally, it was a challenge for both the faculty and the students to coordinate the complex experience of cultural visits, planning, teaching, and completing a set of challenging course assignments.

Opportunities

This project provided students with a robust field trip which enriched their teaching practices. It also provided the participating faculty members with an excellent basis for further development of this approach to field placements and multicultural education. It is hoped that additional experiences of this type can be offered to future candidates. If a less distant field trip is preferred, there are many sites within Montana, particularly in schools on Native American reservations, where similar cultural and socioeconomic experiences could be attained. These sites would still provide participating students with challenging field-based learning opportunities.

Risks

A three-week field trip from a remote rural area to a large urban centre is accompanied by many risks, such as unfamiliarity with urban conditions, disruption of income, and remoteness from family and other supports. Given the number of participants, partners, stakeholders, and events

in this project, it was subject to risks of varying degree, related to travel, health of participants, and the stressors inherent in the field trip's intensity. The need to vary an existing plan or schedule arose frequently, and participants were required to maintain flexibility as they responded to the inevitable changes which came their way.

Case 3–Victoria University: Independent Student Visits to Local Libraries

Context

The course design of *Literacy in Education* (a requirement for the Bachelor of Education Studies degree) includes an emphasis on real-world literacy experiences in community contexts. These experiences enrich students' understanding of literacy as a multidimensional social practice. To this end, independent student visits to local libraries were organized where students observed and participated in Storytime at a selected library. Students were also asked to explore the availability and variety of programs and resources offered, and to examine the link between literacy and the community. Flexibility and student agency were embedded into the field trip design, as students individually chose the time and location for their visits and for completion of the assignment associated with the trip.

Strengths

Visiting a community library made the learning real and relevant. Students were empowered to be independent and show initiative as they researched libraries in their area and then liaised personally with their local librarian to organize the visit. Students were provided with one “free” class session during which attendance was not required, to offset their individual scheduling of the library trip. The visit was not required to occur during the “free” session, however, giving students the freedom to select a time that accorded with their other commitments. This element of student agency significantly improved students' completion of the independently undertaken field trip. Linking the field trip to an assessment task also proved to be important for raising the profile of this task and thus student engagement.

Challenges

Organizing a field trip in the Block for a course that runs multiple times a year is a challenge. Organizations might not be prepared to receive repeated waves of students as the Block rolls around; university classes may run at times which do not reflect the operating hours of the organization; the organization may be situated in a location too far or inconvenient for some students. Further, whenever a single instructor-scheduled field trip occurs, there are always some students who miss the excursion. In turn, key learning opportunities are missed which are irreplaceable. To meet these challenges, the use of independently-scheduled student visits was developed for this frequently-taught literacy course. Implementation of that solution reduced the challenges inherent in this type of field trip.

Opportunities

While a personal field trip is not common (Shinneman, Loeffler, & Myrbo, 2020), it provided a robust learning opportunity that not only demonstrated the concepts of literacy in the 21st century, but exposed students to opportunities available within their own communities. Many expressed surprise at the available resources, and some expressed their intention to sign up for some of the activities offered. Additionally, had the excursion been a traditional whole-class visit, students would have experienced only one locale. Instead, students were exposed to

multiple libraries, and students benefitted from the shared understandings about those community sites which arose during ensuing in-class discussions.

Risks

As with whole-class field trips, the typical risks related to travel and student safety also arise with independently-conducted student visits to any location. Furthermore, in sending students out into the community unsupervised, there is always the risk of possible inappropriate or disruptive behaviour, or even the possibility a student might report on having visited a library without having done so.

Case 4–University of Montana Western: Global Business Course Trip to Austria and Germany

Context

During a course on global business, a two-week field trip took students to various companies in Austria and Germany. For example, students visited Swarovski Crystal, a maker of mid-range luxury jewelry. This visit afforded students the opportunity to study the company's strategic planning process, organizational makeup, leadership approach, and operational control mechanisms. Prior to the one-day company visit, students had to prepare themselves with the help of company case studies and financial profiles.

This visit helped students gain an understanding of a family-focused business within the lived context of a foreign culture and business operations. Throughout the trip abroad, application of Hofstede's (2010) cultural dimensions theory enabled students to recognize and evaluate differences across business cultures. Students examined various cultural dimensions in companies, such as the distribution of organizational power, degree of departmental self-sufficiency in companies, short- and long-term company planning, prevalence of masculinity in the leadership of firms, and strategic handling of unpredictable situations in organizations.

Strengths

By its very nature, Block scheduling allows for rich, immersive and authentic international experiences. Experiencing different business cultures first-hand can be rewarding and allows students to explore a range of professional trajectories, possibly prompting them to study a second language, as well. This course also introduced students to the diverse workforces employed by the companies they visited. Additionally, students benefitted from international faculty experts who discussed their home culture and their country's economic makeup.

Challenges

International trips are complex and time-consuming undertakings which require extensive preparation. As with all intensive and Block experiences, the duration of exposure to and immersion in class content may be too brief for some students. Often it takes longer than the two weeks allotted for an international trip to appreciate and learn a foreign culture and language, especially in the specialized context of international business studies. Equity of access to an international field trip is also a challenge. The cost of such trips is formidable to many students, and students also face the demands of having work schedules which do not permit them to travel. The outcomes of these trips are hard to assess, at times, due to differing

learning methods in the individual disciplines, unique course content, and can only be seen after an extended period of time.

Opportunities

This field experience gave participants the opportunity for a deep dive into the organizational operations and culture of a specific region. Students experienced the precision and structured approach of several German and Austrian companies as compared to the imprecision of some US companies. In addition, they were exposed to the synergistic connection between government and industry (the private sector) and the social benefits offered by this relationship in the German corporate space. Opportunities arose for students to make connections with the companies, and the company management, enabling possible internships and employment for students in the future.

Risks

An international trip harbours many risks which must be anticipated prior to travel. Travel requirements or conditions can change rapidly due to political conflicts, economic challenges, or weather-related issues. Accordingly, the organizers of the trip put contingency plans in place for pre-travel as well as during-travel issues, such as composing to-do lists and document lists, purchasing adequate medical insurance, gathering emergency contact information, and connecting with government agencies that oversee foreign travel. During the trip, accessibility of local medical facilities was always known, and the organizers had infrastructure and backup plans in place. Alternative corporate venues and additional sites to visit were also determined, in case any originally-selected sites became inaccessible.

Case Analyses and Reflections

In this section, the four cases described above are analyzed through application of the *Framework to Support Assurance of Institution-Wide Quality in Work-Integrated Learning* (WIL framework; Campbell et al., 2019). Separate analyses within each of the framework's four domains (student experience, curriculum design, institutional requirements, and stakeholder engagement) are provided, and themes which emerged from the four cases for each domain are identified and discussed. The importance of distinguishing across temporal phases is recognized. Elements embedded within the framework (e.g., pedagogy, assessment, and reflection) are foundational to this analysis. Reflections are included for each of the four domains, rather than providing a single discussion of findings, and tables are provided to summarize the themes.

Domain 1: Student Experience

Several important themes emerged across all four cases with respect to the student experience (see Table 1). The key principle of the WIL framework for this domain is: "A quality WIL experience provides students with a scaffolded, connected and supported pedagogical experience" (Campbell et al., 2019, p. 3). Although all four trips varied widely in nature and duration, all were designed in alignment with this principle. Students' trips were carefully scaffolded to support the students during all phases, ensuring student readiness, successful participation, and meaningful reflection. Well-designed field trips enable students to productively envision their future *possible selves* (e.g., Miller & Brickman, 2004) in personally relevant ways while gaining authentic experiences related to a field of study or a possible

career. Across all four cases, students were expected to exercise responsibility for many trip elements, and were given numerous choices to make, resulting in a sense of ownership and co-construction of the experience. The Block model is well-suited for such field opportunities, particularly since students generally have fewer conflicts and demands on their time, other than the single class they are taking in any given Block. However, the short duration of a Block course can pose challenges to student learning in some cases. The inclusion of a WIL experience in a Block course needs to be intentional and students may not internalize learning outcomes due to the compressed experience of the course (Jederud, 2024).

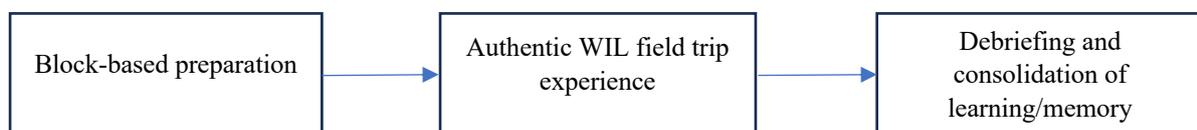
Table 1. Overview of themes related to student experience

Student Experience	
Student agency	Choice; ownership; students assumed responsibility for various elements of the trips
Possible/future selves	Students' ability to envision themselves in the future; internships; employment; members of communities
Connections to prior experience and to future learning (WIL framework 1.2)	Careful focus on temporal phases (pre-trip, during, and post-trip); scaffolding; debriefing at end
The Block: Affordances and constraints	Few conflicts in students' schedules; duration of the Block may impede learning for some

Domain 2: Curriculum Design

The principle related to curriculum design within the WIL framework is stated as: “A quality WIL curriculum should contain embedded, accessible and authentic learning and assessment within an intended and enacted curriculum” (Campbell et al., 2019, p. 9). Table 2 provides examples of authentic experiences. While it may seem like an oversimplification, the emphasis within the WIL framework on being cognizant of temporal phases emerged as an overarching theme when it came to curriculum design in all four field trips. Participants must maximize the value of the WIL affordances to be found in the "before, during, and after" periods of any field trip. Figure 1 illustrates the importance of: (a) careful preparation before the trip; (b) ensuring the trip itself is an authentic WIL experience; and (c) addressing the necessity of ample and focused debriefing at the conclusion of the trip. Ultimately, the goal is to foster learning through the consolidation of memories, which is facilitated by making connections to what is already known (Alonso et al., 2007). This was a common goal for all four field trip cases. It should be noted, however, that the time pressures of the Block model sometimes reduce the opportunity to engage sufficiently in the debrief, lessening the benefit of the trip.

Figure 1: Maximizing field trip impact via attention to temporal phases



Emphasis on authentic assessments emerged as another theme. For Case #1, the field trip was not formally assessed, but in the remaining cases, instructors designed a variety of assessment tasks aligned specifically with individual course objectives. These assessment tasks were both generative and reflective in nature. Providing timely, iterative assessment feedback is essential to reflective student learning (Northcote et al., 2017). Berte and Jones (2017) emphasized the importance of student reflection during all three temporal phases of the field trip (p. 3). Their use of a reflective field-trip assessment model led to improvements in student learning outcomes, a finding which parallels the data recorded by the instructors in this study.

Table 2. Overview of themes related to curriculum design

Curriculum Design	
Course outcomes	Students benefit when field trips are housed within courses; students perceived articulation between field trip and future required courses
Assessment and evaluation	Assessment tasks varied; generative, by design; reflective
Consolidation of learning/memory	Emphasis on course outcomes; connections to background knowledge; further developed students' schemata
The Block: Affordances & Constraints	Some students may need longer than one Block to let the material resonate.

Domain 3: Institutional Requirements

The domain of institutional requirements is an essential—but sometimes overlooked—element of the WIL framework, and its associated principle states: “Quality WIL activity across tertiary institutions requires effective leadership, management of risk and resources, and reporting around WIL experiences supporting continual improvement (Campbell et al., 2019, p. 15). Although the Block model fosters field trips in many ways, even within that model, the trips can also be problematic, often in unexpected ways (see Table 3).

Assumptions about the Block as an uninterrupted and thus unfettered period of time during which nearly anything is possible are naïve and simplistic. For all four cases, field trips were strongly promoted, and institutional support was voiced, yet practical realities tended to complicate field trip implementation. In a study of academics’ perceptions of the challenges inherent in embedding WIL experiences into curriculum, Dean et al. (2023) noted several unaddressed needs that instructors have: (a) time and other supports for planning and development; (b) explicit appreciation of field trips as a value-added curricular element; (c) recognition of WIL work as real work in an academic’s task load. The Block model of scheduling demands consideration of additional variables which influence embedding field trips into a course (Simson-Woods & Kappes, 2023). The intensity of delivery, the short duration of the Block, and the attempt to maintain a reasonable pace while meeting academic standards provide challenges which, rather than facilitating the integration of the field trip experience, may create frustrations and limitations which constrain the trip’s effectiveness.

Table 3. Overview of themes related to institutional requirements

Institutional Requirements	
Sustainability	Can the field trip be run multiple times per year, if needed? Are stakeholders willing to support multiple offerings per year? Can it be run in successive years?
Resourcing	Numerous resources are required: partner support; sufficient planning/organizing time; travel time and funding; on-site personnel and activities; time for assessments
Recognition/compensation	Does the institution recognize the additional time and effort required for planning and delivery of the field trip?
The Block: Affordances and constraints	What can be done if the length of a trip should—ideally—exceed the duration of the Block? How should scheduling conflicts (for students and instructors) be addressed if the field trip extends to days not typically scheduled for the class?

Domain 4: Stakeholder Engagement

Across the four cases, the various stakeholders enriched the field trips while also increasing trip complexity, sometimes to a daunting extent (see Table 4). The WIL framework explains the importance of stakeholder engagement as a domain through this statement of principle: “Quality WIL experiences are supported by connections and responsiveness to the dynamic expectations of diverse stakeholders (industry, community, government, tertiary education sector, professional bodies)” (Campbell et al., 2019, p. 20). The students themselves are arguably the most important stakeholders, and care must be taken to maximize their educational experiences. Given the diverse needs of students in higher education, it is essential to use an innovative, sustainable approach to embedding field trips in the Block so those needs can be met (Kay et al., 2019). As Kay (2019) and her colleagues noted, co-design and co-construction of WIL experiences with participating students leads to better learning outcomes and engagement. This approach is consistent with the constructivist lens employed by the two IHEs involved in the four cases which are the subject of this paper. During the co-construction process, it is incumbent upon the stakeholders (students, instructors, administrators, institutions) to attend to the important characteristics of integration and intention (Sachs et al., 2016, p. 10), so that the learning experience is both meaningful and purposeful.

Table 4. Overview of themes related to stakeholder engagement

Stakeholder Engagement	
Co-construction	Numerous considerations: allowing enough time for student and partner input; evaluating and acting upon the input; how to weigh stakeholder input.
Relationships	How are student/instructor relationships built and sustained? Should a long-term relationship with a partner(s) be continued? What is the opportunity cost of beginning a new partnership?

The Block: Affordances and constraints	Small class sizes in Block models afford greater ease in bringing groups to a site; repeated offerings of Block courses in a semester can negatively impact both the instructor(s) and partners/sites.
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Conclusion

Two research questions were posed for this analysis of four field trip cases: (1) What are the high-quality educational affordances provided by field trips, in the Block? (2) What challenges and/or obstacles do instructors encounter, in the Block, with regard to field trips? A contextualized description and analysis of each case identified numerous affordances which generally outweigh the often significant challenges, particularly within the domains of student experience, curriculum design, and stakeholder engagement. However, the domain of institutional requirements may be problematic, particularly when resources are scarce, and institutional WIL expectations are not simply high, but unrealistic.

Field trips are enormously important in higher education (Jones & Washko, 2022; Stern & Powell, 2020). They provide students with learning which is real and relevant. This is particularly true when high-impact WIL opportunities are embedded in field trips, which can inspire students and keep them focused on their goals. While classroom-centred learning may at times seem remote and disconnected from the real world, field trips are often perceived as having immediate and authentic value. Field trips can foster student retention, as learners appreciate the direct relevance of their studies during these experiences. Field trips often expose students to new cultural and content-based experiences, making them a richly authentic pedagogical strategy which can be transformative. Additionally, they provide experiences to which students may not otherwise be exposed, informing their practice immeasurably. For instructors, field trips provide the opportunity to see students *in-situ* and establish connections, which often leads to deeper and more individualized guidance of students.

Block-model intensive teaching can indeed accommodate field trips and provide opportunities which are not possible when students are balancing multiple courses and assessment tasks. However, the challenges on faculty time and the added responsibilities for faculty can become a deterrent in seeing field trips implemented in a Block schedule. Moreover, the technical obstacles imposed by a rolling Block schedule remain a challenge, as does reliance on the continued goodwill of the host organizations when courses are offered multiple times in a semester. This analysis of four widely-varying field trips within a four-domain WIL framework contributes to research on the role that field trips can play within an intensive-learning, Block scheduling model. Further research is needed, though, to better understand “the Block in the Field,” and to fully analyse the capacities of Block-model institutions to support field trips, along with instructors’ abilities and limitations in offering them.

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