

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING: FIELDWORK



USING GEOGRAPHICAL FIELDWORK TO TACKLE PRECONCEPTIONS ABOUT PLACE

David Latimer, MLC School

Over the last two years my school has trialed a fieldtrip to the Auburn community to explore the effects of international immigration on Sydney as a part of the Changing Places unit. In part, this fieldwork unit was planned as an opportunity to expose our students to a fascinatingly diverse part of Sydney for which they rarely encounter. We had hopes that the concept of place could be examined when students recognised that the reality of suburbs like Auburn may be quite different from their preconceived ideas.

When the fieldtrip was planned, Australia was regularly exhibiting disturbing examples of islamophobia in the media and an apparently growing rejection of Australia's successful experiment with multiculturalism. We felt this excursion could be used as tool to promote the benefits of immigration and the valuable contribution suburbs like Auburn make in accommodating international migrants. The excursion also provides students with an opportunity to experiment with a variety of fieldwork tool, such as questionnaires, interviews and transects.

Practically the excursion was designed for a whole cohort group of 130 students. The group was broken in three smaller groups for the day with each group participating three separate activities. The activities can easily be planned so that buses can drop students at Auburn Train station and make minimal trips throughout the day. Including the small fee for the mosque and transport the excursion cost \$30 per student.

Figure 1. Migration alters development, sustainability and cultural influences in urban



EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING: AUBURN FIELDWORK

Table 1. Activity planning

	GROUP 1	GROUP 2	GROUP 3
Activity 1	Gallipoli Mosque Visit	Lecture from Cumberland City Council	Retail transect and interviews on Auburn Road
Activity 2	Retail transect and interviews on Auburn Road	Gallipoli Mosque Visit	Lecture from Cumberland City Council
Activity 3	Lecture from Cumberland City Council	Retail transect and interviews on Auburn Road	Gallipoli Mosque Visit

The first activity was a visit to the Gallipoli Mosque to build an understanding about the importance of Islam in the Cumberland City Council. In this Local Government Area 21.9% of residents are Islamic (ABS, 2016) compared with 2.6% in Australia as a whole. The community liaison from Gallipoli Mosque provided an excellent tour through the mosque and discussion about how the mosque serves the local community. Students are required to bring modest dress which covers the legs and (for women) can be worn over the hair for this part of the excursion.



Gallipoli Mosque. Wikimedia Commons – https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Auburn_NSW_2144_Australia_-_panoramio.jpg

During the next activity students received a seminar from the urban planning team at Cumberland City Council. The council planners discussed how local government managed some of the key challenges of the community, including sustainable transport, climate change and multicultural harmony. The talk lasted approximately 45 minutes and was presented within a theatre in the Civic Centre.

The last activity involved more hands-on Geography, with students completing an urban transect of retail activity on Auburn. During this activity students were allowed to move between Auburn Train Station and the Auburn Civic Centre at 78 Auburn Road independently.

Figure 2. The mosque has expectations of modest dress



Table 2. Selected student feedback

- “I liked asking questions to people in the public and also the mosque tour as I learned a lot. Also, the council’s existing and future plans were really interesting to hear.”
- “The mosque was interesting. Getting to know about city planning (behind-the-scenes stuff) and how social & technological changes occur in a city/town was very interesting as well.”
- “I liked having the independence and walking around Auburn asking people about the questions we wanted them to answer.”

Over the two years the excursion has been used, it has been quite successful with 70% of the cohort rating the experience as both an enjoyable and valuable learning experience. Most students also identified the community interviews and the mosque as the most high-impact learning experiences. I would also like to extend my thanks to both the Cumberland City Council team and the Gallipoli Mosque, both of whom have been extremely helpful and accommodating while planning this execution.

ANNOUNCING

The 2021 GTA NSW & ACT Young Geographer Awards

The Young Geographer Awards invites students in NSW and the ACT to demonstrate engagement with Geography, the discipline and with the tools and skills of Geography through the creation and conduct of an inquiry-based research project. Although it is not essential, teachers are encouraged to incorporate the research and construction of the project into their teaching programs to help support students.



Prizes for the winning entries in the Young Geographer Award prizes, in any category are:

- ★ First Prize \$500
- ★ Second Prize \$250
- ★ Third Prize \$100

FOR MORE DETAILS CLICK HERE