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# Informalising and Transforming Learning Experiences in an Unfamiliar Landscape: Reflections on the ‘Awayscape’ of an A-Level Geography Field Trip

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## Abstract

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Young people studying geography in a school setting are sometimes presented with opportunities to visit unfamiliar places—or ‘contrasting localities’—as part of a field trip or study visit. Ostensibly, this is seen as a characteristic of ‘good’ geography education, providing students with immersive, real-world and experiential learning opportunities (Kinder in Lambert and Jones (eds) *Debates in geography*, Routledge, 2013).

## 1. Introduction

Young people studying geography in a school setting are sometimes presented with opportunities to visit unfamiliar places—or ‘contrasting localities’—as part of a field trip or study visit. Ostensibly, this is seen as a characteristic of ‘good’ geography education, providing students with immersive, real-world and experiential learning opportunities (Kinder, 2013). However, arguably school-level fieldwork can be rather utilitarian or instrumental in nature. Too often, fieldwork is seen—by teachers and students—as a means to an end, a necessary part of preparing students for examination success within the narrow constraints of formal curricular and examination

since this is ultimately what is tested through examinations and coursework tasks. This rather shallow and instrumentalist rationale for fieldwork constrains the potential for deeper, or more emancipatory explorations (Wals et al., 2008) by students of *'their world'* and *'their place'* in it. A more holistic framework for outdoor learning has been presented by Malone (2008) which extends the potential beyond the cognitive to include physical, social, emotional and personal aspects of progression or development. This chapter advocates such an expanded understanding of the learning potential of fieldwork.

Whilst these broader learning dimensions represent an emerging area of research in Higher Education (Marvell & Simm, 2018; Phillips, 2015), they have received limited attention at the secondary geography school level. What work there **is** has tended to be published in professional rather than academic journals (see: Cook, 2010; Moncrieff, 2008; Selmes & Wallace, 2014). This chapter seeks to partially address these gaps through presenting the findings of a small-scale study into the experiences of a small yet heterogeneous group of students from Outer London who undertook an A-level geography field trip to visit the unfamiliar, *'contrasting locality'* of Swanage in Dorset in the spring of 2019. The goal of this chapter is to provide support for a broadened understanding of the purposes and scope of geographical fieldwork to unfamiliar places as a vehicle not just for advancing academic study but also for personal and social development. It draws on *'informal learning'* theory and practice, which explicitly seeks to promote human flourishing by acknowledging and extending the lived experience of learners, establishing and pursuing *their* wants and needs as the basis for developing their agency (Smith, 2007).

## 2. Contextualising Learning

A general contextual model of learning would comprise three inextricable and interrelated dimensions or contexts (following Braund & Reiss, 2004; Falk & Dierking, 2016): intrapersonal (the subjective experiences of the individual learner); socio-cultural or interpersonal (social interactions amongst people in the learning context—learners, teachers, and other people); and physical or *'place'* (the environmental setting or milieu). Arguably, the physical context represents a range of scales, including the micro-scale (e.g. a desk within a classroom). However, the focus here is on *'places'* understood as *'macroenvironments encountered outdoors'* (Matthews, 1992: 2), including considerations of the physical environments encountered in fieldwork. Such places represent complex assemblages of non-living or abiotic elements (soil, rock, buildings), living elements (plants, animals, humans) and social and cultural relationships.

All places potentially provide rich contexts for learning in terms of their features (including species, landscapes, cultural heritage and how they are interconnected), and presenting opportunities for individual and collaborative investigation, inquiry and discovery. This observation lies behind the place-based education movement which takes as its focus the *'home locality'* (Morgan, 2010; Sobel, 2005). However, given that *'familiarity breeds contempt'*, it is often the case that teachers wish to take learners away from the home locality, such as on a field trip. The choice of destination is usually made because of its perceived quality or affordances for progressing learning outcomes. However, the relative unfamiliarity of the destination is likely to give rise to additional considerations and learning implications, whether deliberate or ancillary, as a consequence of factors relating to the intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions, and how they all interrelate.

Here, O'Dell and Billing's (2005) notion of *'experiencescape'* is helpful. This can be seen as the emergent outcome of the interaction between all three dimensions of the contextual model of learning. These can be further divided into the *'setting'* (comprising both *'place'* and social aspects), and intrapersonal *'set'* (the metaphoric *'inner space'* of subjectivity—the personal dimension) (Tart, 1990) or *'mindset'*. With an unfamiliar landscape, both aspects of *'setting'* are unfamiliar, and the *'mindset'* will be affected prior to (anticipation, trepidation, excitement), during (experience) and after (reflection) the field trip event. Consequently, the particular attributes and affordances of the place are crucial, but so too are the social dynamics at play and the subjectivities (motivations, perceptions, responses, etc.) of the *'experiencing subjects'*. This is why it is important, in this study, that we have explored the students' own shifting perceptions, combining *'various sensory elements, including physical, intellectual, social and emotional'* (Chen et al., 2019: 10), as they engage with the unfamiliar landscape and social dynamics at play.

*'Mindset'* (emotions, volitions, motivations, reactions, etc.) is crucial since all *'[s]paces'* invoke powerful feelings, including those associated with belonging, exclusion, safety and/or danger' (Leverett, 2011: 9). However, being presented by *unfamiliar* places, in the context of fieldwork, necessarily involves a number of stressors encountered by young people. These include the challenges of being *'away'* from home, supportive friends and familiar territory. In addition, being away also means being *'relocated'* into (potentially) challenging physical environments, unfamiliar social environment (including living communally and working in groups), and travelling long distances (Birnie & Grant, 2001). Thus, a residential field trip potentially undermines feelings of belonging, security, status and identity (Verbeek & de Waal, 2002). However, it simultaneously affords enhanced opportunities for investigation and discovery. Such situations of unfamiliarity can lead to disorientation of existing habitual modes of thinking (or what psychologists refer to as mental schemas) which, ideally, results in *'learning'* (i.e. reconstructed mental schemas that provide a better fit with this new experience). Of course, this cannot always be guaranteed, and there is the danger of being overwhelmed by unfamiliarity (*'culture shock'* and *'travel psychosis'* being extreme possibilities).

### ***'Youthscape', Formal and Informal Learning/Contexts, and 'Awayscape'***

These three dimensions of learning (place-intrapersonal-interpersonal) can be contextualised in broader sociocultural terms. Maira and Soep (2005) introduced the concept of *'Youthscape'* to describe the lived experiences of young people, set within broader national and global processes. This can be seen as the overarching setting within which learning takes place. A simplistic distinction might be made between aspects of the *Youthscape* that are relatively *'formal'* and *'adult-controlled'*, and *'young people's informal worlds, friendship groups and social experiences'* (Hopkins, 2010: 184). This relates to a corresponding distinction between formal and

externally sanctioned programs. In contrast, informal learning represents the learning taking place in other aspects of social life, in a range of contexts outside of the school, including: 'the home; the workplace; libraries; museums; popular culture; the media; the street corner, the mall, and other "public" space; and, most recently, the Internet' (Bekerman et al., 2007: 1).

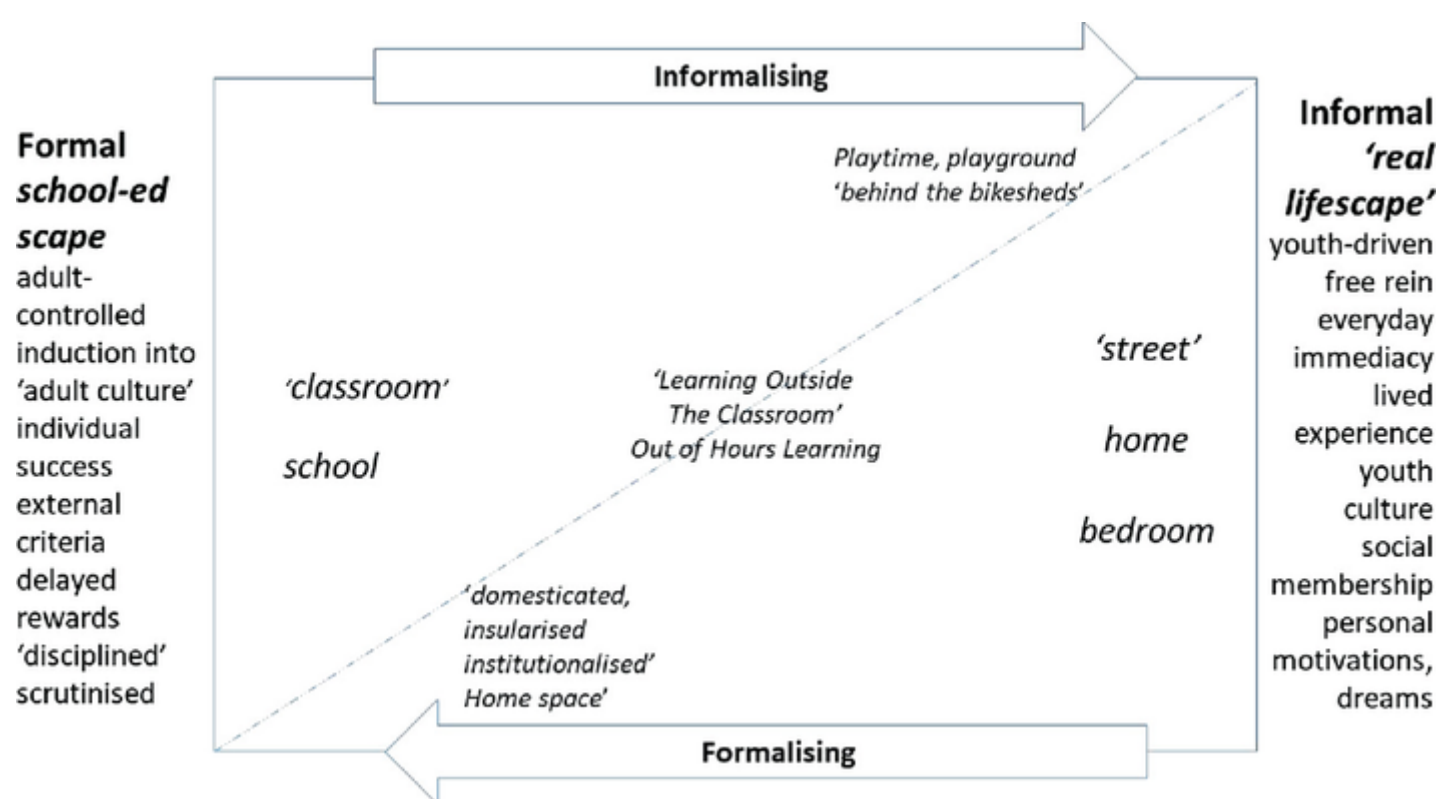
Hopkins (2011) discusses different settings in the 'home locality' that are most salient to the Youthscape: home, street and school. He draws attention to the power relations imbued within these various contexts, and their socialising function in 'reinforcing norms and practices' (Hopkins, 2011: 30) expected of the formal, adult world. 'Schooling' or becoming 'schooled' represents the most obvious instance of this. For school geography in England and Wales, this is ordained by the centrally-dictated National Curriculum (DFE, 2013) and examination specifications that is to be followed (DfE, 2014), typically in the formal setting of a geography classroom through mainstream teaching and learning practices and materials, within the broader formal school culture.

These adult-impositions or exertions of power are also evident beyond school. Leverett (2011) discusses three processes which are curtailing the independence of young people beyond school, and exerting adult-socialising norms. Firstly, there is 'domestication': the increasing 'corralling' of young people into protected spaces such as the home, adult-designed playgrounds and activity spaces. Secondly, there is 'institutionalisation': the increasing imposition of adult-organised activities into 'out-of-school-hours' often with an overtly 'formal educational' rationale of improving 'success' through accredited courses e.g. homework, music lessons, and sports clubs. Finally, there is 'insularisation': the fragmentation of young people's experiences and interpersonal contact with their peers as they are 'shuttled'—by parents/adults—between these imposed activities.

However, young people are not without their own agency and create their own informal spaces in the 'cultural crevices' and 'social fissures' beyond adult surveillance (Hopkins, 2011). Such spaces typically have been created in the home (the bedroom) or in the street (the street corner), abandoned spaces and parks, although the processes of 'privatisation', 'domestication' and 'institutionalisation' are reducing these opportunities. Figure 1 attempts to relate these relatively formal and informal dimensions of the Youthscape within the home locality (the boundary rectangle), with the diagonal line conveying a spectrum of positions rather than binaries.

**Fig. 1**

#### Youthscape(s) of learning



Some have deliberately sought to straddle the formal-informal divide in order to enhance and broaden learning potential. Thus, Aponte-Martínez and Pellegrino (2017: 102) argue for a process of 'Youthscaping' the classroom and curriculum to move 'beyond mandated standards and nominal attention to student interest, requiring teachers to not only understand what youth are interested in but also the ways that these interests matter to students'. Whilst it might not be possible, nor perhaps desirable, to create a wholly 'Youthscaped' geography curriculum employing 'youthscaped pedagogy', attempts are underway in geography education to acknowledge young people's lived experiences. Examples include 'young people's ethnogeographies' (Martin, 2005, 2008), and 'Young People's Geographies' (Firth, 2011).

Smith (2007: 19), on the other hand, writes of the desirability of informalising the formal curriculum or 'learning beyond the formality of the classroom'. Such a process is behind the promotion of extracurricular learning which might be literally and metaphorically *outside* (or *marginal*) to the school curriculum either temporally as in 'Out of School Hours Learning' (OSHL: Smith, 2007); and/or geographically as in 'Learning Outside the Classroom' (LOtC: DfES, 2006). Such informalising of learning is particularly relevant for field trips, which tend to involve non-school-like settings, in terms of the transportation to and from sites, residential accommodation, mealtime and 'free time' arrangements. In addition, fieldwork, particularly those involving a stay away from home, necessarily involves a flattening of the power-relations between staff and students, and affords opportunities to develop learners holistically.

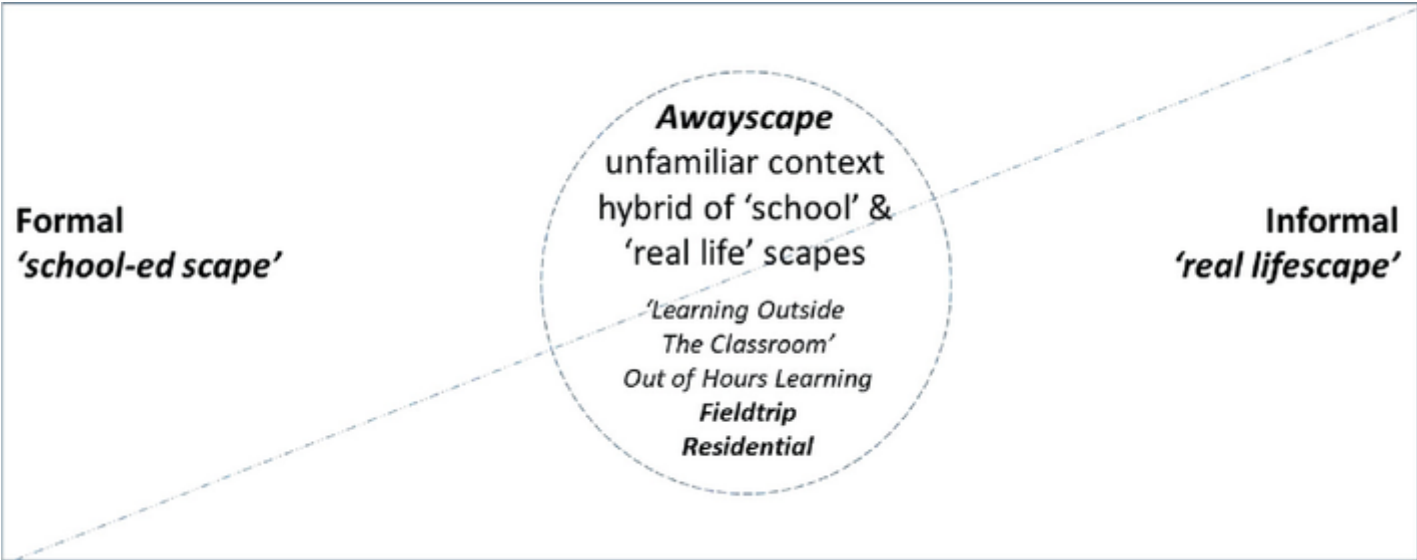
We have coined the term 'awayscape' (extending Appadurai, 1996; Maira & Soep, 2005) to describe learning spaces or settings away from the familiar, home locality that sit in the lacuna between formal and informal learning contexts (Fig. 2). Figuratively, the



and informal) which is transported to another, unfamiliar context. Thus, awayscapes offer an ephemeral ‘semi-formal realm’ (Schugurensky, 2007: 101) in which blurring can take place in terms of: social relations (between learners and teachers); acceptable knowledge (between formal, school and academic geography, and young people’s geographies and youthscape); and educational purposes (academic success within formal schooling, and personal and social development as advocated in informal learning). We believe that such blurring is both possible and desirable, although all too often, it remains accidental or, at best, permitted rather than positively encouraged.

Fig. 2

‘Awayscape’



Thus, an awayscape can be seen as a ‘between space’: a space shaped by formal aspects of schooling, and influenced by the informal, lived experiences of students and leaders. What follows is a discussion of a small-scale research project involving a group of students on a field trip in 2019. The research explored the student’s motivations and expectations before the visit, their readings of the unfamiliar landscapes they encountered and the ways in which they made sense of the experience within their own individual Youthscapes.

### 3. Research Context: The Dorset Coast as Awayscape

The students who participated in the research were aged 16–18 and all attended an outer-London, state-run comprehensive school, in the London Borough of Redbridge. All studied geography at A-Level (a school-leaving qualification in England and Wales completed before university or employment). The participants were a heterogeneous group of nine students, from a range of ethnic, social and economic backgrounds, and were mixed in terms of gender and academic ability. The diversity within the group was representative of the comprehensive nature of the school and the range of different religious and ethnic communities living locally. Like most London Boroughs, Redbridge is home to marked disparities in wealth (LBR, 2011). The area around the school is ‘average’ in terms of income and deprivation. The trip was organised in response to requirements for A-level students to complete 4 days ‘in the field’, covering aspects of human and physical geography (DfE, 2014). It was optional and free to attend, and the importance of attending (to meet DfE requirements) was emphasised to students. All chose to take part, although undoubtedly with some influence from their parents.

The students travelled by minibus to the coastal town of Swanage in Dorset, located along the ‘Jurassic Coast’ in southern England. The Jurassic Coast is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, a status granted in recognition of its geological significance. This location was selected because of its close proximity to several sites of interest for studying coastal geography such as the stacks, arches, coves and bays. The geographically and geologically significant nature of the coastline, with its ‘textbook’ features, means that it has become a widely visited fieldwork destination for schools, colleges and universities, with the infrastructure needed to support educational tourism. As a result, the town of Swanage hosts many school visits and is very familiar to geography teachers. For many students it also has a level of familiarity, due to the number of maps and photographs of the area included in educational resources.

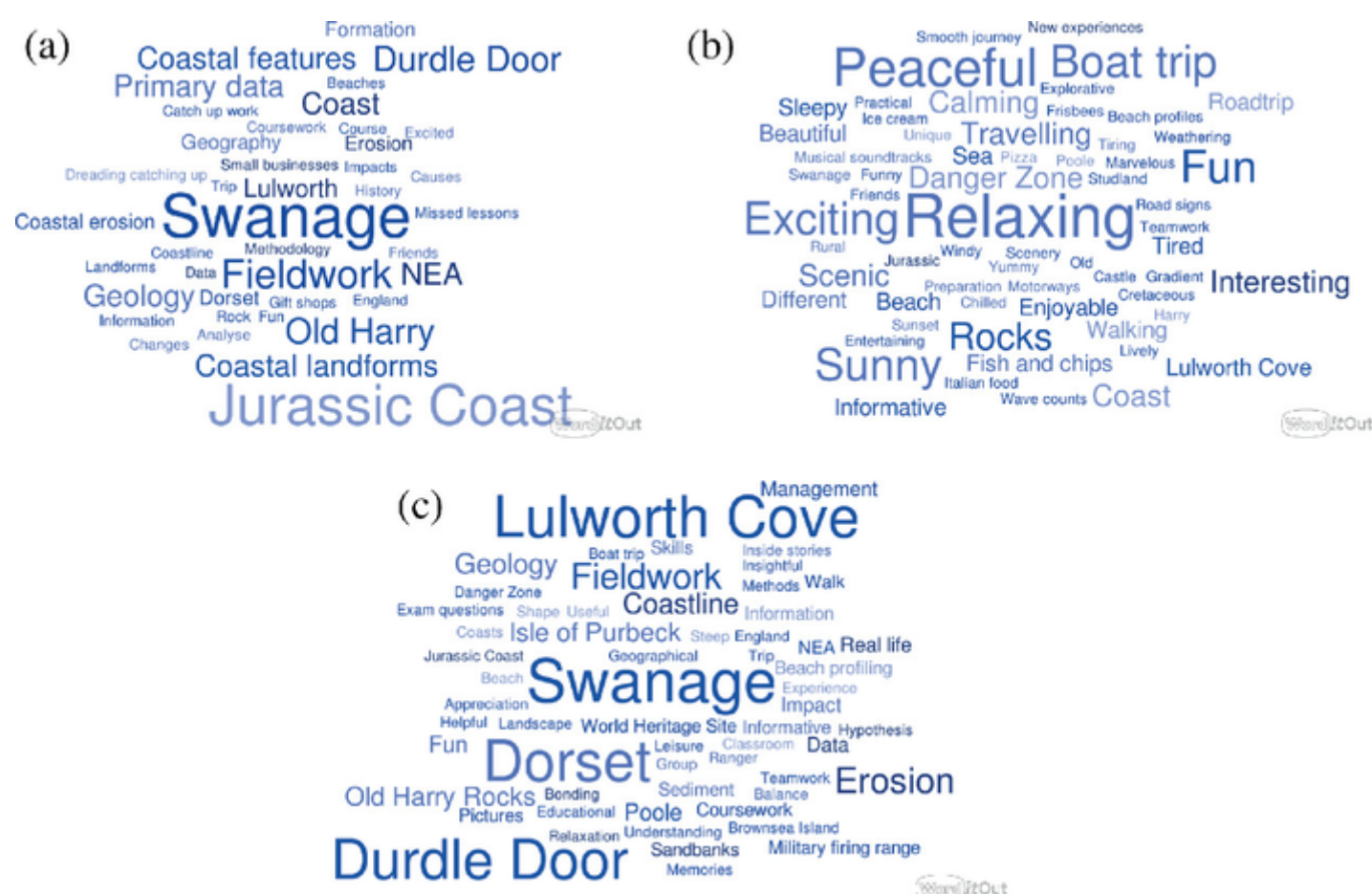
The largely rural nature of the Dorset coast stands in contrast to the home locality of the students in this study: a dense, urban landscape in outer London, well connected to central London through public transport. However, its peripheral location on the edge of London, means that Redbridge does have areas of greenery including farmland, a Country Park and recreational lakes. Nevertheless, the Dorset coast can be seen as a much ‘bluer’ and ‘greener’ space than Redbridge. It is also more ethnically homogenous. Redbridge is a home to diverse ethnicities, with the total number from Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME backgrounds) exceeding White British residents (LBR, 2011). The largest ethnic groups come from the Indian sub-continent, with 16.4% from an Indian background and 11.1% from Pakistani origins. 34.5% of residents classified themselves as White British. In the same period, 94.6% of those living in Swanage consider themselves to be White British (Dorset County Council, 2020). All of these characteristics created an unfamiliar context for the awayscape.

The research data for this study was gathered using several methods. Two surveys were conducted with the group, one before and one after the visit. These consisted of open-ended questions. During the fieldtrip, the students were asked to record their thoughts and reflections, completed at the end of each day, using a structured log sheet. This document is referred to in this account as their field notes. During the four-day visit, the students took photographs and recorded video footage. These multi-media outputs formed part of the data collection process. On the day of departure, the group were asked to take photographs of any aspect of the trip that interested them. This deliberately vague brief was intended to explore how they made sense of the unfamiliar landscape themselves. Anote-

#### 4. Exploring ~~Expectations of~~ the Unfamiliar

Although one respondent stated that he was also looking forward to having 'fun with friends'. The pre-visit survey also showed that all the students believed that the field trip had been organised with formal learning and the curriculum in mind, stating that the geography department had planned the trip so that the students could carry out fieldwork, collect data for their NEA and gain knowledge to help them in their final exams. It is likely that this perception came from reading the letter sent home to parents outlining details of the field trip and emphasising its importance in supporting the aims of the geography course. This message was reinforced in class, particularly whilst completing pre-visit tasks. However, the letter home also mentioned the 'enjoyment' that past students had experienced whilst away, and the teaching staff often spoke fondly about Dorset and their memories of taking students there previously. Yet, in hindsight, the more informal aspects of the visit and the potential personal benefits of taking part were not explicitly signposted.

**a** Keywords from the pre-visit survey. **b** Keywords from the student's field notes. **c** Keywords from the post-visit survey



*I don't mind where I go, so long as it works best for the course.*

The students were also asked what they expected to see whilst they were on the field trip. Overall, the Dorset coast was a largely unfamiliar landscape to the group: only one had been to the area before (also on a geography field trip, with a different school). However, their responses to the pre-visit survey were often place-specific, with many references to locations such as Old Harry Rocks, Durdle Door, Swanage, the Jurassic Coast and Lulworth Cove. These places feature in almost all of the responses and appeared very familiar to the group, primarily because these places were studied in school as part of the geography curriculum (at A-level and before).



resources. Thus, whilst most of the students had not yet gained any lived experience of being in Dorset, they had begun developing a sense of familiarity with the area, through the lens of geographical education. Throughout the pre-visit survey, there was also repeated use of key geographical terminology such as rock types, geology, erosion, sediment, formations and landforms. When asked about what they thought the area would be like, the students' responses contained strong evocations of a natural environment shaped by the power of the sea and dominated by rocks and physical structures, including caves, arches and stacks. Their answers made limited references to the social or cultural landscape, although some students included suggestions of small, rural communities, a peaceful landscape and elements of coastal tourism. The Dorset Coast is commonly used as a case study to support the teaching of physical geography and landforms. Once again, this formal learning appeared to have a strong influence in shaping the students' perceptions of place. As a result, it could be argued that the students travelled to Dorset with an institutionalised sense of familiarity for their intended destination, shaped and structured by their formal classroom learning.

## Engaging with Unfamiliar Places Through Technology

One of the key outcomes of the research was a recognition of the role mobile technologies, namely smartphones, can play in facilitating interactions between students and the unfamiliar landscapes they encounter. In this case, mobile phones enabled the group to engage with their surroundings, document points of interest and record their thoughts. The students were also able to use the same technology to share their reflections with others around them, as well as those further away, who were not directly involved in the visit. The media captured on smartphones can be referred to after the visit, which facilitates an ongoing relationship with a distant landscape and shapes the memories held of that place. The use of mobile technology was a useful research tool, particularly the camera function, which provided a very visible way for students to register their interest in the landscape. This was something that could be easily observed, noted and analysed. Some of this analysis is discussed in more detail below.

## Sharing the Landscape Through Photographs

The students were invited to take photographs and record anything of interest to them during the visit. This approach to fieldwork sits well with what Kinder (2013: 187) calls 'discovery fieldwork', in which the teacher 'provides the opportunity and encouragement for learners to explore the environments for themselves'. All the students took photographs without having to be reminded, suggesting this was something they wanted to do and were used to doing. For example, upon arrival in Swanage, after a long bus ride, the group took a walk to explore their new locality. Approaching the seafront, they all gathered by the sea wall and spent time taking pictures of the scene, including the sun setting over the bay. This view appeared to be of interest to them, and one they considered to be important. The sunset seemed to enhance the significance of the view, adding the effect of a natural photographic filter through which to view the landscape. One of the students later noted that their favourite moment of the day had been 'taking pictures of the coastline'. For another student it was 'watching the sun set'.

Taking photographs promoted a range of social interactions amongst the students, the staff and those not directly involved in the field trip. At the end of each day, the students gathered around the kitchen table to review their photographs and compile their field notes. On the first evening one of the students suggested a way of sharing the images using Bluetooth technology, allowing them to collect the photos together on one device. This became part of the daily routine. The experience of gathering together each night to reflect and share, was an unplanned, student-led event, with the students taking control, making decisions and helping each other. It appeared that coming together to share the photographs became as important, for the group, as the task of taking them. This positive social interaction highlights the value and importance of the interpersonal context, as part of the learning process. It also suggests that smartphones can play a positive role in connecting students to each other and the landscapes they encounter, as opposed to common perception that mobile technologies disconnect young people from others and from 'real' spaces.

The social interaction facilitated by the sharing of photographs also extended beyond the awayscape. For example, a photograph of Durdle Door taken by a student (Fig. 4) was shared amongst geography educators, via social media, by one of the leaders, and was viewed by hundreds of people as a result. It prompted an online discussion amongst other viewers, who added their own layers of meaning to the image, many highlighting technical aspects of the physical landscape and geology. In this way, the students' photograph provided a vehicle for social interaction beyond the immediate setting. This suggests that mobile technology can challenge traditional conceptions of place-based learning, transcending the 'fixed' location of a field trip.

**Fig. 4**

**Photograph taken by a student of Durdle Door**



Most of the photographs taken by the students were quite traditional in style: predominantly of landscapes (devoid of people) and the same view was often photographed by multiple students. For example, whilst on a boat trip to visit Old Harry Rocks, most of the group took photographs of the white foamy waves generated by the vessel (Fig. 5). Many of the students used the panoramic feature on their phone, to capture vast stretches of the landscapes. Only one student appeared to edit the photographs before sharing them, with no one else in the group using filters to enhance their photographs. The traditional style of the students' landscape photographs may have been in response to their own perceptions of what was expected of them, on an educational trip focused on landscape features and forms. In this way, formal education can be seen to shape student behaviour and perhaps constrain it. A less critical analysis may be that adult perceptions of youthscape and youth culture are misplaced, and that the students valued the aesthetic properties of landscape.

**Fig. 5**  
Photograph taken by a student during a boat trip to Old Harry Rocks



**Documenting the Interactions with the Unfamiliar Using Video**

The group made a video whilst on the field trip. This provided valuable insights into how the students made sense of and interacted with the unfamiliar landscape around them, as well as the unfamiliar social context of the visit. It was also an important vehicle for promoting group collaboration. The production was led by one student, who recorded the majority of the footage and edited it. On the first day of the visit, this student commented that he wished he had made a 'vlog' (video blog) of the trip. After some encouragement from the research lead, he began recording, enthusiastically. This was in contrast to his behaviour at the start of the trip, in which he had seemed 'switched off' and distant from the group (spending a lot of time speaking on his phone to friends at home). He appeared disconnected from the awayscape, preferring to maintain connections with the familiar. Once he started filming the vlog, he became committed to producing a final, edited account of the field trip. Being a small group, all of the students' voices are heard on the film and their shared experience is documented. The students used the video to record the more mundane aspects of their visit and discuss their thoughts, providing a record from their perspective.

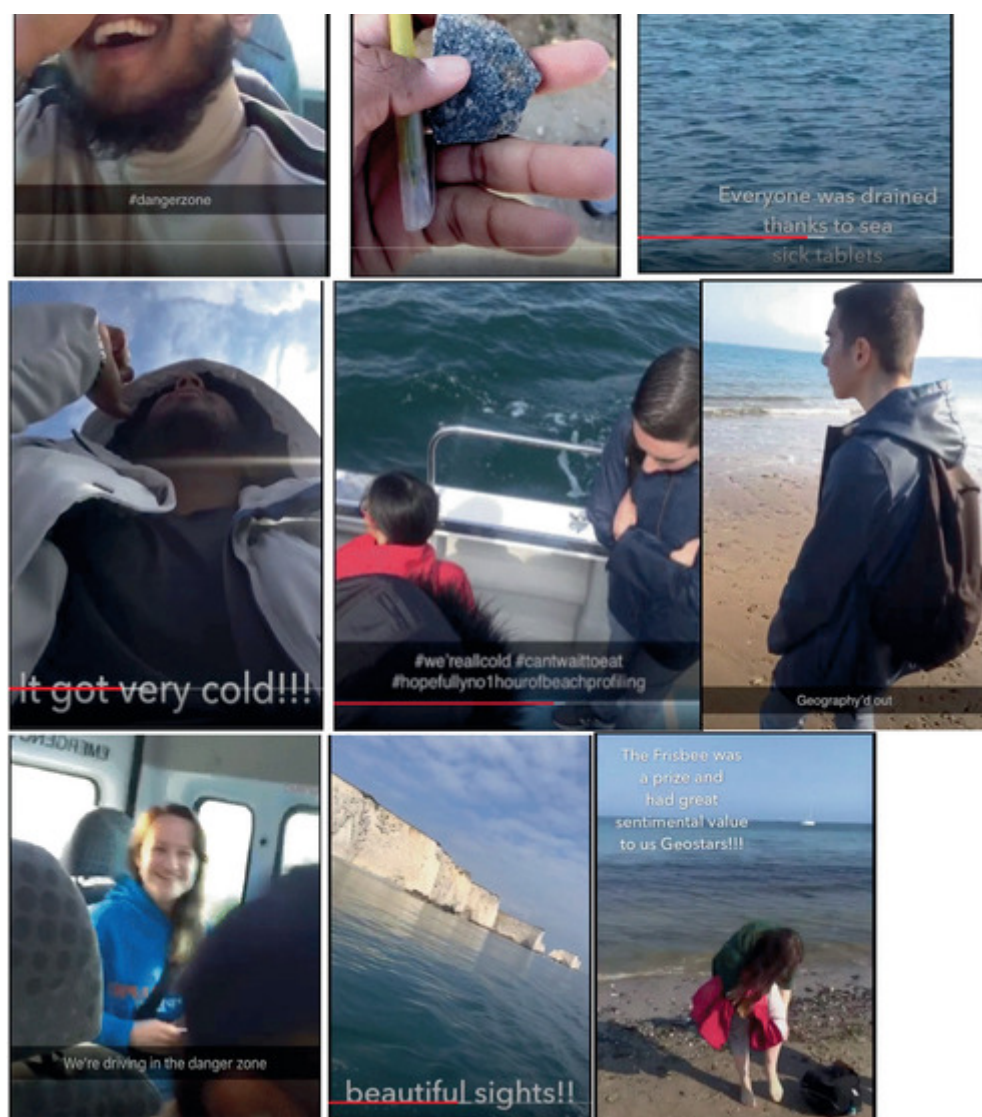
Footage from the video (Fig. 6) shows the camaraderie of the group developing as the trip progressed. They use a series of hashtags to explain key scenes and clearly developed a group identity, having given themselves a group name, 'the geostars'. This social interaction is commented on in the follow up survey, with one student stating, 'it was very fun bonding with the rest of the class'. Another commented that:

*We [the group] got along really well and all enjoyed our stay – made some very funny memories and inside stories.*

**Fig. 6**  
Video fragments/photovoice montage







The development of relationships is an important part of field trips, with people interacting with each other in an unfamiliar way, in an unfamiliar setting. Making the video became a vehicle for facilitating these interactions. It also appeared to blur the boundaries between formal and informal learning, as well as delving into the 'Youthscapes' of those on camera. The formal agenda for the visit provided the context for much of the material; however, the intrapersonal and social dimensions of the learning process are very evident. As with the photographs, the process of making the video became as important, if not more important, than the finished product. Recording, editing, sharing and discussing the footage formed a significant part of each day. As such, making the video played a key role in shaping the awayscape. However, the recording and editing provides a particular perspective of the trip (influenced by the person recording it) and may not reflect how everyone in the group experienced the visit, with some students having feelings they were not willing to share on camera.

The video provides an insight into the individual, intrapersonal aspects of the awayscape experience. Whilst the field notes (Fig. 3) suggest that the students' mindset was largely positive (with multiple references to feelings of excitement, fun, relaxation and an appreciation for their surroundings), the video footage show moments in which individuals were quiet or less engaged with the group and their surroundings. For example, the group are slightly withdrawn during a lengthy, cold and windy boat ride across Poole Harbour to view Old Harry Rocks. There is much discussion on the video about the sharing of seasickness tablets before the boat trip, which allegedly made the group drowsy and quiet. Feelings of apparent boredom are also articulated, with one student complaining about having to conduct 'yet another wave count' as part of the fieldwork. The student appears on camera, uninterested in the work or the experience of being at the coast. He sits staring out to sea. This is set in contrast to footage of the group laughing on the minibus or working as a group to demonstrate, to camera, how to collect beach profile data. Some feelings of discontent were also present in the students' field notes, in which they were asked to consider their least favourite part of the day. Many of these refer to the more mundane aspects of the awayscape, such as waiting to do something or the more personal aspects of dealing with shared sleeping spaces.

The video footage also documents emotional responses to different aspects of the landscape. Some of the video conversations between students centre upon how the landscape differed to their expectations, predominantly their surprise. Several students commented that they expected Dorset to be 'dirty' but in fact it turned out to be '...actually clean' and '...actually nice'. Cook (2010) discusses how similar findings emerged during a research-based field trip to Malham, in Yorkshire, where students had a similar preoccupation with the cleanliness of the area. It was not clear in what ways the students expected Dorset to be 'more dirty'. We might speculate that 'dirty' is a word that students may use to describe unfamiliar or unknown places, a word used for places that are different to what they usually experience. Or it might be that their perception of places is strongly shaped by their experiences of living in London, in which some parts of the landscape are 'dirty' and in which there are strong smells associated with 'dirty' urban waste and traffic fumes. This highlights the influence of lived experience in shaping perceptions of the physical setting in which learning takes place.

## Engaging with Unfamiliar Places Through Fieldwork

A key aim of the Dorset visit was to undertake geographical fieldwork, in support of formal classroom learning. Malone (2008) argues that, given the opportunity to visit another location, young people are able to acquire knowledge and develop new skills. Writing about school geography, Hope (2009, cited in Hammond, 2018: 172) supports this, arguing that fieldwork is an 'important mode of

the field, including the collection of coastal fieldwork data and guided tours of the area. However, our research suggests that in this example, learning took place within the unique context of the awayscape: a hybrid space of formal education and informal 'lifestyles' or 'youthworlds'. Furthermore, in this space learning can occur in new and perhaps more spontaneous ways.

For the students, smartphone technology became an important learning tool. They used mobile data to explore the meanings of place names, such as the Jurassic Coast and to look at online maps. Each morning, one student would use their smartphone to look up the distances between the places they were due to visit that day, quoting these as the group travelled in the minibus, announcing the expected arrival time for each destination. In doing this, the student was beginning to make sense of the area around her and increase its familiarity. In another example, one of the students suggested using a smartphone app to check the angle of each slope, whilst profiling the beach, illustrating further evidence of student-led learning influencing the fieldwork. This also influenced future fieldwork practice for the staff, who have used this app since with other students. These examples show the way in which smartphones may be used to support learning outdoors, as opposed to detaching students from the experience or their surroundings. This is supported by Anderson et al. (2015: 1), whose research found that rather than 'curtailing ties to the environment', the use of mobile technology during fieldwork can enhance the development of knowledge.

Our research also illustrates ways in which students can be given opportunities, during a field trip, to respond emotionally to the landscape and use their senses to explore their surroundings. When arriving at Durdle Door, with the aim of completing a formal data collection task, the students all walked to the water's edge and sat down. They sat for some time, talking to each other, looking at the sea and feeling the different pebbles and stones around them. They picked up the beach material and ran it through their hands. Some of them threw pebbles into the sea. For one student, their favourite part of the day was 'when I got my feet wet in the water'. Here, the planned agenda was paused and the itinerary became student-led. This desire to explore the landscape through touch was also seen during a guided tour of Lulworth cove. When shown some rock samples, a student eagerly stated: 'I want to touch it' and reached out to do so. This action was then repeated by the rest of the group. The impact of this experience and their interest in the rocks was evident in their field notes. One student commented:

*It was interesting finding out about the composition of the rocks and how the resistance of the rock varies, and how the environment affected the formation [of the rocks].*

The students' field notes included a significant number of comments on geology (Fig. 3), and an enjoyment of the guided tour. This could be because the session was led by a local Ranger. It was a new voice, a new narrative, delivered in an unfamiliar way, in an unfamiliar setting. This unfamiliarity may have been what caught their attention and engaged them, in ways that formal learning does not always do. The rocks were 'real', tangible. They could be held, touched and seen as situated in, and part of the surrounding landscape. The group had not studied geology in detail at school, therefore it provided a new focus for their learning, and was 'exciting' and engaging. Their field notes also highlight that many of the students considered the process of collecting fieldwork data and learning new skills to be significant, with one commenting that they 'enjoyed learning new fieldwork techniques'. Experiencing the landscape first-hand, whilst also learning, was considered a welcome part of the awayscape. Several students commented that they welcomed seeing places such as Old Harry Rocks 'in real life' rather than 'just in exam questions' or 'online'.

## Reflections on the Unfamiliar

Upon returning to London, some weeks after the visit, the students were asked to reflect upon their experiences in Dorset. The responses to the post-visit surveys are richer in detail and content than those before the trip (Fig. 3). They make reference to geographical learning, as well as informal social experiences. There is also a greater sense of place and familiarity, with multiple references to the names of locations visited in Dorset, although some places appear to have become more familiar than others, with Durdle Door and Swanage being key memories. As in the pre-visit survey, aspects of the formal geography curriculum are still present, with some focusing on their upcoming assessment (NEA) and how they successfully collected coastal data:

*It was useful as the skills and methods can be applied to my own coursework.*

However, these formal reflections were less pronounced in comparison with the pre-visit survey. The process of 'bonding with the rest of the class' and collecting some 'very funny memories' were cited as positive elements. One wrote explicitly about the welcome 'balance between work and independent leisure and recreation time'.

The relationship between the formal and informal learning is a complex one. This complexity can be seen in the students' answers to the question: 'if you were to go another field trip, where would you like to go and what would you do there?' This generated a lot of ideas and suggestions for future visits. Like their answers to the pre-visit survey, the students' responses were largely shaped by their experiences of formal school geography and textbooks. For example, they wanted to go to Blackpool and look at evidence of regeneration or visit Norfolk to investigate erosion, aspects of geography covered by the school curriculum. However, having experienced the visit to Dorset, their responses show that they now held an interest in visiting other places, in wanting to discover new environments. As such, it could be argued that the visit to Dorset had provided them with a new lens for viewing the world and the formal scaffolding to think about visiting other, unfamiliar landscapes.

## 5. Conclusions

The goal of this chapter was to provide support for a broader understanding of the role that fieldwork can play in individual learning



learning provided a reason for this field trip to take place, it did not define it. Although set within the framework of the school curriculum, the personal youthscape of the students shaped aspects of the trip and influenced how they learnt about the landscape. Students were able to *informalise* their experiences by exercising their agency at various points, thus enhancing their engagement with unfamiliar landscapes *and* the unfamiliar social dynamics associated with the awayscape. During the visit to Dorset, students embraced a variety of learning opportunities, beyond simply cognitive development. The many experiential aspects of the visit appeared to contribute to their personal and social development. Thus, whilst the fieldwork was undertaken within the constraints of the formal education systems, where exam results and other performance indicators are key, the potential benefits far exceed this narrow, instrumentalist rationale. The research supports the principle of offering young people a range of learning opportunities during a field trip, as well as recognising new opportunities for learning as they emerge. This generates positive outcomes for those involved in the fieldwork (including trip leaders).

Furthermore, the research suggests that planning periods of 'freedom', away from the formal schedule, can have powerful outcomes for those taking part. Arguably, trip leaders should consider this when planning visits, and provide space for the informal and spontaneous to occur. However, there is a danger of overplanning, of formalising the informal, therefore reducing the impact of serendipitous moments. It could also be tempting to place greater importance on the informal, social elements of the awayscape over formal learning. Instead, our research suggests that formal and informal learning can come together synergistically to create a valuable experience for young people. Furthermore, by making small adjustments to the planning of field trips, there are opportunities for a more holistic approach to fieldwork, capable of embracing different disciplinary traditions (natural science, humanistic and critical). Ideally this would become part of deliberate practice, rather than being accidental, although the freedom to embrace the unexpected is essential.

In many ways the field trip described here was no different to many others that take place each year, in many settings. However, the emphasis placed upon 'experimenting' and being 'responsive' to the students during the visit, was a particular characteristic of the visit. The use of smartphone technology to assist learning and discovery of the unfamiliar was also an important feature of this particular awayscape. The students were able to use tools that were familiar to them (their phones) to make sense of a new experience and an unfamiliar landscape. This approach to fieldwork and to learning can also be explored by those taking young people to unfamiliar landscapes in other contexts, beyond educational settings. The focus of this research was very much that of an 'edu-awayscape'—travelling away specifically for educational purposes—but the outcomes may benefit those working in a range of other contexts involving awaysapes such as youth work or sports-related activity or, indeed vacation and leisure. A closer dialogue between schools and others involved in outdoor learning may also help those planning and running geographical fieldwork.

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