

Holidays inspire disadvantaged children to learn, says study

May 25 2012, By Emma Thorne



Holidays could serve as a valuable extension of the national curriculum for the UK’s disadvantaged youngsters, new research has suggested.

They provide a significant source of [learning](#) for children from low-income families who are otherwise stuck in “routine and mundane” environments, say academics at Nottingham University Business School.

According to a study for the Family Holiday Association, the experience can improve their confidence, decision-making, relaxation, attitude and ability to bond.

Dr. Scott McCabe who led the research, said: “Learning never takes a break — it doesn’t stop when the school bell rings.

“But children from low-income families are often in the same environment their whole life and never get a chance to learn from adapting to new settings and surroundings.

“In light of this problem, our study shows how [holidays](#) can be considered an added value for education and can effectively function as an extension of the national curriculum.

“Ideally, the enthusiasm for learning that disadvantaged children develop in an unfamiliar setting can be taken home and can continue to flourish in an everyday environment.”

Social tourism

The study comes after a major cross-party inquiry, published last year and entitled Giving Britain a Break, called for further research into the benefits of “social tourism”.

The concept is roughly defined as the provision of holidays and other leisure activities for the benefit of individuals and families on low incomes.

Britain has been accused of lagging behind many European nations, with the likes of Spain and France ploughing sizeable resources into social tourism schemes.

The Family Holiday Association, a London-based charity, provides breaks both in the UK and overseas for around 2,000 disadvantaged families every year.

Schools

Schools are always involved in the process of approving and arranging the trips, irrespective of whether they take place in term time or during school holidays.

The study interviewed a number of parents, children and “learning mentors” who took part in recent breaks organised by the charity in the UK, Belgium and Turkey.

It drew on the idea of experiential learning — making meaning from direct experience — developed in the ’70s and ’80s by American educational theorist David Kolb.

Dr. McCabe, an Associate Professor of Tourism Management/Marketing, said: “There’s been a surprising lack of work on social tourism’s educational benefits.

“More comprehensive research is obviously still needed, but our study certainly suggests holidays can influence children’s educational achievement and attainment.

“For a start, some of these children have all kinds of worries that damage their confidence. They learn better when they’re relaxed — and that’s how holidays make them feel.

“Generally, the youngsters and families we spoke to linked their experiences with acquiring new knowledge and skills, as well as improving decision-making and attitude.”

Unplanned learning

Study author Lilian Bos added: “Most tourists don’t choose ‘learning’ as a motivation for their holiday, but learning can occur in all sorts of unplanned ways.

“In that regard social tourism really is a once-in-a-lifetime experience for some [children](#), because it gives them a precious chance to learn from a new environment.

“The fact is that holidays can create that one memorable moment that has the power to change a young person’s outlook and influence the rest of his or her life.”

Researchers say the findings raise the question of whether holidays might eventually serve as a genuine addition to the national curriculum for some youngsters.

Bos said: “The responses we encountered indicate it could be well worth considering the benefits of holidays as recognition for hard work at school.

“Many of our subjects spoke positively of a sense of acknowledgment and reward and how their attitudes towards learning and school in general had changed.”

Provided by University of Nottingham

Citation: Holidays inspire disadvantaged children to learn, says study (2012, May 25) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-05-holidays-disadvantaged-children.html>

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