

Traveling at TLC: a learning experience

by Ananda Ceballos

Introduction

« The world is a book, and those who do not travel read only a page »,

Saint Augustine

In the classical educational system traveling is associated with leisure, pleasure, while learning is associated with goals, compulsory activities and the education system. Traveling often appears as an entertaining interlude in the school year of these students. At TLC trips are organically integrated into a process that values the educational benefits that children derive from such an experience. This paper is the result of observation and participation in the preparation of a trip with X..children and ...X....adults to Elephant Valley, at Kodaikanal, from April 1 to 9, 2021. The nature of this paper's research is partly empirical, but also consists of a conceptual elaboration of the issues of education through travel in the context of *The Learning Community* [TLC] and of Integral Education. As Johnny, a pioneer in the accompaniment of trips with children in Auroville since the 70's that we interviewed, says: « trips allow to work with the whole being of the children ». Traveling creates an encounter between all the dimensions of the being in a narrow compenetration of the physical, the emotional and the intellectual journey. I will first present a synthesis of the observation carried out at TLC during and after the trip, then I will analyse the skills developed though the trip, and eventually I will highlight the elements that allow me to lay the foundations for a more general theorization on education through travel.

The process

The process has started, during a Community Gathering, with the question of the means of transportation that was going to be used. A few children, accompanied by an adult, went to Auroville Transport Service to obtain the practical information necessary to make this trip: type of vehicle, number of seats, rental price and driver's fee, time of transportation.

Then the question of food was raised. It was decided to appeal for food donations by contacting different units in Auroville.

Once the list of foods was established, it was time to prepare the menu for each day. Teams were formed, consisting of two adults and two children, to design each meal. Some members of the kitchen team that provides the daily canteen at TLC accompanied the children in the elaboration of the and the search for recipes, using local products and with a balanced caloric intake and optimal nutritional values. It was also necessary to shop for meals on arrival, taking into account that the farm where the trip would take place was isolated and far from shops. Allergies and other individual needs were also addressed and taken into consideration. On health issues more generally, such as delicate medical situations of some children, the team of adult facilitators responsible for the trip gathered prescriptions and informed themselves about the protocol to follow in case of health problems. TLC's pharmacy kit was assembled and its contents checked on occasion. At the same time, the preparation of the trip was organized. A list of objects to bring was established and a general verification day was organized the day before the departure during which the children, constituted in binomial, looked at the bag of their comrade to make sure that the contents were correct and possibly remove the superfluous. The organization of the sleeping arrangements and the preparation of the stay took place during a special meeting. The building was presented on a plan to organize the allocation of rooms. Families" were formed for the duration of the trip. The aim was to recreate an emotionally secure environment for each child, under the responsibility of a referent adult. On a more specific academic level, research was carried out by the children on the southern states of India that were to be travelled through, the geography, the flora and fauna of the regions crossed. On their return, the children continued their research, especially with the animals they met, the elephants having particularly attracted the attention of the younger ones. The older children have been involved in writing articles for the TLC magazine by drawing their inspiration from their stay at the farm in Elephant Valley.

The analysis

In order to assess trips as an educational tool as I am currently doing in TL "Research Team", it's important to identify objectives, to define the major orientations of a travel project. They state what the facilitators team wants to achieve and constitute the *raison d'être* of the trip, as well as the philosophy of the project. Depending on the level of the students general objectives of the trips are to develop autonomy, to learn to live together, to discover flora and fauna of a geographic area and to understand the history of a society. the architecture of the temples of the Chola period The specific objectives translate the general objectives of Integral Education into pedagogical actions and learning. They indicate the means implemented by the facilitator to achieve them. They constitute the framework of the journey, set precise objectives (individual or in group) and constitute the provisional diary during the period of the trip.

Preparing for a trip is already starting the journey. By including the child (depending on his age, of course) in the preparation of the trip, we help him to project himself, and above all, we accompany him in understanding the organization, the choices to be made, the priorities, the logic, etc. What is the duration of the trip? Where are we going to sleep? What is the climate or weather and what clothes to take? What are the essentials for travelling light depending on the duration of the trip? This part involves the means that will be put in place to ensure the educational, material and financial success of the trip, that includes:

1. The financial means:

- The global budget, and the distribution: transport, accommodation, catering, visits, purchases, ...
- Financing: participation requested from unities in Auroville, fundraising, etc...

2. The pedagogical means :

The gathering of all the means to insure a joyful and rich stay:

- list and planning of activities.
- typical day-daily schedule: one day at the farm and the next day one outing (nature, river, mountains).

3. Personal involvement:

The participation of all the people who intervene in the course of the trip:

- the facilitators in charge of the project,
- supervising adults, depending on the number of children and their age,

4. Logistical means :

The children have to gather logistic means used during the trip:

- transportation (bus, train,...),
- accommodation and catering,
- organization of departures and returns,
- packing list: to prepare their own bags and to check their partner's bag.

Collective dynamics - the relationship with the fellow travelers, conflicting or on the contrary friendly - as well as the feeling of being far from home are, de facto, reinforced and culminates in a form of unity of knowledge, beyond the division of disciplines and classrooms.

In the trip, the continuity of learning is at stake. The coherence and the convergence of the learnings during the same day assure what a child have express as follows : « It's as if [on a trip] you're in class from the moment you get up until the moment you go to bed ». The material, psychological and pedagogical preparation and all that happens during the travel help to develop basic skills naturally:

- **Applied History & Geography:** traveling is the opportunity to see the regions, the rivers, the mountains...the different places the children will cross and their characteristics. Learning how to find their way on a map for instante is a notions that is much easier to learn in real life.

- **Observing, listening and adapting:** When children are not in their usual place of life, and because everything is new, all their senses are on the lookout. They observe more, listen more, and feel more things. And they have this ability to listen to what they feel, what they need, and how they adapt themselves as best they can.
- **Emotional skills :** Travelling is about making connections. Connecting with fellow travelers enriches the children's experience throughout the trip and allows them to develop their self-knowledge and their capacity to communicate with people around them about what their needs.
- **Learning how to savour the moment:** To appreciate each step of a trip, the children have to accept the failures, the unexpected and the obstacles sometimes. They are part of the journey and allow them to savor the successful moments even better.

Elements for further theorisation about learning through travel

« One's destination is never a place, but a new way of seeing things »

Henry Miller

Travel is supposed to train youth and this educational question has been raised by many educational thinkers. The first definition of the expression « education through travel » comes from Diderot and Alembert's *Encyclopedia* of 1751: « Travel (Education): the great men of antiquity judged that there was no better school of life than that of travel; a school where one learns the diversity of so many other lives, where one constantly finds some new lesson in this great book of the world and where the change of air with the exercise are profitable to the body and the spirit ». The Enlightenment appreciates travel: the reading of travel stories is part of the training of thinkers; the educational journey does not lose its popularity since the seventeenth century the exploration trips contribute to the birth of anthropology. The book « Thoughts on Education », also known as *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, is a treatise on education written in 1693 by the British philosopher John Locke. For over a century, it was the most important philosophical work on education in England and was translated into most European languages during the eighteenth century. At the end of this book Locks states that the purpose of travel is to « complete the gentleman »,

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who wrote on the subject also acknowledged its influence. Rousseau and his *Emile or Education* also raises the question of the educational journey by integrating the idea that by traveling the person becomes a better citizen. Most authors of the first half of the eighteenth century inherit still the humanist concept of the educational journey that improves a person and perfects

his education. Humanist education had transformed the means -education - into an end, limiting itself to preparing scholars and school teachers. The role of travels within the framework of the rationalism of the Enlightenment is then to complete the formation of the individual, « master and possessor of nature », as Descartes would say, who advised « to learn from the great book of the world ». In XXI century, education through travel still carries an ambiguity in its relationship to contemporary society. One could conceive of it as a preparation for better adapting to the neoliberal dynamic in which children will be enrolled. Travelling would cultivate the ability to manage accounts, to engage with certain risks, to develop a sense of flexibility, to discuss in several languages, and to react effectively to unexpected situations. Within the framework of education conceived as the continuous acquisition of cosmopolitan skills, the experience of travel must be capitalized upon and placed at the service of the globalized market.

But education through traveling as I am considering it here is not just a method of learning, a way to get better training, an innovative pedagogy useful for the acquisition of skills. Education through travel is not just a part of an alternative pedagogy, nor even an alternative to the school. Educational trips rather creates the conditions of possibility and a living force to conceive a radically different child subjectivation. By subjectivation, I mean a process by which not so much a finite subject is constituted, but a human subjectivity through which a personal trajectory is drawn that cannot be conceived otherwise than in movement and in constant evolution. I have seen children returning from trips transformed by their journey. This transformation emerges from the confrontation with the other (friends, adult facilitators, new spaces...) and with the otherness in themselves. The very impulse given by education consists precisely in "leading out », as in the world « education », from the Latin *educere*, « to lead out of », to lead out of a programmed and formatted body, to lead out of certain « confort zones », learn to be yourself by becoming your own companion the road. As Michel Serres says: « Get out of your mother's womb, out of the cradle, out of the shadow of the father's house and the juvenile landscape... The children's journey is the naked meaning of the Greek word « pedagogy ». To learn starts the wandering... To leave. To go out. To let oneself be seduced one day. To become several, to brave the outside, to branch off elsewhere. Here are the first three strangenesses, the three varieties of otherness, the first three ways of exposing oneself. For there is no learning without exposure, often dangerous, to the other »¹. The travel is a creative adventure, a process by which a subject becomes able to travel, to move in relation to himself, in particular by the reflexivity of a knowledge on oneself as part of a territory, even of the world, and therefore capable of defying the dominant ideology of profitability at all costs, including that of education. the truth of the world is not given to the subject by the only act of the knowledge, it supposes to be apprehended 'a work of oneself on oneself, an elaboration of oneself on oneself', to say it in the way of Foucault, in the Hermeneutics of the subject. The education by the journey coincides thus in some way with the education understood as a journey, that of a subject able to live himself not as a finished identity but as the confident walker on the open road of the unknown.

¹ Michel Serres, *Tiers-instruit*, Paris, Gallimard, 1992

Bibliographie

Kerouac, Jack, *On the Road*, New York, Penguin Books, 1976

Locke, John, *Quelques pensées sur l'éducation*, Paris, Vrin, 2007.

Pugibet, Véronique Se former à l'altérité par le voyage dès l'école, L'Harmattan, Paris, 2004 .

Peyvel, Emmanuelle, *L'éducation au voyage. Pratiques touristiques et circulations des savoirs*, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2019.

Vian, Thibault, *L'éducation par le voyage*, L'Harmattan, Paris, 2019.