

Foreword

Informal Learning and Field Trips: Engaging Students in Standards-Based Experiences Across the K–5 Curriculum is the book we have been waiting for. By we, I mean the teachers, researchers, and docents working with learners in classrooms, museums, aquariums, zoos, and other places of learning. This is a time of extraordinary interest in out-of-school learning and teaching. Research, texts, and pedagogies, however, have not yet caught up with such heightened interest. We have been hungry for expertise that crosses from classroom to museums and back again.

Informal Learning and Field Trips makes such essential connections for teachers who want to make full use of their community's resources. In these days of standardized testing, paperwork, and special needs, teachers want, need, and deserve to have their out-of-school, field trip time facilitated, so that they can spend quality time teaching their students rather than worrying about logistics. This text is aimed at teachers seeking information about how to maximize their efforts as well as how to best serve their students.

Informal Learning and Field Trips also begins to take down the walls between in-classroom and out-of-classroom teaching and learning, letting us know how to use classrooms, the outdoors, and museums seamlessly. Over the past decade, those geographical locations have been conflated with the kind of learning and teaching that occurs in them. Many of us, however, believe that learning has the same fundamental characteristics whether it takes place at home, in school, or in a museum. Dr. Melber has encouraged docents and teachers alike to crisscross learning landscapes using powerful ideas, specific content, and intentional teaching activities.

As Dr. Melber has worked in both schools and in museums, she is eminently qualified to present such teaching strategies across context and content areas. The five specialized chapters, each matched to particular content areas and national content standards, allow teachers interested in math, science, or art to find meaningful, creative, practical activities. Such a rich selection of materials has heretofore not been available.

Informal Learning and Field Trips is brimming with other valuable resources. Besides the things one might expect, such as Web sites, addresses, information about fees and buses, and other nitty-gritty essentials, Dr. Melber provides vignettes that allow an instant glimpse into a field trip, complete with teacher dialogue, expectations, and how success might look. I have found these

vignettes particularly useful. Such vignettes provide one vision of success; the evaluation rubrics provide another. I am especially impressed by Dr. Melber's guidelines for making discussion an essential part of pre-, mid-, and after-trip activities. Such activities are greatly enhanced by the suggested ways to evaluate student participation.

My final comments relate to the tone of *Informal Learning and Field Trips*. This is an intelligent book aimed at intelligent (but busy) teachers. Dr. Melber's activities are easy to understand, yet rich, and most important they span from classroom to field trip in a seamless fashion that connects teaching and learning in all their guises.

—Doris B. Ash