

PEDAGOGICAL IMPORTANCE AND REALIZATION OF EXCURSIONS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract

The changes that have occurred in the field of education are a consequence of the criticism it faced because of its separation from life and society, and of the demonstrated needs for the school to become as welcoming and accessible as possible and more connected with the social environment. That connection can be best realized through educational excursions. However, they have still been insufficiently studied in our country despite their role and importance for the students themselves.

In this paper, first of all the issues related to the educational value, curriculum positioning and organization of excursions in primary schools have been theoretically elaborated. Secondly, empiric insights obtained by a survey conducted with students and teachers in primary education have been presented and analyzed. The results obtained generally indicate that both the teachers and the students think that excursions are beneficial for the realization of the educational process within the school and their opinion on the realization of excursions so far is positive.

Key words: excursions, extracurricular activities, primary school, pedagogical importance of excursions, realization of excursions

Excursions as an extracurricular activity

It is an indisputable fact that excursions today, as well as in the distant and the near past, have been and still are a part of the educational process. Despite all this, excursions belong to the category of pedagogical and didactic issues which have not been studied enough or scientifically researched yet, and little nothing at all has been written about them in the pedagogical literature.

However, practical experiences give enough evidence that excursions are of great importance in the intensification of the educational process and the improvement of its quality.

The educational work of the school today cannot be “isolated”, or “enclosed”, and take place only within the school’s building i.e. premises – classrooms, cabinets, or labs. Today, it requires more than ever a connection, even a certain integration with the real life out of the school. Despite all the modern educational technology, it is still necessary this process to be organized and performed also out of the school’s premises. That is why it is necessary there to be a correlation between the teaching process and the extracurricular educational work, since the educational process is inconceivable without extracurricular forms of teaching. The field of extracurricular activity is permeated by contents and activities realized out of the regular teaching process. Through leisure activities of the students, prerequisites for individualization of the educational process are created so that their individual interests and abilities could be satisfied and nurtured. The extracurricular work in primary schools includes a large number of activities among which, beside the free activities and contests, there are also *excursions*. Excursions, as an extracurricular activity, enable connection and integration of the educational work in the school with the real life.

According to the latest *Concept on Primary Education (2021)*, the excursions fall in the category of obligatory short-term extracurricular activities¹, while the *Concept on Extracurricular Activities (2020)* says that excursions are organized with the goal of widening and deepening students’ knowledge in particular educational fields and recommends them to be organized as much as possible as a means of getting the students acquainted with the cultures of various ethnic communities living in our country (by selection of the cultural and historic objects which are going to be visited) and as a way of achieving interethnic integration in education (by providing interaction between the students who study in different teaching languages)², which corresponds to the multicultural approach, inclusion, gender sensitivity/equality and acquiring inter-cultural competences as key principles of the new Concept towards which the entire organization and realization of the educational process in the primary school ought to strive.

¹ Concept on Primary Education (2021). Skopje: Education Development Bureau, p.10

Концепција за основно образование (2021). Скопје: Биро за развој на образование, стр.10

² Concept on Extracurricular Activities in Primary Education (2020). Skopje: Education Development Bureau, p.47.

Концепција за ВООНАСТАВНИ АКТИВНОСТИ во основното образование (2020). Скопје: Биро за развој на образование, стр.47

As a pedagogical form with its own specific features, the excursion contributes efficiently to the modernization and improvement of the educational work in the school. Excursions also enable the students to get acquainted, directly and live, with the reality, i.e. the places, objects, things, phenomena and processes they learn about, on the very spot, in their real environment. Neither by the best possible oral nor by the best possible textual or visual presentation of the lecture, the teacher can achieve what can be achieved during the excursion when a particular object, phenomenon or process can be seen and studied live, from close distance, i.e. when they are shown to the students in its original form. And this is exactly the main educational value of the excursion, since the direct observation and experience enables the acquisition of complete, deep and long-lasting knowledge. This feature has been specially pointed out in the new Concept which states that the curriculum ought to be oriented towards a deeper and deliberated process of learning based on critical thinking and logical deduction, also stating that students can more easily achieve the results expected if they can experience what they are learning about as something relevant and useful, that is as something they can bring in correlation with the everyday life, and exactly for this reason the Concept recommends creating the syllabuses following this leading principle.

On the other hand, socializing outside the school gives the teacher an opportunity to become better acquainted with the student's personality, and vice versa – it gives the student an opportunity to get to know better their own teacher and to discover all their characteristics which otherwise are quite rarely manifested in the everyday school surroundings. During the excursion, the participants are set free from the conventional interpersonal relations within the school, and that is why excursions are suitable for establishing correct, cooperative, friendly interpersonal relations.

Another very important benefit of the excursion that has to be emphasized, is that the students also participate in its preparation, organization and realization, thus developing their own initiative, cooperation, organizational skills, independence, responsibility and discipline. This kind of extracurricular activity much more than the traditional work in the classroom enables the students to spend more time together, to communicate in a larger extent between themselves, to help each other, to socialize one with another, to fulfil the tasks and duties agreed on previously, and to concert their individual needs and interests with the needs and the interests of their schoolmates.

Every excursion is in a way introduction of the students to the values of a certain country. If the excursion is organized in the closer vicinity of the school itself, it gives them the chance to get acquainted with that particular environment; if it is organized somewhere farther within our country – to get acquainted with Macedonia’s natural and cultural riches. The excursion is a very efficient means for cherishing and developing young people’s love for their homeland. Excursions to foreign countries contribute to acquiring better respect for and acceptance of the achievements of other nations.

Organization of the excursions

The process of organizing excursions consists of three phases: planning and preparation, realization, and final activities after the excursion ends.

The planning is done at the beginning of the school year, thus a rational approach towards excursions’ scheduling is enabled and the educational needs and the possibilities for their satisfaction are analyzed and resolved; the number and the type of excursions are determined based on the educational needs, as well as the aim and the time when the excursions will take place; what conditions ought to be provided for their realization; and so on. Each school makes a framework plan for the excursions which are going to be performed with every new generation of students, a plan for the excursions which will be performed in the particular school year (the plan is a constituent part of the school’s annual working programme), as well as a programme for organization and realization of each excursion. The types of excursions, the educational goals and tasks, the contents of the particular activities, each excursion’s manager, the teachers that will take part in the excursion, the students, the excursion’s duration, the locations which are going to be visited and the routes for travelling, the technical organization and the way of financing ought to be planned in the Annual Programme.

Besides planning the excursions, programming is also necessary, i.e. deliberation and elaboration (operationalization) of the tasks and the contents as well as of all the other elements and conditions on which their realization depends. Also, the literature dealing with these issues emphasizes the need of making the following types of preparations for excursions’ realization:

- Teaching-methodical preparation of the teacher for the excursion (detailed acquainting with the topics that are going to be treated and their elements, acquaintance with the opportunities the out-of-school teaching premises give, determination of the teaching-methodical

forms and ways of work with the students, determination of the teaching instruments needed, determination of the organization and articulation of the teaching work, the question whether other persons will be involved and, if so, who are going to be those and how they will be involved);

- Preparation of the students for the excursion (revision of the curricular contents directly related to the contents that are going to be treated in the excursion, general information about the excursion's significance and contents, what they are going to see and what kind of knowledge they are going to obtain, what kind of equipment for work as well as what kind of clothing and shoes and other personal items they will have to take with them, and so on.). The students are also warned of how they should behave themselves (during the travel and during the stay) so that no serious problems might arise during the excursion.

In this context, the necessity of informing the students' parents through parents' meetings should be stressed, as well as the possibility of active involvement of some of the parents in the process of preparation and organization of the excursions.

The stage of an excursion's practical realization begins with the participants' (both teachers and students) departure (from the school), and lasts until their arrival back. In the pedagogical literature dealing with these issues, some requirements have been stressed which are very important and to which special attention must be paid. Depending on the means of transport and how long the excursionists are going to travel, it is the teacher's duty to make sure that the journey will be as pleasant as possible, beneficial in educational respect, and as safe as possible as well. Naturally, the teacher must actively care for the students through the entire course of the excursion, i.e. during the travel to and from the destination and during the stay at the destination.³ With the arrival at the destination, the educational work begins. It depends on the particular tasks and teaching contents, and on the specific conditions the particular location or object provides; also, achieving the excursion's main goal is of vital importance, i.e. realization of all planned educational and upbringing activities. To achieve better rationality and efficiency, it is recommendable the educational work to be conducted following the normal phases or stages. This way, at the beginning, the students are given some general and short explanations about the

³ Ampov, B. (1986). Methodics of Teaching Natural Science and Social Science. Skopje: NIO Studentski zbor, p.131.

Ампов, Б. (1985). *УЧЕНИЧКИ ЕКСКУРЗИИ воспитно-образовно значење, организирање и изведување*. Скопје: НИО „Студентски збор“, стр.131

location/object, and they are reminded about the tasks that ought to be realized, about what they are going to see and what they are going to be acquainted with. B. Ampov thinks that such introductory and principal explanations are necessary for achieving bigger motivation of the students and more complete introduction to what has been planned to visit. The next step is students' observation of the particular things, phenomenon, objects and processes. Although it ultimately depends on the students' age and experience, nevertheless it is not recommendable a large number of objects or things to be observed at the same time, and the process of observation ought to be directed only to the important elements of a particular phenomenon. Another aspect of importance is the time-limit of the observation. The process of long-term observation can be tiresome and thus provoke students' indifference. During the process of observation and investigation of the particular object or phenomenon, the students should be allowed to ask questions and be informed in an appropriate way.

The end of the excursion itself doesn't mean an end of all the activities that have to be performed with the students. No matter how well and successfully the excursion has been carried out, after the teachers and students come back to the school it is necessary for the excursion to get its final form. Such a necessity is often neglected in practice despite its big importance, since the excursions achieve their true effect precisely through this final work of the teachers with the students within the school. The work in the classroom is different for different types of excursions, its character depending on the particular goals, tasks and contents of the excursion itself. According to Bezić, the final activities in the classroom can be divided in four phases:

- ✓ In the first phase it is recommendable, through informal conversation, to obtain a general impression about the excursion. The students like describing their experiences very much, and this creates a certain feeling of delight. Therewith, it is of great importance the individual impressions to be amalgamated in one common general impression of the whole class.
- ✓ The second phase consists of organized work. It is best that the students give their impressions using their own notes and memories. If the tasks have been allocated in advance, each student should report about their own share of the work, and if this was not the case, they should report only about what they think is important and significant. Students should be allowed to talk as long as they have something new to say, i.e., until they start repeating themselves.
- ✓ The third phase consists of contents' systematization. It is done that way that the teacher establishes criterions and manages the work taking care not to deviate from the specific topic.

The basic elements are written on the blackboard, and also a chart may be devised if the content itself allows that.

✓ In the end, the work finishes by testing the knowledge acquired. The teacher must get insight in what extent the knowledge has been assimilated, taking the necessary steps to correct the possible mistakes and fill up the voids.⁴

The final activity within the classroom is of crucial importance for the students, since here a general review is made on what has been achieved by the realization of the excursion. In the current *Concept on Extracurricular Activities in the Primary Education* (2020), directives have been given on the realization of this phase of the excursion. According to these directives it is recommendable, after the excursion ends, for the teachers in charge to encourage the students to prepare presentation of the activities done and the goals achieved, and to impart the impressions they have obtained by the observation. The school itself is expected to publish the prepared presentations on its website, and in addition, regarding the engagement of each student involved in its preparation, the teacher in charge is asked to write a special note containing his/her opinion which shall be descriptively recorded in the annex of the student's certificate.⁵

In our country, for years now various documents have been drawn up, through which attempts have been made to regulate the way of organizing excursions in primary schools. All of them, starting from the *Instructions for Organization of Excursions* (1978), as the oldest document of this type, through the *Directives for Organization and Realization of Excursions* (2007), and many other Books of Regulations, ending with the latest *Book of Regulations about the Way of Performing Excursions, Outings and Other Kinds of Extracurricular Activities of the Students in Primary Schools* (2019), are with the goal of improvement and specification of the directives and the ways of planning, realization and evaluation of the excursions.

Taking into account the Pandemic of Covid-19, and based on the protocols related to the organization and realization of the teaching process, the *Book of Regulations for Amending the Book of Regulations about the Way of Performing Excursions, Outings and Other Out-of-School Activities of the Students in Primary Schools* (2020) was brought up. This amendment relates to

⁴ Bezić, K. (1975). *Methodics of Teaching the Subject of Nature and Society*. Zagreb: Školska knjiga, p.302.

Bezih, K. (1975). *Metodike nastave prirode i društva*. Zagreb: Školska knjiga, str.302

⁵ *Conception about Extracurricular Activities in the Primary Education* (2020). Skopje: Education Development Bureau, p.48.

Концепција за ВОИНАСТАВНИ АКТИВНОСТИ во основното образование (2020). Скопје: Биро за развој на образование, стр.48

the fields of planning and programming conditions for organization and realization of excursions, prescribing that the Annual Programme for work in the school also includes the plan, programme and conditions for organization and realization of excursions, and specifically stating the data the Programme for Excursions must contain, which also has to be made and is a constituent part of the Annual Programme for work. Based on this, the School Board brings a decision for creation of a specialized experts' team for preparing the Programme for Excursions. In this context, what is of importance is Article 6-a from the Amending Book of Regulations, which states: *“During the organization and realization of a teaching process lasting less than 180 teaching days, as well as realization of a teaching process following a shortened teaching programme in the conditions of extraordinary circumstances (a state of crisis, or of an epidemic or pandemic, or appearance of large-scale fires, floods or other natural disasters has been declared), or during the organization of a teaching process through teaching from distance, the school does not prepare a Programme for Excursions, Outings and Other Out-of-School Activities...”*⁶

Method of Research

The goal of this research is to survey the students' and the teachers' opinions regarding the contribution of the excursions to the realization of the educational tasks, and to get insights into how they are organized. According to the goal set up, the following research tasks have been defined: to find out the opinions of both the students and the teachers about the excursions' contribution to the realization of the educational tasks; to find out whether the teachers before going to an excursion inform their students about the locations and the objects they will visit and about their duties and activities in that process; to get insight whether the teachers and the students are satisfied by the so-far practice of excursions' realization; to get insight what students find most interesting to the students and what they don't like in the excursions, and to find out whether teachers perform final activities with their students after the excursion ends.

⁶ Book of Regulations for Amending the Book of Regulations about the Way of Performing Excursions, Outings and Other Out-of-School Activities of the Students in Primary Schools (2020). Skopje: Ministry of Education and Science.

Правилник дополнување на Правилникот за начинот на изведување на екскурзиите, излетите и другите вонучилишни активности на учениците од основните училишта. (2020). Скопје: Министерство за образование и наука

For the purposes of this research, a scale questionnaire has been devised – one for the students and one for the teachers, containing two types of questions: closed-type questions in the form of formulated claims, offering three alternatives for answer; and open-type questions where respondents can freely state their opinions in their own words.

In the research a simple random-choice sample has been used, covering these population categories: students and teachers from three primary schools in the city of Ohrid. The sample schools to be covered by the polling was determined by random choice. A total of 190 respondents have been included in the research: 120 students from III and VI grades as well as 70 class-teachers and subject-teachers.

Results from the research and their interpretation

According to the sequence of the tasks set for the research, the results obtained from the research, i.e. the answers obtained from surveying the students and the teachers are successively presented and interpreted in this part of the paper.

In the context of the first task of the research – finding out the students' and the teachers' opinions about the excursions' contribution to the realization of the educational tasks, two different sets of four claims have been offered for answering in the questionnaire for the students and in the questionnaire for the teachers. The answers obtained are shown in the following two tables.

Table 1. Teachers' opinions regarding excursions' contribution to the realization of the educational tasks

Claims	I agree		I partly agree		I don't agree	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Excursions are of great educational importance for the students	55	78.6	15	21.4	0	0.0
it is much easier to explain to the students some educational topics at the excursions than in the classroom	51	72.9	19	27.1	0	0.0
With the excursions, children's curiosity and ability of observation and noticing are developed (especially with the students from lower grades)	65	92.9	4	5.7	1	1.4
The excursions contribute to improving the teaching process and overcoming the verbalism	59	84.3	10	14.3	1	1.4

The results given in Table 1 show that quite a large percentage of the teachers have a positive opinion regarding excursions' contribution to the realization of the educational tasks in the school. This can be concluded since regarding all the four claims most of the teachers stated a positive opinion.

The results given in Table 2 demonstrate the students' positive opinion regarding excursions' contribution to the realization of the educational tasks, from many aspects. The largest percentage of the students think that excursions help them to do research and to more easily learn some of the teaching topics. Also, a very large percentage stated that by the realization of the excursions, the topics they learn about become clearer to them and that during the excursions they observe with a great interest the particular things, processes and phenomena subject to their visit.

Table 2. Students' opinions regarding excursions' contribution to the realization of the educational tasks

Claims	I agree		I partly agree		I don't agree	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
The excursion helps us to do research and learn some of the educational topics more easily	98	81.7	19	15.8	3	2.5
When we go on an excursion, we observe with a big interest the objects, processes and phenomena	77	64.2	33	27.5	10	8.3
When we learn some educational topic outdoors, in our school's vicinity, we understand and memorize it more easily than when we learn it in the classroom	87	72.5	26	21.7	7	5.8
The excursions help us understand the educational topics more clearly	83	69.2	31	25.8	6	5.0

Regarding the second research task – finding out whether the teachers, before going to an excursion, inform their students about the locations and the objects they will visit and about their duties and activities, two claims have been formulated in the questionnaire for the students. The answers obtained are shown in the next table.

The results given in the table show that a very high percentage (89.2%) of the students claim that before going on an excursion, their teacher informs them about the locations and the

objects planned for visiting. Also, a very high percentage (82.5%) of the students claim that their teacher tells them about their activities, duties and tasks during the realization of the excursion.

Table 3. Students' answers on whether they have been informed about the locations and the objects they will visit, as well as their duties and activities in that process

Claims	I agree		I partly agree		I don't agree	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Before going on an excursion, our teacher informs us about the locations and objects we shall visit	107	89.2	9	7.5	4	3.3
Before going on an excursion, our teacher tells us about our activities, duties and tasks	99	82.5	16	13.3	5	4.2

One of the tasks of the research has also been to find out whether the teachers and the students are satisfied with the excursions' realization practice so far. In that respect, this claim was formulated: "I am satisfied with the current practice of excursions' realization in our school", and was included in both the questionnaires for the students and for the teachers. The answers given by the teachers and by the students are presented in the following table.

Table 4. Students' and teachers' answers regarding the claim: "I am satisfied with the current practice of excursions' realization in our school."

Categories of answers	Teachers		Students		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
I agree	40	57.1	106	88.3	146	76.8
I partly agree	24	34.3	12	10.0	36	19.0
I don't agree	6	8.6	2	1.7	8	4.2
Total:	70	100	120	100	190	100

$$\chi\text{-square} = 24.36; df = 2; p < 0.01$$

From the results presented in the table we can freely say that, in general, the largest percentage of the respondents stated that they were satisfied by the current practice of excursions' realization. Just a small percentage of the teachers (8.6%) and only a very small, insignificant percentage (1.7%) of the students answered that they were dissatisfied with the

excursions' realization. Actually, this small percentage of the teachers were the same ones who answering to the open question stated what problems they faced in the process of excursions' realization. They quoted these problems: Difficulties in finding a touristic agency willing to organize a tour for a small number of students; The agencies don't provide what they have promised in their tender proposal offer; The lodging premises the agencies provide are often inappropriate; A substantial lack of time needed for properly seeing everything that has been planned; Too many formalities and tenders processes are necessary even for the organization of a one-day excursion (in case when there is a need of using transportation).

According to the obtained value of the χ -square test, we can conclude that there is a statistically significant difference between the answers given by the teachers and those given by the students regarding the issue whether they are satisfied with the so-far realization of the excursions. Unlike the teachers, a significantly higher percentage of the students said that they were satisfied with the current realization of the excursions.

Table 5. Students' answers to the open-type questions

What is the most interesting to you?	What don't you like?
» We play, socialize and have fun	» Throwing garbage in the bus and in the environment
» We play various games and dance	» Hotel food
» Recreation	» Dirty rooms and old hotels
» "Pajama parties"	» Getting up early in the morning
» Playing football	» In some excursions the travel lasts longer than the viewing
» Socializing in the bus	» One-day, short lasting excursions
» Staying in a hotel	» Disagreements between the students
» Meeting new friends	» Disorganization
» Getting acquainted with other cities	» The longtime of waiting to get accommodation in the hotel
» The visit of cultural monuments, museums, old buildings, archaeological locations and so on	» Shouting and intolerance between students
» The visit of the zoo (especially when we visited the ostrich)	» Buses without air-conditioning
» We observe, investigate and learn more easily	» Some of the students not obeyin teachers' orders
» Going on more distant excursions which last for several days	» Nausea when travelling by bus

In the context of this research task, in the Table 5 are presented the answers obtained from the students to the open-type questions: “State what is the most interesting to you in the excursions” and “State what you don’t like in the excursions”, which have been included in the questionnaire for the students.

According to the statements given by the students, it is obvious that from their point of view an excursion’s purpose is to allow them a recreation or a relaxation, i.e. it should be a kind of a recreational or relaxing journey. Based on these statements, an impression arises that most of the students think that the excursions should be, in the first place, of an amusing and recreational character, by which they will lose their educational character and their positive, socially desirable impact on the students will decline.

This can be concluded also from students’ answers to the claim: “Excursions are trips where we have fun.”

Table 6. Students’ answers about how they experience the excursions

Claim	I agree		I partly agree		I don’t agree	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Excursions are trips where we have fun	93	77.5	23	19.2	4	3.3

The data given in the table show that a very high percentage (77.5%) of the students say that excursions are trips where they have fun.

Beside planning and realization of excursions, a very significant moment are the final activities done after the excursion ends, therefore one of the research tasks has been to find out whether the teachers do any final activities with the students. That’s why in the questionnaire for the students two claims on this topic were included, and the answers obtained are given in the following table.

The results obtained show that 90% of the students say that, after the excursion ends, they talk with their teachers about their impressions, and 82.5% that each of them imparts his/her opinion and remarks about the excursion. According to these results, a conclusion can be drawn that the teachers, surveyed in this research, do such final activities.

Table 7. Students' answers on whether their teachers do any final activities with them after the excursion ends

Claims	I agree		I partly agree		I don't agree	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
After the excursion ends, we discuss in the classroom about our experiences from the excursion	108	90.0	10	8.3	2	1.7
Each of us imparts the own remarks and opinions about the excursion	99	82.5	21	17.5	0	0.0

Conclusion

Based on the theoretical analysis of the topic subject of this study, it is an indisputable fact that the realization of excursions gives opportunities for immediate observation and experience thus enabling the acquirement of complete, deep and long-lasting knowledge, which way the quality of the educational process is improved. This is in fact the main educational worth of the excursion as a form of extracurricular activity. During the excursion, the students can directly experience the reality – the locations, objects, things, phenomenon's and processes they learn about, in their natural environment; thus in a certain way becoming more independent and more socialized personalities; furthermore, the excursion is a great opportunity for maximal activation of the students and a chance for developing their own organizational skills; and also a chance for getting them acquainted with the values of their country. Also, we can freely say that the excursion has quite significant contribution to the educational and upbringing work of the school and has positive effect on the students, but only if its pedagogical potentials have been properly cognized and understood and if it is properly organized and successfully realized in the practice. If we don't take into account these requirements and if we don't know the pedagogical potentials of the excursion, it can very easily lose its educational character and get the form of unorganized and purposeless activity, thus transforming into something else contrary to what it is supposed to be.

Based on the empiric findings obtained in this research, two general conclusions can be drawn. The first is that among both the students and the teachers the opinion prevails that the excursions contribute significantly to the realization of the educational and upbringing tasks within the school itself. This contribution has a significant pedagogic importance from two

aspects: educational and upbringing. In educational sense, the excursions are activities which enable the students to enrich their knowledge by observation and analyzation of the particular objects and phenomenon's in their real, natural conditions. Moreover, regarding certain educational topics the excursions alleviate the process of learning, at the same time strengthening students' motivation for learning. In upbringing sense, the excursions have significant socialization effects. They enable the students to familiarize better with their schoolmates, to socialize as true friends, to help each other, to create mutual respect, to have fun, i.e. to develop and cherish socially positive characteristics of their personality.

The second general conclusion is that both the students and the teachers from primary schools have positive opinion about the realization of excursions. They think that excursions are well-planned extracurricular activity realized according to the current rules and regulations. The largest percentage of the surveyed students and teachers stated that they were satisfied by the current practicing the excursions in their school.

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