



A Comparative Analysis of Field Trip Teaching Strategies in Frank McCourt's *Teacher Man* and E. R. Braithwaite's *to Sir, With Love*

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Abstract

This study examines the portrayal of field trip strategies in Frank McCourt's *Teacher Man* (2005) and E.R. Braithwaite's *to Sir, With Love* (1959) through the lens of comparative literature, which enables cross-textual analysis of pedagogical themes in different socio-cultural settings. A qualitative library research approach was employed, utilizing the method of comparative literary analysis in two stages. First, close reading and manual/digital annotation of both texts were conducted to identify recurring pedagogical themes, particularly those related to field trip planning, implementation, and impact. Thematic categories were developed inductively—focusing on (1) planning and structure of field trips, (2) student engagement and learning outcomes, and (3) socio-political challenges. To strengthen reliability, inter-rater coding was applied using the agreed framework, and a Cohen's Kappa score of 0.82 was obtained, indicating substantial agreement. The analysis reveals two contrasting approaches: McCourt's informal and unstructured trips, marked by minimal planning, result in limited educational outcomes, while Braithwaite's well-organized museum visit leads to meaningful student engagement and reflection. Both texts reflect how socio-political factors—particularly racial prejudice and stereotyping—influence educational practice. Additionally, McCourt faces internal challenges related to classroom management and preparation. The findings highlight that effective field trip implementation requires not only strategic planning but also cultural sensitivity and awareness of systemic bias. These insights offer practical implications for contemporary educators seeking to design inclusive and impactful experiential learning experiences.

Keywords: *field trip; Teacher Man; teaching strategy; To Sir, With Love*

Introduction

Teaching and learning are intrinsically connected processes that shape both students and educators. While students acquire knowledge through guided instruction, teachers also develop insights and refine their pedagogy through classroom experiences and student interactions. This reciprocal dynamic underlies the belief that effective teaching fosters meaningful learning and, conversely, that teaching itself is a continual act of learning. Educators often face complex classroom realities—such as low student motivation, limited resources, and socio-political tensions—that demand creativity and adaptability in choosing appropriate instructional strategies.

One such strategy is the field trip, an experiential learning method that brings academic content to life outside the classroom setting. When carefully designed, field trips have the potential to enhance student engagement, contextual understanding, and long-term retention. This study explores the pedagogical use of field trips as represented in two literary works: Frank McCourt's *Teacher Man* (2005), a memoir set in New York during the late 1960s, and E.R. Braithwaite's *To Sir, With Love* (1959), an autobiographical novel set in post-war London.

Both texts offer firsthand depictions of teaching in urban, multicultural settings marked by social inequities and racial tension. In *Teacher Man*, McCourt recounts his efforts to teach a challenging ninth-grade class composed of marginalized minority students, during which he organizes trips to a cinema and a Broadway play—experiences that expose issues of behavioral management and inadequate preparation. Meanwhile, *To Sir, With Love* follows Braithwaite, a Black teacher in a predominantly white school, as he uses a museum visit to enhance a geography lesson and strengthen student interest.

The two texts were chosen for comparison because they depict teaching moments rooted in personal experience yet shaped by contrasting cultural, temporal, and racial contexts. They offer valuable perspectives on the realities of schooling across two distinct education systems—the United States and the United Kingdom—while highlighting how pedagogical strategies like field trips are both challenged and shaped by these contexts.

This study aims to analyze and compare how field trip strategies are portrayed in these two works, with the goal of identifying pedagogical insights, cultural influences, and the practical implications of experiential learning. It contributes to the intersection of education and literature by illustrating how fictionalized autobiographical narratives can inform reflective teaching practice.

Literature Review

Field trips have long been recognized as valuable pedagogical tools, providing students with authentic experiences that connect classroom learning to real-world contexts. As Behrendt and Franklin (2014) explain, “field trips provide students with authentic experiences that deepen understanding and promote active

learning, especially when they are structured and integrated into the curriculum". They classify field trips into two categories: formal and informal. Formal field trips are carefully structured and guided, often in collaboration with institutions such as museums or cultural organizations. Informal field trips, by contrast, offer more student autonomy but may risk diminished educational impact if poorly managed.

Myers and Jones (2004) elaborate three important stages in organizing a successful field trip; they are pre-trip stage, trip, and post-trip.

- Pre-Trip;
 - a) Administration; the steps taken by the field trip organizer to handle logistics. These steps include getting permission from school authorities, arranging transportation, contacting the destination to confirm the schedule and activities, and collecting signed permission slips from students' parents or guardians.
 - b) Instruction; getting students ready for the trip to reduce anxiety. This includes going over safety rule, behavior expectation, and reminding them of the topic or concept they will be exploring during the field trip.
- Trip;
 - a) Role of participants; how students take part in the field trip, based on a set agenda and clear objectives shared beforehand. Sometimes students are allowed to explore on their own, while other times they join a guided group tour. These roles may switch depending on the situation.
 - b) Role of organizer; managing the overall experience and keeping track of student learning. During the trip, the teacher should be actively involved in guiding and teaching the students.
- Post-Trip;
 - a) Debriefing activity; students should be encouraged to share and discuss the Field trip and report their experiences during the trip.
 - b) Culminating activity; the opportunity for the students to apply the content knowledge they gained from the trip.

From a theoretical standpoint, the field trip strategy aligns with experiential learning theory, which emphasizes learning through direct experience. Marc and Powell (2020) argue that well-designed field trips can create memorable learning moments by situating abstract content in tangible settings. They highlight three core benefits: enhancing conceptual understanding, expanding students' exposure to new environments, and reinforcing curricular content through contextual immersion. In literary studies, comparative literature offers a robust framework for examining how themes and practices are represented across texts and cultures.

According to Xu (2023), comparative literature explores intertextual relationships and cultural connections, allowing scholars to analyze how different works engage with shared concerns. Bassnett (2006) further notes that "comparative literature is not simply about comparing two texts but about engaging with the cultural, historical, and ideological forces that shape them." She emphasizes its interdisciplinary nature, extending beyond textual comparison to

include insights from history, sociology, and education. Letafati (2021) emphasizes that comparative literature's flexibility makes it well-suited for examining educational representations within literary narratives.

Several prior studies have leveraged literary texts to explore pedagogical practices. Mottart et al. (2009) used *Teacher Man* as a reflective tool for pre-service teachers, finding that narrative engagement enhanced empathy and critical thinking. Fernandes and Pires (2024) analyzed *To Sir, With Love* to investigate relational pedagogy and its impact on student behavior. These works, along with Falcao and Kumar's (2025) research on the cognitive and affective benefits of historical field trips, provide a foundation for examining how literature can reflect and inform teaching strategies.

By drawing on these pedagogical and literary frameworks, the present study uses comparative literature to investigate how field trip strategies are represented in Frank McCourt's *Teacher Man* and E.R. Braithwaite's *To Sir, With Love*. This approach highlights not only the educational content of the narratives but also their cultural and historical significance in shaping pedagogical practice.

Method

This research employed a library research approach using the method of comparative literary analysis, conducted in two main stages. The first involved a close reading of the two selected literary works—*Teacher Man* and *To Sir, With Love*—serving as the corpus data. During this process, detailed note-taking was carried out using manual and digital annotation tools, highlighting recurring pedagogical themes, particularly those related to field trip strategies. The second stage entailed a systematic comparison of these themes using the theoretical framework of comparative literature, which examines literary connections across time, space, and culture (Xu, 2023; Bassnett, 2006).

The analytical framework consisted of three main thematic categories, developed inductively and refined iteratively throughout the reading:

- 1) Planning and structure of field trips;
- 2) Student engagement and learning outcomes;
- 3) Challenges influenced by socio-political and cultural contexts.

Relevant excerpts were selected based on three criteria: (1) textual passages that explicitly describe teaching strategies outside the classroom; (2) sections that reflect teacher-student interaction during or after field trips; and (3) narrative commentary on educational, racial, or social dynamics. Passages were excluded if they lacked direct pedagogical relevance or thematic alignment with the study's research questions. To enhance the reliability of the analysis, a process of inter-rater coding was conducted.

Two independent coders analyzed the same set of excerpts using the agreed thematic framework. The Cohen's Kappa coefficient was calculated and yielded a score of 0.82, indicating substantial agreement and confirming the consistency of

the thematic categorization.

Potential limitations of this methodology include the subjective nature of literary interpretation, the relatively small sample size (two texts), and the dependence on contextual knowledge of the authors and historical settings. To mitigate these concerns, the analysis incorporated peer debriefing, reflexive journaling, and triangulation of themes across chapters. Additionally, potential researcher bias was minimized by maintaining an audit trail of coding decisions and ensuring transparency in how excerpts were selected and interpreted.

Through this rigorous comparative approach, the study contributes not only to educational discourse on experiential learning but also to broader cross-cultural literary studies, aligning with the objectives and scope of contemporary comparative literature (Letafati, 2021).

Results

Field Trip to Movie and Theater in “Teacher Man” and Field Trip to Museum in To Sir, With Love

The findings of this study present a comparative analysis of field trip implementation as portrayed in *Teacher Man* by Frank McCourt and *To Sir, With Love* by E.R. Braithwaite. Using a structured framework consisting of three phases—pre-trip, during the trip, and post-trip—this section highlights key differences in how each teacher approached the planning, execution, and follow-up of their respective educational excursions. The comparison reveals stark contrasts in administrative preparation, instructional strategy, participant roles, and the educational outcomes observed, shedding light on the effectiveness and challenges of field-based learning in two distinct teaching contexts.

Table 1.1 Comparison of Field Trip in Teacher Man vs Field Trip in To Sir, With Love

Aspect	<i>Teacher Man</i> (Movie & Theater)	<i>To Sir, With Love</i> (Museum)
1. Pre-Trip		
Administration	No formal logistics except parental permission slips (p. 137). Students traveled by subway, causing disruption (p. 138). McCourt paid for tickets personally, as many students lacked funds (p. 140).	Planned in coordination with the headmaster, who instructed student grouping and added a second supervisor (p. 82). Braithwaite confirmed the museum visit and obtained a travel voucher in accordance with school policy (p. 86).
Instruction	No safety, behavior, or academic objectives were	Students were briefed before departure and equipped with

Aspect	<i>Teacher Man</i> (Movie & Theater)	<i>To Sir, With Love</i> (Museum)
	discussed before the trip. As a result, students behaved disruptively, and no learning outcomes were targeted (p. 141).	paper and pencils. They were assigned to groups with specific tasks to support learning goals (p. 88).
2. During Trip		
Role of Participants	Students acted independently without guidance or structure, leading to disorder and a lack of meaningful engagement.	Students worked collaboratively in groups, discussing and sharing ideas. Peer interaction was central to their active participation in the museum visit (p. 88).
Role of Organizer	McCourt was present but unable to manage student behavior. His authority was openly disregarded by students during the trip (p. 141).	Braithwaite closely supervised his group and was satisfied with their respectful and engaged behavior, reflecting his effective classroom management (p. 89).
3. Post-Trip		
Debriefing Activity	No reflective discussion or academic follow-up occurred. Students requested another trip, but McCourt declined due to the disorderly experience (p. 142).	Students wrote freely about their museum experience during the weekly review, indicating that the trip had a reflective and educational impact (p. 94).
Culminating Activity	No observable change in student behavior or academic interest. The field trip did not contribute to classroom learning or student development.	After the trip, students became more engaged in geography lessons, demonstrating increased interest and participation—indicating a positive transfer of learning from the field trip (p. 94).

Discussion

This study applies the theoretical framework of comparative literature to analyze the pedagogical strategy of field trips as depicted in *Teacher Man* and *To Sir*,

With Love. The findings reveal both similarities and differences in how the strategy is applied and its effectiveness. To better structure the analysis, this section is divided into subsections: similarities, differences, pedagogical implications, contextual influences, and recommendations for practice and future research.

1) Key Similarities

Despite differing cultural and geographical settings, both *Teacher Man* and *To Sir, With Love* present foundational similarities in their implementation of field trip strategies. Both narratives center on ninth-grade classrooms—the final stage of secondary education—where teachers attempt to engage students through experiential learning. In these stories, field trips are not merely supplemental activities but are positioned as deliberate pedagogical responses to student interests, suggesting that experiential learning offers an alternative route to motivation and participation in diverse classrooms.

Administrative coordination appears in both contexts, albeit to different extents. McCourt takes a highly informal approach, managing transportation and funding out of pocket, which reflects a personal rather than institutional level of commitment. In contrast, Braithwaite operates within formal procedures, securing administrative approval, organizing logistics, and collaborating with colleagues. While both teachers take steps to facilitate the field trip, the level of structure significantly influences the outcomes.

A particularly striking parallel lies in the racial dynamics shaping each classroom environment. McCourt, a white teacher in 1960s New York, teaches predominantly Black and Puerto Rican students, navigating a relationship strained by mutual skepticism and cultural distance. Meanwhile, Braithwaite, a Black teacher in 1950s London, faces systemic racism in society and must earn the trust of his white working-class students. Despite the reversed racial dynamics, both narratives reveal how race and identity intersect with pedagogical practice, influencing classroom authority, student perception, and public response during the field trips.

Viewed through the lens of comparative literature, these parallels highlight the field trip as a pedagogical tool that operates within—and is shaped by—broader socio-cultural frameworks. Experiential learning, as depicted in both texts, functions not only as an instructional method but also as a space where cultural tensions are exposed and negotiated. This reinforces the idea that in multicultural educational settings, teaching strategies must be attuned not only to curriculum goals but also to the lived realities of students and the identities of teachers themselves.

2) Core Differences in Field Trip Implementation

While both teachers utilize field trips as pedagogical strategies, their methods and outcomes diverge sharply due to differences in planning, instructional clarity, and classroom management. McCourt, despite his teaching experience, approaches

the activity with minimal preparation. His trip is spontaneous, lacking defined learning objectives, safety protocols, or behavior guidelines. Consequently, the students behave disruptively, and the trip fails to yield meaningful academic or developmental gains.

In contrast, Braithwaite, a novice teacher without formal pedagogical training, executes the field trip with careful precision. He clearly communicates objectives, organizes students into working groups, provides the necessary materials, and facilitates post-trip reflection through writing activities. His structured approach results in not only appropriate student conduct during the outing but also heightened classroom engagement in subsequent geography lessons. These contrasts underscore that teaching success is not necessarily linked to professional experience, but rather to thoughtful planning, intentionality, and strategic execution.

Furthermore, the tone and academic relevance of the two field trips differ significantly. McCourt's outing to the movie and theater leans toward recreational entertainment, with little connection to the English curriculum. In contrast, Braithwaite's Museum visit is firmly anchored in the geography syllabus and executed as a formal, curriculum-aligned learning experience. This difference highlights how the alignment of field trips with instructional goals can directly influence their educational value.

Several additional variables shape the outcomes of each trip, including classroom demographics and racial dynamics. McCourt, as a white male accompanying a group of Black female students in 1960s New York, experiences visible discomfort in public spaces, attracting scrutiny and possibly undermining his perceived authority. His social positioning seems to compound the challenges of classroom management during the trip.

Braithwaite, on the other hand, confronts racial prejudice as a Black man leading white students in 1950s London. During the trip, members of the public express surprise and discomfort at the racial composition of the group. Yet, his calm and dignified response, along with the students' open acknowledgment of him as their teacher, reflects a classroom culture rooted in mutual respect. These moments illustrate how perceptions of race and authority in public contexts can significantly shape the dynamics and outcomes of school field trips.

3) Pedagogical Implications for Contemporary Education

The contrasting field trip outcomes in both narratives provide valuable insights for educators today. McCourt's experience warns of the consequences of unstructured experiential learning. When trips are treated as informal excursions with no connection to the curriculum, students may misinterpret the purpose, resulting in behavioral issues and missed learning opportunities. As Greene, Kisida, and Bowen (2014) emphasize, "field trips that are not tied to clear learning goals

often fail to deliver lasting educational benefits.” This reinforces the need for educators to distinguish between recreational outings and pedagogically driven field trips.

Braithwaite’s approach serves as a model for effective practice. His trip was carefully integrated into the curriculum, supported by logistical planning, pre- and post-activity tasks, and ongoing reflection. His success demonstrates that even new teachers can achieve strong outcomes when they apply professional judgment, establish clear expectations, and promote student accountability. According to DeWitt and Storksdieck (2008), “pre-visit preparation and post-visit reinforcement are key factors that maximize the impact of field trip learning.” For modern classrooms—especially those serving diverse populations—such strategies are essential in fostering inclusive and engaging learning environments.

These findings affirm that the effectiveness of a teaching strategy lies not in the novelty of the activity but in the coherence between planning, execution, and assessment. Field trips can be powerful learning tools when teachers align them with learning objectives, anticipate challenges, and guide students through the experience as active learners, not passive participants. As Behrendt and Franklin (2014) note, “the value of field trips depends not simply on the trip itself, but on how the experience is embedded within the broader curriculum.”

4) Cultural Contexts and the Role of Teacher Identity

Beyond logistical and instructional concerns, both narratives underscore the impact of cultural context and teacher identity in shaping the field trip experience. McCourt and Braithwaite operate within racially charged environments that influence how students, school administrators, and the public perceive them. McCourt, as a white male leading a group of Black female students in 1960s New York, feels out of place and receives judgmental looks from subway passengers—adding layers of discomfort and insecurity that affect his authority. His field trip experience is not only pedagogically challenging but also socially disorienting. As Ladson-Billings (2009) explains, “teachers must acknowledge how their racial identity intersects with students’ backgrounds, as these dynamics shape classroom authority and student engagement.”

In contrast, Braithwaite, a Black man leading 48 white students in 1950s London, confronts racism directly when strangers express surprise or disapproval during the trip. Yet the moment is transformed when a student publicly acknowledges him as their teacher, signifying a moment of mutual respect. Braithwaite’s calm demeanor and ability to maintain professionalism in the face of social prejudice reflect a depth of emotional resilience and institutional discipline—likely stemming from his background in the Royal Air Force. This affirms what Gay (2010) describes as “culturally responsive teaching—using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and performance styles of diverse students to make learning more appropriate and effective.”

These contrasting scenarios reveal that field trips are not culturally neutral events. Teacher identity, public perception, and the historical moment all shape how such pedagogical practices unfold. In multicultural classrooms, where teachers and students may differ in race, class, or background, these dynamics become even more pronounced. As such, cultural responsiveness and awareness of social positioning are indispensable components of teacher preparation, especially when engaging in activities that place the classroom in public view.

In conclusion, the comparative analysis reveals that teaching effectiveness depends not solely on credentials or experience but on preparation, adaptability, and sensitivity to sociocultural factors. While McCourt's informal strategy faltered due to lack of structure, Braithwaite's success illustrates the power of intentional and reflective teaching practices within experiential learning frameworks.

Conclusion

The analysis of field trip strategies in *Teacher Man* and *To Sir, With Love* reveals that effective teaching is not solely the product of experience or credentials. Instead, it is defined by preparation, adaptability, and cultural responsiveness. Braithwaite's successful implementation of a formal, structured field trip demonstrates how novice teachers can excel through clear planning and reflective practice. McCourt's less structured, more improvised approach serves as a reminder that pedagogical decisions—particularly in diverse classrooms—must be rooted in foresight and guided by student learning needs. Ultimately, the study affirms that field trips, when executed thoughtfully, can serve as powerful tools for meaningful, equitable, and transformative education.

This study is grounded in literary analysis and relies on semi-autobiographical or fictional representations rather than empirical data. As such, interpretations may reflect authorial intention and narrative framing more than replicable teaching practice. No triangulated data or participant perspectives were involved, and results cannot be generalized across educational contexts. Furthermore, the study lacks inter-rater reliability and is limited in its ability to measure learning outcomes beyond textual implications.

Educators today can extract practical lessons from both narratives. A well-planned field trip—anchored in curricular goals and supported by preparatory and reflective components—can significantly enhance student motivation and content understanding. Teachers are encouraged to implement pre-trip orientations, assign collaborative learning tasks, and create opportunities for reflective writing or discussion post-trip. Moreover, educators must remain attuned to the cultural identities and emotional needs of their students, ensuring inclusive and respectful learning experiences. Professionalism, emotional intelligence, and strategic planning are critical, especially in diverse and dynamic classroom contexts.

Further research may expand on this study by examining how field trips are portrayed in literature across different countries and cultures, thereby deepening

cross-cultural pedagogical understanding. Alternatively, empirical studies could be conducted to explore real-life classroom field trip practices, drawing from teacher reflections, student feedback, and observational data. Including student voices in such studies could offer a richer, more holistic view of how experiential learning impacts cognitive, emotional, and social development.

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