Assisting Visual Learners in Geography

‘I never once made a discovery ... I speak without exaggeration that I have constructed three thousand different theories in connection with the electric light ... Yet in only two cases did my experiments prove the truth of my theory.’
Thomas A Edison

Geographic fieldwork gives our students the rare opportunity to test their ideas and observe processes as they occur in the environment. Students learn so much more by doing, even with the best educationalists theorising in the classroom; and often what we thought might happen doesn’t!

Our annual Year 9 trek to Port Noarlunga focuses on observing the processes of weathering, erosion, transport and deposition. This year the task for students was to collect evidence that these four processes are indeed operating powerfully in the Port Noarlunga area. Students were encouraged to take multiple photographs of landforms that helped them to illustrate the existence of physical processes such as oxidation, hydraulic action and abrasion.

They learned the value of orienting their images, and finding ways to indicate scale on their photographs too.

The highlight of the day was perhaps the experimental work on transport, where students released a number of floats (such as corks and tennis balls) into the ocean to work out the directions of both longshore drift and build-up of sand. Like Edison, I think our students were surprised at the results, and certainly had fun getting a little wet, even if it was not always by accident!

Now back in the classroom, the learning has continued. Our students have researched the definitions of processes on various websites, and scrutinised their own images taken in the field to see if they have evidence of those processes in operation at Port Noarlunga. The teachers look forward to reading their reports and viewing the student slideshows that are currently being written up. The early signs are terrific and certainly we are reminded of the power of visual learning.

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