

# Worldschooling: Homeschooling Away from Home

Gina Riley<sup>1,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Hunter College, City University of New York, New York, USA

\*Corresponding author: Hunter College, City University of New York, New York, USA.

E-mail: [griley@hunter.cuny.edu](mailto:griley@hunter.cuny.edu)

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## Abstract

Worldschooling is a form of home education, where travel takes the place of school. Worldschooling can be done alone, with family and friends, or more formally through a program called Project World School. The mission of Project World School is to provide learning retreats for adolescents and young adults with a strong emphasis on cooperative learning, co-creation, community, and social learning. This article is a review and analysis of the five retreats Project World School took in 2016, based on pre and post experience questionnaires filled out by the participants. A discussion of the challenges and benefits of worldschooling is also included within the article.

**Keywords:** Alternative education, home education, worldschooling, travel, adolescents

## 1. Introduction

When those within the homeschooling and unschooling communities think of the term Worldschooled, all roads lead to its' unofficial founder, Lainie Liberti. Lainie is a former corporate branding expert, who, in 2008, left her career to spend more time with her then 9 years old son, Miro. She closed her business, sold or gave away most of their possessions, and started an adventure that became a lifestyle as well as an educational movement.

Worldschooling can be defined as experiencing the world as one's classroom. It is a form of home education, where travel takes the place of school. Worldschooled can be done alone, with family and friends, or more formally through Liberti's program called Project World School. Project World School is a 2 – 4 week retreat program open to adolescents and young adults ages 13 – 25. These 2 – 4 week retreats cost approximately 2,500 – 4, 000 USD, depending on the location, and include the participant's lodging, food, workshops, attractions, lectures, and classes. The cost of international flights to get to and from the retreat location is not covered.

The mission of Project World School is to provide learning retreats for adolescents and young adults with a strong emphasis on cooperative learning, co-creation, community, and social learning. The retreats themselves focus on offering a deeper cultural immersion that differs from a regular tourist experience. Each retreat offers the opportunity for a past participant to participate as a volunteer in a future retreat, providing teen and young adult participants with intense group facilitation and leadership experience (Lainie Liberti, personal communication, January 24, 2017).

In 2016, Project World School organized five retreats, serving 40 worldschooled teens and young adults. Before and after each retreat, each participant filled out a pre and post experience survey. The pre experience survey was a short questionnaire which asked questions about expectations regarding their chosen trip, as well as how participants planned to document their learning during the trip. The post experience survey was more in depth, and asked about most memorable and least memorable experiences, what participants learned during their adventure, and level of motivation during different aspects of the trip. Participants were also asked for suggestions in order to improve the Project World School experience, as well as the types of retreats they would like to see Project World School host in the future. It is the goal of this paper to summarize those pre and post retreat surveys, as well as to share participant experiences regarding the retreats. Locations of the 2016 retreats included: Mexico, the Amazon Jungle, Peru, Wales, and Thailand.

## 2. Mexico

Before the retreat in Mexico, held in February 2016, participants (N = 10) were given a pre-retreat questionnaire, which asked about their perception of world schooling, expectations for the trip, and how they would document the trip itself. Participants were clearly excited about the opportunity they signed up for, and were ready to learn and grow during the adventure ahead of them. As one participant stated:

*“I’ve never really traveled anywhere, so frankly anything that I see, learn, or do will probably feel like the most miraculous and interesting thing I’ve ever done in my entire life”.*

Most participants indicated that they were most looking forward to deepening their understanding of another culture, seeing things from different perspectives, and finding their place in the world.

In the last days of the retreat, a post retreat survey was given to summarize and give closure to participant experiences, and to assess what students will “bring back with them” from the retreat. In Mexico, favorite activities included swimming with turtles in Akumal, climbing/biking around Coba, visiting ruins, and learning about Mayan and Mexican culture. Participants left motivated to know more about the writing process, philosophy, and mythology. Challenges for one included not being able to be alone, and always needing to be with another person. This particular participant expressed:

*“I don’t really rest in bed, I do it out there in nature, being alone, so I can be more present with myself. So I felt sorry for myself that the ocean was so close, and I couldn’t just go there and look at the ocean. But I also understand that there was a reason for it, so I don’t know if I would change anything. I just share what I struggled with”.*

Although participants, because of safety reasons, don’t get much alone time, there is time for group reflection during circle time. Circle time is an integral part of all Project World School retreats. It is a chance for Project World School participants to reflect deeply on their day, and gain information regarding the agenda for the next day. Lainie Liberti generally leads circle time for the first week, and after the first week, any participant who would like to lead circle time can, providing integral facilitation and group leadership experience. Circle time in Mexico was especially noted as an important time of reflection for all participants.

### **3. Amazon Jungle**

The Amazon Jungle retreat occurred in March of 2016, and included 8 worldschoolers. Within the pre-experience survey, participants indicated an interest in being able to study botany, mycology, the rainforest, and the Spanish language during the trip. Many planned to keep a journal during the trip, and use photography as a way of documenting their experiences.

In the post experience survey, participants reported most enjoying the night hikes, nature walks, and experiencing the biodiversity of the Amazon Jungle. Participants also enjoyed visiting Lima, Peru. Participants were less enthusiastic about the clay licks, and would have wanted to experience a trip to Machu Pichu.

Learning was deep, long lasting, and relevant within the Amazon Jungle retreat. Participants learned about mycology, botany, conservation, and bird behavior; and the history of the Amazon. Participants also reported learning more about self care and wellness, and the importance of hydrating, regular meals, and napping to catch up on sleep. Packing and washing one’s own clothes was a life skill learned, as well as the importance of daily

meditation and connection with nature. In every post experience survey for every retreat made, a feeling of acceptance and community was always listed as one of the most favorite aspects of the retreat.

#### **4. Cusco and Sacred Valley**

Project World School's third retreat of 2016 was held in Cusco and Sacred Valley, Peru. Nine worldschoolers participated. It was a more expensive retreat, with the cost of the retreat approximately 3,900 USD. Pre-experience, participants wanted to learn about the medicinal uses of plants in Peru, and the history and culture of Peru. The post experience survey indicated that students also learned skills such as money conversion, budgeting, and weaving.

#### **5. Wales**

Project World School's fourth retreat was held between August and September of 2016 in Wales. The Wales retreat had 6 participants, with an average age of 18. Most of the participants in the Wales retreat were unschooled their whole life, and found out about Project World School through Lainie's son, Miro; or through searching "alternatives to school" on the internet. Pre-experience, participants on this retreat looked forward to tapping into their intrinsic motivation to learn and grow through the travel experience; and stated they were looking forward to learning about farming, beekeeping, and facilitation skills. During the retreat, participants engaged in the building of a roundhouse, hiking, foraging and farming.

Post retreat, participants wished they could have experienced bread and cheese making, but also reported many new areas of interest including sustainable living, fire starting, foraging, farming, and cooking. In terms of learning, one participant stated:

*"I now know that I can travel by myself. I'm more aware about differences in native English speakers throughout the world. In many ways (this retreat) has shown me how much healthier life can be".*

#### **6. Thailand**

Project World School's last retreat for 2016 was held in November in Thailand. The average age of participants on this retreat was 16.33. Two out of seven participants were unschooled their whole lives, others had some years of formal schooling. Participants on this retreat found out about Project World School from Facebook, word of mouth, and unschooling groups. Information from the pre-retreat survey indicated that most participants joined the retreat to travel, and engage in fun and interesting experiences.

Post experience, activities that participants found most interesting included rock climbing, Muay Thai, Tai Chi and Qi Gong. Learning progress was monitored by journaling, self

reflection, and enjoying the moment. Participants reported gaining knowledge about the power of prayer and meditation, Buddhist and Muslim peoples and practices, batik painting, and Thai household and cultural norms. Participants also strongly felt that their perspective of the world, and themselves, had changed as a result of their Project World School experience. As one participant expressed:

*“My experience with Project World School has given me a much needed spring in my step! I have a significantly higher level of confidence coming off the retreat. It is easier for me to confidently say YES now after watching myself excel as a volunteer, especially on the days when I was feeling down, and on the days when self doubt crept up the most. I still did what I needed to do, and I did it well”.*

## 7. Community and Project World School

It is important to note that within every post experience survey, participants mentioned how powerful being part of the Project World School community was for them. Participants felt nurtured, mentored, supported, and embraced in each and every retreat. That power of community was something they wanted to bring back to their everyday lives as well.

## 8. Conclusion

After completion of the data analysis aspect of this project, I asked Lainie what she saw as the benefits of being part of Project World School. She responded:

*“Besides the feeling of being connected to one’s own internal ability to learn in real time....the love of learning is absolutely experienced through world schooling. As an unschooler who worldschools, I can see in real time, learning that covers every single academic subject (language, arts, history, science, etc.)....I also see so many experiential “soft skills” being honed in through travel. Examples run far and wide....learning patience, teamwork, leadership, service, compassion, critical thinking, problem solving, self reliance, vast social interaction with people of all ages and walks of life, and being able to have a voice to advocate for oneself” (Lainie Liberti, personal communication, January 24, 2017).*

The challenges of worldschooling were also discussed. Major challenges of worldschooling include time, cost, and fear of travel or exploration. Another challenge is being tempted to “force” learning during travel, and not realizing that learning happens naturally and organically. The biggest challenge, however, lies in having the outside world see world schooling as a legitimate form of education.

Despite this challenge, Project World School and the Worldschooling movement is gaining considerable traction as a viable alternative to traditional education. Each and every year, more teens, young adults, and their families register for Project World School retreats or engage in a worldschooling adventure of their own, knowing that “a mind that is stretched by a new experience can never go back to it’s own dimensions” (Holmes, 1858).

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