

Learning Expeditions: Incorporating Fieldwork, Local Expertise, and Service Learning

Overview

Students in Expeditionary Learning schools learn from fieldwork, experts, and service in addition to learning from text. They use the natural and social environments of their communities as sites for purposeful fieldwork and service connected to academic work. Students working in the field are active investigators using the research tools, techniques of inquiry, and standards of presentation used by professionals in the field. Schools develop procedures and protocols to ensure that fieldwork is safe and productive. In addition to having students conduct research outside the school, teachers bring experts from the community into the classroom. Older students participate in internships and apprenticeships that engage them in the real world and service learning. These experiences maximize students' motivation to learn.

BENCHMARK 4:

INCORPORATING FIELDWORK, LOCAL EXPERTISE, AND SERVICE LEARNING

A. Fieldwork in Learning Expeditions

1. Fieldwork is used to build curiosity and background knowledge.
2. Unlike the traditional field trip, fieldwork has a clear purpose that furthers the work of the learning expedition (e.g., students collect data, conduct interviews, or do structured observations).
3. In many cases, fieldwork takes place over an extended period of time with several visits to the same site.
4. Procedures and skills for fieldwork are taught before the event and data collected are analyzed and used back in the classroom.

B. Authenticity of Fieldwork

1. Fieldwork is modeled, as much as possible, on the authentic research of professionals in the field (e.g. zoologists, historians, anthropologists, newspaper reporters, artists, etc.).
2. Teachers select data collection tools to suit the purpose of the fieldwork (e.g. interviewing, mapping, sketching, sampling, and using observational protocols).
3. Data collected in the field are published or presented to real, external audiences.

C. Protocols for Safe Fieldwork

1. Fieldwork is structured so that it is safe.
2. The school has written policies and well-documented safety procedures for conducting fieldwork, which are followed by teachers and students.

D. Experts

1. Outside experts reflect the community as much as possible and include professionals and families.
2. Experts' work may include but goes beyond lecture and presentation to train students in professional skills and techniques used in the field.
3. Experts help students critique their work against professional standards.
4. Teachers and students maintain ongoing relationships with experts.

E. Service Learning in Learning Expeditions

1. Service learning is an integral part of many learning expeditions' investigations and products, and meets an authentic community need.
2. Each year, students participate in at least one learning expedition that includes service learning.