

FIELDWORK

NOTES FROM EXPEDITIONARY LEARNING CLASSROOMS

SPECIAL SUMMER EDITION 2004

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Capturing the Collective Wisdom: THE BEAUTY OF A CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK

BY LISA WING

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Schools Making Headway

Guiding Question:

What does it look like when schools make progress in implementing Expeditionary Learning design principles and core practices?

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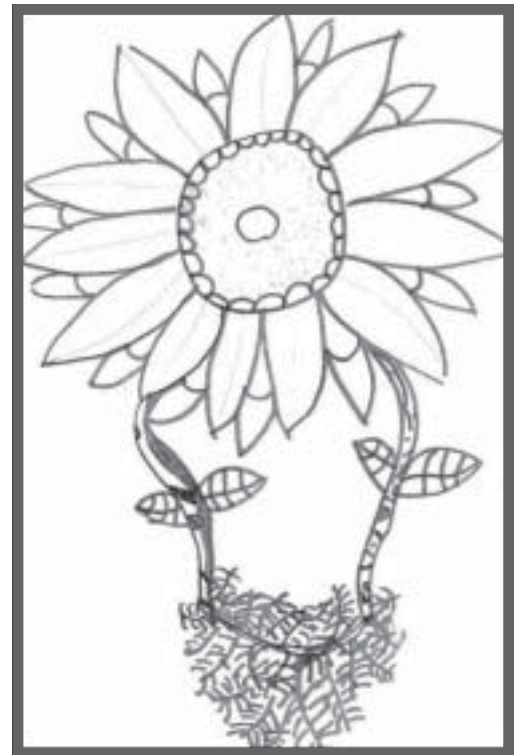
For more teacher tools related to this issue, visit our website at www.elob.org/publications/webarchive/v12n4tt.html.

The Genesee Community Charter School, which has 185 students in grades K-5, is located on the campus of the Rochester Museum and Science Center and in the cultural district of Rochester, New York. The school's local history-based and globally-connected program immerses children in investigation and discovery, extensively using the cultural as well as the natural resources of the community.

The anticipation had been building for days. This morning the third-grade classroom had even been off limits until this moment—the kickoff for their new Indians/Explorers/Settlers expedition. As these 31 budding local historians entered the room and circled up, they eagerly feasted their eyes on the scene before them.

A wide wave of blue paper, representing Rochester's Genesee River, ran down the carpet flanked by wooded banks in green paper. A narrower strip of blue represented the Erie Canal. An architect's model of the city lay at the

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Whitney White, a third grader at the Genesee Community Charter School in Rochester, New York, sketched this flower while studying botanical drawing in the Seeds of the Flower City expedition.

EDITOR
Amy Mednick

LAYOUT AND PRODUCTION
Leslie Hansen

TEMPLATE DESIGN
Carroll Conquest,
Conquest Design

Fieldwork welcomes articles,
letters, reviews, journal entries,
and samples of student work.
Please submit entries to
amednick@rochester.rr.com.

Expeditionary Learning
Outward Bound
National Office
100 Mystery Point Road
Garrison, NY 10524
845-424-4000

www.elob.org

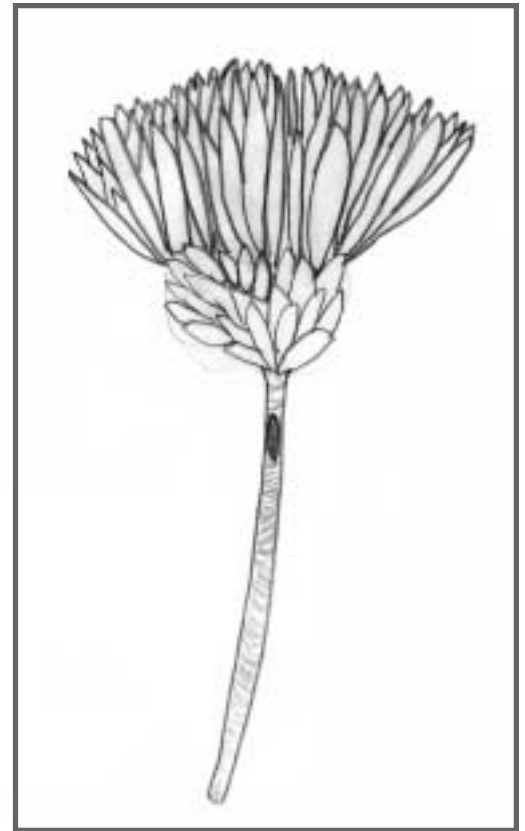
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rigorous academic and charac-
ter standards. Our model is
based on 10 principles that
grow out of the experience and
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Collective Wisdom, continued from page 1

intersection. But most impressive were seven bridge models that this class had created a year ago during its City Grows expedition. The bridges—made from reinforced concrete, twisted cables, riveted steel, plaster, wood, and handmade clay bricks—were positioned in their geographic locations on the “map.”

Jean Hurst, one of the third-grade teachers, dramatically narrated Rochester’s history referring to a timeline on the wall. As she moved back through time, her co-teacher Peter Hilling made a grand show of removing each bridge, the architect’s model, and the Erie Canal in turn. Left on the carpet were the symbols of the natural world in which Rochester is located, without any of the human-made structures that define this place as we know it today.

This new expedition is titled *Before the Bridges*. From previous expeditions, students have a great deal of background knowledge about the Seneca people who inhabited the region, and they have some understanding of the city that has evolved in this place. They will explore the many natural and social factors that contributed to the transition from a relatively untouched natural world to a bustling city with a booming economy, and a number of bridges, in a mere 25 years. This expedition is made richer and more meaningful to stu-



Third grader Eric Quitter drew this picture while studying botanical drawing in the Seeds of the Flower City expedition at the Genesee Community Charter School in Rochester, New York.

Our framework provides just that—a frame—which invites teachers and students to fill with the rich colors and varied shapes of an expedition.

dents because it positions them in a familiar historical context, building on previous fieldwork, research, and projects.

STRUCTURE AND FLEXIBILITY

The Genesee Community Charter School in Rochester, New York, has created a K-5 curriculum framework that gives form and focus to expedition planning and strengthens school culture, but at the same time provides plenty of room for teacher creativity and student spontaneity. Our framework provides just that—a frame—which invites teachers and students to fill with the rich colors and varied shapes of an expedition.

Our curriculum framework offers teachers

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School as Jazz

CORE PRACTICE BENCHMARKS STEER TEACHER LEARNING

BY STEPHEN SEXTON

Lighthouse Community Charter School, located in downtown Oakland, California, opened two years ago with kindergarten and sixth-grade classes. It has now expanded to serve 184 kindergarten, first-, sixth-, and seventh-grade students. Lighthouse will continue to expand to become a K-12 school. The mission of the Lighthouse Community Charter School is to prepare a diverse K-12 student population for college or a career of their choice by equipping each child with the knowledge, skills, and principles to be a self-motivated, lifelong learner.

School as jazz. Imagine an instrumental ensemble playing a familiar riff. Bass, guitar, piano, and voice mesh and interplay melodies and harmonies. Throughout the musical piece, individual artists rise above the rest of the group to improvise and try on new innovations. The members of the ensemble are united and connected to one another by a commitment to the overall composition of the piece, the underlying time, key, and style. And within the structure of the music, each player contributes unique and powerful ways.

As a new school in its second year of operation, Lighthouse Community Charter School is that jazz ensemble. As a learning community, we are committed to a shared mission, practices, and pedagogy—we share the key of the music, the time of the music, and the overall style. As we continue to practice together as an ensemble, we continue to define, hone, and rehearse our essential practices and pedagogies. Each individual understands and develops his or her capacity to play the melody. Just as a jazz composition takes cre-

ative twists and turns while the musicians improvise on the musical theme, so do teaching and learning. At Lighthouse, teachers employ their own individual talents, interests, and passions to improvise on the themes of the school.

APPLYING THE BENCHMARKS

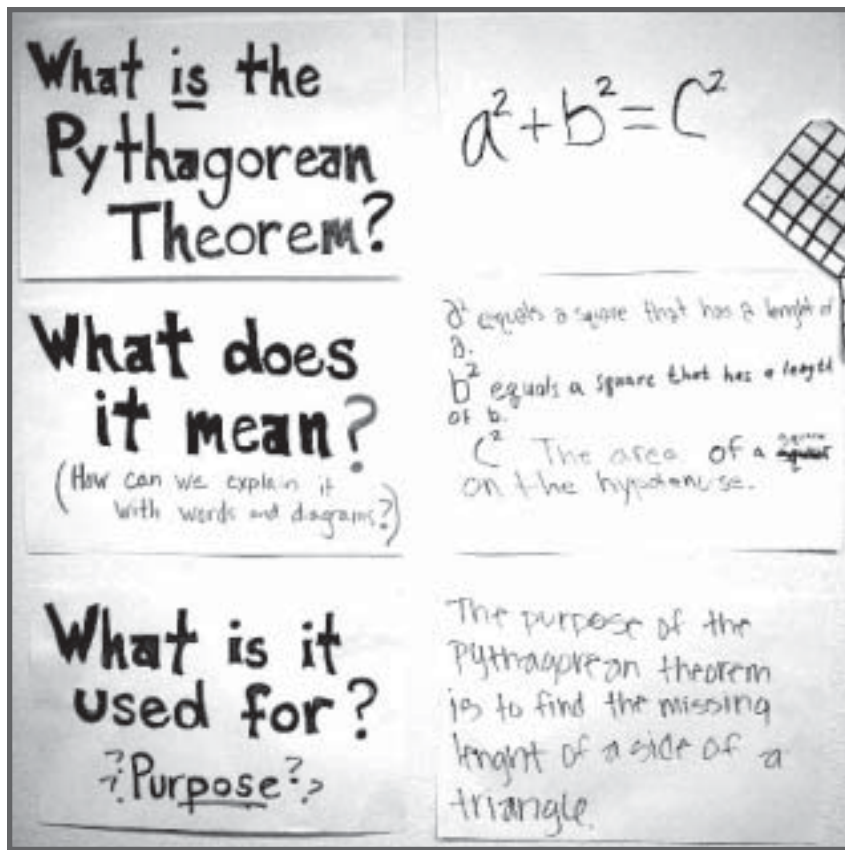
Expeditionary Learning's *Core Practice Benchmarks* provide the perfect structure and help to define Lighthouse's shared practices and pedagogy. Lighthouse's introduction to the benchmarks came through work with our school designer and through the thoughtful leadership of teachers. This past October, three primary teachers returned to school from the Early Literacy Institute galvanized and ready to apply their learning. Members of the jazz ensemble were rising to take their turn at the melody. The teachers designed the proposal to focus on the Effective Schoolwide Instructional Practices (*Core Practice Benchmarks*, p. 19). The genius of the proposal was driven by a collective commitment amongst all Lighthouse staff to create and maintain the strongest possible school.

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REPRESENTING THINKING

- ~ Teachers using anchor charts and other forms of documentation to synthesize and make public student understanding,
- ~ Students representing their thinking using formats such as graphic organizers, recording forms, journals, quick-writes, and summaries of their learning.

Expeditionary Learning Core Practice Benchmarks, p. 19



A middle school teacher at Lighthouse Community Charter School began posting student work and core concepts on the classroom walls to help students refer back to prior studies when confused.

School as Jazz, continued from page 3

At our next faculty meeting, the teachers leading the reform introduced their proposal to our entire staff. We discussed the idea as a staff and committed to the new structure. The proposed structure focused weekly professional development on a specific pedagogical strategy

The conversation began as a brainstorm of disconnected ideas. This divergent conversation enabled teachers to test their ideas and further their understanding of the proposal.

over a six- to eight-week period. We asked our school designer and the director of instruction to design and facilitate weekly professional development experiences focused on the selected pedagogical strategy.

Rolling out a new professional development structure demanded a thoughtful discussion amongst all teaching staff to collectively select a focal strategy. The conversation began as a brainstorm of disconnected ideas. This divergent conversation enabled teachers to test their ideas and further their understanding of the proposal. The conversation converged when we considered our upcoming Winter Exposition (Expo) of Student Work, a schoolwide exhibition of learning. The purpose of Expo is to showcase student learning and reveal the variety of learning experiences embedded in an expedition. Through consensus, we decided that focusing on representing thinking for January and February would enhance our ability to achieve the purpose of Expo and positively affect student learning.

REPRESENTING THINKING

Through January and February, our entire teaching staff spent the first part of four faculty meetings focused on this core practice. We dedicated our first session to an after-school tour of all seven classrooms, designed to collectively develop our practical classroom level definition of representing thinking. At Lighthouse we are taking action to create a learning community that is critically friendly rather than a culture of competition or isolation. Therefore, we did not announce the tour and every teacher participated by opening their classroom up for review and to review all others. Our practical classroom level definition now serves as our collective expectation of how to represent thinking, providing enough clarity to hopefully serve as a standard to strive to achieve. We focused the room tours around a set of questions:

~ What forms of documentation make our thinking public?

- ~ To what degree is it student created?
- ~ What evidence suggests that students can make sense of their progress toward achieving goals or meeting expectations?
- ~ What evidence reveals teacher expedition planning?

The initial room tour generated fruitful discussion amongst the teaching staff. At the end of the tour we gathered and all teachers shared their responses, round robin. I then asked the staff, “Does defining how we represent thinking even matter? Why?”

One teacher remarked that student work, “is a window into understanding that all students can access at any time.” Constant access is important because students are immersed in an environment that serves as a historical record of their learning. This observation inspired our middle school teachers to create a question wall where students post questions connected to the guiding questions of their current expedition. The question wall validates student inquiry while maintaining the focus on the compelling topics. Students post answers next to their question for all curious students, and visitors, to reference.

One of our primary teachers found anchor charts, graphic organizers, and documentation of the expedition, “provide(d) students with a focus on the learning process rather than the final project or product.” This particular teacher has since showcased student summaries of fieldwork, the most recent being their trip to Angel Island in the San Francisco Bay. Representing the learning process creates the opportunity for students to connect their learning to a visual schema. This connection allows students to make sense of their learning at all times so they are equipped to cogently answer the powerful and simple questions, “What am I studying? Why?”

One of our middle school math and science teachers remarked on how her collaborating teacher’s method of representing student problem solving, “provides a real purpose to have record of past learning to reference when con-

fused.” The commenting teacher immediately began to post more student work and core concepts on her walls and subsequently shared her observations of students referring to different parts of the room throughout the day, especially the Pythagorean theorem visual (see illustration on page 4).

EXPO NEARS

As Expo approached and we wrestled with how to best represent student learning and thinking, we tackled the burning questions of “What is important and what is the purpose of each posted piece of work?” Tackling these questions revealed that we did not have a shared definition of the purpose of Expo. Some staff wanted an overarching philosophy

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WHAT DOES EXPO LOOK LIKE?

Below are guidelines for what Expo should look like. Please use your talents to improvise within these guidelines to best express the content of the expedition and your individual style.

- ~ Each classroom has a space that visually explains the expedition and compelling topics.
- ~ Each classroom has a space that visually explains the expedition process:
 - ~ How did we get to here?
 - ~ Where are we?
 - ~ Where are we going from here?
- ~ Each classroom has individual student work from every student that enables families and students to evaluate achievement / expedition understandings.
- ~ Students lead families through a tour of their room, expedition, and work (as developmentally appropriate).

The faculty at Lighthouse Community Charter School in Oakland, California, created these guidelines (excerpted here) for their exhibition of student work. A complete version, including the purpose of Expo, is available at www.elob.org/publications/webarchive/v12n4tt.html.

Becoming a Team:

BOLSTERING SCHOOL CULTURE WITH CREW

BY ANDREW BAUMGART

Reuther Central High School in Kenosha, Wisconsin, an alternative education environment with 600 students, houses five different programs with a school-within-a-school concept. Each school targets students with specific educational needs, and the Expeditionary Learning component is the largest of all with 176 students. In a few short years, the Expeditionary Learning high school has grown from a fairly unstructured learning environment into a community that has staff committed to co-teaching, instructional collaborative planning, and regular staff and leadership meetings.

Clink, clink, clink, clink, clink. Sounds of coins in a jug at this year's Crew Penny Drive. The objective was to raise money for a battered women and children's center in

Kenosha, Wisconsin. *There were rules:* pennies count for positive points and any silver coin or bill counted as negative points. *There was strategy:* collect as many pennies for your own crew jug and put silver or bills into other crews' jugs. *There was collaboration and competition:* crew vs. crew to earn the most points. *There was service:* a check presentation to Womyn's [sic] and Children's Horizons. The students raised \$480 for someone other than themselves.

Over the last four years at Reuther, we have had a long, but fruitful journey in putting together a crew advisory structure that works for our school. At its inception in the 2000-2001 school year, we developed a short 15-minute period with no credit attached, no service component, no portfolios, no journaling, and no literacy component. It was purely social. The staff wanted more than just a generic advisory program. We used faculty summer institutes to make crew more concrete and purposeful with clear goals.

The staff decided to make crew a longer period, make it worth elective credit, add in large crew, and structure each week's events on one of the Expeditionary Learning Design Principles. Every Tuesday and Thursday all 125 students met in large crew, had a circle-up with a reading, announcements, and an activity. For the rest of the week staff took turns designing schoolwide activities for every crew team.

Large crew allowed us to define our program through numerous readings and group activities. For example, once the crews participated in a relay race in which they had to solve riddles. This provided students the chance to have wonderful ideas, collaborate,

THE BREAK

The great satisfaction lay in seeing the physical duffer discover that through trying from day to day he could do much better than he would have dared to dream. He had learned in [Kurt] Hahn's phrase, to "defeat his defeatism." You could see him shed—Hahn again—"the misery of his unimportance." His new-found confidence would carry over into his peer relationships, his classroom performance, the quality of work on his project. It was not unusual for a timid or sensitive boy with an undeveloped physique to emerge from the chrysalis of his underconfidence a competent athlete, surprised to find himself confirming what the headmaster had so often told the school: "Your disability is your opportunity."

*Outward Bound USA: Crew not Passengers, Josh Miner and Joe Boldt
(The Mountaineers Books, 2002, p. 52)*

and compete in an intimate environment while becoming familiar with the design principles. The students grew to enjoy this interaction with everyone in the school.

Last year we suffered setbacks because our student population increased, we had a temporary change in leadership, and we hired eight new teachers. Space constraints forced large crew meeting to end. Rotation of duties for planning weekly events for crew continued, but the staff soon became overwhelmed by our difficulties. Individual teachers still tried to plan for their own crew. Many of the new staff had no idea what crew meant. A lot of the old-hand staff resorted back to making crew a social hour. This plummeted Reuther to the low point in crew development.

The staff and students yearned for the intimacy and bonding we shared through the previous year's structured activities. We felt crew had defined our school's culture, and that once again we needed to strengthen this period. Students and staff desperately needed to be "crew, not passengers!"

Finding answers to building a viable crew became the goal at Reuther. At the end of last school year, our school designer, Tom Van Winkle, brought the crew committee *Outward Bound USA: Crew not Passengers* by Josh Miner and Joe Bolt (Seattle: The Mountaineers Books, 2002). This book helped answer our questions. The most powerful example used physical activity to enhance the classroom performance. Outward Bound founder Kurt



Hahn called it *The Break*. Josh Miner, who brought the idea of Outward Bound to the United States, used *The Break* to foster self-confidence in students and create an atmosphere of teamwork. Our staff also turned to the Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound Core Practice Benchmarks to find even more answers.

Hannah Hagan did this illustration for her historical fiction story about early man completed during the fifth-grade Early People/Woodland People expedition at the Genesee Community Charter School in Rochester, New York.

Creating a weekly format has also shaped our present crew structure. The week includes literacy skill practice, journaling, physical activity, and portfolio development. Individual crews create their own service projects throughout the year. And, in our biggest addition, we spend an hour every Wednesday on our own version of *The Break*. This smaller version always includes a lengthy walk when weather permits. Every four weeks on Wednesday, the students then have four physical challenges: one minute of sit-ups, one minute of step-ups, the standing long jump and a sit and reach for dexterity. Teachers record individual scores in student portfolios and post them as a crew average in the hallway. Students are encouraged to beat their

REUTHER CREW SCHEDULE

Mondays	Book Club
Tuesdays	Journal Topics
Wednesdays	The Break
Thursdays	Book Club
Friday	Social Day*

*Many teachers use Fridays for planning and conducting service projects with their crew.

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while others wanted every classroom to be configured similarly, and some would have preferred an executive mandate to a consensus conversation. We came up with a document that defined the purpose of Expo and how thinking should be represented (see excerpt on page 5). In an attempt to meet the needs of our entire staff, the document highlights shared practices and where teachers should improve.

Following our Expo of Student Work, we conducted another classroom tour looking for evidence of how individual teachers represented thinking in their own domains. We designed this tour to share best Expo practices, to get a better sense of what students were learning throughout the school, and, most importantly, to measure how we had grown in our ability to represent thinking since our last room tour. During our professional development two teachers, one kindergarten and one sixth-grade math and science teacher, volunteered to give us a tour of their rooms. The

teachers delivered a brief introduction to the room, followed by questions and answers. The ensuing conversations resulted in middle loop teachers appropriating kindergarten strategies and vice versa. It was exciting to watch classrooms develop and change after each room tour, reflecting the best practices from different rooms.

The room tours also strengthened our teacher community. Middle school teachers developed a better sense of the primary

As Expo approached and we wrestled with how to best represent student learning and thinking, we tackled the burning questions of “What is important and what is the purpose of each posted piece of work?”

expeditions, and vice versa. The importance of room tours as a community-building tool has since been incorporated into our professional development by rotating the hosting room each week. Now, each professional development session opens with a teacher introduction to their room and a focused question, if desired.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

The process of selecting a core practice benchmark to focus on schoolwide will continue at Lighthouse, along with teacher innovation. The original affirmation of teacher innovation has begun to create an activist school culture committed to creating the best possible school. We will continue to fine tune and refine the process of sharing best practices and developing core practices throughout the school. As practitioners, we understand that when we play in the same key and time our piece of music sounds best—when we share foundational pedagogies throughout the school, our instructional practice is greatly improved and serves our ultimate mission of preparing students for college or a career of their choice. ✎

Stephen Sexton is director of instruction at Lighthouse Community Charter School in Oakland, California.

Amelia Carter, a second-grade student at the Genesee Community Charter School, observed and sketched this Native American artifact at the Rochester Museum and Science Center during the Early People/Woodland People expedition.



both structure and flexibility in expedition planning. It is based on the study of history in six historical time periods we call Prehistory; Early People/Woodland Peoples; Indians/Explorers, Settlers; Village to City; City Grows; and Today and Tomorrow. It defines a range of topics taken from the New York State Social Studies and Science Learning Standards for investigation within each time period. We complete three expeditions each year, exploring all six time periods (teachers loop) over a two-year course of study. As Hurst and Hilling's students experienced at their kickoff, echoes from previous expeditions reverberate throughout students' years at the school as classes explore new content within familiar time periods.

With an emphasis on the study of local social and natural history, our curriculum immerses students in the people and places, past and present, which form the Rochester region. Our local community becomes the lens through which we explore fundamental concepts in science and universal themes in history. It becomes the canvas on which we learn to read, write, and calculate. Expeditions draw their content from social studies and science, and develop skills in language arts and math.

In planning, teachers may choose to emphasize certain topics rather than others, although throughout the



expedition most of the listed topics will be incorporated to some extent. For example, Hurst and Hilling opted to focus their third-grade expedition on the first seven settlements along the Genesee River, while the second-grade class will concentrate on the early milling industry. The teachers will create opportunities for both classes to join together periodically as the expeditions unfold, allowing their students to learn from each other.

One of the strengths of having a curriculum framework is the consistency and cohesiveness it brings to the school. The framework bonds our school in a common effort to learn about our community's past and actively contribute to its future. Each year, students at all levels study the same time period of history. The topics of investigation within each time period increase in complexity and sophistication as students move

Third-grade student Addie Ainsworth drew this picture during a study of botanical drawing in the Seeds of the Flower City expedition at the Genesee Community Charter School in Rochester, New York.

CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK RESOURCES

Heidi Hayes Jacobs. *Mapping the Big Picture: Integrating Curriculum and Assessment K-12*. ASCD, Alexandria, VA, 1997.

Heidi Hayes Jacobs. "Focus on Curriculum Mapping." *ASCD Curriculum Handbook*. Summer, 2000.

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through the grade levels.

Teachers are mindful of the need to plan a program that balances social studies and science. The curriculum framework ensures that students explore the full scope of those disciplines. Each two-year loop contains time periods that focus on physical, earth, and natural sciences, as well as history content with political, sociological, economic, and geographical aspects. Teachers attend to the breadth of skills and concepts defined by their learning goals in selecting expedition topics and designing activities and projects.

FINDING TIME TO PLAN

The greatest curriculum framework will not produce quality expeditions if structured time is not allotted for teachers to create, collaborate, and critique each other's plans. We have created a number of structures to support professional development and planning.

Time is our most valuable resource. We have built ten professional development days into our school calendar for expedition planning and reflection. In addition, staff works three weeks in August to gear up for the year. Early student dismissal every Wednesday gives staff time throughout the school year to work together, giving one another structured feedback on student work and teacher plans.

We use a planning template based on Grant Wiggins' and Jay McTighe's backwards planning approach in *Understanding by Design* (Prentice Hall, 2000). During planning, we identify compelling topics, guiding questions, learning goals, end products, and then determine the sequence of activities, lessons, and fieldwork that will help children accomplish our goals and produce quality work. (For GCCS planning template, visit our website, www.elob.org/publications/webarchive/v12n4tt.html.)

Our art, music, and dance (physical expedition) teachers play an integral role in every expedition, deepening students' understanding of the material. As we plan, our special subjects teachers circulate among classroom teachers. They get a sense of the focus and final products of expeditions, then interject ways in which the visual arts, music, and dance can be integrated into the expeditions. Botanical drawing became a centerpiece of last year's third-grade expedition on Rochester's seed and nursery industry. Student artwork accompanied their writing in the almanac they produced for their final project. Dance and music featured prominently in the fourth-grade musical that culminated the Freedom expedition.

Revisiting time periods of history and planning expedition topics that are similar every

USING THE FRAMEWORK ACROSS GRADE LEVELS

~ Kindergarten and First Grade: During the Village to City time period, students explore community members' roles and responsibilities. They learn about early occupations and industries and the interdependence that existed between village artisans, merchants, farmers, and others. They also learn about the cycle of seasons and the effect of seasons on villagers' work. For their final project, last year's first graders dressed in period costumes and became student docents at the museum's "Our Town" exhibit of early Rochester.

~ Second and Third Grade: Students focus on the milling industry that was central to the establishment and growth of Rochester. They explore the importance of transportation to the economy as they investigate the Erie Canal's significant role in Rochester's development. A study of simple machines illuminates the physics behind the workings of mills and canal locks. Last year, the second grade created a video presentation about the Erie Canal to accompany an exhibit of a working lock at the museum.

~ Fourth and Fifth Grade: Students investigate the quest for freedom that characterized the time period, and more specifically the significant role of Rochesterians such as Frederick Douglass and Susan B. Anthony. Last year's fourth grade performed a musical play about the Underground Railroad, as well as creating a freedom quilt with accompanying historical fiction stories.

Please visit www.elob.org/publications/webarchive/v12n4tt.html to download a copy of the Genesee Community Charter School's curriculum framework.

two years has allowed the school to accumulate a wealth of resource materials for students and teachers. Our teacher resource room is full of books, journal articles, Rochester History periodicals, science kits, videos, maps, picture files, and teacher-made materials. Each time we repeat the study of a historical time period, our expedition plans improve, our knowledge of community experts and field study sites increases, and our library of materials expands. Teachers have room to revisit, revise, and refine expedition topics, or craft a new one based on the topics appropriate to the schoolwide time period theme.

CONNECTING STUDENTS

The curriculum framework also connects our students to one another. The structure encourages cross-grade appreciation and understanding of one another's work. During each expedition, the school comes alive with displays of guiding questions and student work that intrigue and inform children of all ages and their families. During the Early People/Woodland Peoples time period, older and younger students marveled at the detailed sketches of native artifacts produced by second graders. Schoolwide traditions and events are also enriched by our curriculum structure. Our weekly schoolwide Community Circle rocks with time period-related song, movement, artwork, writing, and performance. Student demonstrations of their expedition progress and projects are learning opportunities for their older and younger schoolmates.

The school has developed a rhythm of expedition work that ebbs and flows, adding to the feeling of community and consistency schoolwide.



The school has developed a rhythm of expedition work that ebbs and flows, adding to the feeling of community and consistency schoolwide. All grade levels begin and end their expeditions at the same time. Exhibition nights are held on predetermined dates for each expedition, allowing students to experience the true meaning of a real deadline, and the motivation (terror) of presenting their work to an authentic audience.

The school hums with great energy, excitement, and admittedly last-minute scrambling, each year in late November, mid-March, and late June. Expedition phases of planning, researching, preparing, panicking, presenting, celebrating and reflecting are shared experiences. We move through history together, collectively advancing to the next historical time period as one expedition ends and the next one begins. ✂

Lisa Wing is school leader of the Genesee Community Charter School in Rochester, New York. Thanks to Steven Levy for his contributions to this article.

This illustration was drawn by Jennifer Son to accompany her historical fiction story about early man. She wrote and illustrated the story during the fifth-grade Early People/Woodland People expedition at the Genesee Community Charter School in Rochester, New York.

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Ron Berger, who has taught public school in western Massachusetts for 25 years, has written a practical and passionate book drawing on his own classroom experience, his own work as a master carpenter as well as his work in Expeditionary Learning schools.

***An Ethic of Excellence
Building a Culture of
Craftsmanship with
Students***

**By Ron Berger
(Heinemann, 2003)**

*Becoming a Team, continued
from page 7*

own personal best, which also helps the crew average rise. Teachers and students take walks all the other Wednesdays. This physical activity has created students who are more calm and ready to learn.

During our cold winter months, we replaced the walks with an indoor crew volleyball tournament. This tournament encouraged the students to become more unified. One junior named Raymond served the ball over the net for the first time as the whole student body watched. The crowd erupted with cheers—an outstanding accomplishment for Raymond who is blind and could not have done it without the support of his crewmates.

Presently, in addition to The Break, teachers and students have book club twice a week, have a day of structured journaling, and have a social day. As we receive more professional development in literacy skills, we try to embed them into our book club and journal writing activities. Next year, we are hoping to incorporate portfolios into our weekly format to show evidence of student learning.

As visitors peek into classrooms when walking down the hallways next year, they will see quiet reading of books, reflective journaling, portfolio building, and physical challenges. The observer will see the mass exodus of students as we participate in our weekly Break on Wednesdays. Through the more personal student-teacher relationship created by our new crew culture, Reuther will be a positive educational environment. ✎

Andrew Baumgart teaches math at Reuther High School in Kenosha, Wisconsin. Baumgart wrote this article with help from his colleagues on the crew committee at Reuther.