

# FIELDWORK

NOTES FROM EXPEDITIONARY LEARNING CLASSROOMS

MAY 2005

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## Documenting the Journey: A SCHOOLWIDE CULTURE OF PORTFOLIOS

BY MARK CONRAD

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What whole school practices support effective teaching and learning in the classroom?

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For more teacher tools related to this issue, visit our website at [www.elob.org/publications/webarchive/v13n3tt.html](http://www.elob.org/publications/webarchive/v13n3tt.html).

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Ellsworth, a quiet, athletic eighth grader, sits by himself in the corner of Mindy Sjoblom's humanities class immune to the buzz that surrounds him. His classmates sit nearby in clusters of two or three, excitedly examining thick binders of their own work. Ellsworth flips slowly through the pages of his sixth-grade portfolio and carefully pulls work out of the clear page protectors and looks at the multiple drafts, revisions, and research notes that hide behind his final products. I hear him whisper, "Wow," as I pass by.

The Crossroads School is a public charter school located in Baltimore, Maryland serving 150 students in sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. Our students live in some of Baltimore's most challenged neighborhoods with over 90 percent qualifying for free or reduced-price lunches. Since it opened in 2002, The Crossroads School has worked to create a learning environment that supports work of high quality, rigor, and relevance. Out of that goal has emerged a schoolwide practice of portfolio assessment infused with regular opportunities for students to share their portfolios with others.

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Gonzalo Navez, a sixth grader at The Crossroads School in Baltimore, Maryland, drew this portrait of Dr. Martin Luther King while exploring famous faces during Black History Month.

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*Documenting, continued from page 1*

## GLIMPSING THE SPIRIT

We live and work in an educational era that values a relatively thin slice of student learning. While standardized tests offer valuable glimpses into students' progress against a set of standard outcomes, they generally fail to provide us with an understanding of the spirit of the learner behind the results. Portfolio assessment offers a wonderful and compelling complement to these measures by enabling students to highlight their growth over time and to showcase high-quality project work.

More than that however, portfolios allow us to glimpse the process of learning and thinking that led to the creation of specific pieces of work. Our school's mission statement speaks of "opening minds, opening worlds and opening possibilities through discovery and diversity." I know of no paper-and-pencil test that could help us assess the extent to which we are meeting that mission. However, the student work and accompanying reflections that make up a portfolio enable us to glimpse not only the learning process, but also the journey of discovery it contains.

## PORTFOLIOS AS CONNECTIVE TISSUE

Portfolios are not merely scrapbooks of student work documenting the range of topics a student has studied and explored. Rather, they are purposeful, organized, and focused artifacts built around the act of reflection. Students carefully select work samples that meet specific criteria. The work must be substantive and significant. It must be work that makes the process of learning evident. It should also be work that reveals mastery of important skills and content. Finally, it should be work that points to personal growth and character development as well as academic proficiency.

As with every other structure and practice, portfolios exist within a specific context in the fabric of our school. The challenge is to make this context explicit and compelling so that



Carolina Munoz, a sixth grader at The Crossroads School in Baltimore, Maryland, studied the face of Zora Neale Hurston to create this bold and colorful portrait. In response to the idea that everything we do is a self-portrait, Carolina has chosen this image for her portfolio cover.

portfolios do not become "one more thing" that students and teachers must complete. In fact, portfolios can provide connective tissue between diverse practices and structures. They can also enable students, parents, teachers, and others to understand connections between the school's code of conduct, the thinking strategies connecting all content areas and the standards of excellence that guide student work. For example, students at Crossroads make five promises when joining the school. One of these promises, Commitment to Quality, is easy to observe when looking at a collection of student work contained in a portfolio. The portfolio makes evident the extent to which a student shows quality, craftsmanship, and care in all subject areas or only in isolated areas. Thus, portfolios facilitate important conversa-

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# Collaborative Professional Development:

## LIVING AND APPLYING THE PROJECT APPROACH

BY SUZANNE GREGG

“Do you have the video camera?” a crew leader frantically asked me one day. “I want to videotape my next lesson for our study group.” The video camera had recently become a popular item at our school encapsulating everything from vignettes of students’ thinking while solving math problems to crew leaders taping one another’s lessons in order to reflect on instruction. It was in constant demand. As the education director at ANSER Charter School in Boise, Idaho, I was concerned that unless I secured more video cameras the momentum of capturing our practice would dissipate.

Soon after, I found a way to purchase video equipment and—we soon discovered—continue our growth as educators and learners. Through the federal charter schools’ dissemination grant, which directs charter schools to share information with other public schools, we were able to purchase more cameras. More importantly, we were led on a journey that forced us to think critically about the work we do as well as engage us more deeply as learners as we inquired about our own practices.

Through a lengthy and collaborative process, our faculty mutually agreed the grant project would include a CD-ROM and companion booklet focusing on “best practices.” The purpose of the project was to share with others what we had learned in our development as a K-6 charter school both in our day-to-day practice and in our professional development. Our primary audience, Idaho public school administrators and teachers, would be able to use this in whole group, small group or

individual staff development opportunities.

Over the last several years, many of us have traveled throughout the state and nation learning from others in the Expeditionary Learning network through summits, institutes, workshops, and conferences. Aligning our practices horizontally and vertically throughout the grade levels, we have continued to see our students’ achievement levels increase. We felt if we could document some of what we had learned and now consistently applied, it might help other educators become better at their practice, in turn, making a difference for their students.

### WHERE TO BEGIN?

We knew we wanted to share our best practices, but we did not know where to start. In the fall of 2003, Expeditionary Learning school designers Barbara Waxman and Cyndi

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People learn best through active involvement and through thinking about and becoming articulate about what they have learned. Processes, practices, and policies built on this view of learning are at the heart of a more expanded view of teacher development that encourages teachers to involve themselves as learners—in as much the same way as they wish their students would.

—Linda Darling-Hammond

*This quotation is cited in ANSER Charter School’s booklet, “Setting Standards for High-Quality Student Work: Quality Work(2004).” The faculty wrote this booklet to accompany the CD-ROM they developed with a federal and state grant to share their own best practices with other Idaho educators.*

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*Living and Applying, continued from page 3*

Gueswel came to our rescue and facilitated the initial brainstorming session of the project.

The next several months became a constant state of revision as we decided on what practices to include in the project. We knew we wanted to make transparent the practices we felt had made such an incredible difference in our students' understanding of process and content. We wanted to make certain that our practices could be easily replicated by other educators in their own schools. It seemed so overwhelming. In order to help determine our direction, we began a "best practice" exploration.

In an attempt to look at best practices in every classroom, the exploration took on many of the qualities and protocols of a lesson study group. One teacher would volunteer to have a particular lesson or series of lessons critiqued by the entire group. We would distribute the lesson plans by e-mail to the entire group several days before the actual lesson was taught, allowing the group to ask questions and make comments. Questions such as, "Have you thought about? or

Georgia Seyfried, a sixth-grade student at ANSER Charter School in Boise, Idaho, created this children's book during the expedition *Origins: The Rise and Fall of the Mayan Civilization*.



*Students creating high quality work products soon became the focal point of the project. Before long, we were asking ourselves, "What embedded processes and practices do we consistently use throughout every classroom in order to get our students to create high quality work products?"*

What about...?" helped tighten the actual lesson. Teachers commented on ways they could contribute such as the addition of a particular book or other materials that might facilitate a stronger lesson. On the day of the actual class, two staff members volunteered to observe in the classroom. One took notes while the other documented the class through digital photographs. A graduate student from the university assisted in documenting through video.

After the lesson, the observers had time to create a documentation panel highlighting classroom practices of the observed lesson. At our next scheduled meeting the documentation panel became the focus of our dialogue and questions. Through our focused inquiry utilizing the documentation panels, it soon became apparent that teachers at ANSER were doing an outstanding job of getting students to high quality work products. This was not only evidenced in our study. Others admired and commented on our students' high quality products as they were showcased at various venues around the city, state, and nation. Students creating high quality work products soon became the focal point of the project. Before long, we were asking ourselves, "What embedded processes and practices do we consistently use throughout every classroom in order to get our students to create high quality work products?"

## CREATING THE PRODUCT

Once we narrowed our focus, we needed to concentrate on what to include in the CD-ROM and booklet. Through our best practice exploration and the documentation panels we were able to go back and clearly define the key elements of how we get students to produce high quality work products. From there, we determined what video segments needed to be captured and who would be responsible for various roles such as contacting experts in the field, writing, researching, ordering equipment, and editing video.

Functioning much like our students with their own inquiry, we questioned, gave opinions, cooperated, learned together, taught one another, laughed, cried, and treated one another respectfully. The grant allowed us to contract with field experts in order to facilitate in the creation of the final product, an important component we had learned in our own professional development.

The most powerful lesson we learned throughout the entire project was the recognition that we actually lived the project approach we expect our students to live every day in our classrooms. We were provided an opportunity that pushed us to assess our own practices. Through this process we had to acquire a shared understanding of what we wanted to accomplish as well as what questions to investigate. Gathering information within our own classrooms and from the field forced us to explore the unknown, observe “best practices,” predict the outcome, experiment with our own inadequacies, and invent a product that could be shared with others.

This project allowed us to understand some of what our students struggle with as we expect them to go from an idea to a final product. We are better able to empathize with students now that we have experienced some of the same realities. We have experienced the importance of support, scaffolding, differentiated instruction, success and failure. Revision



and reflection, asking experts in the field, and pushing ourselves beyond what we ever thought possible led us to a better product to share with others. It also provided us a vision for future professional development.

We lived and experienced most every key element we deem necessary for getting our students to high quality work products. From studying exemplary models to revision and reflection, we experienced the frustration of the unknown. Then, what a feeling of accomplishment we had sharing our final product and voicing, “We did this!” There is not a more powerful way to understand teaching and learning than to become intimately involved in the process and content through meaningful and authentic opportunities. We expect that for our students, we should expect no less from ourselves.

*Suzanne Gregg, Ed.D. is education director at ANSER Charter School in Boise, Idaho.*

Kade Wagers, a kindergartener at ANSER Charter School in Boise, Idaho, drew this Hawaiian Stilt, and worked with fifth grader Conner Madigan on the research for this note card. Kindergarteners worked with “study-buddies” for several weeks and then dictated the text for a note card series.

For further information on ANSER’s dissemination project, contact the school at [www.anser-charter-school.org](http://www.anser-charter-school.org). The professional development CD-ROM and companion booklet, “Setting Standards for High-Quality Student Work,” is available for a nominal fee. Excerpts are posted on our website at [www.elob.org/publications/webarchive/v13n3tt.html](http://www.elob.org/publications/webarchive/v13n3tt.html).

# The Power of Language:

## RECREATING A SCHOOL COMMUNITY

BY INGRID DICKSON, SHARON PECK, AND SHEELA WEBSTER

**I**n the 1960s, World of Inquiry opened as a progressive, inquiry-based Rochester City School, and for years after parents lined up to put their children's names on the waiting list. Yet over time we began lose our identity as a model, urban elementary school. Parent involvement dwindled, discipline problems increased, student performance declined, and our school culture suffered. Even our commitment to inquiry wavered.

The rote teaching dictated by a basal series and textbooks across the curriculum frustrated many faculty members. While individual teachers explored instructional practices such as guided reading and cooperative learning, we did not have a common dialog as a faculty. Rather than sharing new ideas in the hallways, teachers reverted to dull questions such as, "What story are you working on in the anthology?" or "Are you working on the subtraction unit next?"

Each teacher and classroom functioned as a separate entity within the walls of World of Inquiry. We cringed at what our once innova-

tive school had become.

When we learned about Expeditionary Learning, our teachers knew this was the model for us: 98 percent of our faculty voted to implement the design. We then faced the daunting questions of where to start, how to make it a positive experience, and how to create a supportive environment that would allow us to keep growing.

Three years later we are still asking, "Are we there yet?" But we have found a simple way to ease the growing pains. Early on, we deliberately decided we needed to speak a common language with each other and with our students. We underestimated the role this common language would hold, initially in our ability to change our school culture, and later in our approach to teaching and learning throughout the school.

### STARTING WITH CULTURE

In establishing a common language, we first took time to learn and understand the Expeditionary Learning Design Principles and figure out how we wanted to teach them to students. We began by teaching them explicitly. The whole building focused on one design principle each month, and every classroom received the same book monthly to read aloud, discuss, and connect to that principle. Music and songs also became powerful tools, and we revised our traditional student pledge to include the language of the design principles.

Students next experienced the design principles through whole school adventures in rock climbing, hiking, and ropes courses. Concepts such as Collaboration and Competition, Success and Failure now came to life.

Now our everyday vernacular, for students

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and teachers, included the design principles. This was the key to shifting our school culture. With language to unite us, we had a means for unifying the experiences we offered our students. Now, teachers' hallway conversations included questions such as, "How did you help your students to become more committed to reflection and solitude time?"

#### A COMMON LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION

In the meantime, we formed an Expeditionary Learning design team to create a template to guide the planning and implementation of expeditions: our first true attempt at a more unified approach to teaching and learning at World of Inquiry. Since then teachers have volunteered many hours for professional development in completing the templates and in planning and teaching throughout the expedition.

We subsequently turned to our district benchmarks to see how they aligned with the Expeditionary Learning Core Practice Benchmarks. Rather than treating the benchmarks as add-ons, we used this common language to integrate fragmented goals in many curricular areas into a new school improvement plan. At first we stressed the importance of having a common language to realign our culture, and now the revised school improvement plan would provide concrete steps toward realigning our instruction. Instructional practices would begin to include morning meetings, teaching the learning strategies, a move to more constructivist teaching, and the use of workshop models.

At the end of the first year, we noticed the positive effect of our common language on teachers' professional growth and on student success. As we began the second year, we further strengthened our common language through participation in Expeditionary Learning professional development. Every faculty member, including our principal, attended a literacy institute. With an expert in every classroom, these common experiences have allowed teachers and school leaders to give and receive ongoing support formally and informally. Dur-

ing our "Are we there yet?" meetings, for example, school leaders began meeting with classroom teachers for 90 minutes a month to discuss expeditions and instructional needs, and later on, to examine data.

During the second year, with a strong school improvement plan, we focused on aligning our instruction with readers' workshop, writers' workshop, math investigations as well as schoolwide and classroom morning meetings. We put aside our workbooks and introduced literature circles, but we still relied heavily on the basal to guide our instructional planning. Then, later in the day, we had expedition time.

And now, in year three, we have the components in place and are honing in on integrating our instruction. Expedition time is all day. We select books that children like to read, workbooks are not ordered, and textbooks are an instructional resource. And, teachers are asking how to use their readers' and writers' workshops to move their in-depth investigations forward. They are searching for ways to further integrate curriculum. Teachers' hallway language has moved to, "Hey, I was really impressed by your students' final products, can you tell me how you got there?" Teachers are collaborating and supporting each other as they teach their expeditions. We continue to ask, "Are we there yet?"

Each year, we have also deepened our understanding of the role, purpose, and possibilities of expeditions. Teaching within an expedition is so comfortable for us that teaching between expeditions has become difficult.



Marcus Elmore, an eighth grader at The Crossroads School in Baltimore, Maryland, used shading to capture the values seen within a magazine photo of a man's face.

*continued on page 12*

*Documenting, continued from page 2*

tions about the guiding principles of the school.

THE PROCESS

We have learned from experience that waiting until spring to begin developing portfolios decreases the effectiveness of the process. Instead, students begin to compile work samples along with multiple drafts and reflection beginning in the first weeks of school. Students quickly learn the importance of saving all work

and maintaining organized work folders in each class. Teachers provide explicit guidance regarding when and how work folders are updated. Each work folder contains major projects and assessments along with student reflections regarding academic growth, personal discoveries, successes, and areas for improvement. At the conclusion of each trimester, students select artifacts from these work folders to share with their parents at student-led conferences.

As the year progresses, students begin to select work that will be included in their final grade-level portfolio. Teachers scaffold the selection process by creating lists of suggested work for younger students and guide student reflection on their work using specific protocols. At Crossroads, students organize their work samples into four specific sections. Each content area has its own section and students complete reflections regarding each one. Students create sections entitled:

- ~ Myself as a Mathematician,
- ~ Myself as a Scientist,
- ~ Myself as a Researcher and Historian, and
- ~ Myself as a Reader and Writer.

Within each section students include reflections detailing their primary learnings, their strengths, and their goals for improvement. Another piece of reflective writing explains the work's significance.

These sections are complemented by a letter of introduction, a resume, and a meaningful quotation selected by the student. The contents of this introductory section are created in a variety of classes over the course of the school year. Humanities teachers guide the development of the letters of introduction in which students discuss past and present experiences and goals for the future. Students create resumes during the computer studies class. Crew leaders work with each student to select a quotation that is personally meaningful and relevant, and assist students with developing a short written piece that explains the quote's significance. We are currently exploring adding sections detailing student growth in the area of the arts, technology, personal fitness,

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PRESENTATIONS OF LEARNING

At The Crossroads School in Baltimore, Maryland, students must convince a panel of parents, teachers, invited guests, community members, and a student assistant that they have developed the academic skills and character traits necessary for success at the next grade level.

The presentations must answer these essential questions:

- ~ What are my strengths and goals as a student?
- ~ What have I learned and accomplished this year?
- ~ What evidence is there that I will be successful in the upcoming grade?

Students receive one of three grades determined by a faculty member on the panel: passing with honors, passing with distinction, or passing.

Students who fail to meet the passing standard are required to redo their presentations of learning.

Sixth Grade Presentation Structure:

1. Introduction and Welcome (2-3 minutes)
2. Overview of sixth grade (5-7 minutes)
3. Two positive characteristics of the student as a learner (7-10 minutes)
4. One area for improvement (3-5 minutes)
5. Goals for seventh grade (2-3 minutes)
6. Questions and answers from the panel

*For a more complete description of the sixth-grade presentation structure, the seventh- and eighth-grade guidelines, as well as the rubrics used by the panel, please visit our website at [www.elob.org/publications/webarchive/v13n3tt.html](http://www.elob.org/publications/webarchive/v13n3tt.html).*

and service.

To no great surprise, we have discovered that you cannot simply expect students to reflect on command. Students need regular and ongoing opportunities at every step of the learning process to think about their emerging understandings, their questions, and their progress to that point. If we neglect to teach students the art and vocabulary of self-reflection they will be unable to thoughtfully construct portfolio sections that accurately demonstrate who they are as learners. Integrating reflection throughout the learning process has allowed us to take the time that students need for guided practice in looking thoughtfully and critically at their own work and learning.

## PRESENTING WORK


In order to further strengthen this context, students share their portfolios with others at three points during the school year. In November and March, they prepare student-led conferences based upon their portfolios-in-progress for their parents or guardians. These conferences provide students with an opportunity to reflect on their growth over the previous 12 weeks and to share significant artifacts of their learning with their caregivers. Too often, we hear parents either praising or scolding students when looking at work samples. Teachers coach parents to avoid these instincts by asking questions that encourage the students to talk deeply about their work. Parents are encouraged to ask probing questions and to push their children for clarity. It is often at a student's first such conference that parents begin to have an appreciation for the nature of learning and teaching at our school.

At the end of the school year, when the portfolios have been completed, they are presented for a final time. This time students create a Presentation of Learning, which is a 45-minute presentation made to a panel comprised of parents, teachers, invited guests, community members, and a student assistant. The student assistant supports the presenter by pulling work samples from the portfolio, offering encourage-

ment and asking questions at appropriate times. It is important to note that students are responsible for building their panels and must recruit members of their family and community to participate.

The presentation of learning is more than simply a presentation of the student's portfolio. Students follow a structure, which differs for each grade level, guided by essential questions. Students build their case with evidence from their portfolios (see sidebar on page 8).

Portfolios, in combination with meaningful opportunities to share them, provide a compelling context for student work and reflection. We have learned from this process that when students, teachers, and parents engage in this type of collaboration the impact is felt throughout the school community. More than any other structure in place at Crossroads, the portfolio process assists in the creation of a culture of quality, rigor, and reflection that permeates all aspects of the school.

For me one of the greatest moments at Crossroads is observing the wonder and awe on children's faces as they explore their previous year's portfolios. I like to believe that they are doing more than remembering highlights and memorable experiences. They are seeing the learner and person they had been at that point in time. They are reading their own words and seeing work that they had struggled to create in collaboration with others. They are catching a glance of their spirit, a glimpse of who they are and who they might become. 

*Mark Conrad is founder and director of The Crossroads School in Baltimore, Maryland.*



Using oil pastels to create this abstract self-portrait, Aunjanea Jones, a sixth grader at The Crossroads School in Baltimore, Maryland, focused on the differences between outer and inner self. This portrait will serve as her sixth-grade portfolio cover.

# Collaborative Practice in High School

## DEVELOPING A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY

BY JOHN D'ANIERI

*Staff culture is characterized by a respectful collegiality where teachers resist judgment and blame, and support each other in improving practice. Teachers and school leaders model a safe community that fosters high quality work.*

Expeditionary Learning Core Practice Benchmarks, Culture and Character

Scattered around the table are several large pieces of paper divided into six or eight panels. Each panel contains a drawing and a caption or speech bubble, sometimes both. The drawings range from intricate to rudimentary—some panels remind me of album cover art from the seventies, others are stick figures and two-dimensional symbols. Six teachers silently and intently examine the drawings. At this point, they know only that the work is by their colleague's ninth- and tenth-grade English students.

After a couple minutes, one of the teachers says, "Okay, we have 10 minutes for probing questions."

"How many of the key concepts do you think most students captured in so few panels?" one teacher asks.

Another offers, "Were there students who showed a greater understanding of the text in this work than in their journals?"

"Were you surprised by which scenes the students chose to illustrate?" another asks.

This Learning from Student Work protocol took place recently during an active pedagogy group meeting at John Stark Regional High School in Weare, New Hampshire. One-third of the faculty at Stark—in the first year of a three-year Comprehensive School Reform (CSR)

grant—agreed at the end of the summer to focus part of their work on literacy strategies. These 30 teachers selected a common text, in this case Cris Tovani's *I Read It, but I Don't Get It* (Stenhouse Publishers, 2000). Over the course of the fall, the teachers and Expeditionary Learning school designers developed an approach to collaborative practice and inquiry that incorporates regular, facilitated, focused work toward the school's CSR goals. The active pedagogy groups are one part of an overall strategy to develop a professional learning community at Stark.

Each month a member of the small group of five or six teachers puts the student work, which resulted from a particular classroom application of one of the strategies, on the table for focused feedback from her colleagues. In this example, the teacher, Nancy, asked her students to use Tovani's comprehension strategy visualization. In learning this technique, students who can visualize what is happening in a text will be better able to make sense of and connect ideas.

Nancy had asked her students to retell their literature circle stories in six or eight panels. After a short explanation of her learning goals, her colleagues asked clarifying questions and then the probing questions above. For the next 15 minutes, Nancy sat silently and took notes while her five colleagues discussed the students' work, their insights and questions and the implications for their own classroom practice. Nancy then reported briefly back to the group the observations that had pushed her thinking the most. The entire protocol took 45 minutes, about half of the 90 minutes that Stark makes available once each month for active pedagogy groups.

At the end, the entire group of teachers de-

briefed. Presenting teachers felt like they got clear feedback on what worked and what they might do differently.

But the individual benefit for the presenting teachers is not the main goal of such work, nor is the intent for one teacher to share a “best practice.” Rather, the shared conversation about both the major elements and the nuances of literacy practices is what begins to build professional community. The teachers giving feedback are also implementing literacy practices in their classroom; the student work samples root the conversation in practice rather than in studying only the ideas in the text. For example, we hear from a science teacher who feels he learned something important about literacy in a group where an English teacher presented. Throughout this process, the Stark faculty is deprivatizing practice and creating an atmosphere where colleagues see themselves as collaborators with common strategies rather than as isolated practitioners of unrelated tasks.

The active pedagogy groups have been a crucial part of Stark’s move toward whole school change. The 60 or so teachers who were not in literacy-based groups met in groups to examine issues of culture and character at the school. They also used common texts, including Kathleen Cushman’s *Fires in the Bathroom: Advice for Teachers from High School Students* (The New Press, 2003) and Denise Pope’s *Doing School: How We Are Creating a Generation of Stressed Out, Materialistic, and Miseducated Students* (Yale Press, 2003).

But teacher feedback has indicated that rather than simply choosing a text and talking about it, they found using common protocols, student work, and deliberate questioning strategies most valuable. While many of the practices of professional learning communities were introduced through these groups, those practices carried over to many of the other settings in which teachers collaborate. Perhaps the most persistent challenge to whole school change in schools with large faculties is simply getting folks to talk with each other in a way that breaks down factions, past history, and individual personality, and instead focuses clearly on the work of students and

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## ACTIVE PEDAGOGY GROUP GUIDELINES

The Northeast Expeditionary Learning staff has tried to meld what we know about powerful adult learning with the Expeditionary Learning model in a way that supports expedition design, active pedagogy, and school culture and character. These guidelines are excerpted below:

What is the purpose?

Active Pedagogy Groups are professional learning communities in which Expeditionary Learning teachers become learners in a purposeful collaboration focused on student performance. Small, facilitated groups meet regularly both with the school designer and on their own to:

~ engage in inquiry-based dialogue focused on key components of Expeditionary Learning school goals

~ Expedition Design and Implementation

~ Literacy and Active Pedagogy

~ Assessment for Learning

~ share experiences, successes, and challenges in a supportive environment

~ give and receive feedback on teacher practice and student learning


~ link research and text to classroom practice

For a complete version of the guidelines, please go to [www.elob.org/publications/webarchive/v13n3tt.html](http://www.elob.org/publications/webarchive/v13n3tt.html).

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teachers.

The work at Stark builds on work of the National School Reform Faculty and Harvard’s Project Zero, among others, and it is important to note that in addition to the time and structures that need to be built into a school’s professional development time, schools need to make a commitment to developing skilled facilitation, feedback practices, and knowledge of a variety of purpose-specific protocols to make such an approach work.

Once developed, these practices can undergird a schoolwide professional learning community that makes active conversation about student learning the norm, rather than the exception. 

*John D’Anieri is a Northeast-based school designer with Expeditionary Learning.*

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### *The Power of Language, continued from page 7*

And, during the month between expeditions, we also see changes in student engagement and behavior. Our old comfort zone is now where we falter. Having an authentic topic is so compelling to our students.

Our story is one of scaffolding, learning, implementing, reflecting, and revising. While we were a school in need of change, we did not have a way to get there. Expeditionary Learning provided us with the instructional vision that we needed, but also a common language and common understandings. This led to what some teachers would call, "the common practice of exemplary teaching." It was really a three-year expedition on teaching and learning. We jumped in with two feet, not sure where we were going, and we made sense of our process together. We, as a faculty, came up with our own solutions that were best for our students. In doing so, we developed a com-

munity of learners and we recreated a school.

Expeditionary Learning has changed our teaching, it has changed us as teachers, and it has changed our students. It has defined us once again as a progressive, desirable public school. Parent involvement is up, discipline problems are down, and students own their learning. Most importantly, our common language has led us to powerful learning and teaching. Come see us in 10 years; we will still be asking, "Are we there yet?" 

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