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## Expanding the Walls of the Classroom: Difficulties and Successes in Expedition Based, Experiential Education

Jaime Evans

*Dominican University of California*

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**Expanding the Walls of the Classroom:  
Difficulties and Successes in Expedition Based, Experiential Education**

by  
Jaime Evans

A culminating thesis submitted to the faculty of Dominican University of California in partial  
fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Education

San Rafael, CA

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## EXPANDING THE WALLS OF THE CLASSROOM

This thesis, written under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor and approved by the department chair, has been presented to and accepted by the Department of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Education. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

Jaime Evans

May 10, 2018

Candidate

Elizabeth Truesdell, PhD

May 10, 2018

Department Chair

Jennifer Lucko, PhD

May 10, 2018

Thesis Advisor

Suresh Appavoo Ed.D., M.I.M.

May 10, 2018

Secondary Thesis Advisor

# EXPANDING THE WALLS OF THE CLASSROOM

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**Abstract**

When planned and executed with purpose and precision, expedition based, experiential education can deepen student learning, increase engagement, and help close the achievement gap. Yet, this approach to education remains the exception, rather than the norm in a standard public high school setting. The purpose of this research project is to better understand the experiences that teachers and administrators have when planning and executing expeditions, and to explore the obstacles that prevent and/or inhibit teachers from teaching outside the classroom.

This is a qualitative research project that was conducted at three schools in the Northern California Bay Area. Teachers, administrators, a parent, and a superintendent were interviewed. Teachers at one location also participated in a survey.

The results of this study indicate that the traditional education system fails to support the needs of expedition based, experiential education. Some teachers who believe in EBEE find ways to fight or work around the system, but the overwhelming workload that accompanies this task can make it difficult for teachers to experience the pay-off. In order for EBEE to become a standard in public schools, teachers need more support on the school and district level.

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### Chapter 1: Introduction

When you think of a classroom- either one that you have been in as a student, or one that you have taught it- what does it look like? Are there desks facing towards the front of the room? Are there maps pinned on the wall, stacks of books on the shelves, and a cupboard full of extra supplies? Perhaps it is a more inviting room- there are plants on the window sill, the desks are arranged in configurations that inspire group work, there is colorful student work arranged neatly on the walls, and a bulletin board pinned full of announcements for play tryouts and bake sale fundraisers. Though the images of classrooms that come to mind will vary with our own personal experiences within the education system, it is very likely that they will all have at least this one thing in common: four walls, and a door.

Most students who attend a standard public school learn within the four walls of the classroom. But, what do we mean when we say “learning?” Ken Robinson’s provides a basic definition of learning: “the process of acquiring new knowledge and skills” (Robinson, 2015). Dierking and Falk add that learning must be pieces (of information or ideas) that work together to give a student a greater understanding, or ability to solve real world problems. There must also be a way to apply knowledge for learning to occur (Dierking & Falk, 1997). Despite best intentions, the type of learning that happens within the four walls of the classroom can easily be a passive form of learning. Though there is some variance, students generally spend most of their classroom time in a desk, doing some relatively quiet combination of listening and writing. Students take notes, write essays, solve math problems, create a poster with a partner, or engage in a class discussion on the symbolism of Holden’s red hunting hat in *The Catcher in the Rye*.

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Classroom learning is attempting to prepare students for their adult lives, outside the walls of the classroom in the “real world.” This is an ironic term because students already live in the real world, but we tend to teach within the walls of the classroom. Therefore, though curriculum is usually relevant and important to a student’s life, students frequently fail to make that connection. “When are we ever going to use this in real life?” is a complaint that can be heard from the lips of the most conscientious to the most truant students in the public high school setting. The fact that many students do not see a connection between their classroom lessons is a real problem. It is a problem that expedition based, experiential education can help solve.

Expedition based, experiential education asks students to learn in the real world, under intentionally designed circumstances, and through active participation. Expeditions play an active role in experiential education because they dissolve the four walls of the classroom. The curriculum being learned inside the classroom is congruent with the student’s understanding and experience of the real world because the classroom is the real world.

### **Expeditions and Experience**

Many students who have been through the education system have been on some sort of field trip (Dierking & Falk, 1997). The number of field trips, the type of trip, and the educational caliber of the trip can vary by many factors, including the time period in which the person in question was a student. Because of the connotations many have associated with this word, the term field trip needs to be clarified. Within the context of more traditional education, the traditional field trip allows students to walk outside the door of the classroom. When teachers utilize best practices the curriculum and the field trip are tied to one another (Coughlin, 2010), but the field trip is still considered an “extra,” rather than a necessity to learning. This is not to say that a traditional field trip is not a valuable experience. In fact, the traditional field trip is

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still proven to be a memorable experience that increases knowledge retention, critical thinking and historical empathy (Greene, Kisida & Bowen, 2014). The important point is that it is not the primary place of learning. For example: a special exhibit of Van Gogh paintings is travelling the world. When it arrives at their local art museum, students in a high school art class visit and learn about the paintings on a docent led tour. This is a meaningful and culturally enriching opportunity that is tied to the curriculum, but it is still a lucky extra, rather than an integral part of learning. To re-emphasize- it is a lucky extra.

It is for this reason that the term field trip needs to be replaced with the term expedition, when speaking within the context of experiential education. Experiential education is an active form of learning that occurs through designed and purposeful circumstances. Experiential education asks the student to *learn by doing in an authentic environment*. Expeditions allow students to travel to those authentic environments. Thus, expedition based, experiential education occurs when students go to a local farmer's market with plans to interview local farmers about their experiences in selling locally grown produce. This expedition is part of a larger, multi-discipline unit about food sourcing. Or perhaps students walk to a nearby lake and identify/observe a handful of local species. They take notes on the environment each species is in, they draw pictures, or take photos/videos of the species. They use this information and academic research they have conducted to put together a field guide about local species. In experiential education, expeditions are not viewed by students, teachers, families, or administration as a "lucky extra." They are an integral part of the curriculum.

### **Statement of Purpose**

The lack of experiential education in standard public schooling is not an alarming new discovery. John Dewey began exploring the relationship between experience and education in

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the late 1800's. In *Experience and Education*, he argues that experiences are the way through which people learn, but he also emphasizes the importance of designed experiences (Dewey, 1936). This was a challenge to progressive thought at the time. Dewey thought that some educators were too liberal in their philosophy that children could direct their own education. He argued that un-designed experiences could be mis-educative and inhibit further learning (Dewey, 1936). Though he did not coin the phrase, Dewey helped to define the role of the teacher as the "guide on the side" rather than the "sage on the stage." Kurt Hahn also provides some important early thought in the realm of Experiential Education. Hahn's emphasis on character building and collaboration between students of varying socio-economic classes lead to the founding of the founded the Outward Bound program (Cousins, 2000).

More recently, some schools have been successful in adopting expedition based, experiential education on a school wide basis. There are essential components underlying these successful adaptations: community (within the school, and with the community at large), and structural changes within the school (Martinez & McGrath, 2014). When successfully implemented, expedition based, experiential education can deepen learning, provide students with a better understanding of career options that will be available to them upon graduation, and help close the achievement gap.

Yet, if there is already research in how to successfully adopt an expedition based, experiential education approach on a school wide level in learning, and if it is already proven that this approach is a successful and engaging model of learning, why is it the exception, rather than the rule to educational methods? The purpose of this research is to better understand the experiences, perceptions and attitudes that teachers, administrators, and parents have towards expedition based, experiential education (EBEE) in order to better understand why EBEE is an

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exception in standard public education. In order to better understand these perceptions, I conducted research at three different school sites. All personal and place names in this thesis are pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality of the participants.

The first school, Ponderosa Middle School in Northern California, has had EBEE program within the school for over twenty years. I interviewed two teachers, one parent board members, and the principal about their experiences establishing and growing the program. The second school, Jack London High School in the Northern California Bay Area, has academies and classes that incorporate elements of experiential education, but rarely include expeditions in the curriculum. Moreover, three teachers from this school take students on international trips, but these trips are not approved by or associated with the district. All teachers were invited to participate in a survey, and six teachers were interviewed. The principal and superintendent were also interviewed. Finally, a teacher at John Muir High School in the Northern California Bay Area was interviewed. This teacher has successfully garnered district level support for a global studies program. I interviewed him about his experiences in establishing and growing this program.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study focuses on the perceptions, experiences, and attitudes that adult educators have about expedition based, experiential education. I chose this approach in hopes that it would provide information to better support educators in providing all students with equitable access to expedition based, experiential education. I worked with three different schools: two had successful expedition based experiential education programs (Ponderosa Middle School and John Muir High School). Jack London High School has teachers who are attempting to implement various forms of expedition based, experiential education programs, but are experiencing

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difficulties. If teachers, administrator, parents, and other members of the education community better understand the experiences that educators have with expedition based, experiential education, they will be able to better support EBEE in public schools. Though the findings of this research are most relevant to Jack London High, it is very likely that there are other educators and schools who have common experiences and would therefore also benefit from this research.

Most importantly, this research has the potential to positively impact the quality of education that students in public high school experience. Expedition based, experiential education has a positive impact on student learning. If educators are able to more widely implement EBEE in public high schools, more students from less-privileged populations will have access to high quality education.

### **Summary of Findings and Implications**

Expedition based, experiential education remains the exception, rather than the norm, in standard public education because the traditional education is not built to support it. Though some teachers continue to fight and/or work the traditional education system in order to teach within the methodology, many teachers find that the work load that accompanies that accompanies the fight to be prohibitive. Because the work load is so cumbersome, it can be difficult for teachers to experience the positive pay-off that EBEE has on their students.

More can be done at the district and/or school level to support teachers in providing EBEE opportunities for their students. Of course more funding is always helpful, but logistical support for teachers at the school level (whether through the current parents teacher association, or through an expedition coordinator who would help teachers with the cumbersome logistical



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elements of organizing expeditions) would be a very effective way to increase EBEE for students at all schools.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

Experiential Education is an effective approach to learning. Research shows that it deepens learning for all students and is especially important for vulnerable populations. Students who learn solely within the confines of the classroom wonder “when am I ever going to use this in real life?” Students who learn experientially, however, know how the knowledge applies to the world because they are learning it in an authentic environment.

In what follows, I provide a review of three components essential to the successful implementation of an expedition based, experiential education program (EBEE). First, EBEE requires that students learn in an authentic environment, under guided and planned circumstances. In other words, students regularly go on expeditions. The field is the classroom. Second, there must also be a strong sense of community among the students and the faculty in the school, and the school must have strong relationships with organizations, businesses, experts, and other important pillars in the community at large. In addition, the school must undergo structural changes in the daily and yearly bell schedule- these changes ensure that the field trips are harmonious with the rest of the student’s schedule. There is also a structural change in power; teachers take on different roles in the school and students are empowered to play roles in shaping their own learning. After discussing these essential components to EBEE, I provide a discussion of the benefits of EBEE. When executed correctly, this type of education can deepen student learning and help close the achievement gap. The relationship between these elements: authentic field work, community, structural change, and deepened learning, is symbiotic. Each element helps reinforce the other, which both strengthens the importance of these elements and makes it difficult to speak of one without mentioning another.

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When authors specifically use the word field trip in their research, I will use their language to describe their research. When analyzing their research, I will use the term expedition based, experiential education when applicable.

### **Not an “Extra”: A Different Room for the Class**

John Dewey provides important foundational thought on experiential education. In *Experience and Education* (1938) Dewey responded to how traditional and progressive education were being pitted against each other as either/or options. He was critical of this way of thinking and proposed a philosophy that floated between traditional and progressive education (though many would say that he floated a little closer to progressive education than traditional). Dewey argued that experience was an important piece of effective education. However, he did not believe that all experiences were “positively educative.” In reality, experiences could be “mis-educative” and propel a student down a destructive path of thinking, or even halt the process of learning all together. This is where he differed from progressives; Dewey believed that students needed proper guidance in their experiences. Experiences needed to be designed and guided by an educator who understands the student’s learning interests and impulses and could wisely guide the student to a desirable outcome. It may be easy to assume, based on this description, that the experiences Dewey desired for students would be manufactured, or inauthentic. Yet, this is not the case at all. Authenticity in experience was of utmost importance to Dewey. He was critical of the fact that most experiences students had were within the walls of a classroom. He found the classroom to be an inauthentic environment that separated learning from the real world. In short, Dewey advocated for purposeful learning experiences in an authentic environment.

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But how exactly does a teacher ensure that a student is guided in learning in an authentic environment? In other words, how does a teacher effectively plan and execute a field trip for maximum impact? Coughlin (2010) emphasizes three points in planning successful field work: excellent location selection, preparation, and building a continued relationship with the location. Though she approaches the field trip within the context of traditional education, Coughlin found that the field trip typically appears to be more of a lucky extra than an integral part of the curriculum. Coughlin's study focused on a trip to a one room schoolhouse. Coughlin worked with teachers in her school and the organization in charge of the one room schoolhouse over the span of a few years. The organization provided teachers with front loading lessons about education in a one room schoolhouse. While Coughlin built a relationship with the organization, teachers taught the lessons and took students on the field trip. Coughlin surveyed teachers before and after the trip and declared the field trip effective. The two themes that emerged from her research (relationships with the community are essential, and there must be relevant connections between curriculum and field work) are congruent with a great deal of research on expedition based, experiential education.

Morris (2012) delves deeper into an analysis of field trip best practices. In her study, Morris tested a new method for conducting field trips in her science classes. She noted that before implementing this new method, field trips were typically a less effective way for her students to learn. For example, although students were given assignments (scavenger hunts, etc.) to complete at the museum they visited, Morris noted that students spent most of the time in the museum looking for their friends. The class would talk about what they learned at the museum when they returned, but their experiences were so varied that it became difficult to draw out any larger meaning for the class as a whole. One of the first things Morris did to re-frame the way

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field trips work in her class was to re-name them expeditions. She explained to her class that scientists go on expeditions, they “travel for the purpose of learning something new” (Morris, 2012). She also developed an inquiry lesson surrounding the field trip- students previewed the museum website and created a question that they wanted to answer while they were there. Upon return from the field trip, students created a self-directed project to showcase the answers to their questions.

The vocabulary that Morris establishes through her research in this article is helpful in re-framing the way that students, parents, and educators approach the idea of field trips. The term expedition helped students, parents, teachers, administration, and other educators see field trips as a genuine learning experience. Students had a purpose for being at the museum (etc.) that they were visiting. It was the classroom for the day.

### **Community**

Community is a key element of a successful expedition based, experiential education program. There must be a strong community within the school, and the school must have a strong relationship with organizations, businesses, and experts in the community at large. Community can help sustain expedition based, experiential education programs, and it can help deepen learning.

In her study of an Expeditionary Learning model in an urban school, Ikpeze (2013) discusses the importance of community as a strategy to help close the achievement gap. Her approach to her research was socio-cultural, so there was an implied understanding that learning happens in a community, not in isolation. One way the school in the study established community amongst the students was through a weekly school wide assembly in which students of various ages presented or performed their work. Teachers also created community through

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cross-curricular learning. Ikpeze wrote about how the teachers collaborated to form relevant curriculum that tied to the community: students read *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* in English class, studied DNA in Science, conducted a Skype conversation with a doctor in the DNA field, viewed a film about Lacks at a local cinema, and took a trip to a local university to see materials referenced in the text. These expeditions created community in the school in part because they were cross curricular; the topic moved from class to class and created a cohesive community around learning. The learning also happened in the community on the expeditions, thus creating a real world understanding of the content.

Ikpeze (2013) also emphasized the importance of community connections in the Expeditionary Learning model. Her study shows that a strong Parent Teacher Association can help with community outreach. The PTA can assist in organizing and executing field trips and fundraisers. In addition, standing relationships with local businesses, organizations, colleges, and experts can ease logistics associated with expeditions while simultaneously deepening learning for students.

Martinez and McGrath (2104) also uncovered a few methods for creating community in their research around innovative public schools. Many of the schools in their study established community through “Dis-Orientations” at the beginning of the school year. Avalon High, Casco Bay High, and others welcomed incoming freshman classes by introducing them to the emotional and intellectual environment of the school, rather than the physical layout and a list of rules. At Casco Bay High, freshmen and teachers began with a camping field trip. They learned about the basics cultural concepts of community through a location specific lens, and they established their own community. They camped together, cooked together, and established a reciprocal teaching and learning model. Then, upperclassmen arrived on the last day of the trip and ceremonially

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accepted the new freshmen into the larger school community. Avalon High had a Dis-Orientation called Project Brainstorm. In this case, students brainstormed things they wanted to know and things they were good at or knew about. This first day activity set an understanding that everyone had something to contribute to a community of learning and helped decide the curriculum for the year.

Smith Walters, Hargrove, and Ervin (2014) attribute the success of Hawken School's re-adaptation of an experiential education model in part to the location of the school. At Hawken, experiential education means learning by doing, and learning in the community. The community is the classroom. In their study, the researchers demonstrated the unique approach of Hawken by analyzing one of the senior elective classes available. The title of the class was called Homelessness. Students engaged in long-term volunteering with the local homeless community and learned to write creative non-fiction about their experiences. Hawken based their curriculum around community issues and resources and were therefore easily able to work in the field when they moved the school to a new location in the middle of the community. The physical position the school had in the community made it easier for students to go on expeditions in the community.

Fernandez and Gama (2009) looked at how expedition based, experiential education conducted in the local community positively affected social and emotional growth, as well as academic growth. This study examined the effectiveness of expedition based, experiential education (through a program called Classrooms Without Walls) in a North American School located in Colombia. Fernandez and Gama defined experiential education as an intentional, academic learning experience, and examined the relationship between multiple intelligences and the effectiveness of experiential education. The school under study (unnamed) required that all

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trips have academic and social elements. The academic element is self-explanatory; expeditions were required to be academically focused. The social element speaks more to another set of the school's focus- to learn about and engage with various social, cultural, and ethnic sectors of Colombia. This study measured a student's social, academic, and emotional growth in experiential education, and emphasized that the connection with the community was an essential element in growth.

Martinez and McGrath (2104) explored how to create positive and effective relationships with businesses in *Deeper Learning*. This study also emphasized the importance of a school creating relationships within a community. Forming a relationship with a business was very beneficial if it was in fact a relationship, not just a hands-off money donation. If students worked with businesses (internships, buddy/mentor programs, partnerships for specific projects, etc.) the following could happen:

- Students saw how their learning is relevant in the real world.
- Students built networks and learned how to network.
- Businesses who complained that employees were not critical thinkers, etc. had the opportunity to train the people they needed before they were even old enough to enter the workforce.

Once again, we are also seeing that the location of a school within its community matters. If a school is located in a dynamic area of its community, it will have more opportunities to easily step outside the classroom and into the field. For example, Science Leadership Academy students took classes at The Franklin Institute, a science museum in Philadelphia. Their school building did not have many facilities in itself, but they were situated a short walk from the Franklin Institute- they took their science lessons there. They listened to



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lectures from experts who work at the museum, and interacted with exhibits (Martinez & McGrath, 2014). The walls of the traditional classroom dissolved: the local museum was the classroom for these students.

Thus, a common theme occurring throughout the literature is the importance of a school's relationship with the community. In expedition based, experiential education, the walls of the traditional classroom disappear. The community is the classroom.

### **Structural Change**

Expedition based, experiential education requires a fundamental shift in the structure of a school's schedule and distribution of responsibility. Most schools employ a traditional daily bell schedule. In this type of learning environment students spend a little less than an hour on six or seven distinct subjects a day. Some schools have moved to block scheduling, but in both cases, students switch rooms, teachers, and classmates for each class- this process can disrupt community, in depth learning, and make planning field trips difficult. The reformation of the school schedule is an important piece in successfully implementing an expedition based, experiential education model because it provides teachers with the necessary time to collaborate, and it ensures that classes are not disrupted when students are engaging in field trips. Schools that have successfully implemented expedition based, experiential education (EBEE), redistributed responsibility amongst school teachers, administrators, and even students in a way that strays from the norm. It appears that empowering students and teachers with decision making roles creates community and deepens learning.

Smith-Walters, Hargrove, and & Ervin (2014) examine one way the yearly school calendar can be altered to let EBEE thrive. They looked at a school that adopted a specific variation on the block schedule. The school has two regular semesters of block scheduling, plus

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two, three week intensives. The intensives are an important part of this approach to EBEE because they offer the scheduling flexibility needed to go on extended expeditions. In traditional education, students miss other classes when they go on field trips. This can disrupt the flow of their learning in the classes they miss, and it can cause frustration amongst teachers. When a few weeks are set aside every year specifically for expeditions, students do not miss other classes- they are all engaged with learning in the field.

Meanwhile, King Middle School in Portland, Maine takes an even more flexible approach to the schedule (Martinez and McGrath, 2014). Their daily bell schedule is open ended. There is not a consistent bell schedule, but rather all teachers in the school work together to decide how to allot school time based on the current needs of the school. When students are deep in a project, large chunks of time are set aside to dive deep into their work. There aren't scheduling conflicts when students go on expeditions, because the schedule is simply changed to accommodate the expedition. The schedule changes as the workflow changes (Martinez and McGrath, 2014).

Avalon High, one of the schools in Martinez and McGrath's (2014) extensive study of innovative public schools does not have a principal. The role of the principal is absorbed into the role of the teachers. Teachers create the yearly and daily bell schedule, Teachers make choices about the professional development they need. They hire other teachers. They establish ties with the community for field trips. Of course, all of these tasks and responsibilities will increase a teacher's workload significantly. However, teachers at Avalon High also have significantly more prep time than the average teacher. This prep time is possible because of the way the school schedule is established. While students are working on long term projects (either independently or with their peers) teachers have time to make decisions about how to run the

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school. This increase in teacher prep time is a common theme among the schools that Martinez and McGrath researched.

Organizing expeditions, especially overnight expeditions, is a process that takes time, resources, and energy. Martinez and McGrath note that Casco Bay High School (Portland, Maine) has a helpful model for implementing overnight expeditions on a school wide level (2014). Casco Bay students participate in Junior Journey- a multi-day expedition that takes place at the end of the student's junior year. Students begin preparing for the trip when they become sophomores. In addition to preparing academically, students also prepare for the trip logistically. Students organize, promote, and execute fundraisers. Martinez and McGrath attribute the success of their fundraisers in part to the sense of community that is already established in the school. Students are also all responsible for at least a portion of their own travel expenses. Approximately half of students at Casco Bay are living in poverty, so this can be a challenge for some. Students can even make contracts to complete small jobs around the school in order to earn their money. They have also found that being held responsible for their expenses also increases their emotional and academic investment in the trip itself. The distribution of responsibility for the trip amongst all members of the school make for an all-around richer learning experience for the students.

Buy-in and empowerment can be extremely effective tools to create community and deepen learning. Avalon High does this through a strategy called Project Brainstorm: a Dis-Orientation activity that empowers students in learning choices (Martinez and McGrath, 2014). Students begin the school year with two brainstorm: things they are good at, or know how to do, and things that they want to know. Teachers create effective curriculum around student interest, thus embracing the role that Dewey imagined for teachers (Dewey,

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1938). Students are more invested in their learning because they play a part in designing their learning. They are empowered learners.

Students are not the only ones who perform better when they are empowered to make important decisions in their education. Teachers are more likely to be successful in adopting an expedition based, experiential education program if they do so voluntarily. When Kenney, Militana, and Donohue (2003) evaluated the effectiveness of adopting an expedition based, experiential education model that was designed to address environmental education in schools, they found that teacher buy in was the factor that made the implementation of this program successful. The school in their study worked with the Watershed Learning Center (WLC) in order to address environmental education in schools. They created curriculum that asks students to learn about the environment in their own neighborhood. Students then went on walking expeditions around their neighborhood and conducted field experiments that helped them develop a better understanding of their own natural environments.

The adaptation of this curriculum was found to be effective due in large part to the way it was presented to the teachers. It was voluntary and supplemental. Teachers were enthusiastic about it and integrated it into their existing curriculum. This is an important element to keep in mind when making systematic changes in schools. Teachers have experienced a great deal of top down, mandated changes. Like students in the classroom, teachers in schools need support and buy in. They need to understand the changes as authentic.

### **Deepened Learning**

Experiential Education deepens learning for all students. When students learn in an authentic environment, they are able to understand the connection between the content and its

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real world relevance. Expedition based, experiential education is especially helpful for closing the achievement gaps for urban, rural, and otherwise disadvantaged students.

In the previously examined study of Casco Bay High, Martinez and McGrath (2014) not only explain how the school effectively re-distributed responsibility, but also discuss how student emotional and academic investment in their Junior Journey deepened student learning. Students began preparing academically for the trip in their sophomore year. Preparation was thematic and cross-curricular. For example, when students created a multi-media documentary at a Habitat for Humanity site in West Virginia, students prepared by reading books about poverty in English class (*Grapes of Wrath* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*), studied the carbon cycle in science, and investigated the effects of the Industrial revolution in humanities. Students also learned documentary filmmaking skills from outside professionals. Because of their thorough academic preparation and investment in the trip, students were able to succeed. Like in Ikpeze's (2013) study, a thematic approach to curriculum that creates community and deeper understanding among students.

Sheppard, Lipson, Hansbrough and Gilbert (2013) examined the relationship between deepened learning, Sense of Place, and field trips. Sense of Place is a theory that explains how students understand a location through three lenses: geology, ecology, and cultural history. In this study, the author investigated the role of field trips in enhancing a student's understanding of a Sense of Place. In other words, did interacting with and studying/identifying rocks, plants, etc. in a particular location increase a student's understanding of a sense of place? Sheppard et. al. were able to conclude that it does by comparing their pre-tests with summative tests and analyzing their field observations. This finding is synchronous with Dewey's assertions about the powers of learning in an authentic environment.

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Experiential Education deepens learning for all students, but it is especially important for disadvantaged or underprivileged populations. Greene, Kisida, and Bowen (2014) conducted research regarding the educational value of culturally enriching field trips. It is important to note that they were distinctly focusing on culturally enriching field trips. Cultural enrichment field trips are valuable experiences, but they fall in the “special extra” category discussed previously. These types of field trips (in this case, a trip to an art museum) do not necessarily tie directly to curriculum, but they are academically and culturally relevant. For example, students do not go to the art museum to see a specific Dorothea Lange exhibit to enhance their study of *Of Mice and Men*. They visit the art museum as a whole and learn about all the pieces that are there. However, Greene and Bowen’s research indicate that culturally enriching field trips have the long term impact desired in education, and they help students engage with learning in the real world. Their study indicated that, after visiting Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, students recalled factual information, had higher levels of critical thinking, and had greater historical empathy. Moreover, students also showed higher levels of tolerance and were more likely to return to the museum on a subsequent visit in their own time. Greene and Bowen also note that this was a particularly important experience for rural students because they are less likely to have exposure to these culturally enriching experiences that produce historical empathy and tolerance.

Additionally, expeditions can help vulnerable populations of students because they can help them envision college and career pathways. In his study, Hutson (2011) focused on a group of students in rural Texas who were doing poorly in science classes. The state of Texas has standards in the science curriculum around making connections between in-class content and career opportunities, but participants self-identified as being unable to make a connection

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between content and career opportunities. They went on an expedition to a vocational/technology training center to better understand the connection between the content in their science class and “the real world.” This is a prime example of expedition based, experiential education. Students who went on the trip self-reported a much greater understanding of science content and career opportunities. Hutson also addressed an important challenge facing rural schools: low funds due to low enrollment. With low funds, high teacher turnover rate, and poor/non-existent role models at home (according to Hutson), students were left without ideas as to what their own professional lives could look like as adults. Hutson noted three technical/vocational schools within a 15 mile radius. While this location provides for relatively viable field trip experiences, the students had never visited them. Though the school seemed to be situated in a good location for expedition based, experiential education, the lack of community in the school (due to the high teacher turnover rate) got in the way. This study showed how expeditions can benefit at risk, rural students. Expeditions can help them envision careers and futures that they had not previously been able to imagine, and they can also increase content knowledge.

### **Conclusion**

The research reveals a significant consensus when it comes to how to effectively execute expedition based, experiential education. The literature shows that expeditions need to be connected to the curriculum and they need to require academic preparation before the trip takes place. When students learn in an authentic environment, their learning is more meaningful. This type of learning is beneficial for all students and is especially important for vulnerable populations.

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In order to implement expedition based, experiential education on a school-wide scale, schools need to undergo several changes. The daily bell schedule and the yearly calendar need to be augmented to accommodate expeditions. Moreover, teachers and students need to be empowered to make high level decisions about curriculum and school structure. Community can also help support expedition based, experiential education. If there is a strong community within the school, and if the school has strong ties within the community, there is more opportunity for deepened learning.

If the research shows that expedition based, experiential education deepens learning for students, and if there are commonly agreed upon practices for the best implementation of expedition based, experiential education, why does it remain the exception, rather than the norm for secondary public education? There is a gap between what the research shows as best practice, and the reality of public education. The purpose of this research is to better understand the experiences, perceptions and attitudes that educators working in the field- teachers, administrators, and parent board members- have towards expedition based, experiential education in order to better understand what factors contribute to the gap between the establish best practice in the academic research and current practice in most public schools today.



## Chapter 3: Methods

### Research Approach

The purpose of this research is to better understand how teachers, administrators, and parents experience and perceive expedition based, experiential education in order to better understand the gap between established best practices and current practices in most public schools. Specifically, this study explores the following questions.

- What beliefs do teachers, parents, and administrators hold about expedition based, experiential education?
- What experiences do teachers, parents and administrators have with expedition based, experiential education?
- What prevents willing teachers from teaching within the expedition based, experiential education methodology?
- Are some teachers unwilling to teach this way? Why?
- Why is expedition based, experiential education the exception, rather than the norm, in standard public high school education?

Since the purpose of this research is so focused on the experience, perceptions and attitudes that participants have, it was very important to construct a research project in which the voices of the participants were fully understood. Therefore, this research involved a Mixed Methods approach that relied heavily on the concept of a dialogic spiral (Kinloch & San Pedro, 2014).

The dialogic spiral is an effective approach to a qualitative research project. When employing this technique in an interview, one assumes that meaning will be created between the interviewer and the interviewee. The interviewee does not hold more knowledge or authority than the interviewer. As Kinloch and San Pedro (2014) explain, “the conversation moves back

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and forth when the speaker becomes the listener and the listener becomes the speaker” (p.30). In a dialogic spiral interview, the experiences and perspectives of the participants are synthesized into a larger meaning through a conversation with the researcher.

This research includes both interviews and survey responses, which technically makes it a Mixed Methods approach. While the interviews in this research focused on an in-depth understanding of a carefully varied selection of participants, the surveys were meant to gather a general sampling of perspectives from the entirety of one school. Yet, even the surveys leaned towards the qualitative- almost all questions provided the participant with an opportunity to elaborate further on their answer.

### **Research Sites and Participants**

All schools and participants listed below are referred to through pseudonyms.

**Ponderosa Middle School.** This is a Northern California Middle school with an expedition based, experiential education academy within the school (hereafter known as the Ponderosa Academy). This school is in a suburban community that is currently experiencing significant growth. There are 766 students attending this school; 7.2% are English Language Learners and 28.5% qualify for free and reduced lunch. Nearly all of the official testing data indicates that students at this school are performing below grade level. (California Department of Education, 2017).

Ponderosa Academy was established in 1995. It contained approximately 60 students in total- a combination of seventh and eighth graders. A few years later a sixth grade class was added, and today the program consists of approximately 180 sixth, seventh, and eighth graders. Students in Ponderosa Academy spend approximately 35 days per year off campus on

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expeditions. Students go on day trips (to the symphony, or to study the Golden Gate Bridge before they begin their own bridge building projects), but the majority of their expeditions are overnight camping trips. Some notable overnight expedition locations include Yosemite, Lassen Cinder-Cone, Monterey, The Oregon Shakespeare Festival, and Los Angeles. Regardless of the destination or length of the expedition, students in Ponderosa Academy travel for the purpose of learning. The teachers in Ponderosa Academy very clearly state that these are not “for fun” field trips. Of course, the students do enjoy the expeditions, but the purpose of the expedition is to learn. Students always have a notebook and pencil on hand, and students always have an assignment. For example, after students hiked to the top of Lassen Cinder-Cone, a parent chaperone, who is also a geologist, gave the students a lecture on their geological surroundings. Students asked questions, took notes, and drew sketches of their surroundings. They learned geology in an authentic environment. Therefore, I chose to include this program and school in this research because they appeared to be a successful model for implementing expedition based, experiential education in standard secondary public education.

There are three categories of participants from this location: teachers, parent board members, and the principal. There is a variety of experience amongst the teachers- one is a founding member of the program who went away for some years, but recently returned. This teacher, Jason Monroe, was selected for interview because of his experience establishing the program. The second teacher, Jeremy Coven, came to the program a few years after it was established. He has been present for nearly all of the program’s history and has watched it expand and solidify in the community. He was chosen for his extensive teaching experience within the program. Julia Forest, also has extensive experience with the Ponderosa Academy; she has been a member of the parent board for six years. She was interviewed because of her

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experience in organizing expeditions for the students. Administrator Flynn Charrington showed enthusiasm for the project and was asked for an interview so that his experiences and perceptions could be compared with the administration at Jack London High School.

**Jack London High School.** I am a teacher at Jack London High School. This high school is in the Northern California Bay Area. There are approximately 1,294 students in attendance, and attendance is growing every year. Approximately 26.1% are English Language Learners and 52.3% qualify for free and reduced lunch. The school is approximately 65% Hispanic and 29% white (California Department of Education, 2017). The school is in a diverse district- it is partially comprised of affluent, predominantly white students and partially comprised of lower income, typically Latinx students, from first and second generation immigrant families. The school offers two project based learning academies that incorporate many elements of experiential education, but the essential expedition component is scarce. Three different teachers take students on international trips during school breaks (service learning, language, and cultural enrichment). The district is not affiliated with these trips.

Five teachers, one administrator, and the superintendent of this school were interviewed. The teachers that were interviewed represent a variety of teachers at the school. Juliet Peterson is a language teacher who takes students on related theater field trips and international language field trips. She was invited to participate in this research for her depth of experience with field trips. Science teacher Helen Bothell takes students on international service learning trips and has previous experience with expedition based, experiential education programs. Aidan Williams teaches in experiential education academies within the school that do not regularly incorporate the expeditions- he was invited to participate in order to better understand why teachers who otherwise seem enthusiastic about this approach do not include the

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field trip component. Physical Education teacher Maya White was interviewed about her experiences in teaching an outdoor, expedition based PE class in hopes that she would provide insight about equity issues and the long-term sustainability of such programs. Sierra Vance was my co-teacher in Aspen Academy, a now non-existent experiential education academy in Jack London High. She was asked to participate for her insights about difficulties teachers face in experiential education academies. Administrator Benjamin Greer has held administrative positions in the district for five years. Before working at Jack London High, he was a teacher in schools that incorporated many elements of the experiential education model. He is an advocate for experiential education and can speak from the perspective of a former teacher and a current administrator. Finally, Superintendent Elliott Wynn was interviewed in order to provide a better understanding of how legal issues may affect a student's access to Experiential Education.

**John Muir High School.** This public high school is in the Northern California Bay Area. There are approximately 1,527 students in attendance. Just under 2% of students are English Language Learners and 7.5% qualify for free and reduced lunch. Overall, students perform above average on state tests (California Department of Education, 2017). This school is in an affluent area of the county. Jonathan Bautista has been a teacher for over 24 years. He established the Global Studies program, which he runs for the district. He was interviewed about his experiences in establishing, maintaining, and growing the Global Studies program.

### **Sampling Procedure**

All interview requests were sent via email. Since I already had a primary contact at each school before beginning this research study, some of the other interview choices were influenced by the perspectives of my primary contact. Occasionally these initial contacts would recommend

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another person on campus who they felt would offer a unique perspective to the research. Survey requests were emailed to all teachers at Jack London High School.

### **Methods**

**Survey.** The purpose of the survey was to collect a wide sampling of information about the perspectives and experiences that teachers at Jack London High School, concerning expedition based, experiential education. The survey was Cross-Sectional; all the survey data was collected at one point in time.

The survey information was collected anonymously through Google Forms. Though teachers completed the survey through their school google accounts, the survey was constructed so the results would not be associated with Google accounts. The survey was accompanied by a letter that explained the research and provided comprehensive definitions of relevant terms. The survey was sent out to all teachers through email.

Many of the questions invited participants to elaborate upon their responses in a narrative format. In consideration of the amount of time it would take a participant to elaborate on each question, the survey instructions reminded participants that elaboration would be helpful, but was also optional. Participants were encouraged to elaborate more thoroughly on a few questions that spoke to them, rather than trying to do so for all.

**Interviews.** Interviews were conducted at a time and place that was convenient and comfortable for all parties. Pseudonyms were used in all interview records. Interviews were recorded digitally so that I could ensure all my attention was focused on being present and engaging in a dialogic spiral. I had a prepared list of questions for each research participant. The initial plan was to ask all interviewees the same questions in the same order. However, I quickly realized that this method was going to be ineffective for the type of research

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I was conducting. The purpose of the interviews was to hear participant stories about their own experiences. My focus shifted from the initial, rigid plan. Instead, I followed the lead of my participants. Some were confident and loose with their stories right away. With others, I would ask a few questions before we found the “right” question: the one that inspired the interviewee to start telling stories about their experiences. I let participants talk as long as they felt the need too, even if they began to ramble off topic. Often, they said the most interesting things the longer they had been talking. When I felt them winding down, I started to ask questions and engage in the dialogic spiral.

### **Researcher Positionality**

It is important to note that I have a personal connection with two of these three schools. In the late 1990’s I graduated from the experiential education program at Ponderosa Middle School. The experiences I had in that program had a profound, long lasting effect on my experiences with education. The program inspired me to continually explore and learn from my own community, it ignited a desire to study abroad in college, and it eventually fueled a desire to give these kinds of learning experiences to others. One of the teachers I worked with while conducting research at this school was my teacher when I was in middle school. The existing relationship I had with this program created a more comfortable entry point for conducting authentic research.

It is also important to note that I teach at Jack London High School. I am also one of the teachers who takes students on international trips during school breaks. My own experiences studying abroad in college had a profound effect on my own personal and educational development. When I decided to go back to school and get my teaching credential, I requested brochures from student travel companies at the same time I was collecting teaching credential

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program brochures from various colleges. I knew that I wanted to be able to give my students the same kinds of extraordinary educational experiences that I was lucky enough to have.

I am a member of, and an advocate of the communities in which I was conducting research. Conducting research with people that one already has positive, established relationships with can be a beneficial thing- it can ensure that there is trust and understanding in the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee. However, this level of trust and understanding can backfire. As Seidman (2013) says, friends can “assume they understand each other.” (p.46) implying that the “understanding” can actually be an assumption. I remained conscious of this phenomena throughout each interview. At the end of each question, I did a quick mental check- did I assume anything about the response this interviewee just provided? If so, I asked a follow up question to clarify and dig deeper. My awareness of my own bias towards expedition based, experiential education also inspired me to actively seek out experiences and perceptions that were different to my own.

### **Data Analysis**

After each interview, I recorded field notes that contained contextual information about the interview we had just experienced, as well as initial thoughts that emerged from the conversations. I listened to interview recordings once after each interview. Interviews were not transcribed, but I did copy relevant direct quotes as they presented themselves in the review of the recording. Interviews were also coded. An emergent coding system was utilized in this project- codes were not preselected, but instead arose from patterns that presented themselves in the interviews. This method of coding was selected to help avoid assumption and to aid the process of the dialogic spiral.



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Survey results were analyzed through charts and graphs that were created by Google Forms. Narrative responses were coded through emergent codes.

### **Reliability and Validity**

The primary method I utilized when checking for validity and reliability in this study was triangulation. The themes were established through emergent codes across multiple different data sources: the interviews from all participants at all the schools, and the narrative responses from survey results at Jack London High School. As previously stated, each of these participants and schools were chosen in hopes that they would represent a variety of experiences with EBEE. Though each participant may talk about the codes in different ways, the same topics, or codes, emerged in nearly every source of data. For example, teachers at Ponderosa Academy spoke about support in the context of the important parent support they receive from the Ponderosa Academy Parent Board. Other teachers at Jack London High School spoke about the lack of support they receive from administration. Though each participant had different experiences with support, it was still a topic that was an important part of their experience with EBEE.

## Chapter 4: Findings

Expedition based experiential education remains the exception, rather than the norm, in standard public education. While this type of education maybe may be philosophically supported by educators, the process is typically prohibitive within the existing school model. In what follows below, I begin by explaining the factors that prevent most teachers from participating in expedition based, experiential education programs. These factors include the difficult relationship between expedition based, experiential education and the traditional school system, the importance of buy in from parents, students and teachers, and finally, the importance of experiencing the pay-off. Each of the following sections includes a table that is designed to help the reader keep track of the multiple schools and participants in this study.

### The System: Fighting it and Working it

<i>Table 1: The System: Fighting it and Working it</i>	
<b>Teachers and Administrators</b>	
Jack London High School	Helen Bothell: Teacher
Ponderosa Middle School	Jason Monroe: Teacher
<b>Finances and Logistics</b>	
Jack London High School	Survey: 42 Teacher Responses Aidan Williams: Teacher Benjamin Greer: Administrator
<b>Reputation and Image</b>	
Jack London High School	Maya White: Teacher
Ponderosa Middle School	Jeremy Coven: Teacher
John Muir High School	Jonathan Bautista: Teacher, Global Studies Director

**Teachers and Administrators.** Jason Monroe, middle school teacher at Ponderosa Middle School, had been teaching for approximately five years when the opportunity to address the problems he was experiencing at his school arose. The transition from elementary school to middle school can be difficult for students. In his experience, students would come in lost. They were used to working under one teacher and one set of rules in elementary school. In middle

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school, they suddenly had seven different teachers, seven different sets of rules, and seven different social environments to encounter on a daily basis. This description of the middle school experience may sound like a basic description, but Monroe was concerned about the underlying issues. Students would transition from one class to another, and each teacher would be unaware of the social or academic issues that had happened the class before. There was no unity in solving problems amongst the teachers. There was no inter-disciplinary or hands on work. The 50 minute class periods were restrictive in time. In short, the experience felt disjointed. His comment, “Twelve to thirteen year olds don’t belong within four walls” succinctly captured his dissatisfaction with the typical middle school student’s experience.

In his fifth year of teaching, Monroe’s school experienced some change in leadership. It was a fairly rocky time, and the relationship between teachers and administration was a bit strained. They were eventually assigned an interim principal, Martina Richmond, who was not planning on staying at the school when the interim period was over. Monroe describes her as someone who was not bound by politics in the same way that someone who was staying would be. She invited the teachers to propose good ideas and promised to support them. Monroe joined together with another teacher, Jane West, that he trusted and had collaborated with in the past. They proposed their idea for an expedition based, experiential education program to Richmond. They presented the program to feeder schools, got enough students to sign up, and the program was born.

Richmond chose not to tell the superintendent about the program until after the students had signed up. When he revealed this piece of the story in our interview, Monroe spoke in a tone that indicated that he thought this was a shrewd move as he spoke fondly of Richmond. She supported the teachers by empowering them, by trusting in their abilities to respond to the needs

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of the school and propose innovative ideas to address those needs. She offered forthright encouragement and followed through with her offer of support. She worked the system. Her professional support, encouragement, and trust allowed Monroe and West to create an expedition based academy within the restrictions of the traditional public school system.

Professional support from administration can be very powerful when establishing an expedition based, experiential education program in a standard public school. Helen Bothell, science teacher at Jack London High School, has a long history in expedition based, experiential education. Earlier in her career, about 25 years ago, she established an environmental education program at a different school. The school was situated next to public land, the students did restoration work with endangered species, and they had a school nursery. Yet, when Bothell tried to establish a similar class at Jack London High School, the process was different.

I put it on the books for kids to sign up for it. I was told that only three kids signed up for it. And then, after programming happened they realized that they had made a mistake and they realized that they actually did have a whole section of kids who had signed up for it. But programming had already happened. And then the next year, they kind of took it off the table. Part of what happened is that EARTH (an experiential education academy with an environmental focus) started (at another school in the district) and they didn't want to have an environmental program at both schools. We have an APES (AP Environmental Science) class, but the curriculum for that is an AP curriculum so its very structured and I wanted to have a class that would allow for the experiential education portion. For us to have a quarter on the garden, and a quarter on the mountain, and a quarter on the ocean... I didn't want the restrictions of the AP Environmental Science curriculum.

Writing a new course takes a significant amount of time and work. Bothell approximately 100 hours creating the environmental science program. A few years later, she tried to get a medical based program established at the school. Neither program was every established in the school, and Bothell has decided not to embark on the process again. "You can only bang your head against the wall so many times," she says.

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The lack of administrative support has played a pivotal role in Bothell's decision to stop trying to establish programs within the existing school system. Professional and relational support and encouragement from school leadership would have influenced her to try again the next year, after the mismanagement of the enrollment for the environmental science class. It was very discouraging to spend so much time on a new program that she thought would benefit the school and only get in return an "Oh, sorry. We lost it." Mistakes happen, and Bothell does not think that the administrators are sitting around in their offices with their feet up all day. However, she would have felt supported if someone would have encouraged her to try again the next year. With defeat and disappointment in her voice, she reflects:

That's all. It doesn't have to be money, just 'that was a really good idea. Maybe you should try that again...' Sometimes I think that support is as simple as small conversations and showing interest. Recognizing that this might be something that is good for the school, because if it is not perceived as something that is good for the school, and I've tried two angles and both of those angles were rejected, then I guess what I am offering you is not what you want.

While professional support and encouragement from administration enabled the establishment of an expedition based program at Ponderosa Middle School, a lack of professional encouragement has contributed to two experiential education programs never being able to take flight. A sense of professional trust and value between teachers and administrators is a key factor in creating expedition based, experiential education opportunities within the traditional education system.

**Money and Logistics.** Expedition based, experiential education literally asks teachers to teach outside the classroom. When a teacher chooses to engage in this type of teaching, they often find that they are not just literally venturing outside of the walls of the classroom, but they are pushing the walls of the traditional education system on a school wide level. Expedition

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based, experiential education puts stressors on the existing traditional education system because this method of teaching has different needs than more traditional teaching.

Aidan Williams has a unique teaching schedule-- he teaches in two experiential education academies, and one self-paced class. While other teachers in the school may teach one or two classes that fit outside the bounds of what one might consider traditional education, Williams does nothing but teach outside the bounds. He notes that while administration offers a philosophical support for the program--they say that the academies offer students a valuable experience for students and are overall an important part of the school --he wishes that that support would manifest in more tangible, logistical ways.

When teaching cross-curricularly, as many experiential education practitioners do, it is important for teachers who are working together to have time to collaborate. Williams works with two other teachers in one of his academies, and each of those teachers is part of a different academic department. When it comes time to make the master schedule for the next year, department chairs, administration, and counselors are charged with the task of ensuring that the three teachers all have one common prep period. Williams also stresses the importance of all three teachers needing to be present on the day they roll out a new project. He and one other teacher in the program teach their two classes in the last two periods of the day- it is easy for them to gather their two classes in one room for the project roll-out. However, they also need the third teacher, who teaches her academy classes in a different portion of the day, to be present. She needs to have her second prep period when the academy students are in their academy classes, so she can be present when necessary.

There are other, school wide concerns when it comes to making the master schedule as well. They also need to consider the needs of the rest of the department: are the remaining

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history classes, for example, arranged in a way that allows students maximum access to all the classes they want and need to take, and are the teacher contracts being honored when assigning their prep periods? Making the master schedule for a school of over a thousand students is a difficult enough task, but when one includes the two academies, several AP classes, and a few other special interest, standalone classes, the process becomes even more challenging.

Williams acknowledges the difference between the needs of experiential education and the structure of the traditional school system. “You can’t have academies at a school like this without having it disrupt the existing systems,” he says. “The existing systems were designed to support a traditional classroom structure. These programs are a pain in the ass. They don’t fit into a nice neat little box.” There are some years when the program gets what it needs within the master schedule, and there are years that it doesn’t. Williams reflects, “When we don’t get that, they have to understand that they are making a choice. And their choice is to destabilize the academy. They don’t recognize it that way. They don’t see it that way.” This difference in perspective is important to note. Williams feels the weight of this decision heavily. When the academy’s needs are not met through the master schedule, he sees it as a serious lack of support from administration. To him, this decision undermines their academy. But he also notes, “they don’t see it that way.” This is the philosophical support, but lack of logistical support mentioned earlier. This perceived lack of support is especially draining for Williams because he and the other teachers in the academy are already doing a lot of extra work to compensate for the discrepancies between the experiential education teaching method and the traditional education system. Experiential education has lots of moving parts that one doesn’t get with what Williams calls “text-book education.” Teachers are building curriculum and teaching together, so they can’t just quickly make decisions by themselves, in their own rooms, when it comes time to plan

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the next lessons. They need to meet, plan cross-circularly, and organize. Even simply checking equipment in and out for students on a daily basis, and maintaining that equipment is a factor. It's not teaching, but it is a task that needs to be done, and most of the time it needs to be done outside of class. The workload does not fit into a traditional school day; teachers must go above and beyond, so when a new obstacle is thrown at teachers because they don't get what they need from the master schedule, the weight of that decision is felt heavily.

Another form of logistical support that is lacking is financial. The Ponderosa Academy does not receive any financial assistance from the district, Bautista does not have access to district funding for the Global Studies program, and most teachers at Jack London High do not have access to funds for field trips. When speaking about the financial obstacles of planning a trip, most teachers at Jack London High focused on busses. The district contracts bus services out to a private company. The busses take elementary school students to and from school in the morning and afternoon. They are available for reservation between drop off and pick up hours and are expensive. If a teacher needs a bus outside of that time slot, they must go through an alternative private company, which is triple the cost. Teachers at Jack London High School who take their students on field trips indicated that finding money was the number one obstacle they faced in planning trips. Teachers who do not take their students on trips indicated financial concerns as the second reason. Jack London Principal, Benjamin Greer, says "All the folks that go on trips have figured out the financial piece. Either families are donating to fund programs, or they have a secure funding source like AVID. Art boosters kicks in for some of these trips. I think it comes down to money."

Time is also a logistical stressor that teachers experience when planning expeditions. In the formative years of the Expedition Based Program, teachers Monroe and West executed every



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part of the program. Of course they planned curriculum and graded work, as any teacher does. On top of that, they planned the expeditions. They filed paperwork through the district to get approval. They contacted campgrounds and made reservations for 60 students and a handful of chaperones to set up camp on the group campsites. They planned hikes. They purchased tickets to shows in San Francisco. They arranged tours. They distributed and collected permission slips. They collected checks from each student for each individual trip. They photocopied each check before submitting each check to the district office. These tasks, plus many more, are all essential components of planning an expedition. They are also tasks that require an extraordinary amount of time and effort, especially when one has to jump through all the logistical hoops that one must jump through when planning a field trip through the school district.

The amount of time that it takes to organize the logistics of field trips can be overwhelming and unsustainable in the long term. This is not an experience that is unique to Ponderosa Middle School. When surveyed, teachers at Jack London High proclaimed that the logistics of organizing field trips were time consuming and confusing. This complaint was common amongst both teachers who do take students on field trips and those who don't.

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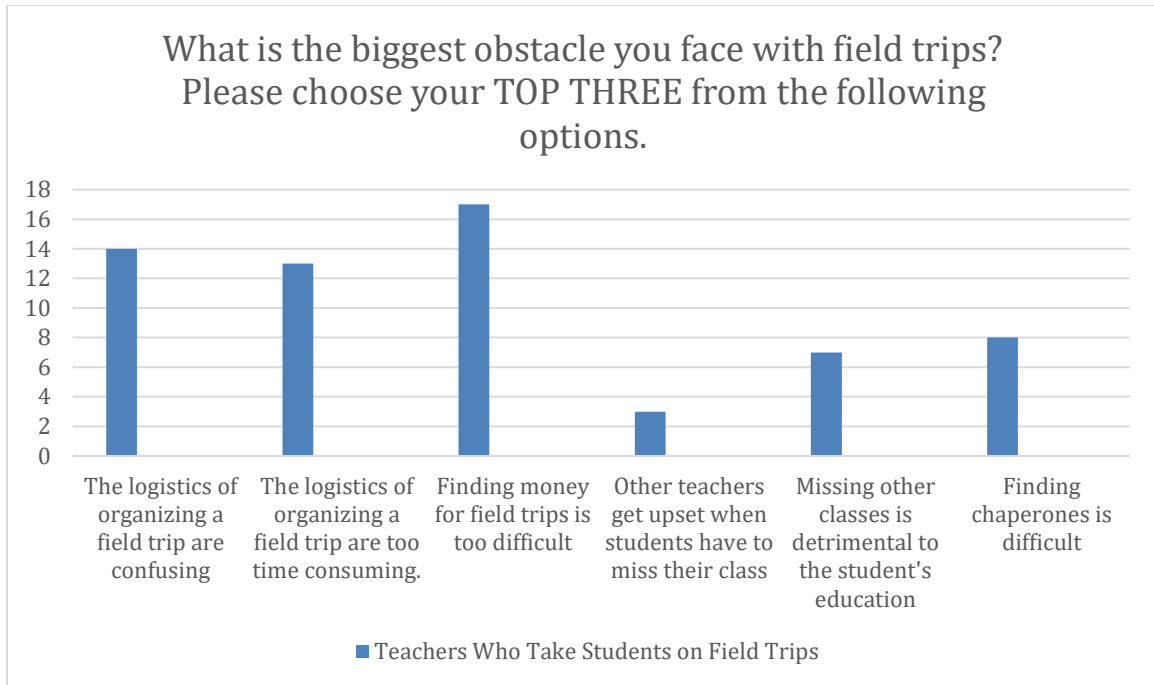


Figure 1: Obstacles Teachers Face With Field Trips

Teachers confirmed their frustrations in write in comments. One teacher who does take students on trips responded with the following:

The paperwork that needs to be turned in is confusing and often different depending on who you talk to. Many times I have got the run around in the office because no one has a clear answer and when they do it is different than what I was told the year before. It also takes a lot of time out of your preparation time for your classes because you have to correspond with different groups and find transportation. This is all done during your time you need to be grading or preparing lessons. There is in my opinion a big lack of support with the whole system from the administration and district.

Teachers who do not do field trips also reported that field trips are “too hard to plan,” or that it’s “too much work to get approval.”

Lack of time to jump through the necessary bureaucratic hoops is clearly an obstacle in organizing field trips. Teachers at Jack London High have 95 minutes of paid prep time a day to plan lessons and grade papers for an average of one hundred and fifty students spread across five sections. They feel like they already have plenty of working overflowing out of their prep time

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and into their non-paid, personal time. The amount of time it takes to plan a field trip discourages teachers from taking students on field trips. The survey conducted at Jack London High School asked teachers: “If you have taken students on field trips in the past, why did you decide to stop? One teacher wrote, “If I had a personal assistant (not kidding!) and the bureaucracy was not so limiting, I would probably do more.”

**Reputation and image.** Once an expedition based, experiential education program has been established in a school system, the program can use the system to help ensure its existence. Jeremy Coven has taught in Ponderosa Academy for 22 years, and has therefore participated in nearly the entirety of the program’s existence. He has helped build the program as it stands today. About 10-15 years ago, the District Office implemented a new rule that affected field trips in the district: students could not travel more than 15 miles away unless they were travelling in a bus. The days of asking parents to drive on field trips was over, and all teachers were now faced with the cost prohibitive task of hiring a bus to drive on field trips. “It’s essentially shutting down field trips 15 miles from school,” Coven says. By this time, the Ponderosa Academy had successfully established a very positive reputation for itself. Parents saw the positive effect the program was having on their children. “We’ve been called a jewel in the crown of the district,” says Coven. The program had a reputation for developing very well prepared, super accelerated students who would go on to succeed in high school. The program was magnet for the district-- students began to commute from surrounding towns and counties in order to be a part of this program. The district, therefore, had an interest in protecting the program. The distinctions of the program, and the 22 year track record of very good safety, made for a little bit of special treatment when this new 15 mile rule passed. The program was allowed to continue using parent drivers, rather than busses, when going 15 miles outside of the

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district. The “15 mile rule” made organizing field trips an insurmountable task for other teachers, and children outside the program were no longer able to go on trips with anywhere near the regularity they used to.

Other programs note that a long standing reputation has contributed to their continued existence as well. Maya White, physical education teacher at Jack London High, doesn’t think that the hiking class she teaches, or the sailing class that the PE department also offers, would be able to be successfully established now. The classes were established years before most of the current district and administration. “They are just such alarmists about everything,” she says, noting the safety concerns the district has around field trips, namely the district wide rule that prohibits field trips where students will be near bodies of water. However, the programs continue because they are an established component of the school culture. Students know about them coming in and look forward to signing up for them in their sophomore years. These two unique PE classes make the school look attractive to parents and students who are considering enrolling. The school and district continue to support/allow them because they contribute positively to the school’s reputation and image.

Jonathan Bautista, Global Studies director for all high schools in a district in Northern California, also uses the program’s positive reputation to ensure the program’s continued existence and support. In 1996, Bautista organized an exchange trip with a school in France. The students were already pen-pals, visiting each other in their home countries seemed like the next logical step. The program has grown over the last 22 years, and Bautista now has an official position within the district- he helps all interested teachers plan and execute international trips for students. In this way, the traditional school system has embraced expedition based, experiential education (though the amount of work he must do to run this

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program is more of a “full time job” than a release period). He has a release period to accomplish this portion of his work, and he works closely with members of the district office, especially the budget secretary, to ensure that expeditions are available to students in the district. The district approves international trips, which can be interpreted as a sign the system has embraced the program. This is a difficult status to achieve- many other teachers who lead international trips work outside the bounds of the district.

Bautista seems well versed in the importance that a program’s image and reputation can play in ensuring its success. He began small when establishing his Global Studies program. They began with one trip, then added more trips and more teachers as word caught on amongst students and parents. “Start small, show success, and nurture it like a plant,” Bautista advises. When the program developed a positive track record among parents and students, the program became entrenched in the culture of the school. He approached and worked with people at the top levels. He pushed back when they said “no” to requests he made. He wrote emails to the board, contacted local papers, posted images to Instagram-- he demonstrated the success of the program while the trips were occurring. In this way, Bautista’s Global Studies program is similar to the Ponderosa Academy. Both programs have a public presence and a positive reputation. To put it bluntly, they make their respective schools and districts look good. Monroe suggests that the program’s reputation among parents help keep the program alive.

For 25 years what has kept this program alive is parent support. Without that, it would be really easy for admin to say, ‘well, you know this is kind of a pain in the neck, you guys want a common prep for four teachers- that puts stress on the rest of the schedule. They’ve been able to do that for us, but field trips, liability, there’s all sorts of issues that a school district can get upset about in one way or another and they can pull the plug on the program. Politically, 160 parents would be upset if suddenly the program disappeared. Parents who aren’t even in the program anymore would probably complain about it because they remember what it did for their kids.

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Though the programs may logistically be an uncomfortable fit within the traditional education system, it is in the system’s best interest to support the programs that shine so brightly within the school.

### **Opt-in and Buy-in: Choose it and Believe in it**

<i>Table 2: Buy in and Opt-in</i>	
<b>“Without the parents, it wouldn’t happen.”</b>	
Ponderosa Middle School	Jeremy Coven: Teacher Julia Forest: Parent Board
<b>Students</b>	
Jack London High	Maya White: Teacher Sierra Vance: Aspen Academy Teacher
Ponderosa Middle School	Jason Monroe: Teacher
<b>Teachers</b>	
Jack London High	Survey: 42 Teacher Participants Juliet Peterson: Teacher Elliot Wynn: Superintendent

**“Without the parents, it wouldn’t happen.”** As previously discussed, expedition based, experiential education is under supported in the traditional education system. However, if parents buy-in to the program, if they see the positive effects it has on their children and have the time and means to offer support, their support can be incredibly powerful.

The amount of time that teachers in Ponderosa Academy must spend planning a field trip has dramatically decreased, thanks to the Ponderosa Academy Parent Board. Several years ago, one parent noticed the amount of time it took the teachers to plan and execute an expedition. This parent also happened to be a lawyer. According to Coven, the parent approached the teachers and offered to use his legal expertise to establish the Ponderosa Academy Parent Board. Coven recounts the experience as follows:

They’re what allows us to function. We were working through the system years ago. We had a parent who was an attorney and he said ‘I can get you guys non-profit status and you can by-pass all these hoops you’re jumping through if you just have a parent support group.’ So he set that up for free for us. We have accountants who used to be parents in

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our program who donate their time to do our taxes every year, so it's a perfect set up. I don't think we would have those opportunities if we weren't attractive to them. Or appreciated.

The Ponderosa Academy Parent Board is a non-profit board that organizes the logistics of expeditions and fundraises for the program. The Board is a key component in the success of this program in two main ways. Primarily, they alleviate the workload for teachers; they help the teachers with the abundant amount of red tape that accompanies expedition planning. They secure reservations at campgrounds, purchase tickets to shows, coordinate tours, seek out new expedition opportunities for student: they do all the work that Monroe and West used to do in the early years of the program. To an outsider it might seem like all they are doing is making a few phone calls and writing a few checks, but the work is much more complex and time consuming than that. Most of this work needs to happen in the day, exactly when teachers need to be teaching their classes. It would be difficult to accomplish this, plus all the other curriculum planning and grading that needs to be done during a one hour prep period. Their work can also be very time sensitive in other ways. Educational tickets are often offered in limited supply and can sell out very quickly. Julia Forest, Expedition Coordinator for the Ponderosa Academy Parent Board, described the intensity of trying to get tickets for a professional production of *The Christmas Carol*. There were three different parents calling in at the exact time the tickets were released, each were waiting in the phone queue, all were hoping that one of them would be able to get the tickets. "It's like being on the phone trying to get tickets for a concert!" she said.

Most parents on the Ponderosa Academy Parent Board have a student currently in the program, but some parents remain after their children have graduated from the program. Their experience is helpful in ensuring the continued success of the program. The Board also has a binder full of notes, tips, and contact information that will help them plan future trips without

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having to reinvent the wheel each time. The Parent Board and teachers meet once or twice a month to coordinate.

The Parent Board is also important in the continued success of the Ponderosa Academy because it allows the program to process money outside of the district. Families pay monthly dues to the Ponderosa Academy Parent Board, and The Board uses those funds to pay for trips. If the money were filtered through the district, it would be an “accounting nightmare” according to Forest. There are extra steps that one must take when taking money out of an account that is established in the school district. The process is time consuming, and teachers at Jack London High reported that they have missed, or nearly missed expedition opportunities because of this obstacle. The Parent Board can write a check with much greater speed, which makes it much more likely that they will be able to secure competitive opportunities for students in the program.

**Students.** Hiking teacher, Maya White, also used to teach in Aspen Academy, an Experiential Education Academy that no longer exists at Jack London High School. Most of her time teaching in that program had occurred before I began teaching at Jack London High, so that experience was not on my radar when I requested to interview her. When speaking about the hiking program, White’s voice and demeanor was calm and positive. When I began asking her about challenges that she has faced, frustration rose in her voice and she asked if she could speak about Aspen Academy.

Aspen Academy was a two year program for 9th and 10th graders. It was promoted as a small learning community that helped students transition from middle school to high school. Though the class White taught in Aspen Academy was similar to the hiking class, her experiences in the academy were vastly different. Students in the hiking class are students who



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have actively chosen to sign up for the class; they requested the class when creating schedules for their sophomore year. Students with a good discipline record, a good attendance record, and an A or B in freshman PE are eligible. Therefore, the students who end up in the class are those who not only have actively chosen expedition based, experiential education, but they are students who White describes as “self-starters.” In Aspen Academy, the activities she did with students was similar, but the experience was very different. White explains,

Aspen, for me, sadly, was the opposite extreme. I put more effort into trying to create this program where students were more engaged- that was our goal, to create an engaging environment. The lack of appreciation was appalling. The hikes, for example. Who would not want to leave school early and go on this amazing hike? Most would whine and complain and say they didn't want to go. And here we are in this beautiful... and they were just negative. It was an awful feeling to put in so much effort... And then the parents were not appreciative, they were like complaining “Oh, my kid can't take chemistry! She has to take environmental science and she won't get into college!” It was just, like, awful. The hiking class- I don't have any of that experience. The kids are appreciative, the parents are appreciative.

But if the curriculum was so similar, why was there such a different reaction from students and parents? White attributes it to the lack of buy-in to the program.

It's the student population. These kids, a lot of them didn't sign up for it. They got forced into it because people wanted them to be in it. The more affluent parents wanted their kids in it, then those kids weren't happy because the other kids were forced into it and they weren't engaged. They didn't sign up for it. They didn't want to do it. They didn't want to do extra work. The high achiever kids were so focused on things like that they couldn't take chemistry. That was more important to them than having this better, in my opinion, educational experience.

Students in the Aspen Academy did not actively opt-in to the program. For the most part, they were there because someone else told them they were going to be there. Expedition based, experiential education is already an incompatible fit with the traditional education system and therefore requires an extra amount of work to effectively execute. If a teacher then has to spend

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extra effort trying to get buy-in from the students as well, the whole process can become very discouraging. The workload begins to outweigh the victorious moments.

Sierra Vance began teaching in the Aspen Academy in the second to the last year of the program- the same year I began teaching in the program. We were both new to the program and excited to teach in an experiential education academy. Shortly after the school year began, we realized that the vast majority of the students who were in the program not only did not sign up for it, but they didn't even know they had been put in a program. Vance elaborates,

We were blindsided. Multiple students were mentioning to us that they never chosen our course and it was hard for us to manage this in addition to just teaching a whole new class. Not only did we have to find our way in collaborating, planning units together and creating projects but we had to do all of this while trying to win over the students and parents. It took some time and eventually we were able to get the students interested into what the academy program was and even today these now seniors and juniors look back on Aspen as one of their favorite experiences in high school. It's great that we were able to turn it around but it took a lot of hard work and constant persuasion through our lessons to gain the confidence of everyone else.

The amount of work and energy that it took for us to create buy-in for the Aspen Academy was a main factor in our decision to end the program after two years. The program had a negative (and misleading) reputation that we were largely unaware of when we enthusiastically agreed to take over the academy. We strongly suspected that we would continue to fight for buy-in when students were inevitably placed in the program against their will in future years. We believed in the philosophy behind the program, but when the resistant students combined with our extra work load, it was not worth the fight.

Monroe says that it's essential to have the "right kids" in a program in order for it to be successful. The "right students" are students who are willing to work hard. "It's wonderful if they are smart and bright and charming and all that, but it's really, are they going to work hard?" Monroe says. One way to get the "right kids" into a program is to require an application

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process. Students must apply to the Ponderosa Academy; they must submit an essay, a letter of recommendation from a teacher, and a parent letter that explains how they will support the program. The application is an important part of the process because it requires that students and families take active steps to opt-in to the program. They have to actively make a choice to be in the program, and they have to spend a little bit of time committing to that choice (filling out the application). When students and families Opt-in to a program they are, for the most part, contributing to the continued success of that program.

The importance of Opting In presents a problem when one is considering how to move expedition based, experiential education from the exception to the norm in standard public education. Monroe claims that there is “No buy-in in traditional school.” One would think that offering what proponents of expedition based, experiential education would describe as more interesting educational opportunities would automatically create more buy-in among students. But, as we saw with Aspen Academy, this assumption can prove false. Forcing students to do work in an experiential education program is actually more difficult than forcing them to do work in a traditional classroom. They are often asked to do more work, and the work may even have to take place outside regular school hours. Monroe muses, “Can you make it schoolwide? I don’t know if you can because you will always have a certain population of students, parents, and teachers who are not going to buy in, and what do you do with them?”

**The Teachers.** Students and parents are not the only ones who need to buy-in, or opt-in to a program in order to make it successful. The importance of choice spreads to teachers as well. Teachers interviewed all shared a common passion for their topic, an adventurous spirit, and a pre-existing belief in the effectiveness of expedition based, experiential education. For all

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but one teacher, these three elements kept them battling through the logistical obstacles and excessive workload.

It is important to note that nearly every teacher surveyed at Jack London High School indicated that they have an interest in exploring their local community and travelling. As shown in the table below, both teachers who do take their students on field trips and teachers who don't indicated that they like to explore their community and travel-- only one teacher indicated that they do not enjoy these types of activities.

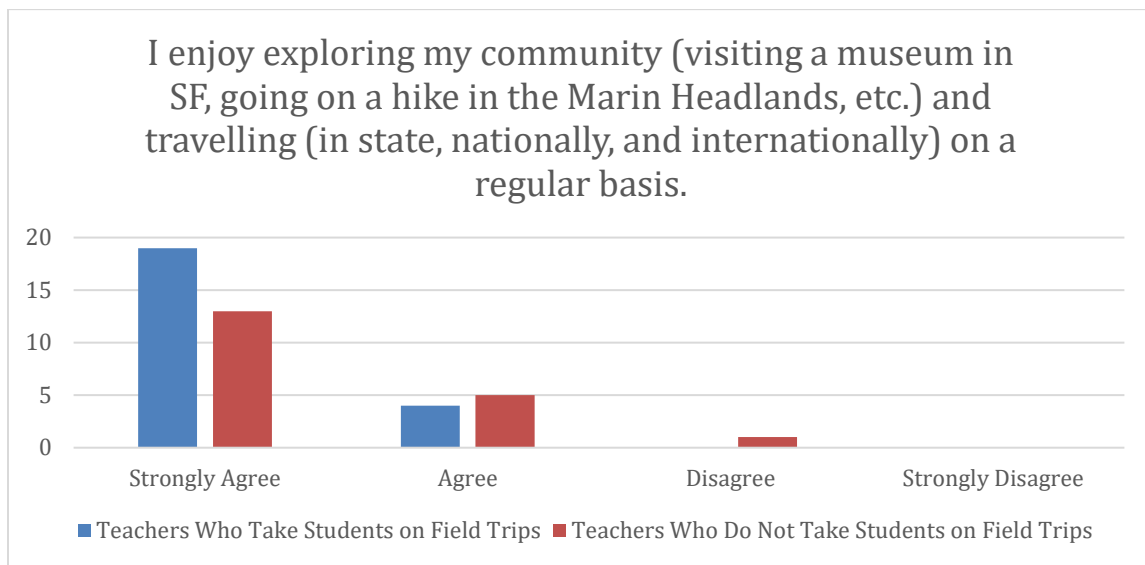


Figure 2: Teacher Travel Interest

Therefore, there must be other factors that prevent teachers from taking students on field trips. Of course workload, logistics, and lack of systemic support are deterrents. Yet, teachers who do take their students outside the bounds of the classroom experience these obstacles as well. Other possible distinguishing characteristics between teachers who take their students on trips and those who don't could include personal motivations, and a teacher's level of support in their own personal life.

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Juliet Peterson take students on international language trips in Europe. Though Peterson advertises the trips on campus and holds meeting in her classroom, the trips otherwise happen completely out of the bounds of the school and the district. Peterson does not solicit approval from the district. Students do not fill out permission slips, and the district does not hold any liability or responsibility for the trips. She does not receive any financial compensation or extra-curricular hours from the district. Though she does not have to pay for her own spot on the trip, all the work that she does to organize and execute these trips for students is unpaid. There is hours of work to be done- writing announcements for the student bulletin and parent newsletter, creating and posting flyers, planning and holding recruitment meetings, planning and holding parent meetings, emailing parents, passport management- these are just a few of the tasks that must be done. The workload is considerable, and Peterson muses,

I do wonder why I do this to myself. I could just teach! I could just be a teacher, and not take kids to the opera and to Europe, but I feel like if I did do just that, I would not be feeding the other part of myself that wants to be fed- going to Europe, teaching them classical music, all of these other things that are important to me. I feel that the experiences that they walk away with that are the strongest are the ones that don't happen in here.

Peterson goes on to talk about how she and her family are currently not in a position to travel as a family. Her trips with students feed the part of her soul that needs to be out in the world, exploring. The trips address the linguist in her. But Peterson points out that this method would not work for all teachers. She has been to Europe numerous times so,

It doesn't bother me that I am not in charge of what I am doing- that I can't just go off and hang out. I want to show them. I want to see their reaction. Because I remember how I felt being there the first time. I'm now living vicariously through them. I want to see that light go off for them and how it impacts them, and that makes it worthwhile for me. So I'm fine if my only way to get to Europe right now is by leading trips. I am totally at peace with that. I learn about myself, and I learn about kids, and I learn about the world. I think a lot of other teachers would not want to do that. If they are going to travel, they want to travel on their own terms, not on someone else's terms.

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Therefore, it is possible that the other teachers who enjoy exploration and travel want to do it in their own time, on their own terms. Exploring Paris is a different experience when one does it with 30 students, rather than with a friend or a spouse. A teacher has to opt-in to this experience for the right reasons in order for the workload to match the pay-off.

It is also possible that teachers feel under-trained in expedition based, experiential education methods. Surveyed teachers at Jack London High were asked about their beliefs about field trips. Their responses are indicated in the charts below:

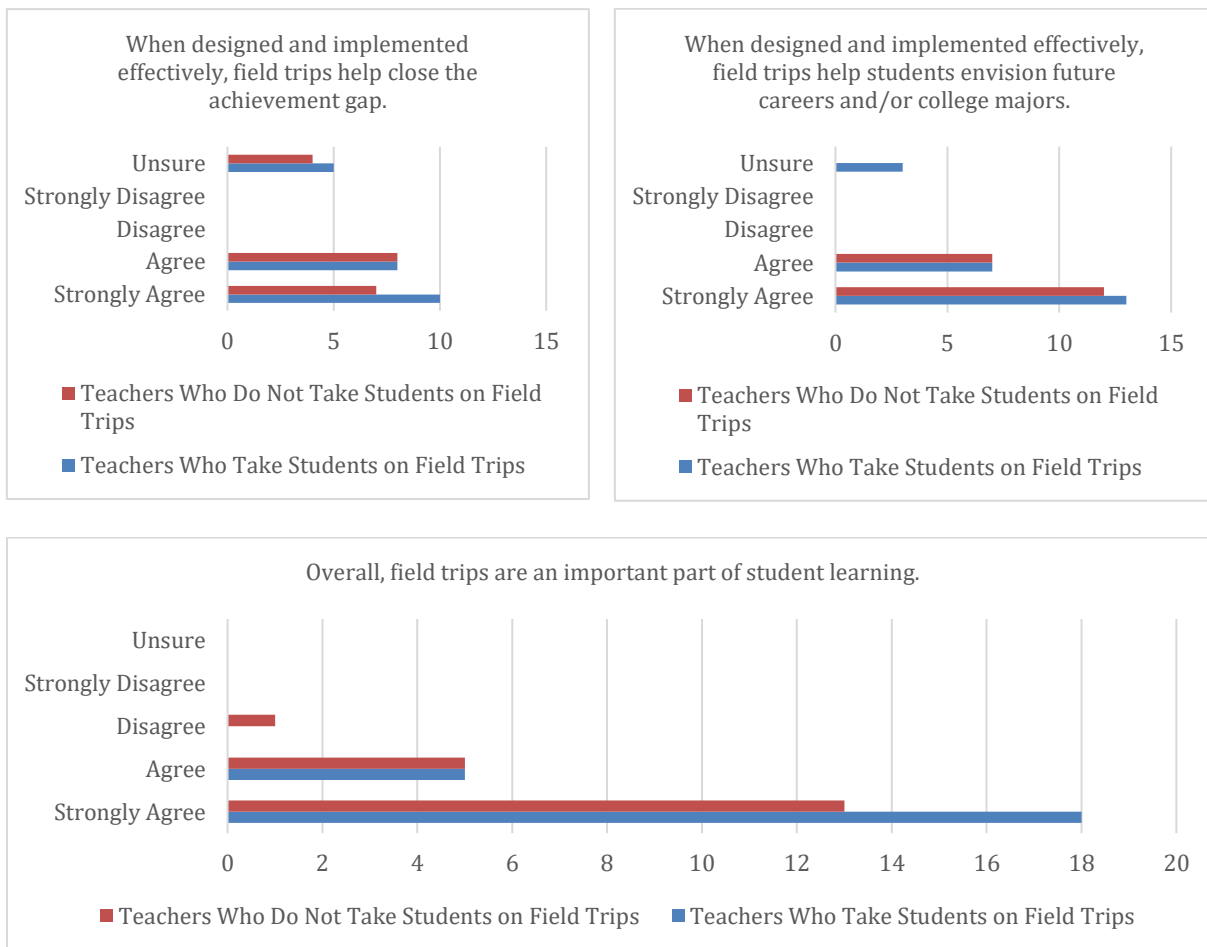


Figure 3: Teacher Perceptions of Field Trips

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Nine teachers indicated that they were unsure whether or not field trips help close the achievement gap, and three were unsure as to whether or not field trips helped students envision future careers. Exposure to research on these topics could help teachers become more informed about the benefits of expedition based, experiential education, and perhaps change their perceptions about this educational method.

It is also important to consider the write in comments after this series of questions. Both teachers who take students on field trips and those who don't addressed the phrasing of these questions. Teachers who do take their students on trips noted, "The 'when designed and implemented correctly' part of these questions is essential." and "I think it is very hard to effectively design and implement. I think it is very easy for students to disengage on field trips and just be glad to be out of school, but if the day is well-planned it is a great way to help kids connect with material." These comments acknowledge the difficulty of expedition based lesson planning, and indicate that teachers might benefit from professional development in this area. Teachers who do not take their students on trips said "'designed and implemented effectively' is the key" and "I think when you design and implement anything effectively under the sun, it's a good thing, so this wording may be a little misleading to our answers." These comments hint at a disbelief in the unique effectiveness of expedition based, experiential education. When questioned about the lack of expedition based, experiential education in schools, Superintendent Elliot Wynn said,

Public education is slow to change. Public education is slow to listen to what is based in research and do a better job than what we are already doing. As a profession, we could do a better job of that and have our practices be more influenced by really works as opposed to what we think works, like homework. If people are going to just do what they have always done, then something like expedition based learning isn't given an opportunity and they aren't given a chance to see how effective it is and to see how positively impacted the kids are.

**Is it Worth it?: The Moonset Moment**

<i>Table 3: Is it worth it?: The Moonset Moment</i>	
Jack London High School	Juliet Peterson: Teacher Maya White: Teacher Aidan Williams: Teacher
Ponderosa Middle School	Flynn Charrington: Principal Jeremy Coven: Teacher

Ponderosa Academy teachers are “dedicated,” according to Ponderosa Middle School principal, Flynn Charrington. “It’s not that (other teachers in the school) are not dedicated. They just didn’t sign up for that level of commitment.” Charrington notes that there is a conflict between the teacher’s contract and the expedition based philosophy; teachers in the Ponderosa Academy teach well beyond the contracted work day. He chaperoned a Ponderosa Academy expedition to Yosemite and says that that’s when he really got to see their dedication. “They’re not just punching the clock,” he said. “They’re loving it.”

Coven notes that not all teachers are interested in the time investment that it takes to run an innovative program like the Ponderosa Academy. He and other teachers in the academy have tried to get the program started in other grades in the district. He says, “The only real obstacle was getting teachers who would do it. It’s so much work.” There are hoops to jump through, meetings to attend, and a significant amount of coordination with other teachers in the program. The flexibility required of a person teaching in close proximity with other teachers, in an innovative way, requires energy. It’s much more difficult than teaching from a book, which is easier, but “not as rewarding.” No matter what support is offered, Coven believes that a program like this will always be more work, and acknowledges that some people are not in a position where that can commit beyond a 9-5 job. His family supports and believes in his professional decisions. Still, the workload can weigh on a teacher, and Coven has found himself wondering, “what am I doing this for?” His answer is what I will call the “Moonset Moment”



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You're 9,000 feet up in the Sierra's and the dawn is breaking, the air is still snow all around. You sit up in your sleeping bag and look and you can see your students do the same thing, watching the moon set. There's a couple times I have had those opportunities. It's often not as poetic as that, but there are times when I look at my co-teachers and say 'I can't believe we're getting paid for this.' That's why.

The work pays off not only because Coven himself wants to be out in the world, camping and watching the moonset, but because he wants to share that opportunity with his students. He believes in this teaching methodology. He has opted in.

Perhaps a key element in a teacher continuing to do the work and fight the system is the opportunity to experience the "Moonset Moment" that Coven spoke about. Peterson continues to plan future Europe trips for her students and describes a similar moment from her first trip.

The year we went to Paris we did an opera assembly and I taught the kids a chorus from Carmen. I teach all my students, they all know it, and then we go in there (to the assembly) and there the singer performs that piece, and they all sing the chorus. We were in Paris on the Bateau Mouche doing a night cruise of the Seine and we were all singing the Toreador chorus on the Bateau Mouche in Paris, at night, and it was an awesome thing. It connected everything. It was really special.

White did not describe a "Moonset Moment" in the Aspen Academy. She left Aspen a few years before the school stopped offering the program, but she continued to teach the Hiking class. She described a "Moonset Moment" while the students were hiking in Yosemite:

The Yosemite trip is always pretty epic because most kids have never been to Yosemite. Their facial expressions when they are going up Vernal Falls and see the double rainbow- they are so amazed. It's really gratifying to be the person that gave them that experience that they might never have had. That's why I keep doing that camping trip. The gratification of the students is worth the obscene amount of effort.

Monroe, Coven, Peterson, and White all have a few things in common: they have a personal interest in their subject matter, they have a personal interest in venturing out into the world, the conditions of their personal lives allow them to take on the heavy workload, and they believe in

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in the expedition based, experiential education teaching methodology. They continue to take their students on expeditions, despite the obstacles.

Williams is dedicated to most elements of experiential education teaching methods, but has almost entirely eliminated the expedition element from his current practices. He believes in EBEE from a professional standpoint; he believes it is a meaningful and effective way to learn. Like other teachers mentioned above, he also feels a personal satisfaction from this method of teaching, "It's a pretty big time commitment. But I've come to see that the benefits outweigh the costs. The benefits are I mean I would be totally bored teaching physics out of a textbook. This is so exciting. So interesting... We're going to do all kinds of cool stuff because I want to know about that stuff too (in reference to a robotics unit). A lot of what we do is to satisfy my own intellectual whimsy." He is not afraid of a significant workload, he has written the course curriculum (and gotten approval) for seven classes at Jack London High School and he has co-written grants to fund academies. These tasks all require several hours of work and jumping through logistical hoops. Williams is unmarried and does not have children, and has indicated that these factors make for a life where he can freely spend his personal time working. Though he philosophically believes in expeditions, he no longer organizes them for his students. He incorporates all other elements of experiential education, but he no longer pursues expeditions.

It's a day. It's a lot of work for a day's worth of teaching. Whereas, if I write a grant for a \$350,000, that's going to get a whole program running and existing for a decade. And writing curriculum is for an entire course. It's for an entire year. And it just felt like the amount of work- what was the pay off? It was fun. I think the kids learned something, but I think that it took a month of planning and getting money and all of that crap, for a day. It wasn't balanced. At some point as a teacher you've gotta let go of some stuff. This is burning me out. I've got to give up somewhere.

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The difference between Williams and the other teachers in this study who continue to organize expeditions for their students? The “Moonset Moment.” For Williams, expeditions were “a day,” not a magical, inspiring moment. The workload outweighed the day.

## **Chapter 5: Implications**

Expedition based, experiential education remains the exception, rather than the norm, in standard public education because the traditional school system is incompatible with the needs of expedition based, experiential education. There are several logistical challenges that teachers and administrators face when trying to teach EBEE within the traditional system. Organizing expeditions is a time consuming process that is under-funded. Moreover, teachers can feel unsupported by administration, especially when it comes to dealing with school wide implications, such as the master schedule. Students and parents also play an important role in the success of EBEE. In order for EBEE to succeed, all parties involved must actively choose to be a part of it. They must buy-in to the philosophy and the program they are a part of. Teachers who work within an EBEE program already have a hefty workload. If they also have to spend time and energy convincing students to buy-in to the program, the workload can seem too cumbersome and can cause teachers to abandon EBEE practices in the future. If parents buy-in to the program, they can help support teachers with the logistical elements that are so time consuming. Of course, teachers must also buy-in to EBEE. They must believe in the philosophy, want to actively engage in expeditions with their students, and have a personal life that allows for the workload that accompanies EBEE. Moreover, they must experience the pay-off, or the “Moonset Moment.” If they are not able to experience the pay-off for their hard work, they may see EBEE as not worth it. The workload cannot outweigh the pay-off.

### **Implications for the Literature**

One commonality between this research project and pre-existing research is the need for structural change within the traditional school setting. Previous research emphasizes the importance of creating flexibility within the daily bell schedule (Martinez and McGrath, 2014)

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and the importance of building time for expeditions into the yearly calendar (Smith-Walters, Hargrove & Ervin, 2014). Though the focus on structural change in this research project focused more on the master schedule and the need for common prep time amongst teachers within an EBEE program, the essence of the problem is very similar. Schedules within the traditional public education system (daily, yearly, etc.) are not naturally conducive with EBEE.

Other research projects have touched briefly on the importance of teacher buy-in. Kenney, Militana, and Donohue (2003) explored the importance of teacher buy-in when adopting an EBEE program. Martinez and McGrath (2014) also touched on the importance of student buy-in. However, they focused on creating buy-in amongst students who were already part of a program. Their discussion of buy-in was focused around creating community in the classroom. In my research project, the discussion of buy-in is centered around students joining an EBEE program. Students cannot be forced into a special program that is already a strain on the existing system. When students are forced in, whether by parents or the school, it places an unfair burden on the program and the teachers working in the program. Any teacher has to inspire buy-in when students walk into their classroom, regardless of whether they are teaching traditionally or in a EBEE program; this is a natural part of teaching. However, because EBEE is essentially a square peg trying to fit in the round hole of the traditional education system, EBEE teachers have to spend more time working. When students actively choose to be part of an EBEE program, the amount of buy-in a teacher has to create in the classroom is within normal expectations for teaching. If a student is forced in, however, teachers have more work cut out for them. Forcing students into EBEE programs creates an unfair burden on the teacher.

This research project also explores the importance of buy-in from parents. When parents buy-in to the value of EBEE programs, they can become an essential asset that keeps the

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program running. The parents at Ponderosa Academy, for example, saw the value in the educational experiences their children were having. A parent volunteered their professional time and expertise to create a non-profit organization that would lift a significant portion of the logistical burden of the program off the shoulders of the teachers. When parents buy-in, they can offer teachers essential support.

Teachers must also buy-in in to EBEE. Survey results from Jack London High School indicated that teachers might not fully believe in the power of EBEE, and they might not know how to implement it successfully. One thing that teachers from Jack London High did agree on was that planning expeditions was a time consuming, difficult, and under supported process. Some teachers are in personal situations that allow them the time and energy to fight the system. Unfortunately, those teachers are not plentiful. However, we shouldn't say that one is more valuable than the other. Teaching outside the system is an above and beyond fight. Expedition based, experiential education remains the exception in standard public education because few teachers are in a position to fight the system.

All participants, need to opt-in in order for EBEE to work. However, not everyone is going to opt-in. Teachers at Ponderosa Academy reported that EBEE will always be extra work for students and teachers, even if it does receive more support from the education system. People have different needs, different interests, and different situations in their personal lives that prevent them from the commitment level necessary for EBEE. It can't be forced.

EBEE can't be forced upon participants, but it can be better supported by the educational system. It can be more plentiful within the traditional public education system. Teachers who want to participate in EBEE should be supported in their endeavors. It is also likely that more

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would opt-in if there wasn't such an enormous workload to contest with. The workload places an unfair burden on the outcome.

### **Implications for Practice and Policy**

There are many ways in which teachers can experiment with EBEE on a small scale. The ideal way to begin on a small scale is with walking expeditions. Walking expeditions are perhaps the simplest and most approachable of all expeditions. Students and teachers walk to a nearby location during class hours, learn in that authentic environment, then walk back to class. For example, Jack London High is situated right across the street from a canal that empties into the bay. During biology class, Helen Bothell walks her students across the street so they can collect water samples. The students then walk back to class to analyze the results. The students are interacting with an authentic environment, and they are connecting the content with its real world relevance. This is a simple trip to organize. In many schools, Jack London High included, parents can sign one walking expedition permission slip for the entire year. The permission slip only needs to be signed and collected once; one of the logistical steps is alleviated. There is no financial cost to the school, district, or students. All of the logistical impediments that a teacher normally experiences when organizing an expedition are either non-existent or significantly minimized. This is a perfect opportunity for a teacher to experience the benefits of EBEE. It is unlikely that the workload will outweigh the pay-off, and, after experiencing the pay-off, teachers may be encouraged to continue EBEE, perhaps on an even larger scale.

There are additional ways to alleviate the burdensome workload associated with EBEE as it currently exists within the traditional education system. Of course, it would be beneficial if teachers could get more guaranteed access to funds and busses. A greater understanding about scheduling needs between administration and teachers would also be helpful. However, the shrewdest move that a school or district could make when implementing EBEE on a more widespread level would be to guarantee logistical support. One way to do this would be to create a paid, professional position, either at the school or district level, that is dedicated to expeditions. This Expedition Coordinator would support teachers in

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the same way that the Parent Board supports the Ponderosa Academy. The Expedition Coordinator would help teachers with paperwork, process funds, organize fundraisers, and scout out expedition opportunities for teachers. In her research, Ikpeze found that ties within a community can support EBEE. When a school develops a good relationship with a business, organization, expert, etc. in the community, it can make future EBEE opportunities easier to organize in the future. The Expedition Coordinator could also be in charge of creating these relationships within the community. The Expedition Coordinator could also serve as an EBEE advisor for teachers. This research project hinted at the possibility that teachers may not know how to effectively teach within the EBEE methodology. The Expedition Coordinator should also be knowledgeable in EBEE from a curriculum standpoint. They could offer professional guidance in curriculum planning, faculty development workshops, and logistical support.

Of course, since the Expedition Coordinator would need to be a paid, professional position, some schools and districts will have difficulty funding this position. Such schools could reach out to parent organizations already within the school (PTA's, Booster Clubs, etc.). Though members of those may not currently be well versed in the benefits of EBEE, they do already have a strong skill set that could be used to help support EBEE. Each parent group in each school is different, so skills sets will vary from group to group. However, it is likely that they will have fundraising experience, experience processing time consuming paperwork, and ties within the community. Most importantly, they have an investment in the well being of the school. They are already committed to helping the school.

It is important that EBEE become more readily accessible to all students in public schools. As previously discussed in this research, EBEE deepens learning for all students, and is especially important for students in vulnerable populations. However, for the most part, EBEE is currently available for students who are either in "special schools" (alternative, charter, etc.) or for students who have opted in to special programs in their traditional public school. There is an equity issue between students who are in these programs and those who aren't. Lower income students (and other vulnerable student populations)



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tend to have parents who are less likely to chaperone, and less likely to donate money for field trips. Some lower income kids have learned that they will find some sort of niche in the system to support them if they are a good student, but there is still an equity issue there. It is important that schools and districts offer in house support for EBEE so that students in vulnerable populations that are less likely to be able to offer external support are not left behind.

### **Limitations of the Study**

In this research project, I attempted to fully understand the experiences and perspectives that teachers, parents, and administrators have with EBEE. Those voices were heard through interviews and survey responses. However, all of the voices heard in interviews came from those who believe in the value of EBEE. Not all of those participants still engage in EBEE, but they do believe in the philosophy. The voices of those who do not believe in the value of EBEE, or those who have not experienced it, were only heard through the survey. Though the survey did give participants the opportunity to elaborate on their responses in narrative format, the depth of understanding I had about their experiences and perspectives was limited in comparison to those who were interviewed. There is more to understand about the experiences and perspectives of those who do not believe in EBEE.

Another limitation of this study rests in the wording of a selection of statements in the survey. I used the word field trip in this survey, rather than expeditions. I provided an explanation of the word in the letter that accompanied the survey, but participants who filled out the survey in response to reminders I sent out, rather than the original invitation, may not have seen that clarification. There was another portion of the survey which contained wording that was problematic. When asking participants about their experience with field trips, I asked about field trips that were “designed and implemented effectively.” Participants wrote in comments on this wording that inspired follow up questions: “Do you believe most expeditions are designed and implemented effectively?” and “Do you know how to effectively design and implement field trips?” Responses to these questions would have helped me better

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understand a perspective that could have a stronger presence in this research project: those who do not believe in the value of EBEE. Time constraints did not permit a follow up survey.

When speaking about the limitations of this research, it is also important to note the emotional climate of one of the participating schools. Many teachers at Jack London High School are currently feeling very unsupported by administration. This theme pops up in almost all arenas of our jobs, not just our experiences with and attitudes towards expeditions. Though this theme is evident in all school I researched, it may be stronger in my school because of other factors.

Finally, I must also address my own biases. As previously discussed, I have had many positive experiences with EBEE, both as a student and as a teacher. I came into this research with the belief that this was the best way to teach. I also had a belief that the fault was within the system, not within the teachers themselves. I believed that teachers would all naturally want to teach this way if it wasn't such a fight with the system. This underlying bias may have contributed to some of the problems with wording in the survey.

### **Directions for Future Research**

There is still a great deal of research that can be done around the topic of EBEE in public schools. Going forward, one primary point of focus should be around teacher skill level and exposure to EBEE. Do teachers believe in the value of expedition based, experiential education? We should also consider the level of training that teachers have in EBEE. Are teachers trained in expedition based, experiential education? If not, professional development may be the answer. If so, it is important to remember the importance of teacher buy-in in EBEE. Therefore, another line of inquiry may be, "How do schools effectively provide professional development so that teachers opt-in, rather than feel like they have another thing shoved on their already full plates?"

It would also be worthwhile to consider the physical locations of schools in their community in relationship to EBEE. Earlier in this chapter, I mentioned that walking expeditions were a good starting point for teachers who were interested in EBEE. Authentic learning environments are plentiful and

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diverse. Parks, creeks, small businesses, farms, theaters, city halls, homeless shelters, public art, architectural patterns: the possibilities are numerous. However, the opportunities for walking field trips will vary greatly from school to school. Some schools may not be located in a place that has plentiful educational opportunities that students can visit within one class period. Therefore, researchers who are interested in focusing on equity may be interested in the following question: What is the relationship between a school's physical location in the community and their access to expeditions?

### **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

All classrooms have four walls and a door. But perhaps these walls are preventing students from understanding the real-world relevance of the content they are learning in the classroom. If students are able to venture through the classroom door, and out into an authentic learning environment, the connection would become clear.

Expedition based, experiential education can help deepen student learning; it can help students make connections between classroom content and real-world relevance. Yet, expedition based, experiential education remains the exception, rather than the norm, in most public education because the traditional education system is incompatible with expedition based, experiential education.

All teachers contend with a significant workload. Teachers who attempt to engage in EBEE within the traditional education system have additional obstacles. When one collaborates with other teachers and deals with the logistical elements of planning and executing a field trip, the workload is even more time consuming. Teachers in EBEE need support that the traditional education simply does not provide on its own. If parents buy-in to the EBEE program, they can provide significant logistical support that can help ensure the continued existence of the program. However, when students are forced into EBEE, whether by parents or the school, the effort teachers must put forth to effectively execute EBEE becomes even more daunting. All parties (parents, teachers, and students) must actively opt-in to EBEE in order for it to be successful and sustainable.

Not all teachers have bought into the EBEE methodology. Survey responses in this research project indicated that teachers may not see EBEE as a more effective learning approach than classroom learning. Even teachers who do initially buy-in to the EBEE methodology can

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eventually abandon it if the workload becomes too prohibitive. If the workload outweighs the pay-off experience, it may seem like it's not worth it. A teacher must experience the rewarding "Moonset Moment" if they are to continue to fight the traditional education system and offer EBEE opportunities to their students.

If EBEE is to be more widely implemented, alterations need to be made to the traditional education system. Expedition coordinators can organize the logistics of expeditions. They can help teachers seek out expedition opportunities. They can also serve as curricular advisors; they can help teachers learn how to effectively teach within the EBEE methodology.

In the meantime, teachers can attempt to include small scale expeditions into their curriculum. Walking expeditions are an excellent way for students to learn in an authentic environment without placing a cumbersome workload on the teacher. Students need the opportunity to learn experientially in an authentic learning environment. Teachers need the chance to see those experiences benefit their students. When the experience outweighs the workload, the teachers will buy in.

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November 22, 2017

Jaime Evans  
50 Acacia Ave.  
San Rafael, CA 94901

Dear Jaime:

I have reviewed your proposal entitled *Moving from the Exception to the Expectation: The Field Trip in Experiential Education* submitted to the Dominican University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Participants (IRBPHP Application, #10635). I am approving it as having met the requirements for minimizing risk and protecting the rights of the participants in your research.

In your final report or paper please indicate that your project was approved by the IRBPHP and indicate the identification number.

I wish you well in your very interesting research effort.

Sincerely,

Randall Hall, Ph.D.  
Chair, IRBPHP

Cc: Jennifer Lucko

**Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Participants**

Office of Academic Affairs • 50 Acacia Avenue, San Rafael, California 95901-2298 • 415-257-1310 [www.dominican.edu](http://www.dominican.edu)