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## Expanding the Walls of the Classroom: Difficulties and Successes in Expedition Based Learning

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# Expanding the Walls of the Classroom

**Difficulties and Successes in  
Expedition Based, Experiential  
Education**

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Dominican University of California

**When am I ever  
going to need this  
in real life?**

# What do we already know about Expedition Based, Experiential Education?

- ◆ Students learn in an authentic environment under guided and planned circumstances. Students go on expeditions regularly. The world is the classroom.
- ◆ In order to succeed, EBEE needs a strong sense of community. It also needs to have strong ties with the community.
- ◆ The school must undergo structural changes.
- ◆ EBEE deepens student learning.

Given that Expedition Based, Experiential Education deepens student learning, and there are commonly agreed upon practices for it's implementation...

**Why does it remain the exception, rather than the norm, in standard public education?**



# Methodology

## **Jack London High School**

Traditional high school with high population of socio-economically disadvantaged students.

### **Interviews**

6 teachers

1 administrator

1 superintendent

### **Survey**

42 of 62 teachers responded

## **Ponderosa Middle School**

Has an expedition based academy.

### **Interviews**

2 teachers

1 parent

1 administrator

## **John Muir High School**

Traditional high school with a global studies program.

### **Interview**

1 Teacher/Director of Global Studies

**Expedition based, experiential education does not fit neatly within the existing traditional education system.**

## The System: Fighting it and Working it.

- ◆ The logistics are overwhelming and confusing.
- ◆ It takes a lot of time.
- ◆ No access to money and transportation.
- ◆ Teachers often feel under supported by administration.
- ◆ There's a philosophical support...
- ◆ ...but we need follow through.



## Buy-in and Opt-in

- ◆ “Without the parents, it doesn’t happen.”
  - ◆ Ponderosa Academy Parent Board
- ◆ Students
  - ◆ They can’t be forced into special programs
- ◆ Teachers
  - ◆ The traditional system does not support EBEE. Teachers must do extra work to compensate for the ill fit.

# Is it Worth it?: The Moonset Moment

- ◆ The “Right” Teacher
  - ◆ Not all teachers are able to do the extra work that EBEE requires (families, etc.).
  - ◆ Must want to have these experiences with their students.
  - ◆ This does not mean they are bad teachers. The system does not support them.
- ◆ Why do other teachers keep fighting?
  - ◆ They experience The Moonset Moment.



You're up 9,000 feet in the Sierras 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 of times I've had those opportunities. It's often not as poetic as that, but there are times when I look at my co-teacher and say 'I can't believe we get paid for this.' That's why.

## What do we do now?

- ◆ The workload cannot outweigh the pay-off.
  - ◆ EBEE can't be forced- creates an unfair burden on the teacher.
- ◆ Experience the pay-off: Walking Expeditions
- ◆ Expedition Coordinator: train teachers, help them find opportunities, and organize logistics.



# Thanks!

## Any questions?

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