What is Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound?

Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound (ELOB) is a proven model for comprehensive school reform for elementary, middle and high schools. It emphasizes learning by doing, with a particular focus on character growth, teamwork, reflection and literacy. Teachers connect high quality academic learning to adventure, service and character development through a variety of student experiences, including interdisciplinary, project-based learning expeditions.

Expeditionary Learning is built on 10 design principles that reflect the educational values and beliefs of Outward Bound. These principles also reflect the design’s connection to other related thinking about teaching, learning and the culture of schools. The 10 design principles are our best short statement of the philosophy of education and core values of Outward Bound and Expeditionary Learning. Drawn from the work of Outward Bound’s founder Kurt Hahn and other educational leaders, the principles focus our attention on what is important and give us something to return to when we need guidance.

Learning is an expedition into the unknown. Expeditions draw together personal experience and intellectual growth to promote self-discovery and construct knowledge. We believe that adults should guide students along this journey with care, compassion and respect for their diverse learning styles, backgrounds and needs. Addressing individual differences profoundly increases the potential for learning and creativity of each student.

Given fundamental levels of health, safety and love, all people can and want to learn. We believe expeditionary learning harnesses the natural passion to learn and is a powerful method for developing the curiosity, skills, knowledge and courage needed to imagine a better world and work toward realizing it.

ELOB at Thornton Creek

Expeditions are purposefully planned to integrate these design principles into many content areas. The expedition structure enables students to develop teamwork skills, learn to think critically, put forth their best effort, value and seek out a diversity of thought, reflect upon their work, and think about meeting others’ needs through service projects in the community. There is a strong emphasis on cooperation and collaboration, building a culture of support, risk-taking, and service and compassion in each classroom, as well as throughout the school. Visual and performing arts are a hallmark of our program. Each continues to thrive as a medium for expression of what children learn in their expeditions.

Expeditionary learning also promotes a strong culture that emphasizes the importance of process in learning. Teachers create experiences in which students are challenged to think deeply about and evaluate their own work over time. Evidence for this process exists in our peer critique and collaborative assessment processes, students’ written reflections on their learning, as well as the multiple drafts that are developed to create a final written product.

Expeditions often take a class outside the school building to do research, conduct interviews or carry out a range of other fieldwork assignments. We also bring community resources into the classroom to support expedition work. Community members who have expertise to offer an expedition are sought out and encouraged to become involved in class work. Parents also provide critical support to students and teachers for daily work, culminating projects, displays of expedition work and travel for fieldwork.
10 Design Principles

1. **THE PRIMACY OF SELF-DISCOVERY**
   Learning happens best with emotion, challenge and the requisite support. People discover their abilities, values, passions and responsibilities in situations that offer adventure and the unexpected. In Expeditionary Learning schools, students undertake tasks that require perseverance, fitness, craftsmanship, imagination, self-discipline and significant achievement. A teacher’s primary task is to help students overcome their fears and discover they can do more than they think they can.

2. **THE HAVING OF WONDERFUL IDEAS**
   Teaching in Expeditionary Learning schools fosters curiosity about the world by creating learning situations that provide something important to think about, time to experiment, and time to make sense of what is observed.

3. **THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR LEARNING**
   Learning is both a personal process of discovery and a social activity. Everyone learns both individually and as part of a group. Every aspect of an Expeditionary Learning school encourages both children and adults to become increasingly responsible for directing their own personal and collective learning.

4. **EMPATHY AND CARING**
   Learning is fostered best in communities where students’ and teachers’ ideas are respected and where there is mutual trust. Learning groups are small in Expeditionary Learning schools, with a caring adult looking after the progress and acting as an advocate for each child. Older students mentor younger ones, and students feel physically and emotionally safe.

5. **SUCCESS AND FAILURE**
   All students need to be successful if they are to build the confidence and capacity to take risks and meet increasingly difficult challenges. But it is also important for students to learn from their failures, to persevere when things are hard, and to learn to turn disabilities into opportunities.

6. **COLLABORATION AND COMPETITION**
   Individual development and group development are integrated so that the value of friendship, trust and group action is clear. Students are encouraged to compete not against each other, but with their own personal best and with rigorous standards of excellence.

7. **DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION**
   Both diversity and inclusion increase the richness of ideas, creative power, problem-solving ability and respect for others. In Expeditionary Learning schools, students investigate and value their different histories and talents as well as those of other communities and cultures. Schools and learning groups are heterogeneous.

8. **THE NATURAL WORLD**
   A direct and respectful relationship with the natural world refreshes the human spirit and teaches the important ideas of recurring cycles and cause and effect. Students learn to become stewards of the earth and of future generations.

9. **SOLITUDE AND REFLECTION**
   Students and teachers need time alone to explore their own thoughts, make their own connections and create their own ideas. They also need time to exchange their reflections with other students and with adults.

10. **SERVICE AND COMPASSION**
    We are crew, not passengers. Students and teachers are strengthened by acts of consequential service to others, and one of an Expeditionary Learning school’s primary functions is to prepare students with the attitudes and skills to learn from and be of service.

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