

University of Montana

ScholarWorks at University of Montana

Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, &
Professional Papers

Graduate School

2005

The rhythm of an expedition: An African celebration : an exploration of African culture and expeditionary learning through music

Saxon Elise Inabnit
The University of Montana

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd>

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation

Inabnit, Saxon Elise, "The rhythm of an expedition: An African celebration : an exploration of African culture and expeditionary learning through music" (2005). *Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers*. 7720.

<https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd/7720>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact scholarworks@mso.umt.edu.



**Maureen and Mike
MANSFIELD LIBRARY**

The University of
Montana

Permission is granted by the author to reproduce this material in its entirety, provided that this material is used for scholarly purposes and is properly cited in published works and reports.

****Please check "Yes" or "No" and provide signature****

Yes, I grant permission

No, I do not grant permission

Author's Signature: Sayer Lambert

Date: 7/8/05

Any copying for commercial purposes or financial gain may be undertaken only with the author's explicit consent.

**THE RHYTHM OF AN EXPEDITION
AN AFRICAN CELEBRATION**

**AN EXPLORATION OF AFRICAN CULTURE AND
EXPEDITIONARY LEARNING THROUGH MUSIC**

by

Saxon Elise Inabnit

B.M.E., The University of Montana-Missoula,
1995

for the degree of

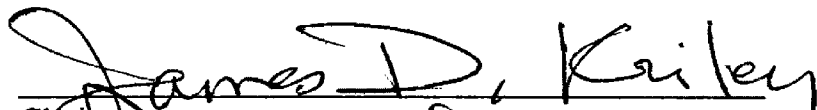
Master of Arts in Fine Arts

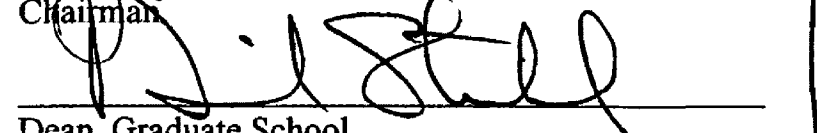
Integrated Arts and Education

The University of Montana

July 2005

Approved by


Chairman


Dean, Graduate School

7-19-05

Date

UMI Number: EP38521

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



UMI EP38521

Published by ProQuest LLC (2013). Copyright in the Dissertation held by the Author.

Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

All rights reserved. This work is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code



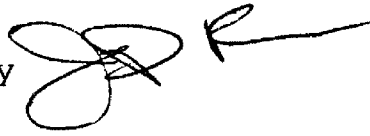
ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 - 1346

Inabnit, Saxon MA, July 2005

Fine Arts

An Exploration of African Culture and Expeditionary Learning through Music

Chairman: Dr. James Kriley



My final thesis was based on the study of Africa with my 7th grade students at the school I currently teach. We explored and discovered Africa through reading, writing, movement, singing, and drumming African rhythms. We had a guest speaker from Africa come in and talk to the class about his culture in Africa. I also enlisted the help of a master drummer here in Missoula to play with and teach my children about authentic African rhythms. This whole process culminated in a performance in front of a large audience at my school. I also extended this project and presented it at a National Expeditionary Learning/Outward Bound Convention in Denver, Colorado. There I did much of the same activities with a group of adults from all over the U.S. I further extended my project again by doing a drum tour with my 8th grade boys at the school in which I currently teach.

Table of contents

Inspiration for a Project	1
The Process	4
Expeditionary Learning/Outward Bound, discovered	8
The Design Principles of Expeditionary Learning/Outward Bound	11
The Creative Pulse, remembered	19
Moving forward	21
Final thoughts	22
Bibliography	24

Inspiration for a Project

Expeditionary Learning/Outward Bound, commonly referred to as ELOB is a remarkable school reform program. My school started this process three years ago to help our standardized test scores in accordance with "No Child Left Behind". However, it has done much more than that for me. The core practices include learning expeditions, active pedagogy, culture and character, leadership and school improvement, and structures. It takes much practice and willingness to change one's teaching habits to master these practices. I accepted that challenge this year when I did my first learning expedition with a group of 7th grade students.

I was first inspired with this idea last fall, while sitting in a meeting with my colleagues from the exploratory team at school. The art teacher was talking about how her kids made African masks. I immediately wrote down in my day planner that I needed to do an African unit with my students. This was on August 30, 2004, and my dream never became a reality until January 2005! This work is a long, hard process that is a lifelong journey of new adventures.

My final project was a two-month, intensive study and exploration of African culture and music. I did this with my 7th grade choir students and many other contributors along the way. We had a culminating experience of a concert, which included live African drumming and dancing! The students and parents loved it. I had never received so many compliments on a concert in my nine years of teaching. There is just something about African rhythms that make the performing space come alive with energy. That in turn is emanated to the audience, as they reciprocated the energy by giving a standing ovation at the end.

The Creative Pulse program definitely inspired me to pursue this dream. It just seemed so unattainable before. I didn't believe in my students or myself enough to want to try to make it happen. Finally, I just decided to commit to this out of the box idea. Then, like magic, everything kept falling into place. Times, people, and places worked out perfectly with my schedule. It was as if it was supposed to happen at this time in my life with this group of students.

Of course, this was not just a two-month project. There was much risk and rigor involved. It turned into much more than just a way to do an African unit with my students. It allowed students who are not gifted at singing to shine on the drums and be leaders in a different way in the classroom. It also allowed me to teach more than just notes on the page. The preparation before the two-month project involved collaborating with colleagues and gathering information for my students to study. After this project culminated on March 1, 2005, I presented this idea in a master class at a National ELOB Conference in Denver, Colorado. I extended this idea again to do an African drum tour with my 8th grade boys and a group of students from another school. The school board also came to visit our school, and I presented this project to them. It was amazing all the places this project took me, both professionally and personally. In fact, when I presented at the National Conference, as I was talking passionately about what effect this had on my students and myself, I started to cry. It was kind of embarrassing, but I was just overwhelmed by what I had actually accomplished and by how much my kids loved it and grew as musicians and people because they had experienced a different culture together.

The Process

After we started school again in January of this year, I introduced the students to Africa by giving them a chapter out of their Social Studies text. As it happened, the Social Studies teacher was doing their African unit at the same time. I then put students into small groups and gave them the task to map the various sections of the chapter. Mapping is a reading strategy talked about in the book Subjects Matter, by Harvey Daniels. It graphically displays the information in bubbles and helps students remember information by connecting them to larger topics. My students also referred to it as webbing or spoking. It is amazing to me, the choir teacher, that whenever I ask my students to write something for me, they get down to business. They don't ask questions, they just do it. I have also discovered that when I do writing activities, students who have not developed their linguistic skills struggle. I usually teach all my music aurally and by rote, touching on the spatial and bodily-kinesthetic intelligences that Howard Gardner talks about in Frames of Mind. Therefore, many students who are not academically gifted can function in my classroom through their other intelligences. I accommodate my non-readers and writers by

putting them in groups with kids who are academically gifted.

I also had them do an activity called Getting the Gist with a Twist. This is another reading strategy that I turned into a music activity. The students read "West African Drumming and Vocal Styles" from the Silver Burdett & Ginn music series. In the original protocol for this strategy, the students are instructed individually to read the article and list fifteen to twenty vocabulary words that are new to them. Next, they were to get into groups of four by finding the other students with the same African word written at the top of their page. To better facilitate the process, I wrote these key words on the top of their pages previous to this activity. Then they collaboratively made a group list of eight of their favorite words.

Their next job was to make a rhythmic speech piece using these eight words. They had a large piece of white, blank paper which I folded for them to make sixteen squares on the paper. Each square represented one beat. The groups could fill the squares with whatever words they wanted. I

did advise them to skip squares, because rests make music interesting.

One by one, the groups performed their speech pieces for the large group while I kept the steady beat for them on a drum. When I did this activity with my kids, they did the bare minimum just to accomplish the assignment. In contrast, when I did this with adults in Denver at the National Expeditionary Learning/Outward Bound conference, they added background sounds by using the drums, their bodies, and their mouths. It was pretty incredible. I love teaching to non-musicians. They are so open!

The rest of the reading activities I had my students do were pretty generic. I had two purposes for them. One was to give them as much information about Africa as I could. The second reason was for classroom management. About the third week into this project I started to introduce the African drums to them. I teach in a middle school that has five hundred and fifty students, therefore, my classes are quite large. My two sections of 7th grade choir have thirty-nine and forty-three students. I only have eighteen drums, so I had to create something for one-half of my class to do while I was drumming with the other half. If

you have ever taught middle school, you know that they don't do very well with unstructured time. They are used to sitting in desks and listening to someone lecture to them. It is quite different in my room where there are no desks and we are always up moving around the room.

I taught them all the rhythms through speech and body percussion. In fact, that's how I teach most rhythms to my students. As non-music readers, it is far more successful to tell a student to say 'rasp-berry', than to tell them to clap one eighth followed by two sixteenths. And if you have ever seen the rhythms written down for African drums, they are incredibly complex and syncopated. Besides, the real African way is to learn everything by rote. Master drummers start at an early age in Africa, and the children sit among the adults and imitate what they are doing. In America, the majority of cultures teach rhythms through note reading, not speech. I can just picture a bunch of African men sitting around with music notation in their hands.

Singing was three-quarters of my culminating program and daily work with my students. My title is Choir Instructor, which means I'm just supposed to teach singing. However,

the reason I was drawn to do this kind of cultural project is because I like to take risks and think outside of the box. There are some choir teachers who just sing in class and that is it. That's just wasting the adolescent mind with all its creativity and adventurous spirit.

It is my philosophy that I teach the whole child, not just the musician. Kids are creative, if you can channel that creativity in the right direction. I am required by my job description and supervisor to produce a certain number of concerts each year. But the great part of my job is that I can deliver my choir curriculum in any way I want, as long as I teach to the National music and art standards.

Expeditionary Learning/Outward Bound, discovered

So, when I first was introduced to Expeditionary Learning/Outward Bound in the fall of 2002, it seemed familiar, because I had already learned to teach this way for awhile. I was trained in the Orff-Shulwerk method and they are very similar. The Orff method teaches children to be their own composers and become independent learners. It also embraces and utilizes small group work and student

collaboration and creation. Students perform pieces for each other that they have written or composed together. Coincidentally, ELOB has many of the same concepts.

Through learning expeditions, students are engaged in learning by designing compelling topics and guiding questions. Students engage in reading strategies in small groups and often collaborate on something to present to the class about what they learned. Expeditionary Learning/Outward Bound also encourages the teacher to bring in experts from the current field of study.

I used several experts in my African Expedition project. Dorothy Morrison, a teacher in The Creative Pulse, is a superb musician, talented teacher, and master drummer. It was through her classes that I learned all the rhythms that I taught to my students. After the students had been doing these rhythms for a while, I asked her to come into my classroom as a guest drummer. My students were a bit leery at first, but that is typical of a middle schooler, who makes one earn their trust and respect. After they heard and saw what she could do, they responded to her with delight and were eager for more. They would love to continue working with Dorothy every day!

I asked a foreign student from the University of Montana to come and talk to my students about Africa. I wanted them to experience African culture from someone who has actually lived it, rather than just from a white girl from Montana who has never even been to Africa. Sico Yaro is from Burkina Faso and he came to my classroom and gave a power point presentation. The students were fascinated by his French accent and his experiences of growing up in Africa. They were mainly interested in food, weather, and what he did for fun growing up, but I know they got a real taste of authentic African culture.

This project and the exploration of Expeditionary Learning/Outward Bound practices has greatly enhanced my curriculum and my students interest in learning. They didn't just sing African songs for a concert. They truly read and wrote about Africa, explored music through hands-on drumming and singing, and were influenced by people from the culture by being immersed in it for a couple of months. This is what the Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound Design Principles are all about. I would like to briefly quote each of these principles and comment on how they applied to my project. The following ten principles can be

found on the ELOB website at

<http://www.elob.org/design/principles.html>.

The Design Principles of Expeditionary Learning/Outward
Bound

"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."

During this project, my students definitely experienced self-discovery. Some of them didn't even know they could drum, nor had they ever seen an African person before our guest speaker. It was all unexpected for me how they would receive studying another culture, due to our lack of diversity in Montana. They also had to be incredibly self-disciplined and patient with themselves while learning how to drum. As I alluded to earlier, some of my strongest drummers were my weakest singers. They all loved excelling at the drums. To this day if I have the drums out when they walk in the room, they shout with excitement.

"2. The Having of Wonderful Idea's

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."

This design principle was the epitome of my project. It was so fun creating the activities that I did with my students. It wasn't like work for me. I would sometimes wake up in the middle of the night and think of a new experience for my kids to have. I literally thought about it all the time for two solid months. But it wasn't wearing on me. It was enlightening and exciting! And when my students went through these learning experiences, their faces said the same thing that I felt! If you are not accustomed to creating new idea's all the time, it is hard teaching this way because it expends so much energy. But compared to the monotony of doing brainless, non-creative work every day, the reward is in the excitement of the students' faces. Once you do make the change to creative teaching, it becomes like second nature.

"3. The Responsibility for Learning

Learning is both a personal process of discovery and a social activity. Everyone learns both individually and as a 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."

This was very evident in drumming. In order to stay together as a drum group, each person must individually pay attention to the person next to them and to the group as a whole. If one person is not concentrating or listening, it can throw the whole rhythm askew. Drumming really connects people. I often had my students shut their eyes and just listen to one another. That's a skill that we just don't teach our kids anymore. It made them realize how important they were to each other. There is a very wise and wonderful teacher named Ron Berger who wrote a document called "Culture of Quality." He states that "if a class is putting on a play or is engaged in a sporting event with another group, any student who does not know his or her lines or does not know how to play his or her position hurts the entire group." (33) Such is the philosophy of drumming.

"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."

This principle is something you have to build over time, especially with the age group I teach. Young adolescents don't just trust you like elementary students do. You have to build and earn respect from teenagers. It is one of the hardest character traits to foster among my students. They are so mean to each other at this age. It is something I work on daily in the classroom, in the hallways, and even out in society. Mutual trust takes a lot of risk for some students. I believe it is something that should start at home but often doesn't. There are so many kids that just don't trust anyone because of abuse, neglect, or lack of empathy and caring on their parents' part. In fact, many of my students don't even live with their parents. However, so many students do have this trust and it is easy to establish the mutual trust relationship developed between a teacher and her students.

"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."

Oh boy, does this apply to learning how to use both hands quickly and rhythmically on a drum. This is a great

challenge for many students. Therefore, in order to make them successful, I always have an easier version of the drum pattern I am playing. If they only play with one hand that is fine with me, as long as they are doing something! It is true that each person needs to be an integral part of a drum group, but sometimes others can carry you in the process.

"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."

My project did not display the competition side of this principle, rather the collaborative process. Almost everything the students did they had to collaborate on. All the small group activities included group discussions and group presentations. I also collaborated with the school's art teacher. She had her students create West African Gabon figures for the concert. They were displayed during my concert and at my presentation in Denver. As always, students are expected to work to the best of their ability level on each task I present to them.

"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."

One of the activities I presented to the students was to write a one-page paper on their own cultural heritage. It was amazing to me how many students didn't even know what I was talking about when I asked them to do that. They had no clue what their ethnic background was, even though it was very evident to me from their last names. Our school is not very diverse. We have mostly Caucasian students, with a few Asian, Russian, and Native American mixes. I think we only have three black students out of a population of five hundred and fifty. Now if we don't need to teach about diversity, then I don't know who does. After my session at the National Conference in Denver, I had an African-American woman come up to me to thank me for exposing her culture to the children of Montana. I love this state, but it is true we are very isolated and not too diverse. That's one of the reasons why I chose to do this with my students. They need more culture! That's why it was so important for Sico to come and speak to his culture and not me. That's why it was important to have a live African drumming and dancing group perform on my concert,

even though they were all white. Some of my students and parents had never been exposed to African culture until my concert. And that's why I will continue to do this project year after year and incorporate new cultures and new projects. Can you tell I'm passionate about his subject? We can only understand ourselves if we know how others live.

"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."

Unfortunately, I did not touch on this design principle at all. I really couldn't haul my eighty 7th graders to Africa. However, there is something called the Fund for Teachers that enables professionals to embark on new journeys to enhance their teaching. Last year one teacher did go to Africa to study how drum rhythms connected with math. I am lucky enough to have a group of teachers at my school who want to do something like this with me. So, it is a possibility that I may go to Africa in a couple of summers and experience the heat, the dust, and the people of the African culture. After all, the real drumming and

dancing done in Africa is mostly performed in the great outdoors!

"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 others."

Yes, yes, yes...however, very hard to do when you are on a tight performance schedule. I usually do a little bit of written and verbal reflection after every concert. After the African concert, I asked questions like what was your favorite and least favorite song, what writing activity did you enjoy the most, how did you like the drumming with Mrs. Morrison, etc. For the most part, the students thoroughly enjoyed the drumming and the visit from Sico. It was something out of the ordinary daily grind of singing. To quote Ron Berger again, it was a good project because it led "students to be creative, to make decisions, and to take real responsibility for their own work." (25) It included "learning new academic and artistic skills and perfecting those skills in practice." (25) Reflection on my part is important too. I know I need to change things, add and delete activities, and expand this into other grade levels and cultures.

"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 to others."

It takes crew to drum together and sound like one instrument. My 7th graders really pulled it off. The proof was in the absolute tightness of those rhythms the night of the concert. There could have been an earthquake and my students still would have stayed together. They learned to rely on and listen to each other; a skill that can only be taught through experience.

The Creative Pulse, remembered

Expeditionary Learning is basically learning by doing. That's how I felt the Creative Pulse was for me. Sure, there were a lot of lectures, but I really felt like the most learning and creating that I did was by doing things that involved risk and rigor. For instance, the personal performances made me expose a more meaningful, deeper layer of myself that wasn't evident before.

From the moment I walked into the Masquer Theatre my first summer, I knew this program was going to be something special. I could tell by the white linen tablecloths, the flowers, and the pitchers of water adorning the tables. Our nameplates were delivered with care to each and every one of us. This was no ordinary Master's program. This was going to be a high-quality expedition into a world of creativity and self-discovery. If these words are sounding familiar, that's because they are EL philosophies. That's why my project fit so perfectly for this degree. EL and the Creative Pulse should join forces to change schools and how teachers teach. That's why leadership is such an integral part in both programs.

I remember Dr. Kriley talking about leaders looking at organizations and asking what their purpose is. If the purpose is lost or not clear, it is up to a leader to make that change for the better. Leaders in EL schools are usually implementing change all the time. It is hard to change the way one thinks and teaches, but necessary for any organization to move forward to a more productive level of existence. It really aggravates me when my colleagues refuse to make any changes to their teaching style for the greater good, and more importantly, to make the students

the most successful they can be. I just wonder why those people are still in this profession if they are not passionate about teaching kids how to be successful and responsible human beings in the twenty-first century.

Moving forward

I recently visited an exemplary middle school in Portland, Maine. The school's name is King Middle School and the staff, principal, and students are prime examples of what a caring, innovative, and productive institution should look and act like. For starters, every student has their very own I-Mac wireless computer that they carry around with them each day to do schoolwork, research, and various collaborative projects. They are a middle school the same size as ours, but diversity should be their middle name. There are twenty-eight different languages spoken at King, and yet they all speak the same universal language of learning because they are connected by EL experiences. During the school visit, there were ninety teachers invading their hallways, classrooms, and cafeteria. In order for all of us to have a space to meet, the students not only ate in their classrooms, but they also cooked us

lunch each day. The students were typical adolescents that jostled one another and told each other to shut up, yet they were incredibly respectful to every adult that was there. King Middle School has been doing expeditions for twelve years now, and fully engaged in active learning. The things they created and studied all met the curriculum standards and pertained to real life. Unlike some students who have a horrible time in middle school, these students are experiencing and learning life-long skills in their most vulnerable, formative years.

Final thoughts

The African project, the Creative Pulse, and discovering Expeditionary Learning have truly changed my life. They have made me a more active and thoughtful teacher. Now I take part in teaching my students and in creating more meaningful experiences for them. I ask what the purpose is for doing this. If I can't answer that, then I change my plans to serve a purpose rather than just to take up time or create busy work for kids to do. I look at my students with more compassion and try to figure out where they are coming from, so I can take them to new places, but not have them get too frustrated along the way. I have learned that

change is a good and necessary thing to grow as a human being in this fast-paced world. Yet, you must take time to find the essence of what you are doing and why you are doing it. I promise to do this for myself and my students for the rest of my life.

Bibliography

Daniels, Harvey, and Steven Zemelman. Subjects Matter: Every Teacher's Guide to Content-Area Reading. Heinmann: Portsmouth, NH, 2004.

History Alive! The Medieval World & Beyond. TCI Curriculum Institute, Rancho Cordova, CA, 1989.

Gardner, Howard. Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences. Tenth-anniversary edition. Basic Books, A Member of the Perseus Books Group, 1983.

Silver Burdett & Ginn Music Series.
<http://www.sbgmusic.com/html/teacher/reference/cultures/westafr.html>.

Berger, Ron. "A Culture of Quality: A Reflection on Practice." Annenberg Institute for School Reform, Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island. Occasional Paper Series, Number 1, September 1996.

Roots: From Outward Bound to Expeditionary Learning. Ed. Emily Cousins. Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, Dubuque, Iowa, 2000.

www.elob.org. Expeditionary Learning/Outward Bound National website.