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Expeditionary Learning

Angie Susag

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EXPEDITIONARY LEARNING

By

ANGELA CHRISTINE SUSAG

B.F.A. University of Montana, Missoula, MT, 2002
B.A. Montana State University, MT, 2005

Professional Paper

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Approved by:

Perry Brown, Associate Provost for Graduate Education
Graduate School

Dr. Randy Bolton, Chair
Creative Pulse, School of Fine Arts, University of Montana

Dr. Ann C Wright, Co-Chair
Creative Pulse, School of Fine Arts, University of Montana

Karen Kaufmann, Co-Chair
Creative Pulse, School of Fine Arts, University of Montana
Angie Susag, M.A., Summer 2009 Fine Arts, Integrated Arts and Education

Expeditionary Learning

Randy Bolton: Anne Wright, Karen Kaufmann

My final creative project began as an effort to be a quality educator who offered a memorable education to my students. I believe that students should be more involved with their education which is where my idea to research expeditionary learning came from. I had to design, plan and execute many activities in order to provide these expeditions.

I planned a trip to Europe for the first expedition. This trip took place in the summer of 2008. I brought eight students along with two parents on this adventure. We went to London, Paris, Florence, Assisi, and Rome. This expedition proved to be truly educational, full of hard work, and life changing.

The next few expeditions were on a smaller scale, but were equally educationally meaningful. The first project was a study of Andy Goldsworthy. Within this project, students assembled objects from nature into an arrangement. These arrangements emphasized one or more of the 5 elements of art. The students would then decide upon the best view of their work to be photographed.

We then headed to the UM Helena School of Technology. Outside of the college, stands a gigantic geometric sculpture by local artist, Richard Swanson. The objective of this expedition was to discover how light moves across a three-dimensional form.

Next the students, and I headed out to the top of the hill in front of our school. Students stood side by side up on the sidewalk that lined the top of the hill as we looked down at the face of our school. This location was easily accessible and offered many vantage points for discovery and observation.

The goal of this expeditionary learning project was to conquer the fear of the unknown. I did succeed at this by finding myself through educating others. I understand myself better through my successes and my failures. Learning requires assent and action. Learning also requires practice, correction, and self-correction. Expeditionary learning helped me to become a better educator, but most importantly I was able to let go and really see my students, myself, and the world without preconceptions.
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Expeditionary learning’s researched based design, combined with its solid teacher-development component, has led to higher student achievement and increased teacher satisfaction. Expeditionary learning is based on ten principles: self-discovery, having wonderful ideas, responsibility for learning, empathy and caring, success and failure, collaboration and competition, diversity and inclusion, the natural world, solitude and reflection, and service and compassion (James Neill, p.1). According to Leticia Gonzalez (JOPERD, p.1), in 1991, after having become increasingly dissatisfied with the existing educational system, a group of business leaders created the New American Schools Development Corporation (NAS), a privately funded, nonprofit organization. Its founders "pledged to raise funds to support the research, design, implementation, and dissemination of 'break the mold' schools to bring about educational reform throughout the country" (Gonzalez, p.1). Therefore, since its inception, NAS has supported and promoted alternative school programs (Gonzalez, p.1). Among the alternative designs that have been created for and accepted by NAS is the Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound program (ELOB). As of May 1998, it had been adopted by about 45 schools in several states across the nation. Expeditionary learning is a school-improvement concept that builds on the work of Kurt Hahn, founder of Outward Bound, as well as other educational leaders including John Dewey, Ted Sizer, Howard Gardner, and Debbie Meier (Gonzalez, p.1). There is a sense of moral purpose to the design that is beyond academic success. There is a sense of citizenship, something closer to a worldview, a shared sense of our place in the world and the responsibilities that come with that.
Expeditionary learning is really powerful, and it’s something that is largely absent today. Is a silent classroom really more conducive to learning than one where children are talking, or is it less trouble for the teacher? Is it reasonable to expect children to sit still for extended periods of time? Is it necessary for them to raise their hands before speaking, to keep their eyes on the teacher (Kohn, p. 58-60)?

Students may leave their textbooks and folders behind when they leave school, but they take their bodies with them wherever they go (Armstrong, p. 74-76). An analysis of the traditional teaching methods reveals a challenge for today’s educator: the need for students to extend their learning beyond the internet and textbooks to the world around them using expeditionary learning.

PASSION FOR KNOWLEDGE:

A Personal Study

Learning happens best with emotion, the use of the senses, and when a challenge presents itself. People discover their abilities, values, passions, and responsibilities in situations that offer adventure and the unexpected. In Expeditionary Learning, 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 (Hahn, p. 1)

Forcing students to sit in a chair and listen is not always an effective path to learning. Yet it’s the approach replicated in everything from K-12, to universities, to adult/corporate training. Expeditionary Learning 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 (Hahn, p.1). 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 encourages both children and adults to become increasingly responsible for directing their own personal and collective learning (Hahn, p. 1).

Learning is fostered best in communities where students and teacher’s ideas are respected and where there is mutual trust. Older students mentor younger ones, and students feel physically and emotionally safe (Hahn, p. 1). All students can be successful if they are able to build the confidence to take risks and to meet increasingly difficult challenges in the future.

It is also important for students to learn from their failures, to persevere when things are hard, and to learn to turn afflictions into opportunities. Individual development and group development are integrated so that the value of friendship, trust, and group action is clear. Hahn has expressed that students are encouraged to compete not against each other but with their own personal best and with rigorous standards of excellence.

Both diversity and inclusion increase the richness of ideas, creative power, problem-solving ability, and respect for others (Berger, p. 90-91). In expeditionary learning, students investigate and value different histories and talents as well as those of other communities and cultures (Hahn, p. 1). Hahn goes on to explain that 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. 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. We are a crew, not individual passengers. Students and teachers are strengthened by acts of consequential service to others. Formal education separates the educator and the pupil into two different teams. Expeditionary Learning’s primary function is to help develop in students the proper attitudes and skills to learn from and be of service to others (Hahn, p. 2). With the proper attitude and skills to be of service to others, they realize that the student and the educator are one in the same person. Students will find that we are more alike than we are different. People generally seek for meaning in things their entire lives. This is the hunger for knowledge.

Students are becoming passive viewers of their culture rather than active makers of it (Lowenfeld and Brittain, p. 443-448). Expeditionary learning can breathe life into a standards-based curriculum. It is a theory primarily created by Hahn that has a joint emphasis on character and academics. It gives a sense of moral purpose. What is moral purpose? Moral purpose is a value that, when it is articulated, appeals to the innate sense which is held by some individuals of what is right and what is worthwhile. Great leaders have learned how they can use moral purpose to allow them to inspire and how to lead an organization toward achieving long-term competitive advantage (Bennina, p. 1). We always want our students to have this competitive advantage. In order for students to have that edge they must be engaged in their education. The complete involvement of oneself in a project of purely physical, sensory nature is rapidly disappearing. Touching, seeing, hearing, smelling, and tasting involve the active participation of the individual (Lowenfeld and Brittain, p. 263-265). We must engage our students.
Teachers are the key to the learner's success. As designers of expeditionary learning curriculum and guides of learning expeditions, teachers must be engaged in their own learning process as well as that of their students. Instead of working in isolation behind closed classroom doors, teachers must collaborate closely with colleagues, family and community members. This openness and collaboration ensures a rich, high quality learning experiences for students, and significant professional growth and renewal for teachers (Demee, p.2).

PERSONAL GROWTH THROUGH EDUCATION:

Planning Expeditions

While researching expeditionary learning, I began to make a fairly basic list of expedition ideas. Some ideas included; students learning about space through drawing outside, learning about value while walking around a seventy foot sculpture, also they could discover that there are endless possibilities to create all around them right in the park.

During my research I also remember a promise that I had made to my grandpa. I told him that I would make it a point to see the Sistine Ceiling at some point in my life. Now seemed like the time. It would definitely be an expedition. I knew it would be a lot of work and a huge commitment. The insight of what would be gained, however, would be priceless. Not only would it give me personal experience as an educator, but it would also become a memory of a lifetime for every individual that would take the journey with me.
EXPEDITIONARY LEARNING
RESEARCH PROJECT I: EUROPE

The Planning

In September of 2007, I held the first introductory meeting mainly to try to gain student enthusiasm and generate interest in the trip. I explained that we would be safely traveling with a tour company called Education First (EF) Educational tours. EF has been a leader in experiential learning for four decades. Experiential learning is directly related to expeditionary learning as they both are based on the process of making meaning from direct experience. Educational Tours is the first and only international travel company to be accredited by six leading educational organizations. The next couple of meetings were on details concerning the cost, insurance, and what the travel arrangements would be like. I encouraged enough travelers to join in on this experience.

The next step was to start raising money. The overall cost of this trip was about two thousand dollars per traveler. The trip would last 10 days. This price included all air fare, breakfast and dinners, as well as entrance fees into museums.

We got an early start in the fall selling beef jerky that we had ordered. Then during the winter holidays we sold reindeer candy canes. Our biggest money maker came in February when the students and I put on a chili feed. We threw all of the bowls on a ceramic wheel. The bowls had to be fired twice and glazed, so it was a lot of work. We put up flyers that read “From our Hands to Your Home” all around Helena and East Helena. We rented the City Hall in East Helena to host the event. Every traveler was in charge of bringing in his or her own famous batch of chili and drinks. The hard work
paid off and the turn out was a success. We ended up making over $800 that day, which we used as our tip money for our bus drivers and tour guides. In April some of the travelers also put on a garage sale and made some additional spending money.

The trip was difficult to plan simply because the students had their own lives. There were a total of about thirteen people that were ready to sign up. Altogether there were four parents and eleven students. I was shocked that there was only one male, Allen. He was a junior, and a very likable, fun kid. Jessica was a sophomore and a promising art historian. Shannon, a junior, was a girl with a great deal of curiosity. Jayme was a junior and humble individual. Ashley also a junior seemed often overwhelmed and strived for freedom. Jessalyn was a senior full of energy and the need for adventure. Meagan was a senior who liked to have fun. Jacquelyn was a senior excited to graduate and see the world. The last was Paige a senior who was quiet and sweet.

Jacquelyn, Jessica, Shannon, and Jessalyn would all have their mothers coming with them. Of course, every one of them was just as busy as I was, so trying to plan meetings was difficult. There were a lot of questions and demands that were placed on me as well. Who will I be rooming with? What are the motels like? Is there a swimming pool? Can we travel separately? How much spending money will we need? Why do we have to tip the bus driver? What groups are we meeting up with when we get there? What will the weather be like? What will the overnight train be like? How long will our flight be? Needless, to say there were a lot of questions. When going overseas,
it is normal to have questions, but it was difficult to answer all of these questions because I simply didn’t know the answers.

I did spend a fair amount of time on the phone with EF trying to find answers for them. There were also other situations that came up. Teenagers often have dramatic lives and this was a factor that often came up. I was pressing kids to get their passports and to simply get organized. Allen ended up dropping out of the trip because he couldn’t get his passport in time. This was after months and months of reminding. Then, about two months before we were scheduled to go on our trip, Ashley got into a fight with her mother and ran away for a few days. She finally appeared back in school and told me that she was not going. I talked with her mother and things got back on track, but it was stressful. I ended up formulating a handful of meetings throughout the year, each with a specific topic covering what to expect on the trip. Some students missed one or two meetings. I then would have to find them the following day and fill them in. Ashley never made it to one meeting. She had a thousand excuses. I thought for awhile about telling her that this trip might not be for her, but I knew that this trip would change her for the better. I hoped that it would open her eyes to the world and give her a new perspective on her life.

The fact that she missed so many meetings proved to become an issue later on. She simply wasn’t prepared financially or mentally. Some of the planning problems were based on the fact that some of the students didn’t take responsibly for some of the planning themselves. Some travelers didn’t plan on the food tasting so different, or they didn’t bring enough money even though I went into detail on these two areas.
The hardest part was trying to get everyone together with their busy lives and for us all to be on the same page on what to expect, although it was becoming increasingly clear that I never knew what to expect with this group of people. Before the expedition even began I was learning so much. I was let down to find out that Jacquelyn and her mother would be unable to attend because she wanted to graduate a semester early, and couldn’t devote her time. Next I would find out that Jessalyn was pregnant, a huge shock. She was so sad that she and her mother would of course not be able to attend as well. In the end my group included nine people. There were six students and two adults, and myself. These people included: Jessica and her mother Jennifer, Shannon and her mother Susan, Meagan, Ashley, Paige, Jayme and I.

The overall organization of the trip was pretty easy. EF tours did much of our planning for us which took a lot of the stress off of me. This included day-to-day activities, breakfasts, dinners, and entertainment opportunities. Alyssa was our Tour guide appointed by EF tours. She was Italian and knew Europe very well. The only planning that I had to do before the trip was to make sure that everyone was fully paid up and had insurance. I created a phone number list, and I also made a graph listing everyone’s medications, allergies, and emergency numbers. The only other step was to get the students to the airport and through security. We were flying out of Missoula, so we all traveled from Helena separately to get there. There was a small amount of confusion, but in the end we all got on the plane and were on our way to London.
London

We arrived in London safe and sound after flying for approximately nineteen hours. London time was about 4:00 pm. We were jet legged, but ready for our first expedition. This was one of the first of many learning experiences for my students. None of them have ever been on a nineteen hour flight. My exhausted students and I ventured on as we took our first walking tour of London with our tour guide Alyssa. We saw this Ferris wheel called the London Eye (Figure 1).

Figure 1

We also learned about the history of the Thames River as it gently flowed under the bridge that we were standing on. We went on to see the Houses of Parliament, and learned about the clock tower (Figure 2) which most people think is Big Ben. Big Ben is
the actual sound that the clock tower makes. While listening to the memorable sound of Big Ben we took pictures in the famous red phone booths (Figure 3).

We continued the journey to Trafalgar Square. The amount of people was shocking. People walking, people riding bikes, double stacker buses, little cars, little black taxis, and they were all so close to each other. The importance of fashion became evident as we watched people scurry about. Everyone was in a hurry to get somewhere. They also left a whirlwind of trash behind them. There were a lot of people smoking and a lot of pigeons.

We learned that driving in London is quite expensive. Gas was eight dollars a gallon and they have to pay an additional eight dollar congestion fee just to come into the city. If you want to park in the city, it’s a minimum of twenty five dollars. Needless, to say we decided to walk.

On our walk back to the hotel, we stopped off at the Westminster Abby, which is huge and very gothic in style. Everyone was in awe. We made it back to the hotel where
we met up with the other groups that we would be traveling with. There were two groups from California, and one was from Texas. Overall, there would end up being about 45 of us on this trip.

All 45 of us sat down for dinner which was a typical London meal of bangers and mash, which is a type of sausage and mashed potatoes. It was a little different, but I ate it. On the first day of the expedition I learned how polite some of my students were and also how ridiculously picky others were. Some students ordered pizza after dinner and we all made our way to our shared rooms to get some much-needed shut eye.

The next day was a coach tour of London which was extremely informative. We found it interesting that there are over 300 languages spoken in London. We made a number of stops including the original Hard Rock Cafe. We went to St. Paul’s Cathedral where Nelson, who was the British naval hero credited with saving Britain from an invasion by France, is buried (Stockstad, p. 1077). This was also where Princess Diana got married to Prince Charles. This was a great stop for the kids to run around and poke their heads into the cathedral. We had previously studied the architecture of this building and it was amazing to be standing right in front of it. They took pictures in the red telephone booths, stared at the oddly shaped, random bathrooms that they had to pay to use. We walked past the Ritz Hotel. Our tour guide informed us that a spot of tea at the Ritz is eighty dollars.

Everywhere we looked there was so much amazing architecture. During WWII, London was heavily bombed, and many of the buildings have actual holes still in the façade. This was so fascinating that they left the buildings as a reminder.
We then drove the coach right over the original London Bridge which was constructed in 1700. Next was the unique Tower of London. Towards the end of the coach tour, my students and I found jet lag catching up with us. It was hard to fight fatigue, even though we were all so eager to see more. Some of us tried the official fish and chips of London. It was a huge helping of food. I’m not a big fan of fish, but I had to try it.

After lunch we got our second wind we headed to Buckingham Palace where we watched the changing of the guards. It was a very interesting experience. There were tons of people, as well as a huge mansion with massive gates, not to mention large amounts of traffic flying by. It was hard trying to keep everyone together. During our free time everyone wanted to do different things which made it even harder to keep things organized. Some kids wanted to shop, others wanted to try more of the exotic cuisine, while the rest just wanted to sit, relax and take it all in.

Overall, London was easy going, and people were friendly. The students enjoyed themselves, and things went relatively smoothly. However, our journey continued on now to Paris the next expedition.
PARIS

We had to get up at 4:45 am to catch the Euro star to get to Paris (Figure 4).

Figure 4

Even though we were all incredibly tired, the train ride was still incredible. The train was really nice, and had a very smooth ride. The countryside between London and Paris is a lot like eastern Montana. Getting off the train, our tour guide explained that we needed to be careful of the gypsies on the streets. They see Americans as an easy target for theft.

As we hit the streets of Paris the kids’ eyes began to wander. They had walked into a whole new world. This was the first time that many of them had been in a place that everyone around them spoke a different language. This was what expeditionary learning is about. This type of knowledge isn’t available in a book.
With everyone in awe it was a welcomed struggle to get them to focus on the next phase of the journey. I finally got them all together and onto the subway for seven stops. They had two different subways. One was called the RER and the other was the Metro. As soon as we got off of the Metro poor Ashley came up to me white as a ghost, holding her coat. The train ride and 10 stops on the subway was more than enough to give Ashley some motion sickness. She tried to stick it out, but as we walked to the Notre Dame it was clear she was not doing well. Ashley wanted to go back to the hotel, so our tour guide arranged a taxi and contacted the hotel. Ashley ended up getting sick in the taxi as well. This was a stressful day right from the beginning. The rest of the gang went on to tour the fascinating Notre Dame Cathedral (Figure 5).

Figure 5
Alyssa, our tour guide, made a phone call to the hotel to ensure that Ashley had made it. The hotel staff told Alyssa that Ashley had made it to the hotel but wasn’t able to talk with us at that time. Needless to say, I spent the rest of the day worrying because I didn’t have much control over the situation. I didn’t have an international cell phone which I now realize is essential. My saving grace was Alyssa as she kept me assured that throughout the day that everything was fine.

We walked a lot. I mean a lot. We walked up some stairs, and we walked down some stairs. Then we would get on the subway and off the subway. Then we would walk again. This trip proved itself to be quite rigorous. A high level of energy was needed each day. The students and I made our way through the crowds of Parisians and shopped about. Many of the kids were shocked by the price of European clothes, yet some still splurged.

We ate so many new things, such as an odd pizza called Flam. We started out with a salad and water, as usual in Paris. Then, the waiter brought out tons of these pizza-like things, flammekueche. They are comparable to a super-thin pizza, with a delicious, creamy sauce instead of tomato sauce. They come with ham, bacon, mushroom, etc.

We also visited some of the most disgusting bathrooms (Figure 6, p. 17) that we had ever seen. Some of the toilets didn’t even have toilet seats and the floors were sticky with bath tissue strung about. It didn’t matter if it was a nice restaurant or not, every establishment in France has a gross bathroom. This was one of the biggest shocks to everyone.
The next big event that day was that of the Eiffel Tower (Figure 7). It is so grand and humbling. To look at it is a bit surreal. To see it right in front of you and 1,986 feet up in the sky (Figure 8, p. 18) is unbelievable.
You see it on the internet, in books, and in the movies but none of them compare to the feeling you get when you stand on top of this architectural wonder.

We took the elevator up and without surprise we got separated. As we ascended, the sun went down and the Eiffel lights started to light up. The kids were grinning ear-to-ear once they reached the top. Everyone took pictures and walked around. Jaime, Megan and I decided to take the stairs down, and this was an experience within itself. It was a total of 719 steps. It was a workout to say the least. We reached the base where, of course, there were still massive crowds of people, but eventually we found our group.

We lay on a grassy knoll starring up at the structure as it began to sparkle. Every single student’s mouth was wide open with amazement. Alyssa then came over to inform me that Ashley had been trying to get a hold of her and couldn’t get through, so she
called her mom. Her mom, naturally concerned, called up EF Tours. Alyssa talked to EF and called Ashley to let her know that we were on our way back to the hotel. We began trying to gather everyone together to get on to the Metro. Getting 45 people together in a crowded place takes some patience.

As we were sitting outside of the Metro on some steps waiting, a transient came over and touched Jaime’s leg. I said “no”, and this man verbally went off. It was scary. We ignored him and he eventually went away. So we thought.

Finally, together we headed underground with a swarm of people. As we were waiting to get into the station, it was like a mob. We were shoulder to shoulder, completely surrounded by strangers who were pushing to get through. This is apparently normal for a Friday night. I watched the faces of my students go from smiling to being scared, and there wasn’t much I could do. Expeditionary learning teaches you to learn from both the “good” and “bad situations”. Benazir Bhutto said it best, “a ship in port is safe, but that is not what ships are built for”. I knew I didn’t have full control of the situation, but that’s not what life is about. I kept calm and took some deep breathes, until we finally got through and on to the subway. Then Jessica tapped me and pointed to the right. I looked over and somehow through the mob of people I saw the transient piercing me with his eyes. I gulped and felt a sense of fear that I have never felt before. Another man shouted out that he hates Americans and “that we should go home”. Anxiety overcame my entire body. The source of anxiety comes from not being able to know the world you’re in, not being able to orient yourself in your own existence (May, p. 59-60). What occurs in this breakthrough is not simply growth; it is much more dynamic. It is
not a mere expansion of awareness; it is rather a kind of battle. A dynamic struggle goes on within a person between what he or she consciously thinks on the one hand and, on the other, some insight, some perspective that is struggling to be born (May, p. 61). The insight that was gained from this situation is that neither the students, the parents, nor I had control. Also, at the time we were unaware that the control could be taken away because we had consciously told ourselves that we could handle anything. It was a humbling experience for all of us. Thankfully, Alyssa was standing right there and we were getting off at the next stop. We got off, and thankfully, the transient stayed on. We were safe, but it definitely heightened our heart beat and made us appreciate Montana in a whole new way.

We made our way to the hotel, and I went directly to Ashley’s room. She seemed to be doing somewhat better, which was a relief. Everything worked out, but there was definitely some stress involved, not to mention how unfortunate it was that Ashley missed out on a whole day. This was a fascinating, yet stressful day to remember. I had so much responsibility, but yet, by no means did I have full control over a multitude of situations. This proved completely foreign to me. At the end of the day I was filled with a mass amount of anxiety. From this situation I learned the importance of traveling with an international cell phone. It is a must, no matter the cost!

Thankfully, Paris is full of visual stimuli that brought our spirits up a bit in the days to follow. A coach tour of Paris was next. Ashley was still sick, but she was a trooper and came along.
Our guide on the couch tour spoke English but her accent was so thick, none of us fully understood what she was saying. She kept asking these historical questions about Europe that we didn’t know the answers to. In a very French way she would respond “uh, no you don’t know?” It felt like she was mocking us.

The city is so old, with amazing architecture. From medieval times to modern days, France has been at the forefront of architectural innovations. Words can’t describe what it is like to finally see the images that you’ve only seen in books. Continuing on we took a short bus ride outside of the city to Versailles (Figure 9).

Figure 9

The Palace of Versailles was the official residence of the Kings of France from 1682 until 1790. It was originally a hunting lodge. Versailles is almost too beautiful to try and describe. There were still a lot of people in the palace, but as you made your way outside it was a whole new world. There was this massive back yard with enormous sculptural
fountains (Figure 10), vibrant gardens, well-groomed trees, and a huge rectangular body of water. This is exactly what we needed. We needed a little bit of nature after being in the city with loads of people the last few days.

Figure 10

Figure 11
The next stop was the Louvre (Figure 11, p. 22). The Louvre is one of the largest places in the world and it exemplifies traditional French Architecture since the Renaissance. It houses a magnificent collection of ancient and Western Art. I have studied the Louvre and the art in the Louvre for six years, and felt honored to have this opportunity.

Figure 12

Inside the Louvre (Figure 12) it is chaotic, but Jessica, Jennifer, Meagan and Jayme are smiling big and ready to explore. Unfortunately, not everyone is sharing my excitement. Ashley, who has been sick, has been refusing to eat the food that has been provided for her. Since Ashley has not been eating, she decides to throw a fit about wanting food at that exact moment. She does this as I am trying to organize the group for
a tour around the Louvre. I tried to explain to her that we had only two hours permitted in the Louvre which isn’t even enough time. Shannon’s attitude then surfaces and joins into the whining. Shannon and Susan want to go clothes shopping. The three of them want to know if they can meet up later. At this point I’m very angry and more so, disappointed. This is the Louvre. A chance of a lifetime, and I would not allow them to meet up with us later. If they would have come to the meetings they might have realized its significance. Regardless of the intense tension in the group, I made the decision to keep everyone together.

I just really wanted them to appreciate the fact they had this opportunity. I knew that Shannon and Ashley would probably not have intense insight today. Insight never comes hit or miss, but in accordance with a pattern of which one essential element is our own commitment (May, p. 70-71). At this point in the trip it was obvious to me that these girls were not committed in the way I needed for them to have some of the breakthroughs that I had hoped for.

It was hard for me at first to fully enjoy this visit to the Louvre. It is really hard to navigate around the Louvre even with a map. My group kept asking me where specific pieces of work were like I was a tour guide. Susan went on to tell me that I should have memorized the map before we came. I had to ignore certain comments, and glares from some of my tired travelers. It was extremely hard, because it was hurting my feelings. I had a job to do though, and I couldn’t take it personally. Now looking back I realize that Paris, and traveling in general, was getting to everyone. It was only a matter of time and I now know to expect it.
Finally, I did get us situated to the right direction and there was Jessica, Jennifer, Meagan, and Jayme with huge smiles wandering through this massive place engaged with the curiosity that I had hoped for. We carried on through this spectacular place. Its layout was confusing. We went back and forth trying to find the masterpieces we had set out for. Keep in mind that we only had two hours here, so once again we were stressed for time. However, we made it to most of the famous works.

We got right up to the Mona Lisa (Figure 13, p. 26), although we had to wiggle our way through a huge crowd. Jayme had tears in her eyes. Snapping pictures, Megan had her camera held up over the crowd, hoping that one would turn out. Jessica was shocked as to how small the painting actually is, and that it’s covered by this huge protective case. When you see a painting like the Mona Lisa in person it looks completely different than in a book. When a camera reproduces a painting, it destroys the uniqueness of the image; as a result its meaning changes (Berger, p. 61).

The importance of seeing unique works of art is priceless. In one day we saw work by Da Vinci, Michelangelo, Raphael, and many others. I left feeling very blessed and stressed. There is no way to make everyone happy when you are traveling. This is also amplified when you are in a foreign place, and you don’t have some of the amenities that you are used to. It was a group consensus that it was time to leave Paris and carry on with our next expedition, Florence.
Florence

We took an overnight train from Paris to Florence which was an experience of a lifetime (Figure 14, p. 27). I had never been on a train with separate little rooms that slept six people. Please note that these were six complete strangers, who spoke a foreign language. The rest of our crew was grouped together, which made their sleeping arrangements a little easier, however, I quickly realized that I couldn’t make everyone happy.

This train was not as nice as the Euro Star. It was old and a little dirty, but that made it even more of a French experience. Ashley was hungry because she threw away her sack lunch that was provided for us. Susan and Shannon didn’t like the smell of the rooms and thought they were too small. Ashley didn’t like her roommates and made it
very apparent. This went on and on until they finally got comfortable and enjoyed the experience. It was a completely new environment in which everyone reacted differently to. According to William Ayers; all human environments have some idea, some belief worked up in them, responsibly and self-consciously or not. Some people set out with specific ideas to create particular environments. But it works the other way as well: We can look at a space and deduce ideas and beliefs from it. The space is a visible container of human action: at times oppressive or liberating; beautiful or ugly (Ayers, p. 67-72). This train ride in some ways was a wreck due to negative attitude, but in some ways it was liberating because I made up my mind to enjoy my environment, no matter what.

Figure 14
There was an adventure in every car, with a huge diversity of people surrounding me. As nightfall came it felt good to be alone. I stuck my head out the window to feel the warm summer wind blanket over my face. I forced out of my head the group’s worries, and concentrated on my own experience for just a minute.

Ravishing landscapes swept by as I hoped the girls were safely in their cabins. Of course they weren’t, so I spent a majority of the night simply trying to keep track of them. They were moody, and I really didn’t feel like dealing with mass amounts of attitude. But it was my job to deal with it, whether I wanted to or not. Night turned into morning and my eyes were barely ajar from lack of sleep. I gathered the troop together. We finally set foot on solid ground after thirteen hours of movement. Our bodies still felt like they were moving, which was a really odd feeling.

Florence was exactly as I had imagined. It had gorgeous people bustling around on brightly colored scooters (Figure 15).
We sat down for breakfast (Figure 16, p. 28) at this stunning little Italian restaurant to find that they didn’t refrigerate their milk. None the less, we ate what we could to provide ourselves with some energy for the busy day.

Most of us were still so tired from our sleepless night on the train that we found it hard to concentrate. I simply felt blessed to be out of Paris and in Italy. We took a guided tour of Florence to see the Piazza della Sinoria and the Ponte Vecchio. We then had the opportunity to visit a leather making studio and see a demonstration.

Jaime, Megan, and I went to a little, quaint, Italian restaurant for lunch while the rest of the group went shopping. Meagan and I had this pesto pasta that melted in your mouth. Jayme, I believe, had some authentic raviolis. At the counter a waitress shredded a huge block of parmesan and the aroma filled the room. Our waiter, a happy, bubbly man laughed when we asked for the bill. He took out his pen and placed upon his forehead, as if he was pondering. Still smiling, he randomly writes out a total upon the paper that covered our table. The girls and I giggled as the rounded Italian waiter walked away singing a little Italian tune. It made for a lasting memory and it was exactly what I needed to continue on with the day.

The heat and humidity was almost unbearable; however, most everyone in Florence was very polite to travelers. We wanted to go to the Academia, and see the original David by Michelangelo, but our time was too short and the walk was too long in such heat. With the remainder of our time we shopped around and got some gelato. Gelato is Italian "ice cream", but is different from American-style ice cream. Gelato is
made from whole milk, eggs, sugar, and flavoring. Some of the fruit flavors are dairy-free; just fruit and sugar.

Assisi

We took a bus ride to Assisi the next day with the rest of the groups in our tour. Most of the 45 people on the bus slept which was nice as it gave us some much needed down time from one place to the next.

On our way to Assisi we stopped at this fascinating ceramic factory named Nuccia and received a demonstration on ceramic molds (Figure 17).

Figure 17

The artwork was hand-crafted, and I felt honored that they took time out of their day to show us their trade. This was an unexpected treat. The students and I then went next door where you could buy some Italian ceramics and sample breads and olive oil.

When we arrived in Assisi, we took a tour of the Basilica of St. Francis, which was peaceful and full of energy. We returned to the bus for our next destination: Rome.
Rome

We arrived into Rome late. I was shocked at how big of a city it is. We got our hotel rooms and nestled our heads in for a good night’s sleep. I woke up the next morning energized and ready to go. I knew that today was going to be an unbelievable day, the day I have been waiting for. Ever since I was young, I have wanted to see the Sistine Ceiling. Today I would make good on my promise to my grandpa, and finally see the wonder he described, the Sistine Ceiling. Now it was my time. Most of my students were equally as excited. We entered the Vatican (Figure 18), and of course, we were surrounded by hundreds of people and it was hot.

The Vatican itself is huge, however, it was incredible! There were tons of people around me, but my only focus was above. I found myself with tears in my eyes. I couldn’t believe that a piece of art could be so emotionally moving. My neck became sore from staring upwards, and I brought my eyes down to refocus. Such receptivity
requires nimbleness, a fine-honed sensitivity in order to let one’s self be the vehicle of whatever vision may emerge (May, p. 41-42). Ashley and Shannon’s vision was short lived, as they took a quick look and were ready to go. However, I took a look at Megan and Jaime and they too had tears in their eyes as their heads were tilted up. Some of the other students weren’t as excited; however, I know that someday they will realize what an amazing opportunity they had.

Megan, Jaime and I pointed out the Creation of Adam, Creation of Eve, Noah’s Arc, and of course the Expulsion from Paradise. We were fascinated to see the detailed work of the Last Judgment, which was done by Michelangelo when he was in his sixties. The experience was breathtaking, and will be remembered for the rest of my life only in my mind, because you are not allowed to take pictures. I wanted to stay longer, but we had to move on. We went on to St. Peter’s Basilica where we saw the ever amazing Pieta (Figure 19, p. 33).
My jaw dropped. It was much bigger than I thought that it would be. The drapery was done with such astonishing craftsmanship. I got right up to it. In this sculpture Michelangelo portrayed pain connected with the idea of redemption. The Madonna is seated, her face is youthful, and her head leans only slightly over the lifeless body of her son, Christ, lying in her lap. It is just so different to see it in person versus seeing it in a book or on the computer. According to Rollo May the intensity of the encounter creates an opportunity for true absorption, for the learner to become wholly involved in the process. Rollo May goes on to explain that in moments of an intensive encounter we experience quite clear neurological changes. These include quickened heart beat, higher blood pressure, increased intensity and constriction of vision, with eyelids narrowed so that we can see more vividly the scene. I felt some of these changes
in my body while looking at the Pieta, and the Sistine Ceiling. This is a feeling that you cannot get from researching the work in a book or online.

The tour drew to an end, and we headed back outside into the blistering heat where we saw the guards dressed up in these interesting jester outfits. I was fascinated to learn that Michelangelo had designed the guard’s suits. Michelangelo’s print is all throughout the Vatican. The heat and humidity again was overwhelming (Figure 20), as it sucked the breath right out of us. On this day it was about 107 degrees and it was just too hot. We were visually stimulated, sticky with sweat, and hungry.

Figure 20
As a group we headed to lunch. After lunch we were off to the Coliseum (Figure 21). Words honestly can’t describe what our eyes saw. The Coliseum is an elliptical amphitheatre in the center of the city of Rome, Italy, the largest ever built in the Roman Empire. It is one of the greatest works of Roman architecture and Roman engineering. Its construction started between 70 and 72 AD under the emperor Vespasian and was completed in 80 AD under Titus. It was fascinating to see what they could build that many years ago, and even though it is falling apart it is still fairly structurally sound.

Figure 21
Next it was off to the Trevi Fountain (Figure 22). Standing at 85 feet high and 65 feet wide, it is the largest Baroque fountain in the city. It was huge! We threw in some coins for good luck and carried on to the Pantheon.

Figure 22

Inside the Pantheon it is quiet and a perfect place to just sit and take in all that we had seen in one day. The afternoon was left with some free time in which we walked around and shopped. We had dinner at a place called Amore. As we ate dinner, a song by Blake Sheldon came on over the radio. This seemed to be ironic since it was our last night of the trip and the lyrics read “Another day in Paris and Rome, surrounded by people but I feel so alone and I want to go home.” This was truly how everyone felt. It had been a trip of a lifetime, and it was time to go home.

Additional European images available:

http://picasaweb.google.com/asusag1
LONDON, PARIS, AND ITALY … A LEARNING EXPERIENCE

A few months after everyone was settled back into their normal routines, I sent out a mass email asking for the participants’ feedback on their experience. Along with this request, I deemed it only fair to share with them what I had personally learned from the experience. This first section is the attachment that I sent out to the group members. The following sections are the responses that I received.

**Angie Susag**

(Art Educator)

How do we learn? As an educator I have asked myself this question a multitude of times. What is education and why do we need it? Education is not about preparation for only a part of life (like work) but is about preparation for the whole of life and the deepest aspects of living. With that being said, how do I educate the whole person? We pass certain exams, find jobs, get married, have children and then become more and more like machines. Often we remain fearful of an adventurous life (Krishnamurti, p. 33-37). There is no doubt that our young people need to be skilled in core subjects. But they also must be prepared for the increasingly complex world they will experience after graduation. It is a world that demands an understanding of other people and cultures; the ability to work within a team structure; to think critically; and to develop good decision-making skills. Our students deserve an education that will not only provide skills in math and reading, but one that will equip them to meet the challenges of a demanding global
society. I believe that it is important for us to find out for ourselves what is true, so that we are able to face the world and understand it, not just conform to it. This is why we set off on this expedition.

This trip to Europe brought history to life. Now, when I lecture on the Sistine Ceiling, Mona Lisa, and Michelangelo’s David, the Louvre, Big Ben, or even the Eiffel Tower, I speak with so much more enthusiasm. I speak from experience. Now, I educate through experience. I can passionately describe minute details that one cannot learn simply by reading about it in a book. My classroom comes to life now through the use of expeditionary learning.

When students graduate from college they must be well rounded in every aspect of education. They are more likely than ever to be working in a global community. They will need to understand the language, customs, geography, business climate, and habits of other nations. Certainly, some of this can be learned in the classroom. But what better way to truly understand the culture and habits of people from another country than to actually go there and experience it first hand? This is what expeditionary learning is aimed towards. My students were engaged with the world around them, learning in a meaningful way. As an educator, expeditionary learning is a curriculum I will continue to incorporate into my classroom. Because of expeditionary leaning, my students and I now have the ability to connect with our studies and the world around us in a whole new way.

This tour went far beyond just seeing the sites. Professionally, I see and understand people in a whole new way. Travel benefits everyone personally. I have become more open-minded, flexible, confident, trusting, and more tolerant as a result of
my traveling experiences. Traveling with a group of vastly different people on a daily basis is a learning experience within itself! There were pressures of emotionally charged interactions.

Now, because of this experience, I have further insight on how complex human behavior actually is. I had to learn this through mistakes. Obtaining people-skills is not as simple as being nice, friendly, and interesting. I feel that I have become a more sensitive person to others’ needs, although I have yet to master this skill. I also realized that people don’t care about you. This isn’t because people are mean or hurtful, but simply because they are mostly focused on themselves. This isn’t necessarily a bad thing; it’s simply reality. To say everyone is completely selfish is a gross exaggeration. That ignores all the acts of kindness, sacrifice and love that make the world work. Also, when people appear to be mean or hurtful they don’t usually do it intentionally. There are exceptions to this, but generally the hurt you feel is a side-effect, not the principle cause.

Ultimately, I now understand that people are simply emotional. Perhaps this is an exaggeration. But the core of the message is that people tend to have stronger feelings about something other than they let on. I have learned that really you don’t need to call people out on their idiosyncrasies, but be sensitive to the overall picture. This is a true understanding of what is really important.

One characteristic of an experience is that insight comes at a moment of transition between work and relaxation. It comes at a break in periods of voluntary effort. Your mind has to be far away from the problem. It is a thorough intense application to the problem – thinking about it, struggling with it – starts the process of full understanding (May, p. 80-81).
When thinking back on this trip I like to take an optimistic, but realistic view of people. I know people generally try their best, but make mistakes and suffer from unintended self-absorption. In other words, they are basically like me. This breakthrough in thought was an educational experience that is priceless, and will be utilized on a daily basis. Thank you to everyone who has opened my eyes to the world. -Angie Susag

Jayme
(Student, Junior)

I had a dream, a dream to go somewhere I had always wished I could; I was a little small town girl living in a big, scratch that, huge world. Every day I walk into my favorite class, Art III, and sit down in my little corner chair and prepare myself to soak up as much information as possible. In this class we learn about the fathers of art and their great impact on the world, fathers such as Michelangelo. As I turn the pages in my art history book, I let my mind drift to these far away places, wondering about the way the brush strokes look on the canvas and how the light hits each color. People used to laugh when I said one day I would reach my ultimate dream to see the Sistine Chapel. I did not truly understand what made my life so special, but once you have stepped into a new world your small conveniences don’t seem all that small anymore. The experience I had in Europe was one I will never ever forget. The memories I have made and shared with my friends and teacher will last a life time. Stepping out of the class room and into the real thing makes you realize that everyday is special, down to the week, day, and minute. When you’re standing under something painted over centuries ago, your heart feels as if it will jump from your chest. It pushed me to be a better artist and for that I am truly
grateful. Art to me is a person's soul; I can say I saw Michelangelo's soul and his soul was the MOST beautiful thing my eyes have ever seen. - Jayme

Jennifer
(Parent of Jessica)

When asked what I had learned from the Art Club trip to Europe, I had to put a great deal of thought into how to organize the many different things. I learned a great deal from being outside of my comfort zone. I also learned just how youthful our country is compared to others. And most of all I learned how to appreciate such a unique experience.

I think that my most immediate lesson from being a part of the trip to Europe was about the boundaries of my comfort zone. I would consider myself a traveler, but a traveler with experience within our own country. It is an entirely different experience for me knowing that no matter how far I walked... I could not get home on my own. And when you do not speak the language, read the signs, menus etc, it can cause a great deal of distance and confusion between you and your surroundings. I learned to ask for help, that there is safety in numbers, and that taking notes and using pictures can be helpful. I think I learned all of these things as a youngster. I need to thank my own parents and teachers for that.

When experiencing the history and art of the European countries, it is profoundly obvious that their history is tremendous compared to ours. Architecturally, the European countries seem to have some experiential knowledge. One glaring example was that most
of their structures were made out of rock, brick or stone. As I listened to the tour guides talk, it seems that European people learned that wood structures burn and break more easily than stone and rock. Building something once out of stone, brick or rock that will last for a century or more? Makes sense to me.

The experience of the Europe trip was a once in a lifetime opportunity. I keep hearing that phrase from many people who hear me talk about the trip. The trip itself and all of the things we saw. The people we traveled with and met along the way. The great food, interesting accommodations and modes of transportation - some were enjoyed more than others. I intend to have several more “once in a lifetime” trips like this one. It was great! An educational experience for this educator. - Thanks, Jennifer.

Jessica
(Student, Sophomore)

People learn and experience new things every day. There is more significance in the things I learn everyday. Those things that one learns rarely and value significantly are more than everyday occurrences or realities. My experience in Europe was one of these - significant and rare captivation of my intellect and knowledge.

This experience not only gave me the opportunity to witness brilliant architectural and artist pieces, but also expended my knowledge of the surrounding world. I am now filled with a great deal of worldly knowledge and experience that I would not have acquired otherwise. To inform oneself about the knowledge of a piece or object’s
significance is in no comparison to actually witnessing the object to all of one’s senses, captivating the soul for all that it is worth.

To see The Louvre and Versailles in person is an experience I will never forget and will always treasure. Everything from the architecture to the culture was different. To see all the architecture was like witnessing art itself, and this is just were they sleep. The people varied from very friendly to unresponsive. The Italians so laid-back and the French so . . . um, well, French.

This trip opened me up to new forms of art as well as new forms of life. To experience people is to experience the making of art. What drives someone - their beliefs, interests and passions - showed through the people and their art. With such rich history it isn’t a wonder that even the buildings have more culture and meaning than our whole democracy. It is hard to put into words all that I’ve learned because there is so much to consume. Even if I had not slept the whole trip I still wouldn’t have consumed all of the art.

I learned to take in things that I wouldn’t have experienced otherwise and appreciate art in a whole new way. Seeing what drove famous artists, in their culture and beliefs. And it is these ideas that I will never forget and always value. To witness these things helped make my hopes for the future very probable and more thoroughly understood. This trip overflowed my expectations, and because of this, I will be able to help me myself develop more as an artist and knowledgeable person.

Thank you so much for this opportunity, Susag. – Jessica
Megan
(Student, Senior)

I have recently acquired a vast amount of knowledge in an experience of a lifetime. My name is Megan Peterson, and I have just graduated from high school in my home town of Helena Montana. I had a very dramatic and difficult senior year, as I struggled to find my true identity and place in the world. Fortunately, I ran head-on into an amazing opportunity to take a trip across the great Atlantic to the countries of Great Britain, France, and Italy. It was the perfect ending to such a trying year. I also got to explore my one true passion-art. My trip to Europe was not only a very educational trip but an amazing experience. I learned so much about so many things I don’t even know where to start!

Our trip began in the city of London. London is such beautiful city with its old-world, elegant architecture and tradition swirled together with the chaos of modern high fashion. We got to see Trafalgar Square, Big Ben and Buckingham Palace’s changing of the guards. It was a great experience to tour around the town of Old London and see all the incredible buildings such as the Shakespeare stage, the London castle and Piccadilly, whose name comes from a funny little story of the Dilly girls. We even got to see the Ritz where they charge $80.00 for a cup of tea. We also went to the Westminster Abby; it was gorgeous. After shopping at Herriot, the biggest department store in the world, we continued on to Paris.
What can I say about Paris? It is dirty and crowded and they are rude and ridiculously overcharge for water, but Versailles alone made it all worth it. Versailles was the hunting camp that King Louis built and broke the city of Paris; however it is exquisite!

All of the incredible photos I took in Versailles have come in handy in my collage sculpture class. We also went to Notre Dame; it was breathtaking, and all of the little meanings behind all the images sculpted in the fresco were very fascinating. The Eiffel tower was amazing; I couldn’t believe I was really there. It is truly a structural marvel. The Louvre was like heaven to me, a young inspired artist. All the historical and truly breathtaking art that filled room by room was almost more than I could take; it was truly a dream come true to be that close to the art I had only dreamed about.

Italy was definitely a grand finale to a fantastic trip. First we went to the little ceramic factory. It was interesting to see the process being done right in front of us. Then we continued to the little town of Assisi and toured the Cathedral of St. Frances and his final resting place. The best of Italy was yet to come: in Florence, we went to the Leonardo leather shop and learned how to determine the real thing from pleather. The Florence Bridge is beautiful and the story behind it is an intriguing little tale of the Golden Street. Further in the heart of the city, Ghiberti’s Gates of Paradise bronze doors were magical at the Basilica of Santa Croce. It almost brought a tear to my eye. After a quick but beautiful bus trip across the Italian countryside, I found myself in the heart and heat of Rome. Rome was stunning as we walked along the narrow streets to the Trevi fountain and made our wish then tossed in our coins. But the best part of Rome was the Vatican. The Vatican is full of magnificent art work but nothing can compare to the
Sistine chapel. It was truly touching and brought tears to my eyes and warmth to my soul a dream come true. I still have trouble believing that I was at the residence of the Pope and got to see the ceiling that Michelangelo painted in 1477. My favorite part was how he had hidden symbols of his strong negative feelings towards the Pope.

The last place we went was to the Coliseum. Construction on The Coliseum begins in 70 a.d. and is still standing. We got to tour around and see where all the action took place, the royal box seat and where the gladiators where kept. It was very cool.

In conclusion I not only learned a ton on this trip, I also think I matured quite a bit. It made me appreciate Montana and how kind the people are, the room and wide open spaces we have here, and most of all my family. This trip truly was an experience of a life time.

A big thank you, to Miss Susag because if it weren’t for her, none of this wonderful experience would have happened. - Meagan

“Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness…Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one's lifetime.” (Mark Twain)

“I have found out that there isn’t any surer way to find out whether you like people or hate them than to travel with them.” (Mark Twain)
EXPEDITIONARY LEARNING
RESEARCH PROJECT II:
Experimenting with Nature

In September of 2008, I introduced to my Art I classes, the artist Andy Goldsworthy, and a famous British artist who collaborates with nature to create his work. To inspire students about the project, we watched clips from his video titled River and Tides.

During the next class we critiqued his work as I projected different examples for the students. We analyzed color schemes, along with his use of movement, contrast, and texture. He manipulates whatever comes to hand, such as twigs, leaves, stones, snow, ice, reeds, or thorns.

Together, the class discussed how he experimented with the use of line and his constant use of repetition. As we investigated Andy’s work together, we concluded that he was obsessed with balance. Within this use of radial, symmetrical, and asymmetrical, balance a magnificent form is always created.

The next day we headed out on our expedition. As a group we traveled by foot east for about six blocks to the nearest park. The objective of the lesson plan was that students would assemble found natural objects into an arrangement emphasizing one or more of the five elements of art and decide upon the best view of their work to be photographed.

Students looked at this park as an empty canvas. I watched as they began to look around. I couldn’t help but think about how this brings back the importance of childhood imagination. It is only through the senses that learning can take place. This may sound like an obvious statement; however, its implications seem to be lost in our education.
system (Lowenfeld and Brittain, p. 258-262). Anything can be art. Within this park everyone is equal. No one has more colored pencils, or more expensive ones. This is equality at its finest.

The park was full of free mediums which students utilized. It may be that education merely reflects the changes in our society, for people seem to be relying less and less on actual sensory contact with their environment (Lowenfeld and Brittain, p. 367). These students had sensory contact and their work was incredibly creative. Granted, not every single student got the full idea within this hour’s time; however, they gained so much insight. I was able to see a different side to them. They are completely different individuals when you allow them to move. Note the use of the word allow. I have learned that we have to find room to allow them to move. Of course we know this, as it is common sense. It seems, though, that it has come to the point where students are asking permission. I was hesitant. It’s more work and more responsibility. It was hard to make sure that they all stayed together as a group, and stayed clear of traffic, and used appropriate language. The hardest part of all was to manage their time to make sure that they created a piece of environmental art work within an hour. In the end it was well worth the experience.

Not only did my students create some unique art work (Figures 23, 24, & 25, p. 49), but I got to see their goofy side, and how they interact with each other. I found out who my kinesthetic learners are. This lesson plan required dexterity along with fine motor movements. My students learned through moving and doing and in the process created interesting art. Students discovered relationships between the environment and
their creation. They were also able to notice differences in art material, techniques, and methods in a new environment.

Figure 23

Figure 24

Figure 25
EXPEDITIONARY LEARNING
RESEARCH PROJECT III:
The Study of Form and Value through Sculpture

This project began at the end of September 2008. We discussed how form is the three-dimensionality of an object. They drew our two-dimensional shapes and turned them into three-dimensional forms with the use of value tones. Students drew out and then painted plastic forms that sat on their desks while experimenting with value to imply form.

The next project was to head next door to the UM Helena School of Technology where an intense sculpture done by local artist, Richard Swanson, stands. My concerns again were to keep the students calm, get them across traffic, and keep them motivated. It was in the beginning of the day, so there was a nip to the air. Therefore, I had to make sure that everyone was dressed properly etc. By the third period, the day was beautiful with excellent lighting.

With each class I walked around the sculpture talking about vantage points. I had them sit in three different positions before they chose the best one. Each student eventually found a comfortable position on the grass around the sculpture and began to draw. I explained the importance of seeing the world as it truly is, right now, observing carefully so you can respond to what is – without that grounding of reality, flights of imagination are unconvincing (Danny Gregory, 12).

Some students forgot that we were there to turn our observations into lines on their papers. So, I of course had to move some students away from their social cliques, but it all worked out. I showed them how to create a viewfinder using their hands to
shape a rectangle. We used our pencil tips to measure distance, while we squinted an eye. Each student had a value scale sitting next to them, which they had made previously. Students were to use a full range of value to portray this sculpture. Students would learn how to create form/3-D space on a 2-D surface using pencil and the value scales. Some students really had a hard time understanding this concept - maybe because of its grandeur. Because of this, I would have them focus on a small portion of it. Others seemed to excel immensely by viewing the sculpture in the round. There was definite progress within this project.

The most important finding in this project was that they got to see how value tone shifts as the clouds move, and the lighting changes. This was something that I would have a difficult time emulating in the classroom. It brought our notes on value tone and form alive. It is one thing to talk about form and hold a small object in hand, but to sit under a hundred foot sculpture is a completely different situation.

Once again, there were obstacles, and one included the talking. My student’s were so excited to be outside that their teenage social instincts kicked in. I had to be on constant patrol around the sculpture to make sure that they stayed focused. The morning classed posed a bit of a problem as it was a little cold and the grass had some dew, but we worked through it.

This was planned to be a two-day project; however, the next day it was raining. However, within one day I still found that students had a new take on vision and spatial judgment. This exercise was beneficial in teaching students how to visualize and how to mentally manipulate objects. This also helped to educate them on the importance of hand eye coordination (Figures 26, 27, & 28).
In October 2009 I introduced space. I lectured as students sat at their desks lazily while taking notes on foreground, middle ground, and background. I verbally explained how to create the illusion of space. We critiqued art work analyzing the properties of overlapping, attention to detail, and size difference. There were discussions on value tones shifts, and vanishing points.

The next day we headed out to the top of the hill in front of our school. Students stood side by side up on the sidewalk that lined the top of the hill as we looked down at the face of our school. This location was easily accessible and offered many vantage points in an organized fashion. It was very easy to keep them together and they could hear me well as I gave instructions. My instructions were to draw what they saw. Don’t use shortcuts, shorthand, and a series of little symbols that you carry around with you. Their depictions show real discovery and observation. (Figures 29 & 30).
I still had to keep them on task a little more than I have to in the classroom. This is something that I have come to expect and honor now in a new way. I realize that it’s a natural characteristic in people to talk when a new visual stimulization is introduced. Within 15 minutes most had calmed down and were completely engaged.

They were using their fingers as viewfinders, going back and forth to their drawing. This was a spot that they have walked past a multitude of times, but now they were really looking at it. I watched with a grin as I saw them throw up their pencils in the sky judging space, and then back down to their paper. Next to them again was their value scale for reference as they spent the entire period working.

Some difficulties included more talking. When they get outside and they really want to talk. Most can stay on task and talk, but with some students they get far too side-tracked. At this point in the year, I knew who to watch for and who to motivate. It was fall and there were leaves on the ground, and kids like leaves. I found quickly that I had to tell each class that they could not throw leaves while drawing. Also, once again the weather was an issue. It was October, and most students were dressed appropriately, but there were some who weren’t. The morning classes were, of course, a little colder and a little less enjoyable; however, the kids still seemed to enjoy the experience. The weather was cooperative and we made it outside for three days in a row.

Each day my students would have to find their positions from the day before. This introduced visual memory and forced them to be specific with the direction they were faced. This project clearly put students in touch with nature and they related to their
natural surroundings. They became good at recognizing and classifying objects. They analyzed and closely related to their image.
QUOTES CONCERNING LOCAL EXPEDITIONS

Art I Students

“I like drawing outside because it lets you really see what you’re drawing, and you can get a better feel for the scene than from a picture.” - Elena

“You really get to see shadows, textures, and all of the detail within the foreground, middle ground, and back ground”
-Jennifer

“Drawing outside helps you to draw the dimension and space.”
- Diego

“You learn more from looking at all of the details.”
- Dawnielle

“It’s a change of pace. I get new ideas.”
- Devon

“It’s nicer than being in a classroom. I draw better.”
- Quin

“You have more freedom to create. It helps me to get out of my mind and just draw.”
- Shelby

“When we are outside I’m able to think more clearly because I’m not so surrounded by people.”
- Erika

“I get fresh air. I love just taking in the beauty of Montana. I love Montana.”
- Danny

“You have more space. You get to spread out and not be in a cramped classroom.”
- Hannah

“I like the fresh air and more space. I can relax and my mind is clearer so I can think easier.”
- Emily

“I think that being able to get outside after being indoors all day benefits me, and sometimes helps me concentrate more.”
- Sally

“The open space and freedom made me more relaxed.” - Britanie
FINAL ANALYSIS:

Outcomes of Expeditionary Learning

If I want to be an effective educator, expeditionary learning must be included in my curriculum. Expeditionary learning helps me to connect with my students in a whole new way. They become more than just another student in a seat, and I become more than another teacher in a classroom. The educator becomes more of an active participant in a curriculum that involves expeditions. With expeditionary leaning I am able make moments and memories that will last forever. My goal is that each student of mine will have personal growth through expeditions that I provide for them. I want to fill my students with curiosity and confidence and expeditionary learning helps me to accomplish this task.

Students need more guidance on how to find their place in this world. Ideally, I would like students to appreciate what they learn and learn how to apply it to their own lives. My goal for both myself, and my students, is to gain more confidence to discover our dreams and pursue our passions. According to Hahn, art is to provide a sense of meaning or significance or intensity to human life that cannot be gained in any other way (Hahn, p. 1). Persons, who feel assured of this meaning, it is said, are more likely to accept the periods when there are difficulties and problems in life; they will have a zest, a feeling of being personally involved in the position of their life, of belonging and mattering. Art has done this for me, and I hope to instill this understanding in my students.
I have learned that I don’t just teach art. I teach problem solving, how to think scientifically, the need to explore, ways of seeing, and how to create. Along with that I want my students to learn how to work productively with others and develop leadership skills. In order to do this I must know them. To get to know them I have to take them out of their comfort zone of the classroom. I didn’t expect so much resistance from the students, however, but this too was a learning experience for an educator.

When students are out of their comfort zone, which is typically the classroom, they get stressed. Their stress turns into attitude and the use of body language. Some insight that I have gained is that students need to be told exactly what the adult expects of them, as well as what will happen if they don’t do what they’re told. 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. I know that my primary task is to help students overcome their fears and discover they can do more than they think they can. This is so painstaking but worth it.

John Burroughs is quoted saying, “for anything worth having one must pay the price; and the price is always work, patience, love, self-sacrifice – no paper currency, no promises to pay, but the gold of real service” (Burroughs, p. 1). Teaching is hard. Understanding people is hard. Learning is hard. Implementing expeditionary learning into any curriculum may also be hard. It is worth it. The goal of education is not to find the perfect job, or get perfect grades. Krishnamurti has stated that the purpose of education is to bring about freedom, love, “the flowering of goodness” and the complete transformation of society (Krishnamurti, p. 153). In order to have a transformation in our society we must educate our students about the world in which their society exists. Through the freedom of exploration, we can find self-discovery. When you are
comfortable with whom you are, and your place in the world, everything else seems to fall into place.

No matter the size of the expedition there will be planning, experimentation, and unknowns. To honor fear was my goal and I succeeded with finding myself through educating others. I understand myself better through my successes and my failures. The point of all this is that learning requires assent and action. Learning requires practice, correction, and self-correction. Learning is sometimes hard work, but if that work ties in with a sense of purpose, it can be deeply satisfying (Ayers, p. 1). Expeditionary learning helped me to become a better educator, but most importantly I was able to let go and really see my students, myself, and the world without preconceptions.

"Success is not the key to happiness. Happiness is the key to success. If you love what you are doing, you will be successful."

- Albert Schweitzer
REFERENCES


