

Core Practice 6

Incorporating Fieldwork, Experts, and Service Learning

Expeditionary Learning students learn from fieldwork, experts, and service in addition to learning from text. They use the natural and social environments of their communities as sites for purposeful fieldwork and service connected to academic work, and they use professional experts and citizens with firsthand knowledge of events and issues to ensure accuracy, integrity, and quality in their work.

EL differentiates between traditional field trips, in which students are often spectators, and fieldwork, in which students are active investigators, applying the research tools, techniques of inquiry, and standards of presentation used by professionals in the field. In addition to having students conduct research outside the school, teachers bring experts from the community into the classroom who collaborate with students on projects, teach them skills from their field, and critique their work using professional standards. Service learning in EL schools goes beyond charitable acts, such as cleaning up a city park, and extends also to rigorous academic products that provide a service for the community, such as conducting energy audits of city buildings to help a city save money and reduce its carbon footprint. Older students may participate in internships and apprenticeships.

Fieldwork, collaboration with experts, and service learning are a part of learning expeditions, but they can also be used as stand-alone structures outside of full learning expeditions.

A. Fieldwork

1. Fieldwork has a clear purpose that enriches the work of the learning expedition, case study, or project (e.g., data collection, interviews, structured observations) and allows students to be researchers, not spectators.
2. Whenever possible and appropriate, fieldwork takes place over an extended period of time with several visits to the same site.
3. Procedures and skills for fieldwork are taught before the event.
4. Fieldwork is modeled, as much as possible, on the authentic research of professionals in the field (e.g., zoologists, historians, anthropologists).
5. Teachers select data collection tools to suit the purpose of the fieldwork. When data are collected, they are analyzed and used back in the classroom.
6. Fieldwork is structured so that it is safe and productive. Teachers preview sites to shape the field experience effectively.
7. The school has written policies and well-documented safety procedures for conducting fieldwork, which are followed by teachers and students.

8. Students are prepared to be ambassadors for their school when on fieldwork. They are courteous, articulate, organized, and helpful.

B. Experts

1. Teachers regularly engage with experts during fieldwork and as classroom guests.
2. Teachers reach out to a range of experts, who may be professionals from a particular discipline or community members with firsthand knowledge of the topic being studied. Experts may work with just teachers or with teachers and students.
3. Experts work collaboratively with students on projects and/or products, and they help students critique their work against professional standards.
4. Students greet experts with courtesy, respect, and background knowledge. Experts should be surprised and delighted by the students' depth of knowledge and preparation.
5. Teachers and students orient experts to the needs of the project and the protocols for class critique.

Incorporating Fieldwork, Experts, and Service Learning (continued)

6. Often, teachers and students maintain ongoing relationships with experts. Whenever possible, students take a lead role in communication with experts before (to ensure alignment and focus), during (to keep the collaboration on track), and after (showing appreciation), to build student responsibility and skills to perform real-world work.

C. Service Learning

1. Service learning is an integral part of academic work—it teaches students that the skills they are learning can be put to use to make a better community.
2. Service learning goes beyond charitable volunteer work to include projects that address important academic skills (e.g., beyond collecting clothing for the homeless, it may involve creating a guide to free city services that can be distributed at homeless shelters).
3. Teachers and students research service opportunities to ensure that service learning projects provide a real benefit to the community.
4. Service learning is not an afterthought or add-on. It is an extension of the ethic of kindness and service that permeates the school. Students and teachers regularly discuss the ways they can contribute to a better world. As such, service learning is a prime vehicle to teach and take action centered on social justice.