



Teachers as Learners: The Expeditionary Way



Photo by Edi Jurčić

Laura Castro (left) and Laurie Gaughran, teachers at Humanities Preparatory Academy, attended our fall Assessment Institute.

Our network of small public schools, in partnership with the City's Department of Education, depends on great principals, talented teachers and a unique school reform model. But a less visible element is the major catalyst for our schools'—and students'—success. Our Professional Development system is a non-stop endeavor to ground our teachers and staff in the Expeditionary Learning framework and skills that they will convey to their students, to engage them in learning and build a positive school culture.

NYC Outward Bound's Professional Development makes us "different in every way from traditional schools," said **Brett Kimmel**, principal of the Washington Heights Expeditionary Learning School (WHEELS), which opened in 2006. "Others have no affiliation with a national network of like-minded schools and an in-house Professional Development arm. Those were among the most important reasons that I decided early on in my school's development that NYC Outward Bound was the right partner. The pedagogical, philosophical and structural like-mindedness was very important to me."

Professional Development takes place on three levels: on site at each school, regionally and nationally. It begins with intensive teacher training in the summer, and continues throughout the year. Last summer 124 teachers from our schools participated in Professional Development activities, stepping outside their typical roles to experience anew the joys and frustrations of learning. Through this active form of instruction, they more fully grasp what it is to read, write, assess and do math, science and art the Expeditionary Learning way.

Teachers new to our network devote a rigorous 25-30 days to Professional Development during the summer. At NYC Outward Bound headquarters, they complete four days each of reading and writing, since all teachers will teach literacy.

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Gates Grant To Add Schools

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has awarded NYC Outward Bound \$3.12 million to develop four new public schools (grades 6-12), two in each of the next two academic years, expanding our network to 11 schools total.

Teachers as Learners:

Continued from page 1

In a full week of Expedition planning, our School Designers and Instructional Guides lead sessions on how to teach all subjects through challenging, real-world projects with specific learning targets. The initial experience continues off-site: In August 43 teachers spent two days at the Sharpe Reservation, a woodland preserve near Fishkill, NY, learning to become Crew advisors. (In Crew classes, a critical element of Expeditionary Learning schools, teachers advise a team of 12-15 students throughout their school years, supporting them in academics and life.) Participants utilized the site's nature building, weather station, low and high ropes courses and planetarium and hiking trails, where their incoming students would undergo five-day Crew orientations.

During the academic year Professional Development continues on-site: our School Designers spend one to two days a week in each school, coaching teachers in implementing Expeditionary Learning. Each network school has an Instructional Guide who provides daily support by offering feedback, strategies and structures for putting Expeditionary Learning into practice. They sometimes conduct special sessions. "Having a high-functioning Professional Development arm in our school is one of the most important things for me as a principal," Brett noted.

School Designers offer off-site experiences as well, such as the day-long "Slice of a Learning Expedition." The "Slice" draws on compelling topics and fieldwork, letting faculty members experience the model first-hand. On a recent Humanities

Slice, teams of teachers fanned out into the City, exploring the question "What is worth fighting for?" with an in-depth study of the 1863 New York City Draft Riots as their lens.


In a course unique to New York City, "What You Don't Know Can Hurt You," teachers learn to support students of differing levels of ability. This module causes educators to examine their personal beliefs about students and to avoid classroom dynamics, biases and assumptions that could negatively impact student achievement.

Faculty members teach and mentor one another. Perhaps



Baldwin's Marie Leblanc Named MetLife Fellow

Marie Leblanc, English teacher at the James Baldwin School, one of our network schools, is among 40 New York City teachers chosen as MetLife Fellows. As part of the Teachers Network Leadership Institute, created to improve student learning in public schools, the MetLife program requires Fellows to research a pressing issue. Drawing on her teaching experience at Baldwin and Humanities Preparatory Academy, Marie will study the schools' multi-age, multi-

level classroom structure vis a vis its contributions to students' academic, social and emotional growth. "I welcome the opportunity to critically assess my practice and to bring consciousness to our institutional decision to structure our school in this manner," said Marie, who also won NYC Outward Bound's first annual **R. Gaynor McCown** Award for Teaching. Her MetLife Fellowship carries a \$1,000 stipend; selected research papers will be published and distributed to national leaders in the field of education. 

The Expeditionary Way



Photos by Edi Juricic

Professional Development gives teachers like Marie Leblanc and John Schaefer of the James Baldwin School opportunities to collaborate on improving instructional practices.

that's why teachers rate our schools so high on encouraging collaboration and working together to improve instructional practices—and that our teacher retention rate is excellent. Principals also benefit individually from development opportunities in our network, Brett points out, by meeting regularly, visiting each others' schools and attending sessions like the recent Assessment Institute.

But Professional Development doesn't stop at city limits. For more than 150 schools nationwide, Expeditionary Learning Schools Outward Bound provides an ambitious menu of seminars and institutes throughout the year where teachers and principals connect with peers, sharing best practices and exchanging ideas. They also make structured visits to other high-functioning schools; this winter, for example, WHEELS' music teacher will attend a site seminar in Rochester, NY, where two Expeditionary Learning schools are doing "a phenomenal job in music," Brett said. "It is a great benefit of our affiliation."

The annual Expeditionary Learning National Conference (whose 2008 theme is "Powerful Learning for All: Linking Rigor and Engagement") is a particularly compelling experience and a unique opportunity to interact with colleagues from across the country.

Professional Development's role in creating a cadre of highly skilled educators pays off handsomely in how well we serve our students—which is, of course, its ultimate goal. "When schools implement our Expeditionary Learning model at a high level, then students will surpass the standard indicators of school success—including student attendance, retention, high school graduation, college admission, and passing scores on New York State Regents exams," said Field Director **Suzanne Tillman**. Moreover, she added, "They will be lifelong learners, motivated to be active members of their communities, and equipped for post-secondary success." ☕

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Verizon Earns 2007 Founders Award

At our annual holiday gathering in December, at the New York Times' stunning new headquarters on Eighth Avenue, the NYC Outward Bound 2007 Founder's Award was presented to **Verizon Communications**.

President **Patrick Gaston** of the Verizon Foundation accepted the award on his company's behalf. Verizon's support of NYC

Outward Bound began at inception, in 1987, and included 11 years during which the company provided us with free headquarters space. Most recently, it has been the lead supporter of our summer literacy program.

"Verizon occupies a special place among our extraordinary corporate supporters," said President **Richard Stopol**, who presented the award. ☕

Many Thanks

New York City Outward Bound is deeply grateful to our many friends and supporters. The list below reflects contributors in our most recent fiscal year, from July 1, 2006 to June 30, 2007. Without the help of everyone on this list, we could not fulfill our mission: to effect positive and lasting change in the lives of New York City's young people and in their public schools.

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Summer Matters

Our summer literacy program saw a four-fold increase in enrollment this year as 104 students took advantage of our unique three-week summer session—82 from our high schools and 22 from our middle school—to improve their reading and writing skills and to stay on track for graduation. With a new emphasis on subject areas like Science and Global Studies, students from our network high schools could earn two academic credits, one in English and another in a different academic subject. Twenty-two students gained enough credits to be promoted to

the next grade; without the program they would have been left behind. The middle-school participants from WHEELS, all English Language Learners, advanced their literacy skills while focusing on the water quality of the nearby Hudson River. Pre- and post-program tests designed by staff and based on the 8th grade New York State science exam showed an increase in the number of students proficient in accessing science-based texts, from 37 percent to 100 percent. Verizon was the lead funder, providing \$60,000 toward the significant program expansion. 📌

On Board

Andrew (Drew) Lipsher is a partner in Greycroft LLC, a venture capital firm founded by **Alan Patricof** to invest in digital media companies. Drew has extensive experience in corporate development and investments for media and entertainment companies. At Warner Music Group, BMG Entertainment and News Corp., he worked as an internal investment banker, consultant, strategist and advisor. His experience encompasses all aspects of the business: private equity and venture investing, M&A, strategic planning, new business development, technology, operations, restructurings and divestitures.



Just prior to joining Greycroft, Drew was head of M&A, Corporate Development and Administration for Interscope Geffen A&M Records, a division of Universal Music Group. There he helped identify and structure music-related strategic opportunities in technology, film, fashion, and television investments and partnerships. Previously, he was founder and managing partner of Little Rose Partners LLC, an investment and advisory firm to media, consumer and service sector clients. In that capacity he was hired as CEO of a customized skincare company to affect a turnaround. Drew holds a BA in History from Yale University and an MBA from Northwestern University's Kellogg Graduate School of Management. He lives in New York City with his wife **Meredith** and their two sons, **Nick** and **Zach**. 📌

HOT off the PRESS

The James Baldwin School and Humanities Preparatory Academy earned mentions in a new book, *New York City's Best Public High Schools, A Parents' Guide*, third edition, by Clara Hemphill (Teachers College Press, 2007). They are listed in the "Alternative Schools" section, along with only two other schools.

Leaders' Win-Win Expedition

Soon after greeting its inaugural class of ninth graders, the **Expeditionary Learning School for Community Leaders** mounted its first Learning Expedition. Studying baseball from academic angles—math, science, English and social studies—was a natural for this small high school housed on Brooklyn's Lafayette Campus. Lafayette High School tops city schools in graduating 20 major-league baseball players, among them Brooklyn Dodgers' storied pitcher **Sandy Koufax**, as well as **Fred Wilpon**, owner of the New York Mets. One Leaders student spoke for all in saying, "We're proud to be in a building where so many baseball players went."

In the Expedition's inquiry phase, students used real data from games to create a mathematical model to determine players' and teams' strengths, and collected, computed and graphed data such as runs batted in (RBIs) from observations at a Brooklyn Cyclones game. They also explored the exhibit "Brooklyn Baseball 1947-1957" at the Museum of the City of New York. Using evidence they collected, students defended with statistical support the question, "Which player would I want on my team and why?"

The humanities segment of the investigation had students write about various viewpoints on baseball in Brooklyn today, and during the Dodgers era. They read news articles about the Dodgers, finding particular inspiration in team luminary **Jackie Robinson** and his staunch supporter **Pee Wee Reese**. As a final product, they penned letters to the editor stating their particular perspective about an issue in baseball.

As students' cameras clicked away, the four-week Expedition culminated in a presentation of their work and a student-led panel discussion with local pros **Steve Cohen**, general manager of the Brooklyn Cyclones; **Mark Lilenwalla**, Brooklyn-based reporter for the *Daily News*; and historian and author **Lee Lowenfish**, who discussed his latest book, a biography of legendary Dodgers owner **Branch Rickey**. As a fitting celebration, students and parents attended a Mets game the next day at Shea Stadium.

Baldwin Students Begin Action Internships

Community action internships got off the ground at the **James Baldwin School** this fall, modeled on the successful program of its mentor school, Humanities Preparatory Academy. Thirty students enrolled in the internship course, taught by Co-Director **Christine Olson**, which focuses on organizations working for social justice and carries a Social Studies credit. Students attend class two days each

week and spend two other class periods at internship sites that include LIFEbeat: The Music Industry Fights AIDS, Girls for Gender Equity, NYPIRG's Straphangers Campaign and a City Council member's office, among others. One intern's site is Baldwin itself, where she is creating a peer-tutoring program.

"We try to match them with something they want to pursue in the future," said Christine. "For many, this is the first time they've worked, so we coach them on resumes and interview skills." Students keep a weekly journal, focusing on how organizations work, and discuss their findings in class. The course also requires them to address an issue of concern and devise an action plan they can execute. "Most are very excited about it, because they're doing things they care about," Christine said. "It feels good and meaningful to them to do something important in the world."

Kurt Hahn's 5 Commitments

The **Kurt Hahn Expeditionary Learning School**, which opened in September, has been striving from day one to uphold five commitments that are fundamental in preparing the next generation of civic leaders. The faculty crafted them during an intensive effort in August, based on the school's core values. The commitments, observed by all members of its community, form the foundation of Kurt Hahn's climate and culture: *courage, compassion, respect, stewardship* and *perseverance*. "They are standards of the heart," said School Designer **Michelle Herbowy**, since they complement the school's academic, content and character standards.



The commitments are part of the school day, as teachers make observations of students' actively demonstrating them—or not. At each Friday's whole school community meeting, one student is recognized for exemplifying each standard. If an apology is due for violating a commitment, that person steps forward. Students are assessed on specific learning targets for each character-based core value, which becomes part of the progress report they and their families receive. As of mid-November, "ownership" of the weekly commitment awards passed to Kurt Hahn students, who now nominate their peers.

WHEELS Retention Is High

This fall the Washington Heights Expeditionary Learning School (WHEELS) saw a major indicator of success: the year-old school's 8th graders had to choose a high school, opting either to stay or enroll elsewhere. Since the school's mission is to serve children throughout grades 6-12, retention denotes how well it is doing. By



the November 30 application deadline, most students—85 percent—had selected WHEELS as their top choice, where they will be among its first graduating class. (Those who decided on other schools cited their varsity sports

teams, specialized programs such as art and locations elsewhere in the city as reasons, said Principal **Brett Kimmel**.)

The high student retention was achieved with great effort, since the school has to recruit its pupils to stay on (current students are assured admission when WHEELS tops their listed choices). Counselor **Ann Glynn** worked intensively with students and their families, in meetings and workshops, to explain and advise on the application process. Students who made early decisions to stay at WHEELS for the 9th grade were given “Class of 2012” T-shirts, which they may wear to school in place of their uniforms—a point of pride in being a member of a lasting school community. As Brett observed with satisfaction, “Our intent to be a neighborhood school is going to work out.” In the first-ever Department of Education Progress Reports released in November, WHEELS scored 89.5 out of a possible 93.6, placing it in the 99th percentile of all City schools. Only four middle schools in the entire City received higher scores.

Prep’s Community Walking Program

Gym requirements can be a problem in the city’s small public schools. That’s why Humanities Preparatory Academy launched a Community Walking Program this year, as an alternative for its largely over-age, under-credited students—many of them transfers who often lack gym credits. As well, the program discourages the frequent absenteeism that typically follows gym periods, and preserves precious time for academic work.

Members of the school community, considering alternatives, decided a walking program filled the bill in several ways. It is very cost-effective: Prep purchased pedometers to let students record daily steps, distances covered and calories and grams of fat burned, and required walking journals for students’ reflections. “They write about what they see and how they feel about their exercise,” said Principal **Barnaby Spring**. But the pedometers—which also support Prep’s goal of introducing more technology in the classroom—are the real hook, he remarked: “Kids love portable technology, and these come in different colors.”

Prep walkers also gather monthly for an urban weekend stroll; alternatively, students may walk on their own using *City Walks: New York: 50 Adventures on Foot*. Two to three teachers usually join the group walk, as do parents and principal; the number of students participating has grown as relationships develop and deepen. “It’s very

much a Prep thing, since our core is rooted in learning relationships that are nurtured by discourse, discussion and debate,” Barnaby observed, adding that it fosters an attachment to community. Since students must use the pedometers all term, they maintain a mindfulness and awareness around exercise that extends well beyond a designated gym period. “That’s what we want them to understand, that their learning at Prep is something to be applied beyond the school and understood more deeply,” the principal said.

As always, Prep weaves cultural insights into courses and moves students beyond the classroom into the world. The school walks—through Greenwich Village and over the Brooklyn Bridge, up Ninth Avenue to Central Park, and to Astoria—“provide opportunities to appreciate the many diverse cultures and landscapes of our city,” said Barnaby, who invited author **Joseph Berger** (*The World in a City: Traveling the Globe Through the Neighborhoods of the New New York*) to join the latter walk and tell students about the history of Greek immigration in Queens. A Greek-American assistant principal from another school facilitated a free lunch for Prep walkers at a Greek restaurant in Astoria.

Validus: Bronx History Up Close

Myrna Melendez, Spanish teacher at **Validus Preparatory Academy**, embarked on a personal quest last summer. Her students typically talked about negative aspects of the Bronx, and fellow staff members weren’t very familiar with the borough. Although Myrna grew up there, she realized she didn’t know Bronx history well enough to fill them in on the positive facts. Thus a 10th grade Learning Expedition on the borough was born, with English Language Arts teacher **Daniel Cyrus** as her co-leader.

Myrna read histories over the summer, and enlisted help from the Bronx Historical Society. The Expedition began with a week of fieldwork immersion—a walking tour, and tours of the Historical Society, **Edgar Allan Poe’s** Cottage, the Valentine-Varian House that holds the borough museum, and Woodlawn Cemetery, where the emphasis was on gravestones of Hispanic residents. Back in class, students made an interactive Google map of sites visited; pored over Poe in English class; and wrote about growing up as a teen in the Bronx. A component on budgeting—what it costs to live there—followed, with graphing and Power Point taught by the math teacher. A health segment examined the borough’s major medical issues. In

Spanish class, students wrote odes to their own neighborhoods, reflecting their excitement at discovering Bronx roots, the people behind street names and

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other mysteries. Concluding the Learning Expedition, the Spanish class videotaped a newscast in Spanish based on their learnings about the borough.

BELHS Structures Student Portfolios

Student-led conferences, in which their work is showcased for public audiences and for evaluation, are regular events at **Bronx Expeditionary Learning High School** (BELHS). But now, to align student work more closely with Expeditionary Learning, subject-based portfolios are being introduced to measure students' growth in each academic area over the year. All teachers are identifying learning targets and archiving products and samples of each student's work in a course. At the first conference in December students were able to capture their growth in each academic area by reflecting on their progress, explained BELHS Instructional Guide **Leslie Chislett**.

"The purpose of the new portfolios is growth," said Leslie, adding that even Crew classes (daily advisory groups) will employ them. These portfolios will add value to student-led conferences and enhance the school's assessment practices on learning targets, she added. Tenth-grade English Language Arts students are learning to recognize their own voice as writers, while discerning those of authors they're reading. In History and Social Studies, students examine political cartoons, Presidential speeches and other primary source documents, and then make inferences about meaning, perspective and events occurring at the time. In Math, real-world dilemmas are part of Regents exams, so students must learn to determine what is important among many details and what strategies will best solve the problem. By analyzing how they got "stuck and unstuck" in all these areas, students will be able to assess their progress and improvement, said Leslie. "Even struggling writers can look back and say, 'I've come a long way.' It's part of continuous learning." 



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