



XPUNPACKED



XPUNPACKED IS THE XP TRUST'S JOURNAL OF LEARNING

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January 2026

May the force be with you!

Welcome to the first official edition of XP Unpacked. Inside this issue there are articles that elevate beautiful work, celebrate partnerships and demonstrate the impact of the importance of the work we do as educators both in the UK and across the world.

Our focus article is written by Ron Berger, who has steadfastly supported our work at XP since its very inception. Ron's mission is to elevate, galvanise and connect learners and educators from across the world who have shared values and who see education as transformative. He has spent a lifetime creating, highlighting and collecting 'beautiful work' crafted by young people and educators that makes a difference to their lives and the communities they serve. Ron in his article sends out a clarion call to educators who are not just concerned with examination results and test scores but those who see education as life-changing for both the individual and the collective: developing young people with compassion and understanding, alongside a sense of agency and civic duty. Education is a means to creating a better world, where we recognise our commonalities rather than dwelling on differences. Ron frames this wryly as 'the Rebel Alliance' a nod to the famous Star Wars franchise but underneath this seemingly light hearted metaphor there is a compelling truth: doesn't the world now need light more than darkness. It is an important message of hope that resonates in his words.

Building on the theme of 'alliances' there are two sections of the magazine where articles focus on the importance of partnerships. Firstly, there are a selection of 'reflections' by staff from across XP Trust schools about their experience visiting and working with Jeff Robin, the world-renowned Project Based Learning educator, at his home in San Diego. These are must reads if we are to take our curriculum to the next level. Secondly, we have invited some of our friends and established partners to contribute their thoughts on education and working with XP.

Also, in this issue we have some home grown articles focusing on Crew, Learning Expeditions and local partnerships. Two of these articles are written by students, Alex and Holly, who joined our Communications Team on work placements last summer - this was the fruit of their experience - and powerfully honest and moving articles they are. Finally, thank you to everyone who has submitted an article. It is an act of courage and selflessness - sharing our stories is one of the most important things we do.

And remember however challenging things may seem or how difficult they appear you are not alone - 'May the force be with you!'

In Crew, always

Andy Sprakes
Editor of XPUnpacked
Chief Academic Officer of XP Trust

Cover and featured art taken from Carcroft School's LKS2 Summer 2025 Learning Expedition, 'Earth Shattering Events', in which the students aimed to answer the guiding question: 'What happens when disaster strikes?'

The work in their writing lessons produced the content needed for their Final Product, a suite of information leaflets for display at Magna, the Science Adventure Centre in the heart of Sheffield's world-famous steel industry.

Showcasing the learning, the leaflets went back to the workshops carried out in the visit. The students produced short pieces of writing linking to their Geography and Science Case Studies.



XPUnpacked is edited, designed and brought to you by the XP Trust Comms Crew.

For further information about any of the content in this edition of XPUnpacked or how to contribute to future editions of the magazine, please contact Editor, Andy Sprakes, at asprakes@xptrust.org or contact comms@xptrust.org



When writing their feature articles and reflections, our contributors found a wealth of useful links and resources. All article references can be found in these links.

Scan to go the web page on the XP Trust website that hosts XPUnpacked. Here, you'll find useful links and additional resources, as well as the digital versions of previous issues.

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The Rebel Alliance



This article, written by our great friend and mentor Ron Berger, explores the metaphor of the Star Wars' Rebel Alliance to describe a global educational resistance movement against traditional, exam-focused schooling.

Ron, who wears a Rebel Alliance pin while traveling, highlights a network of 'Rebel Alliance Bases' dedicated to transformational education that unleashes student potential. The XP community (Doncaster and Gateshead) is celebrated as a critical worldwide centre for this movement. Ron shares compelling examples from recent travels, detailing visits with inspirational educators in Islamabad, Pakistan, and describing the extraordinary new, modern, project-based school built by radical Catholic nuns in the impoverished, remote jungle of Timor Leste.

The reflection concludes with a proud affirmation of shared mission and the acknowledgment that educators within this alliance are 'superheroes.'

For the past two years, I have been traveling around the world wearing a Star Wars Rebel Alliance pin on my suit coat and waistcoat, and the reaction has been interesting. Many people have no idea what the symbol means, but it has been surprising that it is often recognized and celebrated in every country I visited (during this period, that includes the United States, England, Scotland, Spain, Australia, Canada, Japan, Pakistan, and Timor Leste). For me, the Rebel Alliance is real and alive - metaphorically at least - in the transformational education work that is happening worldwide.

In every country, there is a dominant paradigm for education - a vision of what school is supposed to look like - and that vision is basically the same everywhere. Students should sit and listen and prepare for exams, because that is how success is measured.

The fact that in life we are not measured by exams, but rather by the quality of our work and our character, is irrelevant. The fact that this approach to education is not working to motivate and educate a large percentage of students is irrelevant.

In every country, there is also a growing (and sometimes dominant) political movement centered on fear and mistrust of others, of intolerance and unkindness.

However, there is also an educational resistance movement - a Rebel Alliance - everywhere. In the dozens of countries in which I have worked during the past decade, there are always educators and schools doing brilliant work with students to unleash their potential. Schools that take the thinking and work of students seriously, and inspire students to be respectful, responsible, courageous, creative, and compassionate, and use their learning to contribute to a better world.

My mission is to affirm the vision and work of each Rebel Alliance Base, and to share beautiful student work and stories of success from Rebel Alliance bases all over the world. It's important to remember that we are everywhere - those of us who believe in the potential of students, all students, to do beautiful and good work.

XP as a Rebel Alliance Base

Whether you follow Star Wars' series or not, the XP community should be aware that XP is one of the most important Rebel Alliance Bases in the world. You are doing great work for the children of Doncaster and Gateshead, and you are also a center for a worldwide movement of educational transformation.

If you are based at XP or XP East, you are likely aware that more than a thousand educators from all over the world visit XP every year to be inspired and to learn strategies to be in the educational resistance movement.

Those of you who work in the primaries or in Gateshead perhaps don't see as many of the visitors, but your work is just as important. It matters that the great work of XP is happening across many schools, serving students of all ages from different neighbourhoods and a range of backgrounds. I share slides and stories of XP students wherever I travel, and include XP stories in the books and articles I write and the interviews I give. There are no schools I feature more as examples. You are showing the world what is possible.

The more that you capture the brilliant work and character of your students through documenting displays and exhibitions of work, through written and video documentation of Crew, Learning Expeditions, Projects, Student-Led Conferences, and Passages, the more your good work can be shared widely as a model for others.



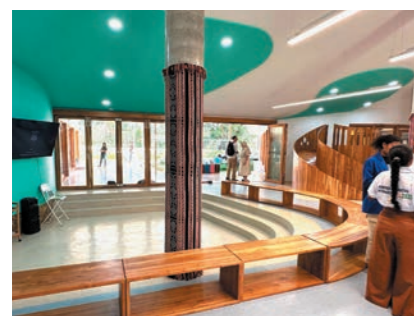
Rebel Alliance Bases Around the World

In the Star Wars' films and series, the Rebel Alliance is comprised of beings from many planets. They have different languages and customs, and sometimes don't look much like humans. But they share a common mission of working together for liberation, unleashing the good side of "the force", because in the galaxy at that time, like in our world now, the dark side is ascendant. All the Rebel Alliance educators I have met on Earth have been humans. However, like in Star Wars, clothing, language, and customs differ greatly, and yet they share a common mission. The pride of students in their brilliant and good work—which, to me, is the good side of the force that we unleash—is the same everywhere. Let me share some examples.

I just returned, a few weeks ago, from speaking and working with schools and school leaders in Islamabad, Pakistan. ▶



“I have only seen superheroes in movies, never in real life. But the Sisters were the closest I have come to being around real-life superheroes. No challenge overwhelmed them; nothing discouraged their mission.”



► Two days after I left, Islamabad was in the news again for another terrorist bombing in the heart of the city. That is the image of Pakistan that the world often sees. I was privileged to see a different side: thousands of Rebel Alliance educators who were excited to learn of the beautiful work of students from XP and other schools. I visited schools that were full of Deeper Learning and projects, where student work was featured in exhibitions, Student-Led Conferences, and Presentations of Learning. I was interviewed by two brilliant Year 9 students, Mahnoor and Zika, on a student-run podcast; they had done more research on my work than most adult podcasters had.

With Gwyn and Kate ap Harri, I spent more than a month traveling through South Australia, sharing XP stories in cities and rural towns. The rural communities were in some ways like being on another planet. The mammals came in strange shapes. Venomous spiders and snakes were so common that everyone ignored them. The most common snake, living in everyone's gardens and even slithering across the primary school car park, was among the world's most poisonous. Vehicles had giant kangaroo bars on the front grill to prevent crashes that might be fatal to humans. But the educators were just like great teachers and leaders everywhere.

School leaders traveled great distances, sometimes driving more than 12 hours through the outback, to attend meetings we convened and learn about the practices of great schools like XP.

This year, inspired by the work of XP and EL Schools, many schools are proudly sharing Learning Expeditions done by their students that are full of beautiful work and community contributions.

A Remarkable Alliance Base

The most unusual Rebel Alliance Base I visited this year is in the jungle of Timor Leste, an island nation in the South Pacific. Timor Leste is a new country, only about 20 years old, that emerged after centuries of colonial control, followed by foreign military rule that killed a quarter of its population and destroyed three-quarters of its buildings. The economy and infrastructure of Timor Leste are just beginning, poverty is severe, and there are not yet enough schools or teachers.

A group of radical Catholic nuns from Barcelona are building a large school campus in the jungle near Gleno, a school that will serve early childhood through high school, and a teacher's college to train the teachers for this campus and for other schools.

I was a speaker at the grand opening of the campus (it is only about half complete, but already serves about 500 students and about 100 teachers in training). I then spent a week supporting the learning of the teachers in the college, all of whom were young local villagers, using a variety of language translation strategies to communicate with them.

One might think that the Sisters would design simple and modest structures, given the challenges of getting water, electricity, internet access, and building materials to the jungle site. Instead, they are building a campus to inspire and change the whole country - beautiful, modern buildings with abundant natural light, solar power, and satellite internet, filled with hand-crafted, student-friendly spaces, furniture, and equipment, and a laptop for every child.

One might think that the Sisters would design a simple, traditional curriculum and use old-fashioned, obedience-based pedagogy. Instead, the school is suffused with project-based learning, student leadership, and beautiful work. I shared with the teachers and leaders there the model of XP and EL Schools, and they aligned perfectly with the vision they had for the potential of their students to do great things.

I have only seen superheroes in movies, never in real life. But the Sisters were the closest I have come to being around real-life superheroes. No challenge overwhelmed them; nothing discouraged their mission.

When I think of the challenges we face in our lives as educators, they seem tiny in comparison to building a new school in a remote jungle in one of the poorest countries in the world, serving students who not only have no books at home, but no running water and often no electricity. Yet the vision of the Sisters is to create skilled, empowered, virtuous students who will be future national leaders.

I left Timor Leste being proud that all of you, and I, are their colleagues in the Rebel Alliance. We are in this together, and we have some superheroes on our team.

 **Ron Berger**
EL Education, USA



The following articles, focus closer to home highlighting some of the great practice and beautiful work happening every day in our schools to transform the lives of our young people.

Stories from around XP Trust



How Presentations of Learning shaped me



This article, written by a Year 10 student named Holly Gray, reflects on the profound impact of Presentations of Learning (POLs) on her personal and academic growth at XP.

The core message is that POLs, which are public exhibitions of learning at the end of every expedition, are a key part of character growth.

Holly wrote this article whilst on her Work Experience programme with the Communications Team at XP Trust.

Presentations of Learning are one of the key aspects of character growth throughout our time at XP. After every expedition, the year group combines together to prepare for a presentation that shares our learning to a wider audience of parents and the public. Everybody has a role, no matter how small, as it's important to work as a Crew to ensure the presentations run smoothly. The presentations usually consist of a brief overview of the expedition, followed by the sharing of our work and our final product.

Throughout the presentation, there is a duality of both collaboration and independence which seems like an interesting combination but works exceptionally well whilst presenting. Although we work collectively to deliver the presentation, individually it takes plenty of courage to stand in front of a large audience and articulate the lines we have constructed with confidence. There's also a sense of community expressed through students volunteering to swap lines if it makes the other feel more comfortable.

In my opinion, these presentations are really beneficial as it helps to improve your confidence and public speaking skills. Speaking in front of strangers and unknown members of the public shows a lot of courage, as a result, it is one of the best character building exercises within school. For many, the first presentation in Year 7 was really nerve-racking and anxiety ridden as we were challenging ourselves by taking part in something we weren't confident with. However, now in Year 10, these presentations have become second nature and we are now comfortable in presenting to an audience. This shows how important it is to practice and get used to public speaking as not only is it helpful for our school work but also is very beneficial for the future and our working lives.

Furthermore, there is always a sense of achievement and pride after presenting. You understand that lots of effort has gone into the planning and organisation of the presentation and, as a result, the end product is always satisfying with that in the back of your mind. For both students and teachers, lots of input and practice over the course of many days builds up to the climax of presenting, and the eventual relief of it running smoothly.

One of the presentations that really stands out to me was from 2023 when we did a production of Macbeth. It was one of the biggest and most exciting productions to be involved in, create and to deliver. Many students in my year have expressed how that presentation was easily their favourite. Although the acting pushed many people out of their comfort zones, it helped to boost our confidence, and removed the fear of later presentations as anything compared to it would now be simpler. At XP, everyone is involved in Presentations of Learning, without exception. Therefore, I think there was a huge sense of pride and accomplishment once the play was finished. This presentation still stands to be the most memorable and exciting one to be completed. Personally, I know that I put all my effort into acting and looking back now, I wouldn't have done anything differently.

More recently, my year created a documentary linking to our expedition about discrimination and disabilities. Many of the individuals who were interviewed were invited back to watch the presentation and film, where a speech was delivered and flowers were given. Personally, I believe that this presentation was one of the most significant ones, as it is highly important to hear the voices of the interviewees and understand the messages they wanted to express and communicate.

I think it's crucial to listen and learn about other people's experiences to ensure that they don't feel victimised by others again. The interview process was extremely eye opening and the presentation of learning, as well as the documentary, was successful in conveying that.

It is important to recognise that Presentations of Learning go hand in hand with Final Products.

These Final Products evoke the same feelings as the presentations: the same sense of reward and pride over what our year has created throughout the term. Products can take many media forms as over the years, we have made books, paintings, model houses and more. Showcasing the craftsmanship and quality of our work is very valuable and important as we can display our progress of knowledge and creativity throughout the term as well as having a positive impact on the school and wider community. Again, this gives self confidence to students, especially when work they are proud of is shown to a large audience and can be appreciated by many.

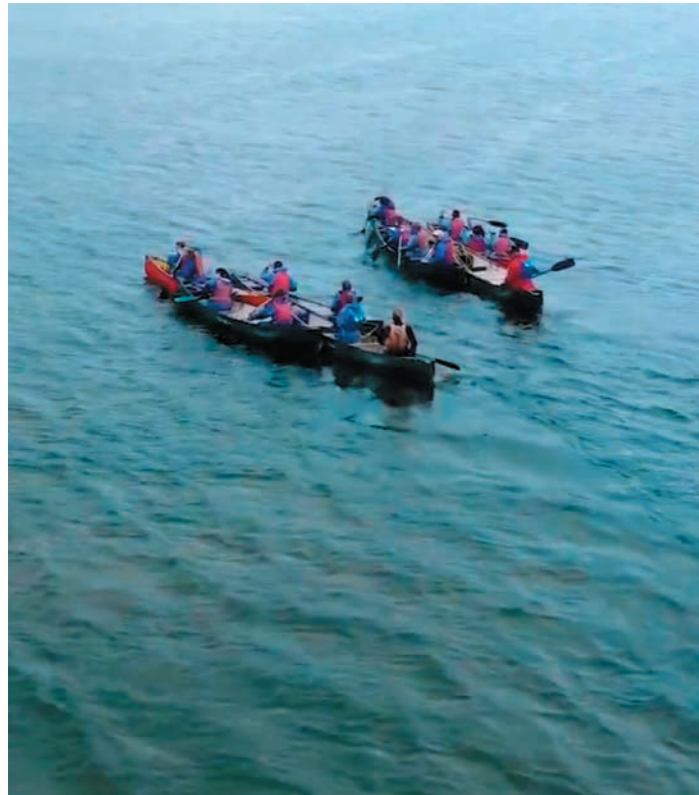
As someone who started XP East shy and self-doubting, Presentations of Learning have drastically improved my confidence and courage to speak over the years. Not only that, but I have also learnt to take pride in what I create and how I present my work to others. I think they're some of the most important lessons showing how much presentations have shaped me.

 **Holly Gray**
Y10 Student, XP East

Why we care

This article, titled 'Why We Care', is by an XP Doncaster student, Alex Jendraszczyk, who reflects on the vital role of Crew within the XP School Trust. He focuses primarily on the purpose, structure but most importantly the impact of Crew.

Alex completed this article as part of his Work Experience programme with our Communications Team last year.



“Crew is like a family. I can count on them when I need to get something off my chest.”

People have always said that I have a unique perspective on things, and I would say Crew is one of those things. I believe a lot of that can be attributed to my first week at XP East, and how different it was to the experience of most of the other year groups in the past. Due to a pandemic that had recently started fizzling out, my class was unable to go to Outward Bound in Wales, as was customary, and instead had to settle for Crew activities inside of our allocated Crew room. A setback for sure, however that was not the end of hitches for my Crew. With members leaving more frequently than in other Crews, and changing Crew Leaders at least once a year, it was challenging both to me and my peers. However, these rapid changes showed to me how, despite everything, my Crew still cared. If it was any other school, they may have taken advantage of the situation to mess around and not take anything seriously, but we still welcomed new additions to our Crew with open arms and understanding, and that has intrigued me for a considerable time.

Crew, for those who may not know, is integral to the XP system. Without Crew, most things done in this school would not have been as simple to complete as they have been. The whole system itself is quite ingenious, really. Teachers are assigned a dozen or so students as their ‘Crew’ when they first join XP, and this Crew will spend their morning together and engage in certain team based activities. It doubles as a way to both organise students, as well as help them gain confidence and comfort during school days. In the mornings, depending on what day of the week

it is, Crew will interact with each other in different ways. On Mondays, the atmosphere is laid-back and relaxed allowing everyone a chance to share their stories from their weekends; Tuesday is quiet and peaceful as the dedicated day for reading; on Wednesdays in Crew we discuss important topics as part of ‘Wise Wednesday’; Thursdays are for reflecting on academic progress and reflecting on our HoWLs (Habits of Work and Learning) and Friday Crew sessions serve as a break from the routine of sessions with something more stimulating and engaging. This is often a Community Meeting where we get the chance to appreciate each other, apologise and make pledges when we have made mistakes and to make stands for our shared Character Traits.

Those perhaps unaware would ask how the above strengthen a student’s academic progress? But it is helpful in so many ways that are invisible to the naked eye until after a few years or so of experienced Crew. Many of the people I know were very shy and afraid of speaking publicly when I first met them, but now it’s quite clear to me how vastly their confidence has increased, which no doubt can be attributed to Crew in some way, shape and form.

The conversations and activities in Crew have helped, little by little, to make these normally reclusive people more comfortable speaking out in front of people they don’t know, as even I feel like it has been beneficial to me personally as I have become unperturbed at being the centre of attention! My Year Seven self would be shocked to see where I am now,

and honestly, I am also shocked that I got here.

The impact Crew has made on some of these students doesn’t just lie in composure regarding speaking, additionally Crew gives students a chance to feel safer and included. Crew acts as a safe space for many, and is a place many can comfortably unwind and feel supported.

Nearing GCSEs, Crew is also a place for help regarding revision and study, and students can talk to each other about their experiences, progress and issues with different topics. It encourages collaboration, understanding and communication in a way not many other schools even try, let alone replicate, and it makes for a very comfortable learning environment. Discussing our achievements and shortcomings is also a fundamental component of what we do in Crew, helping us show that we understand each other’s struggles and hardships.

I think that is what makes Crew so special to XP’s model. While maybe less obvious, our Crew Sports Day is also important for character development. The teamwork and community on display manages to really showcase how heavily Crew has impacted the growth of so many students. Instead of being assigned into random groups, kids participate in their Crews, allowing them to use what they’ve learnt about each other to create the best possible team so that they can be successful in all of the events. Participating in one of these Sports Days is a feeling that I’ve never felt before, ►

“Crew helps me to get going in the morning. It’s just something to look forward to before I go to the first session.”



► if I was on an actual team, but maybe that’s because I was! Despite this, my Crew knew each other’s strengths and weaknesses, and the fact most of us knew each other well enough helped us feel comfortable when we chose which sports we wanted to participate in. I suppose the same could have been said for all of the other Crews: I dreaded all of the Sports Days in previous schools I have been at, yet at XP it feels more like a community effort to succeed in each event and bring your Crew the glory you and your peers all deserved.

Of course, I alone cannot make a judgement of how important Crew is. There are hundreds of other perspectives that I may have not even considered, and so I decided to go around XP East school and ask some students what Crew meant to them.

The first student I asked responded with, “Crew is like a family. I can count on them when I need to get something off my chest.”

I think this one simple statement really shows what Crew is at its very heart. It gave me a comprehensive idea of just how universally important crew was to

everyone at XP, and most notably gave me a glimpse into the view of another student’s idea of it. However, I wasn’t satisfied with just one answer, so I thought I would ask another student the same question. The response I got from them was, “Crew helps me to get going in the morning. It’s just something to look forward to before I go to the first session.”

This was another view I agreed with, and it highlighted to me the importance of Crew, especially at starting school days. While maybe not as philosophical as the last answer, its simplicity showed me how such a basic system could impact people so much. One thing I noticed was that both of these answers came from Key Stage 3 students, and it made me start contemplating my time at XP, and especially that first week when I started and how important this was in establishing Crew.

Maybe it wasn’t as exciting as going to Wales. Maybe we just built bridges together to see which team could create the one that could hold the most pencils at once. But that didn’t matter, as at the end of that week, we still learnt and understood the values that

were needed in order to succeed in the XP environment, and probably more importantly, how to succeed together. Crew is the word that makes this school stand out compared to all the others in the crowd, as you aren’t just another person in this school. You’re a friend. To your peers, your teachers, and everyone is willing to help. The message that XP manages to bring to young people through Crew, in a world of computers and technology, without making it tedious is truly something astounding, that not many other schools would even dream of accomplishing. Through Crew there is a sense of community that just isn’t present in most other schools.

And it showcases many things: that the teachers care, that the students care, and most importantly, that we all care.

 **Alex Jendraszczyk**
Student, XP East

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Building school culture through Character Traits at Green Top



Chris Mumby, the Whole School Crew Lead at Green Top School, highlights how launching XP Character Traits last year has impacted positively on Crew literacy at his school and how a simple idea can embed culture in a meaningful and rewarding way.

Building on the work at Green Top, all of our primary schools have now launched, or are in the process of launching, Character Traits with their children.



I have the privilege of leading Crew at Green Top School. Leading Crew is a collaborative effort, supported by our leadership team, and together, we work hard to create a school culture where every child and staff member feels valued.

This year we undertook a shape-up project based on Character Trait development. As a leadership team, we decided we wanted to develop our children's oracy when reflecting about their learning and how they learn after noticing that Crew check outs were often surface level thinking. While these sessions provided valuable opportunities for discussion and unpacking of the day, we found that students often needed more guidance in understanding and articulating their thoughts about personal growth, relationships, and responsibilities.

By shining a spotlight on Character Traits, we wanted to provide a clearer framework for self-reflection and personal development. We knew this approach would help students deepen their understanding of their actions, foster meaningful and deeper discussions, and build a stronger sense of community within our school.

Our journey began with student and staff ownership. We asked them what each character trait looked like in action by carrying out the silent discussion protocol. The feedback we were given formed our Character Trait map in which we were able to see the actions which underpinned each trait.

Following this, working alongside Rick in XP Trust's Comms Team, we created symbols to represent each Character Trait. Again, this was done in Crew sessions so that the children (and staff) had ownership and felt a part of the journey we had undertaken. This then formed decisions we made about curation in our shared spaces.

Character Traits

- Courage**
 - I demonstrate bravery when I am faced with something new.
 - I have 'word' courage.
 - I have 'calculated' courage.
 - I am positive and ask clarifying questions.
 - I set my own challenges; I do not settle for the easy option.
 - I showcase resilience; I don't give up at the first hurdle!
- Respect**
 - I can show consideration towards others and our environment.
 - I can demonstrate good manners and courtesy when engaging with other people.
 - I can take on constructive feedback and accept pitfalls when they happen.
 - I show excellent listening when other people have the courage to speak.
- Integrity**
 - I show honesty in my actions and will take responsibility for them.
 - I follow through on things I pledge both academic and HoW, focused.
 - I am able to make the right choices; I am supportive of others and encourage them to make right choices too.
 - I reflect on my actions in order for me to learn from past experiences.
- Craftsmanship & Quality**
 - I am consistently crafting work to the best of my ability.
 - I actively engage with feedback so that I learn from the critique of others.
 - I take pride in my work; my workbooks reflect my high standards.
 - I take my time to ensure quality over quantity.
- Compassion**
 - I am inclusive; I make sure that everyone is included and no one is left out.
 - I am kind to others by thinking about my physical actions and the words I use to communicate.
 - I help others to achieve as well as myself.
 - I know I am contributing to a positive Crew / class / school culture.

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Once we had visual representations of our Character Traits, we began using them on slides in our Crew sessions. This ensured that Crew was always underpinned and driven through our traits.

Whilst I was satisfied with the work that had been done and the vast improvement in children's understanding and articulation of our Character Traits, I still felt that something was missing. I wanted an initiative that ensured that Character Traits ran through everything we did.

The idea to create 'Character Trait' badges was inspired by my own experiences as a 10-year-old earning badges in Cubs. I remember the sense of pride and accomplishment that came with each new badge, each one representing a skill I had learned or a challenge I had overcome. Those small embroidered patches were more than just fabric; they were symbols of growth, perseverance, and personal achievement.

Reflecting on that experience, I realised how powerful badges could be in motivating and recognising character, not just practical skills. That's what led us to create 'Character Trait' badges - tangible reminders of the values and qualities we strive to nurture in ourselves and others. The badges are not just symbols of achievement - they spark conversations, too. Adults can ask children which badges they have earned and how they achieved them, encouraging meaningful discussions about character growth and personal development.

In January 2025, we took the important step of sourcing our badges, carefully considering the size, material, and quality to ensure they felt truly special. We wanted them to be more than just tokens—they needed to be something children would wear with pride, a tangible reminder of their achievements and character growth. To keep parents informed, we sent out a letter explaining the initiative and its purpose. At the same time, we ►



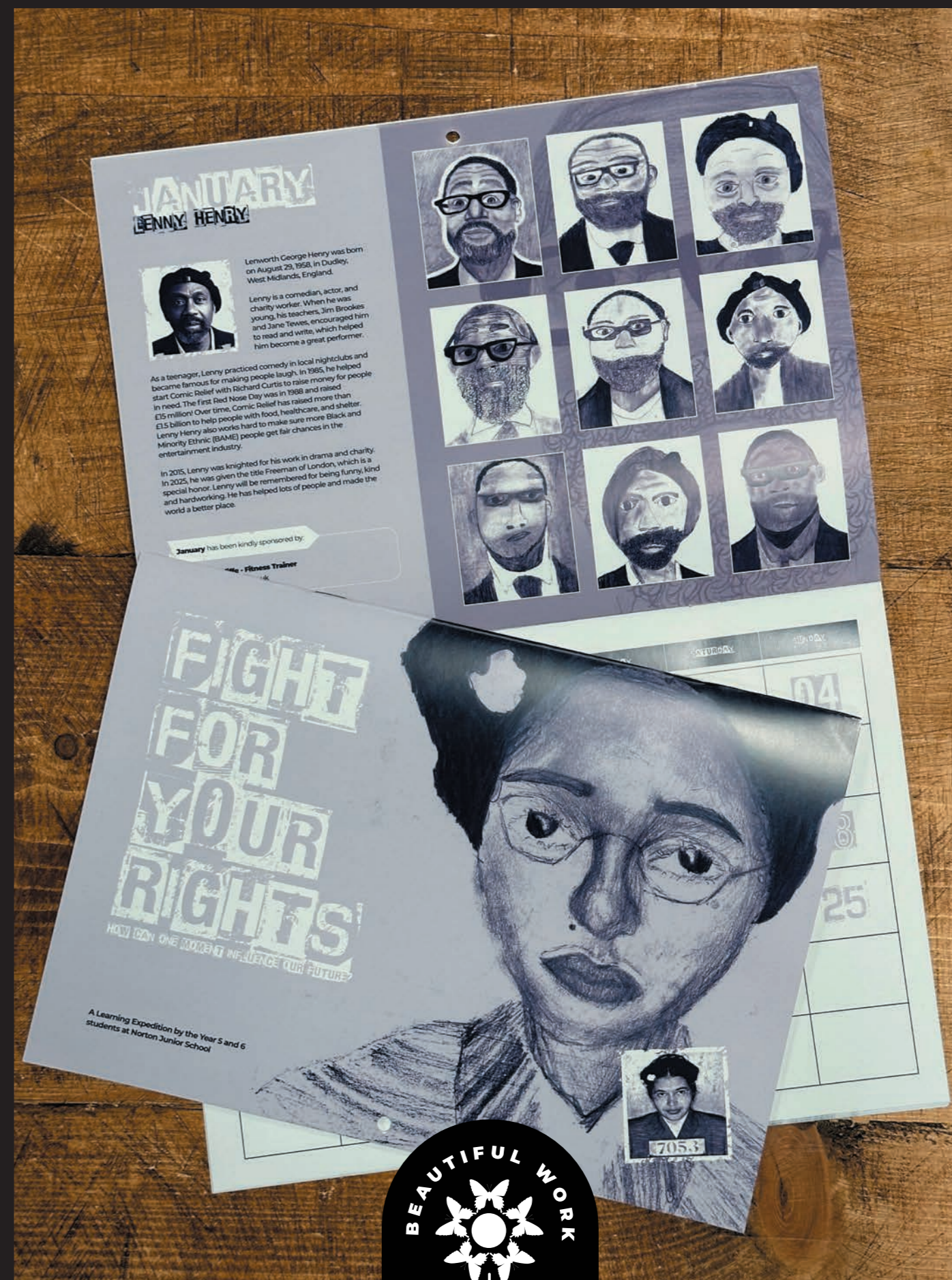
► developed a detailed school protocol to document every step of the process. This included everything from where to order the badges to who would be responsible for collecting and distributing them during Community Meeting days. By putting these structures in place, we ensured the smooth and consistent implementation of the badge system, reinforcing its value within our school community.

Badges are awarded during our weekly Community Meetings, making the moment of recognition truly special. To add to the celebration, we invite the parents of nominated children to attend, allowing them to share in their child's achievement and reinforcing the importance of character development.

Each badge earned is carefully tracked, ensuring that children have the opportunity to work towards collecting all of them by the time they reach Y6.

We're really proud of the work we have put into Character Traits and we are already seeing the success it is bringing.

Chris Mumby
Whole School Crew Lead, GT



Forget the standards: Designing learning that starts with the heart



In this article, Laura Parsons, the Whole School Crew and Expedition Lead from Norton, reflects on how a professional learning experience with Jeff Robin at 'Jeff Tech High,' has started to redefine the leadership expeditions at Norton Campus.

Laura explores the evolution of our Key Stage One expedition Ready, Steady, Grow: How Can I Be the Healthiest Version of Me?, and how placing creativity, curiosity, and student ownership before standards led to deeper learning and memorable outcomes.

“This expedition reminded us of why we do what we do at XP: to create learning experiences that matter. The cultural shift in our team - the shared ownership, excitement, and professional rigour - has embedded expeditionary learning more deeply than ever before. It is no longer just about the final product. It’s about the process, the people, and the pride that emerges when learning is led with heart.”

In Spring 2025, Year 1 and 2 pupils at Norton Campus embarked on a Learning Expedition called Ready, Steady, Grow: How Can I Be the Healthiest Version of Me? Rooted in cross-curricular, experience-rich learning, this expedition aimed to build children’s understanding of health and wellbeing through art, science, and design technology.

What made this expedition distinct was not just its depth or joyful outcomes - it was how it came to be. Earlier that year, I travelled to San Diego as part of the XP Trust team visiting 'Jeff Tech High' to work with Jeff Robin. His philosophy and provocations challenged how I viewed planning, curriculum, and product design. What I brought back to Norton wasn't a template - it was a mindset shift. One that placed inspiration and creativity at the centre and invited every adult to 'do the project first' before asking anything of our students.

Our expedition launched with a rich sensory experience inspired by Handa’s Surprise. This hook week allowed children to explore exotic fruits, create art inspired by their observations, and

begin hands-on learning that would form the foundation of the entire term. What looked like light-hearted play was in fact deeply embedded in science, maths, art and English—children were collecting data, describing the senses, and beginning to critique their own work through artistic techniques.

From there, we explored three core Case Studies. The first centred around vegetables and observational artwork, where students produced fact files and non-chronological reports. They learned how to safely chop, peel, and prepare vegetables they were researching - bringing Design Technology to life with purpose. The second Case Study shifted to fruit, where children wrote rhyming poetry and innovative stories inspired by Oliver’s Fruit Salad, creating their own published versions titled Oliver’s Fruit Smoothie. One fantastic, unexpected tool that helped bring this learning to life was Shrinky Dink plastic. We introduced it in the early weeks, not as a rigid task, but as an opportunity for playful exploration.

Children experimented freely - cutting, colouring, and observing how the

material reacted to heat. Teachers and support staff, having already 'done the project', were able to guide and prompt with questions that supported deeper understanding: What size should we draw this to make it work? What happens if we use too much ink?

The excitement was contagious. Children couldn't wait to make their next design, and the quality of their work improved because they knew what was possible. Shrinky Dink became a bridge between art, science, and design - helping children think critically, create confidently, and feel real pride in their products. The excitement even spilled into homes, with families buying their own Shrinky Dink packs and children sharing new creations with their Crew at school.

By the third Case Study, students were confidently exploring nutrition, food groups, and food chains. They used their understanding to design healthy tasters and displays for a science fair-style Presentation of Learning. Every child became a subject expert, presenting to parents with poise and pride. ►



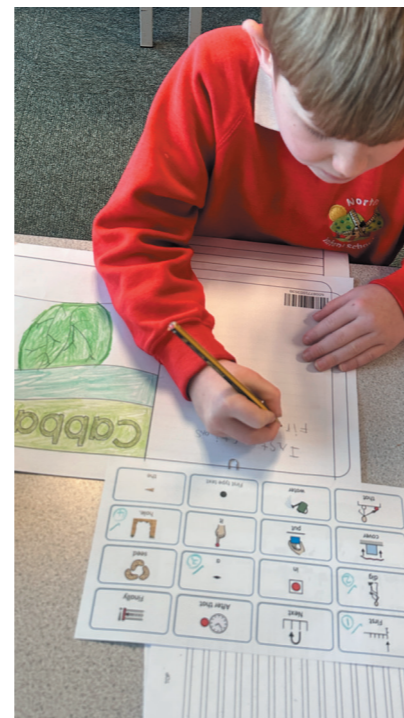
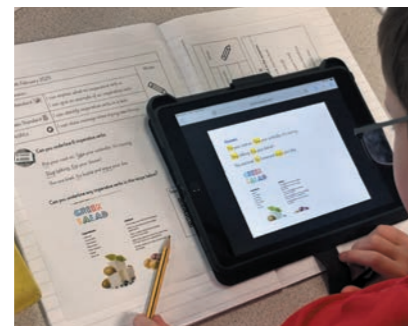
► Behind these confident voices were weeks of meaningful critique, deliberate practice, and staff who had already 'done the project' alongside them.

This shift - ensuring every adult had experienced the process first - was transformative. Instead of creating mock-ups or partial prototypes, our team now fully commits to experiencing the learning ourselves. We practise art techniques, trial food preparation skills, and challenge each other in critique. That deliberate change in process made our product more authentic, our teaching more secure, and our support staff more confident in how to scaffold learning.

For staff, it marked a turning point in how we view curriculum planning. Instead of starting with standards, we now start with purpose, curiosity, and a clear vision of what we want children to feel, create and understand.

Jeff's challenge to 'forget the standards' initially terrified me. I am someone who values structure and a rigorously mapped curriculum. But what I learned - and what I've since proven - is that when we lead with inspiration and creativity, the standards don't disappear. They are met, and often far exceeded, because children are deeply engaged and intrinsically motivated.

This expedition reminded us of why we do what we do at XP: to create learning experiences that matter. The cultural shift in our team - the shared ownership, excitement, and professional rigour - has embedded expeditionary learning more deeply than ever before. It is no longer just about the Final Product. It's about the process, the people, and the pride that emerges when learning is led with heart.





Old kid on the block!



This article follows the journey of Grace Jones, a former student, returning to the XP Trust as a member of the Communications (Comms) team.

It highlights the transition from being a student to a professional contributor, emphasizing the 'XP mindset' and the development of new creative skills.

Grace, who had exhibited her illustration talent as an XP student, when she worked closely with Comms and provided some stunning character sketches for the Dickens' Christmas Carol YTI Study Guide/book, describes the journey as a 'coming home' that has allowed her to see the inner workings of the organisation and expresses the gratitude she feels for being given an opportunity to give something back to XP.



“Being away from XP culture for two years, and then returning, has made me realise how much I missed it.”



I have had the amazing opportunity to join the XP Comms team, seeing the inner workings of how the XP Trust functions.

It started with having the chance to imagine and illustrate a design to be displayed in the student toilet blocks of both XP and East, or, in other words, the 'Bog Job'. Despite the 'glamour', it has been an amazing experience to create and realise. With the theme of the design brief being 'Crew' and 'What it means to be Crew?', it has allowed me to experience and put myself back in the XP mindset as a past student, and to be honest, it has felt like coming back home. Being away from the XP culture for two years, and then returning, has made me realise how much I missed it.

For example, being a part of check-ins again, and seeing the process and outcomes of expeditions. The overall design is a collage of influential music artists who I believe represent XP by using their voice to fight for social justice. A big part of the design process was interviewing students and using direct quotes from their insights about what Crew means to them. These interactions made what I was doing feel more real as it promoted Student Voice.

Working with the XPT Comms Crew, I have been learning new skills such as curation - and what steps it takes to create displays and populate the schools with beautiful work, as well as icon design and identity creation. I've also been improving my knowledge and skills in photography and video editing, having had the opportunity to take photos and capture moments across the Trust schools.

Visiting our primary schools and taking photos has been really interesting, seeing how each school tackles and embraces the XP fundamentals, such as Crew and Learning Expeditions. Hearing how the kids spoke and articulated themselves when speaking about their HoWLs and Character Traits surprised

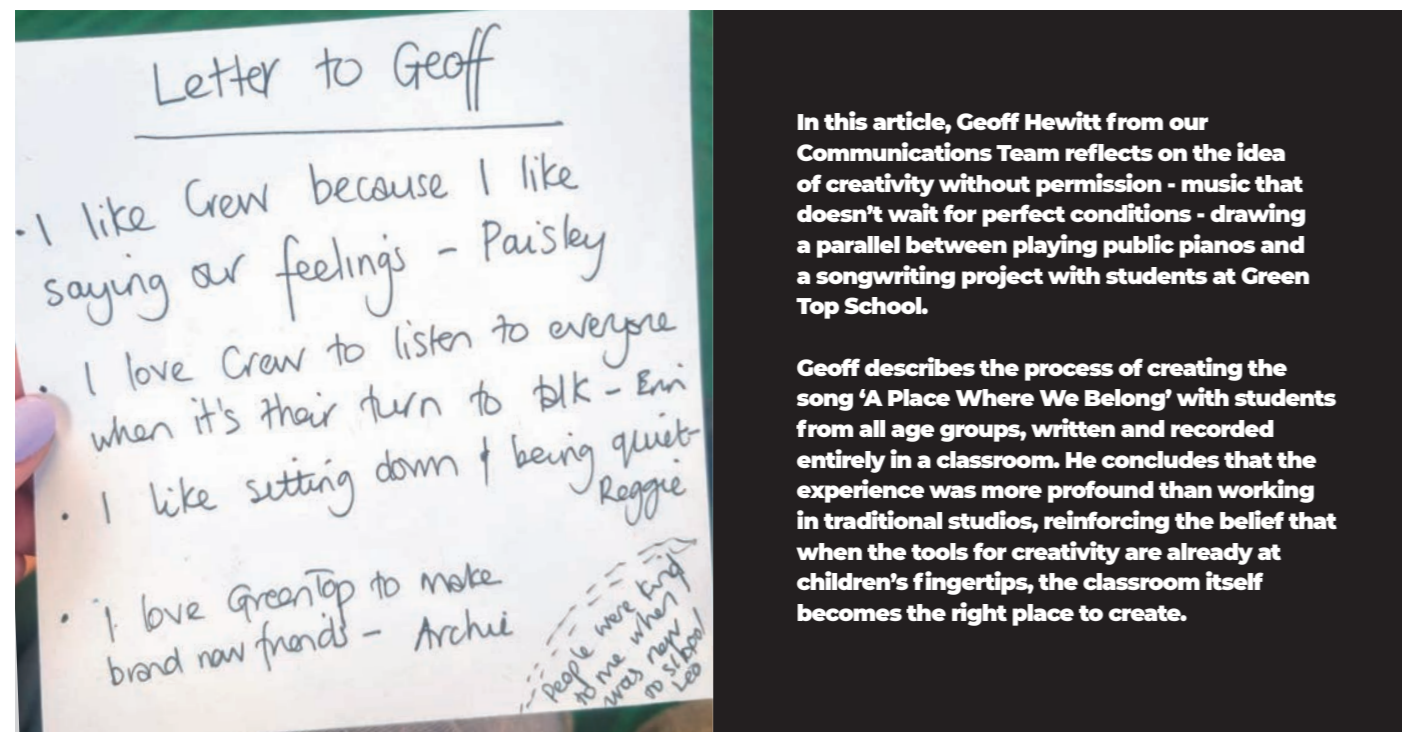
me and made me think about how I wouldn't have been able to talk about such topics with such confidence like what the primary students are doing... whether talking to peers, their teachers or visitors. Altogether, I have felt a strong sense of humanity in everything I've encountered.

Learning these new skills has really taken me out of my comfort zone in the best ways possible. Doing things I've never done in any great depth before, such as filming and editing a video of the performance of 'A Christmas Carol' by Box Clever, as well as designing icons and badges. This has really helped me expand my knowledge and skillset.

Overall, working with the XPT Comms Crew has been an amazing experience so far, and one which I am extremely thankful for. I appreciate everyone who helped to make it happen by giving me the opportunity, and the welcome, guidance and sense of inclusion I have experienced. I am very excited to see where this opportunity will take me.

 **Grace Jones**
XPT Comms Crew

There's nothing you can do that can't be done



In this article, Geoff Hewitt from our Communications Team reflects on the idea of creativity without permission - music that doesn't wait for perfect conditions - drawing a parallel between playing public pianos and a songwriting project with students at Green Top School.

Geoff describes the process of creating the song 'A Place Where We Belong' with students from all age groups, written and recorded entirely in a classroom. He concludes that the experience was more profound than working in traditional studios, reinforcing the belief that when the tools for creativity are already at children's fingertips, the classroom itself becomes the right place to create.

"A standout moment was when a child in KS1 was asked 'what do you feel in Crew?' and he simply responded 'I feel a little bit of everything, really'. Wow. And thus their chorus hook was born."

I have always been drawn to playing public pianos. To me, they are magnetic. It doesn't matter if my train is waiting on the platform, I have to go over and play a single note and run. It's hardwired into me. I'm sure that part of the appeal is the location - I've been lucky enough to have busked and listened to others play all over. But the real draw is the readiness - the inherent availability. The "it's there, so why shouldn't I?".

Over time, I've realised that what I'm really drawn to isn't the piano itself, but the idea it represents: creativity without permission. Music that doesn't wait for perfect conditions. That idea underpinned 'A Place Where We Belong', a song created with students at Green Top School. Written in a classroom. Recorded in the same space. No studio, no specialist environment - just accessible tools, and the belief that the work was worth capturing exactly where it was happening.

The song started life as a conversation in Crew. Students across the school, from all age groups, were asked what it means to belong. As you can imagine, the responses were thoughtful, generous and full of care. Some Crews chose to write their reflections as letters - a technique I've borrowed from Tunesmith by Jimmy Webb, and one that gives people permission to say exactly what they mean. After that, we let the letters germinate for a little while. The great thing about taking that break was knowing everything was already

captured - it was just a case of finding a way to say it. I went back into Green Top armed with an acoustic guitar and no fixed ideas about where we'd go next. Anything could happen. And naturally, the best thing did.

We started in Early Years, and their beautiful reflection became the opening line of the song: "Come and play, every day - 'cause we care about you."

It felt right that the song began there - with the youngest voices, setting the tone for everything that followed.

Over the course of the day, the voice of the song grew stronger with every classroom visited. It didn't matter that some older students wanted to use more words to express themselves - it only made the tapestry richer.

We didn't get much time together in every classroom, but that helped students distil the most important parts of their letters. They critiqued their own work from months earlier and selected the lines they wanted to set to music - real craftsmanship and quality.

The most wonderful part of writing songs with kids is you never quite know how they're going to articulate themselves - but there is always one line that emerges out of thin air that you'd never expect. A standout moment was when a child in KS1 was asked 'what do you feel in Crew?' and he simply responded 'I feel a little bit of

everything, really'. Wow. And thus their chorus hook was born.

What a beautiful day it was. I remember walking Brontë that evening and not quite being able to comprehend that they'd written a song as an entire school. The children had previously written as an LKS2 phase on Dear World, which was sensational - but XP students always find a way to one-up themselves.

Over the coming weeks, the song was tweaked, a demo version was made for rehearsals, and a recording date was set. We knew we wanted to record at Green Top, as that's where the story began and it was the right place to capture the magic. We picked a classroom (thank you, Miss Cooper!) and commandeered it for two days. Students filed in as Crews, recorded the parts they'd been practising in their own classrooms for months, and the song began to bloom.

One of the best things about sessions like these is the questions. "What does that do?" they ask, pointing at an audio interface. I tell them it listens and captures their singing in the computer (which is essentially true, when you think about it). "Why can't I hear myself in the microphone?" they ask. I tell them to look for a speaker - when they don't see one, it starts to make sense. Then came the best question of the day. "Can I do this?" It stopped me in my tracks. Of course you can, I replied. "All of you can." ►



“Then came the best question of the day. Can I do this? It stopped me in my tracks. Of course you can, I replied. All of you can.”



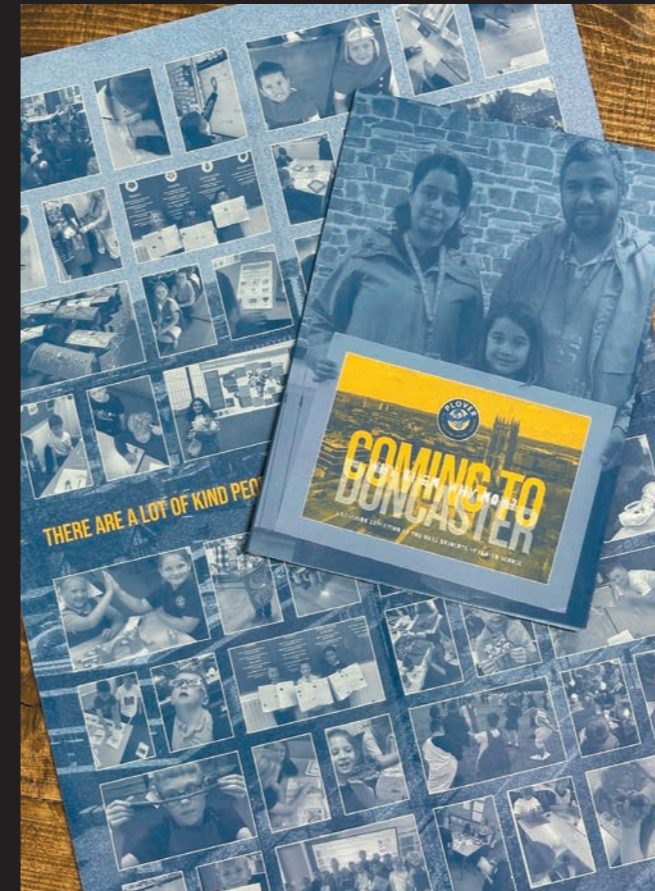
► We could talk all day about how technology is changing children's lives - but when it comes to creativity, we've never been better placed. Albums are produced at home, videos are edited at the dinner table, and great stories are written in coffee shops. The world is their proverbial oyster.

I went on to tell the students they could do everything I was doing on their school iPads. As they reflected on their journey, they realised they'd created the song with tools already at their fingertips. Pencils, paper and words - shaped into a real song, recorded in their own classroom.

Whenever I've worked with children on songwriting, I've wanted them to come away feeling empowered and inspired. I want them to take what I've shown them and run with it. This time, it felt a little different.

I thought of the public piano and my compulsion to play. I thought of the studios and venues I've worked in over the years and realised that none of them have compared to that 'makeshift' recording space in their own school. The piano was there. The classroom was ready. So why shouldn't they?

 **Geoff Hewitt**
XPT Comms Crew





California Dreamin'

Reflections from 'Jeff Tech High 2025'

From the 18th - 24th October 2025, colleagues from XP Trust travelled to San Diego to work with the world's leading Project Based Learning expert, Jeff Robin, to craft and create model Learning Expeditions and products that they would then use with their students back in the UK.

The Guiding Question for the fieldwork to Jeff Tech High (JTH) in 2025 was:

'How will engaging in Jeff Tech High positively influence and change my work when I return to the UK?'

The Learning Targets for this Expedition Slice were:

I can contribute significantly to the 'JTH Crew' through actively engaging with Crew roles.

I can demonstrate I am open to new ways of thinking?

I can engage fully in the process to create a final product, presenting my learning to others.

I can reflect on my experience and identify why and how this will positively impact my practice back, and that of others, at XP on why and how we create products at XP.

Our Learning Expedition started with an 'Immersion' experience where we pitched our ideas to Jeff Robin online. We were given specific and helpful critique and also given clear advice on how to prepare for the upcoming expedition.

On arriving in San Diego we acclimatised ourselves to the area of La Jolla and settled into our bases for the week. In addition, we had a Crew session on the first day, where we established norms for working; allocated Crew roles; reflected on our reasons for coming to JTH and the purpose of the visit. We committed to creating a journal and began to capture and reflect on our experiences.

Our expedition began with a session led by Jeff where he explored the importance of the concept of 'doing the project first' and that this should be driven by teacher passion.

We reflected on our own practice and started to work through our ideas for an expedition and a product that we would create. By the end of these sessions we had a much clearer idea of what we wanted to produce.

On the second day, we engaged in fieldwork at High Tech High in San Diego. Jeff guided us through the different projects that were displayed there and reinforced the importance of staff exemplars and the significant impact this has on determining deliverables and the subsequent quality of products.

On the third day, we took a deep dive into establishing our expedition deliverables and created a sequence of learning to make this possible. We were also mindful at this point of the appropriateness of our Guiding Questions and also the standards we were going to engage with. The key consideration was to keep the creative/making process at the forefront of the expedition to allow students to grapple with and have authentic

ownership of their learning. Also, we embraced the idea of back filling content, if required, after the creation of the product into our planning.

Our final product was to create an exemplar that we presented to the rest of the group, and to our Chief Executive Officer and members of the Executive Team from the Trust, following Jeff's mantra of, 'do the project first.'

In addition, we pledged to write up our experiences from JTH into the form of an article for the upcoming edition of XP Unpacked in January 2026. And most importantly we pledged to engage with our students in the expedition we had planned, take our learning back into school to share with colleagues and ultimately to reinforce the integrity of our Expeditionary curriculum.

The following articles, reflections and journals capture the vagaries, struggles and successes from our week long Learning Expedition.

We hope you enjoy them.

 **Andy Sprakes**
JTH Expedition Lead 2025.





A few words from Jeff...

“Equivocating test prep with great hands-on learning is bullsh*t.”



As an educator, Jeff Tech High in 2025 was successful because Andy and I met several times with all the participants. They were ready and thinking about the work we were going to do individually and as a group well before they arrived in San Diego. Also, as a host it was much easier the second time round.

The only thing that was tough for me was the High Tech High visit. I might not be the right person to take people there on a tour because I really don't want to point out how disappointing the exhibition on the walls are post my contribution as a teacher and the curator. There are sad examples of project-oriented learning at HTH and I had to tell the XP staff, 'Oh don't do that.' I felt bad, however honest.

We learned that we need to have discrete benchmarks:

Exemplars

Deliverables

Calendars

Exhibition plans (of student work, not wholly relying on the Comms team)

Back fill component

We learned there are three communication issues that exist:

Firstly, teachers think they have to do other people's expeditions from the past so that every student studies the same thing. They also think that they have to work with large groups of teachers even if it doesn't make sense. Teams of two or even alone are far more effective.

Secondly, teachers don't have to teach to the test like in conventional schools. Do the expedition - then back fill content where it is needed.

Finally, we need to reinforce the truth (literally hit all teachers over the head!!) that anyone can come to Jeff Tech High. However, you do need to lift a finger, show courage and apply!! No one is asked, every one could do the work, it's about stepping up. Ultimately, everyone has to engage with Learning Expeditions and projects and I am thrilled to help them.

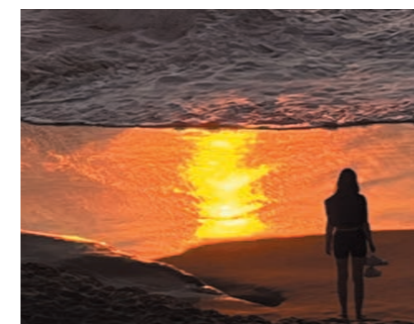
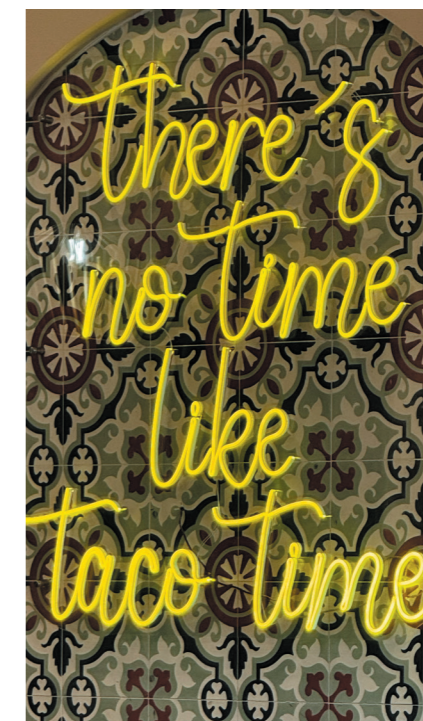
I also like our proposed idea of a January visit with Heads, to help them spread the message of 'exemplars', 'deliverables', 'calendars', 'exhibitions' and 'back filling'. And also, potentially developing the idea and creation of Project Cards that make it easier for check-ins and accountability. This, I think, would be really useful.

I am also excited to think about potentially changing the venue of JTH in the future to different venues like Barcelona. That would save money and time. We could be in the city or even go south to Sitges.

Whatever the future shape of JTH, I look forward to continuing to work with XP, possibly the last Project Based Learning game in the world.

Remember "equivocating test prep with great hands-on learning is bullsh*t."

 **Jeff Robin**
Jeff Tech High, 2025



The Project of Reflection



In this article, Hannah Simpson, a teacher from XP Gateshead, outlines the fieldwork to San Diego and High Tech High, discussing how reflection can be our most powerful tool in refining projects within Expeditionary Learning Schools.

“What I really learnt from time spent with Jeff and in San Diego was that we have to be change-makers in our own schools. We need to lead by example, to show that things can change and that ideas can become reality. We need to encourage thinking - through reflecting.”

I find the link between an inspiring surrounding and great ideas really interesting, and who can say that La Jolla was not an inspiring surrounding to find yourself in? I think there is something about being in beautiful surroundings - the relaxed nature of California, or a beautifully curated home - that prompts ideas. There is almost a feeling that someone else has had a great idea before you, has created something, imagined something, strived for something to make it successful, so you can do it too. Whether this is a human decision - beauty feels meaningful to me, and so the artistry of Jeff's home felt meaningful - or in a more abstract way, that somehow nature has been arranged with innate beauty and meaning to inspire.

Our time in the beauty of California gave our group the time and space to really do some deep thinking. It was impactful to have time away from home responsibilities, allowing space for ideas, inspiration and, most importantly of all, reflection. Leaving responsibilities behind pushed us to be mindful of ourselves. Allowing ourselves to embrace warmth, eat what we wanted, and have fun was a prioritisation of the self, which I think led to better ideas. If you are physically prioritising yourself, you can have great ideas, because you are already looking inward.

Reading this, I hope that people who know me don't think I had succumbed to the 'hippy-dippy' ways of California. That's not me. What I'd like to discuss in this article is how reflections should be at the heart of how we build and manage expeditions. What I saw in California helped me understand that sharp, timely, structured and meaningful reflections can promote critical thinking in a really expansive way, and that is surely what we want our learners to be able to do.

Reflecting at High Tech High

An idea that we saw at High Tech High that resonated with me was a reflection project that they had completed, complete with narrative and final project. Speaking to the staff at HTH truly crystallised why this instantly seemed so meaningful. The clarity with which the staff spoke about the benefits of reflecting in this way was inspirational. They did not reflect in a meeting with a shared Google Doc at the very end of a project; they spoke about how the reflection changed their future projects and ideas. They made a reflection project about the previous project. At XP, we seem to be on a tight-rope between Project Based Learning, Expeditionary Learning and the UK school system. In trying to think about how we mitigate this, this type of reflection seems to be a way we might bring those three strands together.

It instantly appealed to me as a way to add tangible value to the process.

Reflection should be a better working part of our expeditions. It occurred to me that although we often ask our learners to reflect on what they have done, they don't always see it as a cog in the wheel of a successful expedition - and I don't know if staff do either. We could allow our students more agency in this and ask them how they best liked to record their thoughts. It could be an investment of time to get more in-depth reflections from expedition teachers. There would be so many ways for us to use these valuable reflections if we are going to be an adaptable and creative institution. ▶





“Our strength lies in our own expertise, and the project needed to reflect that... just as we encourage the children to lean into what they know and care about.”



► Reflective as a group

Of course, we went to learn and benefit from Jeff’s wisdom and expertise. About half way through the experience, we had a really interesting discussion with our house group about what we wanted to take from Jeff and how we might bring these ideas back to school. There was a clear consensus on the importance of practicality and on having a stronger focus on projects being used meaningfully. At the same time, we were proud of the work we already did, and a sense of reality crept in when we began working on individual projects with very different ideas in the Jeff Robin model, with the ‘teacher’ supporting each group separately.

What emerged from these conversations was an awareness that a productive middle ground existed between traditional schoolwork and complete Project-Based Learning. Two key take-aways felt both realistic and transformative: firstly, making the project or final product visible from the first day of the expedition so that students knew what they were working towards and where their agency lay; secondly, instituting clear deliverables as planned key steps to structure the expedition. These felt like simple, streamlined changes that could immediately improve planning and practice. I think multiple of these deliverables should be reflections.

Of course, we went with a project that needed to be worked on and presented. There were many moving aspects of the presentations, most importantly seeing how much people cared about their work. I had felt more than a little jaded this term, and the experience of seeing our colleagues talk really blew that out of the water.

Although there was a sense of trepidation -there always is when

change is on the horizon - the strength of the experience and the trust within the group made it feel possible. But these presentations were not only the product of teaching experience and passion for our schools, but of a week’s talk and reflection about what we could do to strengthen and improve our work for the benefit of our learners. It is because of this that I have made the focus of this article reflection, as it is truly these key moments of talk and reflection that keep jumping out to me as the most important aspect of the trip.

How reflections helped our own project

This process highlighted for me just how important it is to create an organic, well-considered product that genuinely resonates with the needs and interests of the learners involved. We run into difficulties when we attempt to stitch together learning experiences that have no natural connection. Steph (my project partner) and I were concerned about cramming in too much and seeming inauthentic. Our strength lies in our own expertise, and the project needed to reflect that- just as we encourage the children to lean into what they know and care about.

As we refined the idea, based on invaluable feedback from the group we incorporated a YouTube tutorial to guide participants and clarified the project outline - please see Steph’s article for the recipe card and QR code if you are interested in recreating our French Lentil Bake! Students would interview, or read anonymised testimonials from, individuals supported by Edberts House or a local food and community hub. They would consider what ‘living well’ means beyond simple survival and, drawing on these stories, craft poems that celebrate the resilience and dignity of the human spirit. Our project was a STEAM and Human expedition entitled ‘Food for the Soul’.



HUMAN Case Study: ‘Stories That Nourish’

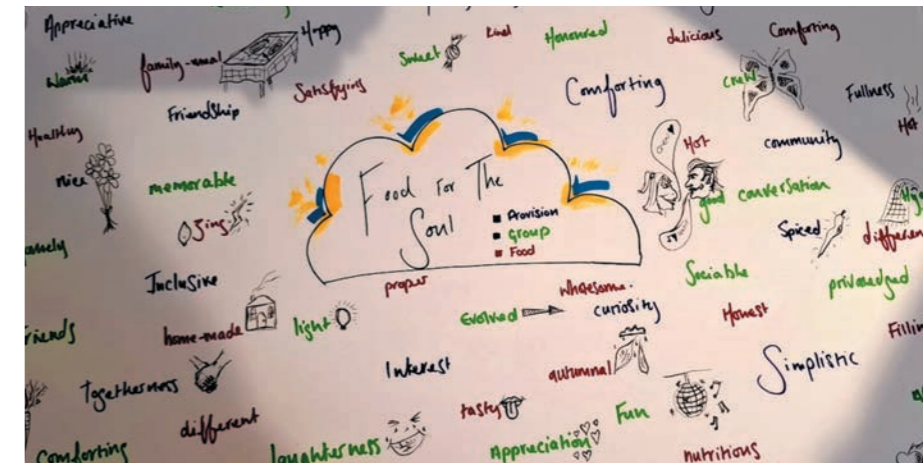
Students will interview or read anonymised testimonials from users of Edberts House or a local food/ community support hub. They will reflect on what “living well” means beyond basic survival. Using these stories, they will write poems that capture the human spirit.

STEAM Case Study: ‘The Spoon That Feeds’

Alongside this, students will explore what the human body needs to stay nourished - looking at nutrition, warmth, and the science behind heat transfer. They investigated the properties of materials as conductors or insulators and will use this knowledge to design elements of their Final product.

Final Product: The Nourishment Box

The outcome will be a thoughtfully curated package: a food box, a recipe card, and a book of poems. These boxes will be gifted to families supported by Edberts House - a tangible reminder of the impact children can have within their community.



To honour the spirit of the project, Steph and I even cooked for the group, hoping to mirror the experience we were asking the students to create. There was a special warmth in providing a meal that brought people together, and we were determined to do justice to the work. We invested deeply in crafting something meaningful, and, because we took feedback from the group, we could see that came through in how it was received.

Ultimately, the entire experience has made me reflect not just on the project itself, but on the value of reflecting with intention - because thoughtful reflection is often what reveals the true heart of our practice.

Our experience at HTH showed us that reflection was most powerful when it was not an afterthought. If we want to strengthen our own expeditions, we could incorporate reflection better at key stages all the way through an expedition.

By making reflection a cyclical part of our expeditions, rather than linear, we could better use it for adaptation, creativity and problem-solving.

What I really learnt from time spent with Jeff and in San Diego was that we have to be change-makers in our own schools. We need to lead by example, to show that things can change and that ideas can become reality. We need to encourage thinking - through reflecting.

All this aside, reflecting on reflecting, we had fun. Fun is meaningful, and we laughed a lot making our products, so hopefully that will translate to the children when they come to do ‘Food for the Soul.’ What I’ve taken away from this is the importance of joy in our work. Working with children should be fun - we need to make sure we maintain the joy of what we do. It is amazing.

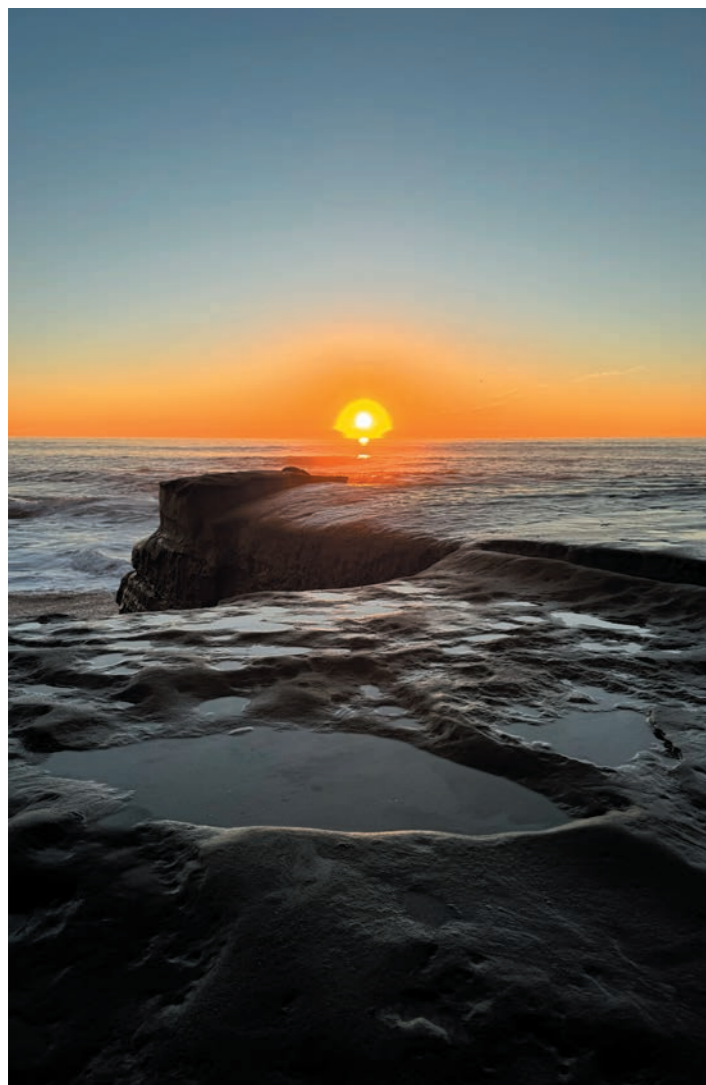
 **Hannah Simpson**
Teacher, XP Gateshead

California Dreaming

In this journal entry Amie Hudson, the XP Trust Lead for Art, chronicles her transformative week in San Diego focusing on Project-Based Learning (PBL) with Jeff Robin. She shows how her experience led to a profound shift in mindset, overcoming self-doubt and moving from compliance-driven planning to designing learning based on conviction and student-centred authenticity.

Key takeaways include the importance of 'doing the project first' and integrating art across learning environments inspired by High Tech High.

The journey, characterized by 'belly laughs' and deep reflection, is viewed as a moment of 'human development' that reinforced Amie's core purpose in education.



Day 1: We're here in time for the sunset

The San Diego Crew finally arrived in sunny San Diego. The moment I stepped out of the airport, the air felt incredible, warm and slightly salty. We checked into 549 Nautilus Street, in La Jolla, which was beautiful. I quickly unpacked and then headed straight for the ocean. We watched the sunset and in this moment it hit me just how lucky and brave I am to have applied for such an incredible opportunity.

Later we met Jeff and Maribel for dinner which was lovely. What a great bunch of people to learn from and with. I'm already looking forward to tomorrow!

Day 2: Culture, Crew and hummingbirds

This morning was our first time circling up as a Crew, gathering on the golden sands of La Jolla Beach. The Pacific shimmered in front of us, vast, calm, and impossibly blue — and yet inside I felt anything but calm. As I looked around the circle at all the incredible people I'd just met that old, familiar voice crept in: What is Amie from Barnsley doing here? I've carried that feeling for as long as I can remember, that quiet hum of not being enough, of not quite belonging, of my words not being worth hearing.

But something shifted at that moment. When it came to my turn to speak, I shared it, the raw, unedited truth of that imposter feeling. And somehow, speaking it aloud, surrounded by kindness and authenticity, lifted its weight. It felt special, fragile but freeing, as if the ocean itself had taken it and washed it away. We set our norms and assigned Crew roles. We had 'Care Bears', content creators 'journalists' and organisers.

Later, we visited Jeff's house for a BBQ, an artist's world of colour, story, and texture. We ate American style burgers

and drank beer. His walls were alive with paintings and assemblages, each one like a chapter of human life. A shrine to the past.

My favourite piece of Jeff's works was the striking mural of a woman in nature, her body strong and luminous against a backdrop of greens and blues. It was bold, unapologetic, and beautiful, a celebration of vulnerability and confidence intertwined. I loved the work that had similarities to the work of Frida, who is my favourite so I felt completely content.

Jeff's space wasn't just a home, it was a living, breathing gallery. Every corner seemed to remind me that art, like honesty, is about showing up as you are. Imperfect, human, and real. And maybe that's what this trip and that Crew circle is really about: learning to belong by daring to be seen. Oh, and the hummingbirds...we don't have them in Barnsley. We are Crew.

Day 3: We start our important work

Today marked the first day of our important work with Jeff, and it already feels like a turning point. The sun rose over La Jolla with that golden, Californian warmth, the kind that seems to slow time and make you notice everything: Yes. I am still mesmerised by the surroundings and the hummingbirds.

Our work began with a Crew check-in and then a session led by Jeff where he highlighted the importance of the concept of 'doing the project first' and that this should be driven by teacher passion. We reflected on our own practice and shared our ideas and actions for the day.

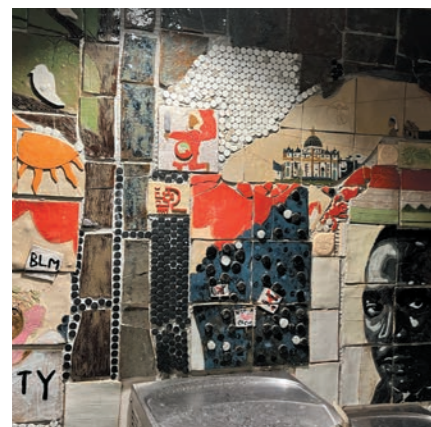
Prior to travelling to San Diego, Chris and I had already made the Final Product. Chris and I refined and adapted our planning today after receiving critique

from Jeff. For our 'Money, Money, Money' expedition, we initially envisioned an immersive experience centered on an authentic fake artist we created, Jay Bolleaux.

Our plan involved the San Diego Crew capturing macro photographs around Jeff's house, then significantly enlarging them. A way of getting work on the walls which was our job. Jeff had made this really clear. This process aimed to provoke thought about how we assign value. The core of our authentic fake artist concept involved close-up photos of unwashed paint palettes from XPD.

Standing there with our ideas after so many hours of thought, care, and curiosity distilled into something tangible. I felt both proud and exposed. Taking critique from the team was humbling but also energising. There's something powerful about working alongside people who listen deeply, question kindly, and push you to be better without ever making you feel small. It reminded me of why we do this work which is to create, to reflect, to build together. Jeff felt that the authentic fake work of Jay Bolleux and the syncretism of iconic artworks should be two separate expeditions!! Wait, Jeff... What?

The afternoon was spent back on the beach, where the sea seemed to echo everything we'd been exploring, calm yet restless, playful yet profound. Light bouncing off the water, friends laughing without inhibition, moments of stillness beside the waves. Some sat quietly, watching the sun go down, while others leaped into the shallows, their reflections dancing on the mirrored surface of the wet sand. That contrast, deep thinking and laughter, felt like the essence of the day. We worked hard, we opened up, and we belly laughed until our stomachs ached. It's only Day Three, but already this place, these people, and this work ►



► are beginning to carve out something lasting. Something I'll carry home long after the sun sets over La Jolla.

Day 4: Jeff Tech High and the Importance of Legacy - Head, Heart and Hands

We began the day by checking in as a Crew, circling up once again to share our reflections and takeaways from yesterday. Each person spoke honestly about what challenged them and how they pushed through. When it came to my turn, I shared how the clarity of our expedition and final product had really settled in for me, clarity that came directly from Jeff's coaching and the fine-tuning conversations we'd had the day before.

I reflected on the deeper significance of this process, how intention and design weave together to create purpose.

Jeff said he was happy I'd demonstrated new ways of thinking, which had been his goal all along: that acknowledgment meant a lot. I have quickly come to realise that Jeff will give you his honest opinion, in Jeff's way. He could be a 'Barnsley lad' as he doesn't mince his words, he says it as it is. As we say in Yorkshire, he calls 'a spade a spade.'



This from Jeff was high praise, so I'm proud of the transformation within my thinking which will be revealed within my planning.

Afterwards, Jeff led a session on Project-Based Learning, reminding us again of the importance of 'doing the project first.' By experiencing the learning ourselves, we reach a deeper level of understanding and empathy for our students. That resonated deeply with me and with how I build culture in my own environment. We have the 'Wall of Excellence' in every Art room at XPD which is a place to hang beautiful work beside the old masters. I aim to notice everything and praise timely to reinforce that student work is important to me. It connected powerfully to how I design the art curriculum, from the initial intent and threshold concepts to the 'head, heart, and hands' approach that underpins every sequence. The design engages all the senses, students respond to powerful themes such as 'Is Migration worth the risk?' and 'Fight the Power.'

I thought about how learning at its best should stimulate all the senses, becoming something habitual, embodied, and felt. Each session, every tiny crafted moment, contributes to the



culture we create. That's what I want for the students at XP, to feel something in art. To be moved, inspired, and changed by the experience of learning, just like I have been whilst here in San Diego.

Later we visited High Tech High in San Diego, and from the moment I stepped inside, I was completely captivated by the environment. Every wall, every corner, every suspended sculpture told a story of creativity, collaboration, and authentic learning. It didn't feel like a traditional school, it felt like a living, breathing gallery of ideas. Legacy! The first thing that struck me was how art and learning were intertwined everywhere. A wall of books formed a tree-like shape, symbolising growth and curiosity. Above it, a sculptural angel watched over the space - a quiet reminder of reflection and aspiration.

Then, turning a corner, I was met with an explosion of colour: a vast mural inspired by 'The Garden of Earthly Delights.' It stretched across the ceiling, transforming a simple hallway into a portal of imagination. This ignited my imagination; I was distracted, contemplating how I could transform XP. Where shall I start? What shall I do first? I want to do it all now.



Jeff mentioned that I had to have courage and do my own expeditions rather than force a weak link as part of a big expedition. The Expedition Team's shifting narrative in 7.1 particularly resonated with me. Chris and I have been actively seeking valuable art-related learning experiences amidst these changes. Upon my return to Doncaster, I intend to implement an 'expedition slice' for 7.1, which I believe will offer more significant value and create a lasting legacy. My plan is to start by creating a Bayeux Tapestry of Doncaster, delivering this project as soon as I am back.

Further along, the murals celebrated culture and identity. Portraits of my favourite artist Frida Kahlo and other iconic figures surrounded by rich patterns and colour. Students articulated beautifully what they were learning, they were generous with their answers and shared not just examples but the processes they had gone through. I was really impressed.

Many High Tech High Staff engaged with us, there was a sense of pride in representation, learning and art that connects to community and heritage. I could see many connections between High Tech High and XP. Staff spoke about the process of critique and creating multiple drafts, for example.

One installation, titled 'Dear Plastic, Fall 2024' showcased a series of framed studies exploring texture, waste, and the natural world. Each small square was a window into a student's voice and perspective. We are currently responding to the theme of Natural World in Art at XP with Y11.

My take away is having the students' voices captured and curated with the work. Jeff hates the frames, so I need to consider how I will curate their beautiful work, however when I do I will add the

student voice and perhaps get them involved in the process of curating their own work.

Nearby, a kinetic sculpture made from bicycle wheels connected engineering and art, a physical embodiment of motion, innovation, and sustainability. Watching Betty (one of my JTH Crew) interact with it, I was reminded how curiosity drives connection. This led me to question how curation can go beyond wall paper, information, legacy and aesthetics. How can people interact with it? Everywhere I looked, learning was visible: pegboards displaying student sketchbooks, murals on justice and equality, cascading paper cranes suspended from the ceiling.

The experience prompted a deep reflection on the environmental influence on culture. High Tech High is more than an educational institution; it is a vibrant learning environment. While some of the exhibit curation could have been more polished, and not every piece displayed was outstanding, the work was consistently of a high standard and, crucially, it was visible.

Day 5: Coaching with Jeff Robin

Today's coaching session with Jeff challenged me to confront something deeply ingrained in our system: the tension between creative freedom and performative planning.

We spoke about what it really means to design learning that is authentic, liberating, and student-centred - not something contorted to tick boxes on a corporate checklist of 'what good looks like.' I felt that challenge and had some feelings of frustration. In education, we are so often asked to align with formats that demonstrate evidence of learning rather than actually enabling it.

The paradox is clear - we talk about creativity, but we build frameworks that stifle it.

A quote from Stephen Covey echoed throughout our discussion: "Keep the main thing the main thing." It made me question how often we lose sight of what really matters: the student, their curiosity, their thinking and when we are too busy performing the part of an effective teacher for someone else's rubric. The compassion I feel for students deepened as I realised how this performative culture affects them too. They feel it when their teacher is 'teaching to be seen,' rather than teaching them.

In conversation, Jeff helped me re-imagine what 'good' could look like. He challenged me to plan not from compliance, but from conviction. To strip back the bolt-ons. To return to the joy of learning, the best bits. He described it like having dessert before the main course, that sense of delight, of starting with something irresistible, and trusting that the rest will follow. ►





► Day 6: Presentation Day

This morning, I woke up with a familiar knot in my stomach, the kind that comes when you know you have to stand up and share something deeply important in front of people who make it look effortless. Presenting has never come naturally to me; finding the right words to articulate everything circling in my head feels like trying to catch light in a jar. But I also knew that today mattered, not for performance, pro ego but for meaning.

When I thought about what truly captured the heart of my expedition, I kept coming back to Andy's story, the one he so generously shared with me. He told me about carving a woodpecker from wood as a gift for his grandma. It wasn't just a creative task; it was a labour of love. His grandma cherished it, and when she passed away, Andy's mum continued to care for it. That simple wooden bird carried so much more than craftsmanship - it carried emotion, connection, and memory.

That story epitomised what I want my students to experience: learning that moves beyond content, beyond 'colouring in.' I want them to be

emotionally invested, to create work that means something, that lives beyond the classroom because it has heart.

Standing there, I shared Andy's story with trembling hands but a full heart. And as our Crew presented one by one, I felt this incredible pride rise up in me. Every presentation was thoughtful, authentic, and brave. Even though at times I'd questioned Jeff's direction, the constant rethinking, the uncomfortable restarts, in this moment I finally got it. This is what mastery looks like. Jeff isn't just teaching Project-Based Learning; he is Project-Based Learning. He pushed us to live it, not just design it.

I presented the final artworks created for the 'Syncretism with Isms' expedition. This art project focused on blending diverse styles and personal identity to produce unique and valuable pieces for exhibition. I also outlined the key deliverables, a new concept in my typical lesson planning approach.

Seeing Gwyn and Kate in the audience made that pride even sharper.

This wasn't just group presentations, it was a shared achievement built on trust, reflection, and care. We've worked hard, but we've also laughed hard, and somewhere between the late-night reflections and the frustrations, we became something more than colleagues, we became a Crew.

Later that evening, we celebrated over food and drinks, locals dancing to Country and Western around us. It was great to be joined by Jeff's colleagues from High Tech High. There was laughter and a little sadness too - the quiet ache that comes when something beautiful is ending. I felt grateful, proud, and a little emotional thinking about our students back home. They have no idea how much love and thought goes into what we do for them. What a journey. What a team. And I feel all in.

“What I really learnt from time spent with Jeff and in San Diego was that we have to be change-makers in our own schools. We need to lead by example, to show that things can change and that ideas can become reality. We need to encourage thinking - through reflecting.”



Day 7: Last Day in San Diego

Today was our final day, the end of something that feels far too precious to let go. We circled up at Jeff's house for one last time, surrounded by suitcases, coffee cups, and the quiet hum of goodbye. Gwyn and Kate were part of this final circle and it was great to share our final thoughts with them. It felt full circle, back where so much learning and laughter began.

Andy asked us to share two words that captured our San Diego fieldwork experience. Around the circle, words like 'deliverables', 'reaffirming' and 'reflecting' filled the air, each one a tiny fragment of a much bigger story. Mine was 'belly laughs,' because amongst all the depth, challenge, and transformation, it was the laughter that anchored me, that reminded me of the happiness in our shared purpose.

As we took our products down from the wall, I felt a lump in my throat. Every piece, every conversation, every tiny creative moment carried meaning. I tried to commit every detail to memory, the sound of voices, the light in the room, the concentration when cutting, cooking and colouring, that sense of belonging.

there, I found myself wishing we could do it all again, the learning, the stretching, the laughter, the connection. This was more than professional development; it was human development. A moment in time I'll carry back home, etched deeply in heart and mind.

After our final circle at Jeff's, we had a little time before heading to the airport, just enough to soak in the last bit of California sunshine. I'd placed seeing the sea lions on my wish list from the start, and I couldn't believe it when we finally arrived at the cove and there they were,

sprawled across the rocks, completely at peace and making a right racket. I could have spent all day there, just watching them. There was something so grounding about the way they moved: slow, content, unbothered by the world around them - apart from the one that had the teeth of a baby great white shark in its side!

Standing on the edge of the cliffs, with the Pacific stretching endlessly ahead, I felt full with a quiet knowing that this experience had changed me. San Diego wasn't just a trip; it was a moment in time that will stay with me forever.

My Mountain, My Rainbow

The journey home felt like another kind of expedition. After saying goodbye to everyone, I found myself facing something I'd quietly dreaded, navigating the underground from Heathrow to Paddington, and then again to King's Cross. For most people, it's just part of travelling. But for me, being claustrophobic, using the language of XP, this was my mountain.

After a ten hour flight and no sleep, and I love my sleep. I took a deep breath, stepped on the train, and did it. I was fine. More than fine, actually. This worry, this fear, has held me back for years, stopping me from saying 'yes' to things I wanted to do. I felt stupid.

When I arrived at King's Cross, there it was, a perfect rainbow arching across the sky. It stopped me in my tracks. They always seem to appear in those special moments ever since my Nannan Rose died. There was one when I chose my wedding dress seventeen years ago, and again when I painted the portraits of the children in Kakuma refugee camp and many other special times ever since. It felt like a quiet whisper from her, a sign of love, courage, and connection. A reminder that I'm never really alone on the journey.

The rainbow above King's Cross felt like more than a coincidence, it took me straight back to a memory that's stitched into my heart. Years ago, my students in Barnsley created portraits for the children in Kakuma refugee camp. Each portrait was made with continuous line stitching using reverse appliqué, threads looping and intertwining to tell stories of connection and compassion. I remember hanging the portraits along a string by the classroom window, and as the light poured through the fabric, an epic rainbow appeared in the distance. It was as if the universe was quietly saying, this matters. We weren't just making art, we were building a classroom for children who had so little: not just food or shelter, but a poverty of education.

My students later made a patchwork wall hanging to adorn that classroom wall. Every stitch a message of kindness and solidarity from one community of learners to another.

Standing under the rainbow at King's Cross, that memory came flooding back and I appreciated how XP has just given me the opportunity to experience what I once gave to my students: a chance to create, to connect deeply, to see the world differently. And just like that day in Barnsley, the rainbow appeared a reminder that when we open our hearts to learning, love, and courage, something extraordinary always shines through. This is where the magic happens.

Finally, a massive appreciation to Jeff and his wife Maribel for their kindness and generosity. They are welcome to stay in Barnsley anytime.



Amie Hudson
Expeditionary Arts Lead, XPT

The Power of Jeff's Law: Bridging the gaps in Project-Based Learning



Marc Voltaire's journal chronicles his transformative week-long trip to Jeff Tech High in San Diego - the 'birthplace of Project-Based Learning' - to reconnect with XP culture and people and to deepen his understanding of expedition design.

The central learning of the week revolved around the importance of deliverables, which Jeff Robin defined as smaller, necessary component projects that act as curatable milestones throughout the expedition, leading to the Final Product.

Marc explores how he realised he had 'gaps and misconceptions' in his understanding but bridged them by authentically engaging in the most crucial lesson: he 'did the project first' and left San Diego with a clear plan to implement this new understanding with his students back at XP.

Day 0

The journey. What a start! The longest day. Packed with laughter. Packed with fun. What a great group.

Day 1

'It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.' We arrived in beautiful San Diego after a long but really pleasant journey. I'm looking forward to reconnecting with everything I love about XP: the culture, the work, but most importantly to me right now, the people.

We circled up on the beach. I look around at the edge of the Pacific. I wonder where it ends. I feel the sand under my feet, the hot autumn sun on my face, and an old, familiar feeling comes back to me. The feeling I had a decade ago: I'm so lucky, so privileged, and so excited to be a part of something so special.

A decade ago, I wondered if I was up to it. Surrounded by people of the highest quality. Today, I feel almost the same. This time, I know I am up to it, and I can't wait for the challenge.

My fortune over the years has been not particularly the things I've done, but the people I've done it with. The experts and mentors I've had to show me how it's done. But there is one more. Another Grand Master to learn from. At a time where I almost feel like I've done all there is to do in projects and expeditions, I'm excited to work with the best - the first. I wonder if I can rise to the challenge here.

I remember the first time I met Jeff, proud of our work, keen to show him what we had done. Only to see him look underwhelmed and deliver the line that sticks with me to this day: "What you guys are doing is OK, but it's not Project-Based Learning." What!!??



Ever since then, I've done my very best to deliver expeditions and our pedagogy in what I thought was the way'. Lately, after different conversations and planning days, I've asked myself: 'am I actually doing it right?' It feels like I am, but there is a dissonance. Something somewhere isn't quite right. So here I am. I'm here to find the answer. To figure it out together. To do the project first and to set the wheels in motion to bring us back to being the best school in the world.

We will do it.

Already, I've laughed so hard, so much. I thought I broke a rib.

Day 2

LT2: I can demonstrate I am open to new ways of thinking.

This was a really interesting day today. In our initial circling up on the beach on the first day, I'd mentioned the need for me to keep an open mind. Open-mindedness in terms of the need to welcome critique and new ideas around my project and my

thinking. It was great to be able to go to Jeff's and be immersed in the design process. His home is dripping with art and inspiration. He lives and breathes the stuff he talks about. He was able to pull a few bits together for me to make a prototype, which gave me something more concrete to work with.

I was really pleased to get started on the product, which will be an interpretation panel. I really want to make this more meaningful for kids in terms of design, so I was pleased to hear Jeff talk about leaning on the XP Comms team less to make products. He had a great idea to bring in the arts more and base the presentation of the work in the style of Christo, which would lend itself really well to presenting the work but also to giving every student the chance to produce a full panel each.

Really looking forward to fleshing this out further with Jeff and producing a first draft of how this might look, so I can present it back to Crew. ►



► Day 3

LT4 I can reflect on my experience and identify why and how this will positively impact my practice back, and that of others, at XP.

After another packed day I feel keen to get on with the doing part of my project. The last couple of days, particularly the session this morning with Jeff, really got me thinking in more detail about how I must do the project first. I've always known this, of course, and I've always pushed the message that 'we don't make a model; we do the project first'. I wonder how much, though, I've actually done this, and whether I can say with integrity that I've always done the project first? I'm not sure. Now I will.

Some key things that have leapt out at me today are the ideas around deliverables. It's the first time I've ever really asked what they are, and as I asked Jeff directly, I got a direct answer. Deliverables are the aspects of a project that must be done along the way so that the final product can be completed. Break the task down into smaller component projects, do these to make the final one. Present and curate these along the way to the final output.

Tomorrow, I'm keen to clearly define these in my own planning, after doing the project. I think we need to make these more explicit for staff and students, perhaps link them to Learning Targets in our context, so the product becomes more important to the learning along the way. And get kids talking about these! I liked how, at HTH, these deliverables were curated to demonstrate what skills the kids had learned along the way to the Final Product.

I really liked how the small boxes were presented to show this. I wonder how we can do more of this with writing, solving equations, and performing practicals? I wonder how we link this to transient learning on walls?

Jeff has been such a great help already. When he gave me a model that he'd spent time on last night to show me the process, I was really grateful for his kindness and help in getting this work done. I don't think Jeff could be any kinder, welcoming, or accommodating of us all, and it's been great to work with him so far. Hoping I can produce something that will stand up to a full critique from Jeff in this Jeff's Law on steroids!

Day 4

The week has provided so much food for thought. Sitting at breakfast with Andy, we talked over the great things that we saw at High Tech High. And there were lots of great things happening. Perhaps if I'd not experienced eleven years of XP, I would have been blown away by what I'd seen. But we work in a pretty amazing school too.

One of the standout themes for me this week is the idea of project management and the role of clearly defined deliverables. These deliverables act as milestones along the journey through the project. Another thing that stood out from HTH and from discussions with Jeff is that each deliverable is tied to a tangible part of the project which can and should be curated along the way. The work produced during the expedition is often as important as the final product itself. It gives students the opportunity to demonstrate the skills and knowledge they have developed throughout the project.

A good example of this was the project where students at HTH were making uniquely designed chairs. To make these chairs, they studied different design

"I've asked myself: 'am I actually doing it right?' It feels like I am, but there is a dissonance. Something somewhere isn't quite right. So here I am. I'm here to find the answer. To figure it out together. To 'do the project first' and to set the wheels in motion to bring us back to being the best school in the world. We will do it."

styles, reported on these, and had these studies on the walls. They had to learn different woodworking skills to craft the chair. To develop the skills of joining wood in different ways; another deliverable was the production of small personalised keepsake boxes. These were where students were able to practise skills of craftsmanship which would be essential in the creation of their final product. These boxes were on display in the school with as much prominence as other final products.

This helped to shape my thinking further on how we manage the projects and make them more project-based and less project-orientated. The only way to really define these deliverables and make them realistic and tangible milestones for students is, of course, to do the project yourself first. I feel like there is a big piece of work to do back at home in the articulation and modelling of deliverables and how they relate to Case Studies and Long Term Learning Targets. It would be good to keep in touch with Jeff and get his thoughts on how we translate this to our context. Another key thing I noticed was that pretty much all the work that was displayed in HTH was the actual students' work, thoughtfully and

imaginatively presented, but still the students' actual work. I wonder if we miss a trick with this sometimes within our school by having the Comms team present this work amongst an overall display. I wonder if we can find ways to have the authentic work on display and the Comms part focuses more on presenting and curating the work beyond the classroom and within the community? I don't know the full answer to that yet, but something to try out with my current expedition in 8.1.

Day 5

Today was a big day. In the morning it was time to pull together all the learning from this week and incorporate this into my expedition. Finish doing the project, define my deliverables, and present this to Jeff, Andy, Gwyn, and Kate.

I've been challenged this week. I came here perhaps thinking I already had expeditions and projects all figured out. I've done them for so long. But I was here with a purpose, here with an open mind and a willingness to be challenged to go further. In this respect, I feel like I got what I came for. There were, in fact, gaps and misconceptions in my own understanding of Project-Based Learning and what it really means

to do the project yourself first. I feel like I've bridged those gaps now, authentically, as I have done the project myself first.

"I am not a hypocrite, because I have done the project myself first."

Jeff Robin

I finish the week happy with how my project has shifted and developed with the help of the world-leading expert on this. I've got a clearer idea of how an Expedition Lead can manage this expedition and draw on the expertise of other teachers to get the project done. And also, how we maintain the small team scale to create incredible projects/products that benefit our students. ►



► How students can create beautiful work that they are proud to stand by.

How we engage our teachers in expedition planning and get them fired up and excited about how we do things at XP.

How we get everyone to produce beautiful work.

I was happy and proud to present my work and learning. I've done the project first. I've done the actual Jeff's Law.

Let's go!

Day 6

It's the last day. It's time to go home. I'm so happy with how things have turned out this week. The investment in me and the rest of the Crew here is not lost on me. To bring us out here to this incredible place. To the birthplace of Project-Based Learning, with the 'Grand Master'. To have this dedicated time and space to think about this important work fills me with gratitude.

A familiar feeling from eleven years ago fills me with excitement for what comes next. For how we all get to this point and produce incredible work that changes lives. A morning of sightseeing in this beautiful land with new friends, before getting on the plane home.

The possibilities are endless again. I can't wait for Part Two!

 **Marc Voltaire**
Teacher, XP Doncaster



Reflections: Prioritising the display of beautiful work



This journal reflects on the five-day professional development trip to San Diego to develop an Expeditionary Learning project as part of Jeff Tech High.

The author, Chris Boxall, recounts the intense experience, which involved pivoting his original art-based expedition idea (focused on 'currency' and 'art value') due to feedback and logistical issues.

The inspirational visit to 'Jeff Tech High' and working with educator, Jeff, fostered a strong sense of 'Crew' and led to the key insight: prioritising the display of 'beautiful work up on the walls' on returning to XP.

Despite initial setbacks, the project was successfully presented, leaving Chris with a clearer focus and renewed energy for his teaching practice.



Arrival

Unpack and meet Jeff!

Day 1

Circle up: everyone was asked to explore why they had applied to come on this fieldwork and what the outcome of the visit would be on a personal level. The exercise was an excellent introduction to the other members of our Crew and offered a personal insight into each person's objectives and goals. I felt able to explain to the Crew that I had nearly made a decision on a beach with my family roughly a year ago to leave teaching after working in schools for over thirty years. Amie had convinced me to follow her to XP and I felt that this had given me renewed confidence with regard to the purpose of education and that I was passionate about developing an idea into an expedition that I had co-developed. This activity developed our sense of Crew.

We then reassembled as a Crew and Andy explained that alongside our own personal expedition that we were all involved in developing an expeditionary slice and presenting this, we would also

reflect on how working with Jeff and visiting Jeff Tech High had inspired us both personally and professionally.

Our Crew enjoyed each other's company and we sat in our garden and got time to get to know each other. The day progressed into an invite from Jeff to have a BBQ at his house. It was really inspiring to meet Jeff in his home and we were warmly welcomed and toured Jeff's house which was inspirational.

Day 2

We started the day with a Crew meet up at Busy Bee Bagels, this was a nice opportunity to say good morning to the Crew staying at the other house. We then walked up to Jeff's house and Andy led a Crew check in. We were asked to review what we personally wanted to get out of working with Jeff. I explained that I really wanted to develop an art based expedition that the students at XP would be as passionate about as I was.

We then listened as Jeff spoke about his own personal experience of developing successful expeditions. He shared with us work developed through these

expeditions, this was really useful as it gave me an insight into how he worked.

We were then given time to create a presentation to share with Jeff about the direction and purpose of our expedition. He then spent time talking through our idea and gave us a book filled with work from an expedition he had previously completed which was in a way similar in places to our own idea. He also asked us to reshape our idea which meant moving away from the concept we had initially formed based on the theme of currency. He also asked us to move away from exploring the notion of art value.

This was difficult as we had arrived with work we had developed on these two areas. After a discussion with Amie Hudson and Andy we found a way of moving forward taking on Jeff's ideas. We spent the next hour developing our presentation.

We then presented it to Jeff and the other members of our Crew. This was really useful and interesting to listen to what other members of the Crew were working on. ►



► Jeff fed back to us and gave us clear instructions concerning what he wanted us to work on next. Amie and I had to carry out our own immersion task and teach the JTH Crew how to also carry out this activity.

After lunch we spent time helping other Crew members carry out a pod cast and we carried out our own immersion task using objects and artifacts available around Jeff's house. At first this seemed strange as we had arrived already having carried out this task. However, it quickly became clear that we had to develop teaching resources to help our Crew carry out this task. The working part of the day ended with Jeff giving each expedition next step tasks to be completed for the following day.

Jeff then took us all to a beautiful beach and we continued to bond as a Crew in what I feel was one of the most beautiful beaches I have ever visited. I really enjoyed the day and felt that Amie and I had a much clearer idea of the direction we were headed into.

Day 3

Our day started with a Crew check in at Jeff's house, Andy asked us to reflect on something that we each personally found difficult during yesterday's expeditionary planning day.

I explained that both Amie and I had struggled to quickly accept the idea of altering our initial proposal idea in such an extreme way. Personally, I felt that our theme of exploring the notion of value and designing an original form of currency was why we had applied in the first place. Furthermore, I had worked really hard on convincing Amie (my work partner) that exploring currency was a wide and interesting starting point. We had also had the pleasure of pitching our idea to both Andy Sprakes and Ron Berger who had also liked the idea and direction of the work.

On reflection, I do believe that Jeff's advice was sound and the time and money I had invested into the currency expedition wasn't completely pointless, it just wasn't right for this specific project. Through working with Jeff and Andy we both bought into the new direction of the project and left the day feeling excited about what we were about to develop. As a Crew Jeff did highlight the potential issues with ego and that it can often get in the way of positive challenge. This check-in linked in with our Expedition Learning Target 2 which asked us to work showing new ways of thinking.

The morning developed into a frank and in-depth discussion on the structure and methods of Project Based Learning. Jeff explored the issues he had encountered at High Tech High which was the school we were going to be visiting later that day. He highlighted the need for schools to not just accept that a way of delivering expeditions would become 'tradition' and that we as PBL teachers had to consistently fight work being delivered year in and year out in exactly the same way. Our discussion moved into exploring issues about front loading the learning and only leaving learners with minimal time at the end of the expedition to make the Final Product.

I found it fascinating and a little frightening to hear about a colleague of Jeff's who was an inspiration to him. This colleague would arrive early to work each day and would be practising the task that he was about to deliver. Jeff explained that he had found this strange as the teacher had worked for over thirty years and knew the expeditions back to front. The colleague then explained that he hadn't modelled it to this specific group of learners before and wasn't sure if the specific climate in the classroom on the day would produce different outcomes. That was why he was determined to model the task!

I found this to be a little overwhelming as I feel that most teachers at XP wouldn't currently do this. However, it did resonate with me as I had recently had to model a monoprint task to a class whilst being observed by the Art team Trust Lead. I had never actually done this task before and it could have gone very badly wrong in terms of the quality of the product I was demonstrating. It actually went well, although this was down to luck and not through doing the task myself. Something to work on here to mitigate the risk?

Around lunch time Jeff drove us to High Tech High. It was quickly apparent how vast and different the schools were to our own place of work in Doncaster. It seemed amazing how we were able to just walk into each building without signing in and being given visitors badges. We did have Jeff with us who was well known to the High School but it still seemed very alien to our experiences of the English education system.

Jeff led us to the first class, who were being covered by a substitute teacher. This turned out to be a positive experience as we were met by a class which contained a learner, who was able to present to us her learning and spoke in an eloquent and beautiful way. Hearing her speak reminded me of my first tour at XP which was led by two amazing Year Nine Ambassadors.

As soon as we entered this first part of the building it was striking how the walls were covered in inspirational student work.

At first this was more than a little daunting as it reminded me that my primary reason for taking part in this expedition is to get learners work up onto the walls at XP. The breadth and quality of the work was stunning. I found myself taking photos of every part of every wall in this first building.



“The danger is that upon getting back into our usual timetable and hectic calendar that we will lose some of this energy and simply go back to doing what we were doing previously. We are determined to make sure this doesn't happen!”

I loved how corners of the building which you might have thought were tucked away and out of sight still contained beautiful work.

Jeff explained that this work was new and was constantly being updated. This was great to hear as he had previously mentioned that the school had stopped producing work of high quality and he had recently returned to refresh and repair products he had created whilst he had taught there which were still on display.

We then headed over to the second building which was even more impressive. The opening to this part of the school took my breath away. I was expecting to see high quality work and had seen pictures of the school in material that Jeff had shown us but to see it all in situ was an experience that I will always remember. Everywhere you looked you were met with outstanding student work. Every window, wall and part of the ceiling had work hanging on it or from it! The large staircase to nowhere was a very powerful piece and it was surrounded by further examples of amazing student work. I was really bowled over by a table of student-made wooden boxes which were on display.

We were told that these were just first prototypes and that the redrafted work would be of an even higher standard.

As we toured and explored the school the quality of the work just kept on being evident. Two more wonderful students approached us and proudly showed us their stop motion puppets and green screen initial filming. I loved this part of the tour and would have loved to have spent more of the visit hearing from these students. Various staff members spoke with us which was a really positive and welcoming part of the visit. They were all clearly very passionate about their school and the work that was being produced.

Jeff showed us around but alongside his clear pride about the work he had done with students, it was clear that he wasn't entirely happy with the current direction of the school, the fact that more modern and updated work was potentially of a lower standard, specifically the idea that staff were putting learners work into different picture frames and sticking these onto various walls.

I saw even more examples of areas showing outstanding student work, such as the toilets and the alcoves with



water fountains surrounded by beautiful art work and pieces of writing. One personal favourite area for me was the 'gates of hell' work based on the literature of Dante which surrounded the way out of the school. This had been adapted and updated to stay relevant. I thought that this was a great piece of work.

We then returned to Jeff's home and he revisited the expectations he had for us to complete during the next day. Today was an exhilarating day and it made me realise just how much potential our school has to show even more of learners' work.



► Day 4

We began the day once again checking in with Andy at Jeff's home. We were asked to reflect on the main thing that we wanted to get out of the day. Personally I wanted to ask Jeff exactly what kind of product he wanted me to make. We had spent time the day before collecting 'Jay Bolleux' style images using our mobile phones around Jeff's house. We had created an immersion task and explained it through a step by step guide. However, Jeff seemed to be suggesting that I needed to make more products there and then in his home. I really wanted him to clarify exactly what he meant.

As the work began, Jeff showed us more video clips exploring the idea of how to sequence a piece of PBL. This was a piece about building a boat which I had viewed before but it is a great reminder of how important this stage is. Jeff then checked in with each of us and quickly detailed what we were going to be working on during the day. He then spent time with Amie and I and was trying to understand how much time we would each be spending with the class we would be delivering the expedition to. We explained that the only phase we both taught was Year 7 and that we had separate classes at different points in the week.

This seemed to change Jeff's view on the expedition that we were planning and he told us that we couldn't do it.

This obviously came as a large shock as we were only one day away from presenting our ideas to our Crew. Jeff told us that without two teachers both working with the same learners that it wasn't PBL and that we would have to work individually from this point on. Panic set in and we were highly concerned that we had worked hard producing work which seemingly had no purpose.

Jeff spent time explaining that he didn't really understand the English education structure (which was fair enough as I know very little about the American education system!).

We moved forward with Jeff telling me to focus on using the 'authentic fake artist' idea that I had developed as the focal point of my piece and Amie was going to focus on getting learners to select two artists from different art history time periods and get them to create artwork which blended these styles. It was a very daunting prospect to change our ideas for the second time and it felt really hard to be wrenched away from the person you applied to attend Jeff Tech High with. I found it really hard to get my head back into work mode and Amie and I spent the next hour feeling completely lost at sea, with literally no work to show for it.

After lunch I tried to work on what I thought Jeff wanted me to do and he looked at my ideas and told me that basically all he wanted from me was to get the learners to get beautiful work up on the walls. He told me not to spend time thinking about tasks and slide planning, featuring activities and constructs, and just allow the learners to get on with making work. He told me to spend the remaining few hours creating ways in which learners could use the idea of authentic fake artists as a vehicle to develop their photography skills and produce lots of display work. For example, he asked me to demonstrate how macro shots could be used with portraiture with the learners placing themselves into their work. This felt like a very pressurised part of the process as I would normally spend a lot more time creating my own product. It seemed that everyone else was finishing off their podcasts/recipe video, graphic novel, and litter trap, whereas Amie and I were now left back at the start.



At the end of the day during check in I thanked everyone for all the support they had offered me throughout the day, everyone had checked in with me and really showed a sense of Crew. I really appreciated this and knew that the support was coming from a genuine place.

Everyone checked-in and we then spent time de-briefing. Personally, I was thankful that the day was done as it had been the hardest part yet. Andy reminded me that Jeff being an Art specialist and a PBL expert potentially made it easier for him to suddenly see issues in the expedition. I agree with this notion, and came out here well aware that nothing was completely set in stone and that I would have to be open to working in new ways.

Today's work had focused mainly on our third Learning Target which was related to creating a final product and preparing a presentation of it to our Expedition Crew. I felt that my presentation would be far less prepared than I would have liked and it felt very rushed to produce my editing ideas.



► Day 5

We spent the morning of this final day adding last minute details to our presentation, I was still trying to get my head around what my presentation would look like. I was happy with the introduction of the artist Jay Bolleux, but once this bit had been shown I wasn't exactly sure how I would fill the suggested time slot.

Ultimately, I took on board what Jeff had been telling me about focusing on getting the students work up onto the walls as a matter of urgency.

I remembered that I had taken various interior shots of XP including the area called the 'heart of the school.' This worked really well as the photo I had taken made this part of the building look particularly empty. I used a photo shop to quickly remove any signs of any display work and then I had my opening. I was able to highlight the need we had at XP to freshen up the displays particularly in the centre of the building. The rest of my presentation was centred around showcasing ideas that I had quickly made up during the past few

hours, this was very hastily put together and certainly not the best standard of work that I have ever produced, but it had purpose and clarity. Before long I had finished my presentation and as a group we all walked up to Jeff's house.

This was the part that I found the hardest as everyone was clearly suffering from nerves and we all just wanted to get it over with.

Before long it was time to start the presentations. This was a real highlight of the past few days as it was fantastic to see each group run through their projects and for us to see the prototypes of each project in its current state. I personally really enjoyed observing the sheer amount of passion that had been put into each piece of work, and felt that the students would really enjoy taking part in each expedition.

After the first two groups had presented there was a natural pause as no one really wanted to go next. I decided that it made sense for me to go next. Overall, I was really pleased with how the presentation went and on

reflection I can say that I had achieved Learning Target 3 through presenting my ideas. I was now looking forward to getting back home and putting it all into practice. Eventually it was time to listen to all the feedback that each member of the audience gave. This was a great opportunity to hear what everybody felt in a safe and supportive environment.

It was also great to hear from Gwyn and Kate who were hearing about each project for the first time. I was really happy with how it all went and felt very positive about the whole experience.

It was hard to believe that this amazing experience had actually come to a close, it was genuinely sad to say goodbye to all the XP colleagues we had spent the past week with. We had certainly formed an affecting Staff Crew out in San Diego and looking through all the pictures that we had shared made me realise just how much of a special experience it really had been.

Now the real work starts though, and Amie and I discussed on the train journey back to Wakefield how hard it would be to remain so excited about our projects. The danger is that upon getting back into our usual timetable and hectic calendar that we will lose some of this energy and simply go back to doing what we were doing previously. We are determined to make sure this doesn't happen!



Chris Boxall
Art Teacher, XP Doncaster



Thoughts, ponders and reflections



Kerry Poncia, Key Stage 3 Lead at XP Doncaster, reflects on her personal journey whilst at Jeff Tech High.

Through engaging in the process, Kerry has rekindled her desire to craft, create and curate Learning Expeditions that will allow students to express who they are through producing work that is beautiful and that has deep meaning and purpose.



Sunday

5,300 miles from home. That's quite some distance. Waking up in California definitely feels like a dream. A morning breakfast of a bagel and latte in the early sunshine was just the start that was needed for our first day. Heading down to the Pacific shore, where we had watched the most magnificent sunset the evening before, felt like the perfect place to begin our San Diego adventure.

Circling up on the sand with our San Diego Crew started with a check-in. Why were we here and what did we want to get out of our time here? I appreciated hearing everyone's reasons for putting in their pitches and I felt a bit of a fraud. My ideas aren't firmed up yet, so many bits buzzing around in my brain but I know it will come together and the fire in my belly will be reignited.

With hummingbirds flickering in the lemon tree behind us, it was exciting to meet again and to find out more about what the coming week holds for us. Usually a bit of a control freak, I feel comfortable with this. I'm nervous about

what lies ahead: being the journalist tomorrow, creating a final product and presenting but, as we say at XP, 'What's good enough for our kids...' (I've finally got this saying the right way round!!).

To be hosted at Jeff and Mirabelle's in their beautiful home was a real privilege and, please, just pinch me!

Monday

So, today I felt out of my depth. Still struggling to think of what I'm wanting to create as my final product. Unable to shift the idea of power out of my head or, at least, rethink it. Wanting to take on board Jeff and Andy's suggestions but still not sure how.

I think it was Jeff's 'Welcome to the Monkey House', a book of short stories by Kurt Vonnegut, that started me on the process of becoming unstuck. And then, I discovered Sophie Scholl. A young girl executed for spreading anti-Nazi propaganda. I've never heard of her before but as I read her story, I knew it needed to be shared.

I think my students back home will feel the same affinity with whoever they are given as the focus for this product. I know this because I am proud of my class of twelve-year olds. I am proud that we have worked hard together to create a true culture of Crew in our classroom. We know that when we honour stories of others, and the sacrifices they made, we treat this with deep reverence.

So, with my product taking a more concrete shape and the fire in my belly starting to burn a little brighter, I felt better about myself and why I am here. A little less fraudulent, for sure.

To be hosted at Jeff and Mirabelle's in their beautiful home was a real privilege and, please, just pinch me!

Tuesday

I have thought a lot about Sophie Scholl since yesterday and I decided that she will be my inspiration for what happens next. Checking in this morning, I enjoyed listening to my Crew and I found it easier to say that I had found it hard the previous day. And when Jeff said that ►



► he was thinking about me and showed what he had worked on to help, I still cannot explain my delight and appreciation. (I will get him to sign his artwork!!)

To visit High Tech High was a real privilege and served to reinforce the answers to the questions I had previously asked. Of course, I will do the project first (that's tomorrow's task). Of course, I will plan to share our product during the immersion week of our new expedition. Of course, I will share our deliverables and schedule session opportunities for these into our overview - I want to share this with my class using a weekly schedule/agenda. Then we all know where we are heading and why.

And, most importantly, my final 'c' and my biggest takeaway from our visit today, is to think about the curation of my students' beautiful work. Not just in a book, but on the walls of XP and the walls of my classroom. That's the least it deserves, right?

Wednesday

Today was a good day. I found clarity in what I was trying to achieve and clarity around a few other questions that had popped into my head as I was working.

I think the best thing about today was, as I was working and creating my own version of my product, I was thinking about my class and students like Miley and Oliver, who are a couple of my little characters, who would become immersed in this. To find out from Amie that we have a class set of lightboards made this more doable and I could visualise us all, music playing, drawing our outlines ready to create our comic strips. Our double session on a Wednesday afternoon would work beautifully.

Capturing each step as our 'deliverables' as I worked, brought

clarity to the process my students will need to undertake. I think this will be an opportunity to delve deeper into the lives of some of the key figures we have already come across in our Year 8 expeditions. Figures such as: William Wilberforce, Equiano, Martin Luther King Jr. And also figures still to come like Wat Tyler and Emily Davison.

It was interesting to talk with Marc about our language around 'Final Product' which suggests that products are done at the end of an expedition. Is this not then Project-Oriented Learning? And, it was also interesting to talk about doing our own products and that not all expedition teachers have to do the same. I think clarity is needed here as Expedition Teams currently work towards the same product, across most subject areas and for all students.

So, I'm ready to start planning my presentation, presenting a project far removed from my original pitch but a damn sight better.

My wonder is whether I can use this as our 'We do' and then my students create a second comic strip which involves them and the story of an act of positive change they have brought about, maybe at XP. But Jeff said not to complicate it at the moment so I won't. This can be food for thought when I get home.

Thursday

I wish this cold would do one!! Thinking about returning home...

Further clarify the language around Final Product - do we do PBL or POB?

Clarify the concept of creating a product based on my learners, potentially working with other subjects but also knowing that it could be a product for just my class.

“I think the best thing about today was, as I was working and creating my own version of my product, I was thinking about my class and students like Miley and Oliver, who are a couple of my little characters, who would become completely immersed in this.”



Consider what our Presentations of Learning could look like - an exhibition of all our work.

Consider how to build my product into our expedition overview.

Consider how I can display our product process (deliverables) as we work through our expedition (expedition walls).

How I can add challenge?

Can students put themselves in their story about how they have affected positive change at XPD/home life?

How can Comms support the curation of our book?

How can I share my key takeaways from our work with Jeff with a wider audience?

How can I use my product to further strengthen the power of Crew in my class and beyond?

There are a lot of thoughts to be considered following our final day as part of Jeff Tech High. My first is that I felt incredibly proud and honoured to listen to my San Diego Crew's Final Products from our time here.



Hannah and Steph: such a wonderful product that has real agency and legacy at the heart of it! I know that our XPD students would relish taking part in this - maybe we can hook up and have discussions about this? To be part of your product 'trial run' was also important and I know we felt exactly how our children will. The process was clear, including each deliverable and the prompts which were created along the way to support the writing of the poem.

Bet: I love Bet's passion for all things XP! It is so evident even in such a short space of time. The product of a historical conspiracy podcast will certainly catch the imaginations of Year 2 - I can't wait to hear what they create. This is a product which could be considered for any year group at any of our schools. I wonder whether Bet can be my expert as I'd love to create a podcast - maybe for 8.3?

Amie and Chris: I know they ended up creating separate products, both of which were amazing and left me



wanting to paint, draw and just be arty. To see them grapple and grow as they did was an honour and I can't wait to see the 's*t' that gets put on our walls.

Marc: I think that Marc and I were on a similar journey throughout the week and I know that I have a real ally when we get back to school so that we can bring our learning to all our staff. I believe we now have a joint understanding about what Project-based learning is and isn't and we have had our passion reignited. And I love Marc's final product and watching how it evolved with Jeff's input.

So, farewell, San Diego! 5,300 miles to go - 5,300 different thoughts flying home, too.



Kerry Poncia
Key Stage 3 Lead, XP Doncaster

Doing the project first: A Teacher's transformative week in San Diego



In this reflection, Betty Ramsay from Carcroft Primary, chronicles a transformative week spent at Jeff Tech High and High Tech High in San Diego, detailing her deepened understanding of Project-Based Learning (PBL) and Expeditions.

Key takeaways include the powerful influence of a guiding question in providing learning with purpose, the realization that an expedition's product must be simple and precise—adopting the mantra to 'do fewer things, better'—and the critical importance of the teacher 'doing the project first.' The experience also underscored the value of public critique (Presentations of Learning) and the significance of displaying students' 'raw drafts' to celebrate the process of 'becoming' alongside the final product.

Betty concludes with a pledge to apply these lessons in her school to strengthen the expedition model at XP.

Sunday

One of the first things we did in San Diego was to check in as a Crew against the backdrop of La Jolla Beach.

This was a significant moment for me. Despite being on an eleven and a half hour plane journey, three hour combined train journey and several hours in an airport with the same people I was currently circled up with, I found that our walls were somehow lowered more profoundly and deliberately on the beach that morning, compared to all of the pleasant small talk we partook in during our - very lengthy - travels the day before. It really did make me realise how powerful Crew is. Being honest, to the point of vulnerability in front of an audience, is an act of bravery. I came away thinking, I need to remember that when I am leading Crew back in my classroom.

Ultimately, I feel we shared a desire to clarify our understanding of Learning Expeditions and Project Based Learning (PBL). It was clear we all wanted to walk away with a clear vision of what a good product looks like and how to plan an expedition around that product.

The defining moment of the first day was hearing the guiding question: "How will engaging in Jeff Tech High positively influence and change my work when I return to the UK?" As a learner, there is instant relief when you find out what is being asked of you but there's a deeper layer to it than that. Up until that moment I had walked around La Jolla admiring the aesthetics and marvelling at the kind of American features I'd only seen in films.

Ultimately, upon hearing the Guiding Question, I instantly saw this trip through a new lens, which was a rapid change from my previous, 'this is a pretty place' lens. It made me realise how impactful Guiding Questions are. They aren't just an arrow flashing one way or another to

encourage direction of thought, they are, to me, a lens through which learners can see an entire experience with purpose. I had never made that connection before I was someone who a Guiding Question was revealed to. It really is quite fascinating how quickly the human brain looks for deeper meaning within an experience, once opportunity for that exploration has been skilfully provided. To evoke that sort of observer mode is really powerful and something I will not take for granted again.

I spent the rest of my time in San Diego, looking for the moments that will impact my practice back in Doncaster. That, I am sure, is evidence of the impact of a Guiding Question done right!

Monday

Our first day at Jeff Tech High bought two defining moments home for me: receiving critique from Jeff and working with my team to record a podcast.

Jeff gave us all critique in an open forum which meant we heard each others' feedback. As I listened to Jeff going from group to group, I noticed the same pattern; he wanted us to keep it simple. He said expedition is a metaphor for the journey our pupils go on but really it is PBL? He drove us all in the direction of simplicity and, 'doing the project first'. I think really these are the components we struggle with as teachers. We begin to fatten up our expeditions with small details and side quests which we know would make the final product 'full' but we struggle to accept a product that can be simple and precise. I realised we are always looking to make our products 'more' when really we should be striving to make our products clear. Basically, we should do fewer things, better.

As my product is a podcast, Jeff tasked me with producing a 'deliverable'; a short podcast of about four minutes designed to get students talking, recording



and editing. Essentially, this deliverable gives students an opportunity to learn the technical aspects of computing before producing the main product of a History based Podcast demonstrating their substantive knowledge.

We sat around a table, set up the microphone and we spoke about our lunch - yes, really - and I recorded the conversation on Garageband to edit later. Recording a podcast with Jeff, Andy and the others was both fun and insightful. As a learner, being asked to talk about what I had for lunch was a little dry and we tended to start joking around and giggling because it felt less serious than, say, a podcast about politics. However, Jeff tasked me with editing the podcast down from fifteen minutes to four minutes and my 'work' really began.

Cutting the fun footage was no easy task when there is fifteen minutes of laughter and friendly banter which makes me smile. I remembered a quote from my English literature degree days, 'in writing, you must kill your darlings'. ►

“What’s celebrated in those publicised drafts isn’t perfectionist craftsmanship, it’s the messiness of becoming, the courage of perseverance. This is something I would like to cultivate in my classroom back home; being proud of the process of making something beautiful, not just of the finished product.”

► If I was struggling to cut the parts of this work that I had made, imagine how my pupils would feel cutting out their favourite parts. I remembered every time I had given feedback on a painting, story or project which meant re-shaping or editing out details and felt a pang of sadness for my students who likely didn’t want to but had to anyway because the teacher said so. It made me realise that to create something is very personal and sentimental, even something as ridiculous as a podcast called, ‘Rate My Plate’ with seven colleagues who are laughing more than talking. I knew that I had to be more mindful of the power of critique back home. I made a pledge to myself to not only do the project myself first, but to do the deliverables too and to give and receive critique with my teaching colleagues so that I can better model how to use critique to my students.

The technical skills involved in my deliverables consumed my focus for a few hours and I still wasn’t done. It made me realise that this was exactly the kind of task my students needed to hone their computing skills ready for the main product. Previously, I had focused more on the substantive knowledge of History rather than the disciplinary knowledge of recording, editing and publishing sound for Computing. Initially, the

podcast was a vehicle to demonstrate historical knowledge. I was realising this was more of a dance between technical skills of sound software and presenting knowledge in History; something I maybe would have overlooked if I hadn’t done the project first myself. I have once again seen this process through the eyes of a learner and value it all the more.

Going forward, drafting and critiquing is definitely something I will prioritise in my future expeditions as I see it provides important opportunities to practise skills needed to produce a high quality product.

Tuesday

In the morning at Jeff’s, we learned more about Project Based Learning (PBL). We were able to really think about what the process of a PBL was from both a teacher’s point of view and that of a student. In the past, I have tended to think of products - in the planning phase - as something to be done by students but am becoming more and more aware that making the product first is important for multiple reasons.

Making a product doesn’t just mean drawing up a picture of the product using AI or making a paper prototype of what will be a plastic/wood/metal

product. It means making exactly what you’d expect your students to make, no excuses. Not only does it allow you to see what could go wrong and plan ahead to avoid that, it also, ‘frees you up to focus on your students’, as Jeff said. He explained that the time commitment required to make a product before an expedition, will allow you to be more present in lessons during the draft and critique cycle. Freeing yourself up to better support your pupils is the best possible reason for an initial energy outlay.

That afternoon we went to High Tech High (HTH) for our fieldwork. Apart from being fascinated and excited in a way I remember from my school trips, it highlighted how important it is to get the children’s work ‘up’ on the walls because HTH is somewhat of an art gallery. To walk through HTH is to be immersed in the raw drafts of pupil work, through the grappling phases into mastery of technique phases. What’s celebrated in those publicised drafts isn’t perfectionist craftsmanship, it’s the messiness of becoming, the courage of perseverance. This is something I would like to cultivate in my classroom back home; being proud of the process of making something beautiful, not just of the finished product.



Jeff had explained that morning that displaying children’s work immediately and constantly, is integral to PBL. I was blown away seeing this in action at HTH. The walls are adorned with raw drafts and finished projects. Some are solo projects and others are collaborative, like the class collage Jeff made in his time as a teacher there and which still stands proudly today. As teachers we often think of displays as the school equivalent of Grandma’s glass cabinet of fine china; it should be our best and fanciest work which tells the world how polished we are. However, seeing the imperfect pieces of work displayed with pride around HTH, I was all the more impressed. How many adults would be happy to have the unfinished version of... anything publically displayed? It is a courageous act to show a work in progress. I saw a culture of bravery in those raw drafts. They declare that PBL is to value the process as well as the Final Product.

This is something I will consider back at XP. How can I better present my student’s raw work in a way which celebrates the process of learning?

Finally, I saw a whole display of what I wrongly assumed were finished wooden boxes, such as the craftsmanship of the polished engraved designs.

In one box, there was a small curved nook which perfectly fit a finger to lift the lid. The nook was smooth and felt as smooth as plastic. The student had laboriously sanded the curved nook to perfection. I couldn’t believe it when I read the signage; these were drafts, not finished products. I had to look at them all again with new eyes... If these were the drafts, how would the finished product look? I made a mental pledge to always put my focus into the examples I make for my students going forward. It is the very least we can do when they are putting so much of themselves into every draft of work we ask of them.

I realised that this fieldwork had propelled me into action. Hearing about PBL is one thing, seeing a school that has done it well is another thing completely. I realised, it is essential to plan fieldwork which is meaningful and illustrative of our learning, into expeditions. The impact on a learner is visceral.

Wednesday

This was our day for finding a quiet space and focusing on making our product. It was an intense day of getting it ‘done’. I spent the day editing, and brainstorming. Jeff and I worked



together to complete the deliverables for this project which was really interesting to do. It helped me to see how the drafts of a product are decided on and made.

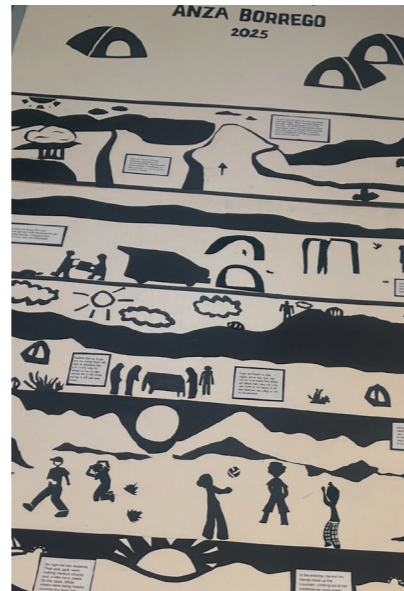
We also planned out the lesson where I would share my product with the class and how to invite meaningful questions from the children. I edited down my final product and one of my deliverable examples which now sound good enough to play to my class. I learned the hard way that so much could go wrong with this project so am now armed with an inventory of misconceptions that I will get ahead of in my demonstrations.

I truly don’t see anything that could go wrong though I am prepared for that eventuality as pupils have a way of humbling me!

I left the day feeling excited to teach this project which I already know will make me the best possible person to teach this expedition! This is a point that Jeff has been making all week; if you do the project first, you’ll be the best person to teach it. I am already feeling the evidence of that in my levels of enthusiasm! ►



“Even though I have been working with these people all week and have grown quite familiar with them, I felt very anxious presenting to them because I was presenting my work, which I am attached to, emotionally, and want to be validated. It made me realise how terrifying this could be for the students.”



► I worked with Amy to help her brainstorm some ideas. It was great to bring my lens of primary education to a secondary teacher and listen to her talk through her expedition. Working with another teacher really helped me to see how expeditions are strengthened through collaboration, especially when it comes to talking through our thoughts and worries and having someone listen intently. Seeing Amy come alive at a resolution was truly a highlight of the day for me. We have had many moments of Crew in San Diego and it really brings home how important Crew is to our learners. It really does make you feel like you are part of something special.

Thursday

Today we did our POLs in front of the staff Crew. It was the highlight of my week to see everyone overcome their nerves to present their ideas. I watched as the others told the story of how they grappled with their ideas/ barriers in the week to fully realise their products.

As I presented my product and deliverables, I felt the kind of nerves I haven't felt in a really long time, possibly since I was last a student and had to stand up and present to an audience. Even though I have been working with these people all week and have grown quite familiar with them, I felt very anxious presenting to them because I was presenting my work, which I am attached to, emotionally, and want to be validated. It made me realise how terrifying this could be for the students. Yes, they are around their peers all day but they are amongst them as learners, standing at the front of the group and presenting a piece of work that is your own, ultimately puts you in a vulnerable position. It is also a necessary part of expeditions because it means you take extra pride in your work knowing it will be public. As soon as I was done with my presentation I was already self-

reflecting on how I would have done the presentation and project better.

For students, the cycle of expeditions and POLs will make them better public speakers and have more agency over their products. I hope to give my students the opportunity to reflect on their presentations so that they can work to become the best possible advocate for their work through their time at XP and beyond.

By the end of my presentation, I felt immense pride and relief. It was done. Then Andy asked everyone for their feedback. Everyone took turns to speak about my product and some even commented on me and my character.

Seeing my work and myself as a teacher through the lens of others was a special moment for me. It was emotional in a way I wasn't prepared for. The praise and critique really was worth all of the nerves beforehand. Critique turns a one sided monologue into a meaningful dialogue between student and teacher which enables pupils to see themselves through the lens of others. This, I feel is paramount to shaping well rounded and self aware young adults who will go into the world and do good, with the goodness they possess.

I have taken so many lessons from this experience which I know will strengthen our expedition offer at XP.

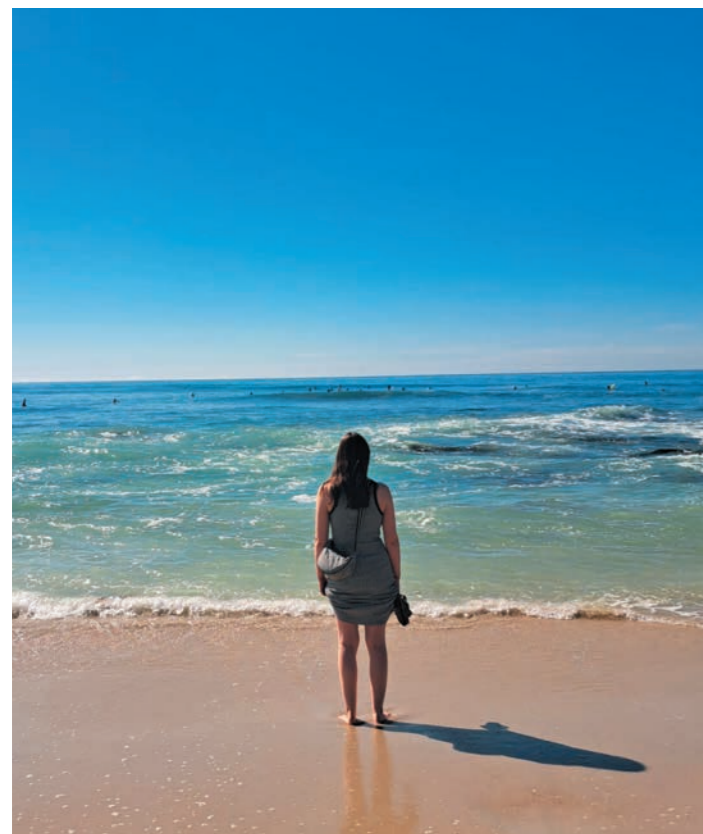
It is hard to articulate the many reflections I have had under the tutelage and guidance of Jeff Robin but I will simply say this; everyone should apply for Jeff Tech High next year, and the year after that until they are able to go and experience it for themselves.

 **Betty Ramsay**
Teacher, Carcroft School



“I will simply say this; everyone should apply for Jeff Tech High next year, and the year after that until they are able to go and experience it for themselves.”

Bridging the gap: A reflection on implementing Project-Based Learning in the UK



In this article, Stephanie Jamison, from XP Gateshead reflects on the challenges and opportunities of implementing Project-Based Learning (PBL) in the UK education system following observations of its practice in the US.

Acknowledging the systemic differences, the author and a colleague undertook their own project, 'Food For the Soul', which involved designing, cooking, and sharing a nutritional meal with their community to experience the core principles firsthand. The project underscored the importance of teacher ownership, agency, and reflection, and emphasized the need for student projects to be the driving force for learning.

The reflection concludes with a commitment to making small, impactful changes to foster greater student agency and joy in their work back at XP Gateshead.

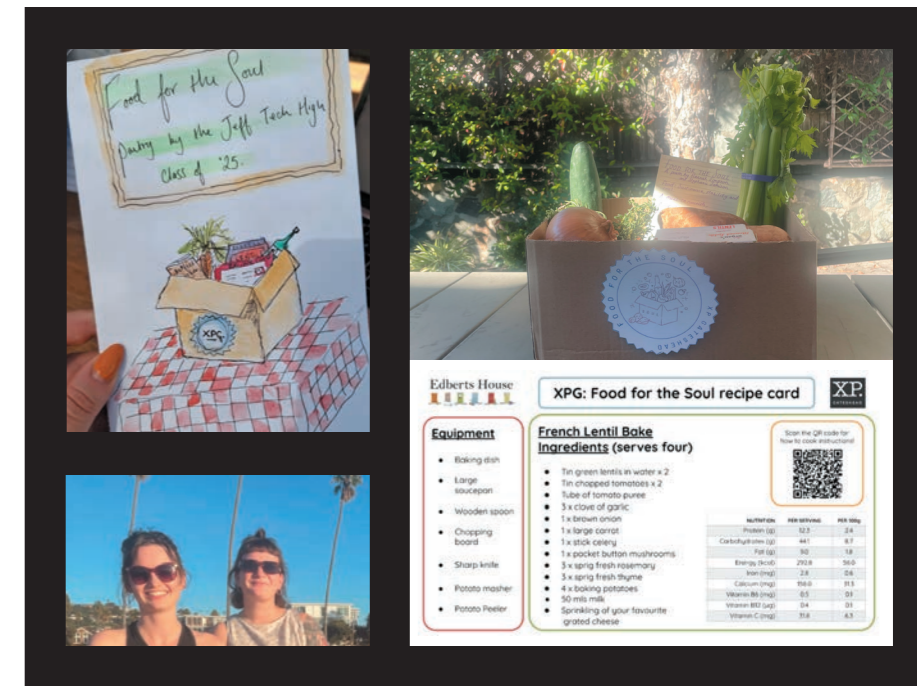
Reflecting on my time in San Diego, the main question I felt lingering was: is it really possible for us to implement Project-Based Learning (PBL) in the UK?

Whilst seeing and hearing how PBL has been implemented in the US was inspiring, it was also impossible not to notice the disparity between the freedom, resources and constraints of the UK and US education systems. We cannot change our education system overnight, or even in five days spent working with experienced Project-Based Learning teachers, so, ultimately, we had to just give our efforts to the core principle of Project-Based Learning: 'do the project yourself first'. Addressing the barriers can come later, but for now, just do the project.

Our project built on a previous iteration of an expedition: Staying Alive: Is Survival Sufficient? We want our students to recognise that survival alone is not enough, and that our lives are enriched by community, the arts and, for us, eating good food. It feels like this message has been diluted, and we wanted to bring it firmly back. We suggested a new title: 'Food For the Soul.'

So, we did the project. Designed a budget friendly nutritional meal, cooked and refined the recipe, and cooked it, filming each key step. We served this to our community (of colleagues) and asked for their feedback: their enjoyment of the meal, how it felt to experience the meal as a community, and how it felt to have this food served to them. Hannah summarised our diners' feedback beautifully in this word wall, which we refined into pieces of poetry to be delivered alongside a recipe card and all of the ingredients needed to recreate the meal.

Doing the project ourselves - and doing it well - was so important.



Even small missteps like forgetting to get the best video shots and having to re-cook the meal, became opportunities for reflection and improvement. The joy and laughter as we assumed our roles as poets, nutritionists, chefs and content creators mirrored the joy we want our students to experience from their work.

Much of the joy came from the ownership and agency of this being our creation, and we cared deeply about the outcome and quality of our work. This is the same feeling we want our students to experience when they create and share their own projects. The experience challenged me to consider how we structure learning in our classrooms to ensure that our projects are what drives learning, rather than being an 'add on'.

I saw the importance of giving students something tangible to pin their learning on, where the product itself becomes a

scaffold for deeper exploration, creativity, and engagement.

This being said, I was struck by the balance between structure and freedom. Clear parameters, Quidding Questions and scaffolding didn't stifle creativity—they encourage it. The most successful projects weren't the most open-ended; they were carefully constrained, giving students enough support to experiment and take risks confidently.

Moving forwards, I hope I can make even small steps to my teaching - allowing student agency, designing tangible products, or experimenting with new formats - can bring joy into the work that students do at XP Gateshead.

 **Stephanie Jamison**
Teacher, XP Gateshead



Since XP first opened in 2014 we have always looked to others with similar values, locally, nationally and globally, to learn from and share our knowledge, ideas and approach with. From the inspiration of High Tech High in San Diego to our ongoing partnerships with the EL schools network across the United States, we continue to learn from value driven approaches to learning. Our partnerships extend across the UK, into Europe and as far as India, Hong Kong and Australia.

Celebrating Partnerships at XP Trust



Our Learning Expedition to XP: Integrity



This article, written by Anna Panisello and Zulema Josa Espanol of CESIRE (Catalan Ministry of Education), reflects on their journey to find meaningful, deep, and human learning experiences for children and young people, which led them to pilot the FAIG programme in Catalan.

The authors were profoundly transformed by their learning expedition to XP Doncaster (XP Schools), which they describe as a 'paradigm of profound coherence' and an example of 'Integrity'.

The authors conclude that XP is an "invincible, powerful, thrilling project" that every education minister should see, as it enables students and educators to go further than they could on their own.

"After walking through empty lots and an industrial estate that did not promise anything remarkable, two warehouse-like buildings appeared before us, surrounded by fencing and with large letters on their façades: XP and XP East. Nothing more. But the moment we stepped inside, everything changed."

We are Anna and Zulema, and our work at CESIRE – the Centre for Educational Innovation and Research Support of the Catalan Ministry of Education – leads us to ask ourselves the same question every day: how can we help schools make it possible for every child and young person to experience learning that is meaningful, deep and profoundly human?

When, three years ago, we began piloting the FAIG programme (Make to Learn, Imagining Globally) – a name which in Catalan also means 'I make' – we had no idea how deeply that adventure would transform us. FAIG is an ambitious innovation programme: 146 state primary and secondary schools placing project-based learning with real social impact at the heart of school life. It is a commitment that connects the maker movement, purposeful creation and digital fabrication with the building of educational communities rooted in the territories they inhabit.

Accompanying this diverse network led us to ask fundamental questions and to seek references that could help us orient the programme. High Tech High, Fab Lab Barcelona and the Edgerton Center at MIT offered us three complementary perspectives: the power of authentic questions, the transformative force of

creating with our hands, and the certainty that communities matter more than any technology.

It was in this context of research and intensity that we turned to Ron Berger and his Beautiful Work, a powerful reminder of why we do what we do. Beauty as an ethical commitment, and the idea of work as a form of responsibility, reconnected us with our purpose at a time when education was experiencing fatigue, noise and polarisation. And it was Ron who told us: go and see XP.

So we embarked on our Learning Expedition to XP Doncaster, to understand how a project inspired by HTH and EL Education had taken root in a British context and had grown its own educational culture. What we found there, however, reached far beyond any technical framework: we encountered a deep love for Doncaster, for its people and for its future, a love that takes shape in the XP Schools. The way they welcomed us – with extraordinary generosity – made us understand that this affection is not only for Doncaster: it is a way of being and sharing that embraces everyone who arrives.

If we had to give our Learning Expedition a title, it would be this: INTEGRITY. ►



Looking up and out: Innovative practice beyond our Trust



In this article, the XP Doncaster 'Rethinking Schools' team (Claira Salter, Natalie Johnson, Kerry Poncia, Eleanor Wilkinson, and Corrine Cross) document their involvement in the 'Big Education - rethinking schools' programme.

They highlight the value of external collaboration, drawing inspiration from a London primary school's social deprivation initiatives, and addressing internal challenges like deepening staff understanding of DEIB and supporting multilingual students.

As part of The Big AI Project, they also developed and piloted highly-rated training and policy guidance for the use of AI in Education, while reflecting on their pedagogy with experts like Bill Lucas and Kate Robinson.

Embarking upon this project has provided a number of opportunities to step inside the stories of other schools 'doing things differently', exploring their signature practices and networking with like-minded professionals to challenge aspects of 'normal' school leadership and curriculum delivery. We have been inspired by the projects students have been undertaking up and down the country and have been keen to share these with colleagues.

It came as a refreshing perspective that we are not alone in our mission to prepare students for the modern world through providing rich learning experiences which enable them to make connections and build schema, whilst also making a difference to the communities where they belong.

We have seen that educators in a range of settings are experiencing similar challenges and successes to ourselves.

Schools of all descriptions are increasingly expected to do much more than schools of the past, and the impact of poverty on our school communities is increasingly pervasive. We saw how a London primary school attempts to tackle social deprivation and its impact on education in a range of ways.

By opening up their school kitchens, the school allowed those in temporary accommodation with no cooking facilities to provide hot meals for their families.

The school also worked closely with immigration services and charities to support families seeking citizenship for their children. These primary aged pupils were given the opportunity to contact their local councils and MPs in order to highlight the poor standards of social housing in the area and the negative impact that overcrowding,

rats, damp and foxes were having on their ability to learn. This powerful, outward facing Final Product not only met a range of Learning Targets but made a tangible difference to the lives of the children and their families.

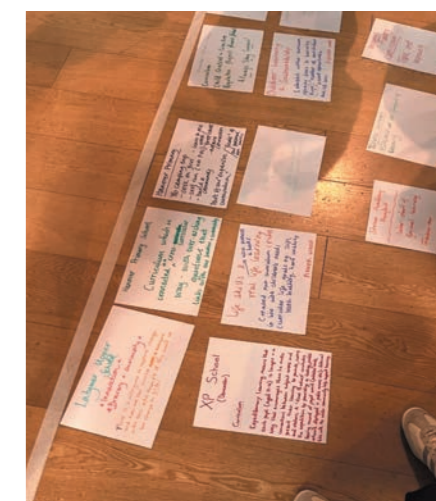
We came away from this visit wondering how we might be able to design products and expeditions with such real world relevance to our children and their families.

Learning from schools who have 'torn up the rule book' has motivated our small group to create a buzz around looking up and out in school. The impact on our personal professional development and also that of others across school has been palpable, with many staff raising in their most recent Professional Engagement Process (PEP) Review the intention to lead visitor days at XP East or visit other schools to learn more about why we do what we do at XP Doncaster.

Part of this programme has included working collaboratively with other innovative leaders on a project focus. One of our projects has been a deep reflection on deepening staff understanding of the students they teach in line with diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging.

This work has encouraged us to look up and out, learning from other settings and recognising that many schools are facing similar questions about diversity, equity and the student experience. It has been reassuring to see that we are not alone in striving for an education that genuinely meets the needs of all young people.

A key aspect of our work involves supporting the development and framing meaningful insights and praise around inclusion and belonging. ►





“AI is undoubtedly having a huge influence on the way learners and educators operate in schools. It is hoped that The Big AI Project will be able provide support, consistency and reassurance as we all negotiate these changes and challenges.”



► Our focus is on how the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB) framework connects to our Core Practices and the Narrative for Success.

The information gathered through this project informs the creation of a visual demographic aid for each phase, helping staff build a clearer understanding of the students they serve. We plan to ensure the data collected maintains integrity to our Narrative for Success and focus on the individual risks that are raised.

As we begin to explore this work, important themes are already emerging, particularly around how we support multilingual and bilingual students.

Staff are raising questions about how best to encourage these learners and how to move away from deficit-based language when discussing their needs.

A second group project has focused on AI in Education. Encouraged to push ourselves beyond our comfort zones, we enrolled on The Big AI Project to work with colleagues from around the world to produce a suite of training materials and policy guidance.

At the time of writing, these training resources are being piloted in schools across the UK, including XP Doncaster.

Training materials for school leaders were piloted at face-to-face conferences in London and Manchester during October. Initial feedback on this is extremely positive as 90% of delegates rated the training as '8 or above out of 10' with 38% giving it 10/10!

AI is undoubtedly having a huge influence on the way learners and educators operate in schools. It is hoped that The Big AI Project will be able provide support, consistency and

reassurance as we all negotiate these changes and challenges.

Alongside building relationships, we were also challenged to reflect upon our own practice and pedagogy.

Each session commenced with a guest speaker, hearing from experts such as Bill Lucas and Kate Robinson on their views around innovative educational practices.

We are determined to keep looking up and out!!

Claira Salter, Natalie Johnson, Kerry Poncia, Eleanor Wilkinson, and Corrine Cross

The Re-thinking Schools Team
XP Doncaster



Learning Expeditions: Down Under



Government
of South Australia

Department for Education



This article by Val Westwell and Mandi Dimitriadis, from the Department for Education, outlines South Australia's new Strategy for Public Education and its adoption of the Expeditionary Learning approach, drawing inspiration from the work of XP Schools and EL Education.

The strategy aims to develop students' knowledge, skills, and capabilities for active citizenship and lifelong learning.

In 2025, 114 schools across the state began designing and trialling their own community-connected Learning Expeditions, resulting in over 130 documented stories of practice. Featured examples include a marine conservation project at Port Neill Primary School and the 'Humans of KICE' biographical poetry exhibition on Kangaroo Island.

The article concludes with a vision for expanding the Learning Expedition approach statewide in 2026, building on the initial success and continued partnership with XP Schools and EL Education.

Our State

South Australia is a large state with a population of 1.8 million people spread across our capital city of Adelaide, small country towns, coastal communities and the desert outback. Our state's economy is driven largely by agriculture, aquaculture and mining, and we are famous for our wineries and beautiful beaches.

Our Strategy for Public Education

In South Australia we have over 500 public schools where over 190,000 children and young people learn and thrive. We are currently activating our new Strategy for Public Education by empowering educators and staff to work in partnership with families and communities to nurture, develop and empower all South Australian children and young people with the knowledge, skills and capabilities they need to become fulfilled individuals, active, compassionate citizens and lifelong learners.

Our ambition is for all children and young people to enter the world beyond the classroom ready to learn and to create opportunities to live a satisfying and fulfilling life of their choosing.

We have adapted our national curriculum to weave together dispositions, capabilities and knowledge to enable the development of deep understanding and the ability to transfer and apply learning in a range of contexts. We want all of our children and young people to experience learning in ways that contributes to strong wellbeing and activates their agency as effective learners and members of society.

Our Inspiration

At the Department for Education, we are excited to be working together as a system to activate our new Strategy for

Public Education. We are working with leaders, teachers and students across the state, to test and trial a range of emerging, promising, and innovative approaches to help our young people grow as successful learners, and confident and active citizens who contribute to their communities in meaningful ways.

We have been inspired by the work of XP schools and EL Education and have been privileged to work with Gwyn and Kate ap Harri, and Ron Berger as generous professional friends and partners in learning. The expeditionary learning approach developed by EL education aligns closely to our strategy. We are especially inspired by the partnership between EL Education and XP Schools and how this had led to expeditionary learning being a key element of how students in XP schools experience their education. We are now working with our teachers to help them design their own Learning Expeditions relevant to their unique contexts and communities.

Gwyn, Kate and Ron have travelled to South Australia several times to inspire our leaders and teachers and are continuing to work alongside us as we explore what Learning Expeditions might look like as a whole state approach within the context of our new curriculum and our Strategy for Public Education.

Our Exploration

In 2025, teachers from 114 schools across South Australia have been designing, testing and trialling their own Learning Expeditions and are now reflecting, evaluating and sharing their experiences.

These schools are representative of primary, secondary, and special education school settings, as well as ranging from large schools in



metropolitan settings through to tiny schools in rural and remote regions.

Participating teachers from each school came together at the beginning of our school year to spend a day with Gwyn, Kate and Ron. They left inspired by many stories of expeditionary learning from XP and EL schools and excited to explore what a Learning Expedition might look like for their students.

Since this time, we have been working with our teachers as they have designed Learning Expeditions that connect deeply with their communities, established cultures of feedback and critique where students strive to produce beautiful work for a purpose, and worked with experts as resources to help students develop the conceptual understandings, knowledge, capabilities and dispositions described in our curriculum.

As a result, we now have over 130 stories of practice documented by teachers to help us grow the expeditionary learning approach across our state as they continue to learn together and grow with each other. ▶



“As a result, we now have over 130 stories of practice documented by teachers to help us grow the expeditionary learning approach across our state as they continue to learn together and grow with each other.”

► **Our Stories**

Our emerging stories stretch across our diverse state... Port Neill Primary School is a tiny school, with 22 students situated in a seaside community.

The upper primary class were compelled by the Learning Expedition designed by their teacher to create awareness of, and protect, the marine wildlife and habitats that are so important to their community. Their learning has been driven by the guiding question: How can we help people care about what is under our jetty?

Working together with an expert marine biologist, underwater photographers and local artists, students created their beautiful work of scientifically accurate drawings of

the marine animals that live at different depths under their jetty. Together with their carefully crafted text, these drawings are now presented as professionally-produced signs on the jetty to help local residents and tourists learn about this unique marine ecosystem. On a recent visit to Port Neill, I witnessed the excitement of students as they saw tourists on the jetty stopping to read and discuss the information on their signs. It was at that moment that the students realised that they can truly contribute to their community in ways that make a lasting difference.

Kangaroo Island is a unique island community, situated off the coast of South Australia. The island is held together by a close-knit and strong community who support each other through thick and thin. This was especially evident when the island was devastated by raging bushfires a couple of years ago. The community is still working together to recover and rebuild from this natural disaster. As the only school on the island, Kangaroo Island Community Education (KICE) is made up of 3 campuses across the island and is an integral heart of the community.

The Learning Expedition 'Humans of KICE' has compelled year 7 and 8 English students to tell the stories of past students and staff who are still living on the island as community members. Students worked together with local journalists to hone their skills as interviewers so that they could honour the stories of valued community members in their biographical poems which aimed to capture the essence and stories of the 'Humans of KICE'. Together with beautifully crafted portraits of each community member, the poems are now shared with the community in an art exhibition in a local gallery as a lasting legacy to honour the stories of people who matter to the community.

Our Vision

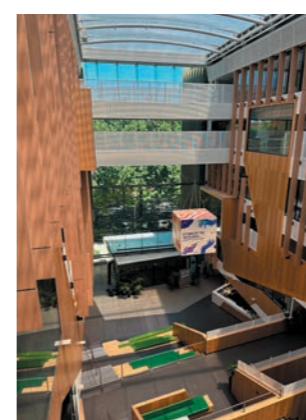
As we hoped, Learning Expeditions have been enthusiastically embraced by teachers as a way of designing learning that matters to their students while helping them develop deep knowledge, important skills and capabilities, and growing as people and citizens. We are hearing teachers talk about this work bringing back the joy to their profession and are inspired by stories of improved student engagement and positive learning outcomes for all students.

We are looking forward to expanding the Learning Expedition approach in 2026 across South Australia. We will continue to work with the teachers who participated in 2025, as they design their next Learning Expeditions and will also be working with school leaders as they continue to lead and scale the approach within their own school contexts.

We are very excited to welcome Gwyn, Kate and Ron back to South Australia in 2026. The word has spread across our state, and we have many more schools and teachers eager to learn more about Learning Expeditions and be inspired by the work of XP Schools and EL Education as a rigorous model for designing learning that helps students achieve high quality learning outcomes as they grow as good people and make meaningful contributions to their communities and society.

Val Westwell and Mandi Dimitriadis

The Department for Education South Australia



‘You cannot be what you cannot see’ – How study visits to XP inspired change in the north east of Scotland



This article reflects on the powerful collaborative partnership between The Wood Foundation (TWF) and XP which drove system-level change in education across 19 secondary schools in the northeast of Scotland through TWF's Excelebrate programme.

The Programmes Director, Georgea Hughes, details how initial study visits to XP inspired school leaders and teachers, even amidst a pandemic lockdown, to adopt practices like ‘Crew’ and ‘expeditions.’ The ongoing influence of XP has led to reported improvements in student attendance, behaviour, and achievement, underscoring the value of high-quality professional learning and the transformative power of ‘seeing’ what is possible.

Context

Established in 2007, TWF is a charitable foundation based in Aberdeen, Scotland. Operating under the principles of venture philanthropy, TWF invests time, talent, and finance in long-term societal change that foster genuine partnership with the stakeholder groups we collaborate with.

TWF's funding portfolio comprises three strands: Transforming livelihoods in Sub-Saharan Africa, Developing Young People in Scotland, and Facilitating Economic Development in Scotland.

Through the Developing Young People in Scotland portfolio, TWF has invested over £20 million in Scotland's education system through school-based capacity building investments including Excelebrate.

Launched in October 2019, Excelebrate is a £5 million, seven-year, programme designed to ignite system-level change by investing in the professional development of school leaders and teachers through coaching, study visits, peer networking, and training in Project-Based Learning (PBL) and oracy. The test-of-change works with 19 secondary schools across three local authorities in the northeast of Scotland.

Content

There is a quote in McKinsey & Company's 2007 report *How the World's Best-performing School Systems Come Out on Top* – “The quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers”. It is from an interview with a South Korean policymaker discussing the importance of attracting high-quality candidates into the teaching profession. However, it's incredibly relevant when also considering how to retain, develop, and inspire the teaching workforce to ensure they have the knowledge, skills, and experiences

“...we have students learning through expeditions who can add published author and activist to their CVs and, we can see their beautiful work in our communities. XP's staff and students were the catalyst for this change.”

needed to cope with new policies, the changing needs of young people, and a dynamic global labour market.

In Scotland, we have on paper, a globally admired curriculum (Curriculum for Excellence), and an innovative youth employment strategy (Developing the Young Workforce).

Together, they have the potential to provide young people with rich learning experiences steeped in real-world context. In reality, students still engage with a curriculum that prioritises the learning experiences of senior students preparing for exams. When we explored the reasons schools retained their traditional approaches, limited time, exam pressure, and a lack of professional learning were cited most often.

Excelebrate, as an investment, seeks to prove that funding high-quality professional learning, for teachers and school leaders, will yield better outcomes for our young people and the education profession more generally.

Our professional learning is designed to stretch vision, guide the strategic planning required for change, and develop the pedagogy needed for improved learning and teaching.

It was Olly Newton (Edge Foundation) who first introduced me to XP. Olly believed XP delivered the ambition of Scotland's curriculum, and he suggested I see for myself. In June 2019, my colleague and I walked through the doors of XP West, exhausted after a long journey. But our exhaustion quickly turned to excitement as we circled up in Crew and discussed curriculum design with teachers.

The highlight of our visit was, without question, our time with the students. We met designers, scientists, published authors and artists who were the embodiment of Scotland's curricular aims - successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens, and effective contributors. Invigorated, we left the XP community confident they would be an essential partner in our programme of professional learning.

In January 2020, we began working with Andy Sprakes, Mel Hewitt, and Julie Morrell to design our first visit - a two-day holistic XP insight.

In February 2020, 34 representatives from four rural Aberdeenshire schools descended on Doncaster. Over the course of two days, I saw colleagues deep in conversation over breakfast, in the auditorium, and on the train ►



“I comforted a teacher who cried with frustration and walked with one who said ‘we have tens of young boys in our school from financially deprived families, here at XP those young boys thrive - in our school we let them down.’”



They were going to do something; they were going to do Crew! They all had questions, and they wanted more support. I met with Andy and Mel to ideate the best way forward. We agreed upon a 6-week online training programme with Crew videos and tutorial time with Andy. We invited 40 teachers to join the training sessions, but each week we had 70.

In August 2020, all four schools launched their version of Crew. We quickly realised the power of that first study visit and as soon as we could visit XP again, we did.

Between October 2021 and April 2025, a further 241 representatives from 19 school partners in Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire, and Angus visited XP.

In March 2026, Excelerate, as a test-of-change, will end but the work in our partner schools will not. The impact of our partnership with XP will continue to grow.

Currently, 16 out of 19 partner schools deliver a version of Crew. In these schools, they report better attendance, improved behaviour, and better connections between students and teachers. Our inspectorate noted the benefit of Crew for students in Northfield Academy and highlighted

► home; they were questioning, challenging, and planning. I comforted a teacher who cried with frustration and walked with one who said “we have tens of young boys in our school from financially deprived families, here at XP those young boys thrive - in our school we let them down.”

A reflection I had not been prepared for but one I challenged with “so what will you do?”

One month after our visit, we locked down. This could have halted the Excelerate investment but something else happened. Our online coaching conversations with school leaders revealed change was afoot.

it as a defining factor in the school's improvement. Additionally, we have students learning through expeditions who can add published author and

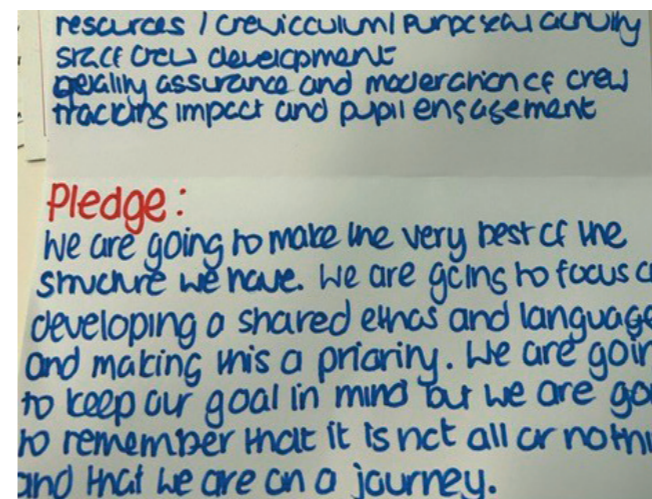
activist to their CVs and, we can see their beautiful work in our communities. XP's staff and students were the catalyst for this change.

Collaborating with XP has been an honour. We have worked openly and honestly, and the results have been powerful. Every visit has evolved based on learning from the last; we have been on micro-adventures, written books, made videos, and left inspired and

motivated to do more for the students we serve today and the students we will serve tomorrow. We can see XP's influence everywhere and we will passionately advocate for continued study visits as part of a well-rounded professional learning offer for educators across Scotland.

After all, “you cannot be what you cannot see”.

Georgea Hughes
Programmes Director
The Wood Foundation



Next issue...

If it ain't Crew, its through!



It's all about Crew! (...and Expeditions!)

The next issue of XP Unpacked will focus on 'The Year of the Crew Leader' as this draws to a close and we'll be celebrating everything that is Crew at XP and with partner organisations. We will also be looking forward to the Year of the Expedition sharing the work we are doing to make Learning Expeditions powerful and purposeful for all our learners.

Thank you to all our contributors in this issue.



In the XP Trust Store, you'll find unique products crafted by our students as part of Expeditions, along with 'How We XP', the story of our journey from the very beginning. It showcases beautifully-designed, student-created artefacts that highlight their creativity, skills, and commitment to academic excellence.

Aligned with this, we've developing a range of beautiful XP merchandise, from cool tees and apparel, to pens and drinking vessels.

Each purchase directly supports our students, celebrating their work, talents, and growth.

Discover our ethos, values, and the story behind XP while taking home something specially crafted by our community.

<https://shop.xptrust.org>





Spring-Summer 2026

12th February
XP Jazz (details to be confirmed)
XP School 7pm



12th March
Thursday Night Live (details to be confirmed)
XP School 7pm



23rd April
Beatles Night (details to be confirmed)
XP School 7pm



22nd May
Higher Rhythm event (details to be confirmed)



25th June
XP Festival of Arts and Culture (all day event)
XP Doncaster Campus

BUILDING COMMUNITY | ACTIVISM | LEADERSHIP | EQUITY | SHARING STORIES



XP Trust are a school trust based in Doncaster, UK. Our schools have Crew at the heart of everything they do and we deliver our curricula through cross-subject Learning Expeditions and developing strong links with partners and community. All of this is done through the prism of our three rich Curriculum Seams.

xptrust.org



RRP £7.95