

Learning outside the classroom



Vickie Haken describes the many educational rewards of going on a World Challenge expedition

The Inter-Community School Zürich (ICS) has been working with World Challenge Expeditions for the past six years and have no doubts that 'the best education is learned outside the classroom'. We started with a month-long team challenge expedition to Ecuador. The following year we completed the ten-day First Expedition to the south of Spain.

We have now run five, month-long expeditions, to India (twice), Ecuador (twice), Peru and Argentina for 2008. Next year we will be returning to India, establishing a rhythm of India and South America, which keeps each expedition unique, but at the same time maintains contact with destinations and projects. This means that a total of 141 10th Grade ICS students have been on a World Challenge expedition since 2002.

We positioned the expedition within the school year from the outset. Clive Greaves, deputy secondary principal, is convinced: "The learning that takes place on the expedition is extremely beneficial. By setting the expedition within the school's academic year, we are indicating the value we place on it."

The Grade 10 programme is now focused on the philosophy that much of a student's learning occurs outside the classroom, and on the belief that every student is different and learns in their own way. ICS also believes that independence, leadership and responsibility are learned and reinforced with experiences outside of the classroom.

As a result, students finish their 10th Grade year with the Personal Development Month, unique to ICS. The expedition is one of three options students can choose for this month:

1. The World Challenge Expedition to either South America or India.
2. School-directed option (including a field trip within Switzerland, work experience and CV/university application, plus job application advice).
3. The students' own proposals (which must include a community service element and must be approved by the administration).

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We have been running the Personal Development Month for the past four years with great success. Students come back from the month full of enthusiasm, new experiences and passions. The students present their experiences at a special evening held in school for an audience of parents and faculty, which is one of the most popular and entertaining evenings that the school runs. Students gain a sense of achievement, and the parents are envious they were never offered such opportunities when they were at school!

I have now been on two World Challenge expeditions, one to Ecuador and one to India. Both were entirely different, not only because of the vast difference in destinations, but because of the students that took part. I have been the school's link teacher for the past two years and love being a part of the team that enables our students to have such experiences.

From talking to students before, during, and after the expedition I am always impressed with how much confidence and how many leadership qualities they acquire throughout the expedition. The learning takes place at different stages for different people.

Sometimes a large part of the learning takes place before the expedition, whilst the students are raising the money and learning about the country they are about to visit. Some learn so much during the expedition, especially when they are the leader and realise that their thoughts and actions count. Many learn the most when they are back at school and planning the parents' evening where they present, and reflect on, the experiences they had.



I have also had students approach me two years after their World Challenge expedition and tell me how the experience has helped them choose a course at university and made them feel more confident about leaving home. Some students, after they have been to university, tell me how it helped them with budgeting, and being sensitive to others when living in close proximity!

We are building on our outdoors programme all the time at ICS and the World Challenge expedition is one of the culminating experiences to aim toward. This builds on various kayaking, hiking, rock climbing, cycling and travelling field trips that take place in the younger years. I also run the Sports Leaders Award programme for Grade 11 students and it is often the students that have been on an expedition that sign up for this optional course. These are the students that we, as a school, are proud to send out into the world.

The students that come back from expedition are more confident, enthusiastic, passionate and sensitive to others. Some of our students are financially affluent and one day will manage large businesses and be in a position to make a difference. They return, having seen parts of a country that they would never have

seen travelling with their families. They have made connections with locals who have such a different life and culture to themselves.

They have played football and cricket with children who live in remote villages in the mountains and laughed and communicated with them with very basic gestures and words. This close connection with local children and adults invariably touches our students' hearts and will stay in their memories forever.

We are confident that these experiences will help to shape the choices and decisions that they will make in their futures. As a school we endeavour to give our students as many opportunities and open them up to as many experiences as possible. A World Challenge expedition is a perfect way of reaching out further into the world and allowing more of the world to touch these very fortunate students.

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For further information about World Challenge contact tburns@world-challenge.co.uk or www.world-challenge.co.uk