

School 21 and XP Real world learning



Foreword



As we set out in *Towards a Twenty-First Century Education System*, at a time when technology and the labour market are changing faster than ever, the Government's education policy is taking us back to a Nineteenth Century education system.

Businesses consistently tell us they want

digital skills, technical skills and employability skills. Meanwhile EBacc, linear exams and performance tables are turning the the clock back to an era of rote learning facts to pass academic examinations.

A few schools and colleges stand out as beacons of hope, daring to take a different approach because they are committed to preparing their students for life and work in the Twenty-First Century.

Two such schools are School 21 in London and XP in Doncaster. Whilst radically different in some ways, they share a commitment to prepare their pupils for the real world. They break down arbitrary subject boundaries, they make use of engaging projects and expeditions to develop skills like problem solving and team working, and they use the real world to bring the curriculum to life.

Visiting these amazing schools and speaking to the articulate, confident young professionals who are their students, you can see immediately the impact of these approaches. We were delighted to ask NFER to provide an independent view so that we can share these lessons more broadly.

This will feed into the further development of Edge Future Learning, our work with schools and colleges to spread these innovative approaches, bring relevance to the classroom and help prepare the next generation of professionals and leaders.

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Contents

1. Edge Future Learning 2. XP School	2
4. Their approaches to education 5. Distinctive characteristics of real world learning	9 ng 10
7. The benefits of this approach	14
8. Conclusion – transferring this approach	16



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1. Edge Future Learning

The Edge Foundation is planning to publish a series of case studies of schools where innovative practices in curriculum development and delivery have been identified and observed. Many of these schools have implemented innovative whole school approaches in areas such as Real World Learning, Community **Connected Learning or Student Centred** Learning. These whole school approaches are characterised by certain features, for example, valuing authentic work that is linked to the real world, having open-minded, creative and collaborative leadership or having a strong emphasis on extended and quality school staff CPD. All case studies will demonstrate how these innovative practices are developed for the school's specific local context

These case studies will be supplemented by literature reviews that will provide further evidence for the importance and effectiveness of these themes, underpinning our development of Edge Future Learning.

The first two case studies in the series, of School 21 and XP, are presented in this report, which focuses on their implementation of Real World Learning as a whole school approach.

Real World Learning

The Edge Foundation commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to undertake an independent study of the provision of real-world learning (RWL) in School 21 and XP School, which are known to be innovative in taking a whole-school approach to its planning and delivery. Key aims of the study were to:

- Gather information about the RWL models and the theoretical thinking underpinning them.
- Identify the common elements of wholeschool RWL models across the two schools.
- Assess how well the model elements are working in the schools.

The methodology comprised case-study visits to XP School and School 21 to examine their realworld learning provision. We visited the schools in July and September 2018 and carried out face-to-face semi-structured interviews with ten members of school staff including senior leaders, curriculum leads, teachers and staff responsible for liaising with employers and other partners. We also carried out five focus groups with young people in Years 5, 8, 9 10 and 11. Additionally, we carried out three telephone interviews with employers working with the schools.



2. XP School

Preparing our children to be successful in the modern world

The CEO and Executive Principal set up XP School after visiting High Tech High in San Diego and Expeditionary Learning (EL) schools in the USA inspired by Ron Berger. A new free school, deliberately small and personalised with 350 students in total from ages 11-19, the school offers a supportive environment with 25 students in each class and two classes per year group. One young person explained what they liked about the school was: 'how understanding the teachers are – you can show them your work and they will show you how to improve it. They give you their time.'

XP'S DESIGN PRINCIPLES

- Personalisation: 'We express who we are through our work; we forge our own pathways to career, University and life readiness: we have ownership of our own progress and learning'.
- **Connect with the world**: 'We learn naturally across subjects from enquiry through to presentation to authentic audiences; we create meaningful relationships beyond the classroom; we engage in relevant work that matters'.
- A common mission: 'We form genuine communities with shared goals; we have collaborative accountability; we take real risks to achieve more; we are 'crew' not passengers'.

- **Teachers are learners**: 'We learn through the design process; we have ownership of the curriculum; we are accountable to our stakeholders'.
- Language is our culture: 'We actively refer to our character values each day, using them as a framework for our conduct, they are not just words on walls; we realise our values through our Habits of Work and Learning; we use sign language and common phrases when appropriate to express our thoughts, feelings and sense of community'.

Real World Learning

Senior leaders described how the school prepares young people to be successful in the modern world and to be life-ready as young people apply their knowledge and this contributes to their confidence and eloquence and their sense of identity and self-worth.

They feel that the school should be tightly integrated into the community and be focussed on creating academically rigorous, authentic experiences that bring the children closer to these goals. The character traits the school aims to develop are courage, respect, craftsmanship and quality, compassion and integrity. They also emphasise habits of work (work hard, be smart, be kind) that they expect from the young people.

Central to the curriculum is expeditions, where teachers act as facilitators to project-based learning. Their aim is for the young people to achieve 'beautiful work' and to grow character. The quality of work and character development underpin the school ethos. Young people apply their knowledge and this along with the focus on language contribute to the young people's confidence, eloquence and their sense of identity and self-worth.



EXAMPLES OF 'EXPEDITIONS'

A local shopping centre created an art space in an area that had previously been attracting anti-social behaviour and a poetry exhibition in this space caught the attention of the XP School communications officer. She contacted the assistant general manager of the shopping centre and discussed ways in which XP School could work with the centre.

The shopping centre sees a footfall of 380,000 at peak times, so is a key space for getting a message out to the public. The shopping centre is now working with XP School and supporting the students at the school to test ideas, do research, and reach the community. For example the young people launched a 'Stand Up' campaign to raise awareness about the importance of standing up for one's rights and finding out what people in Doncaster want. The shopping centre started working with XP School last year so have just finished their first year of projects which have included a foodbank campaign, the 'Stand Up' campaign, and a suffragette exhibition.

B. A project on coal mining encompassed the effect of the closures of the pits on Doncaster, the science and mathematics behind coal mining, and the art and poetry that discussed and portrayed the impact of the closures on the local area. The students have to carry out fieldwork as part of their expeditions; they regularly have input from 'experts' and they use their local knowledge and expertise and are encouraged to ask pertinent questions.

Experts on the mining project included not just specialists at the local museum but also older residents (or their children) who could talk about mining from their memories. Young people researched the different subject areas related to mining, visited local museums, interviewed staff there and interviewed representatives from local families involved in the mining industry. One young person explained: *'on the mining expedition we went out to meet experts, for example the national coalmining museum and had a tour of the pits and visited old people in their homes'*. They then wrote a book which was published.

XP School

'The ethos of ownership of the curriculum is key to underpinning the whole-school approach to learning.'

The development of the curriculum is collaborative and dynamic, and teachers noted they 'can have a say in it'. The teachers create the curriculum jointly, they use a 'curriculum map' where they review the educational standards against the map. The expedition lead looks for horizontal links between subjects. Expeditions tend to evolve over time (i.e. they are never 'picked off the shelf') and the designated lead may change things where there are new opportunities and new input, such as the emergence of a new expert. At the end of each expedition there is a rigorous expedition review. One teacher commented that the best part of the job '*is that we rarely do things the same way – so you stay interested*'.

The ethos of ownership of the curriculum is key to underpinning the whole-school approach to learning (i.e. what they teach and how they teach). There are extra INSET days and CPD so teachers can design and plan horizontal expeditions including different subjects. Expeditions also include experts (for example employers and community leaders) who are immersed in the expeditions and are key to providing the critical real-world perspective.

XP School has 15 CPD/INSET days per year (compared to five in most schools) and has designed their own CPD structure from the ground up where they develop staff who are pioneering in the way they teach, taking an exploratory approach, and taking risks (such as doing things in slightly different ways). XP School uses these days to develop and plan expeditions by having long weekends (extended by having INSET days on Friday and Monday for example) where they typically use the Friday to develop their business strategy and Monday to plan the expedition. They use technology to ensure transparency and enable all teachers involved in an expedition to contribute to the plans. There is a strong philosophy of 'teachers as learners' that underpins the ethos and values of the educational approach.



3. School 21

FOR SUCCESS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Similar to XP School, School 21 is a free school inspired by Ron Berger and opened in 2012. The educational approach of the school came from the three founders, who believed that education needed to be 'done differently'.

The school operates a small schools model. This means there are only 75 pupils per year group so the school can offer small and supportive classes. The educational approach is informed by the belief that education needs to be more innovative so that pupils leave school able to solve real-world problems. The oracy curriculum is core to the school ethos and recognises the importance of communication skills. School 21 defines oracy as 'the ability to communicate effectively'.

There is a central focus on ensuring that all learning is meaningful and relevant in the real world, so 'students are never asked to complete an inauthentic task'. The school priorities are 'bringing expertise in and taking students out into the community' and 'lifting learning out of the classroom and taking it to the people that are experts in that'. The school aims to upskill pupils holistically and move beyond the knowledge needed to pass exams. They have a 'Head, Heart, and Hands' philosophy i.e. the knowledge, wellbeing and moral impetus, and practical skills and craftsmanship to impact the world.

The oracy curriculum is essential to achieving the vision of the school. Oracy is embedded into all aspects of school life.

For example:

- in primary, the focus is on pupils learning to contribute and the importance of how they communicate
- in secondary, the focus shifts to facilitating learning through talk and discussion. For example, projects often involve debates, interviews, discussion, and group work.



bringing expertise in and taking students out into the communi

Additional oracy opportunities come from other activities such as: the annual poetry competition and opportunities to speak at external events for example, the House of Commons. The delivery of oracy is carefully planned for and scaffolded outside of the classroom. The CPD framework in school, especially important for new staff, is carefully and thoughtfully constructed to train staff in how to implement oracy effectively.

The school uses additional INSET days (seven in school time) to train staff in coaching, oracy and to facilitate additional CPD. For example, on Wednesday afternoons there are two hours ring-fenced for CPD. Oracy and coaching modules are compulsory for new staff. There is a developmental culture prevalent in the school. For example, they have craft reviews where teachers present on their craft and receive feedback in curriculum areas such as how to use drama techniques in any subject.

CPD strands generally fall within Oracy, Project-Based Learning, Wellbeing modules, and subject domains. There are six modules available for staff to opt into throughout the year, for example how to design and teach a project over a 6-8 week period; the science of learning and mastery; methods of questioning; and oracy practice. Staff can also undertake longer pieces of research. The idea is that CPD is viewed as flexible for an individual's and the school's needs.

The school encourages staff to see their practice itself as CPD. They are seeking to employ the 70:20:10 professional learning model in school. This means 70 per cent of CPD time will be on-the-job experiential learning, where staff reflect on their day-to-day work to stretch, challenge, and develop their practice, possibly working with their line manager or an expert. Twenty per cent will consist of exposure to and work within relevant teams of experts such as departments, subject teams, or year groups. The final ten per cent will be dedicated to the education of staff through formal CPD, which is used to train staff in the use of core, whole-school approaches and techniques, such as oracy.

There is a clear belief that oracy facilitates pupil agency and access to the real world. Pupils of all ages are engaged and appeared to be empowered by this curriculum. For example, the school runs portfolio evenings where pupils deliver self-reflection presentations to their coach and parents about their achievements and areas for improvement over the term.

Real World Learning - From Theory to Practice

Project-Based Learning is deployed throughout the school and across all subjects, either within one subject or cross-curricular. Curriculum delivery is structured through designing and completing projects around an essential question/problem and results in an authentic and "real" end product that is delivered to a genuine audience, preferably from an external group.

School 21 believes in *'bringing expertise in and taking students out into the community'*. Real-world learning placements are based around a mutually beneficial relationship with an external organization.

EXAMPLE OF A REAL WORLD LEARNING PLACEMENT

A local hotel provided placements for students and briefed them on a special project on how to engage and recruit young people via social media as the hotel was interested in finding avenues to bring young people into the hospitality industry. This project included the students presenting recommendations to the hotel on how to engage young people as employees in the future. Students felt that they properly engaged with the workplace and were treated as colleagues in a more authentic way than during traditional work experience. The hotel considered this a unique experience.

They reported that they wanted to work with School 21 as they perceived the school to be a more 'forwardthinking organisation' and they were interested in developing an opportunity to build links and recruit individuals from the school in the future. They believed that this relationship provided a way to offer experience of the world of work to young people as well as to try to solve an in-house problem they had identified. They felt that other schools do not offer real-world learning projects – most want more standard two-week placements. On this project the young people were expected to work like colleagues and according to the employer they weren't given any 'lee-way' for being students. Organisations are provided with thorough training and support for their placements from the school, while they also set out very clear expectations to the students on the professionalism that is expected of them (i.e. that they will be treated as colleagues and must behave in an appropriate way).

The School 21 partnerships team arrange and allocate students to placements, which helps ensure they are in appropriately challenging placements. The frequency of student-stakeholder engagements and interactions is high. Employers often come to the school to run sessions with the young people. These encounters, which can involve all year groups, across all subjects, often include interactions with and presentations to stakeholders. For example, a Year 3 project involved creating a dinner and involved pupils visiting restaurants, interacting with restaurateurs before designing their own menu and delivering the meal. In another Year 3 project pupils used science/physics of electricity/circuitry knowledge and their art skills to create and decorate toys.

'There is a clear belief that oracy facilitates pupil agency and access to the real world.'

Approaches



4. Their approaches to education

Broadly, both schools' approach to education is based on <u>High Tech High</u> and <u>Ron</u> <u>Berger's</u> principles of <u>Expeditionary Learning</u> in the USA. Recent commentary in this country includes an analysis of how curriculum making is characterised at XP School (<u>Pountney, R. and McPhail G. (2019</u>). Although the two schools do have an emphasis on different aspects of education and the curriculum, for example XP School is characterised particularly by its 'expeditions' informed by experts and School 21 has a whole-school focus on oracy to develop young people's character and confidence, the two schools do share similar features.

Core characteristics common to both schools include:

- an overarching whole-school ethos that values authentic work relevant to the real world beyond the school gates;
- an emphasis on the development of the young person's character, especially their communication skills (for example language and 'oracy');
- open-minded, creative and collaborative leadership;
- development and delivery of a broad curriculum mainly via projects/expeditions where teachers are also learners, and external experts (for example community representatives or employers) are integral;
- school design principles that show an acute awareness of the wider context in which the school is located;
- a strong emphasis on CPD with additional days allocated.

Real World Learning - From Theory to Practice

5. Distinctive characteristics of real-world learning

The real-world approach was evidenced throughout the schools. Young people are encouraged to realise that they are part of the real world and not separate from it. An employer made this revealing observation: 'The difference between XP and other schools was their receptiveness and their recognition of the importance of engaging with businesses and employers.' There is an emphasis on preparing young people to be ready for life and the working world after school. Understanding the working world and taking part in their local community while at school are part of this preparation. One senior leader explained: 'We believe that the school should be tightly integrated into the community, and be focused on creating academically rigorous, authentic experiences that bring our children closer to this goal'.

Furthermore, young people are prepared to engage with the world around them in order to make a difference. Projects often act to take pupils into the community, for example a Year 1 project at School 21 on the environment led to a protest outside the Stratford Centre informing people how they could be 'greener' or more environmentally friendly, while a Year 7 project read Newham's biodiversity report and turned it into a readable leaflet to distribute to local people.

One senior leader outlined how their school '*is aiming to create young people who have the knowledge, confidence, and skills to change the world for the better.*' For example, Year 8 pupils at School 21 worked with two local illustrators to design and produce a book for



Distinctive learning

refugees arriving in the UK. The pupils worked with the illustrators during their 'expert sessions' to produce highquality artwork and illustrations that met the brief of the book, which was later published.

Many of the projects/expeditions reflect local community, heritage and history to increase pupils' understanding and knowledge of these contextual elements. For example, in one project Year 7 students interviewed members of the local community about their culture and cuisine and produced a recipe book.

Interestingly, one teacher highlighted how the school prioritises '*lifting learning out of the classroom and taking it to the people that are experts*'. Typically, projects bring subjects together, for example history and drama, and students' outputs are critiqued by an authentic, external expert, an exercise valued by staff and students. The experts are notably not just employers; they could be local residents, charities, artists, historians or actors.

They are representatives of the local community who can enrich the young people's understanding of a variety of subjects and who frequently also benefit from the relationship with the school and the young people. For example, the hotel (described in section 3 above) wanted some real-life recommendations from the students about how to attract the younger generation to work in the hospitality industry.

To facilitate this real-world approach, both schools have dedicated staff working on building and developing relationships with local employers and the community. This was seen as crucial as teachers do not have the time for this task and it was recognised that time must be protected to maintain relations with local experts and employers. A key challenge was recruiting enough partners and as well as asking staff to consider any of their own personal contacts, it was recognised that existing partners need to be nurtured.

An illustration of the commitment to these relationships is that School 21 emphasised that an important component of building and nurturing these partnerships was ensuring that all partners are provided with appropriate training, information, and support prior to and during their contact with pupils. This ensures that partners, teachers, and pupils know what is expected of them and are all equipped to collaborate effectively.



6. The whole-school model

Both schools have taken the core characteristics and embedded them within the whole school so that for example:

- Young people feel supported, valued and listened to; one student commented: 'everyone speaks and everyone gets to be heard'
- 2. There is an emphasis on developing and building character and confidence through, for example, 'beautiful work' and 'oracy'. Character building includes, for example, developing a positive attitude in pupils, encouraging pupils to take more control over their lives and be more proactive and developing pupils' voices so they can

articulate their feelings to adults and to each other. It is expected that academic development will follow

3. Young people feel part of the real world; they understand it and expect to find their role in it. They know how to communicate in the workplace. One employer observed: 'If you wanted to put any representative from that school in front of one of your businesses, it would not be a risk. It would actually be a positive experience.'



The whole-school model

These characteristics are facilitated through whole-school practices such as:

- a. Teachers having ownership of the curriculum (what they teach and how they teach). They review the curriculum standards, look for horizontal links between curriculum subjects, map the standards onto each project/expedition; emphasise craftsmanship and producing quality work, and projects culminate in an authentic end product.
- **b. Small and supportive classes** enabling strong relationships where young people and teachers know each other well; this is viewed as important, as one senior leader explained: '*Currently young people are growing up in a different context with social media and a lot of anxiety. They have a solid culture here.'*





- c. Having a strong emphasis on CPD with additional days allocated and CPD sessions linked to one another so that the CPD programme is linked to and structured around the core values of the school. This also enables teachers to progressively develop their skills.
- d. Senior leaders encouraging teachers and young people to be creative and take risks to expand their learning. One teacher observed: 'Young people are outward looking, they can take risks without fear of getting it wrong'.

Different approaches are used to initiate and monitor projects such as the use of smart technology in one school to enable transparency at all times and to ensure all project/expedition staff have ownership and are up-to-date with how projects/expeditions are planned and delivered. Whereas in the other school, teachers design their own projects and submit these to an approval panel who review the project before it is formally added to the timetable. CPD is used to support teachers in how to formulate and design a successful project. The approval panel ensures feasibility and quality.

7. Benefits of this approach

The research identified several benefits of this approach including young people developing holistically and teachers emphasising to young people that their character and their employability skills are as important as their academic achievements (indeed, perhaps more so, as the latter were seen to follow the former). Additionally, through this approach students become aware of the employability skills they are developing. For example, one teacher drew attention to how: 'Young people work as experts would do, rather than learning what experts do'. One student said what she liked about the school was that: 'We have freedom of speech and we can have our own ideas, for example, I started a medical society. I am in charge of it. It is independent and I have responsibility for it.' Another student expressed why she valued the expeditions: 'They are engaging and memorable because they link with the world of work'. A third student commented: 'They [teachers] push us to go forward not to fall'.

The schools' emphasis on developing well-rounded young people who have engaged in the world of work and have been given multiple opportunities to express themselves was evident (see sections 2 and 3 above). Young people's well-being, their ability to articulate their thoughts calmly and coherently and the development of their identity and self-worth were seen as critical to producing well-rounded, resilient young people who have clear awareness of the possibilities open to them in the future, have confidence in their ideas and can articulate them.



Benefits of this approach



For example, a young person pointed out: 'We [the students] have got organisational and presentation skills – social skills come naturally as we are continually using them here. This school does quite a good job at

[developing our] *public speaking*? An employer made the following endorsement: *'The biggest complement I can give them is that I would be willing to introduce them [the young people] to any of the clients that I have.'*



Real World Learning

8. Conclusion – transferring this approach

The elements identified in this report as working well are crucial to the model being scaled to more schools and areas. Although challenging to transfer this educational approach to existing schools (as the design principles assume new and small schools), introducing the approach by degree could be possible by considering some or all of the following components.

For example, school senior leaders could:

- Reflect on the school characteristics and values and consider what type of young people the school wants to develop. Communicate and embed any revised values and principles;
- Create an ethos where risk-taking by teachers and young people is encouraged and creativity is prevalent;
- Review current processes and consider how change could be progressively introduced e.g. by year group or key stage or by a strand (such as oracy) throughout the school;
- Assess the school's context and locality to identify where opportunities for external partnerships or realworld learning could be sourced and how these could be incorporated into the school's revised vision of teaching and learning;

Work hard

- I arrive for each class on time and prepared.
- I participate fully and mindfully in class.
- I complete all work in a timely manner to the best of my ability.

Get smart

- I take responsibility for my learning by asking questions and seeking help when needed.
- I assess my work based on established criteria and rubrics.
- I welcome feedback and revise my work.
- Lead from the top with a dedicated senior leader implementing and a dedicated staff member building and nurturing relationships with external partners, experts and employers so young people feel part of their local community and can see where they and their education fits into the working world;
- Introduce (and extend time allocated to) a structured, linked and progressive CPD programme based on 'teachers as learners'.

Finally, it will be important to communicate this vision, and the journey plan to achieve it, to all parties such as school staff, governors, young people, parents, and the local community.

References

Pountney, R. and McPhail G. (2019) Crossing boundaries: exploring the theory, practice and possibility of a 'Future 3' curriculum, *British Educational Research Journal,* DOI <u>10.1002/berj.3508</u>

'How understanding the teachers are – you can show them your work and they will show you how to improve it. They give you their time.'



