



Reflections on Professional Induction



ELC speeches
2014-17

Summary

At XP, all staff are expected to go through a professional induction process to deeply understand what our school is about, how our children learn and how we teach.

Core to this process is a notion that we “practise what we preach” - that what is good enough for our students is good enough for us.

For instance, on the first day of school, our students set out on an Outward Bound experience, then they learn through cross-subject “expeditions”, and eventually hold Student-Led Conferences where they explain their learning to their parents.

As best we can, all staff follow a similar process during induction, swapping hats between experiencing things as students do, and unpacking the experience as professionals.

Our staff go on an Outward Bound experience before they start working at XP, then they experience a learning expedition “slice” (a small expedition lasting around 2-3 weeks), and the culminating event to our induction is an Educator-Led Conference, where staff prepare speeches, critiqued by their peers. During the Educator Led Conferences staff answered the following guiding question:

In 2014 and 2015 - “What kind of person, and what kind of educator do I want to be at XP?”

In 2016 - “What have I learnt from the experience of the slice and how has it changed me as a person?”

In 2017 - “How have my ideas about teaching and learning changed during this induction process and have I changed as a person during this induction process?”

This is a collection of these reflections.

Angella

Let's go back to April, when I stumbled across an advert for a learning coach position for something called XP. And I say "something" because at that point I had no idea what XP was.

I'd recently made the decision to leave my management position in libraries and was planning on having a bit of a career break, so wasn't even looking for another job, but I guess the universe had other plans for me and something made me click on the link.

I read the job advert and quickly established that XP was a secondary school, in Doncaster, and I began to picture in my head what working in that school would be like:

There would be a teacher, and a big classroom full of kids, all sat in matching clothes, being talked at, being taught how to pass tests.

Being put into top sets and bottom sets; being told you were really good at something, or that you're actually really bad at something, but given no instruction on how to improve.

That there was a direct correlation between what grade you got on your last maths test and your feeling of self-worth.

I soon realised that the picture in my head was actually based on my own experience of secondary school (which I happily left at 16.)

I carried on clicking around the website, and that was my hook. I watched the online videos where students, staff and parents spoke about the pride of being part of XP; the shared values, the mutual respect, that learning could be delivered differently. I soon knew that I wanted to be a part of this Utopian world!

Mystery words and terms stood out to me that I'd never heard before in a school context: celebrations of learning; student led conferences; expeditionary learning... Expeditionary learning?

HoWLS. Crew. Character traits. "Preparing our children to be successful in the modern world".

It all sounded amazing, but drawing on my experience of learning, my experiences of being at school, I couldn't understand how.

The application form was submitted. I was invited to interview. I sang to Jamie, Andy and Martin (badly). I was challenged by the student panel (they were a tough crowd).

I went home, rang my best friend, said I'd had a jolly good time, that it was the first interview where I felt I could truly be myself, but I was up against people who were already working in schools, so hey-ho. And she said, "If they mean what

they say about doing things differently, they'll have you. Let's see if their money's where their mouth is."

And then Jamie rang me and proved that his money was, indeed, where his mouth is by offering me: a pink and fluffy librarian from libraryland, the opportunity to come and be a part of something I already felt was amazing. Something that I already believed in, even though I still didn't really understand the application of the learning process.

So, if you ask my mates what they think I've been doing since I started here, they'd say that I've been off on a jolly, slept in a tent and then I've come back here to play at being a student.

"When you are going to start your proper job?"

And I guess it does look a bit like that to the outside world.

But, a wise woman once said, and continues to say: To do things differently, you gotta do things differently.

Over the past 3 weeks, I've seen those mystery words and phrases I first saw on the website come alive. I have experienced a learning expedition; I have taken part in a celebration of learning, I have created beautiful work. I have added practices and protocols to my previously empty toolbox of teaching devices.

I have come to understand that teachers are learners too, and if you're going to teach and support students, you have to spend some time being the student.

But during the induction process, a little voice in the back of my head has been saying "aaaah, but does this really happen?"

After all, I've come from a place where visions were just posters on a wall.

I've had the chance to watch teachers teaching, and after briefly observing some expeditions in action I can happily say that yes, it really is happening. That our "pretend" classroom looks exactly like a real classroom. We have the same stages of discovery on the walls; we use the same common language.

I now see a classroom with a teacher fostering curiosity in children; encouraging them to notice and wonder; look at things differently; have wonderful ideas; children praising and constructively critiquing each other.

Children who are challenged academically - together, at all levels, in a supportive environment; that you can teach maths skills alongside a trip to a Sikh temple...

Children who are tracking their own progress against their learning targets. Children who are supporting each other throughout their learning journeys.

I see that XP isn't just teaching what children need to learn, but they're creating learning opportunities so children actually want to learn.

I see children who will not only leave this school university ready (if that's what they choose to do) but also as decent human beings because there is so much emphasis placed on character growth, too.

Which leads me into how the induction process has changed me as a person. When I was interviewed by the staff panel, I was asked how I would show the character traits on the poster behind me in school.

I remember reading the poster and almost dismissively saying that they're just what people do. We all have respect, integrity, compassion etc. and "isn't it a shame that we have to "teach" kids these skills."

At interview, I honestly thought I knew what it meant to display these traits; that they were decent human being behaviours, and I like to think that I'm a decent human being.

It's important to note that this process hasn't just been about learning new skills, or a crash course in teaching.

The process has been a time of great self-reflection for me, for all of us. I've never cried so much!

I've reflected on times in my past where I could've be a bit more kinder and tolerant. Where I could've been more respectful or shown more compassion. Why standing up for what I believe in is so important, and I wish I'd done more of it.

But I'm only human; And I'm still a work in progress.

Forget first draft, second draft, third draft... I'm currently on the 42nd draft of being me and I'm still far from being the final product. But I pledge to keep on learning, and learning, and learning.

And going back to one of those mystery words I first saw: Crew. For me, crew is all about support. Mutual respect. Being brave. Discovery. Circles of trust. A safe space. Community.

This amazing group of people - the people in this room - you're the ones who have taught me that together, we're crew.

Finally, to summarise my induction experience: it was the best of times; it was the worst of times. It has broken me; it has made me.

My unfamiliar zone, even some elements of my panic zone, are now becoming my familiar.

I'm still the same person you all met on that first day in the hall; but hopefully I'm a slightly better version.

Thank you.

- Angella joined XP East in 2017 as a Learning Coach

Claire B

My ideas of teaching before joining XP were relatively short, in the sense that I haven't had a predominant job within a school before. I experienced the educational journey for myself throughout school and university but then my academic involvement stopped, for a number of years, until I started volunteering 2 years ago.

While I was a student within school I think I had a similar perception to many others within the class. I went to school to learn the answers to pass exams, and most of the information wasn't retained as it had no purpose, and it was difficult to understand when I would need to know this information again to help me through life.

After a few years of working in a different environment, and training adults within a classroom I wanted to pursue the educational avenue, and really start to help children to succeed, so started volunteering at a primary school.

While volunteering I tried to gain as much insight as I could into the workings of a school, I wanted to understand the ways children were taught and how I could help children to achieve academically, as well as personally. It was difficult due to the limited amount of time I was there, but I remember there was similarities to how I remember school, in the sense of having specific lessons, where the teacher explained a lot of information where the children are required to conduct a piece of work, with the same uncertainty of why.

This for me has changed dramatically since joining XP. I'm now processing a considerable amount of information from the last couple of weeks, so cannot begin to imagine what I will learn within the years to come.

One aspect I love is the work the children conduct has a purpose with them creating a final product which can involve a variety of subjects. I was slightly unclear how this would have worked before I started my XP journey as when I was a student you were aware which lesson you were in at that moment in time, due to answering mathematical problems/equations for maths, or writing an essay in English, but even just through our slice we understood subjects can be collaborated to help answer a guiding question. With our question of 'How the Golden Temple can feed so many people', we had a taster of answering with a mixture of subjects, for example maths for looking at the logistics of fitting so many people in a room, with other subjects, for example English, through dissecting texts and religious studies with field work at the Sikh temple in Doncaster to comprehend their beliefs and principles.

Due to actually going through the process myself I started to understand the ways learning targets and a guiding question work, with more clarity of this now we have started observing lessons and seeing the students work. They have a clear guided question, and we could start to understand how they incorporate different subjects to help for example English literature texts, newspapers, history and art, and not only can you see the different subjects coming together but you can also see the passion within the children, and the beautiful work they create. Throughout all the information I have started to filter I'm coming to understand there are many aspects to consider when helping to produce expeditions and lessons, and these will need to be addressed to create a successful and engaging

plan, where the students will become hooked at the start, have high challenge throughout the expedition, with equally high levels of support and as a result create beautiful work.

With regards to how I have changed I feel this has been such a challenging, exciting but most of all fulfilling experience. Throughout my life I have always tried to increase my self confidence, as at times I have desired to do things, but not necessarily had the guts to proceed with them, or share my opinions so easily if they differed with somebody else's. This induction process has shown me I can do it, and will continue to grow my confidence as the change in the last couple of weeks I believe has been evident within myself.

Throughout the first week, while away I started off slightly reserved within circle time, this wasn't because I wasn't engaged or couldn't be bothered but it was easing myself into being comfortable with others and the feeling of being accepted within the group. As the week progressed I found it easier to share my feelings with the others, this was partly because I was becoming more confident and comfortable but also because I started to feel a sense of belonging, and could feel the respect and compassion everyone had for each other. This has made me understand the experience every child that joins XP has (and will) face.

Before this process I wouldn't have being as open about my inhibitions, but by experiencing this journey first hand it has displayed the importance of being honest and understanding everyone is human. If I felt this way then others probably will at some point, so it made me be aware that when I am supporting students either on a trip or within a classroom and a student isn't contributing verbally, it doesn't mean they aren't necessarily engaged but they may need a little more encouragement, to make sure they are aware the support is there for them as well of a feeling of belonging.

I didn't understand when we left on that Tuesday morning, the rationale of the trip, or why every member of staff we encountered would say 'I'm so jealous of you!' or 'I wish I was in your shoes!' particularly on the first night when I was scared the tent would blow away! But as the week went on I truly started to understand because I could feel myself changing as a person.

I've always wanted to help people but throughout the week my levels of compassion grew along with the awareness of other people's feelings, without them having to say a word. I suspect that was because we had an overwhelming sense of unity, which was incredible for the short space of time we had being with each other. This became more evident when I returned home for the weekend, my husband and others commented how I was taking things in my stride easier, as normally I can get stressed about little things quickly yet this week showed me things don't always go to plan, plans can change due to a number of factors but as long as what needs to happen does within the period of time it will be ok.

I considered all my growing and changing to be complete when we returned as it was already a massive change within the period of time, but again I was shocked to have further changes within the last couple of weeks, through diving back into being in a student's position and having a complete new approach on things. It has been amazing to be able to experience the practises the students do, and

start to understand the workings of the school. Within this period of time we have often still being in a position of not knowing all the facts, yet completed our specific targets through collaboration and support.

I'm still learning and growing which will probably never stop as we are all learners but I believe this experience has considerably helped me to appreciate the character traits, live by them and become a member of the crew.

- Claire joined XP in 2017 as a Learning Coach

Clare D

To answer this question fully I first had to think about what I used to think my ideas about teaching and learning were, something I don't think I've ever done in a broad or exclusive way, my focus had always been what my job entailed, what was expected of me and what I needed to fulfil this. I remember being at school and my memories are of long hot days sat at a desk listening to the teacher talking at us whilst looking out of the window wishing I was somewhere else. I recall being talked at and then completing a piece of work in silence, no opportunity to collaborate or talk through ideas. I went on to think about how my experience of working in a classroom was different to my own school experience.

The lessons (learning and teaching) were delivered via teacher input at the start of a session, perhaps then some opportunity to discuss with a buddy next to you, students would then start to work on their learning, the expectation or outcome of the learning would be explained and then modelled...typically children then go and produce their own learning using a learning target, the following lesson moving onto another element or something completely different. Children are grouped by ability working most closely with other children at their level. These are my experiences of teaching and learning and I suppose my ideas as well, wow how they have changed over the last 3 weeks. I have gained knowledge about student-led learning and added many protocols and practices to my tool kit to enable me to support this during lessons. Students are exposed to the world through their studies and this enables them to develop a deeper understanding of the given subject and for their knowledge to become embedded. Children take ownership for their own learning and are able to explicitly talk about this. As a learning coach I believe that my role is to help the subject teacher facilitate an environment where children feel safe and confident to explore through learning.

We are crew not passengers is a statement that will stay with me, such a powerful statement with so few words and one I am also trying to incorporate into family life. Learning is a voyage that everyone at XP journeys, we are all responsible for our own learning, that of each other and our students. The induction process has definitely allowed me to empathise with the students as I have experienced exactly what I will expect them to do, being completely genuine will allow me to develop much deeper levels of trust and establish key relationships from day one, I feel this is crucial to be able to both challenge and support the students throughout their learning and time at XP.

When I first started working within education settings it was important to me to feel like I would make a difference - even if it was just to one child. Over the last 7 years I have gained a vast amount of experience and knowledge through exploring and working within different age groups across the primary setting (in fact I've worked in every year group across primary settings). As a member of support staff I have tried my hand in a variety of roles to expand my skillset to fully enable me to support students in their learning some of those roles include classroom based Teaching Assistant, Literacy intervention TA and more recently changing schools to work and gain more experience in a more SEN based role a field that has always interested me ,with the new tools and knowledge I have

gained throughout the induction I finally feel that when I step into the classroom I will be able to make a difference everyday.

I have changed in so many ways since starting at XP. My ability to face challenge head on and look at 'it' as a challenge as opposed to something to worry about or to try to analyse. The outdoor expedition is quite possibly the hardest thing I have ever faced alone in my life, by alone I don't mean I felt like I wasn't part of the group I mean alone as me being a single being for so long I have had the support of my husband when facing new or unfamiliar. In my daily life for many years now I have very much been an extension of my children, everything I have done /faced/ worried about has pretty much revolved around them. To go away 4 days was unheard of. In 14 years I have never been away from my children for any real length of time. Being on the expedition allowed me to discover myself and really start to get grips with who I am as a person.

I was definitely not in a familiar zone, and crawling into the tent of the first night to sleep with 2 complete strangers is probably one of the hardest things I've ever had to do, but I did it and waking up the following morning I was relieved to discover we hadn't blown away during the night, I also woke up with a sense of achievement that I had made it through the first night. During the expedition I felt myself grow in courage and in confidence and was so amazed by the feeling of belonging to be part of a team, a member of crew. I found myself sat watching, absorbing everything that was happening around me. I remember waking up on Thursday morning suddenly feeling lighter somehow. I was smiling and I was conscious of this, the process had started to make sense to me, the importance of being pulled out of our familiar zone the need for this to happen to be open to learning and that is exactly what I was doing. I was learning...being in the familiar zone is easy, it's comfortable, it's safe yet in many ways it's stagnant. I discovered that being in the unfamiliar zone was ok, it was interesting, it felt safe with the correct support, being challenged was stimulating, exciting. Little did I know on that smiley Thursday morning I would abseil off a bridge suspended by only 2 ropes yet supported by something huge...CREW. So Friday morning arrived and it was our time to go solo. After Anna left me in my little spot I set up my tarp and got comfy and took in the view. I sat and thought about the whole week and how I had grown and the things I had learnt about myself over the week. In my time I wrote a poem that I'd like to share with you now.

In a field on a Derbyshire hill.

So much to see the beauties outstanding,
The long blades of grass blow freely,
The clouds tumble across the sky rolling across the long flowing peaks,
So many vibrant shades of green, too many to count,
Warblers tucked away in the hedgerow, sing their tuneful song,
Here in this moment, so much life surrounds me,
All travelling through the strong summer breeze,
Here in this moment,
I am still, observing, looking, feeling, learning,
Here in this moment I am me.

The following Monday we returned to school, this is when we were introduced to 'slice' we spent the majority of this week in student hat experiencing what an

expedition was like from the inside. I found this experience so rewarding I was amazed by how much I learnt and how far we came as crew in the space of this week. Overall I feel I have changed considerably over this process I am so much more self aware and I have started to rediscover my own identity again, I feel I am more confident, this is something I have often been able to display outwardly when needed but I can truthfully say I now feel it too. My daily outlook is positive one of excitement, wondering what challenges the day will bring instead of worrying about all the many things I need to make sure are done and the 10 million things which may go wrong. I know that as I face the new challenges XP will offer I will have the support of Crew and also be there offering the support back when it's needed. Most importantly and the biggest change is that I now feel like me.

- Clare joined XP East in 2017 as a Learning Coach

David

I've taught MFL in 2 challenging Sheffield schools for the last 23 consecutive years, and I've dedicated half of my life to reaching typical career milestones - form tutor, teacher coach, ITT mentor, Head of Dept, GCSE examiner, NVQ assessor and author of a Masters Level research paper. As a young, dynamic, energetic newly-qualified teacher who was passionate about my subject, I also invested hugely in developing my pastoral role because I saw developing positive relationships with students as pivotal to success in the classroom. Crew takes this to another level. I would argue that you can't describe Crew, nor watch Crew...you have to experience Crew, first hand, through students' eyes. I've tasted an expedition slice...but now I want the whole cake!

A year ago, on my initial visit to XP I was deeply impressed by the culture of learning and strong student adherence to character traits that were tangible and prevalent throughout the school. The ambassadors were exceptionally articulate and confident students, they spoke with genuine conviction and passion about their expeditions, they showed collective ownership of their learning and they articulated their experiences through a common language. My views of teaching and learning have been informed by my increased understanding of this shared terminology and I know that I now have to realign my own way of thinking to emulate the collective approach.

The induction process has radically transformed my thinking about teaching and learning and allowed me the time to reflect on my own practice in a far deeper way than I ever thought possible. I consider myself to be a naturally creative person, originally left-handed, usually the "token bloke" in a department staffed by women. For some time I've felt frustrated by knowing what I wanted - to explore teaching and learning free from the constraints of norm and convention - but until I began working at XP School I did not know how to achieve this.

I've discovered that through the design and delivery of project-based experiential learning experiences students are empowered to seek out the answers for themselves and that this can subvert the traditional role of educator and student. By accessing the untapped wealth of what students can achieve and presenting their re-drafted work before an authentic audience, prevailing conventional concepts of progress and attainment are tested and challenged. Furthermore, it appears that by pursuing collaborative lines of enquiry - before refining the planning and execution of the projects with others' contributions - we're only really limited by our own imagination as to what can be achieved.

The induction process has also triggered some guiding questions of my own: why hasn't this been done before? How could it be replicated on a much larger scale? How could my specialism be integrated even closer into the expeditionary learning model? How might the links with American Expeditionary Learning Schools be developed? How far can we challenge XP students' parents' concepts of teaching and learning? How far will my own learning have evolved five years from now?

When I'm asked what job I do, I used to say: "I'm a teacher", which was invariably met by "what do you teach?" and promptly countered with "I teach Modern

Languages". This would then invite unsolicited and uninformed comments from my inquisitor about the number of holidays that teachers get, how easy the work must be as they only work until 3.30 and then earn my retort: "Well, I stop teaching at 3.30 and that's when I start working".

And so the next time I'm asked the question: "what do you teach?" I will make a stand for expeditionary learning. I pledge to look my inquisitor in the eye and reply knowingly: "I teach children".

Eighteen months ago I suffered a catastrophic close family bereavement. As I had already lost my sister, I had become even closer to my mum and so for me this was a devastating life changing event. For two years I had struggled to lead a department, to enthuse, motivate and inspire both my team and my students whilst simultaneously acting as my mum's carer as she faced a terminal illness.

My mum's death acted as a catalyst to me making a significant change in life. Whilst I was powerless to prevent what sadly became the inevitable, I convinced myself that I was able to influence my destiny and take back some control in my life. I took a risk. I attended interview at XP School, determined to achieve greater self-fulfilment and persuaded of the primacy of my desire to enjoy better quality family time and greater job satisfaction over and above all other considerations.

Having negotiated a substantial pay cut and demotion to enable me to prioritise my life choices, I made myself a promise: if and when I were to be fortunate enough to join the XP Crew I would not step over the homeless man holding out a cup at the end of my road with my customary disdain. Instead, I would order him cooked food from a local take-away and offer it to him. Last Friday, without telling anyone, not even my own family, I did just that. I'm sharing this with you not in some Trump-like quest for forced and insincere adulation, but because it helps me to contextualise just how I have changed as a person - an element of compassion fused with the integrity of knowing that I have done what I said I would do, even though I was accountable only to myself. This intention was conceived during the four months that I was waiting to join the induction programme, and executed exactly a week ago.

XP has gifted me a fresh start. Since arriving here I have met some truly amazing and inspiring colleagues. I now share an affinity with the adults in this room, that transcends the physical boundaries of the classroom, or of the farmer's field, of the river valley or of the campsite. When I was tasked with helping prepare and serve breakfast before the 12 mile hike I experienced a profound sense of responsibility and accountability, and I was really anxious not to wake up late, or mess up the meal. I discovered that fear of failure and of letting Crew down was an unexpectedly powerful motivator, for although I could accept mediocre for myself I could not possibly tolerate substandard for others. If I did so then the consequences could have lowered morale and impacted on the performance of everyone.

The induction programme has significantly redefined my perception of myself and others. The very intensive nature of the process has encouraged me to position my colleagues' personal qualities above and before their role, status or designation. Overcoming the emotional, physical, and intellectual challenges that I have shared with Crew during the last three weeks has made me a better person, a stronger version of myself. It has fortified my resolve and determination

to take risks, and not to fear failure but to embrace it as and when it happens, and regard it as essential and integral to eventual success.

When I look at my recent self, hanging over the bridge parapet, I notice that I have gone full circle and I wonder what else I am capable of. I know that I have started to grow again, both on a personal and on a professional level, and the very fact that I am sharing my experience in this forum and with this audience reveals an increase in my self-confidence, a development of my self-belief, and an enhancement of my self-esteem. Being surrounded by such positive “can-do” people is contagious! I have a much more positive outlook, and I believe that I am happier and probably healthier as a result.

I’m not the fully polished version of myself and never will be, but like Austin’s butterfly I’m getting ever closer to becoming the final product. I would have liked to have had the confidence and the oral proficiency to deliver this speech without reading from a prepared script, but I haven’t. I can’t do it.....yet.

- David joined XP East in 2017 as a Teacher of Spanish

Debbie

I can't answer this question with any clarity yet. I'm still un-picking and unravelling my emotional ties. Finishing at my old school of 14 years on Tuesday at 1pm, 'starting' at xp at 2pm....

Learning Target 1 - I can complete my ELC without blubbing and crying....

I'm still in mourning.....I still need to process my divorce from my old school. My beautiful, dedicated, dear colleagues. Friends. People who I've stood shoulder to shoulder with trying to grapple with the latest CPD session which doesn't seem to have any reliance to what's best for the student. Simply ticking a box. Looking at statistics and data. Questioning, how does this make me a better teacher anyway? I've left them behind. And I feel guilty. Guilty for finding my new home, my new crew.

I need to strip back the layers of years of teaching using the 'traditional' model which is deeply deeply ingrained, to shift my focus from what I believed was expected of me, to what I believe is important to me.

Realisation that my faith in the current education system had gone, wasn't a gradual thing. It came swiftly. A jolting, eye widening shock, that I didn't actually believe a word I'd been saying for months.

My line manager had been, for want of a better word, 'grooming me' to take over her role when she left. I'd taken on extra responsibilities over and above my role as head of faculty. She'd recommend me for a senior leadership training course, the NPQSL. Deputy safeguarding lead, Safeguarding lead for staff training, Running whole school assemblies, running whole school celebration days. It was my thing. It was something I excelled at. It was exciting. It was flattering. It was what was expected of me.

I was at a NPQSL day last year. And reading through the Competency framework - number 2 "Modelling excellence in leadership teaching and learning" - I read...

"Someone who is strong on modelling excellence in the leadership of teaching and learning, consistently demonstrates and communicates their vision, passion and commitment to high quality teaching and its impact on learning."

This statement hung heavy for me.

How could I lead others not believing in the vision? How could I be passionate about a system I no longer believed in? I simply wanted to make a difference, be a positive role model, guide and empower young people to be the very best they can be and to be ready to succeed in the world. These are the reasons why I wanted to teach in the first place. XP is the way I want to teach.

Learning target 2 - I can realise I have new talents.

My meadow.....Thank you Anna.

Here I could have stayed all day. Just looking observing, watching the world drift by and being at one with my thoughts. Clear of clutter, noise, confusion.

Being a scientist, I busied myself observing and recording my surrounding. What sounds could I hear, what I could see, smell. A road due South. I know this is south because the Sun was rising in the East to the left of my position. How many vehicles passed by in a minute. There was a manmade structure, far in the distance. I made a note to check this out when I got back to camp. A radio mast I guessed.

Then I started to sketch - I wish I had a pencil and colours, a clip board. I'm not actually half bad.....I feel at peace, grown, lighter in spirit.

Thank you Anna.

I am so very proud of my sketches. I showed Dave. He didn't believe I'd drawn them. He'd never seen me draw all the time we've been together and we've been together for 35 years!

Learning target 3 - I can put myself in the position of the student

Learner hat.

I'm not comfortable with this, this expression of self through the written word, the spotlight on my open soul. And.... how do you spell soul anyway?? I puzzle, a distraction. A blockage to the flow. Just put pen to paper! Why haven't you written anything yet Debbie!? Now I feel vulnerable. Stupid, exposed. Can't I just speak for 6 min? I can do that! Why do I have to produce a narrative anyway!? I can't do writing, what if I spell something wrong.

"Have courage". A small whispering almost inaudible voice. "Have courage" - louder now, you are crew, you have crew, look at your crew, they're giving you their courage, HAVE COURAGE!"

Remind myself of Learning Target 1 - I can complete my ELC without blubbing and crying...

- Debbie joined XP in 2017 as a Teacher of STEM

Robbie

What do you remember of school? I was a goody two shoes, teacher's pet at school, and for me, I don't remember a single lesson.

I know everyone's experience of education is different and don't know if this a good thing or a bad thing, but I found education easy. I went 21 years before I first felt, what it was like to fail. I had never failed a test, got a detention or even knew what it felt like to be challenged. I'd bound my self worth and how I felt about myself to my exam grades and looking smart. I'd spent my entire childhood and young adult life being lectured at and succeeding. Yet, I had a different idea of what education should be. As much as I read, saw and believed in a certain pedagogy or way of teaching, putting it into practice was another matter. I had many ideas of what education should be, and then I started teaching. I was 21, looked 14, fresh out of university, had 6 weeks teacher training, and walked into a school in East Hull, on one the most deprived estates in the country. I entered a classroom with 30 bottom set year 11s, and suddenly I experienced for the first time in my life, massive, very public failure. This failure wasn't just a one off, I was humiliated every day for about 6 months. And it was the best thing that could have ever happened to me. Over time, I built resilience, took advice, learnt, reflected, experimented and worked harder than I had ever worked in my life. It was the first time that I had ever been challenged. Eventually, I found something that 'worked'. That seemed to be lecturing. I lectured because I could control the learning the students made and it was easier to control behaviour. I could use humour, personality and tricks from my toolbox to survive a lesson. I used gimmicks to get me through the day. I had compromised my beliefs about the purpose of education. Even worse, that is where I stopped really challenging myself again. I have then stayed in this risk free, what 'works' familiar zone mindset, where failure can be avoided.

I came into the teaching profession to make a difference. I've worked incredibly hard to do this. Despite my best efforts, using everything that I had learnt, I had failed to make a real difference. I have always had a sense of frustration and anger that my efforts have had little long term impact. I guess this frustration is born out of the fact that I have compromised my beliefs, played it safe, settled for what 'worked' and kept quiet when I should have spoken up, despite knowing that my school communities had let children down. I was afraid to be vulnerable, afraid to look stupid, and always comparing myself to others.

I taught with a knowledge deficit model of education. My view was that students came into my classroom with little knowledge or skills, and only I could teach them. I will share one example, which, when I think back to, makes me incredibly uncomfortable. I taught my year 8s about genetics and disease and they got very engaged. One student, following a class discussion about zombies, went home and for her own interest, spent a few hours creating a beautiful piece of work about the zombie virus could replicate in cells. I had planned to teach cell division the following lesson. My conversation the next morning went as follows:

Megan, holding up her work and looking proudly: "I missed I'm a celebrity get me out of here to do that."

Whilst I appreciated the enormous effort and quality that Megan had produced I had a niggling feeling in the back of mind.

Me: "How dare you know something that I haven't taught you yet?"

The last three weeks have changed the way I think. One quote we were introduced to early on resonates strongly with me: "A ship in the harbour is safe, but that is not what ships are built for."

I pledge to be more courageous; to take risks, to speak up when needed and to allow myself to be vulnerable. This is something I find difficult having never really allowed myself to fail anything before. And it is something that I couldn't do without the guidance and support of all of you. I know teaching is hard, its part of the reason I love it, but I am so grateful to know that when things do get hard, that I have an amazing crew around me who support me. But as well as support, will continue to challenge me and call me out when I settle for anything other than my best. I am genuinely excited to see and be part of a crew that truly changes young people's lives. If we continue to support and challenge each other, I think we can do some pretty amazing things.

In terms of teaching and learning, the process has unveiled the learning side of the equation more. I feel very lucky to have had the opportunity to become a student again. I will change the way I teach, to be more about student's learning. I believe that students can change their communities and the world, not just when they are older, but that they can make a difference now. So my classroom and expeditions I work on will reflect this.

In 20 years time, I want to ask my ex-students the same question in I asked at the start, 'What do you remember of school?' and I want to be blown away by how they still remember the expedition, the fieldwork, authentic presentations, real life products and the difference they made to the community.

The final thing that this induction process has taught me, is that:

"It is not what you do, but how you do it." Or going further than that, how it makes you feel.

A lot of this stems from Anna, and the way you are is something I aspire to be like. So thank you Anna.

I been able to experience the value in small tweaks having a profound influence on how I felt about an activity. A stand out moment was the giving of certificates at the end of the expedition in Derbyshire. I think back to school assemblies (even the word assembly makes me switch off) and kids being given certificates without meaning and receiving them without any emotion. A small tweak being given a certificate by a respected colleague and friend, for a really specific achievement or development, made the experience truly meaningful. These tiny words, actions or habits which are visible in XP are just the tip of the iceberg; they are the symptoms of the ethos and culture on which the school is built. An ethos which has a clear and unwavering understanding of the purpose of education. I believe in this purpose and I hope that I won't be to afraid of failure to accept anything less.

If I think back to my conversation with Megan where she showed me this great piece of work on the zombie virus. I wonder how I'd respond now, having gone through this induction over the last 3 weeks.

What would I now say to Megan?

Firstly, I would hope I wouldn't be surprised. I hope that I would expect incredible work and I'd hope that I have been able to re-framed my view of excellence and inside my students mind re-frame their view of excellence that exists, so that incredible work is the norm for every single child. I would know that every child when they walk into my class, has an incredible contribution to make.

Secondly, I wouldn't just tell Megan how proud I am of the effort she put in or of the quality of the work, I would show her. I would show by scrapping whatever lesson I had planned and devoting the entire time to a whole class critique. I would display her work to all, so that her work, that she worked so hard on, is able to be seen by everyone.

Finally, I would challenge Megan further. I would challenge her to run further with the topic which she clearly loved, and to run as far she could with it.

Thank you.

- Robbie joined XP in 2017 as a Teacher of STEM

Kelly

For someone who enjoys getting directly to the heart of the matter, I found this difficult to write. In truth, I think I came to education with a little too much baggage. For a long time I felt scarred by my experience of school, and ever since I got a job working with young people who were cast outside of mainstream education I did my best to help them in ways that I wanted someone to have helped me. It was as if I understood where they were coming from because I could empathise with their reasons why they withdrew into a culture where 'try hards' were despised and apathy was expected. It was a space where teachers were authoritarians who judged you and your mother on how white your school shirt was. I'll never forget working with a group of four toughened, scrappy girls, who could see in me what I saw in them as they lived on the estate where I grew up, but we didn't have to talk about that. For while decades apart in age, we shared some common ground, which was they and I had spent our childhood feeling degraded by learning.

For us, secondary school was a humiliating place. Using the new(ish) language of today's education authorities, we would've been called 'disadvantaged', but we weren't. What we lacked in social graces we gained in the feeling that we belonged to something - that was each other. We lived in a community that was once integral to the success of Doncaster's people; a pit village that while economically redundant was nonetheless rich in personality, humour, intelligence and grit. My four scrappy girls ended up working with me and youth offending services because they ganged together and did things that got them in trouble. Ganging up was how we differed, however, as I never truly joined in with anyone. Instead I more or less disappeared into books that helped me come to terms with how I was born in a place that couldn't decide on its expectations of me. It was as if somehow it was both right and wrong for me to be the same as everyone else yet also stand out from the crowd. Perhaps I was selfish, but because I kept my distance from school and people around me, I managed to carve out my future by learning only what I felt was important to stand out for. The result of this was that nobody else could tell me that I wasn't bright enough to read, write or think about the things that only other people - the ones who weren't like me - should.

At 20 years old and after having a few underwhelming attempts at alternative education, I had my first child. I then got a good job working with groups of teenagers and later worked in community development for a number of years. I had my second child in 2007 and then, in 2008 both myself and my husband were made redundant and we consequently lost all of the symbols of a family who were doing things right (whatever that means). I was completely devastated, but after a while this began to ease and I was left with a sense of growing excitement at the thought of starting life all over again. Consequently I applied to do a degree in history and English literature where I hoped that everything I had learned from books and my community fell into place. I got hooked on the thrill of achieving good grades and became a 'try hard' myself who got a first class degree and a full scholarship to study for a Masters degree then a full scholarship for a PhD. For a while I fell in love with the idea of being a lecturer in a York university, who rode a vintage bike to work and had students over for dinner and enlightened conversation; I truly thought I'd opened up the floodgates to another

life. In truth, however, I think I allowed myself to become so carried away by my academic success that I forgot what I was really good at. That changed after I lost my mother and father. Neither of my whom had much to show for their lives, and I simply couldn't understand why they never felt the deep rooted yearning to prove themselves like I always had. Eventually my research work became just another source from which I could find answers to this question; I was entirely consumed by it. Some say that when you grieve for who and what you've lost, you look back on your life to piece together memories that help make sense of who you are. Yet it was only when i looked back on my life and not theirs that something clicked into place - I was everything I had once despised - a teacher, only I had been teaching myself and all the scrappy kids I once worked with how to learn when no one else could. Teacher training wasn't exactly a breeze (I don't think it ever is), but even after years spent fuelling my work with empathy for kids who didn't fit mainstream education, I knew I made the right decision.

All of this culminates here, in this room with people I met only three weeks ago but feel like I've spent a lifetime with. Therefore, when I think about how my ideas about teaching and learning have changed during this gift of an induction process at XP, I can tell you that even in this short period of time I've learned how to learn alongside people who would never make any child feel the way that I did. You've made me feel welcome to be part of this exceptional (and let's be frank) wonderfully bizarre, emotional, and hilarious process for which I truly cannot thank you enough. Therefore in answer to the question how has this induction changed me as a person - the answer is quite simple really. I've spent a long time hating what school can do to young people, but with you here at XP, I recognise the same richness in personality, humour, intelligence and grit that I felt within the community I grew up in. it is because of this that I will spend my time here loving the good that our school can do for young people instead.

- Kelly joined XP in 2017 as a Teacher of Humanities

James

Outward Bound states that "Education is tied unequivocally to experience". Over the last few weeks, throughout the induction process, I have... shared a tent with a stranger. Cooked for 15 people in the pouring rain. Abseiled off a bridge. Visited a Gurdwara - serving Langar in Doncaster centre. Opened up to people about my feelings and emotions. Cried. Made friends. Witnessed them cry. Learnt about a topic I had no previous knowledge of. Presented to an audience of parents. Taken a bearing. learnt how to tie new knots and gone 4 days - 3 nights unwashed, unkempt and wearing the same clothes.

I have shown courage when speaking honestly - when sharing my opinions and ideas. I have attempted to be respectful of other people's skills - of their strengths and of their weaknesses - of their fears. I have Crafted a poem, a windbreak and a Crew meeting - taking steps to ensure the quality of each task was as high as I could make it. Doing my best - doing what is right by my crew and being honest with myself has meant that I am able to say that I have acted with integrity over these last 3 weeks and in times of challenge I have shown compassion for my fellow crew members and for those less fortunate than myself.

Did I possess these virtues before I began working at XP? Yes. I believe I did. So in that case what has changed about me in this regard? In honesty I believe that, for anyone with any sort of moral compass, these qualities are (for want of a better phrase) common sense. After all, you cannot reasonably argue that showing courage or integrity for example is ever a bad thing! However, in the hustle and bustle that is every day life one can easily lose sight of common sense (one can allow the urgent to overtake the important) - Losing sight and perspective of what, in their heart of hearts, they know is right and wrong. In this sense, my moral compass has been re-calibrated. In the last 3 weeks I have been presented with opportunities to live these virtues out and in doing so this has allowed me to step outside of myself for a while, take stock of the things that I do on a day to day basis and, as such, reset what I believe in and what I stand for.

According to my wife I'm sleeping better - which I attribute to two things; Firstly that I'm more content with the work that I am doing and the cause that I'm fighting for but also to the fact that I am using my brain more - something that I felt starved of in recent weeks, months and years. In hindsight this is probably why she would occasionally come home and find that I had engaged my brain in other ways - surprise decorating, building decking in the back garden against her wishes... buying a stinking, worn out old horse box and converting into a mobile bar... that sort of thing! I was bored. Unchallenged and in my opinion under utilised.

I have also found myself telling people about my day, not just because more people have asked but because I am interested in telling them. This is because I feel energised again. I feel I have a sense of purpose and that my contribution will not only be valued by those who know me best but also as part of the greater picture. I feel like I have stepped into what I always believed education should be and a place where I can be myself - my imperfect but try damn hard with the best intentions self.

As a crew, whilst on our Outward bound experience, we alluded to a similar notion. We spoke of feeling like we had previously been assuming the role of 'who we are supposed to be' as opposed to who we actually are. Don't get me wrong, it would be unreasonable, I feel, to dispel the notion completely of wearing certain hats and behaving in certain ways according to our company. However, the extent to which I already feel like I can be myself within my new role and surrounded by new people is nothing short of liberating.

Being myself is always something I have had to battle with somewhat. As I'm sure we all have? I have always been comfortable in my own skin, made friends relatively easily and expressed my opinions etc but in a sporting environment character traits, physical features, skills and attributes are highly scrutinised and honed in upon. When sport becomes about winning and losing, as it inevitably does beyond a recreational level, then learning curves are extremely steep and extremely ruthless. Ultimately, although you may wear the same colours and share the same changing room as someone that same person is often who you have to compete with most - and a strong personality can often triumph over ability. As such, in trial games for example or when playing for representative teams, where my capabilities might have been lesser known, I would often retreat into my shell and potentially find myself being overshadowed by a 'larger than life' character who would compensate for what they lacked in ability with outspoken confidence that I could only dream of. I discovered though that this was life. The world was a football dressing room. Those who you thought 'had your back' - perhaps didn't - and as such I adapted. I stuck my elbows out, stood up straight, spoke up and put walls around me so that when I attended job interviews for example or trial sessions with new football teams my voice was heard and my opinions noted because I felt that what I had to say or do was valid and that my natural inability to gloat, flaunt what I had or be brash shouldn't inhibit this.

I've learnt over the last three weeks that what I have to say is valid but that the world doesn't have to be a football changing room. I've learnt that if the correct culture is fostered then it isn't necessary for anyone within a community to have to stick their elbows out or shout over someone in order to be heard or valued. Where a culture of courage, respect, craftsmanship & quality, compassion and integrity exists - then everyone is allowed the opportunity to shine in any form and in fact are supported boundlessly in doing so.

I feel indebted that my philosophy in this regard has been reaffirmed and my ideas surrounding teaching and learning going forward will most definitely reflect this. I will help our children to understand that the world can be a ruthless and unforgiving place and that they must find a way to raise their head above the parapet and be counted but that they need not jeopardise their integrity in the process. I will insist that they pursue their dreams with tenacity and vigour whilst never forgetting that they are not the finished article and that learning opportunities should be cherished at every level. I will strive to ensure that every individual child feels valued and that their quirks and eccentricities are harnessed so that they are comfortable in their own skin and can be the best version of themselves. I will ask the children to show the courage to embrace challenge, to leave the safety of the shore and to go and do what they were made to do. Sail

to any destination that they dare to dream of - no matter how treacherous the course may seem.

- James joined XP in 2017 as a Teacher of PE

Joe

I have been spending the last few days thinking about the person who I was when I was a student; to help me understand how beneficial the concept of crew can be. When I was as student I was allowed to become a passenger, a passenger with a fixed mindset. Completing what I needed to keep the wolf from the door but still meet minimum expectation, slipping under the radar, never pushed. Partly due to the culture my school cultivated, but also the values I deemed important.

I was concerned with individual achievement, and thought intelligence was linear, something you were born with, and ultimately the factor to determine success. When I failed, I was a failure, when I succeeded it was because I thought it was within my ability to do so, and character traits were something you had, not something you could develop.

Luckily I had many opportunities in the years that followed in further education, life experiences and teacher training to change this mindset for me, but old habits die hard. Even in this last week when faced with new challenges outside my comfort zone, I found myself thinking the fatal 'I can't' but in the words of Carol Dweck (2010) becoming is better than being.

When I started teaching, I knew I wanted to develop and prepare students for adult life. Not just to pass exams, but to develop them as people. Using my own meandering experience of school life as a reminder of the problems I wanted to address, I began my career.

Due to the route I took, I was able to learn through failure and practice what I preached by adopting a growth mindset. I started as a science technician, then teaching assistant, then cover supervisor, trainee and now a qualified teacher. At each stage I would reflect on when things went wrong, ask for help, gaining more experience each time. concerned only with getting better, rather than what I already was. My practice is the product off all the great teachers I have had the pleasure of working with and who have helped me.

After qualifying, I became frustrated with the landscape of traditional teaching. I felt something was missing and that what I was doing contradicted my core values. When I stopped developing as a person and practitioner I knew it was time to change.

Fast forward to starting XP's induction process. As we made our first crew circle, there was something niggling in the back of my mind. I was fear that I wouldn't understand. I wouldn't understand why we were going to be running around the woods.

I had no idea of what I was getting into on the way out to Derbyshire. I packed my phone charger because I genuinely thought we were staying in a hostel. I even said that worst case scenario, I end up with top bunk. Only to find myself topping and tailing with my new boss later that night.

In actual fact, the harder things got, the more we developed our sense of crew. I think that the wind and rain even helped the cause, and certainly aided my understanding of the guiding question. When faced with difficult situations, we had nothing but each other to rely on. We subconsciously became a network, developing a community of trust and compassion. Motivating, caring and supporting those in need. Taking solace that others were sharing in this experience and ready to help if needed. Nobody riding coat tails, nobody slacking off. Nobody a passenger.

I felt comfortable taking risks. A risk for me is sharing my feelings in a circle. The integrity of the group made this possible. When the group shared their feelings, it led to sharing ideas. This was a light bulb moment for me. What does running around the woods have to do with building a school? Because of this crew culture, we were comfortable sharing ideas. Building on each others thoughts, trusting that our opinions would be considered. This led to collective innovating ideas to reach shared goals. People were not pulling in multiple directions, they were innovating together.

The teaching and learning CPD over the last two weeks has really highlighted things I need to improve in my own practice. I have missed so many chances for students to lead their own learning. If I had used my voice less, and spent more time using good protocols that allowed me to stand back and listen, then my students would have benefited so much more. Not just academically, but as people.

Even things as small as presenting certificates and trophies to each other; rather than from the teacher, shifting the onus onto the pupils. Although collaborative learning and Kagan structures is something I am familiar with, this training has highlighted so much more scope for me to improve. Collaborative learning needs to be an integral piece of lessons, taking a whole school consistent approach to application. I really can't wait to put these new skills into practice. This experience has given me the motivation to lead by example, by continuing my own learning.

The experience of the last 3 weeks will allow me to move forward as an XP educator, to guide, support and equip our students to be great people.

- Joe joined XP East in 2017 as a Teacher of STEM and PE

Jamie

'Come to XP' they said. 'You're going camping' he said. 'In order to do things differently, we need to do things differently' she said. 'I'm totally with ya!' I said. Yet, how can running about in the woods lead to thinking about adopting changes to my repertoire of teaching and learning? 'After all I'm a seasoned pro!' I said. Well, I was wrong.

Profound. That's how I would describe it. And by this, I mean the last 3 weeks. I have grown both professionally, and personally. Yet, I wouldn't have previously admitted that I needed to.

After all, I am a teacher with 15 years experience that knows. Yep: 8 years of 'Senior Leadership' too that knows: Advanced Skills Teacher, Head of History, Head of House, Assistant Headteacher, and Vice Principal... but then again - so what? Those previous lives are not part of my life here at XP.

A key learning point for me has to be that we leave our egos at the door. There is no room for such illusions in Crew. And do you know what? I'm relieved. I'm relieved.

A clever man once said that 'knowing yourself is the first step to wisdom', and I have explored my personal and professional self in ways that I had previously thought were not possible. And for that, I'm feeling fresh. Fresher than I have felt for 15 years. But I have achieved this by experiencing the very difficult and different stages of what can only be described as 'The honest Softlad from Barnsley's guide to being a better soft lad from Barnsley'

Stage 1: 'Plausible Denial.'

Dear self... pretend that you're hard. Rock hard in fact. Never admit that you don't like camping, and that you don't like the rain. Don't talk about your emotions in public. You're rock hard remember. You're the Head of School. Keep up the pretense up at all costs. At all costs.

Stage 2: 'Pretend you're not really bothered.'

Dear self...act like those experiences in your personal and professional life haven't really bothered you.' Dependency!' That's what people need! Stiff upper lip right? A self assurance that glides through the predetermined realms of consciousness, and sticks too fingers up at compassion. You have 'difficult conversations' with people remember? You apply pressure, you get results. That's what leadership's about, right! Right?

Stage 3 of 'The honest Softlad from Barnsley's guide to being a better softlad from Barnsley': 'Accept beginning to question yourself'

Dear self... Now that nature is beginning to get the better of you, and now that you've seen that others have left their egos behind: are trusting you, listening to you, respecting you, confiding in you... why not begin to question those things that have passed: accept them, move on and move into what really matters. You

now have hope - that the real mission...the real educational movement is upon you. Question yourself, and question yourself well. This is the chance to put that dent into the universe. Embrace it.

Stage 4: 'Relax, and breathe...'

Breathe. That's what Anna said. Breathe it in, but more importantly, breathe it out. Breathe deeply. Breathe in the sounds of the elements...and as you exhale breathe out the tensions, breathe out the tensions and the strains and the fuzziness. Acknowledge that the dawn is upon you. You're becoming your real self now. Breathe.

The final stage - Stage 5: 'Humility? It's OK'

So now you're at the stage where you may as well just let it flow. You're at ease with Crew. You were, and are, interdependent now. Your connections are such that you are accountable to them, and they are accountable to you. Embrace the challenge of this authentic - this authentic level of accountability. You're part of a new culture now, and this culture is deepening. The culture means that it's OK to roar in front of everyone in a circle, because everyone has shed a tear (whether literally or metaphorically) The softlad from Barnsley's emergence is OK. You're not bothered by this now. You're not rock hard. You do find it difficult to talk about those overpowering emotions, but the reluctance has passed. The pretenses are no longer kept up at all costs. You've breathed them out.

As a person, I am changing. During my Solo I realised that I had reached a stage of acceptance. An acceptance of what I can bring, an acceptance of what I can do, and an acceptance of who I am. I'm also accepting of those things that I can't do, and what I need to be and do in order to grow - both professionally and personally. My sketch of the scene during the Solo was accompanied with a quote from Richard Ashcroft's song 'Lucky Man' "...I'm stood here naked, I smile and I have no disgrace with who I am."

Nevertheless, I am not satisfied. I still need to fight. Fight those certain aspects of my persona that shy away from the true qualities of courage, compassion, quality and craftsmanship, respect and integrity. Ego may still have to be wrestled with, as Vice Principal Billy Big Bananas no longer resides in this human frame of mine. For that, the struggle continues, but I have him under control.

So as we leave our beautiful and splendid bubble of induction, I go through my own personal mandatory kit list for the voyage ahead, and tick off the essentials, but throw away those things that need to be left behind:

Courage: check

Ego: nope

Compassion: check

Quality and Craftsmanship: check

Canadian Geese: Check

Illusion: nope

Integrity: check

Respect: check

And 'check' to the softer lad from Barnsley who was the first one to roar in the circle.

...and now I'm checked in.

- Jamie joined XP East in 2017 as Head of School

Claire S

When considering how to answer the question “how have my ideas about teaching and learning changed”, I would like to begin with a view of my own mind-set. When given a maths problem over the course of the ‘slice’, I heard myself say “I’m not a maths person”, and felt myself crumbling under the pressure of being faced with something so difficult for someone that ‘can’t’ do maths.

However, through the process of independent grappling and with the collaboration of my peers, I was able to recognise my own ability. It appears that I was harbouring a fatal “fixed” mindset. Despite being familiar with Dweck’s ideas, and even having lectured many students before on the necessity of “growth” in the face of challenge, I had not embodied my own advice.

This made me think about the power of exploratory learning and the amazing learning journey that XP students are a part of every day; it is a place where everyone can be anyone and good at anything, which makes XP incredibly special. As Einstein said “It’s not that I’m smart, It’s just that I stay with problems longer”, and this is something that I feel has a strong connection to what I’ve experienced so far. I’ve always known that ‘smartness’ is learned, developed and nurtured, but I’ve never really connected with this on an empathetic level, and now I have I know that this will have a positive impact on my teaching.

I’ve recognised that learning at XP has no boundaries or limits. My learning in this short space of time has taken me abseiling, caving, climbing, hiking, camping. We’ve been testing water quality at Lakeside and in the river Don. We’ve read challenging scientific texts and met with an expert in his field. The whole exploratory learning method has sparked my curiosity and left me wanting more, and I think it’s fair to say that I’ve even surprised myself with how much I know, and can remember, about ‘water quality’.

But even more importantly, this experience has been much more than venturing outside, because what we have done with these learning experiences through reflection has, for me, been even more powerful. The continual process of reflection and exchange of ideas has allowed for me to explore my own mind and unlock my own potential.

Arguably, the most challenging task that I have faced was a two hour SOLO in which we were asked to write a poem, draw a picture and sit in silence, by a lake, to reflect on our Outward Bound experiences. When this task was revealed, I’ll admit that I thought it sounded like madness, and the thought of two hours alone filled me with dread. It appears that sitting with my own thoughts was even more terrifying than throwing myself from a viaduct on a piece of rope!

However, I learned that taking this time is vital in exploring my own creativity and making sense of the experience overall. In the business of life and the daily need to tick things off of a ‘to do’ list, somehow, I’d forgotten to stand back, look at the world, and think.

On reflection, my teaching career so far has been driven by results. I feel quite guilty to admit that I have fallen into placing much greater emphasis on 'teaching to an exam' than working on providing immersive learning opportunities, and grade-chasing over building student character. I felt like I worked hard for my students, maintaining a relentless passion for their success, and the students in my care worked hard for their grade, but I was working harder still. I have to consider, will my students remember anything I taught them after their exam is over? Perhaps not. Einstein also said, "education is something that happens after one has forgotten what one has learned at school", but I believe that at XP it's different, I believe our students will, and should, remember what they have learned in school.

I am amazed by the powerfully positive ethos at XP, generated by the core values that are inhabited by every crew member, and this has had a huge impact on the way I look at teaching. Core values and character targets are much more than the school's tag-line; they ARE the school. Now, being a crew member myself, I look forward to helping to create some amazing young people.

I use the word 'crew' with purpose. During this journey I've felt like I'm a real part of something special. I feel grateful to have met some wonderful people and through our shared experiences (and a rollercoaster of emotions) we have developed a special lasting connection. Our guiding question on Outward Bound was "what is crew?" and I've come to realise that 'crew' is a network of support, but moreover 'crew' is manifested through the individual that embodies the XP character traits, which in unity works to create a place, and a state-of mind, that knows no limits. This understanding of 'crew', and being a part of 'crew', has changed me forever.

Before I came here, I worried about the practice of offering 'acknowledgments' and 'apologies' in crew meetings. I thought, "will I really be able to do that?" But, now I recognise that this is a necessary part of building this respectful working environment in which people care about each other, and reinforcing the core values that are XP. I now question why this ever concerned me, having experienced how empowering it feels to receive an appreciation, and how courageous it feels to give a meaningful apology.

Drawing to a close, during one of our 'slice' debriefs we were asked to summarise our feelings about our journey so far into one word. I chose the word "enlightened". I do not use this word lightly. This word shows that my eyes have been opened, but it also represents my willingness to embrace the journey ahead with a new and improved, open mind-set. I will continue to develop my 'can do attitude'. I will also stop and think when needed, not to think about my 'to do' list, but because I can and I should.

When answering the question of how have I changed? I feel like I know myself a little better, and I feel more willing to share with those around me. I'm full of excitement and energy for the future. I feel happy to be here, and feel like I've already made some amazing new memories full of laughter and learning. I am now looking forward to learning even more and being the best version of myself, as I embark on the next part of my journey as 'XP crew'.

Our part of the 'slice' is over, but I can safely say that what I have learned here 'in school' will stay with me forever.

- Claire joined XP in 2016 as a English Lead

Julie

For me, the word 'teach' was interpreted as a teacher in a classroom delivering their specialised subject for all the class to learn. The teacher is there to teach, and the children are there to learn. Children cover all areas of learning on a daily basis, and by listening to what the teacher has to say, learn their compulsory subjects. Wow, how my ideas of these words have changed!

2 years ago I applied for XP school for my eldest son. It appeared new and exciting. As the process progressed and I attended information evenings I was completely hooked with Gwynn and Andy's ideas and passion for this new school, their aims and expectations and the whole idea of it. I wanted to go there myself!

As luck would have it my son had a place and he was soon off on his first Outward Bound journey. At this point I never imagined I would soon be part of the crew on my own Outward Bound journey!

When parents would ask me knowing that my son was a student at XP and what it was like I would say "it's a new school with a different way of teaching. They do expeditions and more hands on project based learning. There will be 50 students in each year".

Following the slice, I can now delve so much deeper into this answer. I can now say that XP is an amazing school that provides a variety of learning opportunities which will make your child curious about learning and engage them. XP is about building character and resilience; about facing fears. At XP children work hard, get smart and be kind.

This illuminates the journey that I have been on through the 'slice' and through my own experience of Outward Bound.

Imagine if you have a fear of heights, you climb over the barrier of a bridge, lean backwards and rely on only a rope you are in control of to lower you down, imagine you are afraid of small dark spaces and fear being trapped in a disused mine!

Now imagine you are part of a group that show, compassion, integrity, & respect that give you encouragement and as you see them use courage face their fears and similar ones to you that so you feel compelled try these new experiences, to open your mind and explore out of your comfort zone, to help each other, to discuss learning so we become leaders of our own learning. This is Crew. Crew changed me.

During the last two weeks of being a student at XP I have recognised that the words 'teacher' and 'learner' are so much more exciting than my above interpretation suggests. I used to think you had to learn at the same pace as everyone else, this week I have had a much bigger insight. Indifferent from the standard way in which I was taught at secondary school, Expeditionary Learning

at XP delivers a rich curriculum through project based learning and offers so much more than I could have ever imagined. It's opportunities are endless.

As a learner I felt I had time to reflect, to explore my thoughts, to learn at my pace as work was shared and a sense of ownership was adopted over a period of time, our work was positively critiqued by us as a crew, to produce a final product.

At XP, teachers give students time to reflect on their experiences, experts from outside sources and further afield are invited in, bringing a sense of reality into the classroom. Learning Targets are set and teachers check for understanding to find the student's pace and ability to allow differentiation.

Most importantly XP work together as crew. Without learning about crew and being part of it I would not have faced my fears on Outward Bound, by adopting the character traits makes me more confident in being part of XP.

I realise that teachers are learners too as we all came together as Crew, to face challenges during slice, as Carl Rogers said "The only person who is educated is the one who has learned how to learn and change" and I can certainly say I have.

Creating a product to be proud of and to present it in front of the XP students showed them that we can do the same and was so rewarding. I don't recall my teachers ever coming together to do a presentation or production of any kind to us!

Connection and explorations with the natural world gave me time to reflect and be close to nature to find my inner self. This helped me understand how students learn. Using protocols such as building background knowledge have enabled me to absorb information that I didn't think I could store.

When trying new experiences I can keep an open mind, I now know that to actually achieve something you would not initially put your hand up to, or volunteer to, you need to physically see it and be faced with the challenge or new experience.

I never thought I would produce anything artistic until I tried! Through being given the opportunity to do so, I have learned that any one of us can become great people, a genius in anything, it is not inherited we just need to be able to see it by changing our mindset and believing we can.

I have Learned about self discovery, I never thought I could create a product that I would be proud of other than my children. I have skills I didn't know I had. I am more confident, I feel that i fit in with the whole of XP as a crew member, and I will always aim to show craftsmanship and quality.

I feel so lucky that I can share being part of XP, and even more proud that my children will too. I know I made the right choice.

- Julie joined XP in 2016 as a Learning Coach

Andrea

Good evening, I am Andrea Goddard. I am a Learning Coach at XP. I was a maths teacher for 8 years prior to this. I stopped due to a fear that I wasn't enough.

For many years I have struggled meeting new people in small groups, I even struggled with going to parties with people I know. Before going on outward bound, I was clearly nervous. Not about the physical aspect - about meeting the new people. How wrong could I be? They are incredible people and it made the experience ever more rewarding. Even whilst discussing this Educator Led Conference, I had a discussion with Polly about the idea that my husband and I could go and do these things, but wouldn't gain as much with just the two of us. Variety is the spice of life. Together we make more possible for not only ourselves but our students.

The Outward Bound experience was incredibly useful, I got to see people at their best. When they showed their most courage. On the 2nd night, we were asked to identify the character traits and how they were being used. I expressed how in awe I was with everyone being so courageous because I generally don't find things that scary and on reflection this was a load of rubbish! However I didn't relate my fears with courage, but with me simply being daft!

When returning to XP. Julie was sharing things from her SOLO, and during the time that she had, she picked quotes that signified some of us to her. Given my struggle with others in the past, she quite rightly picked:

"No man becomes great on his own. No woman becomes great on her own. The people around them make them great"

So how have my ideas about Teaching and Learning changed?

I have more compassion for the students, I have always been respectful and completely honest to them. But. I was the student that didn't read quite as fast as everyone else during the slice. This challenged me, there was a responsibility to do well to allow everyone to succeed, not just me! The sense of urgency is a powerful tool. Also Gist statements are very useful! I need more practice on this.

At a previous school I witnessed anchor charts. They are like the synapses that connect the parts of the nervous system with the brain. However, never having had much chance to share good practice, I just didn't get the point! Even though I have a good memory, when it fails (as it does now and again), an anchor chart really helps you to quickly associate with other pieces of information to get the juices flowing again. I also expect that it could be very useful as a planning tool.

I've always preached about group work and even used it. But never felt the power of it working effectively. Until now! Which is also one of the greatest parts of XP, the chance to work collaboratively and share good practice for both staff and students. By simply spending time with my crew members I've learnt a lot about education and myself. Education is a team sport not an individual endeavour.

I have always been a competitive person and I've always found most of my drive in this mindset. I found that I was angry after the PSA because I know I can do better! However in practice, I only ever contemplated using peer competition rather than competing with oneself. The seemingly simple question How can I make it better? Putting the ownership and responsibility back on the student. I also understand reflection is an enormously

important process in this - try your hardest, allow yourself to try and fail, it is how we learn.

I have been given the chance to work with others in different circumstances through: crew building games, hosted gallery walks, reading with a purpose, BBKs, reading the expert texts and creating a Public Service Announcement. Of course all of the above culminated in the sharing of information, some more successfully than others. For me, the outcome was more to do with feeling as though I do have ideas/thoughts to share. I am able to be comfortable around my work colleagues which is an amazing feeling.

I also found writing this difficult because I like to be succinct. When in conversation I summarise rather than expand. Why use 1000 words when you can say the same thing in 100. Yet, when working towards the PSA I realised when I consider informing others I over do it (as long as it's not about me), including points that weren't required to answer the Guiding Question. But I did it-I clarified my own thinking (with a little help from Julie).

Throughout my experience in XP, the Outward Bound and the slice, as with all staff here (I expect). My thoughts have changed about our guiding question "what is crew?".

Having started here in January I had heard it used by both staff and students alike. CREW, we get up the mountain together. This gave me a predetermined idea which I have built on. Anna informed us that it can even refer to a time of day. In the first instance it was "we enable everyone to achieve to their fullest, Together we are stronger." which on reflection. It just doesn't cut it.

Crew is my extra family, they are the people who catch me if I fall. Encourage me to strive to be the best I can be and through working with them I have found more self-belief. We join to make more than a team, we ensure that working with our students enables them to show who they are and help them to realise their full potential, which I expect to be awesome things. We work for each other and in the end we grow bigger & better. Being both educators and students, helping each other through sharing our experiences and strengths. We inspire each other to know more, be more and care more.

With reference to Learning targets:

I feel that I can keep an open mind when experiencing new things-you have to be open minded to explore your full capabilities. You don't know until you try it. What's the worst that can happen? As evidence, on Tuesday when Anna told us we were going to paint my knee-jerk reaction was oh-no I even said it out loud, but this was in response to the thought I cannot paint, not the task, which was very enjoyable. I kept an open mind about the SOLO sitting for 2 hours writing and drawing, but I would've preferred to have been sat on my tractor to do it-clears the mind of bad feelings and allows your mind to wander.

So what do I need to work on?

In general terms, there's loads I would like to work on, but for XP. is "I can run greetings, games and initiatives." I feel I need help in locating ideas for this, I have seen many excellent examples, but has anyone started to make a list and instructions of them all?

In closing I would like to share with you my 'I am' poem that I formed during the solo, which has only grown through the slice.

I am a climber,
I am a rambler,
I am a person who can converse comfortably.

I can assist others,
I can accept assistance,
I can be me around everyone here.

We are climbers,
We are rambler,
We can discuss anything together.

We help each other,
We welcome help,
We draw on each others diversity.

We share a common goal,
We scaled the mountain,
We are crew.

- Andrea joined XP in 2016 as a Learning Coach. From September 2017 she took on some teaching responsibilities.

Sophie

I first visited XP. in March as part of my initial teacher training programme and by the end of the day I had written, completed and sent off a job application form. It is fair to say I was blown away. Several standout moments on that day that were significant in leading me to submit my application. In particular, I was delighted by the enthusiasm of the crew members, impressed by the interaction between them, the courtesy and respect they demonstrated for one another was beautiful to witness. It was apparent even from brief observation of classroom teaching and crew meetings that XP. is a community where staff and the student body grow and develop together. I was confident that in terms of my own development as an educator I would benefit immensely from the opportunities to work alongside staff and students at XP.

More profoundly to enable you to fully understand my journey into expeditionary learning I have to share with you my experience aged eleven. Theoretically I had the potential to make a great transition into secondary school. I achieved exceptionally well in Year Six, I made up for lost ground and had a new found confidence. I was following my two older sisters into a school where my mother had been a governor for several years. When I arrived I found that I didn't just dislike secondary school I hated it to the core of my being. I cried hysterically about it. I was one in over 1,000 pupils but I might as well have been one in 10,000. I felt invisible, anonymous and I was certain that was how I was supposed to be. Of course I adapted, I put up with it, it's what you do, but I can honestly tell you until Year 10 I didn't enjoy a single day of it.

At this point with what I know now, I can tell you that what I was yearning for was a community where I felt secure, staff who wanted to know me for who I am, peers who would seek to understand me not to judge me. Aged 11 I didn't know that school could feel like that, look like that and be experienced like that. These deficits would have been met by what this environment offers to our crew members. Some of what I buried aged 11 I have had to re-examine, it's ugly, like a piece of coal, but if I keep pressing into that it can become a diamond. It has been and will be what motivates me, it will keep me going through the tough demands of being part of the staff team here. I am utterly thrilled that I have been equipped to ensure that each and every student I will come alongside here will not have to endure what I experienced, learning will be so very, very much better than that.

Having experienced something of the approach adopted at XP, I embarked on the expedition slice and staff induction with enthusiasm, excitement and a measure of trepidation. Over the past few weeks we as new crew members have been on a significant and challenging journey learning the art of educating through Expeditionary Learning protocols and practices. We have been pushed to our limits, we have grappled with complex text, we have shared personal and meaningful experiences, we have developed a growth mindset, we have created and presented our own PSA, we have laughed, painted, danced and even been to Whitby's for fish and chips. But most importantly we have experienced what it is like for students at XP. We have walked in their shoes, not just a trip round the block, we've walked miles and it has been good!

Immersing myself in this has been an intensely emotional experience and throughout the process I have discovered so much more about myself. I realise now, that in many ways I had a fixed mindset, confining myself within the parameters of what I thought I was capable of and subconsciously reminding myself of failures and struggles. When I discovered that we were doing a maths workshop my first instinct was 'I CANNOT do that'. After collaboration with Tom and Julie who went through the method with me I'm delighted to tell you I did it and better still I can repeat the process! I have learnt that basic ability can be developed through dedication, hard work and a willingness to try. I appreciate the value of growth mindset and how vitally important it is to encourage students to be open to difficult tasks and believe that they are capable of exceeding their own expectations.

An Expeditionary Learning design principle that I have grappled with the most over the last two weeks is solitude and reflection. I am naturally reflective, I enjoy times of solitude, in my experience it can be both surprising and disappointing what flows from this. One of the most powerful realisations that I have come to as I have reflected is the number of techniques, strategies and approaches that I need to UNLEARN. I feel like a butterfly coming out of it's chrysalis. I am leaving behind a leathery old shell that had confined me to many practices that I now see of no value, or worse, potentially damaging. I have new insight into the perils of questioning techniques that afford a teacher a tick box opportunity to evidence progression, but risk a young person feeling desperately insecure. I am delighted that such practices hold no place in Expeditionary Learning.

The provision at XP. is entirely different. Now having had experience I believe Expeditionary Learning as a style of education offers a more meaningful and authentic learning process than traditional routes. I am thankful to Anna and my crew members for past two weeks which in honesty have taught me more than I learnt over the course of year. When I came for my interview I met a panel of students who were charged with the task of assessing my suitability to become a member of staff here. I'm told their verdict was "She get's us, we want her". I was of course delighted by this, the more I explore about XP the more I can say, I get this and I want more of it!

- Sophie joined XP in 2016 as a Teacher of Humanities

Andy J

Before I started at XP, I thought that I was a pretty good teacher and I was doing good things. Students liked my lessons, we made some really cool things and I enjoyed having people visit my classroom. I developed all kinds of tools and frameworks for students, but the more I developed the more I had to develop. Students came to rely on the support that I was building for them, and when it was removed they struggled.

In staff rooms we talked about the 'problem with education' - spoon feeding the kids was making them totally reliant upon us. But we carried on - giving students model answers, discussing "tricks" for passing exams, getting groups of students in a hall to copy out exam answers that we were giving them, telling students exactly which words to add to a piece of work in order to hit the mark scheme. Getting all the students to make the same thing because it met the exam criteria.

And I thought that all of this was fine.

I'd been exposed to plenty of new ideas over my teaching career. Lesson plans, marking students work, and not going to the pub at lunchtime were all concepts that were introduced to me during my first five years of teaching. In recent times I had the privilege to work with new staff who had brilliant ideas and these were shared through training sessions after school and in conversations over lunch.

But I couldn't see how these applied to me.

I was doing fine, I was a good teacher, my students liked me and my classes. I didn't have time for reflection with students - we had deadlines to hit. I couldn't risk giving more control over to the students - I didn't have the budget, I didn't have the time, and I didn't believe that they could do it whilst I maintained control. Visiting XP in the stadium gave me a glimpse of what could be done but I still found excuses. They're younger than me, they're better teachers than me, the students have special powers.

It wasn't until I sat down in the drama space with Marc and Kate and a bunch of friendly strangers who would become my Crew that I started to realise that I could do it.

The outward bound was great fun and our guiding question - "what is crew?", like so many other things in the last two weeks, became more clear and more relevant. Experiencing the strength of Crew relationships and the power of the protocols that were being modelled so beautifully by our teachers allowed me to begin to recognise the parts of my own practice that are effective and the things that I need to adjust or just chuck out of the window.

So to my guiding question for this talk - How have my ideas about teaching and learning changed over the past two weeks?

One thing is a realisation about my own practice. Many of my most satisfying classroom moments have been the times when I could stand at the side of the

workshop and watch a class just go. Seeing students making progress, helping each other, being safe. But I often felt during those moments that I should have been doing something else, working harder, doing... more. I realise now that those moments were satisfying for me because they were powerful learning experiences for those students - probably more powerful than when I was "teaching" them how to work.

The second change to my thinking and my practice is to allow time for silences. The kind that I used to find awkward - that I always tried to fill with conversation. The first few times that Anna and Marc just sat, waiting after asking a question totally threw me. Were they waiting for me to speak? Did I miss something? What should I be doing? It took a while for me to recognise the need for reflection time and the respect necessary to wait until everyone has had a chance to contribute...

...and then wait a little longer just in case!

The final change comes from something that Claire wrote during the first session we had together on the Friday before we went off on our outward bound expedition. An expectation for our work at XP was that we would be helping the students to "learn to learn to learn." I had to roll that one around my brain for a long while before I could start to make sense of it and I think it will take a while before I'm confident that I'm doing it. Talking about it on outward bound, experiencing it in the slice and seeing it as I've toured lessons this week has made it clearer for me.

I need to stop answering students questions for them and give them space and time to work it out for themselves.

I need to trust in their ability to solve problems.

I need to stop deciding what they won't be able to do and start to guide them towards things that they don't think they can do.

Alongside this reflection about teaching and learning we've had many learning targets since we all started on June 3rd but I've picked out two that have been particularly relevant to me.

The first was "I can reflect on my relationship with XP character traits." The keyword for me there is reflect, and it was the outward bound that opened that door for me. My first entries in my field journal were single words or bullet points. By the end I was filling pages with cramped text about my thoughts and feelings and drawing pictures of trees. Writing this speech is the culmination of this journey for me and I feel ready to share that reflective experience with our students. I've worked in school where values are 'words on a wall' but I've never worked anywhere where those values are understood and reflected on by all the members of the institution every day. Until now.

The target that I'm still working on is "I can develop rigorous learning expeditions." I'm desperate to get into this one! I struggled to get to sleep on the day that Andy and Gwyn offered me the job because there were so many ideas whirling through my head. I've even infected my wife who keeps showing me things she's found on Twitter saying "could this be an expedition?" Now I'm here it's even worse... I can't wait to build a massive map with Beth, build swords with Paul, rockets with Martin and Marc, a sculpture park with Gemma and Polly,

put on a play with Sophie and Claire, and find time to sit down with everyone else to help me to get all these ideas out of my head!

In summary - I've changed a lot, there's more to come, and I can't wait!

- Andy joined XP in 2016 as Design Technology Lead

Paula C

Apprehensively, I arrived at XP school 2 weeks ago with what I thought was an open mind, with regards to the fortnight to follow. How little did I know what a huge journey was ahead of me.

Having worked in education for 20 years I have seen many changes along the way, some good, some not so good and some dreadful. However, what I have just witnessed, been part of and experienced has made me feel like my blinkers have been removed. My mindset has changed. There wasn't a flash of lightning or a thunderbolt it was a steady and gradual understanding of how all the different ways and techniques used on the outward bound weekend and at XP school, focused upon making it realistic and getting the best from everyone. I have now had the luxury of witnessing this within the classroom too. I have seen how the continual use of learning targets, broken down to meet the needs of all, are implemented, I have also had experience of being a student, relying on these learning targets (including the supporting targets) which has helped me with my understanding and alongside this has extended my knowledge on a particular task, activity or expedition. This experience has given me a lot of food for thought, allowing me to look at my own practices and how I have taught children previously, giving particular thought to the EL design principles.

Having been given the opportunity to spend time within the school and absorb the positive and upbeat atmosphere has given me time to reflect on how the structure that is in place, where I still currently work influences how my work colleagues treat each other, and how this reflects on some of the classroom practices. I have seen and felt the welcome that was extended to me from all staff at XP, even those I had never met before. For this I am eternally grateful yet I still wonder how they knew who I was when we first met, as there was no photographic evidence then!!!!

Experiencing the way teaching and learning is approached at XP makes me feel extremely positive for all the children that will be given the opportunity to participate in this way of teaching and learning. I have felt vitality and enthusiasm returning to me after losing my oomph amongst all the test papers, tick boxes and tantrums.

Protocols and practices have come into my life, as have expeditionary learning design principles. I have been introduced to go round, popcorn and quiz quiz trade alongside text coding, jigsaw, grapple and many more. As an educator and a learner I see what a vital part they all play in students engagement understanding and growth.

Walking around the classrooms and witnessing many protocols and practices taking place I decided as both an educator and a learner I was going to take this one step further and quietly talk to several previous students of my primary to see if they felt the same enthusiasm I was seeing and feeling and whether, to be perfectly honest, if they endorsed what I was thinking. It was a 100% resounding yes.

In my particular case I am joining XP as a learning coach for a young boy with some complex needs and a very involved background. I will be honest, I was dubious when his parents told me which school they had in mind for him, only because I didn't know the mechanisms of the school. Looking back how narrow minded was that? With a forward thinking and ever increasing open minded thought process I can now see how he will have the opportunity to become totally immersed in his expeditions and crew . I also envisage that he will grow, and I will continue with my growth when we both become a permanent part of your Crew.

Having spent 2 weeks with such wonderful colleagues and experts I know I have changed as a person. I have done so many things that are way out of my comfort zone, pushing myself to the limit physically and mentally and taking part in activities that terrify me (this included), but I have come out of the other side still standing, feeling proud and courageous- It is now a case of I can't DEFINITELY becomes I can. I have felt confidence emerging again.

Reflecting upon and exploring my comfort zone has been an education in itself. Reflection is not something that comes particularly naturally to me, or is it that I have previously not really allowed myself to engage in it?

I have found that I have come a long way over the past fortnight as I have been given many opportunities to reflect. If someone had told me 6 months ago that I would be leaving a job I had been comfortably ensconced in for 15 years, I would have frowned and thought what on earth are they talking about. If someone had told me 6 months ago that I would be hiking up mountains, abseiling off bridges, tunnelling into caves and baring my soul to a group of strangers I would have laughed out loud.

Challenges galore and so so far out of my comfort zone. But here I am 6 months later having done all that.

However I would not have done any of it without the encouragement and support from a great bunch of people who pushed me to "rise to it and face the challenges head on".

Reflecting upon the words comfort zone I know that I have experienced a lot of feelings over the past fortnight and without and without been given the opportunity to work collaboratively with others I know I wouldn't have been able to explore these feelings as much as I have. I have felt humility, fear, excitement, ambition and trust, to name but a few but I have been openly wanting to share these feelings, as I now know others have had the same feelings too.

A moment of paramount importance to me and a memory that will last forever was a member of our crew declaring during one of our activities on the outward bound, when I was struggling greatly with my comfort zone, "We are one crew, one team and we are all in this together". Yes we are.

I have enjoyed laughter, being taught, absorbing knowledge and listening. I have experienced taking part in tasks as a pair, a small group and as a whole group,

enabling me to work co-operatively with others. As we did at the outward bound we have naturally fallen into roles in the classroom and on our fieldwork, rotating to suit the given task. I have been able to answer questions if somebody needed reassurance with their work, as they have all done for me too when I needed my understanding reinforcing. Going back into a classroom situation as a learner was out of my comfort zone. It is many years since I was a student, and I am much more comfortable being the educator however after this last fortnight I think I can say "I can work co-operatively with others to explore my comfort zone."

Keeping this in mind I have spent some time reflecting upon whether I have constantly kept an open mind with regards to all the new experiences and feelings that have come my way and I can honestly say I don't think I have. Not totally. I think in a couple of instances I have struggled, and maybe even been narrow minded. For example once or twice I have found it easier to keep quiet than to join in verbally and on the outward bound I found my mindset drifting towards the flight side of the fight or flight syndrome. Luckily it didn't stay there and it drifted back. I think all this though is part of the same jigsaw- comfort zones and open minds.

As our fortnight is almost over and unfortunately I have to return to my old school, albeit briefly, I would just like to say that I feel I have come a very long way in a very short space of time and for this I will be forever grateful. Thank you.

- Paula joined XP in 2016 as a Learning Coach

Tom

I wondered how I was going to open this ELC when I was told we were going to feedback about the impact of these past two weeks on my ideas about Teaching and Learning I would have expected to have said that my ideas would have changed dramatically from my teaching during these past 37 years.

However I think that one of the major things that this induction process has done, is bring out the 'latent' project based learning creativity in me.

As a practical based learner from my background in PE and Sport in general, the ability to do things that are hands on, that seem relevant to everyday life, and build skills, then the last two weeks have been a brilliant experience for me.

To explain further, I need to tell you that I have not been at the 'chalk face' so to speak much in my current role, during the past few years. But annually I have usually been given an interesting group of students for Maths that no one seems to want.

My last Maths group consisted of 11 students all boys who were not unable, but were removed to my 'care' shall we say, as the learning of others was being disrupted due to their inability to 'conform' in the way expected in lessons.

They were disengaged, could see no relevance in Algebra or Geometry for example, or in fact any other mathematical process for that matter, and always gave the answer that they 'couldn't do it' when asked.

Obviously I still needed to ensure that they were 'taught' the relevant topics to ensure that they could access the examination. They understood the need to pass if possible as they would need to continue their Maths studies until 18 unless in employment and that was certainly something they did not want to happen.

Initially I found that linking things to money was a hook with these students and made Maths seem real for them. They were always asking how much I earned for example but they knew nothing of Tax, Insurance and Pension payments. Apparently, for them, if you earned £500 a week that's what you got - Oh if life was so simple!! However when I asked if they were to go into the corner shop and buy 4 cans of lager at £1.75 each they knew exactly what their change would be from £20, but ask them to work out $20 - (4 \times 1.75)$ they reckoned they couldn't do it!

Their processes were the correct mathematical skills and made the concepts real to them and they started to realise their potential and began stopping the 'I can't' statements.

I then decided to do a mini project over the five Maths lessons a week. They were to 'decorate' the classroom! Not literally, but wouldn't that have been great if they could have. That would have been an amazing 'product' from the project! See I'm already indoctrinated with the need for producing a product!!! The task was to paint the ceiling white, have a feature wall wallpapered and the other three walls

painted in a colour of their choice. The floor was to be carpeted with carpet tiles and they were to come up with an estimate or a quote to present to a colleague who would come in to decide on whom he was going to hire for the job.

The results were brilliant. Students were engaged, they worked collaboratively, developed their writing skills, researched the difference between a Quote and an Estimate and learned a valuable skill for life in the need for decorating - and I'm sure us men know all about that. I mean why do we need to change the colour scheme every 5 minutes!!

They needed expert guidance at times regarding wallpaper drop for example with patterned paper, which mathematically was actually a hard concept for them, but they all produced in groups their Quotations.

I will never forget the final groups quotation. When all the others had given theirs they went £20 lower than anyone else. When asked how they had come to that total one of the group answered. 'Don't know but I've undercut him to get the job'!! My dad says most people will go with the lowest quote! The fact that they had even discussed Maths with their parents was massive in itself and showed the power of engaging and inspiring students in a task that was relevant to them. After all is this not what we do this job for?

This process is already embedded at XP and as I said, has not so much changed my views on Teaching and Learning, but opened my mind to the many different ways that through collaboration with like-minded colleagues, inquisitive and motivated students who are not afraid to fail to move forward, who redraft, redraft and redraft enabling them to achieve great things.

The experience of Crew would also have been massive for these students who could have gained so much from the processes and protocols that I have been introduced to these past two weeks and this is where I think my personal development has been impacted upon most.

The engagement with and ownership of your own Crew must be a wonderful thing. I now know much time is wasted in most schools in that 20-30 minutes where most students are maybe, one day in a Year Group meeting, and dare I say it usually wasting a further four sessions participating in meaningless 'activities'!

Crew extends the learning experience for students to all times of school life. Those 45 minutes will help us ensure that the students understand the ways of working and character traits that XP students all have. In some cases these traits need to be teased out to enable all students to be proud of who they are and enjoy the journey they are on to outstanding achievement.

As a sportsman I have always felt that I have been able to work collaboratively in a team and these two weeks have reinforced that belief to me. It has been great to watch others grow as people, be able to feel valued, give their expert input and become the Staff Crew of 2016. As I said I think that working collaboratively is a strength of mine and I have not been afraid to go out of my comfort zone to support and be supported by others. I never thought for example that I would ever be referred to as a Care Bear!! I have learnt how to Grapple - although I did

think Gwyn was challenging me to a fight when he first suggested the idea - and been introduced to many other Practices and Protocols over the past two weeks.

However I must say that when we reached the last task during our Outward Bound weekend away and were told that we were going to have to sit for 2½ hours reflecting on the weekend my heart sank. I never thought that I would have been able to sit that long in one spot 'reflecting', even though we had several tasks to do within that time. I was actually amazed how quickly the time went and what a valuable and brilliant activity! The need to have time to reflect during the processes, protocols and practices I now see will be a vital aspect of Expeditions.

I also know that following these protocols and practices is where I will have to concentrate and work harder to ensure that all these differing approaches are used to ensure that students enjoy learning and are engaged in sessions.

This is obviously a never ending learning process for staff as well as students as there are always ways to improve your practices and new ideas will always come your way - for example don't let Mark tell you he invented Tarp Drop, no matter what he has rebranded it as. He pinched it from Anna - or is that modelling good practice? After all we are here to give students those 'light bulb moments' but in doing that we must not be afraid to embrace these moments ourselves as they will undoubtedly come.

It has been a wonderful two weeks and it is just unfortunate that it will be further down the XP journey for me before I am back, but I can't wait for the opportunity to play a small part within the larger XP Crew.

To finish, two years ago we were all asked to have a quote on our classroom or office doors that students could read as they entered. My quote was from American swimmer Matt Biondi a multi gold medal Olympian

He said:

"Persistence can change failure into extraordinary achievement"

I think that XP can ensure that students who come here will gain those extraordinary achievements.

- Tom joined XP in 2016 as Leadership and Data Support

Beth

How many moments do we look back on? Photos taken offer a stillness, a reflection on an experience. There are moments in life I have frozen in that mental frame, for me education has had many snapshot moments.

In the last 8 years I have worked in a range of educational settings experienced the highs and lows that the profession encompasses.

Doncaster is where I started my career and arriving at XP. means that my professional life has come full circle.

Why an educator and not a teacher? Google defines a teacher as 'A person who teaches, especially in a school.'

Oxford dictionary has a slightly more specific approach stating a teacher 'Imparts knowledge or instructs (someone) as to how to do something.'

What determines the difference between a teacher and an educator? Both nouns, and both with equally ranging definitions.

Perhaps the most most profound difference is found in the following: 'A person that accepts responsibility for the educating process and educates by supporting and assisting an educand.'

So...rather than imparting knowledge you are encouraging students to expand their own understanding, and to develop a love of learn for learning's sake; that joy of finding out something new not because it's a chore, but because you want to. This ideal is embodied in the inquisitive nature of my nephew Noah who continues to amaze everyone around him-at 17 months old his obsessions range from spray top bottles to screw drivers.

I believe that this is the mainstay of any educator, someone who gives inspiration by mentorship impacting on the mindset of others and their ambition to develop academically.

To me being viewed as an educator rather than a teacher is important. Too often politics, flash in the pan ideals or individual teachers have been the focus of the education system, I, too have often fallen into this trap... forgetting that we joined the profession to enthuse, challenge and broaden the minds of the young people we see on a day to day basis.

It was John Donne who said 'no man is an island.' when considered in educational terms this becomes profound, the encounters we have with the young people in our care shape and mould the individuals they become.

If being an educator encompasses these attributes then it could be argued they have the utmost significance on those around them. However significance can be viewed from a range of realms. This concept both in terms of nature and that of

astronomy were pertinently and beautiful presented during the Outward Bound experience and Slice.

Climbing mountains (something I didn't honestly think I would have done at the start of the weekend) and surveying the landscape of the Peak District gave us the chance to experience both the awe and wonder of our surroundings. The shared experiences, no winners or losers, a joint adventure reinforcing how collaboration is required to achieve our goals.

While standing in a field well after midnight surveying the sky, may not have been appreciated at the time, was both humbling and enthralling in equal measure.

Carl Sagan spoke with greater eloquence than I could ever hope to about "significance" in astronomical terms. He wrote of the image taken by the Voyager 1 spacecraft at 6.4 billion kilometres from earth as it travelled through space on a mission to study the outer Solar System.

'The Earth is a very small stage in a vast cosmic arena...Our posturings, our imagined self-importance, the delusion that we have some privileged position in the universe, are challenged by this point of pale light. ...

It is the final words of Sagan that struck accord with me and it is this paradigm that I have returned to over and over again during the previous three weeks.

So although Sagan is correct in astronomical terms the significance of the role of people not just educators should not be underestimated.

However I wonder what or whom will determine the significance I have? I have yet to determine if I am to hold any significance perhaps this remains the biggest mountain both professionally and personally I have yet to conquer.

Until this point my pedagogical approach had been inconsistent, my frustration with education drew me to look for a new challenges, examining those both inside and outside of the profession I had experience of project based learning but without common threads, protocols or the culture I was striving for to hold everything together, I had lost sight of the craft I loved so much.

At XP I want to re immerse myself in that craft, to hone my role as an educator but also a person of integrity.

Marcel Proust stated:

'The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but having new eyes.'

I have been given the opportunity to see things differently so I resolve to not dwell on the past, present or future, or view each as checkpoints along the road on which I travel, and instead remain focused on the mindset that this role at XP has offered. I want to live and work in a post-snapshot age. I may still stress and worry about things (including this speech) however I hope it reflects my nature and intention to do the right thing and do things right.

- Beth joined XP in 2015 as a Teacher of Humanities

Kathryn

My name is Kathryn Welch and when I am asked what my dream job is I always say “When I grow up I want to work with older kids with learning and behavioural difficulties”. This has stayed my long term ambition for the last 6 years, until now, so how did it all start I hear you ask, well

In a previous life I have carried out a range of roles from Fork Lift Truck driver to Warehouse Manager. I left school at 15 with very few qualifications and a jaded view of education as a whole, feeling it was stifling and less than inspiring, like chewing on cardboard, pointless and unenjoyable. It took me another 10 years before I rekindled my love of learning. Then I found myself in the role of Warehouse Manager without any formal qualifications; and started on my academic journey, which I fell in love with, and from then on it was Education! Education! Education!

During this time I met an amazingly determined lady, who was to become a close friend. She was dealing with the authorities and ongoing problems with her young son; who happened to have autism alongside a lot of other medical issues. I watched this little boy grow and helped him develop both his learning and his social skills and felt joy at every step as he blossomed into an amazing young lad. I experienced the privilege of making a difference in a child's development and enjoyment of life and it felt meaningful and powerful. This then led me to a change of career goal and my extraordinary experience of University. I had decided I wanted to work in education, where I could make a difference but unsure how to get there and in what role.

I graduated from Nottingham Trent University with a shiny new degree and a newfound purpose in life. I often compare Trent to XP, with it's small class numbers and an overpowering sense of belonging. At Trent I knew each lecturer who also gave us tutorials and one to one sessions; mirroring XP where pupils are individuals and not just a name in a sea of uniforms. Where teachers and the Principal alike are immersed in teaching and know each child and their strengths, weaknesses and idiosyncrasies.

Today I am here to talk about what kind of educator and person I want to be at XP School, and at first that was a toughy for me. I can categorically state that I am relishing the opportunity to work at this ground-breaking new school and contribute to the enhanced learning that the pupils are exposed to throughout their secondary education. Since first hearing about expeditionary learning I have felt that this style of educating the future generation offers a more meaningful and authentic learning process than traditional routes. Having seen the theory put into practice first hand, with my daughter being one of the pioneering students already on board; and the results that are already visible in both her and the rest of the first cohort, I feel honoured and privileged to be part of the process as a member of the XP crew.

I realise upon reflection that I showed an immense amount of courage by leaving my well paid managerial position to start again from the beginning, the same courage shown by our first students and their families; when they chose to come

to a school that wasn't built, that had no history of excellence, no Ofsted Report and these young children had faith in just two men with a dream and a video of what a school should be like.

I had to dig deep and show the same courage during the Outward Bound expedition when I found myself at an all time low struggling to put one foot in front of the other; wondering what on earth I was doing half way up a mountain, when all I wanted to do was have a mini tantrum and refuse to move. However with some amazing support from my fellow adventurers and new found family, I found the strength to reach the top of the mountain and enjoy the view and a massive sense of achievement alongside them. What a proud moment that was and thank you my Crewmates for your patience and compassion, without you all I could not have made it.

In the past few weeks we as new crew, have also embodied the XP ethos of 'teachers being learners'. By completing the expedition slice, not only have we been learning about the size and scale of the universe, exploring our own significance, or lack of it in the bigger picture; but also on reflection I realise we have been learning the art of educating XP students using Expeditionary Learning protocols and character values, in order to build them into our own DNA. We have shown craftsmanship and quality by crafting our speeches, by collaborating to create beautiful work. We can deliver an expedition to our students and appreciate the struggle and the achievements they will make, as we have struggled and overcome challenges during our own expedition slice.

Having debated the question of whether we are important in the grand scale of things, it is my belief that although we are here at XP School; on a tiny planet in a vast universe, we can still choose to make a difference, we can still choose to be significant. In our ability to make education something to be enjoyed, embraced and proud of, we can fill our students with that same joy of learning and a deep understanding of whatever subject matter they encounter; because we as educators are now making the same journey.

Finally I can say that since coming to XP and experiencing the many highs and a few lows, together with my crew mates, I have realised that I am exactly where I want to be in my life at this moment in time; and that sound practices and inspired teaching can make a difference to children no matter what their developmental level may be. Dr Kurt Reinhardt had a motto "Grow to be what you are." This I have now done, so my dream job when I grow up has become a reality, and I have discovered that I am the sort of educator and the person inside who works best alongside my new family of inspiring colleagues and students, at XP School, in collaboration with leaders and members of the community, to educate each other, in order to produce courageous and respectful young adults, who are ready to take on the next challenge that life has in store. I am proud to be part of this school, I am proud to be Crew XP.

- Kathryn joined XP in 2015 as a Learning Coach

Victoria

Consider a new born baby, this little helpless being who until now has formed within the confines of its mother's womb. And now it takes its first breath. Its lungs fill into its chest cavity, which expands, the first of a potential six hundred and seventy two million, seven hundred and sixty eight respirations throughout its lifetime, and if it surpasses the generous age of eighty years, then many more breaths may be added to that number.

Within this same moment the baby becomes a member of our family, our society, our species, planet and our universe, and lets out a cry. It is communicating, and with each and every breath will develop a little further, immersed within its life-long environment.

Grasping, exploring and identifying, as the tiny neurones within its brain connect, sending messages to every cell of its body. The most advanced species known by mankind, to exist within this infinitely expanding Universe.

This phenomenal creature is our treasure, our future, our hope and our legacy. Life is a gift to cherish and our teachings shall be our legacy. A responsibility of which we are answerable for.

So as a parent and a person in education, with this in mind, I asked myself a simple question... What is good enough?

You see, we may envisage ourselves as insignificant in the great scheme of existence, but in doing so we are only observing with limitation, and abstaining from visualising the potential we can in fact conceive. If we narrow down our expectations of education and believe that teaching is merely a job, and learning is a chore, then we cannot inspire or have faith in ourselves as mentors, nor expect our learners to thrive under our wilted wing.

When I was a child, my lack of enthusiasm and engagement with methods of teaching had contributed to my mediocre success throughout school. As time passed, life experience, travelling and becoming a mother pushed me to gain academic status. Along this journey I learnt that I have a passion for education and a belief that learning can be made an adventure and not a chore. This pivotal experience occurred when part of my degree subject 'applied practice' meant creating engaging workshops for Children's University students. Utilising a range of drama skills within a team we promoted social and creative skills by building confidence whilst developing a unique learning experience that the children wanted to participate in. I loved this twinkle of a moment in my life!

Eventually graduating with a first class honours degree in Contemporary Performance Practice and as a partner in an engineering company, I had yet to find my niche. I was working part time at a school and I engaged in countless hours of voluntary mentorship, performance activities, and workshops. My introduction to XP School occurred by word of mouth. Becoming intrigued I decided to research it. I found that the concept of Expeditionary Learning appealed to me as it derives from the same principles as applied practice. So as the position of learning coach was eventually advertised I eagerly completed the

application pack, and when I was invited to join XP School, I was filled with anticipation and excitement.

This initial excitement however, became slightly diluted as I was informed that an Outward Bound Experience would take place. I must admit that the prospect of a mosquito infested tent at the base of a valley was not in the least bit appealing. However, armed with every conceivable fly spray known to man, I gritted my teeth and climbed a mountain. Yes, exactly that, I actually climbed a mountain, but not alone. The outward bound experience was the starting point to understanding the concept of team-work at XP. Mountains, wall climbing and rafts created a team, a crew. We pushed each other when our weaknesses reared their ugly heads and praised one and other when our goals and challenges were faced or conquered. No one was in front, everyone moved at the same pace, we stuck together. People of various ages and abilities, different backgrounds and life experience, this was diversity creating a fusion of strength.

Our final night was met with a warm fire built and created with the striking of flint. A sedimentary rock formed over time by compression. When struck against metal, elements become exposed to oxygen and sparking creates a flame. The flame in turn quickly creeps and becomes a fire, one which is fuelled by wood and oxygen, breathing in the air like the newborn baby. Growing and changing. And as we gave it fuel, we enabled it to grow, where it in turn provided us with light, warmth and an energetic glow.

A moment of reflection that evening brought about the question which I had earlier contemplated... What is enough?

Something may inspire you, but unless you share your passion and the knowledge you have gained from this influence, then what becomes of your finding? What is the advantage?

Joining the crew at XP School has to date already allowed me to stretch my boundaries and encouraged me to think outside of the box. Being a mentor will enable me to share my passion for learning and my knowledge. It shall allow me to evolve further by learning from my colleagues and the students of XP alike.

So what is enough...? For me, my colleagues and most importantly for the students of XP School? Enough is endeavouring to absorb the oxygen around us and developing as people, learning about ourselves as individuals. Striving and thriving whatever we face.

Enough is being kind to ourselves and those we impact upon, leaving a positive impression on those around us. For us the opportunity of life and its teachings is enough.

- Victoria joined XP in 2015 as a Learning Coach

Paul

I sat,
I sat down on the beach,
I looked out at the Ocean,
some time passed,
I looked at the waves thrashing into the shore,
More time passed.
I sat in the sunshine, I closed my eyes, the thoughts started to settle down, more time passed.
I then saw.

I saw the world, without me in it, i realised everything, all the suffering, thinking, questioning was my fault. I sat some more, I experienced wonder. Not a meta-physical wonder but a fleeting glimpse of sanity! I continued to sit and tried to keep my mind on the present moment. It was incredible.

This was the SOLO part of our outward bounds experience, Before i sat down i had so much baggage, when i stood up to leave my spot, I had none. It is not too much to say I was a changed man. I had found peace with myself.

I realised from this disassembling that part of who I am is vulnerable, it is this vulnerability that makes me whole. I realised I am responsible for my life, it is me who makes myself happy or sad.

My outward bound journey led me to have a direct connection with the natural world. I "saw" the natural cycles of death and rebirth around me, I understood the deep nature of cause and effect.

I had decided that the cycles of the natural world are not to be ignored, that Death and rebirth are essential, in fact - Death itself is the best advisor there is.

I have constantly battled with my own personal history through its highs and lows. Being part of a crew, and in particular the XP. crew, I have felt that I can be vulnerable. So instead of selling myself short, to protect my false image, I have begun to understand how losing my self importance makes a difference.

This shared experience has dug into who I really am, it strips you naked so what is left is really you. You can't do that alone.

Andy said to me, it isn't you as a maths teacher we have employed, it is you we want. I hope I can fulfil that promise with the respect it deserves.

I have come to discover during the course of this slice, that life has made me me, it is inevitable. The answer to am I significant is yes. The inflation theory of quantum mechanics shows that infinite universes must be created, as emptiness is forbidden by the rules of the game. Even though we are an infinitesimal speck in infinitesimal universes, our existence is not only inevitable, it is certain. I am, because I have to be. The only question left is, who do I want to be? I have this choice.

For centuries it was thought that the planet wasn't moving. It was believed that it was the centre of everything and the stars, planets, sun and moon revolved around it. We thought we were special, the centre of the universe.

It took a change in perspective, a use of depth and the geometry of the ancient Greeks alongside a desire to see things as they really are, not as we wish them to be to change this worldview.

As humans, We explored, we took risks, we went out into the deepest reaches of space. We have a natural inclination to find out where we are and who we are. This deep desire to explore and discover cannot be squashed.

We have from our exploration discovered the universe is far grander than we realised, its sheer scale is incredible. We have also worked out our entire history, all the way to when all life on Earth began. This didn't involve exploration, this involved something all human beings possess - imagination and the ability to keep asking why, to explore sometimes without that adult common sense or fear. It is these qualities that an educator possesses, the ability to raise questions, to challenge and to foster the imagination of youth.

We now know our place in time, we are 13.8 Billion years from the big bang, 27,000 light years from the centre of the Milky way Galaxy on a watery rocky world, orbiting a yellow main sequence star. We have come a long way as explorers to know this, in finding our place we have come to know how small and fragile we really are.

This, our physical diminishing, this discovery we are not what the universe revolves around, is our greatest achievement! We have gone from being the puppets of the Gods to a scientific civilisation that has determined our place in nature. By accepting our humility we can see the vastness of the cosmos.

XP. is all about exploration, none of us on this grand expedition have settled to be puppets of the Gods, or accepted things as they are, we have decided to have the courage and humility to reach out into the vastness of the unexplored.

I believe an Educator is someone who has gone on a personal journey into the unknown. Who has looked at their own ego through the lens of the Character traits. Their primary task is to help students overcome their own personal fears, as they have their own, and help them do more than they think they can.

An educator must face challenge, and rise to it, he must compete not against other teachers but against his own personal best in a culture of collaboration. He must slay the beast of self importance whenever it rises in them, as there is no place for ego. Humility is what I found on the beach, it is humility that is the door to real and true knowledge.

At XP. I want to make a stand for real deep knowledge of the self and have the courage to be honest and not fearful of loss.

Since i know I am significant, I don't just want to be alive, to accept things as they are, I want an amazing life, a life of exploration, experience and freedom. I can choose this, it is my choice.

In Washington DC, after my Solo Outward bound experience on Camp Lulu Beach, I read this quote from Thomas Jefferson, "I have sworn upon the altar of God eternal hostility against any form of tyranny over the mind of man." It is this freedom i fight for, the freedom to explore, the freedom to imagine, the freedom to see things as they are, not as we wish them to be.

- Paul joined XP in 2015 as a Teacher of Maths

Nicola

Let me start, colleagues, family and friends, by saying that XP is already woven into my fabric, and the fabric of my family and those who are closest to me. You may think that this means that writing this speech was somehow easier for me, but I would argue that it has been the opposite case; being close to something sometimes makes it more difficult to be objective, to analyse, to evaluate, but this is how I've tried to approach this titanic task over the last few weeks.

When considering where XP fits into my personal narrative, I must of course mention my husband. We are, and always have been, a partnership. Personally, I could not be prouder of the mammoth task that Andy has achieved over the last two and a half years, from the inception of the thoughts of XP with Gwyn, to the amazing, though still fledgling, school we have now. Being part of the process, the decisions to leave other jobs, and the raw emotion that has at times gone along with this has been a real rollercoaster. The opportunity to apply for a job as part of the Humanities and Arts Team that came up this time last year was simply too good to miss. Why wouldn't I want to be part of something as exciting, groundbreaking and unique as XP? Although I left my previous school at short notice with plenty of ex - students tugging at my heart strings, I haven't looked over my shoulder once.

I've been teaching now for 23 years, in 6 comprehensive schools in 4 different LA's, with posts ranging from classroom teacher, head of department, and preparation for SLT. Some might consider me a nomad, and indeed at several points in my professional life I have wondered if I would ever find my long - stay school, the one where I would put down roots and become the teacher everyone else talks about as having some kind of magical inner wisdom, or as being part of the furniture. At one point I thought I had found it, only to be severely disappointed. XP is my 7th school, my most daring school, and hopefully my forever school.

Being part of a team is just as important as leading one, whether that team is macro or micro, being part of the human race or being part of the community of XP. The human race on Earth in the scale of the universe is tiny, trifling, trivial. We know this, yet does it stop us striving to discover more? Does it stop us from wanting to be our very best in whatever we do? Over the course of my professional life I know I fit in, I know I can do this by being part of a team, I know I can help to support others in this goal, and I know I can help all students to be their very best as well.

To show and feel humility is a rare thing, taking part in the Outward Bound in late May gave me the opportunity for this; feeling other people's sense of achievement and at times suffering over the weekend started to build a bond, to build courage and compassion... to build crew. This is what our new year group will experience in Wales in August, and I don't think I've ever had a more powerful experience of teacher as learner. To feel a sense of wonder and amazement at the universe, being made to really understand this challenging concept through the delivery of the slice, also made me feel humble. I do not count amongst my strengths anything mathematical or scientific, though I am in awe at those who

do, and always try my best when students ask for help in these areas ; so to be told by Martin at one point that we were touching on ideas in A level Physics was astounding. This became a pivotal moment for me. As a result of the fact that I spent 5 years studying other languages apart from French at night classes at the start of my professional life, I have always said that I didn't want to learn any more. Martin's passionate delivery of the slice, and his craftsmanship and quality, has resulted in me wanting to do a self - study Physics GCSE (with a little help I hope!), and finding that love of learning again. Humility and not a little discomfort were also the feelings when I realised that the bar was set so high for us as crew throughout the slice, because actually this is what our pupils go through every day. They grapple and contend with concepts and texts with anticipation, problem solving skills, and sheer hard work. . So why should I react with true fear when the word 'equation" was mentioned? I looked with respect to the current year group of XP for an excellent example of what it is like to be out of your comfort zone, and get on with it regardless. I felt humbled. I felt reinvigorated. I felt reminded not to give students constraints.

Of course I hope to be significant as an educator at XP, just as we all hope to be significant in everything we do; what is the point of humanity otherwise? My universe is not XP, but a large part of my world is, even more so once our daughter joins us in 3 years time. This said, I hope to lead by example through still learning myself, to inspire a love of learning in others, to be part of a learning experience no matter where that takes place, to truly journey with all students at XP and encourage and support them to be beautiful people. So far it has been a privilege over the last year to have been a part of XP. If the next 23 years can only match my last 23 working with young people in education, I will be content, but I have the feeling the next 23 will outstrip anything I have experienced yet, and in that case, the word "content" sounds feeble. I will be fulfilled.

- Nicola joined XP in 2014 as a Teacher of Spanish

Martin

My growth as an educator starts with a mountain, and a leg. The sight of Jenny literally pulling her leg up Cadair Idris will never leave me. It is a physical embodiment of courage that has already, and will continue to give me strength when needed. And so it has continued to be like this working at XP. Time and again, just when I thought it was time to stop growing there would be another timely shot in the arm.

If someone grows on a solo alone in the wilderness and there is no one there to witness it, do they actually grow? Of course they do, don't be silly. However that growth is consolidated and validated only where they share their experience with friends. If you were to ask my wife, she would tell you I am not the best at talking about how I feel. And yet, in a circle, with my new friends I feel compelled to share. I now understand the equity and power of circles and the need to be a build and maintain a culture of respect. I know I still have a lot of work to do on my listening, but I am trying, honest!

The decision to step into the unknown with you at XP was always exciting, but I was scared nonetheless. To be laid on my back on day one, giggling after lights out in a tent with Marc put me at ease. This was going to be brilliant, of course I had made the right decision. That feeling endures and I have grown in confidence, not just in my own decision, but in the certainty that what we are doing together for the young people of Doncaster is something truly special.

I have grown in my knowledge and respect for other cultures. Teja's compassion, his sense of community and willingness to share was profound. I made jokes about stirring, though in truth, if I could be stirred in a such a way in just two weeks, then how great an impact must we be able to have with our students over seven years?

Jacqui's experience has been invaluable to the group. I remember her wonderful creation in the camp kitchen in Wales. At the time I thought, I could never do that. And I couldn't. The last two months have taught me to stop that nonsense and instead to think "I'd like to be more like that, how do I make that happen?"

I have learned some new expressions, in particular some colourful ones from Nicola, but my abiding memory of the slice is the moment when she first spoke to our students at our langar. At once faces at the tables were put at ease and I must admit to feeling a similar sense of release. None of my growth as an educator would have been possible without the support of my colleagues. I still need to be better at asking for advice and consensus rather than ploughing on, but I have learned to be a little more vulnerable, and to see this as a strength rather than weakness.

I have recaptured my enthusiasm for education. Each day I am surrounded by people like Gemma, whose passion is boundless, her positivity unbridled. Similarly this last week we welcomed our students for our transition day, at the end of which, it felt like I had gained back a little something that I did not know I had lost. It is difficult not to grow in such circumstances.

It seems an irrefutable truth that to be head teacher of an expeditionary learning school, it helps if you swear, a lot! Dr Mahoney's energy was infectious, as was the emphasis of culture which dripped from the walls of Springfield. I have learned that in order to succeed in creating a school culture you need to be able to walk the walk as well as talk the talk. In particular Stephen's openness and honesty made it clear to that offers of assistance came from a position of genuine solidarity, rather than a desire for us to see how fantastic their school or their way is. I have come to realise that this is the way to be an educator; you must be a manifestation of that which you believe, to have integrity and to admit to one's mistakes or failings, to talk to others about what you do and why do it without a need or desire to impress.

For their integrity in doing that which they knew to be right I must also thank Andy and Gwyn for my growth as an educator. I have seen what quality leadership looks like and now know that management is not the same thing. Previously I have perhaps focused too much on doing things right, but from them both I have learned that first you must do the right things.

Finally, any reflection on my growth during my time so far with XP would be insufficient without paying tribute to Anna: 'The empress of invisible rigour'. Any words I use here will not suffice but I must try. Actually the rigour that she has provided has not been invisible at all, it is present in every thought, word or action. She has shown me that there is more to me than I knew and I will not settle for anything less; I will become "Mr Follow Through".

I have a standard of Craftswomanship and Quality, one which I will aim towards knowing that I will likely never reach. But, my sails are up, and I have left the harbour, because that is what I was made for.

I'd like to end with a quote from Gilbert K Chesterton:

"The fatal metaphor of progress, which means leaving things behind us, has utterly obscured the real idea of growth, which means leaving things inside us."

I believe that children learn from who their teacher is, not just what their teacher says. The sight of the mountain, and the leg, and all the rest, will never leave me. I have grown as an educator because of who my new friends are and for that I am eternally and truly thankful.

- Martin joined XP in 2014 as a Teacher of STEM and is now Head of School

Marc

As a teacher and educator, I have always been ambitious. My greatest ambitions have always been for my students. To ensure that they receive the best possible education that I can give them, and to allow them to learn and develop as students but also as people has always been at the forefront of my mind. Enabling students simply to pass an exam or to gain a qualification has never been my motivation and I find this approach counterproductive. It always was, and still is my strong belief that we have the profound responsibility to teach the person, not the course. To teach the person is to not simply to impart information. It is to nurture young minds and make sure that they have the knowledge and enough wisdom to use it. As I quickly found out when leaving education; the world can be a cruel and unforgiving place and it's fast pace rarely leaves opportunity for those who are not equipped to face it. Perhaps before arriving at XP there was a confusion in my thinking and the struggle with what I wanted to do and what I was allowed to do made me less effective.

When I found XP, I literally found everything I had ever been searching for in my job, some of those things I had no idea I had been searching for; but I found them anyway (if that makes sense!). I've now had the chance to work with truly phenomenal people who have already taught me so much and that privilege has at times been overwhelming. My hope is that may return favour and repay the faith that has been shown in me. At this point I'd like to thank everyone who has been a part of my XP journey as it's all of you who changed me for the better as an educator. I struggle with what to call my time at XP. It's far more than just a job and it certainly can't be referred to as work. There's little toil and it doesn't feel like labour. So for now it'll have to be 'that place where I go everyday and do awesome stuff'.

So as I am reflecting, writing, speaking, I have found that my heart has always been in the right place and still is, which makes me glad. But now with XP School; suddenly, it's as though someone has switched a light on. In my previous role, I felt like I had reached the top of my game and fulfilled my potential. And I perhaps I had. There wasn't much I could do to take things further. In my previous role.

But here at XP, I have a new potential. The bar has been raised. Now I realise that there is still much to learn and so many ways to develop. I don't want this particular message to be confused. I never thought I knew it all, and still don't, but I also don't mean to say that I knew nothing. But it is my potential to know more and do more that has been raised. My time at XP has set me on the journey to fulfilling it, as large as it may seem. XP has not just made me want to become a better educator, simply it makes me want to become a better person.

If this is the effect just a few months has had on me. What this will do to the minds of our young people throughout their entire school career is mind boggling. Perhaps with no other frame of reference, our young people may not realise themselves just how tremendous their journey through school will be. Perhaps they don't need to know. Perhaps they need only know that there is more in them than they knew and will no longer settle for less. If I can be but a

part in making them see it, it would be one of the greatest privileges and honours I could ever expect. How I have changed as an educator is in some ways quite simple, teach less, educate more. The better I become as an educator, the less our students will need me. The greatest lessons we can teach our young people are those that foster their curiosity and wonder, sustain their courage and resilience, and embed the self respect and integrity that will make them leaders of their own learning.

That is key to their future success.

- Marc joined XP in 2014 as a Teacher of STEM

Anna

"Don't ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive." Howard Thurman - civil rights activist

I'm starting my response to the question "How have I grown as an educator these past two months?" with this quotation because in many ways this quotation was the start of my last two months, even though it came into my life well over a year ago. I used this quote as a closing statement I made in a presentation to a group of graduate students, and even as I said it I knew that I was a fraud. I was giving them advice that I wasn't myself living out. So, that was the beginning of the road that set me free from work behind a desk to the real and challenging work that has been these past two months.

Now, how have I grown as an educator these 2 months? (And, for me it is really 3 months, as I came into the UK in early April to get things sorted for the work ahead.) The bottom line is that I think it has given me my confidence back. You see, before I formally studied "education" (for my PhD), I think I had a natural instinct for teaching. I had taught in various settings over many years. However, the PhD process in many ways stripped me of many things. I don't know how it is in the UK, but in the US (and depending on the University) the process is very heavy-handed. It is based on critique and more critique, and not the friendly kind that we have been working on. It was often really mean, awful, degrading critique. It chewed me up, over and over again, and spit me out over and over again. Finally, it spit me out for good...but I was a changed person. Even though I had gained 3 letters, I had lost something more crucial.

So, fast forward to my involvement with XP. It has been like a resurrection for me, and I am not a religious person. I felt like I was able to take all of the things I had learned over the past 20 or so years and funnel it into one really great challenge. My work as an EL School Designer, my former teaching, my Outward Bound instructing, my work at NatGeo, and many other things came into play here. And, because it was a completely NEW challenge for me (meaning I had never been in on the start of a new school before) it was also really compelling. Compelling because I would have the freedom to put things together in my own way; compelling because I knew I was working with some people who were smart and who I trusted immediately; compelling because I had been thinking of leaving the field of education and so this would be one last attempt at making a difference with what I knew. And, lastly, I believed that to truly make it work, Andy and Gwyn and I would HAVE TO support one another and fill in for each other's gaps. I felt like I had a lot of knowledge and skills to bring to the table, and they had the passion as well as the confidence in me (among many other things, too, of course!).

And, this time and this work and you people have far exceeded my expectations. I can't be too sure what my expectations were now that I look back. But, whatever they were, they couldn't have come close to what we have done together. I know that I have given it my all. And, I know that the crucial things seem to be traveling across the space between us - because you all are really doing it!! Many IT's in

fact. You have come together as a very highly functional team. You take care of each other with compassion and a cuppa. You push each other's thinking. You allow each person to be who they are. And, you are brilliant with your students. I am blown away by the work we have done together. Through this work, I have gained as much as I have given. Though, how can I put a measure on my own confidence? I am walking away with a bit more swagger in my stride (internally anyway) and I am also walking away with the knowledge that I have so much more to learn. And, I am okay with that. I feel good about what I know and confident that I can learn what I don't. Lastly, I am really aware of what I don't know but not in a bad way; instead in a way that invites me forward and perhaps even into more school design work.

To sum it up, the Kurt Hahn quote which I picked sort of at random at the beginning and that we have lived into together, seems appropriate:

There is more to us than we know. If we can be made to see it, perhaps for the rest of our lives we will be unwilling to settle for less.

While I am not sure what life will hold for me once I cross back over 'the pond', I do know that I am unwilling to settle for less than bringing the best of myself to shine in the world. And, I am humbled by how incredibly much I seemed to have needed this challenge to bring out the best of me again. I thank you all for your patience with me when I have not been at my best, and I hope that my best is what you will remember. Some part of me that went missing several years ago is back, I think, and maybe even better than before. Thank you.

- Anna is our School Designer who created and led our first Staff Induction Programme in 2014