

PARALLELS

An Expeditionary Learning Program for Billund Kommune

Kulturskolen / Ungdomsskolen



Submitted by Mike Sullivan

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The following plan is the third document created in the process of launching PARALLELS, Billund's first Expeditionary Learning program, proposed for 2017. Two preliminary pitches were approved in October and November and this proposal provides a more detailed plan for the program, pending final approval in January.

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Introduction to Expeditionary Learning

“How beautiful it is to get up and go out and do something.”

- Kurt Vonnegut, author and former trekker
with [Cottonwood Gulch](#) expeditions

As an anthropologist and an educator, I believe strongly in the power of travel to inspire great personal growth and new degrees of community building. The exciting challenges that come with every change of context enable travelers to apply their present skills and knowledge in *new* settings and manners, thus enhancing and transforming those abilities with deeper learning, sharper perspectives, and stronger relationships. When such adventures are pursued thoughtfully and responsibly, travelers return home enriched and, in turn, they enrich their home.

But this model is not merely a personal passion and a hallmark of my career. It is also a widely-praised pedagogical approach with strong ties to the educational philosophies celebrated by **N.F.S. Grundtvig**. As Denmark’s most influential educator, [Grundtvig](#) pioneered concepts such as *lifelong learning*, *learning-by-doing*, and *education for the whole person*. He was also fiercely committed to *civic actions for the common good*, *equal opportunities in education*, and the powerful concepts of *folkelighed* and *levende vekselvirkning* – all of which comprise the foundation of Billund’s first Expeditionary Learning (EL) program.

Some of the additional Danish models that are currently informing this program include:

- [Den åbne skole](#) -- Ministeriet for Børn, Undervisning, og Ligestilling
- [Culture Adventure](#) – based in Copenhagen
- [Højskolendk](#) – based in Skanderborg
- [Svenstrup Friskole](#) – based in Nordborg
- [Morten Vinther](#) – teacher at Gerlev Idrætshøjskole

In 1992, a union of educators and researchers from [Outward Bound USA](#) and [Harvard University’s Graduate School of Education](#) created the Expeditionary Learning curriculum. As described by practitioners from [Tufts University](#):

EL recognizes “igniting curiosity” as a major pillar of education and seeks to cultivate a sense of responsibility and accountability in children, and highlight the need for action and creativity, while also fostering a culture of self-motivation and curiosity-driven learning. Finally, EL seeks to make all actions and interactions contribute to an environment of respect, communication, and collaboration.

A brief explanation of Expeditionary Learning is also provided by Svenstrup Friskole on their own web page:

Ekspeditions læring er en projektbaseret undervisningsform, der flytter undervisningen ud i samfundet og den omkringliggende natur. Eleverne skal f.eks. lære om skoven ved at se, høre, lugte og fornemme skoven og bagefter på friskolen gennem billeder, debat og underen. De skal ud og undersøge!

It is with this same intent – thoughtful and reflective while also deliberate and ambitious -- that we move forward with the process of launching options for Expeditionary Learning experiences for young people in Billund Kommune.

Stakeholders and Goals

This proposal recognizes that Billund Kommune is very unique and fortunate in many ways, but especially in its composition of small towns and international residents. The Expeditionary Learning program for 2017 builds on this very positive paradox and involves a variety of stakeholders, including:

- 1) All young people in Billund Kommune ages 13-18
 - a. Danes
 - b. Internationals
 - i. Expats
 - ii. Refugees
- 2) Billund Kommune, itself
 - a. Kulturskolen
 - b. Ungdomsskolen
- 3) Local and regional experts, representing various fields
 - a. Government
 - b. Business
 - c. Education
 - d. Services and Utilities
 - e. Arts and Sciences
- 4) The general population
 - a. Present residents
 - i. benefits due to a more dynamic, nuanced, and connected community through youth development and opportunity
 - b. Future residents
 - i. benefits for all in hosting yet another powerful and interesting opportunity for young people and their families, serving to affirm Billund's impressive offerings and notable ideals in successfully blending small town life with global visions, connections, and capacities

Below, is a list of the goals for PARALLELS:

- 1) Personal growth through new skills, knowledge, and experiences
- 2) Community building through intercultural connections and daily expedition life
- 3) Commitment to responsible action and civic engagement
- 4) Sustainable passion for meaningful adventures and informed perspectives
- 5) Enriching life in the Kommune and making it even more attractive to future residents
- 6) New fun, new friends, and memories for a lifetime

Personally, I am inspired to create and deliver the PARALLELS program in order to realize the above goals for all stakeholders, and to share the wonderful gifts of knowledge and growth that I have been lucky enough to enjoy through two decades of experience in both Denmark and New Mexico. In both places, I am building the program based on extensive personal and professional networks – networks which I continue to grow. But in New Mexico, we will have the benefit of working with [Cottonwood Gulch Foundation](#), a 90-year old non-profit educational organization which sponsors expeditionary learning treks for students and families. Since 1926, "The Gulch" has produced generations of change-makers, including:

- Senator Mark Udall (D - CO)
- Douglas Preston (author)
- Wenda Trevathan (anthropologist)
- Kurt Vonnegut (author)
- Senator Martin Heinrich (D-NM)
- Emily White (Google/Facebook Exec.)

Theme for 2017: PARALLELS

Simply put, anthropology is the study of human similarities and differences. It is grounded in the understanding that by observing and even experiencing new cultures, we learn not only about others, but also about ourselves and our own home – our own humanity. We grow greater respect and empathy, building an improved capacity for resolving conflict and serving the common good, both on the local and global stage.

Perhaps the Grundvigian concept that relates most directly to the ideals of anthropology is *levende vekselvirkning*. This is the notion that differences bring enlightenment, and that seemingly opposing entities can complement each other. The true and deep exploration of disparate places and peoples will actually reveal much that is similar.

It is in this spirit that the 2017 Expeditionary Learning program for Billund Kommune will focus on the *levende vekselvirkning* and parallels between two places: **Denmark and New Mexico**.

At first glance, the differences are quite stark. Denmark is a small, wealthy European country with low elevation and high levels of moisture. New Mexico is a large, poor, rural state located in the high deserts of southwestern USA. And yet through the monthly exploration of topics like natural science and cultural history, participants on the Expeditionary Learning program will start to recognize amazing similarities in the way humans have shaped their own cultures and landscapes over space and time.

In conjunction with topic-oriented workshops and travel, teambuilding experiences will play a large part in challenging students on a more personal level. Above all else, the program will provide real opportunities for the exchange of ideas and actions, both inside and outside of the group, at home and abroad.

Logistics

The 2017 PARALLELS program will be carried out as follows:

- Monthly workshops will be held at each of Billund's ungdomsskoler for the young people in that particular city. These workshops will tie into the theme for that month (see below) and will be as hands-on as possible, generally with a focus on New Mexico. The regular schedule will be as follows during the third and fourth weeks of the month: Hejnsvig (Monday), Vorbasse (Tuesday), Sdr Omme (Wednesday), Billund (Thursday), Grindsted (Tuesday).
- Once a month, a weekend expedition will bring together students from the different ungdomsskoler and highlight the Danish side of the month's theme. These expeditions will be general enough to be of interest even to students not planning to participate in the trip to the US.
- Depending on the budget, an additional expedition to Iceland could be offered in August. This could either serve as a "primer" expedition for the students going to New Mexico, or as an alternative finale for students who are unable to travel to New Mexico due to high demand or for personal reasons. As another "land of fire and ice," Iceland offers many similar parallels in terms of geography (New Mexico) and culture (Denmark).
- The program will culminate in a trip to New Mexico in October. In order to qualify for this (free) trip, students will be required to attend a certain number of workshops and weekend expeditions. Should any event have to be limited to a certain number of students, preference will be given to those whose participation has been most consistent. Students attending the August and October treks must take part in the workshops before and after each of the expeditions.

2017 Schedule for PARALLELS

Despite established themes, I provide a variety of workshop topics and expeditions with the intention of discussing and determining final choices with the students. Should they wish to do so, students will be enabled and encouraged to pursue a subject of their choice. This may take the form of a book to read, an artist to follow, a skill to learn, a song to write, a project to build, or a story to tell. Of course, alongside this decision process, any budgetary concerns will be seriously considered.

MONTH	THEME	WORKSHOP TOPICS	EXPEDITIONS
January / February	Introduction to EL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction/Overview • Teambuilding games 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kirstinelyst overnight (camping) • Fjederholt overnight (old farm)
March	Science and Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Earthships • Solar power • Trinity site (nuclear test) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ecohouses in Horsens • Vestas / LEGO wind farm • Aarhus Permaculture
April	Ethnographies of Art and Integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditional/contemporary Native art and culture • Ancient trade routes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visit Greenlandic artists in DK • Hærvejen trek • Refugees in DK • LEGOLAND debate
May	Adolescence and Personal Growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coming-of-Age (Navajo kinalda, first hunt, Spanish quinceanera, Confirmation, Silent retreat, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GorillaPark climbing • Kabelpark and Kite Surfing • Paddleboard trek • Overnight solo
June	Cosmos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chaco Canyon (solstice) • Space X / Very Large Array • Roswell (alien mythology) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jelling archaeoastronomy (Chaco) • Trelleborg • Roskilde (sailing trek) • Skaldic Poetry Slam
July	--	Expedition Prep for Iceland	--
August	Flexible / Elective (student choice)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible/ Elective • Expedition Prep 	<p style="text-align: center;">Iceland <u>Story & Stone</u>: Cultural Connections in the Land of Fire & Ice</p>
September	Ecology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wolf reintroduction • Invasive species • Forest management (controlled burns) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thy Naturpark (wolves in DK) • Nordic Food Lab • Foraging in Silkeborg • Frederikshåb hede restoration

September (cont.)	<i>Reflection (students returning from Iceland)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Sharing and reflection</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Informal presentations</i>
October	Flexible / Elective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expedition Prep 	<p align="center">New Mexico <u>Vikings & Volcanoes:</u> Parallels in People and Place</p>
November	Reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing and reflection • All students • All expeditions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thanksgiving retreat to Fjederholt
December	Celebration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation prep 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation Party & Julefrokost

Next Steps

- 1) Create a draft budget of the Expeditionary Learning program
 - a. Staff and Consultants
 - b. Fees and services
 - c. Food and Transportation
 - d. Equipment and Supplies
- 2) Create marketing materials in Danish and English (mostly on website for Ungdomskolen)
- 3) Create a press release for the program launch (January)

Reflections

- 1) Final steps to confirm budget and program details
- 2) Familiarizing the Team Leaders, launching the program, and recruiting students
- 3) The importance of documenting the year-long experience will be prioritized and shared
- 4) Certain activities in the PARALLELS program may be separated by gender to enable a more varied – and often more powerful – experience for students. For example, a girls’ overnight hike or a boys’ sweat ceremony may be arranged in addition to the majority of co-ed experiences.

