

## Saskatchewan's Trek School and the Greenall Outdoor School

By Rob Notenboom and Jeff Moore

Trek School is an outdoor school program for any Grade 11 students in Regina. During the program students engage in a series of classroom, outdoor and experiential activities. The various courses are taught through these experiences.

### How Does Trek School Work?

Students spend one entire semester in the program. During that semester they take Biology 20, Social Studies 30, Geography 20, Physical education 20, CPT 20 and Math B30 (optional). Two teachers instruct the students in these subjects and also coordinate the various outdoor and other learning experiences.

#### *Where do students go during the semester?*

The program takes students many places around Saskatchewan to learn from their unique biological, geographical and historical characteristics. During a semester students will travel to many areas around Regina and Qu'Appelle regions as well as Moose Mountain, Grasslands National Park, Cypress Hills and the Churchill River.

*Philosophy/Theory:* Originally when my first Trek School teaching partner and I began planning Trek School, we saw it as a direct reaction to our teaching experience. My teaching partner characterized this as "pushing a rope" and asked the question, "Why can't I get a student to care about 'x'?" We felt that school presented several barriers to student engagement and that we could change this. We felt that this could be done primarily through structural changes. We would integrate curriculum through place-based, outdoor activities, we would use student interest to drive some of their projects and we would get out of the stuffy environment of the school to get some "real experience."

*Type of Student:* We look for students who are willing to try something different so that they

will accept the difficulties that they ultimately have to face. Besides being challenging academically, the program is busy and it is difficult to balance all of the activities, and the changes that students experience can be disorienting ... charting your own course is not something that most students are asked to do. We have taken on many students who would be considered "at risk," but usually we get students who are just a bit more mature than the average and can see the potential merits of doing our program for a semester.

*Politics/Barriers:* I think it goes without saying that any time you are trying to do something different, there are going to be some difficulties. We have experienced some push-back from other staff, we have had to argue our case for funding/staffing with admin and yearly we must do the job of convincing students and parents of what we are offering. (I had no idea how much misinformation abounds before I started doing Trek School.) We have dealt with many of these issues by being a little isolationist. Since we are already on the periphery of what happens in our school division, we quietly go about doing our own thing and try to stay away from those issues that might negatively affect us. In part this has allowed us to survive for as long as we have, but the downside is that we don't have a lot of renown.

### Goals of Trek School

The main goal of Trek School is to deliver an educational experience to students superior to anything else they can find in high school. The program is designed to help students experience greater levels of academic achievement, but it is also designed to help students develop in the areas of independent learning, critical and creative thinking, and personal and social growth. It is a goal of the program for students to not only learn more but to find greater meaning in what they learn. The methods used to accomplish these goals include the following:

*Experiential Learning:* In Trek School we try to go to the places that we are talking about. We believe place-based learning to be especially academically enriching.

*Inquiry-based Learning:* In Trek School students experience many activities where they ask questions about the locations that we see and then investigate those questions. We believe that this helps students develop critical and creative thinking skills.

*Alternative Structure:* We focus more on project work, have a more open classroom structure and often give students the opportunity to direct their learning. We coach students on how to adapt to these new learning situations, and we believe that this helps students develop more autonomy, more agencies in their learning, better time management skills and a deeper level of investment in their learning.

*Academic, Physical and Emotional Challenges:* Although much of high school is already demanding, we are very attentive to the kinds of challenges that students in Trek School are faced with and what they get out of these challenges. Not only do we deliver a challenging academic program but also students are physically and emotionally challenged by the activities on our various trips. Although this sounds daunting, by the end of the program most students are thriving on these challenges rather than being intimidated or avoiding them.

**The Greenall Outdoor School**

*Who:* Jeff Moore and Brenda Werner are the Greenall Outdoor School advisors

*Where:* Our home base is in Greenall High School in Balgonie, SK, but we can usually be found wandering the province of Saskatchewan.

*When:* The Greenall Outdoor School (know by students as ODS) was formed by Caren Gilroy and Jeff Moore in 2008. We run the program in the second semester every year and will be working with our fourth group of students this year.

*What:* Students in ODS (Outdoor School) receive credit for ELA (English Language Arts) 20, Bio 20, Native Studies 20, Wildlife Management 30 and PE 20. Classes are truly integrated as students complete their work in this project-based, holistic program. At the end of the semester students receive one mark for their classes. Students spend approximately one-third of their time in their regular classroom, one-third of the time in their community and one-third of the time travelling throughout the beautiful province of Saskatchewan. In ODS students are immersed in hands-on learning as they travel throughout Saskatchewan learning from the amazing people and professionals who take the time to share their knowledge.

*Why:* Jeff Moore has been interested in outdoor education throughout his career and was inspired by the amazing work that Kim Archibald and Rob Notenboom have been doing in Saskatchewan for years. Jeff attended a professional development seminar held on the banks of the South Saskatchewan River in 2001 by Kim Archibald. Ever since, he has dreamt of starting his own program. It wasn't until one fateful day in Cuba when Jeff happened across Bruce Murphy of the TERRA program in Ontario that he decided to do something about his dream. Through consultation with Bruce, Kim and Rob, through a lot of hard work by Jeff and Caren Gilroy and with support from administrators like Ron Reinhart, Dion Hrynewich and Gloria Antifaiff, to name a few, the Greenall Outdoor School was born.

**Editor's Note**

Both Rob and Jeff acknowledge the importance of Kim Archibald in getting the ICP ball rolling in Saskatchewan. Kim's program will be featured in a future issue.

*Rob Notenboom and Jeff Moore teach integrated curriculum programs in Saskatchewan.*