

With 'Google Expeditions,' Royle Students Go Where No Elementary School Classroom (in Darien) Has Gone Before

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Royle Elementary School students climbed Mount Everest, swam with sharks, and explored the outer reaches of space last week.

And all without leaving the classroom.

Royle students (from Kindergarten to Grade 5) had a chance to participate in the Google Expeditions VR program; the VR stands for Virtual Reality. Using special cardboard goggles or holding a selfie stick with a smartphone, students immersed themselves in 365 degree images that took them momentarily to places far

beyond.

From the beaches of Normandy to a field of active volcanoes, Royle teachers led the expeditions, sharing information from a central device that controlled the experience for all students. On the teacher device, small smiley faces — representing where students' eyes were directed — darted across the screen.

The event, which was sought by Royle Library Media Specialist Sherrie Lanier, showcased the potential this technology can bring to engaging students in the study of science and social studies. Two Google trainers were on hand throughout the day to train and support teachers and students.

"We are always looking for unique and various resources to enhance our curricular units," said Lanier. "We use Google Apps for Education (Google Classroom, Sites, Drive, Forms, etc.) every day. The Google Expeditions app would be a welcome addition to the learning environment. "

Students also seemed to agree — with great excitement — that it could be helpful.

"If you cannot go to the Grand Canyon, you can see what they are taking about," said one 4th grader. Another 4th grader added, "I like that I don't have to jump into the sea. I like I can see the sharks up close."

Google Expeditions is a free, national outreach program with the purpose of introducing teachers to new digital tools that can deepen understanding.

In addition to VR, Google Expeditions is developing an AR or "augmented reality" app. People who have seen *Pokémon Go* have experienced AR.

A Google Expeditions AR event is being planned for the secondary level.

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Editor's note: This article is republished from the Darien Public Schools News of the Week newsletter. Photos published here are also from the newsletter. Marc Marin, director of instructional technology, edits this newsletter.