

Solutions for Creating the Learning Spaces Students Deserve

Reimagining Literacy Through Global Collaboration



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Introduction

I was born in a small town in the heart of Denmark called Bjerringbro. Surrounded by farm fields and enveloped in a community where it seemed like everybody knew me, I never imagined that I would become a teacher in the U.S. public school system. In fact, I never imagined I would become a teacher. That was for those who felt they had the power to change the world, and I most certainly did not feel that way.

When my mother got the opportunity to migrate to Wisconsin, I took a chance and went along, not quite knowing how long I would stay or what I would do. I was eighteen, newly graduated from junior college, and not quite sure what to do with myself. I had left my country behind, and I felt so lost. It took years to find my place, to feel at home, and to feel like I was no longer lost. Becoming a teacher was a large part of the journey to find out who I was.

When I became a fourth-grade teacher, I knew that regardless of the path that led students to my classroom, they should never feel lost like I had, but instead, they should find ways to create connections with everyone around them. They would connect with not only those they interacted with daily but also those outside our Wisconsin classroom. I knew that their dreams for themselves and the world they live in deserved a larger audience than just me. Therefore, I set out to create a globally connected classroom, and for many years, this has continued to be my mission: to create a classroom where students truly feel that they are citizens of the world,

that their voices matter, and that what they do matters not just to each other but to people they will never meet in person.

While my initial dream of global citizenry was lofty, my students' desire proved bigger than my dreams. My students wanted to have shared experiences so they could discuss books, their writing, and their expertise and reflect with other students who did not lead the same lives or share the same experiences. So we decided to blog. They wanted to use Skype (www.skype.com) to speak to experts, other classrooms, and anyone else who could add something to our learning. It was not that they wanted to learn more technology; they wanted to connect.

So, I stopped scheduling New Tool Thursdays and instead asked my students what we could do with the tools we already knew how to use. Soon, my students had ideas to share that started to change the way we used our literacy time together. It is from these ideas that the seeds of this book were planted and then grew. My students wanted more than what I was offering, so I had to find a way to provide them with opportunities to collaborate, create, and find others to become part of their literacy journey.

I had to create a global literacy experience, even if I was not sure exactly what that entailed. Adding an audience to their writing or engaging in discussions with classrooms far from us would ensure that they saw the greater purpose of what reading and writing could do for them as world citizens, rather than allowing them to treat their literacy work as just another assignment.

While my students have since changed from eight- and nine-year-olds to twelve- and thirteen-year-olds, my purpose for teaching has not changed. I still want to create an experience for students in which they see their own ideas extend beyond our classroom. I want them to realize the reach they can have and also how other students can influence them in order to explore their place in the world. As part of developing their unique *literacy identity*, or how they view

themselves as readers, writers, and speakers, they must understand their larger place in the world.

I hope this book will provide you with inspiration to start or further your own journey to becoming, and helping your students become, global citizens. You do not need to focus on technology; instead, expand the world of literacy your students function within—that change can start today. We can create classrooms where our students know that once they leave they will never feel lost in the world because they have experienced what it means to be connected. We can create classrooms that make schools different for all of the students we have yet to teach. We can create classrooms where what they create matters. The journey starts now.