



Discovering the World in Kindergarten

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There are many ways that we have built a globally competent community in our classroom. The children painted a map of the world on a large piece of canvas. It is the epicenter of our room and we refer to it all the time. We label the continents and oceans and any countries that we talk about. That's our map in the picture above. Our class has connected with students around the world through Twitter, participating in digital events focused on the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals, Empatico.org, and Flipgrid.

I traveled to Thailand on a Fulbright-Hays Summer Seminar in 2017. During the month we spent in the country, I was fortunate to visit the Prateepsasana Islamic School in Nakhon Si Thammarat. There we were greeted with musical numbers, inspiring speeches, and Thai cooking classes run by the children. Back at school with my kindergarteners, when I was teaching my students about Thailand, I showed them a video taken at the school of the children dancing and singing. My learners had so many questions, but the biggest one was, "Why do all the girls have fabric on their heads?" I told them that was a great question. Instead of explaining why the girls were wearing hijabs, I suggested that we send them a video and ask them. Small groups of students asked the Thai students questions using Flipgrid. It was so easy to use! In addition to wondering about the hijabs, they also wanted to know what they eat for breakfast, what cars look like in Thailand, etc... We sent our Flipgrid to a middle school English teacher at the school and they made a video for us to answer our questions. It was magical! Here is a link to the video they sent us.

<https://www.facebook.com/speakyourmindpondokbantan/videos/1645990352115072/>



There are always some challenges when trying something new. The first challenge is getting over the awkwardness of putting yourself out there and asking another teacher to partner with you for a project. My advice is to lean in and just ask! Send an email to a teacher you saw on an interesting Facebook story or get involved in opportunities like the “Global Read Aloud” and dive in bravely. The benefits to your students connecting and building relationships with real people is phenomenal.

The other challenge I faced was learning about new digital platforms. Flipgrid was pretty easy but setting up my room for Skyping with a classroom in Vermont or with a marine biologist with the Skype a Scientist program was challenging. You just want it to go well! I did many test runs and asked a lot of questions!

Everytime we meet or learn about new countries, customs, and people, we always come back to the fact that we have so many similarities and that our differences are really fascinating. When presented with the awesomeness of our planet, their curiosity is peaked and excited and they are engaged while learning as much as they can! They also make connections later on. When reading the book, *Mommy's Khimar*, by Jamilah Thompkins-Bigelow, they learned that a khimar is like a hijab and they remembered their friends in Thailand and wondered if the characters in this book were Muslim too.

Connecting with real people from other parts of our country or world opens up a window into others' lives that may have seemed fictional to students at first. The children gain empathy and understanding that “different” is interesting and that we can learn so much from each other. Our main understanding that we come back to again and again is that we want to take care of the Earth and make it a more fair and equitable place for everyone and that kindergarteners can take action right now. One country is not going to solve all the problems alone. We need to foster a new group of leaders who are ready to investigate the world, work collaboratively with a diverse population, and be ready to think creatively as they take action.