



MIKE SOSKIL

Changing lives worldwide in the classroom with Mike Soskil

Twitter: @msoskil <http://twitter.com/msoskil>

Mike's website: <http://michaelsoskil.com>

Five Clue Challenge: <http://5cluechallenge.weebly.com/>

Mike's blog: <http://teacherslifeforme.blogspot.com/>

“The solutions of the world’s problems are locked in the passions of our students.”

“After starting to network myself and with other teachers, I started to realize there was so much I should be doing.”

Ginger Lewman (<http://twitter.com/gingerlewman>) supported Mike in project-based learning.

- He embedded math into projects instead of keeping it separate.

“There are a lot of problems in the world that aren’t in textbooks. What if we embedded the content that we needed to teach into those problems?”

“When they solve a real problem in the world or work with a social do-gooder, they feel powerful. They feel like they’re learning for a real reason.”

“The service projects we’ve been involved in have always been a two-way street. We want to make sure that we’re not disempowering anyone. You need to be careful that ... everybody is empowered.”

Mike is a Skype Master Teacher. Skype in the Classroom website (with resources for connecting with others to do lessons using Skype): <http://SkypeInTheClassroom.com>

“My 94 year old grandmother Skypes in with her great grandchildren on a regular basis. If she can figure it out, all of us can figure it out as teachers. ... **If it’s important for us as teachers to give those experiences to kids, we can figure it out too.**”

We can bring in ...

- Scientists
- Social do-gooders
- Other classes
- Teachers

- Artists
- Authors

How do these service projects fit with our curriculum? “That’s what makes us professionals is finding that connection.”

Mike connected with a class in the Kibera Slum in Nairobi, Kenya ...

- Connected with Livingstone Kegode, Cheery Children’s School
- Fourth and fifth grade chrous students were looking for a way to practice for a concert
- Livingstone’s students sang in Swahili, Mike’s kids practiced their songs in English
- Afterward, the kids saw the conditions the kids were living in and said, “We need to do something to help them.”
- The community wasn’t affluent, so they looked beyond fundraising. They swapped: they created math videos for the Kenyan students, and the Kenyan students created Swahili videos
- Students from France, China and beyond got in and contributed videos too.
- How did they get involved? Mike says he’s an “oversharer on social media”, and they found out through that.
- “We need to seek and share inspiration with other teachers.”
- Mike’s students learned about the infrastructure of the water pipes at the school and how the rainy season affected drinking water, making kids sick in the Kibera Slum.
- Mike’s students, students in Kansas and students in Greece raised money to buy water filters. They raised +\$12,000 for water filters for the school AND at home for their families.
- Mike flew to Kenya for two weeks. He documented the learning needs and delivered the water filters.
- Mike set up a seven-school Skype call when the filters were delivered. He saw his students in the call 7,000 miles away with tears streaming down their cheeks.
- For the rest of their lives, I knew, because of the good they were feeling for doing good for others, for what they had done for those kids in Kibera, they for the rest of their lives would seek out ways to use their learning to do good in the world. THEY had learned that lesson.”
- This was intrinsic motivation and was much more powerful than any assignment for a grade.
- Second project: An unsafe bridge over a river kept students from going to school at times. Mike’s students through math/science curriculum, engineered a bridge and sent plans to a bridge builder. They funded the bridge and it was built.
- News article about water filter project:
<http://www.neagle.com/article/20150511/NEWS/150519974>

Immediate impact was on kids’ survival in Kenya.

“Every time we have a Skype call, it has become culture in our school (to find a way to impact the world through their actions).”

“When you hear those magic words ‘**We need to do something about that,**’ you let the kids run. You give them all the support and autonomy you can to make sure that that happens and you embed the learning into it.”

99 percent of the tools that we use are free tools that are available to everybody.

“Does it take a change in mindset? Absolutely. Does it mean getting away from your textbook and looking for authentic learning experiences? Without a doubt. Is change hard? Sure. it’s outside of our comfort zone. But that’s where we grow and that’s what we can model for kids.”

“What can we do now because of technology that we couldn’t do 10 years ago?” If you answer that question, we can do amazing stuff for our students. And some of it is so easy to set up! (An email back and forth, set up Skype on your computer.)

Justifying these service projects pedagogically ... how it fits into standards and curriculum ...

- Language arts: it’s a piece of cake. Kids can read and write about anything. (Mike’s water filter project fit language arts curriculum.)
- Math project (distance teaching): kids retaught new math concepts to others through videos. When kids teach something, they retain 90 percent of what they taught. Having kids reteach is always a good pedagogical model.
- “We have to be creative as teachers to find how our standards have real world applications. Once you do that, it’s easy to tie into real world problems.” Everything we teach should have applications to real-world problems. Connect with people who are using it to solve real-world problems and tap into it.

Research shows ...

- Intrinsic motivation is more powerful
- The more extrinsic motivation, the less kids want to learn
- Neuroscience tells us for kids to learn long-term, they have to be emotionally invested in what they’re learning. “Everyone forgot it because we didn’t care!”

We want to empower kids instead of coercing them.

We have to create emotional experiences for kids that allow them to retain learning. They make kids excited about learning. It becomes emotional for them.

Skill vital for students to be successful: **Most important quality we can give students is the ability to empathize.** Quality that correlates best with success, yet we spend almost no time teaching it in school.

If you want to do this but you need some concrete advice on how to get started ...

- Build your professional network. When you know more teachers, you have more opportunity. (Matt's Twitter for Teachers guide: DitchThatTextbook.com/twitter)
- When it comes to global learning, the easiest thing you can do: Mystery Skype. ([Skype's Mystery Skype](#) page and [Paul Solarz's guide for running one](#)) Doesn't have to be locations ... Mike taught animal classification by doing Mystery Animal Skype games with other classes (instead of guessing geographical location). MysterySkypeOneNote.com (Mike's resource he mentioned for doing Mystery Skype)
- Virtual field trips (SkypeInTheClassroom.com) ... set it up with facilitator and do the video call ... that's it! Also, find people who aren't signed up to give virtual field trips and just email them and ask them to Skype with your students. (Have the kids ask ... it's hard to say no to kids!) If they haven't Skyped before, help walk them through it and they might be willing to try it!
- Go to Google. Search "site:twitter.com <insert job title of the type of person you're looking for>" to find active people in that field that might help you.

"One of the keys is you have to have a growth mindset. **We want kids to be open to failure and to learn from their mistakes. We have to model that for kids.**"

"There have been countless times where we tried a Skype call and it's gone wrong for some reason. Our internet has gone down. We had the time zone wrong. **Stuff goes wrong all the time. That's fine. That's gonna happen. How you react to it is the lesson for the kids.**"

Five Clue Challenge: <http://5cluechallenge.weebly.com/>

Like a Mystery Skype without having a live Skype call. Almost 100 videos to guess location or animal he's standing next to.