



Matt Grundler: Hey everybody, this is Matt Grundler, welcome to our third episode of Creatively Connected classrooms, I'm getting used to that. And we have a really great host someone who hasn't hosted before but has been in our chat quite often and we probably will be asking her later to host for us at some point but Carol I'm going to have you pronounce your last name because just like mine and Laura as we get it, what you're doing in several different ways. So we want to just welcome Carol to our discussion today.

Laura Grundler: So Carol, can you introduce yourself and tell us a little bit about your background? We know a lot about you, but we'd like few to know about you.

Carol Varsalona: Absolutely. So I'm Caroline Varsalona. I've been in public education for as I put it decades, but I retired in 2013 from public education. Now I'm consulting on Long Island to teachers to further their literacy backgrounds and to make it really come into play in their classrooms. And that's all teachers. So I'm really excited about going back to my roots. In the past, I've been a reading specialist, a coach, a presenter at national conferences, writer of grants and an administrator for the last 10 years. So I've seen all types of students, I've been challenged by all types of teachers.

Matt Grundler: You don't look like.

Carol Varsalona: One role is to make sure that everyone finds their voice which is deep inside and express it creatively in various ways through printed word or artistic word or through compositions. And now my new idea is through digital art. So I'm really excited at all, looking forward for that. And to broaden my repertoire of creativity.

Carol Varsalona: I joined the Wonder Apple as wonder lead ambassadors. And so I'm really excited to be able to bring that natural desire for inquiry and curiosity right to the forefront. I'm part of the poetry Friday community of learners and poets, and I'm very proud to say that recently Matt became



my news right model. But had art teachers, had as artist, had models in their paths, in their salons, I use that.

Carol Varsalona: My model and he is the inspiration behind the poem I created called, the art class for great morning tones for school leaders to read aloud. Here it is.

Matt Grundler: Really awesome.

Carol Varsalona: And Laura are both getting copies of their [inaudible 00:03:31]at long last Sylvia Barack well they're very excited that you were, well that news behind me, my poetry.

Matt Grundler: You just happened to catch me when, you and I were talking because I was getting ready for open house. The several days before so you know I was staying late I think that night and my classroom kind of getting ready and it was uninterrupted conversation because we didn't have kids running around. We didn't have this and that to do. So it was good.

Laura Grundler: And you got pictures of the studio?

Matt Grundler: I did.

Laura Grundler: Kind of clean state.

Carol Varsalona: Even if it wasn't a messing stage I would have loved it because learning is messy.

Laura Grundler: Yes.

Matt Grundler: Yes absolutely.

Carol Varsalona: They would find to promote that idea with teachers when they create the classrooms. So your classroom to your art studio. It reminded me of what we need in classrooms, that freedom and that imagination and vivid colors. Because we don't see that a lot is been in elementary but once we go into secondary it kind of becomes plain and devoid.

Laura Grundler: Yes.

Matt Grundler: Oh yeah.



- Laura Grundler: In fact, I don't know if you know this Carol, but Matt is making the move into secondary this year.
- Matt Grundler: I'm moving into middle school this year.
- Carol Varsalona: Wow. Middle school?
- Matt Grundler: Middle school [inaudible 00:04:56].
- Laura Grundler: And that's as a former high school administrator, that's something I ... And now that I work with K12 art teachers, I'm constantly trying to get them to my ... Especially my high school middles teachers to look back at my elementary models because I feel like elementary does so many things so well that we forget how important those things are, when we get to especially high school because we're so focused on getting the credits and ensuring that they've got this box checked and that box checked and they're ready for the next step.
- Laura Grundler: We kind of forget about the environment and the community sense of all of those things. So I'm definitely trying to encourage our teachers to have that connection, and look down to our elementary as our elementary always also looks up. That it's a two way street.
- Carol Varsalona: If it wasn't the passion into the classroom and to showcase that in your environment.
- Matt Grundler: Yeah.
- Laura Grundler: Yeah. Can you tell us a little bit more about the book? Because we're really curious because it's for school leaders. And by the way, I think both Matt and I see teachers of school leaders too.
- Carol Varsalona: Absolutely. I always say when I'm working with my teachers in the PD program, that they are instructional leaders of their classroom. So enhance they are leader and as what you say. So, yes, the book says the title, "Great Morning Poems For School Leaders To Read Aloud". And school leaders in this case, they're starting with the principal because there are enough poems, there are 50 poems ... No there's 50 poets and 75 poems in the book.



- Carol Varsalona: So there are 36 poems, which would be a poem a week for nine months. So if the idea is to read a poem out loud, just for the pure pleasure of hearing poetry, and then to pair it with another poem. So I wrote art class, but there is the cared poem. So my poem is on page nine, somewhere in 63, somewhere around there, 63. And then you turn to page 113. And where my colleagues were unable to look, wrote a poem called, "Virtual adventure", which is about green screen and making.
- Laura Grundler: Oh, how cool.
- Matt Grundler: There we go.
- Carol Varsalona: The poem has, you know, it can start in the principal's office with the morning announcements. And what a great way to spread the love of poetry by having a call from the principal. And then it filters on through to the classrooms and to build out other leaders. It just doesn't have to be in English classroom. It can be in a science classroom, because some of the poems are science related, and mine is art related.
- Carol Varsalona: And so we were touching all phases of the school Community. Even we're talking about everybody in the school in this, so we can have the custodian read upon to the children they think then. And it's not relegating poetry just to national poetry month. We've got it continuous low gear.
- Laura Grundler: I understand that actually.
- Matt Grundler: I love to see that, you can say I love to see how there are other subject areas that are kind of struggling with that category wall of, oh well it can only be done here and it can only be done there, sign now -
- Laura Grundler: In art its more trust.
- Matt Grundler: In art we get that.
- Laura Grundler: And we really try to break out of, it just be much time here.
- Matt Grundler: All the time.
- Carol Varsalona: And you know what, I started back in the late 90s when project based learning was just starting off under the career and occupational



standards, career development standard. And we started talking about the integration of different content areas. So that all projects become authentic in passionate field and that children have choice. So I may be able to project what I want to say through art. Whereas somebody else may want to do it through poetry, or somebody else may want to be doing it through an engineering project.

Carol Varsalona: So it's an interesting how I often say this with the teachers I work with. It's interesting how project based learning was so authentic and had such a great footing. And then it went under for a while, a decade, a whole decade, because I'm testing. This testing was 20 minutes to call. Now we're back, and so we're excited.

Laura Grundler: That's awesome. Well, let's talk a little bit more about project based learning. I recently did a presentation and it kind of just naturally came up and one of the things that has always intrigued me is that as an adult it's all integrated, right? I mean there's not a day that goes by that I'm not using my creative school skills, my writing skills. I have a budget I'm responsible for, I'm doing now which is related to whichever project that I'm writing a grant for. All of those things are all integrated all the time but for some reason in school we separate them.

Laura Grundler: Our son is going into sixth grade and he has a schedule and he goes from choir to social studies to science to math, and it's funny to me because even the choir, the science, in social says there's so many connections there and yet is his individual boxes that he has to be in. In fact one of his favorite, I mean he will just start seeing is Hamilton. He loves Hamilton and what better way to infuse music and social studies than those kinds of ...

Matt Grundler: Fanatics.

Laura Grundler: Yeah and even the emotions in that movement and all of those things. So what are your thoughts about promoting PDL, but as you said in a very authentic way because I've seen it done well and I've seen it not done well.

Carol Varsalona: Exactly. So for me project based learning is an adventure, a journey and in order to take that journey you have to have, ... you have to capture the creativity and the curiosity of the child and research is showing us that as



we move on in school, there's less and less questioning. There's less and less inquiry. So how do we bring that back? I think the idea is to really allow the teachers to understand what project based learning is, how to integrate it into their classroom on, instead of just teaching content. If you miss the content now you give me the end result through a collaborative project.

Susan Riley: Hey there everyone, it's Susan Riley from Ed closet. If you're loving this conversation as much as I am about project based learning and all of the ways that we can engage our students, definitely be sure to check out the project based learning and the arts online class over an education closet. It's got a ton of great information about how to use inquiry based learning in the classroom in and through the arts. You'll get 10 PDL hours and lifetime access to everything plus bunch of helpful templates. So definitely head on over there, that's over at [educationcloset.com/courses](http://educationcloset.com/courses). And now back to the conversation.

Carol Varsalona: So we need to really move teachers away from the teacher directed environments into the student centered ones. And that takes on time. I was just talking to one of my colleagues, who asked me to come into their district and to really introduce all of this to the high school communities department and we're bringing this special ed and ENL, ELA, and social studies. And probably I am going to be talking to them about creativity factor, for them to find their passion.

Carol Varsalona: So I have to get them to find their passion first.

Matt Grundler: Yes on that.

Carol Varsalona: I have. That I have to slowly introduce a small project, maybe a three day project as opposed to a whole unit of study and ask them to put all their wonderful skills as a teacher into the mix. And to then think of the student, put the student right there in the forefront and to say, "Okay, I'm opening up possibilities". And with those possibilities, I may have missed steps, but that's okay.

Laura Grundler: Yeah.

Laura Grundler: Yeah.



Carol Varsalona: Because that's going to move us forward. So project based learning is, as I said is a journey. So it's not just okay we're going to be doing project based learning today. We are going to be learning how to turn over our passions into real creative type projects for students to learn. So for instance this is really funny that this came up this way. I was on ... Just quickly I went on to NTT to teachers since where since, this morning and couple of my friends were moderating and the first, the question I popped into was, what do you do with that question? What did you do when you're in summer vacation.

Carol Varsalona: Would you ask that. To me my answer was oh god, that's old school and well essay. So why not turn it around to and in this kind of like dovetailed into my galleries that I create of feedback questions. So I said why not say, what is your concept of the artist summary? Because the artist summary is my title and how does that play out? And so this way it's a project, it's based on authenticity.

Carol Varsalona: They can bring in a wealth of ideas of what they did but how do you show that? It doesn't just have to be in the printed word. It could be digital, photograph, it could be an art collage, an art journal. It could be through their scientific project and then I was talking about camp Wonderopolis, which we opened for this summer. And how we have that as a digital journey for students and families. So project based learning is just such a glorious idea to promote that, I'm sure you haven't tried that through, your art work as well.

Matt Grundler: I mean, I know that Laura does some consulting through the direction of visual journals. And so she goes, and she talks to campuses, not just our teachers, but campuses, districts in general and introduce this idea of visual journaling. Not that it's her idea, but just I know a way to do it. Whether it's through just painting, whether it's through collage, whether it's through the written word, whether it's through ... But it's a way for them to document bits and pieces of information that stick with them.

Laura Grundler: So, I think the idea really for me around that is just what you said Carol, about kids finding their voice and having some choice in that. Just like teachers need to have their passion, kids need to have that and especially as I see not to bring up the testing thing but when you have high stakes testing, and kids are low performing in reading or math,



they're often taken out of the one thing that they're passionate about. They get taken out of their music class, or they get taken out of their art class or theater class or their CTE class to be put in a second reading class or a second math class.

Laura Grundler: And it really hurts my heart. Because I know for a lot of those kids, that's how they learn. And so you've taken them out of the one thing that connects all the dots for them. And so the journals to me are really about an integrated place for kiddo to be able to write poetry or just -

Matt Grundler: Turn it in collage.

Laura Grundler: Judge on their thoughts or turn it into a wrap or to sketch or draw or paste in their digital pieces, but it should be a place where they're able to connect the dots and if I am definitely very passionate about it. But ultimately is all about kids finding their voice. And that's what it's all about.

Carol Varsalona: It's interesting because I had a teacher once say to me, "I'll go and sit in that writing workshop that you're bringing in the consultant, but you know I don't write", And I said that you're teaching ENL, and so what does that say? You have to be the mother -

Laura Grundler: Yes.

Carol Varsalona: In every inch, and really was fear. That's all it was.

Laura Grundler: Yes, it always is.

Matt Grundler: It is.

Carol Varsalona: And she was a great teacher. And so she was just worried that whatever she had to say in case was not going to be good enough next to other people. So I think a lot of it has to do with moving beyond our comfort zone. Kind of willing it so, and the teacher has to encourage that and the families have to encourage students, their children to do that as well. And if we have more of that we'd be able to have children passionately diving into choice boards.

Matt Grundler: You brought up a Wonderopolis, camp. What is that exactly?





- Carol Varsalona: So Wonderopolis, is a site, a previewing site. It's an inquiry based learning, so we have wonders of the day and the wonder of the day could be two people still right sonnets or poetry or what does it go all day. And so kids will go in and they'll see a video. They will have a reading and they will have extension activities where it was. So it's all about exploring, their possibilities inquiry. So camp Wonderopolis, was an outgrowth of all of that, and camp Wonderopolis, has a theme.
- Carol Varsalona: So this year, it's about music and ends camp or symphony of wonders. So children will go in and there's a series, it's like a digital game almost. You go in and you see all of these different paths. And a child would say, "Well, I'm going to explore this wonder". And so in that journey and they can create, they can read, and they can go on different little adventures, digital journeys, and they receive digital badges.
- Carol Varsalona: So it's all free. And it's all related to parents being involved, families being involved in learning and exploring the world outside of the classroom. But in essence, they're learning. So it really has a lot to do with helping the summer slide, which we all know is a real thing.
- Matt Grundler: Real real thing.
- Carol Varsalona: Exactly.
- Matt Grundler: No, it sounds awesome.
- Carol Varsalona: ESL.
- Matt Grundler: Message test our kids on that.
- Laura Grundler: Well, I know, and you know what, this is going to, is talking about the summer slide art. Our kids are well, dyslexic, so they have the joy of also having some dyslexic tendencies. One of them is also dysgraphic. But in order to tap into their passions, they all did theater this summer which is a lot of reading.
- Carol Varsalona: That's what I do.
- Laura Grundler: And so we didn't, we're just not into the sit and get. They also read you know our oldest is reading Jurassic Park right now, and the fourth Harry



Potter book but I think that again it's just finding that thing that will make them ask questions and make them get excited and we purposely found a local theater, that Children's theater that teaches the kids all the theater skills about and they write. They're actually there, they had their last two performances yesterday.

Matt Grundler: To create their own performance based on, I think one of them was the theme of Star Wars but they had to come up with a story that was different than the Star Wars theme. But they used all the characters but they [inaudible 00:22:03].

Laura Grundler: They had some interesting unique characters.

Matt Grundler: And other places.

Laura Grundler: It was really great to see. So I love the idea of the Wonderopolis camp because not everybody has that opportunity in their community like we do and that's really exciting. Is there's a particular age group that it's geared toward?

Carol Varsalona: No, not really. Of course if you're really young kindergarten, first grade your parents will go on that journey with you. As you get older you can navigate the environments, the computer environment, computer world by yourself but we even tried it out with high school students. We have a wonder lead Ambassador that had a camp program. So they became almost like a camp counselors.

Laura Grundler: Wow, that's good.

Carol Varsalona: They started thinking in those terms. Okay, I'm going to go and work on these digital graphics and digital journey pieces. And I'm going to hopefully be able to work with my little brother when I go home.

Matt Grundler: Wow.

Carol Varsalona: Now its computerized, that doesn't mean that every child has to have a computer. I mean both and library's, Wonderopolis and Kid Wonderopolis are joining with the library system that is promoting summer reading. So certainly there's many venues where children can get into the camp Wonderopolis for free and it's the freedom, parents



don't have to pay. Children sit in front of the computer, but they're doing it for a specific reason, they're doing to explore their curiosity and that's sitting at a computer and watching the guns go off.

Laura Grundler: Yeah, that's a whole nother story that we can get into later but oh my gosh, yeah, that's so true. And I was actually, I'm really into interested. I haven't watched it yet, but that Screenagers, have you heard about that?

Carol Varsalona: Oh, I will go and watch it. We had a showing, we had a showing, at Wonderopolis conference last year. And it was frightening.

Laura Grundler: Yeah.

Carol Varsalona: I've seen the reality of it too. I've seen students just talking about it and glued, glued to the same.

Laura Grundler: Well. We have an almost teenager, I think we'll be watching it soon. I've heard, I've heard good things, and I've heard that it is frightening. But it's a good reality check.

Carol Varsalona: But it's a good starting point for conversations.

Matt Grundler: Yes.

Carol Varsalona: After we saw it, we had a roundtable discussions and there were people from all over the country at this conference. It was the National Center for families learning and we had picked not just teachers. People who were home care workers and people who had nursery programs? There were philanthropists there. So there were quite a few different people, so we heard from them, from everybody, their take on it. And if the people who are next to me were parents, and they were really, really upset by what they saw.

Carol Varsalona: And they related it to their own children. Because oftentimes we don't know what's going on. And I mean, I happen to be at a family gathering and two of my little cousins were playing that game that, I don't even know the name of it.

Laura Grundler: Fortnite probably.

Matt Grundler: Fortnite.



Carol Varsalona: I was so shocked at what they were doing. They were glued and we talk about well, it's family time. So you have to come and you have to sit.

Matt Grundler: I kind think Laura and I have a little bit of an advantage doing what we do on the social media, we become more aware of the other platforms that are out there. And the other things that are coming up or that are ...

Laura Grundler: Same drug.

Matt Grundler: And so that allows us to really, we have to be conscious, we have to make those choices of, ... We have conscious with our kids about. Okay, this is why we are doing, we are doing it for purpose, it's not just ... I want to see what everyone's doing. And this is what we're using it in a positive way. And so -

Laura Grundler: And we're actually interacting with people. Like there's, in a very positive manner. So it's interesting that we're on this conversation because I was out consulting in another district yesterday and it was with our teachers and they were very awesome group. They don't have a lot of digital media in their classrooms and they were a little resistant to the idea of digital media and I asked them why and they were the ones that brought up. One of them had recently seen Screenagers with her teenager and she said, You know, I'm just, I feel like there's so much screen time in their face and I said, well, here's my philosophy on it is, number one, we have to model appropriateness with that. And I said number two it really is how you use the device, are you using it as a consumer device to just scroll through and consume material all the time and just see what people are doing on Instagram, Facebook or Twitter or are you creating something positive?

Laura Grundler: I said in our school district I'm a big proponent of, I have had the creative devices. They're not meant to be consumer devices, you're not meant to be playing games on them and consuming material or you know, just consuming music and books. I mean that's one way to use them but in the art room they're meant to be creative devices. What can you create to put something positive out in the world? And those apps, when I interview teachers, I often ask, what apps they like. And it's very telling to me if their creators are consumers based on the apps that they tell me about.



Laura Grundler: And so I think that's a really important conversation to have with teachers around the technology in their classroom. Is it just being used as a consumer device? Or is it being used as a creative output device? Are you creating something that's going to contribute to the world around you? And that's chromebooks, iPads, whatever.

Matt Grundler: Device status.

Laura Grundler: Innovative device but I think that that's really important to think about is that how are you using it to create not just consume.

Carol Varsalona: That's a great point because in the literacy world. I often say to teachers that no ... We've been through the information age and we've been data collectors and data collectors of content website. And so teachers often I think about of them, I think of us as the content driven collectors of content, but we really need to turn that around. And so my one digital that I created was that not to have children become consumers of information, but creators and meaning makers. And so once I create, how do I change that into a meaningful idea for myself and to share with them.

Carol Varsalona: I like the idea that you also mentioned the positivity because I really feel when I talk about Twitter and Social Media with teachers I talk about the positives and how it's really, it's really a professional development tool.

Laura Grundler: Yes.

Carol Varsalona: And we're in the connected cater movement or even the connect to colleagues movement. It's about positivity and there is some negativity that comes in and out and we kind of filter that out in a very digital way.

Matt Grundler: I agree with you on that because I know that Lauren I started our journey on Twitter. We were very resistant because of how we saw it being used and then once we saw a more positive way, a more beneficial way for us as educators, meeting different chat groups that you know all had inspiration to use it in a more positive way. We then, we're like holy cow, this is a goldmine of resources.

Laura Grundler: And what I do, I do a lot the same Carol is when I'm talking to teachers out there just even our teacher. They ask me, "Why are you so heavily



into social media"? And I said, "Well, it just kind of naturally happened". Actually, I was looking for positive connections to make. And at the same time, Matt, being the only art teacher at his elementary school was looking for other educators to connect with, without having to leave the house.

Laura Grundler: And so it just naturally was an outgrowth of us trying to grow. But I think that I still get a lot of pushback, and one of the questions I get is, "Why are you not more active on Facebook"? And I said, "Well, we do have Facebook, I just personally find Twitter to be a better outlet for myself". And I think you have to find the one that works for you. But also from our first personal standpoint, there are a lot of art teacher Facebook groups and they're okay. I'm not against them, but for me some of the -

Matt Grundler: Conversation.

Laura Grundler: Some of the conversation turns more negative maybe because there's just more room to rants, maybe it's having only 240 characters keeps it concise. I don't know. But I do think that it's really important for everyone to find the outlet that works best for them to stay connected in a very positive way.

Matt Grundler: And that's what we try to do with K12 is we've been told that our community is probably one of the more positive ones out of quite a bit.

Laura Grundler: So we actually point that's as the positive PLN, because we just that's something we want to make sure that everybody knows. If you're coming into this environment, that this is one of our norms. The norm is that we're uplifting each other, that we're supporting each other. And we're giving each other ideas to jump off from and that's just the expectation for our chat.

Matt Grundler: There to make an improvement.

Carol Varsalona: I agree that you chat, I think it's great and it would be wonderful if more people outside of the art world get involved.

Laura Grundler: That's probably part of the reason we're calling this podcast not K12 art or chat but the creatively connected classroom because we have seen more and more non art teachers come into the chat but I think that the



word art as you said earlier, there's a fear right. So I think when they see K12 art chat, it's scary for a lot of them because I'm not an artist or I'm not creative or whatever it is. And really it's become that it's not just for our educators, it's really not but I think at this point to change the hashtag might be difficult. So that's kind of where we are with that.

Laura Grundler: So we're starting out with a different title for the podcast but we really do and you can speak to this too. We want to inspire all educators to find their own creative voice.

Carol Varsalona: Yes.

Laura Grundler: And infuse that in the classroom. So as a poet, what would you suggest to get educators past that fear point?

Carol Varsalona: I do a lot of collaborative protocols when I go out into the classrooms and to work with teachers like short ones that people would be able to ... What is your concept of the artist in summary? So everyone has to have a concept of it because everyone enjoys summer pretty much. I've never heard of anyone who don't.

Matt Grundler: Especially kids.

Laura Grundler: Yeah.

Carol Varsalona: Well, by posing in a short questions that are universal in their appeal and people will be willing to talk about that because they are familiar. So I like to think that we could start with a place of familiarity whatever it is. And have a collaborative protocol, shows little quick conversations. I have so many different collaborative protocols that have been shown and use over decade, a couple of decades, they go back that those are great activities to get people into. So it doesn't have to be like, All right, so I write poetry and you have to write a poem today.

Laura Grundler: That would scare me.

Carol Varsalona: Yeah, they don't even know well, what do I do? I mean, there are so many different types of poems. So sometimes when people are told, well today we're going to work on a golden shovel. And when I write my blogs and I like to try out different format. So give it a try, you know that



I'm not so great at it and someone else's better that's okay. So you have to be able to model, to talk about what it is, to model the process. And then to ask people to try it out. And I think that takes a little bit of the fear out of it. Poetry, I so tell is a great quote that I just loved it from Moscow. And it's ... The poetry is a window into the breathtaking diversity of humanity.

Laura Grundler: And isn't that fabulous?

Matt Grundler: Yeah it is fabulous.

Carol Varsalona: Yeah it is like that. So it's not saying poetry is an art, so to speak, right? It's a window.

Matt Grundler: The window.

Carol Varsalona: It takes me into the diversity of the world, and I can find poetry through various sector and other place, through sports or, through the arts, or painting. So by doing that, by thinking of poetry in a different format, in a different way as a window into the world. It kind of gives me the opportunity to branch out and talk about what I see life is. And so the galleries that I create, the seasonal galleries, we're an offshoot of that desire to be able to look out into the world based around on the seasons which is the universal and to be able to project your thoughts in a very creative way. Granted they're all digital but I don't say that specifically you have to come in as a photographer and give me your picture digitally meaning that I've digitized it.

Carol Varsalona: Just send me a photo, and I will to work the art of summary, and so I've been getting beautiful summer sunsets and that is an art because people love watching that or recently I just got to pay per collage. So people make things and then they take a picture of it and we can put it up on On this gallery and now my galleries are going around the world. And it's noise, it's all about voice. I'm trying to get more student voice, I'm trying to bring in people from all different walks of life so that you don't have to be that designated blogger or writer, a poet.

Carol Varsalona: You could be a parent, you could be a teacher, you could be a child, you want to see more student voice out there too. And I know in some cases people are fearful of putting their students work but we usually just put





the first name unless a parent says, a student says, I want my whole name down, the high school student. So that's what poetry is that window and I love that.

Laura Grundler: I love that too.

Matt Grundler: That's sound cool.

Laura Grundler: You know irony, I knew that we were having you on today and it's raining and it we're in Texas and it doesn't rain very much in this summer.

Matt Grundler: We're not having any -

Laura Grundler: So I said on our back porch. We have a covered porch and I just sat there listening to the rain and so much cooler finally for the first morning.

Matt Grundler: Long time -

Laura Grundler: Lovely, so it's this nice little summer rain and I think just knowing that you are here as I was inspired to jot down a little, a little poem which I never do, right now.

Carol Varsalona: If there is any -

Laura Grundler: It's in my little visual journal. So I'll see what comes of it.

Carol Varsalona: That would be great if you gave me a copy of the visual journaling of your phone.

Laura Grundler: It would be, I will get past my fear and do that.

Carol Varsalona: It probably works before which is fabulous. And you know what someone sent me the other day rainstorm. A person took a video of the rain, and it was just a few minutes and so I'm thinking okay, now we have to get that link so she just sent me her link so I could somehow get it up. But there just noticing it's all about the noticing the one ... Well actually, I hadn't digital to notice and be awed by nature and then to wonder, and then I call it. So when I call composing poetry, or any written essay, I call a word weeping. Because that has such a beautiful idea of -



Laura Grundler: Now I'm just, I'm loving all these, I guess they're metaphors. I'm like, I'm loving the visuals. They're making so much sense for me.

Carol Varsalona: And then we have ... And once you do that, you collaborate. So you just did that, you watched, you were awed by nature, you wrote something and now you'd share that with me. And you're going to hopefully create your journal which would be playing with your digital tools. And that's a whole other step. I say that to teach us, you know what? That's another level.

Laura Grundler: Yes.

Carol Varsalona: All right. We can get it into that level if you want to be in that level with me, and then when we're all finished, we let our voice fly.

Laura Grundler: Yeah.

Carol Varsalona: Because we show that we're brave it.

Laura Grundler: The brave.

Matt Grundler: It leads into kind of what you know Laura and I decided, I guess about three years ago. As teachers get ready to go back to school, we created this month long challenge kind of activity for teachers and call it reflect 31 and that became teachers getting ready reflecting on past, reflecting on what worked, what didn't work -

Laura Grundler: Goals.

Matt Grundler: Goals for the new year, exciting things, pondering and so what is your feeling on reflecting and how do you think teachers could use that a little bit more or students could use that a little bit more?

Carol Varsalona: I am the hugest proponent of reflecting to the point that I have tried all different ways to get students to reflect, on teachers to reflect and we're talking about on a daily basis, once in a while.

Laura Grundler: It has to be consistent.

Matt Grundler: It has to be consistent.



Carol Varsalona: I leave a classroom and I want to know what's going on in that child's head. So I asked the child to reflect, give me an exit card or draw something or sketch or what did you learn today or turn to your partner and tell them so that it is part, it's ingrained in them. So I've made a full career of teaching students who were having difficulty with the reading process and this struggling, that whole issue of struggling is really what I see in a lot of adults eyes too. That they're still struggling, they're still trying to figure it out.

Carol Varsalona: So reflecting is so very important, when I was in my last district. I created a collaborative group way before Twitter started, and it was called, "The reflective pathway". And so we started out with a small core group of 25 teachers, and we grew it into 150 teachers who were K12. And we got together as a study group. When we read the texts, we reflected, we had all different ways to collaborate and to really impact our teaching and learning.

Carol Varsalona: So I just found something very exciting to me. While I was talking to my colleagues on Twitter, two of the colleagues created, two colleagues out of Jersey, Corey Radish and Scott Tony, created a term called reflection and now for New York edge chat because I'm the moderator New York edge chat.

Matt Grundler: Yes.

Laura Grundler: Yes.

Carol Varsalona: I use reflection as our last, instead of six questions, we have five questions, and a reflection. The collection is a reflection with action. So it's similar to what you're talking about, you're pondering, you're reflecting what didn't work, what worked. And the best part of it is what next step will you take.

Laura Grundler: Right.

Matt Grundler: The action is for sure.

Laura Grundler: So in the past we've done reflect 31 where we've had an inspirational kind of quote and question for each day in August. This year we decided to do it differently. So we did it by week, just gave a big idea for these.



- Matt Grundler: Our last, the first week which was last week we went with the idea of triumph and it was what triumph did you have in the previous year? Whether it was a triumph for Student making a great connection on a student, a triumph of a lesson or maybe you broke through with a colleague or made some kind of astounding relationship with your administration or something like that and then this -
- Laura Grundler: This week has changed.
- Matt Grundler: This week has changed.
- Carol Varsalona: All right.
- Laura Grundler: And then it kind of thinking on the action piece that week three is potential and week four is comments like getting started. So that's kind of where, so we did it a little differently this year, just because we wanted to leave it more open ended and we're going to see where it takes us but it's really, it's really important for us and working with other teachers to have them have that consistent reflection. I talked about it a lot with our new teachers about just whatever works for you, if it's keeping a little personal blog on, there's just for you, if it's having a little notebook that you just jot things down daily, but you really need to be looking at at all of those pieces of the puzzle. And then thinking about how am I going to continue to improve.
- Carol Varsalona: That's the key. How do we make ourselves into a better.
- Matt Grundler: Sure.
- Laura Grundler: Yeah, speaking on that, how do you make yourself into a better self? That's a life long journey.
- Matt Grundler: It is. That's why [inaudible 00:46:40].
- Laura Grundler: Carol, we'd like to ask you if you had some parting words for the community listening, what would they be? I mean, we've covered a lot of topics this morning. We've gone all over the place. If our listeners can't find something interesting, then I'm not sure what we've done. So what's something you'd like to leave the community with as parting words?



- Carol Varsalona: I think to connecting back to your title of your blog, post creatively connecting connected classrooms. I think the most important part is to, for teachers to step back and reflect and find their passion and to exhibit their passion in the classroom. So students understand what their passion is. So for me, it would be poetry. So how can I infuse poetry into a lesson so that students can find their voice and to let on. So I think that whole idea of create creativity is so important in our classrooms. And the other notion about how every teacher as a teacher of literacy, so it's not about reading on English department, every teacher is a teacher of literacy and if every teacher has that goal with a creative mindset because we have to get into that mindset. Then we can help students on impact their learning and we in essence we will definitely be impacting our teaching because it'll become more joyful.
- Matt Grundler: Yeah hands down. On that note, thank you again Carol and we appreciate you coming on and talking to us. And I appreciate the shout out in your poem and I'm glad I inspired you and we're definitely going to have you and probably Wonderopolis as well host, I don't know if together or separate.
- Laura Grundler: Or figure it out. So many great ideas for us even this morning.
- Carol Varsalona: If it happens With you coming on board give me a chat. I am honored, definitely honored that you chose me to be one of your spokespersons here.
- Laura Grundler: Well, we have a lot to learn, we could probably talk to you for several more hours.
- Carol Varsalona: Have the activity aspect and I thank you. It was a wonderful morning, and so have a great weekend.
- Laura Grundler: That was an amazing conversation with Carol Varsalona.
- Matt Grundler: Varsalona.
- Laura Grundler: And wow. I remember when she has the cutest little Long Island accent which I love.



- Matt Grundler: Some of our new york friends will be all about it. I guess the biggest thing that kept jumping out at me was one, everybody is dealing with fear in their subject matter, kids are afraid of not being able to draw well, kids are being able to write well, and they like stigmatized themselves.
- Laura Grundler: Well, isn't that funny, how we say it's okay to fail. And yet we don't really allow them to fail. I mean, it's this thing where I think that all of us are afraid of the fear probably is the failure. And being seen as a failure or not being good enough. Or, I think something that comes up in our subject area a lot is, kids just want to know what the next step is. So that they can get the A. Yeah, well, that's not how the word. The creative process works through failure and improving on those failures. Failure is not a bad word, but it's something that we've really got to think about changing.
- Matt Grundler: In a negative content.
- Laura Grundler: Yes, exactly.
- Matt Grundler: I would agree.
- Laura Grundler: I also found it really interesting how inquiry and pondering and reflecting kept coming up.
- Matt Grundler: Yeah, I mean, that almost becomes kind of like that science piece, that observation that we do in art, you know, being able to look at something, take it in, think about it. And then, you know, eventually hopefully you get to the point where you're improving upon it.
- Laura Grundler: Again, a process.
- Matt Grundler: A process for sure.
- Laura Grundler: But we started with the inquiry you know, I know that a lot of teachers feel the pressure to move through the content at a certain pace because they have a pressure to pass the test. I mean, you know, that's the bottom line for a lot of teachers. And I think that stepping back and reflecting and considering where you can build in investigation for your students is key.



Matt Grundler: And then I think kind of going along with what she was talking about with the teachers finding their own passion as I know they're passionate about their subject matter. Or maybe they're not. But to find really they ...

Laura Grundler: Hopefully they're, we ought ...

Matt Grundler: Trying to be able to find their to be able to see where their passion lies and being able to pull it into their subject matter. You know, they might be a theater person who teaches English, or they might be a science person who enjoys the idea of whatever.

Laura Grundler: But whether a math teacher that's an amazing Baker. And we're not saying bring your baked goods inn classroom, but bringing that passion for baking into the classroom and showing kids how math connects with that process and, you know, recipes and all of those things are, you know, so closely related to formulas, and -

Matt Grundler: Passion and measurement and -

Laura Grundler: All of that. I think being able to see ourselves outside the box of maybe our traditional subject area. And, you know even for me this morning, I have a fear of writing because that's a real thing. I've been asked to do lots of different things and said no to them. Just because I have a fear of writing. It's been there since I was a little kid. And just thinking of it in a different context this morning about, you know, a short little poem and how that can connect my art puts it in a new frame or a new light for me.

Matt Grundler: When you can use those words maybe that you wrote down like some of them, and they might trigger images to help, you know, create around those words that you wrote. So you wrote your poetry, but you have some idea that maybe jumps visually out at you, then you can add that into it, and then it I think it helps lessen the fear.

Laura Grundler: And then how much did you love the visual she gave us, you know, the window and the weaving?

Matt Grundler: The word weaving.

Laura Grundler: The poetry is a window to be the world, oh my gosh, that you've heard and thinking about that like if that makes so much sense for us, think



about the kids in the classroom that have the same kind of brain. And, you know, this might sound weird, but I see images in my head. I mean, that's how I that's how I interpret the world.

Matt Grundler: Kind of crossing over each other and, you know, we're weaving and becoming that thing.

Laura Grundler: It was really impactful. So just like we have all kinds of learners in the classroom our teachers are all kinds of learners too. I thought it was a great conversations.

Matt Grundler: It was.

Laura Grundler: Definitely sparked a lot of ideas for me and I hope that it sparks a lot of ideas for our listeners.

Matt Grundler: Alright guys well from a connected creativity ... from the creatively connected classroom. That alliteration get to me ... we wanna thank you guys for listening and hope that you join us in our reflect 31 journey and as well as our next week's host who is Kelly McGee and she's talking about targeting curriculum for K12 chat. All right, well we'll talk to you guys later.

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