

GUEST COLUMN – January 2023

Open your classroom window Malcolm Wheeler

Marsha Ivins*, a veteran of five space shuttle missions who logged over 1,300 hours in space, was asked by one of our students, 'So how do you go to toilet in space?' Her smile told me it was a question she had often fielded. Her answer, although given hundreds of times by her, was original for every child asking the question for the first time.

It was a prelude to a real conversation about living in space in which she made science real for all of us. Why? Because our kids wanted to know.

Today, the influence and impact that visitors can have in our classrooms has been expanded through access to technology. Without ever leaving the confines of our own rooms we can talk to a climber at the base camp of Everest, to a surgeon preparing for a complex brain surgery, interview a footballer straight from her team's success in the World Cup, or simply sit with a grandparent reflecting on her life in the comfort of her own home with a cup of chai in her hands.

Of all the things I have learned as an educator over the years is something I have always really known as a teacher. The most profound and yet simple revelation is that students learn best when they are involved in their own learning with each other undertaking real activities.

They won't always be as breathtaking as standing with a climber on the roof of the world talking about the impact of altitude on the human body. Sometimes they will be as simple as primary children listening to and asking questions of local trades people as part of their unit of enquiry. When our students are watching a chai walah prepare the tea for his customers, working with an artist as she helps us create colours, or learning with a writer how to craft the words to create our own pictures - *all* are engaged.

What is truly surprising is how few of us see our classrooms as windows onto the world. Fortunately, especially now as we emerge from the global pandemic, more teachers and schools are looking for ways to enrich student learning by expanding their horizons.

It doesn't matter where our schools are or what curriculum we follow. All we need to do is to find out the work and passions of our parents and local community and then match these against our curriculum. Bringing people into school, sending our children out from school, whether physically or virtually, is in all of our grasps.

Why not make a new year's resolution to open your classroom window even more widely this January to let the world in?

* [A conversation with NASA astronaut Marsha Ivins](#)

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