



Learning Outside the Box

Grades 1 and 2 teacher Pamela Newton couldn't quite believe it herself. Her students were so engaged in saving the dwindling monarch butterfly population that they didn't bother with their video games anymore. She said, "One student who used to talk about his Xbox every day, cannot stop talking about monarch butterflies. He works on the garden at recess and eagerly looks for butterfly books in the library. It is exciting to see his curiosity captured."

But the engagement didn't end when the bell rang. Parents described how the learning spilled over into their homes. One parent reported, "Alex really enjoyed learning about monarch butterflies. She often came home and told all of us interesting facts that she learned about. It has also made an impact on me while whipper snipping yesterday, I avoided all of the milkweed." Another cheered, "I think you know, but Brooke LOVED everything about monarchs. We had lots of talk at home. I now get the daily report on what the caterpillars look like. I like how you tied in art and writing as well. The seed bombs and community involvement were awesome. I love the out-of-the-box learning and feel this study looked at so many things. The country study too . . . started with monarchs but covered so many other subjects. The book on YouTube is so cool. We have shared it with friends and relatives, and everyone is quite impressed."

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Newton easily found cross-curricular connections to generate a Deep Learning Task. The students Skyped with a butterfly expert and spoke to a contact in Mexico to learn more about the plight of the monarchs. They also studied local and global migration patterns and maps to learn about the dwindling monarch population (geography) and then studied the life cycle of butterflies (science). Propelled to take action, the students created information flyers with QR codes (media) and crafted seed bombs to sell in the community. They also composed a digital short-story book (language) to get the message across. They enhanced their community garden and measured tree stumps to attract more butterflies (math). The local newspaper soon caught wind of the student energy and featured them, further drawing attention to their campaign.

Give students a choice whether they want to feel empowered to make a difference in the real world or in the imaginary world and there is no contest. The real world wins every time. Step out of the box and they will put aside the games. There's a new way of learning and students are showing us they can lead the way.