



Learning to Juggle Life's Demands

Across New Zealand, young students participated in a nationwide shared Read Aloud and used digital tools such as Edmodo and Padlet to connect with students from all over the country.

Edmodo allowed students to communicate with each other online in a contained, supervised community. Their chosen book was *Juggling With Mandarins*, written by New Zealander V. M. Jones. The literature provided a platform for developing Global Competencies in Communication, Critical Thinking and . . . life.

Students introduced themselves to peers from distant schools by using Padlet. Then teachers posed weekly tasks for six weeks. Some of these tasks involved typical communication and critical thinking approaches. For example, students were to write predictions about the book, interpret language, and visualize characters or analyze plot developments. Other tasks were more open-ended, like creating a Twitter profile for their fictional character or a dialogue between two characters using the texting feature.

“If you are really passionate about something, then go ahead and do it.”

Students also built on each other's thinking by responding to each other's texts. They learned how to constructively and politely disagree with each other while online—a relevant digital literacy skill for all of us. This back-and-forth naturally evolved into providing peer feedback. In one post, a student writes, “It looks like great work though unfortunately it is upside down. You can change this using. . . . Good luck!”

Student

Literature is a launchpad for reflection, and students shared those insights in a safe online space. One student writes, “I chose this quote because it's true: You can't make an omelette without breaking eggs.” The other replies, “I had never heard of that saying before, I had to look it up. I think it's true that you have to make sacrifices to something else in life. I find this very inspiring. Thanks for introducing this to me.”

The learning stretched beyond Communication and Critical Thinking. This task provided a platform for students to share more personal thoughts. They used this opportunity to juggle life's questions. One student processed how she handled a painful friendship. Another shared insight that life doesn't always unfold as planned. Another student remarked, “I think it could be a life lesson for kids our age about how kids should not be afraid of their parents and let them know how they feel without being scared.” This serves as another reminder that when you create an interactive learning environment and establish partnerships that foster trust and mutual respect, the learning goes well beyond the curriculum.