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**Micki Uppena:**

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*Vicki Davis:*

***The Ten-minute Teacher podcast with Vicki Davis. Every week day you’ll learn powerful practical ways to be a more remarkable teacher today.***

VICKI: Hello. It’s March and I’m renaming Wednesdays to be Wonderful Wednesdays instead of Wildcard Wednesdays because we just have so many wonderful things happening in classrooms around the world. Now, today’s guest, Micki Uppena @mic\_uppena, is a librarian who was turned in by her friend, Leah Whitford, on Facebook. So, a lot of times I go on Facebook and Twitter and say, “Hey, who do you know that is awesome that people really need to know about?” And Leah said that Micki is an incredible innovator, she teaches literacy, maker spaces, creativity and student voice.

So, Micki, let’s get started by having you describe for us, what are some of the typical conversations you have with students about what they’re doing in a day in your library?

MICKI: Well, the first thing is – I mean, building relationships is number one. And so I have those conversations with, “What books are you reading? What have you been doing?” And it’s not always about what’s happening at school, it’s to try to find those personal connections. And as far as the Makerspaces, the number one thing is that I showed them that they’re lifelong learners and I model that daily and that they need to make mistakes. And I model that daily as well. So, I really think it’s that risk-taking and question asking and just encouraging them to have their voice and to speak their minds, let us know what they know.

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VICKI: So, there are so many things that go on in your library. Kind of give us an overview of – you know, if we never got to see the pictures <http://wp.me/p442Ca-3Mv> that I’m going to put in the show notes, describe for us what we would experience if we came into your library as a student.

MICKI: Well, it is not a quiet place and that has mixed reactions, but it is definitely not quiet. There’s books all over that represents all different kinds of kids. We have activities like we have the Legos <http://amzn.to/2lVWg3c> and the cardboard and K’NEX <http://amzn.to/2lbuR00>. And then we have a creation station that has this treasure

box in it. And it's a place where teachers and parents and kids can just dump their treasures from their classroom and kids create something new with it.

We have kids using technology but that really isn't the focus. Technology tends to be a tool that they gravitate to after they've built with something else. So they use the books and the technology for tools but kids are all over and they collaborating with other kids that they normally might not collaborate with in the classroom. So, it's pretty exciting to see them choose what they want to focus on each day.

VICKI: Now, you even have green screen <http://amzn.to/2mcEA67> and filmmaking. So what do they do with their films and what types of films are they shooting?

MICKI: Well, we've done book commercials and we've done our middle school news. They've done history projects, a lot of them just write plays and stories that they want to act out. Sometimes it's really there's no process at all, they just get involved. But I would say every classroom and library needs to have some kind of a green screen technology, it is the number one thing.

VICKI: Oh my goodness. There's so many librarians, I think, that would say, "Are you kidding me? You're going to have me make video?"

MICKI: Yeah. So there's thing that "You don't have to know everything." You can know a little bit and then the kids are so motivated that they figure it out. Or they go on YouTube.

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YouTube is a big thing and we let them have it and go and figure things out for themselves. So as long as you provide the tools and you ask the questions and get them excited, they're going to figure out how to do everything they want to do.

VICKI: Okay. So I could just play a pundit here and say, "Okay, I know they're excited but what are they learning, Micki?"

MICKI: Okay. Well, they learn that everything is not going to work the first time they do something. They learn persistence, they learn how to work with people, they really learn how to accept frustration and stick to it. And when they're passionate about something and they go to the books, and they go to the websites and do the research, they're driving their own learning so they get to choose that direction. So we could go through the common core and I could list a zillion things. But I can defend it, they can defend it.

Play is a kid's work and they are learning when they play.

VICKI: So, Micki, what was the biggest problem you had in your transition to this type of student-centered library and how did you overcome it?

MICKI: Well, I moved from the classroom two and a half years ago and I don't know if I really had problems, I just kind of jumped in and just started changing everything. And Leah Whitford has been an amazing supporter and she's just kind of let me go on

this journey. You could say that money is a problem but it really isn't because so many of these things are free or really inexpensive. I would say my biggest challenge was professional development and I really had to search out on my own to figure out how to do things. I attended an engineering class that was offered in Madison for free for teachers. I travel a lot so that I can incorporate those kind of corporation with kids. I go to nerd camp to connect with authors, I read tons of blogs and Twitter – the social medial learning is crazy ridiculous.

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I would say, figuring out that I was responsible for that learning, that it wasn't going to be given to me and that I needed to reach out and ask questions and find out more has been the biggest challenge but the greatest joy. And I really feel like I model that continuous learning for kids and they see the passion for in it.

VICKI: Oh I love that. And I'm going to get lots of emails if I don't ask you these questions, Micki. What are these inexpensive tool that have transformed your library?

MICKI: Well, I beg, I borrow and I dive in dumpsters. Pressure box switches, people's junks, the Happy Meal toys are great for stop motion, kids take them apart and create new things. Cardboard, boxes for sure, Legos, K'NEX. I go to garage sales all the time and find any kind of building toys or construction kind of toys. You know, scrapbooking things, markers. People always ask me if I want to take their junk. So, you have to find those places. Reach out to companies, find connections in the community. Sometimes I'll just say, "Oh my gosh, I would love to do this in my library" on Facebook and I will have people call in and say, "I want to find and get that for you." But you just have to be afraid not to ask because there's somebody that wants to help.

VICKI: So Micki, you seem so confident and bubbly and excited. Have you always been this way? Are you this confident on the inside?

MICKI: No. I would say I was getting frustrated in the classroom because I have always been learning through play. I started out as a 4-K and kindergarten teacher and I did my masters on play and I was up in the upper grades and with all the state mandates and stuff I'm like, "Oh my gosh" I was just turning away from what I really believe in. And Leah saw something in me that I wasn't ready to see yet.

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And she's like, "This is where you need to be." And so I took the risk and she was right, she believed in my first, I found my tribe in other areas, not necessarily in your school all the time. I feel very confident in what I do now but I know that there's always so much more that I could be doing. But I am in love with being in the classroom, I feel confident in the relationships that I'm building with kids and connecting out in this educational world. It's been life-changing for me. And I feel like it has really changed out school climate too.

VICKI: And I feel that I and everybody listening can feel your joy and your excitement. And educators, our 10 minutes are almost up, so I just want to encourage you to experiment and try new things and realize sometimes you do have to change where you are in the school so that you can keep your passion alive. Don't get stuck in the rut, we all feel a little bit nervous inside. So go out there and have a wonderful Wednesday and just celebrate what Micki has done and dig in and see if you can do it in your school.

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