



To Future Don't Wait Project Filmmakers,

I have tried to think of many different ways of how to start this letter. I could start by telling you how Mike pays attention to detail, or how the kids transform under his direction into problem solvers and true collaborators. Or how my special ed kids, the "quiet" kids and the underdogs of my class, every year I've done this, have been my top contenders in the project. Or how the public product at the end is something beyond anything I can offer the kids in my line of "teacher work". Or how I burst with pride sitting back and watching the kids work while Mike facilitates because they care so much about the project.

I've worked with Mike for over ten years. Every project we have done has been unique and tailored to what the needs of the class are. Mike is very thoughtful in making the project surround topics that my kids are facing and making every part of the process teachable moments. As much as the kids think the meetings are unscripted, they aren't. Mike takes the time to talk to each teacher before meeting with the class so that he knows exactly what direction to take the conversation and ideas. There are some years I don't know how he's going to get them to circle to an issue I want addressed but every year he does it. The project allows you to address issues the kids are facing, and problem-solve solutions to these real-life scenarios that the kids can relate to and use.

Mike quickly connects to the kids and has them opening up in no time. He calls each student by name and is aware of who he needs to dig deeper with and who he can lean on. The first year I worked with Mike I remember thinking how the heck did he walk in here and read this class so quickly. Be ready cause he's taking his anecdotal notes in his head and at lunch he's going to verify his thinking with you. He walks in ready to co-teach with you and learn what he needs to make every minute count. In all my years doing this it has covered social emotional curriculum, and collaboration skills in a week far beyond what I can offer in other projects in class. I never feel like I am just handing off my class and pausing my work. He's coming in and tailoring to my needs.

This year our typical format of in class instruction for the project had a wrench thrown into it when all New York State schools went to remote learning. The students and my team were so disappointed as we thought for sure the project, like everything else in our world, was going to have to be canceled. My team and I had decided we were still going to use the Unmake Project videos as a teaching tool to open up conversations on topics with our kids. Little did I know The DON'T WAIT Project had a remote learning plan when I reached out to him about a video that wasn't playing. With my head spinning and literally about to explode, I opened Mike's email asking if we would take on a remote project. My team and I didn't think twice about it. One: we knew like every other year Mike would include us every step of the way and problem solve with us. Two: our kids more than ever needed something to feel united as a class and this program does just that. They all work towards a common goal. And three: (the big one) it makes the kids work....HARD! They have so much fun, but they don't realize how much work they are doing. When things get challenging, Mike puts it back on them to work through and problem solve. Throughout the whole process, the work and hurdles are owned by the students. This makes the project that much more meaningful to them. Mike guides them through.

I could go on and on describing the value this project has added to my class curriculum over the past ten years. The intimidation that comes with the equipment and the technology is on me. The kids thrive and I learn from them. My facilitation every year is with ease under Mike's direction. I wholeheartedly recommend this project remote or in person as I have seen the magic for myself.

Rachel A. Daurio
4th Grade Teacher
Division Street Elementary SSCSD