

## Transcript- Go Global ED Podcast: Episode 3 – Amy Barsanti, Fulbright-Hays Seminars Abroad

**[Intro]** Welcome to the Go Global ED podcast, brought to you by the International and Foreign Language Education office, also known as IFLE, at the US Department of Education. On the Go Global ED podcast, we speak with IFLE grant and fellowship recipients to highlight their experiences, discuss issues in international and foreign language education, share advice on the application process and explore the long-term value and impact of IFLE's programs. In celebration of International Education Week 2021 and the 60th anniversary of Fulbright-Hays, today on the podcast a member of the IFLE team, Matt Robinson, speaks to Amy Barsanti, a second-grade teacher in rural North Carolina who participated in the 2021 Fulbright-Hays seminar abroad to Iceland with a group of US teachers and administrators. Let's listen

**[Matt]** Amy Barsanti, welcome to the podcast!

**[Amy]** Thank you.

**[Matt]** Maybe we could begin by if you could tell us a little bit about yourself?

**[Amy]** OK I teach second grade in rural eastern North Carolina Jamesville North Carolina there are fewer than 500 people in our town but it's very beautiful and wonderful I have I've been married for 31 years and I have three daughters in their 20s.

**[Matt]** So you teach at a school there, right?

**[Amy]** Yes, I teach second grade at Jamesville elementary is very small we have fewer than 180 students in grades pre-K through 5.

**[Matt]** Ah, second graders

**[Amy]** yes

**[Matt]** How long have you been teaching at that level?

**[Amy]** 32 years, in second or third grade

**[Matt]** tell us a bit about why you chose to apply to the seminars program. What made you think that you wanted to do the seminars abroad in Iceland?

**[Amy]** Well I love to travel, and I usually travel to places where I know someone, or I feel some connection and I had no frame of reference at all for Iceland, so I was very intrigued about that. I'm a lifelong learner. I love learning new things and I really was in a place that I wanted to energize my teaching infuse some new life in my classroom, my school and my community and I

had a little bit of time during the pandemic to write the application to really apply myself and do some research and get that going

**[Matt]** One of the few kind of silver linings of the pandemic I guess

**[Amy]** Right yes exactly.

**[Matt]** So tell us a bit about the context of your school that you're at. You mentioned it's in a rural area, you know, maybe you could tell us a bit about your students and about the context.

**[Amy]** Well our students are very isolated, we do not have a lot of families that travel and if they do it's to Disney World so everything they find out about the world is through the filter of media, and that's a little disconcerting for me. One of the stories I always tell is it my goal is by October to make them understand that not every language other than English is Mexican. So I have my work cut out for me, but they're not, they're not as tech savvy as they are even in nearby towns, but they are very provincial in a lot of ways. They're eager to learn but they don't really have that lexicon to make their curiosity academic and, and you get so many who say I would never get on an airplane, and so I tried to very gently expose them to as much as I can and teach them the language and the effect of being able to approach different culture with not only tolerance but with the goal of celebration. And they are so little, I mean they're only seven and they've never had a normal year of school and they've been in a pandemic for over a quarter of their lives. So, it's really interesting to me, it's an interesting opportunity—because they've been so isolated—to really make them more curious about the world.

**[Matt]** Yes. Is this pretty much the first time that they will have any exposure to somebody who has had global experiences?

**[Amy]** For many, yes. We do have some students who have family in Central America, but, and we do have some teachers who have traveled, we have a really good system in our county, some people who take groups to travel. So I would say compared to a lot of places in our region, they are exposed. Our other bind is though that global studies in these grades is kind of at the low end of priorities. Um, social studies is not tested and you know we are getting them ready for high stakes testing. So I'm very fortunate to be in a place where I have some autonomy and freedom: I'm following the standard course of study in the Common Core standards, but I can work in math and science and social studies and reading language arts all into the global piece. They are curious and they do want to know and they're fascinated and I had a little boy come in the other day and say to me “Can you believe that my mother never heard of Rosh Hashana?” [laughter] Why yes I absolutely do believe that but I bet you told her all about it! So they do, they are very generous and loving children, and very curious.

**[Matt]** So speaking of the global parts that you want to incorporate into their learning, would you like to highlight some of the most memorable parts of going on the seminar to Iceland?

**[Amy]** Oh yes. Well, I did some very challenging things for me and like kayaking on the glacier lake and snowmobiling on the glacier and climbing with micro spikes on a floating iceberg. Um, we had a really great horseback ride like going through little streams, things that I never thought I would do. And I also really love that like we met the goat lady at the goat farm, and she single handedly re-populated the Arctic goats that had almost become extinct. So things like that were really exciting too. We went puffin and whale watching, we went to a preschool where the students are separated by gender and there are no specific identifiable toys— everything is about creative play. So you get sticks and scarves and stuff like that and I thought that was pretty amazing. I think one of my favorites though was our hosts had a 4th of July cookout for us and so all the Fulbright Iceland people were there and they invited teachers, so we could talk shop a little bit. But it was just such a kind thing to do they got a bunch of American flags had a barbecue, and so that was really a peak experience for me as well.

**[Matt]** Wow, you know, sometimes we forget to think about that aspect of going abroad, that experiencing something American but not in America.

**[Amy]** yes yes and I thought it was just such a charming and thoughtful thing to do. And in telling my students about it they say, ‘why don't they have the 4th of July?’ as well. They have the 4th of July it just you know, so explain why it's not such a big deal there and we had the same conversation about Thanksgiving and so that's really a good approachable way to teach it I think for my students, is about the holidays. I can't wait to get into the Yule lads with my students. I'm really excited about that.

**[Matt]** Tell me a bit about that, you mentioned “yule lads?”

**[Amy]** [laughs] The Yule lads are kind of like a cross between elves and trolls, and they're kind of designed to scare the living daylight out of children so they behave. And that's how Victor, who was one of our hosts, explained it to us. And so there it's very rich in the history and the land, there's a lot, there's a lot of mythology that explains what is so wild about all the landforms and everything, and so we did visit a place where the Yule lands are supposed to live. They also have this great Christmas Eve tradition. I can't pronounce it but it's flood of books, and people give each other books and they read late into the night on Christmas Eve together.

**[Matt]** oh wow

**[Amy]** So I'm going to work that in, too

**[Matt]** There are already so many examples that you shared of things that you experienced that you know you want to work into your teaching back here, right?

**[Amy]** yes

**[Matt]** But, maybe it would be germane to pause for a second and have you tell us about the curriculum project that you've been working on as a result of this seminar.

**[Amy]** OK terrific. I am working on a project that has to do with inquiry based social studies. I am very interested in having the children explore artifacts from different cultures and even from different historical periods to draw their own conclusions and record those and then do additional research to correct or confirm their misconceptions. And I'm very fortunate in North Carolina we have a program called Carolina Navigators, so I didn't completely make this up myself. I don't feel like a lot of teachers use it this way they're more likely to show the object explain what it is and take it from there and I'm really trying to get children to handle the objects and try to figure out what the purpose is what they can tell about the land or the climate or the culture based on artifact. And one example is I had a student looking at coins and stamps saying that they must really value or they didn't say that. They said "they must really be into nature because everything on their money and their stamps is either animals or plants," and that's a really intense thing for a 7-year-old to figure out on his own. so

**[Matt]** That's really insightful

**[Amy]** Yes, and we have glimmers like that. So it's important for vocabulary and to teach descriptive rather than judgmental language, we don't say it's gross, and a lot of times they don't have the vocabulary for that so to use phrasing like "what does that remind you of?" "Well, it looks Chinese." "Why do you think it's Chinese?" "Well, it has a dragon on it." Those those kinds of conversations and after practice the students talk to each other that way and I can facilitate more but in North Carolina at Chapel Hill they have a program called Carolina Navigators and their students who study abroad gather artifacts and bring them back and teachers can reserve these culture kits and borrow them for three or four weeks at a time FedEx to you free of charge with the return label and then descriptions of the artifacts of the students gathered. So that's what kind of got me pointed in this direction and for my curriculum project that I'm submitting, I realized that it's not realistic or replicable for people to have the artifacts. So I did something comparable with pictures that I took when I was in Iceland and I've pulled out curriculum objectives for grades K through 5 that teachers could use this inquiry with say a landform unit or a unit on plants, and so I have them the slides divided by category that way.

**[Matt]** That sounds like it also lends itself well to virtual learning

**[Amy]** yes definitely

**[Matt]** So you mentioned that you're a lifelong learner and it sounds like you've had some very memorable experiences on this trip. Maybe you can tell us a bit about what you gained from experiencing this seminar in Iceland, you know professionally and personally?

**[Amy]** Well, I learned a lot. just I call them fun facts with Mrs. Barsanti. I really like the little details about cultures like the only indigenous mammal in Iceland is the Arctic fox. So even the reindeer and the bumblebees are imported or were brought with travelers or traders or settlers, so I love that kind of thing. But I also learned how much I don't know, and different kinds of things that in future travels will focus the kinds of experiences I have. I've never been a

particularly touristy traveler. I like to stay long enough and be where people live so that I can learn more about the people in the culture, and I do plenty of the touristy stuff too, but we were in Iceland for almost a month, and that gave me a chance to really dig deep and think more about the way I travel and the kinds of things I do. I really challenged myself physically and academically. There was a balance, it wasn't all kayaks and reindeer. We also visited university we visited parliament not in session, and the children's parliament you know so we it really informed my practice too because there's some things that you just have to as we say in the South 'sit n get.' So, we did attend a lot of lectures on gender equity education we met the president who invited us to stay for tea. So, the variety of experiences that, you learn it, you see it you see the slides and then you're out in the field sometimes with the person who gave the talk to then guide us see the things that they were talking about and I feel like that's something that I can incorporate on a much smaller scale in my classroom. This is something that you're just going to have to listen to maybe even take notes or draw a picture, but here we are going to dive right in and look at it and touch it and apply it. So personally, I really learned a lot about like I said challenging myself, really appropriate levels of risk taking. I'm 61. I never thought I would get on a snowmobile, but I picked the smartest person that I could find who I knew had been snowmobiling to actually do the driving. So, I found this really sweet spot between the physical challenge part and the getting the appropriate level of help and learning about those things. Professionally, long range I would really love to see the soft sciences incorporated into STEM and STEAM. I feel like my littles don't have access to real STEM not just STEM with a sticker that says it's STEM. But you know giving them legos is not that but with anthropology and sociology and that global peace they can really participate in inquiry in a way that's different and Iceland made me feel that's a project I can really undertake, kind of formalizing it in a way for my school and my system and maybe even further than that.

**[Matt]** can I ask you a bit about that? If you have an example to mind, how would you envision doing that?

**[Amy]** Well my curriculum project is one way, to have students figure out what they can figure out about the culture based on artifacts or pictures and then move forward with that to do more investigating. And again we're in a great place to be able to access resources not just online, but at great museums, the Natural History Museum is terrific in Raleigh, so I think that that's one example. I think that exploring different kinds of maps: historical maps and maps that are geared toward children and maps that are not. We saw some amazing maps that are polar. It's like a view of the globe but from the pole, and I just thought you think that things like that will blow children's minds and get them really digging deeper into things about other cultures

**[Matt]** So kind of changing gears a bit. It was the pandemic this past summer. What was it like to travel on a seminar?

**[Amy]** Well, it was a little scary because I hadn't been farther away from home than an hour in over a year and a half and I generally get around pretty much. I was most concerned about the airports, but I found that it was a very safe experience I did feel much safer in Iceland. There

were a lot of, they had lifted the mask restriction and we're doing extremely well, and the protocols that were in place made me feel safer. We had to be vaccinated we had to have a test 72 hours before we left, we were tested in the airport that was a little creepy, and then we went back to the hotel and we had box lunches and breakfast and we just stayed there until we got the call or but they let us know on an app that we were clear. And then we got tested before we left Iceland as well. So I felt very safe health wise. All around safe! It's a very safe place to be. We did go to the volcanic fields but the new volcano was sleeping, so we did get to see it from the airport, that's how close the volcano is to the city. Yeah, but it was really interesting to learn about that particular phenomenon, it was just like a giant like picture of a volcano just spewing, it was like the earth unzipped itself. There was like 1 and then there were three and then there were five and so it was really intense. I wish I had gotten to see it up close I did get to see like the steam fields and stuff but I didn't get to actually see any flowing lava. I do like to travel as if I will be back, and I definitely want to go back to Iceland. We were there in the summer so we didn't get to see the Northern Lights. When I go back I would like to go in winter and see that.

**[Matt]** Do you have, you mentioned that it's a good practice to travel as though you're going to come back again, I wonder if you have any other recommendations or advice that you would give to individuals who are going to go on a seminar or who are thinking about applying to seminars?

**[Amy]** Well to go on the seminar you just get so much information. I mean we had Zooms with the Fulbright Iceland folks, they were absolutely terrific. So forthcoming in terms of and you know we're teachers we were like what do we wear? how do we act what presents do we bring? What do you mean we don't bring presents? We have to bring, but you know it was but your Fulbright people will give you all the information that you need. And for the application process I would say just trying not to be intimidated by the whole Department of Education thing. To be honest, that's part of the reason I didn't apply sooner. I just thought it was bigger than I was up for, and then I was a little intimidated by the amount of writing. But once I got started it just it seemed natural. The questions are good and solid and clear. If you apply and are not selected, you should definitely apply again. I got my essays back with very specific comments and suggestions it was good enough. It's my understanding that it's a numerical selection process but the feedback that I got if I hadn't gotten it I would have been able to fix it and apply again. And as it is, I'm going to use the feedback to apply for other things. So that was unique, I have not gotten that kind of feedback in other situations other things that I've applied for. I feel like especially if you're in a rural area, small town, it can be a little daunting but once you get into it, it really isn't, it's a great process.

**[Matt]** and I'm really glad that you underscored that that it doesn't hurt to apply right? If you're thinking that you're interested, you know why not?

**[Amy]** Somebody has to go it might as well be me. [laughter]

**[Matt]** So I just have one other question for you, which is, tell us what your Fulbright-Hays experience has meant for you?

**[Amy]** It has really meant a lot. It has meant a lot in terms of like what I talked about before physical challenges being out there for a month away from my family which actually was fine. At 61 I'm still learning I'm still growing I felt so valued and valuable. It did exactly what I hoped it would it energized my teaching practice it let me assume more of a leadership role in my school, they got a lot of teachers interested in the prospect of doing more global work in their classroom, so I like that feeling of scaling my impact. And I'm going to be honest I'm a shameless self-promoter and, and the prestige of it, well not everybody around here and not all my friends know what it is, my three daughters were so excited and thrilled and proud of me and I liked that lesson for them as well that they don't ever have to stop learning. And finally I have made friends for life. That cohort not a day goes by that somebody doesn't make some kind of contact in our WhatsApp group, and we know what we're doing in our classrooms and we share things and we know what Bill cooked for dinner, and these people from all over the United States are going to be my friends forever. And that's another huge thing at 61 to still be making that kind of depth of friendship.

**[Matt]** That's wonderful and it's really great to hear that too that the group of cohered so well and that you're all still in touch. Amy thanks so much for taking the time to join us on the podcast today. We really appreciated your candid answers to all the questions.

**[Amy]** Well thank you, I really appreciate this chance to take a little mini memory trip back to Iceland.

**[Outro]** Thanks for listening to the Go Global Ed podcast, a production of the International and Foreign Language Education office at the US Department of Education. Be sure to follow us on Twitter @GoGlobalEd and subscribe to our newsletter to learn more about upcoming podcast episodes and other IFLE updates.

### **Guest Biography – Amy Barsanti**

Amy Barsanti has been teaching for 32 years and currently teaches 2nd grade at Jamesville Elementary School, a small school located in North Carolina. She has a BA in Communication Arts and Theater, an MS in Elementary Education, and an MEd in Science Education with STEM concentration, which began with a NASA Endeavor STEM Education Teacher Certification Fellowship. Amy has published in many periodicals, including Mailbox, Parents Magazine, and Teacher's Helper.