

Natalie Robb



Natalie Robb's path to school leadership has been shaped by a deep commitment to justice, equity, and the transformative power of literacy. Originally from London, she brings an international lens to her work as English Department Chair at Equality Charter School in the Bronx. As she prepares to graduate from the Summer Principals Academy, Natalie is working to reimagine what school can look like, one classroom at a time.

Leadership and Literacy in the UK

Natalie did not plan on being an educator. She initially trained to be an actress at the BRIT School, the UK's leading school in performing arts. Alongside acting, she pursued a degree in English Literature, and an experience as a teaching assistant led to a life-changing realization:

"It didn't feel like work. I wasn't watching the clock and waiting for the day to finish. The relationships that you build with all of the people in the community were just so rich and powerful that I was like, right, actually, this is what I could see myself doing."

After traveling and working in the media, Robb returned to education and trained to be a teacher. From the beginning, she took on leadership roles—developing curriculum, training new teachers, and stepping into departmental responsibilities. In 2021, she completed the National Qualification for Senior Leadership in the UK, a pathway to becoming a school leader.

She said, “I think I’m a lifelong learner, and I’ve also always wanted to be recognized in what I’m capable of doing.”

Throughout her training, Natalie focused on improving reading skills and fostering a love of reading.

“Literacy is a tool for bringing about social justice and making change. Not just reading in terms of the technical sense, but actually just opening them up to a wealth of different texts is so important.”

She emphasized what she calls a “cultural toolkit,” giving students exposure to texts, authors, and real-world experiences that “open their door to different concepts and ideas.”

New York City: A System in Contrast

Natalie moved to New York in 2022 and quickly noticed key differences between the education systems in the UK and US. “Within the first year, I was able to see the disparities between what is a given in terms of what students receive as a basic education to what students receive here.”

A major difference is space. “Sometimes you might have two or three schools in one building, sharing spaces.”

She detailed challenges of holding gym class in a hallway and scheduling use of a single playground. “That doesn’t happen in the UK. In the UK, you will have two or three huge playgrounds.”

She also remarked on curriculum development: “In the UK, we typically don’t buy curriculums. We make our own.” In contrast, her current school uses a purchased curriculum, which she estimates can cost tens of thousands of dollars.

Natalie attributes many of these differences to educational policy. In the UK, she explained, there are national mandates around curriculum content and school facilities—including requirements for subjects like geography, history, and modern foreign languages, as well as minimum standards for physical space. “It’s just a legal requirement,” she said. In the U.S., by contrast, such standards vary widely by state and district, resulting in uneven access to both academic subjects and basic infrastructure.

Adjustment and Empowerment

Natalie currently serves as English Department Chair at Equality Charter School.

She is leading a focus on writing development, called the “Writing Revolution.” Natalie enjoys seeing her students, particularly English language learners, “assimilate into the community and find themselves.”

Reflecting on her professional journey, Natalie spoke candidly about the barriers she has faced as a Black woman in education. “There is a ceiling, especially in the UK,” she said, noting that only 4% of school leaders there are Black. “I never had a Black teacher in all of my years going to school.” In New York, however, she has witnessed a greater push for diversity. “They understand the importance of having representation of people to represent the kids in the school.” As an educator and a leader, Natalie is breaking through limitations and modeling what’s possible for the students in her school.

Looking Ahead

Natalie is looking forward to graduating from SPA, where she has developed skills in culturally responsive pedagogy, social emotional development, and data analysis. What she values most about SPA is how it has strengthened her ability to “build the capacity of others.”

Her long-term dream is to open a school, one “rooted in culturally responsive practices, activism, and a rich curriculum—with “a building and facilities to match.” She is also curious about reviving her creative roots, exploring New York’s acting scene after graduation.

Natalie noted that SPA “broke you down as a person and built you back up again.” She offered the following advice to future SPA students:

“Be open to feel all the feels... Be open and ready to question your beliefs.”

And if you’re afraid?

“Work out what you’re afraid of—and do it anyway.”