The 2015 NCTE Presidential Address:
Advocacy as Capacity Building: Creating a Movement through Collaborative Inquiry

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The following is the text of Kathy Short's presidential address as delivered at the NCTE Annual Convention in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on November 22, 2015.

In a dialogue at the beginning of the 2014 NCTE Annual Convention, Ernest Morrell and I said "enough is enough"—the time had come for us to take a stand as a Council. We proposed that NCTE members come together in a movement to change the conditions for literacy learning and teaching in our schools, colleges, and universities. We spoke of NCTE's commitment to providing avenues for highlighting the voices of educators and engaging decision makers in meaningful dialogue about why the "test and punish" approach to literacy reform will never work and how systematically building support for deeper literacy learning across a community yields impressive results.

Our comments were based in Kent Williamson's vision that the key to improving literacy is changing the conditions in which literacy is being taught, instead of subjecting ourselves to the ongoing onslaught of reforms (NCLE, 2013). That promise was also based in the belief that all of us are teachers in classrooms, whether those classrooms are in a university, community college, early-childhood center, or K–12 school setting. This belief provides a stance from which to reflect on the ways in which NCTE is working to move beyond reform approaches to advocacy. My focus is on advocacy as capacity building, which has been taken on as a shared agenda across the different conferences, sections, assemblies, and committees that constitute NCTE.

Advocacy as Capacity Building and Action

Many teachers respond with a defensive stance to calls for change because reform efforts typically revolve around a deficit view of teachers and schools. Reforms emphasize fixing what is wrong and attempt to force change through accountability, standards, and mandated programs (Ravitch, 2011). Not surprisingly, motivating change by telling teachers that they are not doing their jobs well and

need to be monitored and standardized has not led to sustained reform. The focus on accountability has also been present in recent rhetoric claiming that teacher education programs lack rigor and that a rating system is needed to measure the success of universities.

My early years as a teacher were influenced by reforms based on *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). This report generated a great deal of discussion about accountability but, more importantly, felt like an attack on the professionalism and integrity of teachers. Our intentions and knowledge were questioned, and experts were hired to tell us what we were doing wrong and what we needed to change in our practice. Like many around me, I closed my door in order to continue teaching in the ways that were most effective for the students in my classroom, while seeming to conform on the surface to administrative mandates. The one positive development from this time was that membership in professional organizations allowed me to remain connected to educators with whom I could think and learn.

Kent Williamson's leadership in guiding NCTE to construct a shared agenda around capacity building is a direct challenge to this approach to reform. Instead of defining change as fixing what is wrong, a capacity-building approach views change as an inquiry through which teachers explore new understandings about learning and literacy (Short, 2015). In an approach based on capacity building, teachers no longer work in isolation, but as members of a team, thinking alongside community members and educators to develop plans for change based on research, practice, and knowledge of the specific students in their classrooms.

To be sure, professional organizations have always been a force for change by supporting educators at all levels of instruction and experience in their efforts to move forward in their teaching, research, and scholarship. The challenge that Kent Williamson provided was to consider how professional organizations could be a movement for positive change through capacity building and increasing teachers' potential to make a difference within schools and universities. He argued that a professional organization can build the capacities of both the systems and the educators involved in those systems (Fournel, 2015). Ernest Morrell (2015) traced the ways in which NCTE has been continuously involved in movements and advocacy over time. He argues that our current work is the *next* movement because taking action is what we are and what we do within NCTE.

The reality, however, is that many of us as educators are uncomfortable in the role of activist, a person who acts within a movement for change. Many teachers view activism as marches and loud public voices of protest, and so we close our classroom doors and teach our students and classes until something happens that makes us realize that "enough is enough." I admit that I am one of those teachers.

I was teaching first grade when reform efforts brought "teacher-proof scripts" to guide our teaching of reading. I put the basal reader on the shelf and taught with my door closed using real books, keeping below the radar until the principal decided children should be ability-grouped across classrooms and grade levels for reading. I refused to participate and provided evidence from research that this practice was not tied to higher achievement and instead lowered self-esteem and

confidence. He huffed and puffed and called me a few names but did not impose ability grouping on students in the school.

I viewed standardized tests as a necessary evil to provide the school board with an accountability measure until the principal agreed for our school to pilot test a new standardized exam that a company was in the process of norming. I was forced to have first graders take the end-of-the-year second-grade test after one month in school. It took months after that to gain back their confidence in themselves as learners. We organized as a group of teachers and went to the school board, presenting on the amount of time being given to testing, the lack of relevance for informing instruction, and alternatives to testing every grade level each year.

I also closed my door at the university during a time when our dean monitored final grades and punished my department because of our strong student advocacy by denying new faculty lines, blocking our initiatives, and questioning our decisions. Most of our department meetings focused on how to respond to whatever new obstacle had been tossed our way. The only factor that kept me from leaving was the community we formed within the department and our willingness to share the task of advocacy and resistance, particularly when the time came for an administrative review of his performance. He did eventually resign, but I was aware that I might need to leave a job I loved because the conditions were no longer tenable.

Many educators do not see advocacy as an integral part of their daily lives. Advocacy is not typically part of our skill set, and we may be unsure about how to communicate effectively with the broader public. We are also extremely busy in our professional lives and not eager to take on another responsibility. The odds seem stacked against us when considering policymakers and legislators, so it is easy to become deeply discouraged. Those perspectives are challenged when we work together to create a movement and a voice in order to advocate for capacity building by forming a professional community that shares an agenda and supports each other on goals that seem impossible to do alone.

Of course, some educators within NCTE have long histories of advocacy and strategies they've used as activists that provide strong demonstrations for us as a council. My comments reflect the views of a larger silent majority who has held back and needs strategies in order to figure out what it means to be part of a movement of advocacy for change.

Authentic Approaches to Advocacy and Action

My understanding of advocacy as actively supporting a cause through multiple means is influenced by my work in elementary classrooms. As part of a four-year research project, I worked with a K–5 school initiative around global inquiry and intercultural understanding. One of the questions we explored was how to engage children in taking action out of a sense of responsibility for making the world a better place. We wanted to define charity as more than giving a handout to "the poor and unfortunate," and volunteering as more than acting on the surface of a problem. Our goal was to engage in action that was meaningful and authentic to children, not just impose a project we conceived onto children, and so we engaged

in two schoolwide inquiries around human rights and hunger that led to developing principles of action essential to advocacy (Short, 2016).

I often find that what I learn through working with children provides a lens through which I can reframe my understandings as an educator, in this case, my understandings about the advocacy initiatives within NCTE. Teachers already know a great deal about advocacy and action through our work with students in classrooms, and we can use those insights in our interactions with policymakers. The principles of advocacy developed from work with children are a productive lens for viewing advocacy within NCTE and distinguishing between reform and capacity building.

Advocacy Is Grounded in Knowledge and Experience

When action is grounded in our lives, experiences, and knowledge, that action grows out of inquiry and understanding instead of functioning in isolation. Our experiences and knowledge create tensions that are the basis for action that drives further learning and new insights (Dewey, 1938). This principle seems self-evident, but action projects within schools often take the form of fundraisers for the most recent global disaster and require children to raise money out of pity rather than a sense of inquiry or understanding.

Our hunger inquiry grew out of observing the annual canned food drive sponsored by the parent organization at the school. Children were given a bag of popcorn if they brought in cans, most of which were unwanted items from their household's cupboards. The food drive was not compelling for children nor connected to their experiences.

That act of charity differs from social action in which children analyze the reasons people go hungry, look at causes, figure out possible solutions based in knowledge and caring, and work with community members on short- and long-term solutions. Social action also moves beyond volunteering to act on a surface problem, such as collecting trash in a stream. Going beyond the surface in this example involves picking up trash, analyzing that trash to figure out its sources, and working with the community to reduce pollution (Kaye, 2010).

When we began working with children around human rights and hunger, we wanted to root those inquiries in their lives and experiences and give them an opportunity to gain knowledge, not just act out of good intentions or pity. The hunger inquiry started with discussions of tight times in families and the differences between tight times where families might not get to go to Disneyland and those where there is not enough food on the table. We also explored the complex distinctions between wants and needs and why people locally and globally experience hunger. Only after gaining a great deal of knowledge about the causes of hunger did students inquire into solutions related to those causes.

The human rights inquiry started with children creating maps to record events they considered unfair at school. They used these maps as the basis for listing their rights in school. Their knowledge of rights was broadened by looking at the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and at sets of books organized around global issues such as child labor, education, violence, basic needs, and the

environment. Our initial intent was to have children select one of these human rights to investigate in groups and then to decide on an action. What was more compelling for children, however, was that *kids* were the ones taking action in these books, because they believed action was the responsibility of adults. As they discussed the strategies used by children around the world to take action, their interest in addressing human rights issues within their own school context became apparent. They went back to their unfair maps and lists of rights to decide what each group wanted to take action on—in which situations they felt that children should have a say, particularly the violation of their rights in the cafeteria and on the playground.

So what do these experiences with children have to do with the work we as educators do on advocacy? Educational reform does not build from our knowledge and experiences, but instead focuses on what experts and policymakers view as missing and needing to be fixed. Typically, the message to teachers is that we don't work hard, don't care about our students or only care about some, are not capable of selecting the pedagogies that work in our contexts for our group of students, and don't know how to assess students. The problem with education is us and our failings, not the underlying systems in which we work (Zhao, 2012). The approach to reform is thus to test and punish by mandate in order to remedy these perceived problems.

In contrast, capacity building does not focus on fixing what is wrong but on changing our capacity, building from what we already know to add new knowledge and strategies, both in the classroom and in taking action within the system alongside administrators and policymakers (Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, & Thomas, 2006). This approach makes clear the distinction between having something done *to* you and engaging in professional learning that both connects to your lived experiences and challenges you to go beyond those experiences. This stance positions us as knowledgeable and as learners and takes us into territory that may feel uncomfortable and uncertain, particularly on issues of racism and equity, but that is essential to building our capacity to make a difference.

Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) refer to capacity building as professional capital developed through long-term investment in teachers who are committed, knowledgeable, collaborative, and able to make effective judgments using their capabilities and experience. Professional capital thus includes the development of human, social, and decisional capital. In particular, the ability to make decisions in complex situations is at the heart of professionalism.

Advocacy Meets Needs That Are Genuine and Valued

Action involves identifying that a genuine need exists and is significant to participants. Time is needed to research and understand the issues related to that need (Cowhey, 2006). A principal in Munich shared a story with me about their annual clothing drive for a nearby refugee camp. After several years, he took a small group of children to the camp to ask about the needs of refugees. They were taken to a room filled floor to ceiling with clothing. The real need was for games and toys so that children had something to fill their time.

In the human rights inquiry, second graders thought that trash on the playground came from a nearby landfill and planned to write a letter of protest to the owners. When researching the trash, however, they found that it was "kid trash." Later observations led to the realization that the problem was the location of the only trash barrel at the far end of the playground.

During the hunger inquiry, students initially believed that hunger was the result of not enough food available in the world. Their participation in the global banquet (Oxfam, 2015) led them to realize that there is enough food and the issues are ones of power and unequal distribution. In this banquet, 100 children were randomly sorted into groups by tickets handed to them as they entered the room. Twelve sat at a table where each had an entire pizza, reflecting the percentage of people in the world who have more than enough to eat. Sixty children sat in small groups with a large bowl of rice and beans and water, representing those who have just enough, and twenty-eight sat on the floor with a jug of brown water and one small bowl of rice, representing those who do not have enough to eat. Their looks of envy at children who each had an entire pizza challenged their beliefs on hunger.

Reform rarely gets at the actual need (e.g., the children's focus on the landfill not the trash barrel) or it acts on the surface (like the canned food drive). After years of NCLB, a real need does exist in classrooms for more complex and high-level thinking by readers, but many schools have used the Common Core Standards to impose scripted programs with little space for student or teacher voices, indicating a lack of deep understanding of that need. We hear lots of talk about the achievement gap for students of color, but solutions rarely focus on the deeply rooted issues of racism, poverty, and lack of opportunity.

News accounts regularly report on teacher shortages due to retirements and to fewer new teachers entering the profession. However, Richard Ingersoll (2015) provides statistical evidence that the real crisis is not retirement and recruitment but retention with 45 percent of teachers leaving the profession in the first five years. Teaching is a high-turnover line of work with some schools experiencing much higher rates of turnover than others. Ingersoll cites surveys showing that teachers are leaving due to dissatisfaction with conditions that influence their classrooms and take away their ability to make decisions about the most effective instruction for their students. Teachers are frustrated with having little influence over key decisions in their classrooms and schools. This dissatisfaction with the lack of voice is a much more frequent complaint than pay or class size. Ingersoll proposes that the solution is to allow teachers to be part of a purposeful profession where they can make a difference and can participate in the decisions that affect their lives in the classroom.

NCTE has shown leadership in establishing the National Center for Literacy Education, a collaborative venture with other professional organizations to facilitate the work of teacher inquiry groups (NCLE, 2012). At the heart of that work is a needs assessment to identify a focus for the group's inquiry and an asset inventory to evaluate current collaborative practices for professional learning. The work of the group is developed from an understanding of their shared needs and strengths, not an imposed structure developed by experts outside of the school community.

These same strategies are part of the work NCTE has done with the LIREC Grant (Literacy Innovation in Rural Education through Collaboration), which focuses on preschool to grade 3 classrooms in rural schools with the purpose of developing sustainability and capacity building in professional learning opportunities for educators, schools, and community members (Dunsmore, 2015). Teachers assess what they want to know and their current systems of working together, and from that information, they create a professional learning plan for systematic inquiry. Within this plan, collaboration is intentional and is designed and rooted in protocols and practices such as analysis of student work and co-creation of instructional practices. This work is being used as a model to develop an approach to professional learning that NCTE can market to school districts instead of the canned programs that are often delivered to teachers.

Advocacy Depends on and Builds Collaborative Relationships
Social action involves working with others by developing partnerships and sharing responsibility (Wade, 2007). For children, these partnerships often involve working with community members, parents, organizations, and teachers. Through these relationships, students learn about each other and gain respect, understanding, and appreciation for what each has to offer.

Individualism is a strong US value and often leads to the depiction of one person acting alone. This individualism is exemplified by the Rosa Parks myth that depicts her as acting alone as a tired, anonymous seamstress rather than as a longstanding activist against segregation within an organized movement (Kohl, 1995). This same emphasis on individualism is evident in the Hollywood myth of the "superteacher" who acts alone to save kids.

In the human rights inquiry mentioned earlier, fourth graders were frustrated with playground rules that seemed to arbitrarily appear out of nowhere. They wanted to be the ones who made the rules, believing that they would do a better job than adults. As part of their research, they interviewed the playground monitor, whom they viewed as the enemy, to find out who made the rules and why. Her nervousness and concern for their safety led them to realize that she was someone to think with and not the person making the rules. When the students interviewed children in other classrooms, they realized that their views about playground use were not necessarily shared, so they ended up proposing collaboration between the principal, playground monitors, and representatives from different age levels. Their proposal was to establish a group that would meet once a month to discuss existing and proposed rules for the playground so that a range of voices could be considered. In the hunger inquiry, once children understood why hunger exists in the world and the complexity of local and global factors, they recognized the need to work with community and global organizations if they wanted to actually make a difference.

This same need for collaboration and partnerships is evident in the work of NCLE. One type of collaboration involves teams of teachers who think together about their practice around a shared focus of inquiry and interact with other teams. A second type of collaboration involves the twenty-five professional associations

who have come together within NCLE to provide resources for these teacher inquiry groups as well as to influence the broader policies and organizational conditions affecting their work and their members. This effort involves professional associations joining together to find important points of inquiry and learning from each other, instead of viewing each other as a competitor.

Another example of encouraging relationships within schools as communities is NCTE's school membership initiative. Elementary, middle or secondary schools can initiate an organizational membership that provides all of the teachers in a school with access to NCTE resources and journals. The goal of these memberships is to encourage educators to work together to improve literacy and to have discussions around common readings.

The NCLE (2013) report, *Remodeling Literacy Learning*, reported data from a broad survey of teachers about what they considered the one professional learning experience that had the greatest impact on their practice during the previous year. Although university coursework, conferences, and school inservices were mentioned, the top ranking went to collaborative inquiry with colleagues that was embedded in the day-to-day work of teaching and learning. That work involved hands-on participation, collaboration, and choice, another reflection of the power of relationships and partnerships in advocacy as capacity building.

Advocacy Results in Mutual Exchanges among Participants

Many action projects in schools take the form of a charity project where students raise money or bring cans of food or clothing to send away to those experiencing hardship. The giving is uni-directional and students remain distanced, feeling a sense of doing good or pity but without being emotionally involved or committed to those who are recipients (Cowhey, 2006). In fact, this work often creates a sense of superiority in the students involved. In contrast, authentic action involves the mutual exchange of ideas, information, and skills among *all* participants so that each sees others as having something to share and so that everyone gains from the experience in some way.

In the hunger inquiry, because of the amount of time students spent researching the causes of hunger through information sources as well as fiction, they gained a sense of respect and empathy for those who experience hunger. Many children talked about learning about the courage and perseverance of those who face such tremendous hardship. This respect led them to seek out organizations engaged in sustainable projects where the recipients receive animals or seeds that enable them to take action for themselves. The children talked about not wanting to make a one-time difference but a change that keeps giving so that families can provide for themselves instead of relying on others. The first graders, for example, decided to work with the community garden project at a local food bank instead of gathering canned food for food boxes.

Reform approaches to education position us as the recipients—*we* are the poor and unfortunate, the inept who need to be saved. Reforms offer an ever-changing selection of silver bullets and short-term solutions to fill gaps and weed out "bad"

teachers in schools. These perspectives also underlie recent discussions on tenure at universities, when it is suggested that tenure exists to protect bad professors.

Although advocacy as capacity building positions us as competent and as professional learners, we tend to position policymakers and administrators as uninformed and corrupt. This stance is not productive if we want to engage in mutual exchanges based on respect and relationship. We have to go beyond the "enemy" stance.

KaiLonnie Dunsmore (2015) argues that we need to integrate top-down and bottom-up approaches to change. Instead of viewing these approaches as in conflict with each other, they should both be considered essential to effective, sustainable change. Bottom-up grassroots efforts build on teacher expertise and agency to ensure ownership and commitment to change and ensure a professional teaching force. Top-down district, state, and national policies ensure equity for all students across multiple systems by guaranteeing resources and accountability so that students have the opportunity and support needed to achieve. These top-down efforts also provide a coherent vision for educational outcomes and high-quality teaching and learning for all students.

If bottom-up efforts dominate and the emphasis is only on teacher ownership and expertise, a fragmented system can be created that hides inherent inequalities in how individual practices disenfranchise particular students. On the other hand, if top-down efforts dominate, an overemphasis on incentives and coherent vision can lead to scripted, canned approaches where teachers have few opportunities to do the work they believe is important for student achievement. Capacity building shifts us from a compliance to a commitment mentality that integrates both approaches.

Advocacy Involves the Use of Strategies within a Continuous Cycle of Action and Reflection

Action is based in engagement throughout the entire process, including witnessing the outcome of action when possible. A continuous process of action and reflection spirals throughout the process that includes identifying a problem, researching to understand it, planning, anticipating consequences of action, taking action, observing what happens, reflecting on those observations, accepting responsibility for consequences, and acting again (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). This balance of action and reflection provides children and educators with an opportunity to be aware of the impact of our actions on our lives and thinking as well as on others (Dewey, 1938).

Taking action thus involves developing strategies for continuous engagement in action and reflection. Those strategies vary according to the type of action (Terry & Bohnenberger, 2007). In the hunger inquiry, some children took *direct action*, an action that directly affects and involves recipients, such as when fifth graders raised money for a classmate whose family was facing hunger after the death of the father and the mother's loss of her job. Some children took *indirect action*, which does not involve direct interaction with recipients but still benefits the community, such as when first graders took seeds to the community garden project at the local

food bank and when third graders raised money for global projects that involved sustainable approaches to hunger. Another type of action is *advocacy for action*, creating awareness or promoting action on an issue, such as when the first graders created posters about how to grow gardens in the desert. Finally, another type is *research for action*, gathering and reporting information on an issue to influence action, such as when students researched the needs related to hunger and the different organizations that take action on those needs.

Another important aspect of these different types of action is that they involve different skills and strategies (Terry & Bohnenberger, 2007). Direct action depends on collaboration, problem solving, and follow-through on commitments, while indirect action requires cooperation, teamwork, the ability to organize and prioritize, and a willingness to support an established effort. Advocacy for action entails understanding rules and systems, perseverance, and how to work with adults, while research includes strategies for gathering and analyzing information and working systematically with data.

As educators, there are also different ways that we can be involved in advocacy (Fleischer, 2000). Protests and marches are one strategy, but others include planning literacy events with parents, creating videos of students at work to put on a class website, scheduling book clubs for teachers and administrators, having students present at community events, getting appointed to the district professional development committee, making presentations to school boards, writing blog posts, proposing a town meeting, starting massive email campaigns to policymakers, and lobbying at the state capital. Or action may be teaching according to research in the face of bad policy. The possibilities are endless and depend on the context and each person's skills and priorities.

The Kent D. Williamson Policy and Advocacy Center in NCTE's Washington DC office has been developing opportunities and strategies for advocacy. This center promotes and coordinates NCTE's advocacy on public policy issues based on our goals and positions, encouraging active member involvement in school, district, institutional, state, and federal decision making. One of the new opportunities is the Williamson Policy Advocate opportunity, a summer internship for a P–16 teacher to work with NCTE staff in influencing legislators and Department of Education leaders on NCTE policy positions. The Policy Advocate internship is based in Kent's belief in the essential role of teachers in policy decision making.

Another initiative is based on teachers' need to develop the tactics and tools needed for advocacy. Cathy Fleischer and Jenna Fournel are developing a tool kit for advocacy at the local level called Advocacy 101. This tool kit will be available on the NCTE website and will be easy to access for teachers who want to develop the insights and tools needed to be more effective advocates in their schools and universities.

Advocacy Invites Participants to Have a Voice in Decisions
Often the action projects in schools are conceived and directed by adults with little room for student voice or choice. Rosenblatt (1938) argues that a democracy means that we—both students and teachers—have the right to participate meaningfully

in the decisions that affect our lives. This participation involves the valuing of individual voices within recognition of group responsibility.

In the human rights inquiry, the children's inquiry was about how *children*, not adults, could be the ones who act. First graders did not believe that they could take action. They stated that action is what adults do and that if an adult tells them what to do, then their right is to do what adults demand. Fourth graders initially saw being given a voice as a sense of entitlement and so wanted to determine the playground rules without input from adults or other children. A fifth-grade boy decided his right was to do his math work whenever he wanted without considering the teacher or other students.

The children latched on to the importance of individual voice in taking action, but not their responsibility to the group. Reading and discussing global literature in which characters take action for others, often at great expense to their own lives, shifted students' sense of responsibility so that they wanted to make a difference in the world and in the lives of their classmates, not just for their own benefit. These shifts led to major changes in their behaviors and a willingness to consider the needs of their classmates as well as their own needs.

Roger Hart (1992) created a Ladder of Participation to visually depict how the focus of power and control usually remains with adults who work *for* children rather than *with* children. This ladder emphasizes the effect of different types of adult/child interactions on the distribution of power and control. At the lower levels, students are not genuinely involved in decisions; instead, adults make the decisions and manipulate children to agree with those decisions. The same problem can be seen in policy initiatives where developers state that teacher input was included, but on closer look, it's evident that the input was manipulated to make it appear as though teacher voices were included. At the top of the ladder, children have the most voice in decisions but with adults providing support and guidance. This same relationship can be found in policy efforts that integrate top-down and bottom-up approaches.

NCTE has put a high priority on finding ways to highlight the voices of members on important issues, both to inform ourselves and to influence broader policies and decisions. State affiliates provide a means for teachers to work together in making their voices heard at state and local levels, increasingly important due to ESEA reauthorization. Another initiative involves the new role of policy analysts, a network of NCTE, CCCC, and TYCA volunteers who track state policy developments impacting literacy. They provide an important voice in analyzing information about state policies that affect schools and universities and providing knowledge NCTE members need to participate in the policymaking processes that influence classrooms. The Assessment Story Project, for example, is focused around a survey that documented the beliefs and practices of K–college teachers on assessment, with a primary focus on high-quality literacy assessments that support learners. Five hundred teachers responded to this survey and told their stories, leading to a rich data set for blogs, interviews, and articles (Yancey, 2015).

Another way in which the voices of NCTE members are highlighted is through the publication of statements that provide voices of critique and possibility related

to the conditions affecting literacy teaching and learning. An NCTE statement on Affirming #BlackLivesMatter by the Black Caucus describes the current crisis of racial injustice, calling for tools, training, and support for literacy educators to build a more equitable system. And there is also an NCTE position statement on ethnic studies initiatives in K–12 curricula that was authored by the Latino Caucus. In addition, a Task Force on Equity and Early Childhood Education was appointed to create short policy documents that identify conditions of inequity and resources for anti-bias curricula for young children.

Finally, NCTE has a detailed communications plan built around members' voices on key issues for a range of audiences. The communications platforms include social media, the NCTE blog, NCTE on Air YouTube videos, NOW messages from the staff liaisons to sections and conferences within NCTE, InBox, and press releases to news media.

Advocacy Involves Civic and Global Responsibility for Social Justice

When we take civic responsibility for social justice, we put the focus on issues of power and we challenge oppression by looking at the social conditions within local and global communities (Lewison, Leland, & Harste, 2008). Paulo Freire (1970) provides a lens of critique, hope, and action for this sort of critical engagement. *Critique* questions what is. Instead of accepting problems as just the way things are, critique asks *why* problems exist and identifies the underlying issues and who benefits from things staying the same. *Hope* imagines what if and considers alternative ways of living in order to develop a vision of equity and justice. *Action* highlights the work of social justice and change. This action grows out of critique and hope, question and vision.

Critique goes below the surface of a problem to get at root causes, social contexts, beliefs, and consequences; for example, not just having students serve in a soup kitchen, but encouraging them to ask why there is poverty in a community. Critique means asking why the elderly are isolated in our society and who benefits rather than just visiting seniors in a nursing home (Wade, 2007).

While critique is essential, we have to go beyond critique in order to create social change. Critique alone can lead to feelings of guilt, hopelessness, and discouragement. Constant critique can also stop people from listening, a hard lesson that NCTE learned in our past efforts at lobbying where we only offered critique of legislation and policies.

Freire (1970) argues that when we deconstruct, we also have to reconstruct. Reconstruction involves hope and figuring out the "what ifs" in order to imagine the possibility of a different world. Hope is audacious and substantial and allows us to deal with problems creatively (Ganz, 2009). With critique and hope, we are positioned to act in an effective manner to make a difference. We need a critical eye and a hopeful heart to create change.

The life-changing significance of critiquing the root causes of local and global issues and then imagining a different world before taking action was evident in the children's inquiries. In the human rights inquiry, children questioned prevailing practices in which adults make rules for the playground without providing space

for children's perspectives. They moved from blaming adults and asking adults to make changes for them to taking responsibility to help work at that change.

In the hunger inquiry, children realized that they needed to understand the multiple causes of hunger so that they could consider solutions that held the possibility of social change, not just filling a gap in services or donating money. They questioned the conditions in society that create hunger, such as famine, reliance on cash crops, breakdowns in food production, disruptions of war, and issues of power. They read nonfiction to get facts and to grasp the extent of problems and fiction to develop empathy. Their understandings of the root causes of hunger led them to seek ways to alter those conditions—to consider alternatives and to act on hope. Their actions grew out of respect and the sense of being an ally rather than a savior of others. For example, when the family of a fifth grader faced hunger and homelessness due to the sudden death of the father and the mother's loss of her job, students rallied to earn money to donate to the family. Their focus, however, was not on charity, but on working together with the student and his family in fixing the family car so that the mother could go back to work.

The biggest insight for children in the hunger inquiry was the realization that power leads to the unequal distribution of food and hunger. One student, Elise, did a sketch-to-stretch on the meaning of action for her. She said that her sketch shows the need for everyone to help the hungry. The light bulb signifies "the need to know about hunger and what causes hunger to figure out how to help others," while the heart signifies "that people have to want to do it by caring and making a choice to help." Elise understands the need to connect the heart and mind and to hold everyone responsible. She sees the bigger picture and is willing to work for change.
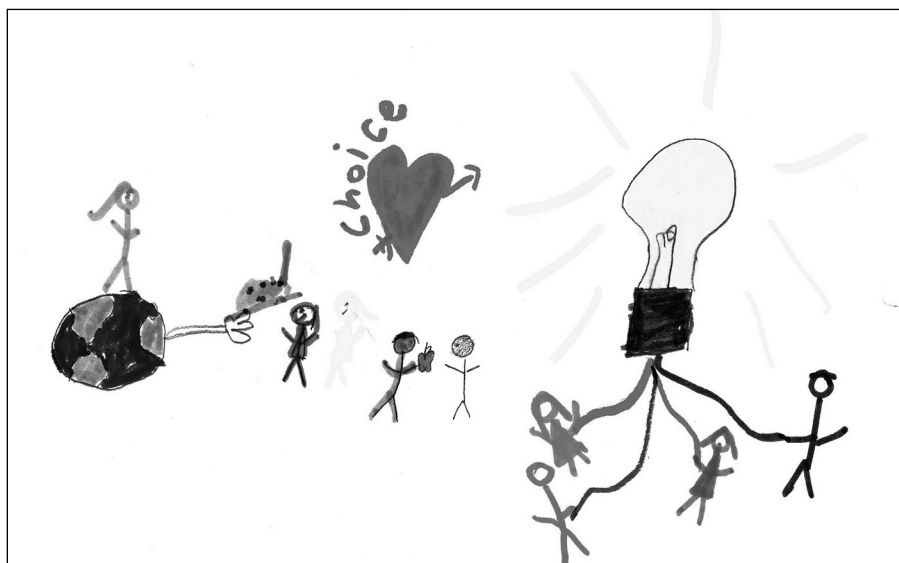

FIGURE 1. *Elise's sketch-to-stretch on taking action*

Freire's focus on critique, hope, and action also inform the ways in which we think about educational reform. Michael Fullan (2011) argues that the four drivers for educational reform used in the US have not been effective anywhere in the world where major improvements in teaching and learning have occurred. Although these four drivers may play a role in change, he provides evidence that they have never led reform as the policy and strategy levers that influence change.

Reform efforts in the US often focus first on the driver of *accountability*, the use of test results and teacher appraisal to reward or punish. The issue is not their presence but their heavy weight that crushes the educational system. Fullan (2011) argues instead for capacity building and professional learning. A second overused driver is the use of incentives to develop *individual teacher and leadership quality*, which he argues will not work unless embedded in a school culture of learning and group collaboration to develop the entire teaching profession. The third driver is viewing *technology as a solution* instead of pursuing new pedagogical innovations that include the use of technology. The fourth driver is an emphasis on *single solutions and fragmented strategies* through reform initiatives that break things into pieces and impose many disparate strategies, trying a little of this and a little of that. Fullan contends that conceiving and pursuing systemic solutions within a coherent whole is a much more effective driver.

Fullan (2011) provides compelling evidence that the drivers of reform in the US have been ineffective because they fail to change the day-to-day culture of schools as systems and institutions. Drivers that are effective involve a change in the culture of teaching and learning and focus on solutions as well as problems within a system. Ineffective drivers alter structures and specific parts of a system without reaching the deeply rooted causes and changes needed within the system and without a vision of a different way to "do" school. We need systemic and cultural change, not just a different set of practices.

Freire's (1970) frame of critique, hope, and action reveals another issue in that the drivers often used to lead reform are ones that omit hope. These drivers involve a critique of current surface conditions but do not get at root causes. They also fail to imagine a different world, so the actions taken rearrange a few parts of the system but fail to make fundamental changes that would alter the conditions that influence literacy teaching and learning.

Ineffective Drivers of Reform	Effective Drivers of Reform
Accountability to reward or punish	Capacity building/professional learning
Individual teacher and leadership quality	Group work and collaboration
Technology as solution	Instruction and pedagogy
Single solution and fragmented strategies	Systemic solutions within a coherent whole

FIGURE 2. *Choosing drivers for whole-system reform (adapted from Fullan, 2011)*

Final Reflections

If we are to create a movement through our work within NCTE, a shared commitment and intent are essential. As the professional home for literacy educators from early childhood through college, NCTE has always provided resources to support instruction and pedagogy in varied classroom contexts; however, in an era where educators can access thousands of resources free with the click of a button, our value to members has become about much more than materials.

Kent Williamson believed that our emphasis needs to shift from being a repository of information and support available to a few highly motivated teachers with the time and funding to seek that knowledge to becoming a trusted source of professional learning and teacher action opportunities for many (Blau, 2015). This goal is based in the belief that the best way to improve student learning is to support teacher collaboration and learning, a major paradigm shift that will require us to advocate for capacity building at all levels.

Building capacity highlights the *processes* that support changes in the content of instruction, specifically the processes of professional learning and inquiry that develop the agency of teachers as decision makers with expertise in teaching and learning. Professional organizations typically share knowledge and expertise with teachers, but teachers also need strategies for action within a system in order to build that knowledge and expertise themselves and to improve the conditions for literacy learning and teaching within their own contexts.

NCTE is becoming a place where members work together to offer knowledge and insights—to make a difference by influencing decision makers at all levels. Our focus has moved from "What do I get if I join NCTE?" to "What do I get to do as a member of NCTE to improve the conditions for literacy learning?"

In order for a movement to succeed, that movement has to tell a new story. Otherwise we just reconfigure networks and resources. A movement is composed of new stories that tell who and what we hope to become (Ganz, 2009). Stories teach us how we ought to act and inspire us with the courage to act. So the challenge we each face is to determine the story we want to tell about teaching and learning in our teaching contexts and who we hope to become within the NCTE community.

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