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Children Taking Action Within Global Inquiries

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The willingness to take action to create social change is essential to developing intercultural understanding and becoming a global citizen. Moving from a commitment to social justice into a curriculum that supports young children in taking action that is meaningful and not adult-imposed is much more difficult. This struggle to encourage authentic action was a tension we explored in a four-year research study on building intercultural understanding through engagements around global literature (Short, 2009). We wanted to engage children in action around social and global issues and so developed several school-wide inquiries on human rights and hunger. These inquiries allowed us as teachers to explore instructional contexts that support moving from talk about literature into action. We struggled with figuring out ways of taking action that were significant to children and that went beyond charity or volunteering to involve children in identifying and acting on the issues underlying global problems.

Freire (1970) argues that action must grow out of stances of critique and hope in order to lead to social change. Many educators have engaged children in critical discussions around literature as a way to work toward social change (Lewison, Leland, & Harste, 2008). These discussions around literature often involve critiques of discrimination and oppression as students question "what is" and challenge the status quo. The discussions also include talk about "what if" and the possibilities for change to create a better world. Less frequent is talk that leads to meaningful action. Talk about literature can engage children as critical thinkers, but often goes no further. To further complicate the issue, many of the action projects that occur in elementary schools are isolated projects to raise money for a specific cause such as natural disasters, and so are adult-imposed rather than child-initiated, with a focus on charity not social change.

Our findings from this action research as well as our exploration of the professional literature on service learning and critical pedagogy led to the development of criteria to consider in creating inquiries and projects that engage children in authentic and meaningful action. The major focus of this article is on describing each of these criteria, providing the theoretical perspectives that support each one, and sharing classroom examples involving children's literature from our research. Before focusing on the criteria, a brief description of the instructional context is provided along with an overview of the two units of inquiry from which the classroom examples are excerpted.

Situating Our Inquiry Within the School Context

Action research provides an opportunity for educators to pursue action (change) and research (understandings) at the same time. Action research involves a cyclical process that alternates between action and critical reflection through planning, action, and data gathering about the results of those actions. Those affected by the change are involved as collaborators engaged in a reflective process of progressive problem-solving with the aim of improving their strategies, practices and knowledge of the contexts in which they function (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993).

The context for our work was a small K-5 public school of 200 students within a large urban district in the southwest with a culturally and linguistically diverse population in a middle-class/working class community. Lisa, the curriculum coordinator, established a Learning Lab as an alternative approach to professional development. Lisa and the teachers decided on a school-wide focus and teachers brought their children to this lab for an hour once a week for experiences around this focus. In this case, our focus was on global inquiry and intercultural understanding, specifically on ways to engage children in taking action. Instruction in the lab grew out of intense teacher study and collaboration that was facilitated by teachers' involvement in a study group that met after school twice a month. The ideas discussed within the study group were pursued within the Learning Lab, providing teachers with an opportunity to observe in the lab sessions and then critique the instruction and assess student work in study group sessions in order to inform instruction for the next lab session. Teachers also committed to exploring these ideas in their classrooms but the ways in which they did so were individually determined based on their goals and involved their own classroom units of inquiry. Participation in the lab and study group was voluntary, but went across all grade levels.

Within the context of the Learning Lab, study group, and classroom work, we gathered teaching journals, field notes, audiotapes and videotapes of literature discussions, and transcripts of lab sessions. Teachers analyzed this data and wrote classroom vignettes about critical incidents in a summer writing group. These vignettes were published in an on-line journal, *WOW Stories* (wowlit.org/on-line-publications/stories/) over a three-year period (2007-2009). Specific descriptions of the literature engagements and examples of children's responses in the human rights and hunger inquiries are available on this free on-line journal along with a video of the human rights inquiry.

A particular curriculum framework, A Curriculum that is International (Short, 2009), was significant in enacting our theoretical beliefs and organizing instruction at the school. This framework highlights multiple ways of engaging with global literature to support children's critical explorations of their own cultural identities, ways of living within specific global cultures, the range of cultural perspectives within any unit of study, and inquiries into complex global issues. These ways of organizing literature were integrated into engagements such as read alouds, independent reading, literature discussions, writing workshop, and inquiry studies within the lab and in the classrooms as determined by each teacher.

During our second year, we developed a shared inquiry into human rights in the lab as a way to explore critical inquiries that might lead to social action. In this inquiry, students created maps of the school where they documented unfair events and used these to reflect on what they believed were their rights in the school. We then moved into literature experiences around a wide range of global human rights issues to expand their perspectives and explore a possible focus for in-depth investigation using text sets of picture books on issues such as child labor, education, freedom, discrimination, violence, basic needs, and the environment. We also engaged in literature discussions around novels such as Francisco D'Adamo's (2003) *Iqbal*, the story of a 12-year-old boy who led the child labor movement in Pakistan. Students found the accounts of children taking action compelling because they viewed action as the responsibility of adults. Their interest in how kids take action led to a decision to move back into their school context to investigate and take action on issues they considered significant, such as rules on the playground, more choices at recess time, and the types of food provided for school lunch.

The following year, an exploration of power led to a shared inquiry on the interconnections of power with hunger. Students initially explored "tight

times" to connect with the economic crisis in their community, using the picture book *Tight Times* by Barbara Shook Hazen (1979) as a touchstone text. We immersed students in exploring the various root causes of hunger locally and globally through fiction and nonfiction, films, guest speakers, and a global banquet. The banquet involved dividing all of the students into three groups and giving them food according to the world population with 15% receiving more than they could eat as pizzas, 60% receiving just enough to eat as rice and beans, and 25% receiving not enough to eat as one small shared bowl of rice. They also read novels such as Patricia Reilly Giff's (2000) *Nory Ryan's Song* to gain insights into the experience of hunger. Only after examining root causes did children identify ways to address hunger through working with community and global organizations that focus on sustainability where those receiving a gift use it to take responsibility for action. This inquiry involved children in taking action both locally and globally.

Both inquiries were the focus of our professional inquiry in the lab as a shared school-wide inquiry that occurred once a week for an hour for each group of students. At the same time, teachers maintained and pursued their own grade-level curriculum and units in their classrooms.

Authentic Approaches to Taking Action

As we reflected on these two inquiries during our summer analysis and writing workshop, we developed a set of characteristics for an instructional environment that supports a move toward authentic action and a consideration of the role of literature within this context. We continuously moved between analyzing these experiences and immersing ourselves in the professional literature to challenge our interpretations and develop our theoretical understandings. The following characteristics were developed as criteria to consider in developing action projects that are authentic and meaningful for children.

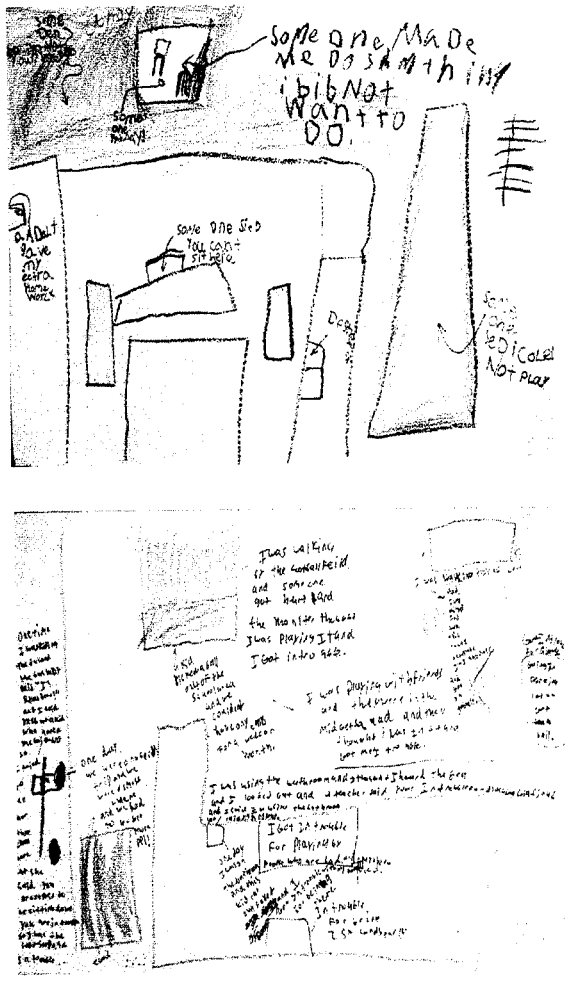
Authentic Action Develops Through Inquiry and Experience

The action that children take should be grounded in their lives and experiences and in their knowledge about the context for that action so that the action is not an isolated project, but grows out of inquiry and understanding. Kaye (2003) argues that meaningful service in the community must be combined with academic content so that the content children are exploring through inquiry informs service and the service drives further learning and inquiry. Action goes beyond volunteering to collect trash in a stream, for example, to include analyzing that trash also, figuring out the sources, and working with the community to reduce pollution. Students need time for reflection, inquiry, and learning values, strategies, and content.

The action taken by our students was carefully grounded in their lives. The inquiries began with their life experiences and followed their interests, tensions, and understandings, moving from local to global. In the human rights inquiry, children documented unfair events at the school to develop conceptual understandings about rights. Literature played a key role in facilitating these early discussions as we read aloud books about unfair events in schools such as *A Fine, Fine School* by Sharon Creech (2001) and *My Secret Bully* by Trudy Ludwig (2005). In their discussion of *A Fine, Fine School,* the fourth graders noted that the principal was well intentioned and "wanted kids to learn as much as possible," but was unfair because "everyone needs a break once in a while" and "you have to have time to play with your friends and have family time." A fifth grader argued, "School is important for your brain, but not that important," while a first grader declared, "He is torturing the kids and they must be tired every day." Although adults see the book as humorous, children were agitated and highly vocal that the principal's decisions to extend school were unfair and their strong feelings led into a discussion of unfair events at their school. To further explore this issue, the children drew maps from a birds-eye view of the school and labeled places where unfair events had occurred (Figure 1).

The hunger study began with using literature to explore tight times in their families and community and to distinguish between *wants* and *needs*. These books helped children realize that tight times can affect families in different ways so that some do without things they want and others do without needs such as food and shelter. In their discussion of Monica Gunning's (2004) *A Shelter in Our Car*, they decided that the homeless family in the car needed food and shelter, as compared to the boy who wanted

Figure 1. Maps of Places in the School Where "Unfair" Events Occurred Drawn by Matt (Age 6) and Breanna (Age 10)



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special shoes that his grandmother could not afford in *Those Shoes* by Maribeth Boelts (2007). They saw different levels of wants and needs, arguing that the family's desire for a new chair after their home burned in Vera B. Williams (1982) *A Chair for My Mother* was a more significant want than the desire for the popular shoes. We continued reading picture books about families in tight times, creating a continuum of books at different levels of wants and needs. These books provided a way for children to access difficult issues in their community and provided a bridge for connecting to these issues on a global level.

Authentic Action Meets Genuine Needs

The action should meet an actual need that is recognized by children. Children need time to research and to understand the issue from multiple perspectives by investigating whether a need actually exists and the nature of that need (Vasquez, 2004). For example, the second graders thought that trash on the playground came from the local landfill and planned to write a letter of protest to the owners. Their research revealed that children were the source of the trash and that the problem was the location of the trash barrel at the far end of the playground. Fourth graders were shocked to learn from the community food bank that children and the elderly constitute the major groups in their community who go hungry, not the homeless. Students believed that hunger was the result of not having enough food in the world until our reading of nonfiction books such as *Famine* by Paul Bennett (1998) and experiences in the global banquet led to the realization that enough food does exist and that the issue is unequal distribution.

Determining a need is not enough—children also must see the need as significant. Visits by a "Lost Boy" from Sudan and a local food bank volunteer created a sense of urgency for children to take action on the causes of hunger. Hunger was a need that was remote and removed from their lives until that need became personal with real people through these visits.

An understanding of need can also be developed through literature, as occurred when the fourth-grade students developed a strong connection with children in refugee camps through books. In discussing *Brothers in Hope* by Mary Williams (2005), the students worried about how one boy could possibly care for another without adults to help. They were concerned about the Lost Boys of Sudan and wanted to know what had happened to them after the book ended. They tried to put themselves in the situation and could not imagine how they would survive, but seemed to gain comfort that the boys had each other. Friends are important to fourth graders so they connected with the relationship between the two girls in *Four Feet, Two Sandals* by Karen Lynn Williams (2007), recognizing that the girls coped with the horrors of war and losing everything through their friendship. They believed that having someone to care for and to be cared for was reflected in the girls' decision to share the pair of sandals. Students may intellectually recognize global needs but they do not always develop a sense of caring or emotion toward those issues. Literature provides the opportunity to make an emotional connection to particular

characters, bringing together the heart and mind to create a sense of connection and a desire for action.

Authentic Action Builds Collaborative Relationships

Reaching out to work *with* others by developing partnerships and sharing responsibility with community members, parents, organizations, and students is critical to authentic action (Kaye, 2003; Wade, 2000). These collaborative relationships involve learning about each other and gaining mutual respect, understanding, and appreciation. Since the human rights inquiry occurred at the end of the fifth graders' final year in the school, they wondered why they should take action for kids' rights when they would not benefit. When they realized that they had a unique perspective because of their knowledge of the school, they took responsibility to help fourth graders consider ways to work with adults in developing playground rules. The fourth graders made a shift when they interviewed the playground monitor to find out who made the rules and the reasons behind the rules. The monitor's nervousness and concern for their safety led them to realize that she was not their enemy, but someone to think with about rules. In both cases, the students realized that they could take more effective action by collaborating with others.

Picture books such as Leyla Torres's (1993) *Subway Sparrow* and Florence Parry Heide and Judith Heide Gilliland's (1992) *Sami and the Time of Troubles* provided examples of collaboration that challenged the children's assumptions that individuals act alone. These books show children who act with adults or their peers on important issues in their worlds. Individualism is a strong value in American culture and often leads to depictions of one person acting alone. Kohl (1995) points out that the Rosa Parks "myth" depicts her acting alone as a tired anonymous seamstress rather than as a longstanding activist against segregation within an organized movement. He argues that not everyone can see themselves acting alone as a national hero, but everyone can imagine themselves as participating in a community effort against injustice.

Authentic Action Results in Mutual Exchanges

Many action projects in schools take the form of charity—"Let's help the poor and unfortunate." Students raise money to send away to those experiencing hardship. The giving goes in one direction and students remain distanced from those whom they are helping (Cowhey, 2006). Authentic action occurs when there is a mutual exchange of ideas, information, and skills among *all* participants. Each person sees the others as having something to share and everyone gains from the experience (Wade, 2007). By taking action on human rights within the school context before examining global issues, our students directly interacted with those involved with the action and recognized how much they were learning from the experience.

Literature can be a tool for envisioning a mutual exchange even when children do not have direct interaction with recipients. The fourth graders raised money for refugee children in Darfur because they felt that they had learned so much from the characters in books about courage and perseverance in the face of tremendous hardship. They wanted to give something back in return. Their action came out of respect rather than pity. Their concerns about the Lost Boys of Sudan led them into further research on the boys as well as on refugee camps. This research helped them understand the reasons for violence that results in people fleeing their homes and living in difficult circumstances within the camps. Eventually, they came across an organization that focused on children making a difference for refugees in Darfur and created several projects to earn money to purchase goats that could be used for milk in the camps.

Authentic Action Includes Action and Reflection

Authentic action is based in children having responsibility throughout the process, including witnessing the outcome of their action when possible. A continuous cycle of action and reflection spirals throughout the process—identifying a problem, researching to understand it, planning, anticipating consequences of the action, taking action, observing what happens, reflecting on what occurs, accepting responsibility for consequences, and then acting again. Dewey (1938) argues that when learners do not have the time to reflect on action, they lose much of the learning potential from an experience. A balance of action and reflection allows children to be aware of the impact of their work on their thinking and life as well as on others, which is essential to mutual exchanges.

Students may move across more than one type of action within a project (Terry & Bohnenberger, 2007). In the hunger inquiry, students engaged in *research for action* to determine the needs and the organizations that take action on hunger. The fifth-grade students engaged in *direct action* to raise money for a classmate whose family was facing hunger and eviction after the sudden death of the father and the mother's loss of her job. The first graders engaged in *indirect action* as they raised money for seeds to support a community garden project at the local food bank. Third graders took *indirect action* by raising money for global projects that involved sustainability. The first graders engaged in *advocacy for action* by creating posters about the ways that gardens could allow a family to support themselves, influenced by books such as *The Good Garden* by Kate Smith Milway (2010) As students acted and reflected, they developed a range of perspectives and problem-solving strategies to carry into new situations.

The focus on sustainability became significant to third graders through their discussions of Page McBrier's (2001) *Beatrice's Goat* and Kate Smith Milway's (2008) *One Hen,* set in Uganda and Ghana respectively. The students talked about how Beatrice had to work for the gift of the goat by planting a pasture, building a shed, and caring for the goat. They were excited to see how the gift of one goat changed the life of an entire family by providing milk and baby goats that could be sold. *One Hen* is the story of how a boy, Kojo, received a loan to buy one hen that he grows into a large poultry business. The students noted that if someone had just given food to Kojo's family, the gift would have lasted for a meal and they would have been hungry again. They realized that giving a goat or chicken provided a way for a family to make their lives better in many different ways and decided to raise money to make these kinds of changes in people's lives. They did not want to make just a one-time difference, but a change that "keeps on giving." This same focus on sustainability led the first graders to focus on the community garden project at the local food bank instead of just gathering canned food for food boxes.

Authentic Action Invites Student Voice and Choice

Too often, the action projects that occur in schools are conceived and directed by adults, with little room for student voice or choice. Rosenblatt (1938) argues that in classrooms based on democratic social relationships, students and teachers live together as equals, not in hierarchies of power where a few decide for all. Students have the right to participate meaningfully in the decisions that affect their lives and in the behind-the-scenes thinking that leads to determining those choices. The valuing of individual voices is balanced within recognition of group responsibility (Shannon, 1993). Through dialogue, students learn to have conviction and courage about their own views while keeping an open mind to the views and needs of others. Freire (1970) argues that dialogue provides the most potential for transformation, and so we worked to create contexts where students could engage in thoughtful in-depth dialogue around issues they found significant within the books we were reading.

The younger children felt they did not have responsibility because they did not believe they could take action—action was what adults do *for* them. They initially thought that if an adult tells them what to do, then their right was to do what adults demand. They did not see rights as choices they could make in their lives that have consequences. Their lack of agency to make decisions and consider their actions concerned us. We read picture books such as *Fred Stays with Me* by Nancy Coffelt (2007), *Daddy Is a Monster Sometimes* by John Steptoe (1983) and *Evan's Corner* by Elizabeth Hill (1993) to help them realize that they negotiate with, and sometimes manipulate, their parents and are not powerless. Steptoe's *Daddy Is a Monster Sometimes* was a compelling book for first graders. They peered closely at the illustrations and talked about the anger of the father and whether he has a right to be angry at his kids when they use manipulation to get another ice cream cone. Some argued that "the kids have a right to be mad when the dad is mean," while others said that "the dad had a right to be mad because they made noise and did things they weren't supposed to do." This discussion led into the children talking about how they manipulate their parents and demonstrating the types of faces they use to get their way. In discussing Coffett's *Fred Stays with Me,* they commented over and over that the girl stood up to her divorced parents to say that her dog stays with her and that her parents did not have the right to make a decision about whether the dog went with her as she moved between the two homes.

As the first and second graders came to realize that they do have agency in their own lives, we encouraged them to consider their agency on broader world issues. They cared about others in the world, but still saw themselves as powerless, leaving the responsibility for adults to do something about the problems in the world. In an inquiry on environmental issues, they read books in which characters take action such as Jeannine Atkins's (1995) *Aani and the Tree Huggers* and Chris Van Allsburg's (1990) *Just a Dream* and charted the choices made by the characters in each book, the consequences of the choice, the right that each choice influenced, and the action that was taken. When they later moved into considering issues related to their rights within the school, their strong feelings about the actions they should take indicated that they had moved beyond a passive acceptance of adults making decisions for them.

The fourth and fifth graders responded to our focus on human rights with a sense of empowerment; however, their first response was to use this power for their own benefit without considering others. The fourth graders wanted to determine the playground rules without input from other classrooms, and a fifth grader believed he should be able to do his math work whenever he wanted without considering the teacher and other students. When we immersed them into global literature in which children take action for others, often at great expense to their own lives, such as in *The Carpet Boy's Gift* by Pegi Deitz Shea (2003) and *Rebel* by Allan Baillie (1994), their perspectives shifted away from a focus on individual benefit to group responsibility. As they discussed *The Carpet Boy's Gift*, the fourth and fifth graders were particularly concerned that the parents sold their children to work in the Pakistani carpet mills and could not protect them and that the laws against child labor were ignored. They were upset that the children did not have adults acting on their behalf and that they were too scared to defend themselves. Their initial talk was judgmental until they realized the dire poverty and desperation that led to children becoming indentured labor because of their parents' debts. They moved beyond blaming families to condemning a system that benefitted from child labor.

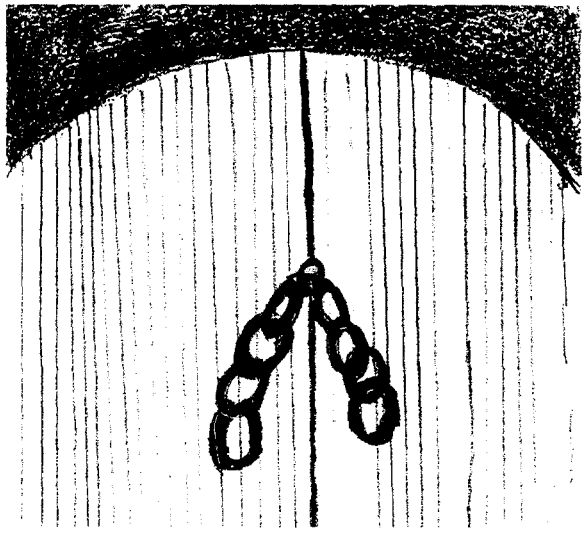
Iqbal's willingness as a 12-year-old boy to lead the movement against child labor surprised the students. They expected him to run away to save himself, not come back and lead protests to free all the children at the risk of his own life. A fifth grader commented, "It seems that whenever someone fights for the rights of others, most of the time someone gets hurt or dies." The students questioned whether they would be willing to risk their lives for others, but the fact that a real boy their own age had done just that and been killed was unsettling and thought-provoking. The students were so interested in Iqbal that the teachers read aloud the novel *Iqbal* (D'Adamo, 2003). They connected with Iqbal as a character, coming to care about him and to admire his willingness to take on such a huge responsibility. This novel led them to talk about their responsibility to make a difference, given Iqbal's willingness to take such huge risks. Miguel's sketch in response to this book (Figure 2) indicates his understanding of Iqbal's action. Miguel explains,

> The chain is empty to show that Iqbal is free and the top part is dark and red to show he is angry because it was wrong to be chained and forced to work. I made it white behind the loom to show that Iqbal knew he and the other children could be free and he was going to make it happen. He knew that child labor was wrong and was brave enough to stand up for himself and the other children.

Miguel saw the chain as a symbol of strength and action, not despair.

Several participation models address children's involvement in decision making based on the

Figure 2. "Sketch to Stretch" to *Iqbal* (D'Adamo, 2003) by Miguel (Age 9)



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realization that the focus of power and control usually remains with adults who work *for* children rather than *with* children. Hart's (1992) Ladder of Participation 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; adults make the decisions and manipulate children to agree with these decisions. At the top of the ladder, children have the most power and control of decisions, with adults providing support and guidance as needed. Shier (2001) examined the processes that occur within interactions and the kinds of attitudes, actions, and practices that schools can develop for a participatory approach to action. He identifies five types of participation of children in decision-making about action and asks teachers to examine their own readiness for children to participate—from being open to this participation, providing opportunities for children to actually engage, and embedding this participation into how things are done in a school.

Authentic Action Involves Civic/Global Responsibility for Social Justice

Civic engagement is often viewed as being a good citizen by voting, volunteering, and engaging in political activities that do not involve challenging the status quo (Banks, 2004). Taking civic or global responsibility from a social justice perspective puts the focus on issues of power and on challenging domination and oppression by looking at the social conditions within local and global communities through:

- **Critique:** Questioning what is; not just accepting problems as the way things are, but asking *why* problems exist and identifying the underlying issues and who benefits.
- **Hope:** Imagining *what if* and considering alternative ways of living in order to develop a vision of equity and justice.
- **Action:** Taking action to work for social justice and change. This action grows out of critique and hope, questions and vision.

Civic responsibility involves going below the surface of a problem to get at root causes, social contexts, beliefs, and consequences of that problem (Christensen, 2000). Children learn to problematize by questioning what is assumed to be "normal" by society and so develop critical consciousness. They do not just serve lunch in a soup kitchen; they also analyze the reasons for poverty in the community. They may visit seniors in a nursing home, but they also explore why the elderly are isolated in our society. The canned food drives in many U.S. schools reinforce stereotypes of the poor, oversimplify problems and solutions, and fail to teach an understanding of the causes of poverty (Cowhey, 2006). Instead of a "give the helpless a handout" approach, civic engagement involves challenging stereotypes of those who live in poverty, developing an understanding of the complex causes of poverty, introducing activists who work at these causes, and removing the stigma of poverty.

Our study of hunger focused on exploring the multiple causes of hunger, both in the U.S. and the world, through fiction and nonfiction books and resources. We found that nonfiction books such as *Famine: The World Reacts* by Paul Bennett (1998) provided definitions, terminology, and facts that made the problem real and sent a message to children that this issue was something actually happening in the world and not just an interesting story. Fiction such as *A Shelter in Our Car* (Gunning, 2004) humanized those numbers and helped children feel empathy for those who go hungry. This experience helped us realize that we were using too much fiction in our inquiries. We valued the role of fiction in humanizing global issues and providing emotional connections to characters and issues, but needed to integrate more nonfiction resources to make the issues real.

We used nonfiction series books on hunger and famine, fact cards on hunger and child mortality rates in specific countries, a science film on food production, the real stories of people experiencing hunger told by visitors to the classroom, and a fabulous book *What the World Eats* by Faith D'Aluisio (2008) that uses photographs to show a week's worth of food for families in many different countries. These nonfiction resources helped children develop an understanding of the extent of the problem and the wide range of reasons for why people go hungry. We balanced the nonfiction with fiction to create understandings of the human struggles and emotions. The fiction texts we used included picture books and novels where characters experience hunger, but also included excerpts from a movie to show a family struggling with hunger and the drama text created at the global banquet. The use of such a wide range of types of texts provided

the students with multiple perspectives about the causes of hunger. Only near the end of the inquiry did students move into considering the actions they might want to take given those causes.

Reading aloud *Nory Ryan's Song* (Giff, 2000) was particularly significant for fourth-grade students in thinking about power as the root cause of hunger. One student noticed that "some people have power over land like the English having power over Ireland. They had power over streams and didn't let the Irish fish." Another student noted, "And they had power over land because they collected rent and kicked people out of homes if they couldn't pay. They even had power over people's things because they took their animals if someone was late with rent." "Yeah," added a student, "when they lost their animals, they lost their food, like eggs, and so were even more hungry."

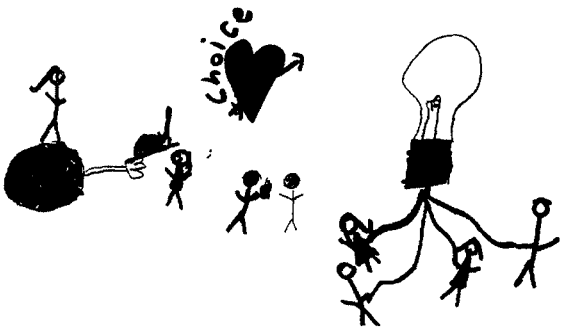
Civic engagement is not just focusing on local or global needs. It involves encouraging students to question prevailing practices and to develop ideas for making the world a better place. Their focus is social change, not just filling a gap in services or donating money, but questioning the conditions in society that create a need and seeking to alter those conditions. Instead of charity, the focus is promoting change and transformative practices (Wade, 2000).

In the human rights inquiry, children raised issues about prevailing practices in which adults make rules for the playground and lunchroom without providing space for the voices of children. Initially, the fourth graders wanted to make the rules, but gradually realized the need to work with adults and other children in the school to develop rules that work for everyone. They suggested developing a system where class representatives met with the principal and playground monitors on a regular basis to discuss the playground rules and any changes that needed to be considered. They moved from blaming adults for problems and asking adults to make changes for them to taking responsibility for challenging injustice and working for change.

In the hunger inquiry, students became aware that enough food exists in the world to feed everyone and critically examined the factors and issues of power that lead to unequal distribution of that food. Elise's sketch of the meaning of taking action indicates her understandings of these issues (Figure 3).

She said that her sketch shows the need to help the hungry and that "everyone in the world has to help." The light bulb signifies that "the need to know

Figure 3. "Sketch to Stretch" on the Meaning of Taking Action by Elise (Age 9)



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about hunger and what causes hunger to figure out how to help others." The heart signifies that "people have to want to do it by caring and making a choice to help." Elise's understandings of the need to connect the heart and mind and to hold everyone responsible indicate her ability to see the larger picture and her willingness to work with others to make change in the world.

Final Reflections

Children are constructing themselves as human beings by developing the ways in which they think about and take action within their lives and world. Our challenge is to build on children's lived experiences to move toward multiple perspectives and action. Our research indicates the complexity of the difficult issues that must be addressed within schools to move beyond *talk* about global issues into authentic and meaningful action for social change.

A key factor in making this shift is *time*—time to research root causes of global and local problems, to explore multiple perspectives on those problems, and to critique, hope, act, and reflect on that action. Taking action runs counter to the individualistic and materialistic nature of many societies and to adult views of children as needing protection. Many children do not have opportunities to engage meaningfully in making decisions that affect their lives. Adults determine their choices and protect children instead of engaging them in experiences where they gain new perspectives and strategies for problem-posing and problem-solving. Children need perspective, not protection.

Dialogue about literature can play a key role in supporting this process. Books can help children reflect on and connect to their own life experiences,

immerse them in the lives and thinking of global cultures and places, offer new perspectives by taking them beyond their life experiences and challenging their views of the world, and provide demonstrations of ways that they might work with others to take action. The lives of children in books provides them with an understanding that the voices of children can make a difference in the world and that there are multiple ways in which children can take action. They are able to try on perspectives and actions beyond their own by living in the story world of the characters whom they have come to care about. Through engagements with global literature, children can develop complex understandings about global issues, engage in critical inquiries about themselves and the world, and take action to create a better world. The significance of these experiences is that children move from a position of powerlessness to a position of possibility.

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