RECLAIMING READING

Teachers, Students, and Researchers Regaining Spaces for Thinking and Action

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DEVELOPING INTERCULTURAL UNDERSTANDINGS THROUGH GLOBAL CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Kathy G. Short and Lisa Thomas

While we live within a world that is increasingly connected through mass media and globalization, North American culture continues to be characterized by ethnocentricism, isolation, and a lack of understanding about world cultures (Case, 1991). Many children obtain their world knowledge through television, with its focus on catastrophe, terrorism, and war, and so their understandings remain superficial, often grounded in fear and stereotypes. Although the development of intercultural understandings and global perspectives can be accomplished through a range of strategies, we are reclaiming the reading curriculum by engaging students in inquiries around global literature to highlight multiple voices and avenues for action. Global literature provides an opportunity for children to go beyond a tourist perspective of gaining surface information about another country. Through immersing themselves in story worlds, children gain insights into how people feel, live, and think in global cultures, both recognizing their common humanity and valuing cultural differences.

Integrating global literature into the curriculum, however, is not an easy matter. One issue is the limited (although growing) availability of culturally authentic literature set in other countries, along with educators' lack of familiarity with the books that are available (Freeman & Lehman, 2001). Once educators access the books, the problem remains of how to engage children thoughtfully with this literature when the books often focus on ways of living that seem far removed from children's immediate experiences and contain unfamiliar stylistic features and unusual names and terms (Tomlinson & Lynch-Brown, 1989). Children may view this literature as "exotic," failing to connect in significant ways and forming superficial understandings about people around the world.

We are engaged in a school-wide project to integrate global literature into the curriculum. Through action research, we reclaim an intercultural curriculum in

which children and teachers engage in meaningful conversations and learning experiences around literature within a global context. This chapter focuses on the pedagogical issues involved in integrating global literature into the curriculum in order to reclaim reading.

Situating Our Inquiry within Theory

Because we define curriculum as *putting a system of beliefs into action* (Short & Burke, 1991), we spent time as a group exploring our beliefs about responses to literature and intercultural understandings. Harris and Willis (2003) note that the different definitions of multiculturalism are connected by a focus on the struggle against social injustice. They found that, despite current literacy wars, researchers continue to examine the school contexts that support children's responses to multicultural literature and the changes that teachers make in moving toward the inclusion of this literature in their classrooms (Brooks, 2006; Martínez-Roldán, 2003). Debates about cultural authenticity and the complex issues of power relations in society continue to dominate the field of multicultural literature. Fox and Short (2003) conducted a comprehensive review of research on cultural authenticity and indicate the pressing need for investigations that go beyond critical content analyses of books to focus on the ways in which children and teachers respond to authentic literature and on the effectiveness of social practices around the use of these books with children.

Scholarly discussions about global children's literature have focused on the value of this literature, its availability and authenticity, translation and publication issues, selection and evaluation, global trends, and use with children (Freeman & Lehman, 2001). Ideas on possible uses of these books are shared, rather than actual classroom examples of the integration of this literature into the curriculum and of children's responses to global texts. An increasing number of articles exist on the books themselves, but not on children's responses or on how this literature influences intercultural understanding. Our view of reclaiming the reading curriculum through global children's literature has included looking at what we do, how we do it, and the effects of the engagements.

Interculturalism as a movement grew out of the aftermath of World War II and is based in the work of European researchers and theorists. Although interculturalism and multiculturalism share similar theoretical constructs and goals, they have parallel scholarly traditions. Interculturalists see multiculturalism as focusing on the relationships between ethnic groups within a country and interculturalism as focusing on relationships between cultural groups across the boundaries of countries. The two fields share the belief that internationalism and multiculturalism are perspectives or orientations on life, not a special unit or book. Key scholars in intercultural education (Fennes & Hapgood, 1997; Hofstede, 1991; Hoopes, 1979) and global education (Begler, 1996; Case, 1991; Collins, Czarra, & Smith, 1998) inform our definition of intercultural understandings as an orientation toward curriculum in which learners:

- explore their cultural identities and develop conceptual understandings of culture;
- develop an awareness and respect for different cultural perspectives as well as the commonality of human experience;
- examine issues that have personal, local and global relevance and significance;
- value the diversity of cultures and perspectives within the world;
- demonstrate a responsibility and commitment to making a difference to, and in, the world;
- develop an inquiring, knowledgeable, and caring perspective on taking action to create a better and more just world.

Case (1991) argues that an intercultural, or global, perspective has both substantive and perceptual dimensions. The substantive dimension refers to the knowledge of various features of the world and how they work, including knowledge of cultural values and practices, global interconnections, present concerns and conditions, historic origins and past patterns, and alternative and future directions. The perceptual dimension consists in the orientations, values, and attitudes that establish the lens through which students perceive the world. This lens includes open-mindedness, anticipation of complexity, resistance to stereotyping, inclination to empathize, and non-chauvinism. These attitudes of mind are viewed as fundamental to a global perspective and are integral to the beliefs we brought to reclaiming the reading curriculum.

Situating Our Inquiry within the School Context

Our engagement in action research has allowed us to pursue action (change) and research (understanding) 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 actions. Those affected by the change are involved as collaborators who engage 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 is a small K-5 public school within a large urban district in the southwest United States with a culturally and linguistically diverse population, serving a middle-class and working-class community. Lisa, the curriculum coordinator, established a Learning Lab as an alternative approach to professional development at the school. Lisa and the teachers decided on a schoolwide focus, and teachers who wanted to be part of this focus brought their children to the lab for an hour once a week. Instruction in the lab grew out of intense teacher study and collaboration that was facilitated by teachers' involvement in a study group. The study group 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 evaluate student work in study group sessions. Teachers also committed to exploring these ideas in their classrooms, but the ways in which they did so were individually determined, based on their own goals. Participation in the lab and study group was voluntary, but went across all grade levels in the school.

Within the context of the Learning Lab, study group, and classroom work, we gathered teaching journals, field notes, audiotapes and videotapes, and transcripts of study group and lab sessions. Teachers were also invited to write classroom vignettes about critical incidents through participation in a summer writing group. These vignettes were published in an online journal, *WOW Stories* (www.wowlit.org), over a three-year period.

This chapter focuses on our exploration of the pedagogical issues involved in creating a curricular context that encouraged the development of intercultural perspectives through interactions with global children's literature. Kathy's field notes of the study group sessions and the debriefing/planning discussions with Lisa were analyzed along with field notes on the lab sessions one day a week.

A Curriculum Framework for Intercultural Learning

We used a particular curriculum framework (Short, 2009) to enact our theoretical beliefs and organize instruction. This framework highlighted the use of global children's literature to support children's critical perspectives in explorations of (1) personal cultural identities, (2) cross-cultural studies, (3) cross-curricular international materials, and (4) sociopolitical global issues (see Figure 9.1). These ways of organizing this literature were integrated into engagements such as reading aloud, independent reading, literature discussions, writing workshop, and inquiry studies within the lab and in the classrooms as determined by each teacher.

Our focus on personal cultural identities highlighted the need of all children to explore their own cultural identities in order to understand why culture is significant in the lives of other children. We engaged in specific inquiries into children's identities and wove connections to children's life experiences into all of our units of inquiry. This focus on personal identity was complemented by cross-cultural studies in which students engage in inquiries into a particular culture to examine the complexity and diversity of that culture and to recognize that their personal perspective was only one way to view the world. The juxtaposition of these two types of engagements created conceptual understandings of culture.

In addition to occasional in-depth studies of specific cultures, intercultural perspectives needed to be woven into every unit of study so that the focus on culture was integral to the entire curriculum. This integration of the stories, languages, and ways of learning from many cultures highlighted the significance of multiple perspectives and developed interculturalism as an orientation. Inquiries around specific global issues focused on difficult social, political, and environmental topics, such as human rights or hunger, and considered the local and global

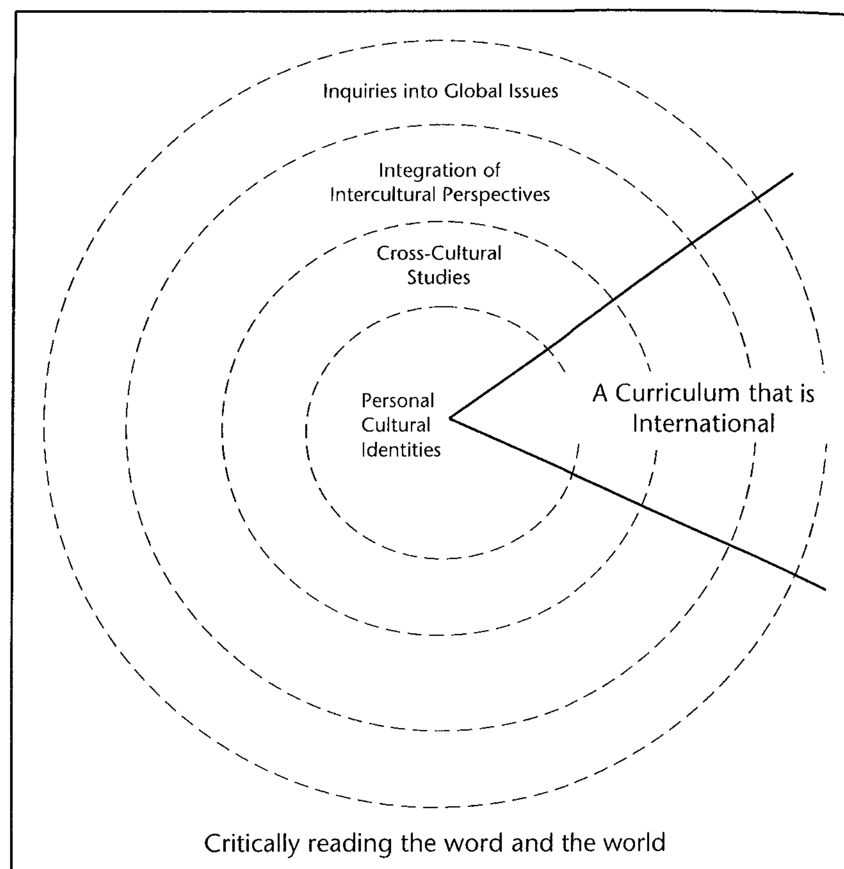

FIGURE 9.1 A Curriculum that is International

complexities of that issue. These inquiries encouraged students to go beyond talk to determine how to take action.

All of these components of a curriculum that is international were permeated with critically reading the word and the world (Freire, 1970). Without this focus on critically engaging with the ideas and texts, the four components could easily have become a superficial tour of culture in which students learned about internationalism as tourists who picked up isolated pieces of information but did not consider difficult issues of social justice and made no real change in their thinking about themselves or the world.

Tensions in Creating a Context for Intercultural Understandings

We struggled with a range of tensions to establish a curricular context that encouraged children to develop intercultural understandings and global perspectives

through their interactions with global literature. Although we expected some of these issues, we did not anticipate the complexity of issues that we needed to consider in exploring an instructional context for intercultural thinking.

Inviting Engagement in Critical Dialogue

One of the first pedagogical issues was the significance of students being able and willing to think critically with each other about difficult issues. Our initial literature discussions indicated that most students did not talk about books from a critical stance. They took turns making a comment about the book instead of sharing new thoughts in response to peers' ideas. Students were not used to engaging with ideas and issues through dialogue around the books in order to challenge their assumptions by questioning "what is?" and asking "what if?" (Freire, 1970). We knew that without a critical stance, engagements around global literature could become a superficial tour of the world based on the beliefs that "if we just learn more about each other, we will like each other and solve the world's problems." We had well-behaved kids who raised their hands, took turns, and made comments rather than sharing with each other, let alone having dialogue with each other.

The pedagogical issues that were documented in our discussions about our struggle to encourage students to move toward critical dialogue included:

- encouraging personal connections and engaging with a book instead of just commenting on it;
- moving from sharing connections to using connections as a way to think about the story (e.g., "I have a dog" versus "They don't like him because he's Mexican. Some people don't like Mexicans. I know because I'm half-Mexican and that has happened to me");
- searching for the big ideas behind personal stories as children connected to the literature as well as focusing on issues they were wondering about;
- challenging students to not avoid difficult social and political issues, such as racism, through the use of clichés (e.g., "It doesn't matter what you look like on the outside, it's the inside that matters," an attitude of colorblindness);
- struggling to listen to and build from each other's thinking to explore an issue. Students were not used to thinking with others or needing someone to help them think through an issue;
- exploring the difference between ideas and issues as the basis for discussion and learning to dig deeply to identify and wrestle with issues.

This reclaiming work involved moving beyond the superficial and previously well-established habits of responding to deeper and more meaningful and critical dialogue.

Developing Conceptual Understandings of Culture

As we moved into discussions of books from many cultural perspectives, we realized the children needed an understanding of culture and why culture matters in order to challenge their view that cultures that differed from their own were strange or exotic. Children needed a conceptual understanding of culture as ways of living and thinking in the world. Our understanding of culture was based on Geertz (1973), who saw culture as the shared patterns that set the tone, character, and quality of people's lives.

We identified two types of inquiries in the study group discussions and the engagements with the students as essential to building a conceptual understanding of culture. One was inquiries that encouraged students to explore their own personal cultural identities—to realize they have a perspective and to value the role that culture plays in their own lives and worldviews in order to understand why culture matters to others. They came to see themselves as cultural beings through engagements such as neighborhood memory maps with a focus on memories as significant to who a person becomes, and cultural X-rays where students identified the attributes, behaviors, and values that influenced their cultural identities. Neighborhood memory maps invited students to sketch a map of their neighborhoods and to label these maps with stories of memories that influence their identities. Cultural X-rays (see Figure 9.2) involved creating visual

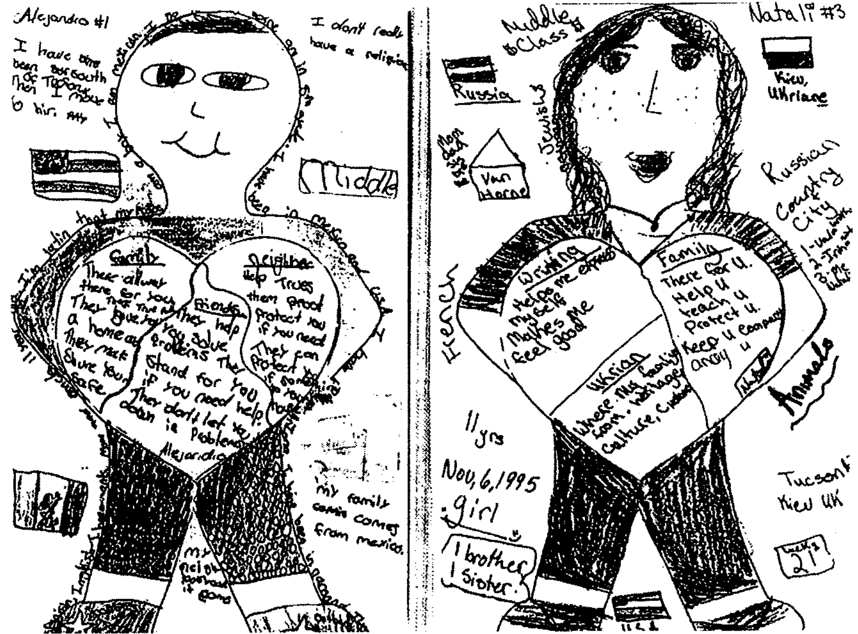

FIGURE 9.2 Fifth-Grade Cultural X-Rays

representations of each child's multiple cultural identities, identifying visible aspects such as age, language, and ethnicity on the outside of the body, and depicting the less visible cultural values as inside the heart. Students found it easier to identify cultural behaviors and characteristics that were apparent to others on the outside of their person than to identify their internal values, which they tended to see as what they liked rather than what they valued.

Another significant engagement involved students researching and constructing their own life journey maps (see Figure 9.3). Students were asked to create maps showing their life journeys. Some students chose sequential structures, such as time lines, highways, and game boards, while others used structures that represented events or people in their lives as part of a whole, like a puzzle or heart. One student used a graph format to merge the events and the emotions in his life journey.

Exploring their own cultural identities was helpful, but did not necessarily lead students to consider points of view beyond their own. The second type of inquiry involved in-depth cross-cultural studies to further develop children's conceptual understandings of culture and to help them realize that their cultural perspectives were only one of many ways to view and live in the world. Cross-cultural units are often poorly taught in schools because of an overemphasis on the "5Fs": fashion, folklore, festivals, foods, and famous people—what Hoopes (1979) represents with an image of an iceberg that shows the small surface tip of visible cultural characteristics above water and the much larger and deeper cultural values and beliefs beneath the surface.

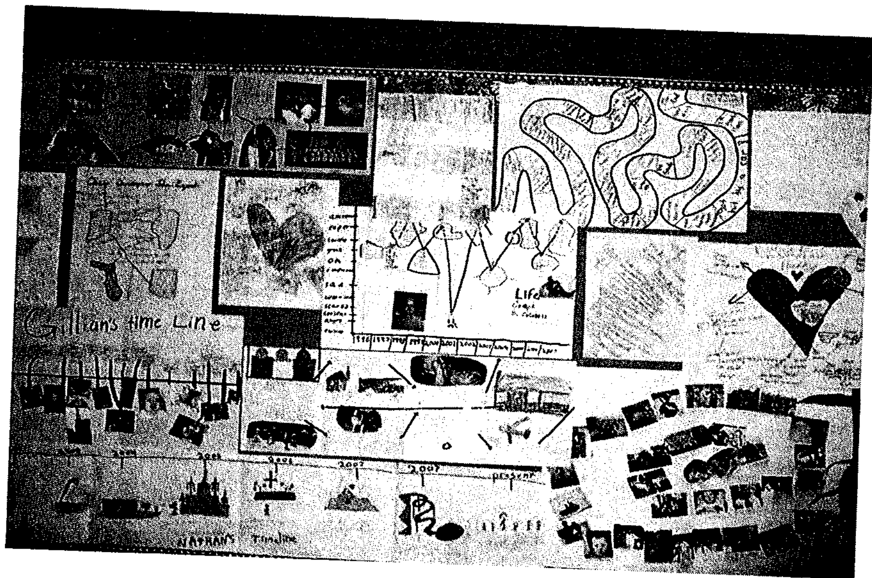

FIGURE 9.3 K–5 Life Journey Maps

The study group decided to move into a three-month study of Korean culture in the Learning Lab and used the iceberg model to evaluate the ways in which students thought about this culture in their artifacts and talk. These evaluations indicated that an in-depth study of a specific culture provided the opportunity to get at the complexity and diversity of that group in a way that integrating books from many different cultures does not. However, it also became clear that students easily got lost in facts once they began doing their own research, and so lost the broader conceptual focus on culture. We continuously encouraged students to consider conceptual understandings of culture during their inquiries through various reflection forms and class discussions.

Challenging the Assumption That One's Own Culture Is the Norm

Another pedagogical issue that emerged during the cross-cultural study was the awareness that students can understand culture conceptually and yet still view their own culture as the norm against which to judge other perspectives and cultures. For example, in an exploration of the Korean written language, students looking at various Asian languages made the comment that "Japanese books open backwards." They were surprised when Kathy pointed out that it depended on a person's cultural perspective and that a Japanese person would see their books as backwards.

We also challenged this assumption by keeping a focus on connections as well as differences across cultures. The younger children were interested in everyday life in families and schools, and their comments and inquiries focused around creating a sense of connection with Korean children. Therefore, we used some books in which the characters were engaged in everyday activities, such as taking care of a mischievous young brother or waiting for mother to arrive home, events to which children had many connections. The study group struggled with how to encourage connection across cultures without perpetuating the view of sameness as "We are all alike."

In addition to reading books that introduced the variety of ways in which "everyone is alike," we selected books that presented cultural uniqueness. Particular books from Korea became "anomalies" because they challenged the view that everyone is alike. Such books included a particular event or perspective that was anomalous from the children's cultural perspectives, such as a young boy and his sister traveling alone on the subway, leading to discussions about both the cultural connections and the differences between their culture and Korean culture.

Overcoming the Limitations of Available Materials

Another curricular and pedagogical issue was locating specific books to meet particular needs or issues that became evident through our evaluation of students' thinking about intercultural issues. We had many discussions about our search for

and careful choice of particular books to support or challenge students' intercultural perspectives. Identifying and locating books was not a major difficulty once we identified the need, because of Kathy's expertise in global children's books and the principal's willingness to make funds available for purchasing new books. In other school contexts, however, the need to quickly identify and locate global books could become a major obstacle. Many of these needs could not be predicted ahead because they grew out of our careful analysis of student thinking in the study group.

One major issue was the lack of contemporary books about world cultures. The books we located about Korean culture, for example, were primarily historical fiction and traditional literature, with virtually no realistic fiction or poetry and only a few informational books. We located few books from other countries that focused on math and science topics or concepts. When we needed to access books in the native language, we needed the help of a native speaker who could read the website to order materials. Interestingly, the Internet search engines designed for children's use sent students to sites that focused on the surface features of culture, which greatly frustrated children during their Korean inquiries. It appeared to us that the adults creating those sites had limited perspectives on culture and on what children would be interested in exploring.

Exploring Cultural Identities through a Specific Culture's Languages

We believe that language is integral to identity, since the way people view and interpret their world is through language (Banks, 2001), and so we integrated a few books in Hangul (the alphabet of the Korean language) into our Korean collection. The children's interest in and excitement about the language led us to purchase and borrow over 40 picture books in Hangul and to engage in beginning language study with a native speaker. The children were highly engaged with trying to write and read Hangul, and their language explorations continued after our inquiry within the lab was completed.

These books played a number of key roles in the children's understandings about culture, in addition to language explorations. One was that these books were an important source of contemporary images of everyday life in Korea and showed the diversity of life in cities as well as rural areas. Given the lack of these images within books available in English, they were significant in preventing misconceptions about modern Korean life. The books had strong credibility for the children as cultural icons because they were published in Korea and read by Korean children. They were also the source of anomalies because they reflected everyday life naturally embedded within Korean culture and so supported children in seeing how their lives both were connected to and differed from those of Korean children. Despite the fact that no one in the school read or spoke Korean, the books played a critical role in inviting children to explore deeper aspects of cultural ways of living and thinking.

Developing an Expectation of Global Perspectives across the Curriculum

Our discussions in the study group led us to realize that our focus on personal cultural identity and cross-cultural studies resulted in students' considering interculturalism as a "special" study or unit instead of expecting global perspectives to be present in every study. Therefore, we knew global and intercultural perspectives needed to be woven into every classroom study across topics and subject areas. We began integrating literature, art, music, and experiences from a range of cultural perspectives across the curriculum and day. This integration was important to our reclaiming of curriculum, because more cultural perspectives were considered within all topics, so students came to expect that there are always diverse perspectives on an issue.

Moving from Topic-Based to Conceptually Based Inquiry Curriculum

The study group's decision to focus on the integration of intercultural perspectives across subject areas and units led us to plan experiences for the Learning Lab that were appropriate across all of the classrooms. Since each classroom had different science and social studies units, we searched for a broader focus that would cut across their units. After much discussion, the group chose *journey* as a conceptual frame for our work in the lab; we defined journey as a movement along physical, emotional, intellectual, social, or spiritual pathways that involve change.

Our work with this broad concept raised pedagogical and curricular issues. Teachers found that many of their units were ones they had done for years without questioning whether they were worth the time, and most involved a primary focus on gathering facts about the topic. Teachers' typical approach to units was challenged as they observed students developing a conceptual understanding of journeys and identifying significant issues within journeys, such as beginnings and endings, pain and healing, spiritual and emotional, dreams and wishes, people and relationships, growing and learning, and competition and movement.

Students initially struggled with conceptually and metaphorically defining "journey," wanting to rely on literal definitions. Their struggles made it evident that they were not used to thinking conceptually. Conceptual thinking includes, but goes beyond, topics and information to seek an explanation, to understand why in order to develop broad abstract mental constructs that serve as organizing ideas for a range of examples. Erickson (2002) argues that a conceptual lens supports metacognitive study, encourages thinking at an integrative level, and leads to deep and essential understanding.

Our discussions about the differences between topic-centered and conceptually centered teaching led to major debates about the mandated curriculum and why particular topics were significant in the larger scheme of students' lives. The

discussion in the study group indicated a shift for teachers from planning projects around specific information (e.g., to learn about Egyptian and Roman civilization) to thinking about ways to engage students in exploring big ideas and conceptual frames (e.g., what is civilization and how is it established and destroyed?). Teachers noted that they no longer felt the need to cover a topic, but instead focused on the concepts and engaging students in a wide range of intercultural perspectives to develop conceptual understanding. Our discussions made it evident that it is difficult to integrate intercultural materials and perspectives into topic-centered studies and that a movement to conceptually focused teaching was essential to reclaiming curricular contexts for interculturalism.

Developing Tools to Challenge and Organize Our Thinking

One pedagogical issue that wove throughout the study in multiple ways was developing tools that students could use to think conceptually and to organize their thinking in order to more generatively engage with each other and with ideas and issues. We pulled from familiar tools like consensus boards, webs, and charts and developed new tools such as cultural X-rays and life journey maps. These tools kept the focus of inquiry open for children's wonderings and tensions and challenged them to think in more complex and conceptual ways. Our goal was to develop tools that challenged students to push their thinking but did not take away their participation in determining the issues and the direction of their inquiries. We spent a great deal of time talking about these tools and their purposes, and tried them out ourselves in the study group.

Later, when we recognized how tool development pushed our thinking in the study group, we realized that students needed to be involved in developing their own tools. At the end of their journey inquiries, students identified the issue of most interest to them. They spent time discussing that issue and developed a tool for sharing their thinking with others. The level of excitement in the room as they developed these tools was palpable and the students' talk and thinking changed dramatically. It was apparent that what a person knew depended on the tool that person used to think with—something researchers know when determining tools for analysis. For example, a group that explored the differing consequences of dreams and wishes developed a visual showing roads leading to a range of alternatives, such as road blocks, side trips, and new destinations (see Figure 9.4). Another group that focused on the changes that result from spiritual and emotional journeys, such as death and separation, shared their thinking on a tree, with the branches as the big ideas from their discussions to show change as a living, growing entity.

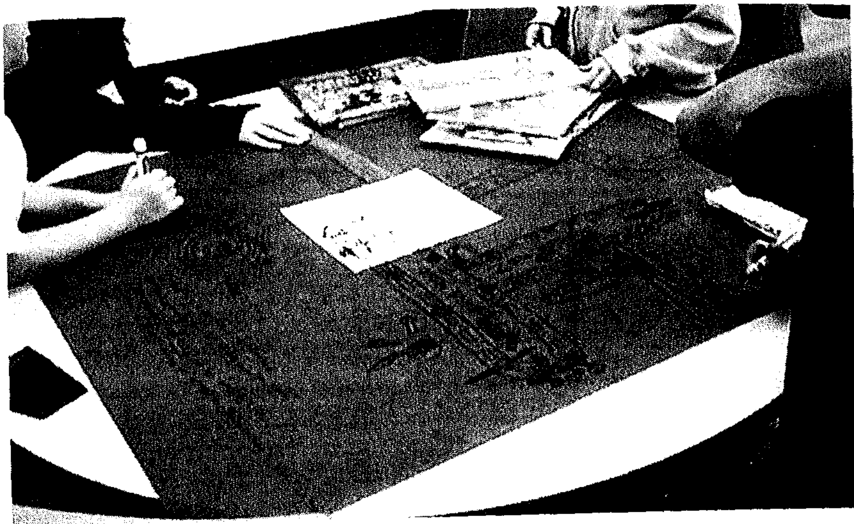

FIGURE 9.4 Fourth Graders Developing a Tool to Show Journeys of Dreams and Wishes

Living within an Interconnected World

Our action research focused on the intersection of intercultural understanding and global literature within critical inquiry as one means of reclaiming curriculum. The significance of our work was enhanced by the university–school collaboration and the rich learning context for teachers and children created within this school through the school-wide focus on global perspectives and the establishment of the Learning Lab and the study group. This context allowed us to examine instructional processes as well as to develop knowledge and understandings from those processes—both *how* we teach and learn (pedagogy) and *what* we teach and learn (curriculum) in building intercultural understandings and global perspectives. Teachers reclaimed their role in constructing curriculum through reflection and action research, and students (re)claimed their role as inquirers engaged in struggle and action upon the world. Our focus was on encouraging students to become critical thinkers who interrogated their lives and the world in order to work toward and imagine a better tomorrow.

Note

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CHAPTER 9 EXTENSION

Rethinking Cultural Authenticity in Global Literature: A Korean Example

Yoo Kyung Sung with Richard J. Meyer

The chapter by Short and Thomas brings back memories for Yoo Kyung of collecting global literature about Korea for a professional workshop, "Beyond Kimchi," in which teachers utilized children's literature to facilitate learning about Korean language and culture by non-Korean children. In order to reclaim curriculum as part of reclaiming reading, it is important to (1) reflect on building collections of global literature, and (2) rethink the concept of cultural authenticity in global literature so that cultural groups are accurately presented.

Considerations in Building a Collection

The collection included multiple genres and perspectives in order to represent diverse facets of Korean culture. In terms of genres, it included traditional literature (e.g., folktales, myths, and legends), historical fiction, realistic fiction, and non-fiction, as well as books published in South Korea (contemporary Korean literature) and in the United States (Korean diaspora literature). Contemporary Korean literature is written in the Korean language and shows glimpses of Korean children's lives and experiences in Korea. Korean diaspora literature refers to the books that are published in the United States and portray Korean populations who live outside of Korea: Korean immigrants and Korean Americans. Both types of literature depict contemporary Korean culture, but provide different perspectives, foci, and social contexts.

The majority of the Korean literature books were in the genres of traditional literature, historical fiction, and non-fiction; there were few contemporary realistic fiction pieces. Traditional literature is a useful tool to develop intercultural understandings of Korea because it conveys cultural values, ethos, beliefs, and customs.

However, a lack of contemporary realistic fiction is problematic because it may contribute to the creation of distorted images of Korea. The role of global children's literature cannot be overemphasized, since for many children Korean literature is "window" literature (Bishop, 1994) through which they develop perceptions about Korea and Koreans without direct experiences. "Literature has the power to help us see the world afresh, to broaden our experiences and change our perception" (Huck, 1998, p. 12). Lowery (2000) argues, "Literature plays an important role in shaping social reality, in that literature reflects society" (p. 8).

Our concern is that knowledge gained through literature may contribute to limited, inaccurate, even negative understandings of another culture if readers only get to read an unbalanced distribution of genres. Traditional literature alone cannot comprehensively and authentically portray Korean culture because this genre lacks a sense of contemporary life and experiences (Sung, 2009). Even non-fiction risks a lack of authenticity when the statistics, photos, and facts are not updated with trends, policies, and other changes. In addition, some contemporary realistic fiction cannot keep up with the realities of contemporary life. Images such as rice fields, thatched roofs, *hanbok* (a traditional outfit), rice paper doors, etc. in contemporary realistic fiction project a Korea of the past. When this sense of the contemporary is not authentically incorporated into global children's literature and traditional images of a country are overemphasized, the result may be a misrepresentation of modernity and a distorted, even romantic, impression of the country (Yenika-Agbaw, 2008; Sung, 2009).

Cultural Authenticity in Global Children's Literature

The issue of cultural authenticity is revealed in the following story of the native Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. She recalls her experiences of writing novels in the United States:

> I had a professor who once told me that my novel was not "authentically African." Now I was quite willing to contend that there were number of things wrong with the novel [but] . . . I had not quite imagined that I had failed to achieve something called "African authenticity." In fact, I didn't know what African authenticity was. The professor said that my characters were too much like him. . . . My characters drove cars. They were not starving. Therefore they are not authentically African.
>
> (*TEDglobal*, 2009)

Adichie's global writing about Nigeria was criticized for violating the criteria of "African authenticity" that non-African readers have. Such images are likely to be outdated and inaccurate. The "imagined" notion of Africa is likely to include the natural environment, wild animals, decivilization, starvation, etc. Once misguided non-contemporary images of Africa grow familiar, audiences resist the authentic portrayal of contemporary Africa. Such distorted perceptions toward the "other" culture become settled and may be difficult to rectify.

Reflecting upon cultural authenticity emphasizes that the nature of culture is fluid, dynamic, and changing, and examines whether this dynamic nature is reflected in children's books. For instance, in *My Name Is Yoon* (Recorvits, 2003) the protagonist is an immigrant girl depicted through surreal paintings that make time and place ambiguous. Readers may assume that Yoon does not know any English words. An interpretation of Yoon as unable to understand English may not represent the current Korean elementary education system or Koreans' decades-long desire for English language education. Particularly since the 1980s, when economic and political conditions shifted toward a focus on globalization, many Korean children learn some English in their Korean elementary schools. Unless the book is identified as historical fiction, audiences may assume Yoon's story is contemporary. The portrayal of her experiences with the English language may underscore a stereotype of Korean people as having limited English skills. Many Korean immigrant children just beginning their understanding of English, like Yoon, face cultural and linguistic shock in their first experiences in US classrooms, which is also open to misinterpretation.

Being reflective about the ways in which cultures are depicted in the literature of Korea helped Yoo Kyung to rethink cultural authenticity in the field of global children's literature. Such reflection must always be a part of the discussion of cultural authenticity because authenticity is often reduced to accuracy. According to Mo and Shen (2003), "authenticity is not just accuracy or the avoidance of stereotyping but involves cultural values and issues/practices that are accepted as norms of the social group" (p. 200).

Reclaiming reading curriculum must involve discussions of cultural authenticity that honor culture as something that transforms, hybridizes, diminishes, and evolves. Deep reflection may support teachers and their students in creating curriculum in which they develop authentic intercultural understanding as well as critical perspectives on depictions of diverse ethnic groups. It may also lead them to seek sources that can interrogate, verify, or add to their emerging assumptions about a cultural group. Teachers could ask families of students at school, and other individuals from the country or group being studied, to read and discuss the books. Websites and book reviews (which should also be interrogated) may provide background information about countries and cultures. A culture has many faces, and one goal in reclaiming reading is to help readers to be aware of cultural authenticity as evolving and always contextualized in time and place. Teachers and students should consider how they will interrogate the validity of the present day within realistic fiction and across genres. They might ask why the collections of different genres available to them are unbalanced, consisting of larger collections of traditional stories and historical fiction compared to few contemporary books. Extending such thinking to books about other cultures is essential to reclaiming curriculum, reading, and schools as places in which we seek deeper understanding

of our similarities, differences, and our responsibilities to make the world more safe, just, and caring.

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10

INVITATIONS

Tools for Thought and Action

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In life, we're invited to parties and special events; we're invited to be members of organizations, clubs, learning communities, face-to-face and online forums, as well as participants in civic life. How we take up these invitations and what happens during and as a result of our participation varies depending on the ways in which the event is framed, who participates, and available resources. In classrooms, curricular invitations can share properties and practices that are often associated with the invitations we take up in our everyday lives. Curricular invitations take on real-life conditions and offer students opportunities to pursue issues of interest. As formal pieces of curriculum, invitations bring together initial resources around a focal issue and then ask that learners pave their own paths of inquiry depending on their lived experiences and interests. Inviting students to engage in inquiries that have no easy answers or a single right path calls for a complex perspective on the world in which we live as well as an understanding of the ways in which decisions about classroom activity shape the kinds of people students become.

We frame this chapter by sharing our current thinking about curriculum, literacy, and learning, then go on to detail what curricular invitations are and aren't, move into classroom examples that animate what curricular invitations look like in action, and share analysis regarding how these invitations allow learners to strategically utilize technology, learn from and with print as well as visual images, and make use of language(s) in ways that best suit their talents, interests, and compelling inquiries. Such activity is at the heart of reclaiming reading curriculum that, once again, places the learner at the center, the teacher as one of many experts, and the world of real and intriguing issues as the source of lifelong learning.