

Inquiry as a Way of Life: Kathy G. Short, 2011 Outstanding Educator in the Language Arts

Whenever I see a collection of children's books displayed in a classroom, whether in a public school or at a university, I immediately think about Kathy Short and my time learning with her in the company of books, engaged in dialogue with other learners. On any given day at the University of Arizona, it is likely that if you see a classroom filled with children's literature, you will find Kathy talking with teachers. My best memories of Kathy as a teacher involve being surrounded by books and deeply engaged in inquiry with others.

Kathy's work as a literacy scholar has been recognized throughout the years by national and international organizations. In recognition of her outstanding contributions to research in the field of English language arts, Kathy was awarded fellow status by the National Conference on Research in Language and Literacy in 1997. In 2000, IRA honored Kathy with the Arbuthnot Award for the Outstanding Teacher of Children's and Adolescent Literature, an international award for her achievements in the field (http://www.reading.org/Resources/AwardsandGrants/arbuthnot_award.aspx). In 2010, Kathy was elected president of the United States Board of Books for Young People (USBYY) (<http://www.usbby.org/>).

Kathy's exceptional scholarship and influence as a teacher educator at the University of Arizona have earned her the 1996 Outstanding Faculty Award in Research, the 2000 Outstanding Graduate Mentor Award, the 2001 Sarlo Family Foundation Outstanding Faculty Award, the 2003 Extraordi-



nary Faculty Award from the Arizona Alumni Association and the National Board of Directors, and the 2006 Erasmus Circle Fellow Award.

Kathy's contributions to NCTE are just as rich, being elected to the Elementary Section Steering Committee in 1993, and serving as chair of this committee and as member of the Executive Committee from 1994–1996. Kathy was appointed to the Commission of Curriculum in 1999, and then began her five-year tenure

as Editor of *Language Arts* in 2001. She served on the award committee for the Notable Children's Books in the Language Arts from 2007–2010 and is currently on the board of the Children's Literature Assembly.

In celebration of Kathy's lifetime achievement and her latest award, NCTE's Outstanding Educator in the Language Arts, I spent time talking with her about the stories, tensions, theories, and learning experiences that frame her journey as an educator and lifelong inquirer.

The Significance of Story: *My Memories as a Reader*

Children's engagements with literature have the potential to transform their worldviews through understanding their current lives and imagining beyond themselves.

(Short, 2009b, p. 10)

Kathy's advocacy for the use of children's literature in the classroom stands out as one of the emerging themes that cut across her work. Given the significance of books and story in her life, I asked

Kathy to share those early experiences and memories of reading. She told me that while she does not remember books being significant in her early life, other than listening to traditional Bible stories in her household, she remembers becoming a reader in school and immediately connecting with reading. “Reading was compelling for me and I learned to read easily and quickly in school because I was so tremendously interested in books and in the learning that happened for me through books.”

Living in small-town Ohio, her parents came from farming families, and she was raised in the country with her four younger brothers. Kathy’s elementary school didn’t have a library, but the town library was across the street, and she recalls taking out as many books as she could possibly carry. Kathy explains that, “What was so compelling for me about reading was that it gave me a sense of possibility. Reading opened my world in both a metaphorical and a literal sense, and I saw the multiple ways in which people live and the possibilities that were part of life.”

Her reading interests at the time included biographies and realistic fiction, and Kathy understood early on “that stories carry you into other

places and times.” Then she discovered fantasy. While babysitting for a neighbor when she was in sixth grade and looking through their bookshelves for something to read, she stumbled upon a set of Hans Christian Andersen’s stories, and suddenly,

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a whole other world of possibilities opened up for her. “I remember being enthralled and transported through these stories that were set in imaginary worlds. I think that it was because they took me into a ‘what if world,’ instead of just dealing with reality.” Kathy explained that fairy tales were not part of her family background. Since she had never heard or read fairy tales in her family, she believes that the Hans Christian Andersen tales represent the first time she had encountered stories “in which it was a world of imagination; thinking that it was not

bounded by reality but about the ‘what ifs’ in the world.”

Kathy’s early memories are those of reading independently, such as reading under the covers late at night or escaping for hours to a cornfield to read beneath a tree in the back of her home, thinking that nobody knew where she was. She later discovered the power of sharing and reading with others. As a senior in high school, Kathy and some of her classmates were placed in an English class where the focus was to read more advanced novels, including the classic Russian novels. Kathy remembers that her teacher decided to try out a different strategy, and so instead of everybody reading the same novel, she put out six Russian novels. The teacher then invited students to select the book they wanted to read, explaining that they were going to read the books in small groups. When they were done, each group would present their book to the class.

Kathy had never participated in such an engagement, and to this day, she has vivid memories from that project. “I was in the group that was reading *Crime and Punishment*. We were *thrilled* to be reading this book and discussing it in a small group. We were *so excited*.” Reflecting on that experience, Kathy wonders why they were so excited to be reading a “heavy Russian novel.” She believes it all had to do with the fact that they had been given a choice. Their intense engagement with the book and with each other came from the nature of the learning context. “Instead of sitting there in a whole-group discussion where the teacher asks a question and then somebody answers, we sat in the small group and talked about the book.”

This was the first time that Kathy participated in a literature circle, and this collaborative engagement was significant for a number of reasons. It was her first experience with recognizing why it is important to have choice and why everyone does not need to read the same book in the classroom. Kathy believes “there is a dramatic difference in perspective and in engagement for readers when given a choice.” She also discovered “what it means to think with others, and not to have the more knowledgeable other be the teacher who teaches the novel, but instead to think about the ideas and issues

from that novel with other readers.” Kathy carried these understandings into her seminal work with literature circles, talk about books, and response strategies (Short & Harste, 1996; Short & Pierce, 1990).

While Kathy recognized how much she had learned, and how challenging and engaging this project was, she didn’t discover the potential of collaborative learning until the 1980s, when she was a graduate student working on her doctorate degree at Indiana University. It was there, while studying under the mentorship of Carolyn Burke and Jerome Harste, that Kathy truly experienced collaborative learning. She recalls how Jerry and Carolyn treated her and her peers as colleagues and “people to think with.” Those experiences were transformative for Kathy as a learner. Once she had lived through the social dimension of collaboratively knowing and coming to know with others, this became part of her identity as a learner and as an educator. In Kathy’s words, “Wherever I am, whatever I am doing, I try to form some kind of community of people who can think and talk together, because I know how powerful that is for learning.”

Teaching and Learning: *Teaching Is What Drives My Spirit*

For me teaching is inquiry. The reason I teach is because it allows me to engage collaboratively in inquiry with others.

Kathy Short

From being an avid reader to becoming a teacher, Kathy’s life experiences set the foundation for her scholarly inquiries that have influenced so many educators around the world. I was intrigued to find out how she came to be a teacher and what that journey was like for her. Kathy explained that no one in her extended family had graduated from college when she entered college. Her parents had both dropped out of school at eighth grade to work on the farm, as was expected of them at that time. When talking about attending Goshen College as an undergraduate, she shared that, “College was seen as something you do until you get married, not as creating a career or life path.” Her choices were limited to becoming a secretary, a nurse, or a teacher, and given that she faints at the sight of

blood and was not interested in becoming a secretary, she decided to become a teacher.

This initial motivation was quickly replaced by more influential reasons when, during her senior year in college, she met faculty members who invited her to think about her “intellectual life” by asking her to consider fields that she might pursue in graduate school and further study. “It was at that time,” Kathy remembers, “that I realized that ‘I *want* to be a teacher.’” From that point on, teaching became part of Kathy’s identity. “Being a teacher is not something that I do; it is something that I am. I can’t imagine any context in which I don’t think and act and feel like a teacher.”

Kathy began her teaching with first graders in Indiana. One of the things she enjoyed the most about teaching “was the opportunity to continue to learn alongside other learners.” This deep commitment to learning as a teacher is what has distinguished Kathy’s role as mentor to all her graduate students and the teachers with whom she has worked throughout the years.

When I look back over my life, the thing that probably marks me, including my interest in story, is that I love to learn. I love to be engaged in situations and contexts where I’m pushed to think about and to learn about something new, or to think about something in a different way. And any time that I am able to do that and to contribute to the learning that others are doing, that to me is a fulfilling situation.

In her teaching at the University of Arizona, which Kathy described as her “intellectual home,” we all benefited from Kathy’s stance as a learner; colleagues and students alike were continuously challenged to explore critical issues that were compelling for her and for us as learners. As an educator, Kathy takes risks in her teaching and develops courses that allow her students to take charge of directing their learning and pushing their thinking. “[The university] provides me with an incredible opportunity to continuously have communities of learners to think with and to push me into areas that I would have never pursued on my own.” Understanding the influence of her students in her own thinking, Kathy shared that “the theorists that I have been able to explore with graduate students have dramatically changed me as a scholar.” In turn, those learning

experiences deeply influence a whole cadre of educators and emerging scholars who then strive to create those same learning opportunities for their own students at schools and universities across the nation.

At the heart of Kathy's teaching philosophy is an understanding that dialogue and response to literature serve as powerful forces to organize thinking and transform learners as they come to understand and value multiple perspectives. Influenced by the work of Brazilian educator Paolo Freire, Kathy conceptualizes dialogue as the "negotiation between students as they collaboratively work

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together at meaning making about a particular text, with the goal of creating and critiquing their understandings, not necessarily coming to the same interpretation" (Short & Kauffman, 2004, p. 50). These ideas are further informed by Rosenblatt's notion

that "imagination, the ability to try on alternative perspectives and ways of thinking about the world, is essential to democracy and is encouraged by literature and dialogue as response to literature" (p. 50).

Since dialogue is essential for pursuing the democratic ideal in education, another important thread in Kathy's scholarship is her work with response strategies as learning engagements that incorporate oral and written language, as well as multiple sign systems (Short, Kauffman, & Kahn, 2000). "The power of the response strategies is that they do not determine the direction of the discussion. They encourage kids to dig deeper to find issues that are significant for them to bring to the conversation. They provide tools that readers can use on their own in order to push their thinking." Her use of response strategies in her teaching also serves as an example of teaching and learning that must involve students and teachers alike in problem posing *and* problem solving, in the Freirean tradition. "To me, a teacher is someone who engages with other learners in collaboratively learning and thinking together," "Teaching is thinking and learn-

ing together in order to push your understanding and in order to challenge yourself to go beyond your current understandings."

Inquiry as a Stance: You Have to Reach beyond Your Current Understandings

If I get to the end of a course and people walk away feeling that they are done, then I feel I have failed. I want them to walk away saying, "I am in the middle of this inquiry and I want to know more."

Kathy Short

Throughout her scholarly writing, Kathy has explored multiple definitions of inquiry, and through her work with others she continues to refine and deepen her own perspectives on inquiry. Her *current* definition positions *inquiry as a stance*, rather than a methodology. She writes, "Inquiry is a collaborative process of connecting to and reaching beyond current understandings to explore tensions significant to learners" (Short, 2009a, p. 12). This definition highlights the key conditions that Kathy considers essential if true inquiry is to take place. Foremost, Kathy explained that inquiry starts with connections to what is significant in your life so that you can connect to what you already know before moving beyond to new learning. "Whatever I am teaching, I start by exploring that idea in the lives of learners," she explains. For example, in a recent doctoral course on influential readings and theorists, she asked her students to think about their lives as scholars, and then to consider, "Who are you and what do you need to read to go beyond where you are now?"

Kathy's definition of inquiry as a stance is also centered on the notion that learners need to explore tensions that are significant to them. Kathy explained, "I use the word *tension* because I think 'questions' is overdone, and that a lot of time is wasted on teaching kids how to ask particular questions, instead of working with them to figure out what is significant in their lives and world." She also recognizes that when she is involved in inquiry, she may not initially be able to express the question; she just knows that an issue is intriguing for

her. “Sometimes it is compelling because of an interest, and sometimes it is compelling because it’s something that is really bothering me.”

Kathy’s use of the word *tension* is influenced by Dewey’s work and his recognition that tension is what drives the learning process. “The word *tension* is one that signifies that you are uncomfortable,” Kathy elaborated, “and I see tension as a positive force in our lives. For me, tension is not stress where you feel overwhelmed and vulnerable; tension is when you feel a need to know and understand.” She perceives inquiry as being notably different from project-based teaching, where students are often “engaged in researching something, but it is not a tension that is significant for them. They are completing an assignment.”

In order to truly transform teaching to embrace inquiry as a stance, instruction must be based “on the processes that are natural to learning” instead of “on how we think people should learn” (Short, 2009a, p. 13). This approach also means that inquiry is perceived as “conceptually based rather than topic-based,” and that our goal for education should extend well beyond students just gaining information on particular topics. When this happens, “knowledge becomes a tool to explore conceptual understanding rather than an end in and of itself” (p. 14).

Kathy can trace the evolution of her interest in inquiry to when she was given the opportunity to teach an undergraduate class at Goshen College for the first time, while still teaching her first-grade class during the day. “What I found as I talked with students and tried to engage them and to help them think about the teaching of reading,” Kathy recalled, “was that I was ignoring my own beliefs in how I was teaching in my classroom. There was a tension between my theoretical beliefs and what I actually did; there was a disconnect. And that is what brought me back to graduate school, because I felt I didn’t know theory.”

Kathy defines curriculum as putting a system of beliefs into action (Short & Burke, 1991).

I became a teacher at the point when I understood the connection of theory and practice. From that point on,

curriculum became very significant for me; the whole notion about how to think curricularly as a teacher—that idea is the thread that weaves through all of my work because I am continuously thinking about the frameworks that I can use that will help me take my beliefs and be able to organize and develop curriculum that I can put into practice.

It was this deep inquiry at Indiana University into literacy theory and what it looked like in practice that led Kathy to learn about writing workshop, writing process, and literature discussions. She began to transform her practice in her first-grade class, moving away from the basal reader and into posing more open-ended questions for her students to consider. She wrote on little cards to “train herself” to move beyond closed-ended basal questions. “I realized that if I am asking the questions, even if they are open-ended, then I am determining the direction of the conversation.”

In so thinking, Kathy began to ask, “How can I invite kids into a discussion so that they can find the issues that are significant to them, instead of them discussing the issues that I think are significant?” When students identified issues that were important for them, issues that, as Kathy described, she had not considered, there was a shift in their engagement and in the nature of the conversation around a book. It was this work with literature discussion and “the power of having kids engage in thinking together about a book” that then brought her back to inquiry and to her understanding that “a literature discussion is an inquiry” (Short, 1997).

Profound curricular implications for teachers emerged from her early work—the authoring cycle (Harste & Short, 1988), curriculum as inquiry (Short & Harste, with Burke, 1996), and the integrated language learning framework, the latter built upon the work of Halliday to discuss literacy experiences that help readers learn language, learn through language, and learn about language (Short, 1999). Today, Kathy continues to expand her use of

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curriculum frameworks with her current exploration of curriculum that is international (see Fig. 1) and that fosters intercultural understandings through the use of global literature (Short, 2009b).

Kathy’s work with curricular frameworks has inspired teachers to think differently about curriculum, not as a set of lesson plans that are restrictive, but as a thinking tool to organize their theoretical beliefs and their practice (Short & Burke, 1991; Short et al., 1996). In her work, she invites teachers to move away from considering “curriculum as a grab bag” of activities, and to conceptualize it as “an underlying framework that allows you to be able to think and plan and organize.” She elaborated on this idea by describing how, as a teacher and a learner, she makes use of curricular frameworks:

I have to have some kind of curricular framework to plan a course or workshop, and once I have that, I am able to much more clearly sort out what is significant. I

am able to have a sense of the experiences and the need for them to flow in order to make decisions as a teacher, in order to evaluate what is happening and make adjustments, and in order to be able to communicate clearly with others.

Global Literature and Intercultural Understandings: *The World Is Present in Our Lives*

When students recognize the cultures that influence their thinking, they become more aware of how and why culture is important to others. They no longer see culture as about the “other” and as exotic, but recognize that it is at the heart of defining who they are as human beings.

(Short, 2009b, p. 4)

In the 21st century, Kathy’s influence on educators has gone global as she works more frequently with teachers around the world and makes use of

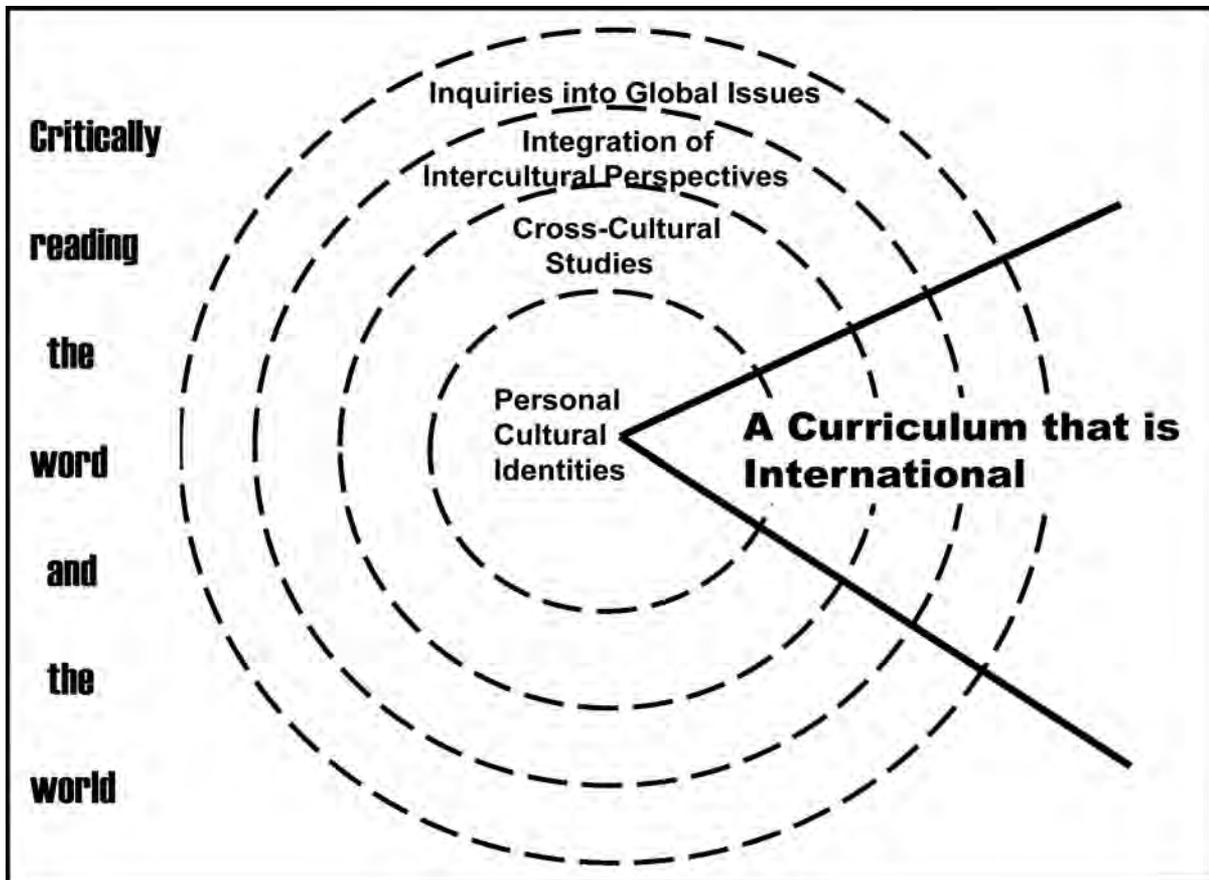


Figure 1. Curricular framework for a curriculum that is international (Short, 2009b, p. 3)

Web 2.0 tools to connect teachers in virtual learning communities. In 2006, Kathy launched an initiative called *Worlds of Words* (wowlit.org). WOW's mission is "to create an international network of people who share the vision of bringing children and books together to open windows on the world." The impetus for creating WOW comes from Kathy's commitment to support teachers in their selection and use of culturally authentic global literature in the classroom. In addition, the project has allowed Kathy to continue to collaborate with those of us who completed our doctorates at Arizona and have now moved into faculty positions in universities across the US and world. We continue to think together as a community and to benefit from our diverse experiences and projects in our current contexts.

To accomplish its goals, WOW includes both digital and print-based resources for teachers. The digital strand of WOW is composed of two online journals (*WOW Stories: Connections from the Classroom* and *WOW Review: Reading across Cultures*), a blog (*WOW Currents*), and a digital database of global literature available in the United States. *WOW Stories* is a peer-reviewed journal that "publishes vignettes by educators about students' experiences reading and responding to global and multicultural literature." *WOW Review* "is an online journal, containing reviews of children's and adolescent literature, written with a careful focus on each book's cultural authenticity."

Finally, *WOW Currents* is a weekly blog "that focuses on research, practice, and issues relating to the use, publication, and reviews of global literature" (Short, 2010a, p. 13). The print-based strand of WOW is the *International Collection of Children's and Adolescent Literature*, an impressive collection of global literature established at the University of Arizona. This collection is available for research and teaching purposes, and open to scholars, teachers, and visitors.

Every component of WOW has been carefully orchestrated to fulfill Kathy's vision of teachers actively engaged in inquiry and dialogue surrounding children's literature, reader response, and engagements that position learners as problem posers and problem solvers. WOW provides the ideal

backdrop for educators to investigate what it means to experience "literature as democratic life" (Short, 2011a, p. 51) and to learn how "literature can . . . play a key role in how children transform themselves as human beings and in how they think about and act on the world" (Short, 2007, p. 109).

To fully grasp Kathy's commitment to promoting the use of global literature to foster intercultural understandings, we need to revisit Kathy's past and her experiences growing up in Ohio. "In my early life in the community that I was part of as a Mennonite," Kathy explained, "there was a focus on the importance of working together within a community and of seeing yourself as part of a global community, with responsibilities for social justice and peace." It was this awareness of her role and her responsibilities within a larger sociocultural and sociopolitical world that frames her scholarly work. Particularly, Kathy recalls that in her early work she felt a tension when she recognized the lack of connection between her commitment to a global community in her personal life and her professional life. "Part of the reason why the focus on global literature has become my scholarly focus is that it allows me to bring together my personal and my professional lives in ways that are significant for me."

In fact, one of the reasons Kathy moved from Indiana to Arizona was because she wanted to push the boundaries of her comfort zone in relation to her own intercultural experiences. "I felt the need to put myself in cultural contexts that were not familiar and comfortable as a way to push how I thought about the world. Arizona allowed me to do this. I was very comfortable in Indiana and that made me uncomfortable." Furthermore, her ongoing work around inquiry with teachers in a range of global settings provided her with additional "opportunities to participate in multiple ways of thinking about the world." These personal and professional inquiries helped to solidify Kathy's wonderings about "how to embed stories into a context that allows the

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reader to think in a more open-minded way and to reach to understand different ways of living in the world rather than to judge them.”

Her ongoing transnational encounters with educators as she works with schools in many parts of the world have had a profound influence on Kathy’s thinking.

Every time I would come back to the United States and to Arizona, I was struck with the limited ways in which kids and teachers were exploring global understandings. While they had taken the step to think about the cultures in their immediate environments, it was more from a “we need to get along” racial harmony perspective, rather than a real appreciation and understanding that there are multiple ways of thinking and living in the world. Instead of considering your way as the norm and everyone else as “different,” we need to recognize that there are multiple ways of thinking and living in the world and that they are all valid; your way of thinking is not the norm, yours is just one of many possibilities.

Kathy’s mission became to consider ways to immerse children in the United States in these broader understandings about the world and about global cultures. Kathy firmly believes that “[l]iterature is one very powerful way to reach for these understandings.” But she also warned, “Kids can get

a lot of information about global cultures without actually having any kind of understanding of how people think and live in that culture.” Following her own long-standing tradition of working to engage in collaborative teacher-research, Kathy

engaged in an action research project with teachers and administrators at Van Horne Elementary School, a small public school in Tucson, Arizona. The research examines “the pedagogical issues and strategies involved in integrating international literature into the curriculum and the influence of literature on children’s understandings of culture and the world” (Short, 2009b, p. 2).

Situated within a framework for intercultural learning, Kathy’s four-year work with teachers at

Van Horne Elementary offers extensive evidence and rich documentation of the challenges and possibilities for building “an intercultural curriculum in which children and teachers engage in meaningful conversations and learning experiences around literature within a global context” (Short & Thomas, 2011, p. 150). Teachers participating in the project have published vignettes of their work in the online journal *WOW Stories* (www.wowlit.org). At the forefront of this work is the understanding that “interculturalism is an attitude of mind, an orientation that pervades thinking and permeates the curriculum. It is based on a broad understanding of culture as ways of living and being in the world that are designs for acting, believing, and valuing” (Short, 2009b, p. 2).

Following Louise Rosenblatt’s work, Kathy contends that “literature immerses you into a story world where you experience the culture through the characters.” In the case of promoting intercultural understanding, this “lived-through” experience is critical, as “once you recognize that there are other ways of thinking and living in the world, you suddenly realize that you have more choices open to you than you originally thought.” Kathy elaborated,

Not only does global literature and the engagements around that literature provide ways for kids to be able to think more globally, to be more open-minded, to be able to understand the ways in which people think and live through the world, as well as in their own community, but they also change their sense of possibility for their own lives.

Kathy carried these beliefs into her term as president of the United States Board on Books for Young People (USBBY), an organization committed to the use of literature as a way to build bridges across cultures. Kathy described the significant influence of USBBY on her work, particularly because of the possibilities afforded to interact with such an interdisciplinary group of people, from publishers to authors, from teachers to librarians, who are all committed to internationalism. These experiences reaffirmed Kathy’s conviction that the need for global literature and global understanding in the 21st century is essential for everyone. “It does not matter if you never leave your home

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community, the world is going to come to you, both physically and through the media.”

New Tensions and Inquiries: *Stories Are How We Gain Wisdom*

Given that inquiry is the force that drives Kathy’s continuous growth as a learner, we concluded our conversation thinking about the new tensions and inquiries that currently frame her thinking. Citing Rosenblatt’s belief that reading is the transaction between the reader and the text, Kathy finds herself focusing her attention on close analysis of texts in order to revisit the notion of cultural authenticity and to distinguish it from issues of representation. Building from her work on cultural authenticity (Fox & Short, 2003), she has come to believe that “some people have an individualistic notion of a text; that you judge a text as an individual work of art.” However, she argued, “We cannot look at a book separate from the sociopolitical context in which a book exists or separate from the larger body of literature that is available for kids.”

As an example of this tension, Kathy cited her reading of the book *Mirror*, written and illustrated by Jeannie Baker (2010). While she recognizes the book is “exemplary and deserving of awards and recognition as an aesthetic masterpiece,” Kathy took issue with the “author’s decision to contrast rural isolated Morocco with modern urban Australia.” Kathy wrote,

Because the two countries are not equal in their economic or political capital, this unfair comparison perpetuates the hierarchy of modern developed Western nations in contrast to the poverty and traditional ways of living in the Middle East and North Africa. . . . Another issue is that picture books set in North Africa and the Middle East overwhelmingly show rural isolated villages with lots of camels and sandThe problem is the almost total absence of modern city life from the larger body of picture books set in this part of the world. The issue is not cultural authenticity, but the lack of diversity in the representations and images of life. (Short, 2011b, unpagged blog entry)

Exploring these issues with educators is challenging, as some believe that Kathy is questioning the authors’ intent or the authenticity of the book, when in fact she is problematizing issues of rep-

resentation within larger sociopolitical contexts. When this happens, Kathy acknowledges that instead of creating a tension that would promote more dialogue and learning, the conversation creates a defensive response, which signals to Kathy that she needs to explore these issues further in order to transform that defensiveness into a tension. In doing so, she is continuously reframing her questions to consider, “How do we look at issues of cultural authenticity and representation?” Kathy is interested in exploring this more deeply, asking, “How do we deepen and problematize the ways in which we are thinking about texts, and then how does that inform the ways in which we interact with those texts with kids?”

Those are profound questions for literacy educators. Kathy argues that “the critical frames that we develop to think about texts will then also become part of the ways in which we think with kids about those texts. But we should not impose our perspectives on them.” The issue for her is to consider, “What are the learning contexts that I can create that will allow kids to explore these ideas and use these frames for themselves?” And she is continuously thinking about these issues both in terms of her work with teachers and undergraduates. Kathy is interested in “how to invite undergraduates to develop more critical stances and perspectives that they are able to take on as their own and not feel that we are imposing on them as their instructors.”

Another issue that Kathy is currently thinking about with her colleagues at the University of Arizona is the ways in which young children respond to books and stories. Kathy seeks to understand the unique ways in which three-, four- and five-year-olds respond to books by looking closely at their transactions with books and documenting their responses, including their use of dramatic play. This research also focuses on “exploring how to bring global literature into the early childhood classroom

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in ways that connect significantly to young children's lives." More specifically, Kathy explained that "we are not trying to teach them about a specific culture or country, we are trying to take the natural things that are significant in their lives, like family, play, grandparents, and birthdays, and show them global representations as a way to encourage their own connections and their own stories." The goal is to introduce these multiple global representations through literature, thus making multiple perspectives and ways of living "a natural part of life."

Hopes for the Future of Literacy Education

We have lost sight of the reasons why we teach and the reasons why being literate matters. If in schools we lose sight of the transformational potential of inquiry, story, and dialogue, and we focus on just the standards and the tests and what strategies do kids know and what do they need learn, then we lose that ultimate goal and we fail. We fail as teachers.

Kathy Short

Kathy has dedicated her life as a literacy educator to creating thought collectives (Fleck, 1935) with teachers, scholars, children, authors, and illustrators around the world. In turn, we have all been transformed through this invitation to participate in her thought collectives, either through her teaching, her mentoring, or her scholarly writing and presentations. Every teacher who has ever worked with Kathy, nationally and internationally, has come to experience literature and inquiry as a way of living and thinking in the world. Kathy's commitment to children and education for democracy serves as a constant reminder of why education matters.

We teach because of those human lives that are in our classroom, no matter what age level we are teaching. We teach because children are human beings and because we can make a difference in how kids think about themselves and think about the world. We need to regain that sense of possibility.

Kathy's hope is that thinking about engagement with global literature is a way of bringing together different groups in our society. "Critical dialogue around global literature in classrooms may be a way to bring us together in terms of what we hope for kids," Kathy explained. "That is probably idealistic," she continued, "but I think it is a possible point of connection right now for transforming classrooms and providing a space for critical inquiry amidst the standards and testing." Her vision for the future of literacy education is far more ambitious than the limited curricular choices available today for children and teachers.

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. Through engagements with global literature, children can develop complex understandings about power and human rights, engage in critical inquiries about themselves and the world, and take action to create a better world. (Short, 2010b, p. 7)

As literacy educators, we all look forward to Kathy's next inquiry and to the future tensions that will push our thinking and invite us to engage in local and global action. Her work keeps us on the edge while pushing the boundaries of our thinking and our understandings about the reasons why being literate matters in this world.

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