

environment that is a democratic community. We each have a voice in the process of our learning and the growth of our students.

Working in education can be lonely. Teachers spend a great deal of time behind closed doors with students and have little or no interaction with colleagues. In many schools, engagement with other adults and their students is not logistically possible due to time or space constraints, or is not encouraged. At Van Horne, the collaboration of teachers, facilitators, students, and administrators has provided me with the support of a community of practice. I feel fortunate to belong to such a thoughtful, committed, and gifted group of educators. They say that practice makes perfect. I believe this community of practice makes perfect for me as a professional learner.

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Exploring a Curriculum that is International

by Kathy G. Short, Professor, University of Arizona

Books can build bridges of understanding across global cultures. Through literature, children have the opportunity to go beyond a tourist perspective of gaining surface-level information about another culture. They are invited to immerse themselves in story worlds, gaining insights into how people feel, live, and think around the world. They come to recognize their common humanity as well as to value cultural differences.

This vision of opening the world through literature remains an elusive goal in many classrooms. Even though international books are increasingly available in the United States, many educators are not familiar with the books and are uncertain about their cultural authenticity. They are often unsure about how to use the books since many contain unfamiliar stylistic devices and terminology

and are about experiences and settings that, at first glance, seem removed from their students' lives. They struggle with how to help students make significant connections to move their responses beyond viewing other cultures as exotic or strange. Many unwittingly adopt strategies that are tangential, or even in opposition, to the goals of global education, through, for example, focusing on "we-they" dualisms or superficial features of cultural lifestyles that reinforce stereotypical perceptions. Simply reading more about the world can actually negatively influence the development of intercultural understanding.

Our research at Van Horne Elementary School, a small public elementary school in Tucson, Arizona, focuses on the challenge of effectively engaging children with international literature to build intercultural understanding. We are examining 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. Our work has been guided by our beliefs about intercultural understanding and our use of a particular framework that focuses on a curriculum that is international.

Teaching for Intercultural Understanding

Teaching for intercultural understanding involves far more than lessons on human relations and sensitivity training or adding a book or unit about a country into the existing curriculum. These approaches typically lead to superficial appreciations of cultural differences that reinforce stereotypes, instead of creating new understandings about cultural perspectives and global issues. 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. Geertz (1973) defines culture as "the shared patterns that set the tone, character and quality of people's lives" (p. 216). These patterns include language, religion, gender, relationships, class, ethnicity, race, disability, age, sexual orientation, family structures, nationality, and rural/suburban/urban communities, as well as the values, symbols, interpretations, and perspectives held by a group of people.

Fleck (1935), a Polish scientist and philosopher, argues that cultures consist of thought collectives that form whenever groups of people learn to think in similar ways because they share a common interest, exchange ideas, maintain interaction over time, and create a history that affects how they think and live. Since most individuals think and act within several thought collectives at a time, this view captures the dynamic, evolving nature of culture as each person interacts with, and is changed through, transactions with other cultures. These understandings highlight the diverse ways in which culture is reflected in children's lives.

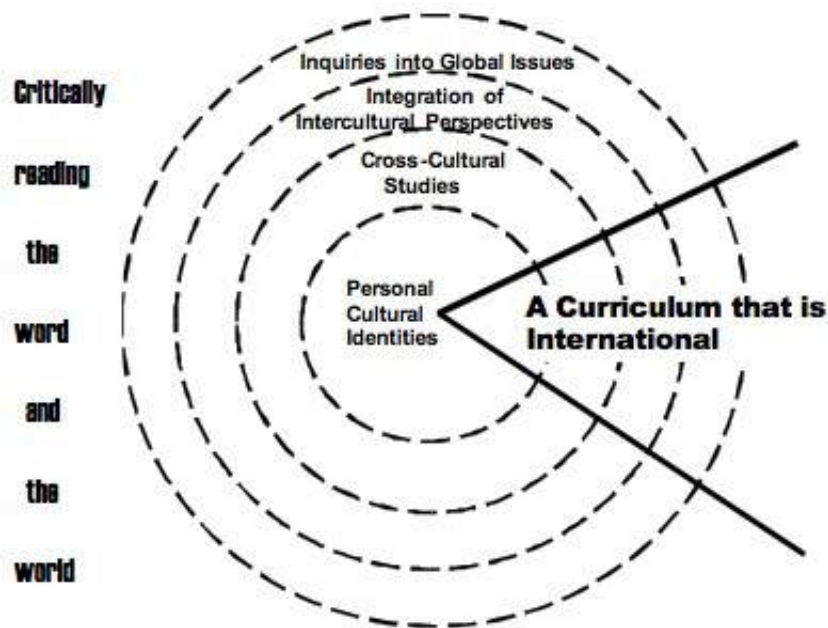
Key scholars in intercultural education (Allan, 2003; Fennes & Hapgood, 1997; Hofstede, 1991) as

well as global education (Begler, 1996; Case, 1991) inform our definition of intercultural understanding as an orientation 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.

To enact these theoretical beliefs in our work with children, we are using a specific curriculum framework to guide our work. This framework highlights multiple ways of engaging with international perspectives to support children's critical explorations of their cultural identities, ways of living within specific cultures, the range of cultural perspectives within any unit of study, and complex global issues. The curricular components in the framework interrelate and build from each other to highlight different intercultural understandings. Surrounding these components is an environment in which students are encouraged to inquire from a critical stance. This framework has supported us in exploring the potentials that each component offers for children's understandings and the ways in which global perspectives and literature can be integrated into the life of the school.

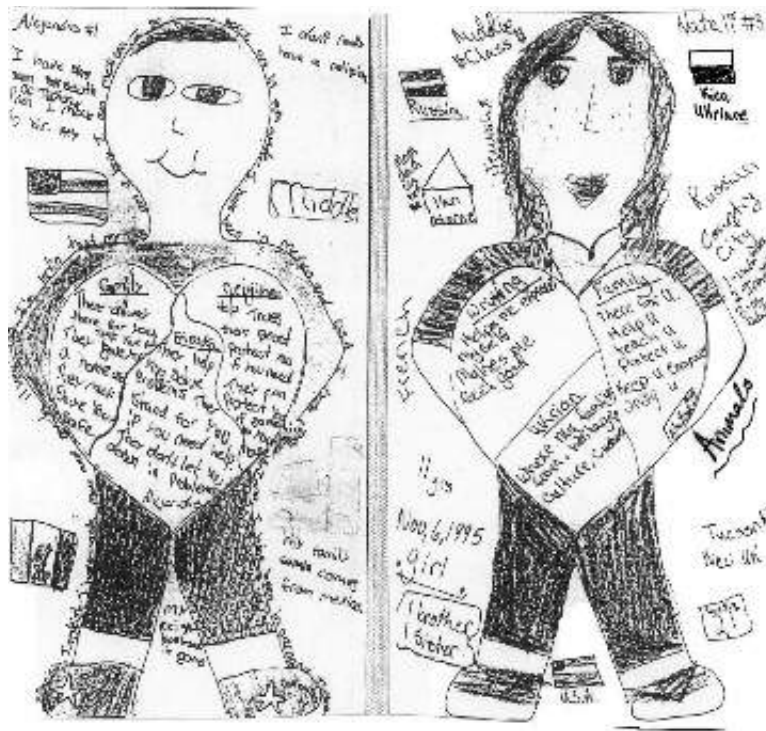
For the past two years, we have closely examined each component of this framework through our discussions in a biweekly Teacher Study Group and in our weekly Learning Lab work with the children. By focusing together on a particular part of the framework for several months, we have worked toward more in-depth understandings of these components so that teachers can then consider how to take this work into their own classroom curricula. This vignette overviews the work we have engaged in around this framework over the past two years within the Learning Lab and Teacher Study Group.



Personal Cultural Identities

All learners, adults and children, must explore their own cultures before they can understand why culture matters in the lives of others around them. Interculturalism does not begin with the ability to consider other points of view but with the realization that you have a point of view. Children bring their personal experiences of living in the world and being part of specific cultural groups and social contexts to school. They need to examine their own histories to understand how those experiences and interactions determine their view of the world and they need to find their lives reflected in books in order to value school as relevant. 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.

Literature can encourage students to focus on themselves as cultural beings in order to go beyond the typical “Who am I?” activities. We read aloud and discuss picture books in which the characters struggle with their identities, such as *You Be Me and I’ll Be You* (Mandelbaum, 1990) and *Cooper’s Lesson* (Shin, 2004). Students have responded to these books by exploring their cultural identities in different ways, such as drawing memory maps of their neighborhoods to identify stories from when they were “little” and mapping significant events in their lives on Life Journey Maps. They also created Cultural X-Rays in which they labeled the outside of their bodies with aspects of their culture that are evident to others, such as language, age, ethnicity, gender, and religion, and the inside with the values and beliefs that they hold in their hearts. These Cultural X-Rays were created by students in Amy Edwards’ fifth grade classroom.



These engagements help students realize that their experiences within families and communities shape how they think and act. Multicultural books that reflect their own life experiences in the American Southwest are essential to building these understandings. We weave multicultural literature along with international books throughout our inquiries so that students recognize the commonalities in life experiences across diverse cultures as well as the unique aspects of these cultures.

Cross-Cultural Studies

Although intercultural understanding is grounded in awareness of one’s own cultural perspective, students need to consider points of view beyond their own so they come to recognize that their perspective is one of many ways to view the world; not the only one or the norm against which to measure other viewpoints. In-depth studies of specific global cultures can broaden students’ perspectives and provide a window on the world. Unfortunately cross-cultural studies often take the form of theme units that focus on superficial aspects of a culture through a limited study of the 5fs -- food, fashion, folklore, festivals, and famous people. A cross-cultural study should provide an opportunity for children to examine the complexity and diversity within a particular cultural group. Focusing on food or folklore is a beginning but can lead to stereotypes and superficial understandings unless students also examine the deeper values and beliefs that are significant within that culture. A cross-cultural study should include literature that reflects complexity in terms of the economic, social, political, aesthetic, moral, historical, and geographical contexts of a cultural group (Begler, 1996).

We found that because our students already recognized the complexity of culture within their own

lives, we could use their experience of creating Cultural X-Rays to brainstorm what they might explore about another culture. When fifth-grade students began a study of Korean culture, for example, they used a large blank Cultural X-ray to brainstorm the aspects of identity that they needed to explore to understand this culture.



This large chart of brainstormed cultural characteristics served as a place for students to record observations throughout our study as they read from a range of fiction and nonfiction literature. When *My Name Was Keoko* (Park, 2002) was read aloud and discussed and students browsed a collection of many picture books and informational books. We found that the books about Korean culture available in the U.S. were primarily historical fiction and folklore with few contemporary images, leaving the impression that Korean culture was mired in the past with traditional clothing and small villages. We purchased picture books from South Korea written in Hangul to provide contemporary images and to encourage explorations of the Korean language. We also located books that had been recently translated into English, such as *My Cat Copies Me* (Kwon, 2007), and discussed picture books, such as *Waiting for Mama* (Lee, 2007), that students could connect to their lives but which also provided an anomaly because of actions or values that were unexpected from their cultural viewpoint.

The value of an in-depth cross-cultural study is that students look deeply to understand the complexity within a culture and so go beyond the surface-level explorations that characterize this type of study. Not only can these studies provide a window on a culture, but they can also encourage insights into students' cultural identities. Students come to deeper understandings about their own cultures and perspectives when they encounter alternative possibilities for thinking about the world. Cross-cultural studies thus provide both a mirror and a window for children as they look out on ways of viewing the world and reflect back on themselves in a new light.

Integration of International Perspectives

While an occasional cross-cultural study is appropriate, literature reflecting a wide range of cultural perspectives needs to be woven into every classroom study, no matter what the topic or curriculum area. We worked to integrate the stories, languages, lifestyles, and ways of learning from many cultures into units of study across the curriculum, not just one or two special units each year. Whether the focus was folklore, family, living at peace with others, the moon, or fractions, we are trying to incorporate literature reflecting a range of global perspectives. Otherwise, interculturalism can be viewed as a special unit instead of an orientation that pervades everything.

We took on a school-wide focus on Journeys, beginning with a conceptual understanding of journeys through connections to children's own lives. We discussed literature, such as *Once There Were Giants* (Waddell, 1997) and *The Pink Refrigerator* (Egan, 2007) and asked students to map their own life journeys.



Their discussions of different types of journeys led to a range of inquiries. The younger students focused on mapping learning and emotional journeys through responding to books such as *No, I Want Daddy!* (Brune-Cosme, 2004) and *Sebastian's Roller Skates* (de Deu Prats, 200). The older students met in small groups to discuss text sets organized around themes that emerged from their brainstorming. Each of these text sets included 10-15 picture books from a range of cultural perspectives around the themes of Beginnings and Endings, Movement and Competition, Dreams and Wishes, Growing and Learning, Pain and Healing, Spiritual and Emotional Pathways, and People and Relationships. Their inquiries eventually led students to a study of the forced migration of people who become refugees throughout the world.

We found that integrating literature from diverse cultures into student inquiries provides for a much wider range of perspectives on a particular theme or topic and so encourages more complexity in the issues that students consider. They cannot settle comfortably into the issues that are part of their own cultural perspective but are challenged to go beyond that world view. We have been able to locate global literature on various social and historical themes and topics but have

struggled with finding books from a range of global cultures on science and mathematical content. Those books appear to rarely be selected for translation and publication in North America.

Inquiries on Global Issues

Another curricular component that is significant for building intercultural understanding are inquiries that focus on specific global issues, many of which highlight difficult social, political and environmental issues, such as violence, human rights and social justice, environmental degradation, overpopulation, poverty, language loss, race and ethnicity, and economic imperialism (Collins, Czarra, & Smith, 1998). Students need to occasionally study a global issue in-depth and over time to understand the local and global complexity of these issues and to consider ways of taking action in their lives. These studies are essential in encouraging students to go beyond talk and inquiry to determine how to take action to create a better and more just world.

We engaged in a school-wide inquiry on Human Rights that each classroom took in different directions. We began with developing a conceptual understanding of rights through connections to children's lives. We knew that children often complain about events they see as "unfair" at school. We read aloud and discussed books such as *A Fine, Fine School* (Creech, 2003) and *The Recess Queen* (O'Neill, 2002) and invited students to create maps of the school on which they located unfair events. These maps supported students in searching for the rights that are involved when they feel something is unfair. Students created lists of what they believed their rights were at school and noted which rights they felt needed to be addressed in their own context.



We moved students beyond a discussion at the local level to the broader global issues through browsing books from many different parts of the world that were on a range of human rights issues, including *Aani and the Tree Huggers* (Atkins, 1995), *Brothers in Hope* (Williams, 2005), *Selavi* (Landowne, 2005) and *Friends from the Other Side* (Anzaldua, 1993). We also read aloud and discussed books such as *The Carpet Boy's Gift* (Shea, 2006) to examine the strategies that children use to take action in their own contexts. In their classrooms, students engaged in range of inquiries that included discussions about literature related to particular human rights issues such

as child labor, gender inequity, undocumented immigrants, and homelessness based on their interests. Throughout these inquiries, students particularly noted the strategies characters used to take action and used these strategies to take action on some of the issues they identified in their own school context.

Critically Reading the Word and the World

All components of a curriculum that is international should be permeated with critically reading the word and the world. Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1970) used this phrase to indicate the importance of raising issues of power, oppression, and social justice. Without a focus on critically reading the word and world, the four components could easily become a superficial tour of culture where students learn about internationalism as tourists who pick up isolated pieces of information. A tourist curriculum is based on the assumption that “if we all just learned more about each other, we would like each other and the world’s problems would be solved.” This approach does not consider difficult issues of social justice and so students are unable to make real changes in how they think about and relate to others.

Reading critically is the stance that race, class, and gender matter in how we interpret and analyze our experiences in the world as well as the texts we encounter. Freire argues that students need to wrestle with ideas and words, not just walk on top of them. Reading the word and the world from a critical stance provides the opportunity to question “what is” and “who benefits” as well as to consider the “what if” of new possibilities. We noticed, for example, that students initially avoided talking about issues of racism by taking a position of colorblindness, stating “It doesn’t matter what you look like on the outside, it’s the inside that counts.” These statements deny that skin color matters in how people are treated and is one essential aspect of cultural identity. Colorblindness allowed students to walk on top of words and they needed to be challenged to wrestle with the difficult issues of racism in their lives as well as the broader world. As always, we began with books close to their lives such as *First Day in Grapes* (Perez, 2002) about a Latino child who is treated with prejudice before moving into literature on these issues from a range of cultural perspectives

Critically reading the word and the world involves students in thinking critically and questioning the way things are and power relationships, in order to consider multiple cultures, perspectives, and ways of taking action. We encourage students to take this critical stance whether they are looking at their own personal cultural identities, engaging in a cross-cultural study, considering multiple perspectives across the curriculum, or examining a difficult global issue.

Final Reflections

This curriculum framework provided us with a means of evaluating what is currently happening within the school to support the development of intercultural understanding and global

perspectives. We can identify what is working well along with what is missing or needs to be strengthened. Although all aspects of this framework will not be in place at one particular moment in time, they should all be available to students across the school year. The interactions across the framework are essential to building complex understandings of interculturalism. The components of personal cultural identity and cross-cultural studies focus students on developing conceptual understandings of culture, the integration of international books across the curriculum develops their conceptual understandings of perspective, and inquiries on global issues highlight conceptual understandings of taking action. All of these understandings are essential for interculturalism as an orientation for approaching life, both inside and outside of school.

Children's engagements with literature have the potential to transform their world views through understanding their current lives and imagining beyond themselves. Students do need to find their lives reflected in books, but if what they read in school only mirrors their own views of the world, they cannot envision alternative ways of thinking and being. These experiences need to be embedded within a curriculum that is international or their potential to challenge students to critically confront issues of culture is diminished or lost. A curriculum and literature that are international offer all of us, educators and students, the potential for enriching and transforming our lives and our views of the world.

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Conceptualization as a Way of Thinking in Schools

by Lisa Thomas, Instructional Coach, Van Horne Elementary School

Learners need to think conceptually to develop insights into their world through the stories that they read. They need to be able to go beyond the specific story events, context and characters to dig deeply into broader issues and ideas. Dewey (1938) argues that without this type of reflection, their thinking is not taken to a higher level to become an organized part of how that learner approaches and thinks about future experiences.

The teachers at Van Horne have worked to support elementary students in recognizing and accessing their ability to think conceptually. Our struggles with supporting this type of thinking have led us to realize that conceptualization is a broad umbrella of thought that grows out of the complex integration of different types of thinking. We want the adults and children at our school to be conceptual thinkers, and we have worked to encourage this thinking in a variety of ways. We know that people, young and old, naturally think conceptually. This kind of thinking is required to learn and function in our world. Our challenge has not been in teaching and learning how to think conceptually, but instead in understanding this thinking in a way that allows us to recognize and access it to support our learning in the school setting where it is often underutilized.

We didn't want to emphasize isolated elements of thinking (spending one week on synthesis, another on symbolic thinking) in a way that would move us away from the flexible coordination and collaboration of real thought. Nor did we want learners to be challenged occasionally and