

Global Literacy Communities are small groups of educators who are committed to professional inquiries about how to build international understanding through global children's and adolescent literature. These communities meet regularly to immerse themselves in global literature and consider strategies for using these books effectively with students in K-12 classroom contexts. The communities are school-based, community-based, or university/school collaborations whose members have a shared commitment to thinking together as a professional learning community in order to transform their practice.

In 2012-2013, thirteen Global Literacy Communities received grants from Worlds of Words to support their work and to encourage their explorations of innovative practices. Community members also participated in an online forum where they shared their explorations and resources with each other. Each literacy community also committed to sharing their work with other educators through writing vignettes for *WOW Stories: Connections from the Classroom*. This effort by Worlds of Words was supported by the Longview Foundation for World Affairs and International Understanding, an organization that has been helping young people in the United States learn about world regions and global issues since 1966. The vignettes from the rest of these communities were published in Volume IV, Issues 6 and 7.

We will be publishing an unthemed issue of WOW Stories in the spring of 2014. Consider sharing your innovative practices around global and multicultural literature by submitting a vignette to *WOW Stories*. We are interested in descriptions of interactions with literature in classrooms and libraries at preschool through graduate levels. [See our call for manuscripts and author guidelines for more information.](#)

Kathy G. Short, Director of Worlds of Words

Developing Empathy and Perspective through Global Literature and Persona Dolls

by Jennifer Carey

We live in a challenging world that calls on educators to make difficult choices every day. The intensity that surrounds our decision-making processes is firmly rooted in the simple yet profound question, "What is best for our students?" This inquiry calls on educators to act as change agents in the lives of students by taking on the challenge to know each student's authentic self and to create and sustain a community. We invite students to practice being compassionate and empathetic human beings in order to be innovative peacemakers in the world. Our tension was how to wade gracefully into such a task with elementary age students.

As literacy teachers, we were excited to embark on a project that would align our shared belief that

all students should have ample learning experiences that support empathy consciousness through a focus on perspective taking. For our project, we utilized thoughtfully selected literature, in particular, contemporary writings that introduced students to global cultures, religions and ideas as the main vehicle for developing empathy. Students read, discussed and wrote responses to the texts. Then students chose a character from their selection of readings to turn into a Persona Doll.



Teaching Empathy in School Contexts

A wide body of research supports the positive benefits of teaching empathy in school settings. While working on this project, we became intrigued by the ways each individual student responded to their text in an empathetic context. We used the psychologist Paul Ekman’s viewpoints on empathy to guide us in determining if an authentic empathic response was experienced. According to Ekman (2003) there are three kinds of empathy: cognitive, emotional and compassionate. We found that most of our students had displayed cognitive empathy using a definition by Daniel Goleman, co-founder of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning,

Cognitive empathy is simply knowing how the other person feels and what they may be thinking. Sometimes perspective taking, this kind of empathy can help in negotiation and or in motivating people. Emotional empathy is when you feel physically along with the other person, as though their emotions were contagious. With compassionate empathy, we not only understand a person’s predicament and feel with them, but are spontaneously moved to help, if needed. (p. 180)

After a written response, in order to further the personal interaction with the texts, we decided that Persona Dolls would be a natural means of expression in which the students could express their empathy for a particular character in a manner that allowed for student choice within the teacher selected texts. The creation of Persona Dolls involves work with a variety of media to form a unique character, which in turn becomes the vehicle for telling a story. We had experienced that dolls are ideal vehicles through which to communicate depersonalizing memories and sensitive issues that might be difficult to discuss. The process is relevant for therapists, educators, and human service professionals. The elements of the Persona Doll creation process support development of voice, identification with the “other,” and the exchange of narratives as a foundation for perspective taking.



In regards to perspective taking research, we used Selman's (1980) theory of the five stages of perspective taking to help us better understand the developmental stages children go through when they are maturing through the perspective taking process. Selman's theory of perspective taking works as a developmental continuum, which illustrates appropriate expectations as students mature. It was extremely beneficial to come across such research because we could better scaffold our support of students

Our Classroom and School Context

Our teacher group consisted of four third through fifth grade teachers and 150 third through fifth grade students. Our school has a high special needs population that challenges us to personalize learning in an authentic way. We serve a wide range of academic and behavioral needs. Within the 8-12 age range, we have emergent readers, at grade level readers and readers at an adult level. We work with students with a variety of unique needs: autism, Asperger syndrome, sensory integration disorder, oppositional defiance disorders and attentional and impulsivity challenges. This population constitutes between 25% and 35% of our classroom make-up. There are roughly 25 students in each classroom. The economic diversity of our families is broad. We serve families in every economic situation; however a larger percentage of our community can be classified in the low and middle class strata.



Collaborating to Develop Our Curricular Plans

This project started with teachers meeting over a two-month period to analyze what texts would be

used. We used the Worlds of Words book lists as our main resource. Each teacher selected two selections from the W.O.W Language and Culture Book Kits and the W.O.W Thematic Lists. Then each teacher presented the books they believed would be of value for our students. Our discussions included critiques centered on lifestyles, heroes, promotion of healthy and positive self-images, copyright date, storyline and illustration. When we had the physical copies of the books, we further determined which books would be appropriate for whole class discussions and for individual students. Across each classroom, common anchor texts were utilized in order to support a common experience among students.

We used the following common anchor texts:

Title	Author	Publishing Year
<i>Brothers in Hope</i>	Mary Williams	2005
<i>Four, Feet, Two Sandals</i>	Karen Lynn Williams and Karen Mohammed	2007
<i>The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind</i>	William Kamkwamba and Bryan Mealer	2010
<i>The Librarian of Basra</i>	Jeanette Winter	2005
<i>The Unbreakable Code</i>	Sara Hoagland and Julia Miner	2007



The foci of our meetings were:

- Overall project vision and implementation
- Individual needs of our students.
- Identifying books that best fit our students' interests and developmental levels

- Carefully reviewing books that would be used for individuals and for read alouds
- Read purchased books and selected books for specific classrooms based on student need
- Created worksheets to complement the objectives of the project
- Wrote our own Persona Doll stories and made our own Persona Dolls
- Whole group and small group lesson collaboration
- Shared and received feedback on student work
- Reflected on sensitive issues that came up in class discussions in regards to race and stereotypes



Mollie Murphy, explains the book selection process.

The next stage of the project occurred over a three-month period during which we engaged in the following experiences:

- Global literature read alouds and discussion groups in whole and small group settings occurred
- Students participated in discussions that highlighted recognizing perspectives, communicating connections and pattern analysis.
- Students responded to texts in written formats such as summaries, compare/contrast essays, literary response essays, “I Am” poems, and journaling
- Students composed narratives for their Persona Dolls
- Students created Persona Dolls
- Students shared and responded to each other’s dolls
- As the project progressed we continued to meet monthly for 1 hour.

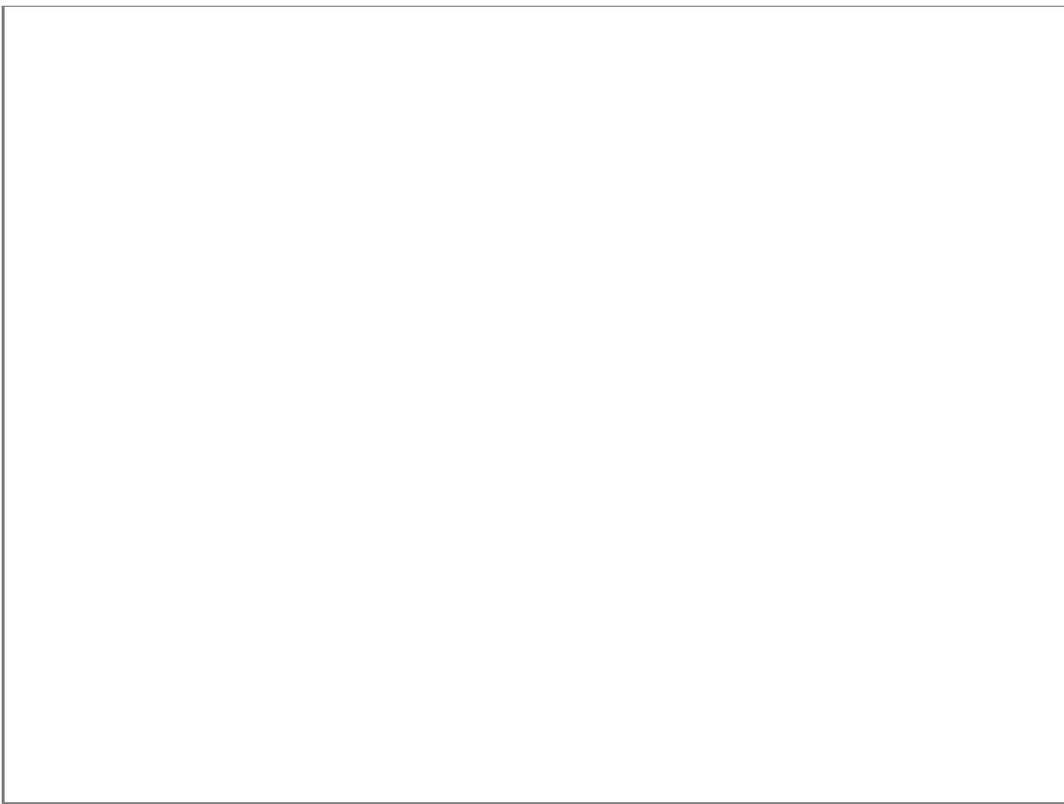
Persona Doll Introduction, Construction and Reflection

The Persona Dolls were introduced after the students had sufficient time to interact with the texts through reading and writing. It was extremely important to us that an authentic connection was made between a character and the student through the intimacy of reading and writing. We wanted that special connection between the character and the student to be a gift that the student was mining for amidst literature exploration. We used our observation to discern when the time was right to switch the focus from exploring the books to inviting the students to explore one character. This was a good decision because it injected fresh energy into the project. We simply stated that each student would choose a character that had most affected him or her and turn that character into a Persona Doll.

We told students:

You will create a Persona Doll about a person or character from your global literature experience. You will compose an appropriate text that will accompany the Persona Doll that will bring the Persona Doll subject to life. Most likely, the texts will be written in the narrative genre.

After we had described what a Persona Doll was, we showed several examples of dolls made with the materials that would be provided to the students. We shared examples of narratives that we authored to accompany these Persona Dolls. After the teacher demonstration, students immediately had their characters in mind. This was exactly what we wanted. We knew that authentic connections were cultivated. Students wrote narratives in the form of essays or poems to capture or continue moments of their characters' lives. Once the texts were in a final draft form, students created their dolls, using scrap material, wooden doll heads, pipe cleaners and markers. In an author's chair setting, students shared their narratives and Persona Dolls with their peers.



Student explains her thinking about The Librarian of Basra.

These two examples samples from a third and fourth grade student clearly use an empathetic thought process in order to take on the perspective of the character.

I AM POEM inspired by *My Name is Keoko* I am thoughtful and inquisitive.

I wonder if I will ever learn Korean

I hear the stifled screams of conflict

I see cultural adversity

I want the war to be over

I am thoughtful and inquisitive. I pretend I am my thoughts

I feel worried about Tae-yul

I touch my diary with my ink

I worry Tae-yul will die while fighting

I am thoughtful and inquisitive. I understand that Korea was once free of adversity

I dream of a free Korea and my uncle

I hope my family will be strong

I am thoughtful and inquisitive.

Why William from *The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind* is

my Role ModelThe most inspiring character to me is William in *The Boy who Harnessed the Wind*. In my opinion, William is inspiring because he is wise, smart, and curious. I think William is wise because in the beginning of the story because I believe he knew deep down inside of him there was a solution to a big challenge in his community. William is wise because he used all his resources to find the solution. He used his smarts, common sense and his observational skills to bring solve a problem in his village. He is wise because he is patient and is willing to wait until the right thing happens. Lastly, William was wise because he did not worry about what other people thought of him. I believe that William is smart because he figured out how to make a windmill. Not only did he design and build a windmill, but he made it out of the junk and trash in his village. William was smart because he used his resources and did not look at the trash as trash but as something to use in an invention. I think that William was always thinking about why things work the way they do and that his brain wheels were always turning. In my opinion William is curious. I think that William is curious because he wondered how a radio worked. He wanted to know how the radio parts worked together to create a sound. I bet that we he looked at something he was trying to see through it with x-ray vision like Superman. Another reason he is curious is because he wondered how an engine worked instead of just looking at one, he took his time to figure it out. For these reasons I think William is curious. I think William is wise, smart and curious because he used all his resources, figured out how to make a windmill, and wondered how an engine worked. He was a problem solver and an inspiration to his community and to me! For all these reasons, William will always be role model for me when I come across a difficult problem or want to explore something I do not understand.

This example is a Persona Doll narrative about a student's experience of being bullied.

My name is Sam. I'm in 4th grade. When I was in 1st grade that's when people started making fun of me. They were saying I was fat, slower than everybody and stupid. I tried to not believe them. I just

ignored, ignored and ignored until I finally snapped. I started bullying those kids and they stopped bullying me. I felt really bad for doing mean things to them. I finally said, "I'm sorry that I did that to you guys." They said in reply, "We are too." After that school year, I moved to a different school. I was scared as HECK. Throughout the year I did pretty good until 3rd grade when this kid came and he started bullying me saying I ate way too many donuts. It started to make me so mad so I pushed him off the monkey bars and I got in big trouble. He just kept on going and going. I got so embarrassed being laughed at every day at school, but a friend stood up for me. The next year my friend left my school and I was scared that I was going to get bullied again. I stayed away from the boy who teased me, but my other friends started playing with him. Two weeks later the bully comes to me and says he's sorry for doing all the bad things he did. But you know what I said, "I am sorry but I can't accept that after all the things you did to me and know you want me to say sorry. Are you kidding?" "That's where I made a giant mistake not taking his apology. I should've manned up and forgot the past. I finally walked over to the bully and I was scared that he wasn't going to accept me forgiving him and bully me again. I saw him and said, "I accept your apology." Me and that bully agreed not to tease each other any more. We actually became friends and we still hang out. I learned that sometimes people who are bullies have been bullied themselves. I do not want to be a bully or get bullied. I don't like to be scared at school. I believe that you should treat people the way you want to be treated. P.S. Don't be a bully and tease people because they are going to do the same thing and you're going to want them to stop.

Evidence of Empathy and Perspective Taking in our Students

Perhaps the most meaning-filled parts of this project were the rich discussions that invited students to challenge political choices that resulted in violence. After reading *The Librarian of Basra*, students' questions and comments circled the room.



When the teacher asked students what they thought of this story, they responded:

- You mean they are dropping bombs right where they live?
- How could anyone do anything if they were afraid of a bomb dropping on their head?
- Why did these people who did nothing wrong have to have their lives destroyed?
- I can't believe our country was dropping bombs on her library!
- It must have been so scary for everyone to not know what was going to happen.
- If I were Alia, I would have done the same thing because I love books like her.
- Wow, I am so amazed she was so brave for her books.
- I think Alia is very smart because she was able to really focus on her goal and she did not let anything stop her. I think she has a very strong heart.

This discussion led many students to question the thought of war, leading to a series of connections and even further questions. Most of the connections were centered around WWII because one student in the class was a WWII buff and loved to share his knowledge with his peers. Their responses focused on:

- Did you know that we dropped an atomic bomb on the Japanese during WWII? It even happened two times. I know this because I saw a documentary on it. [*The student goes on to explain the attack in detail.*]
- Yeah, I just read a book about that. Her name was Sadako.
- Oh, I have read that book too and in the second grade we made the cranes.
- This just has to stop.... it has to stop! How could this happen? We do not have to fight like this!

The discussion concluded with a sharing of strategies and tools students have observed people use in order to not go to war.

There were many moments where we as teachers had to carefully construct our responses to the student's inquiries after reading texts that dealt with sensitive issues and provide examples of peacemaking entities i.e.: Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in post-apartheid South Africa. In these moments when we thoughtfully chose to silence our viewpoints, we saw deep, raw and transforming discussions take place.

After the Boston Marathon bombing, two students were using derogatory comments against Muslim people in the hallway. One girl, coincidentally, the only practicing Muslim in her class, was within earshot of the remarks. She listened and told a teacher what she had heard. This conversation led the class to a discussion that exposed incorrect beliefs that were held by the students' families about the Muslim community. This was tough stuff! The approach we took was to educate the class on vocabulary terms that would help all the students communicate with each other. We defined Islam, Muslim and other terms that would support our comprehension of the issues. We used maps to show countries that followed Islamic religion and talked about the different belief systems that are within the Islamic world. We brought in newspaper articles of how Muslim Americans have been treated in connection to their chosen faith. Lastly, Muslims from our school described their belief systems to our classes. And of course, throughout the entire time we read pertinent literature that built bridges of connections. The WOW booklist for children's books from Arabic speaking nations of the Middle East was a valuable resource for appropriate texts. After the immersion period, the students who made the comments changed. They saw how their statements were hurtful and destructive, saying, "I really didn't know what I was saying before. I see things very differently now."

Not long after this experience, a student shared a derogatory joke putting down people of another race and culture. The person who heard the offensive joke decided to use this as an opportunity to create a Persona Doll that was teased because of her background. Struggling to put the ideas into a written piece, the student verbally shared a story with her class about a student who was teased by her classmates because of her background. This became such a powerful moment for the student. "I was feeling really bad about what he said. That is me he is making fun of! That is my mom too! Then when my Persona Doll told her story, she was brave and said things I could not have said. I could stand up to my friend and show him that what he did was wrong. He is still my friend and now he has a different way of seeing things from my eyes."

Most students in the assessment interview process spoke of an awakening of new knowledge and of how people struggle. "I didn't realize that kids have to go through these ordeals and obstacles. I thought that things like this just happen in the mind, but they are real." Other student's responses circled around a theme of gratitude. "I feel so lucky to have a house, school and clean water." "I am so lucky that I can go to school. If I was a girl in this village I would have to work and maybe even be married."

We started this project on the heels of a Caldecott study that analyzed Caldecott illustrations and story lines throughout the decades. At the end of the school year an observant young girl made a remark, "You know, I just realized there weren't any people who were gay, Muslim or that had special needs in any of the Caldecott books we read. I hope that will change in the next decades." Clearly, some students were able to transfer their experience from the project and apply it to into

real world situations.

Conclusion

Our students were able to exercise their empathetic muscles by reading and responding to contemporary global literature and by creating Persona Dolls. The project invited students to connect with their own stories, the stories of their classmates and the characters in the selected texts. We learned that a classroom culture of interconnectivity is possible when students are given authentic opportunities to practice perspective taking. Thus, our challenge now becomes to facilitate learning experiences that invite our students to practice becoming, “good perspective takers who display empathy and compassion and are better at thinking of effective ways to handle difficult social situations that reflect multiple perspectives” (Eisenberg, 1987, p. 152).

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Persona Doll Resources

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Creating Global Awareness through Collaboration between the Public School and the University

by Garden Hills Global Literacy Community

The Garden Hills Elementary School Teacher Group was a public-school-based group of teachers that received support from a university professor. The teachers were dedicated to extending their abilities to work in equitable and just ways within their recently adopted globally-focused International Baccalaureate Americas (IBA) program. This internationally themed, multilingual magnet school is located in a high poverty crime area of a small urban school district in a university city. Group members included literacy specialists, classroom teachers, and other educational specialists in all three strands offered by the school (bilingual education, gifted education, and native English language education).

The group had two key goals: (1) to increase the global awareness of the school community while working to become fully accredited by the PYP-IBA and (2) to continue to work to decrease the ethnic achievement gap at the school by increasing the use of culturally relevant literacy instruction using authentic materials. Teachers wanted to “increase both our access to and knowledge about culturally authentic and engaging global literature so we can more effectively incorporate it into