

Developing Curriculum with Global Literature

Prisca Martens, Ray Martens, and Nicole McMillan

Creation School is located southeast of Tucson near the Rincon Mountains in the heart of the Sonoran Desert. The school served about 100 students in 2021-2022 in preschool (beginning at age two) through fifth grade. As a Lutheran school, it provides a Christ-centered environment that nurtures children's faith, strengthens families, and invites children to explore and discover their world through rich indoor and outdoor learning experiences. The school is about 50% Latinx and 50% European American and Asian/other cultural groups. A few teachers and students speak Spanish, but English is the primary language used.

Creation just completed its ninth year. For the third consecutive year, Creation has had a Worlds of Words Global Literacy Communities Grant to develop a curriculum using global literature. Through story, global literature focuses on building intercultural understandings of cultures, regions, and people around the world (Freeman, Lehman, & Scharer, 2007; Short, 2016), which supports and is integral to the school's Christian/Lutheran beliefs.

Our Vail Global Literacy Community Study Group

Our Vail Global Literacy Community in 2021-2022 included six teachers: Lacey Elisea (first grade teacher), Jane Metzger (inclusion specialist and first grade teaching assistant), Cassandra Sutherland (K-5 physical education/art teacher), Nicole McMillan (kindergarten teacher), Josh Landi (fourth/fifth grade teachers), and Jennifer Hook (school administrator/preschool teacher). Prisca and Ray Martens were facilitators in the literacy community. Our goals for the year were (1) to continue to develop a curriculum for preschool through fifth grades using global literature and organized around a "Curriculum that is Intercultural," (Short, 2016); and (2) to continue developing writing and art curricula that include experiences inviting children to explore global literature and deepen their intercultural understandings, as well as create and share their own stories.

Our study group met regularly throughout the year and followed a consistent agenda. We began our meetings with teachers discussing events and issues in their classrooms and questions/concerns of teachers. Examples of these included teachers sharing student writing samples or other work, talking about student responses to read-alouds, and creating student book clubs in classrooms. We then discussed a piece of literature we had all read. This literature included *Voices in the Park* (Browne, 2001), *Each Kindness* (Woodson & Lewis, 2012), and *A Good Night for Freedom* (Morrow & Jenkins, 2003). Our discussions focused on our responses to the stories and comments on what we noticed in the art. Some teachers then read these books to students in their classrooms.

We then discussed professional literature we'd read. These readings included journal articles such as "Building Intercultural Understandings Through Global Literature" (Martens et al., 2015) and the book *Leading Literate Lives* (Affinito, 2021). In *Leading Literate Lives*, Affinito discusses the importance of teachers being readers and writers themselves. She provides numerous strategies to support teachers personally in this goal as well as strategies for how to encourage students as readers and writers in the classroom. We ended our meetings by sharing plans for the upcoming weeks and for our next meeting.

In their classrooms teachers read and discussed global and multicultural literature with students, provided time for students to respond to the literature orally and/or in response journals, and integrated text sets to support the focus of classroom topics. These text sets were on identity, the 2021 Summer and 2022 Winter Olympics; and cross-cultural studies of China and Mexico.

Learning Through Read-Alouds

Teachers at Creation use a variety of strategies to engage students in learning and read-alouds are an essential one. The numerous benefits of read-alouds include supporting language and vocabulary development, building content knowledge, strengthening listening comprehension, expanding literary knowledge, inviting personal connections and reflection, and building community in the classroom through story (Laminack, 2016). Through story in read-alouds, students have a shared experience they can discuss and revisit as they build and make sense of themselves, the story they heard, and the world (Short, 2012). Stories invite students to respond and make connections to their own lives.

Read-Alouds in Kindergarten

Nicole Macmillan shared an example of a read-aloud in one of our study group meetings. In her kindergarten class, Nicole was helping her ten students develop a strong understanding of who they are as cultural beings and appreciate their own uniqueness. She knew that only then could her students appreciate the culture and uniqueness of others. In addition, she understood that when literature mirrors students' lives and identities, students are encouraged to value literacy as critical to their identities (Short, 2016).

One of Nicole's read-alouds was *Alma and How She Got Her Name* (Martinez-Neal, 2018). In the story, young Alma Sofia Esperanza José Pura Candela decides that her name is just too long. Once her father explains the significance of each part of her name, however, Alma decides that her name fits her "just right."

As Nicole read, she could see students connecting the story to their own names, lives, and identities and wondering what their names meant and how they got them. When she finished reading, Nicole asked if anyone knew the story behind their names. Oriana eagerly shared, "My parents picked my name while I was still in mommy's tummy. But after I was born, my parents called me 'Spike' because my hair stood straight up!" Since students were curious about their names, Nicole created a form for them to take to their parents. The form explained the book and discussion in class and invited parents to share how they decided on their child's name.

Students were excited to share what they discovered about their names with their classmates. William, for example, received his name because his mother liked Will Turner's character in the movie *Pirates of the Caribbean* (Bruckheimer, 2003) and Fitzwilliam Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice* (Austen, 1995). In addition, "William" means determined/valiant protector and has been used for royalty throughout history. Zachariah received his name because his parents wanted a Biblical name that reminded people God remembers the fallen and those who are lonely and hurt.

The students' interest in names prompted Nicole to locate other books to read-aloud, such as *The Name Jar* (Choi, 2001), *My Name is Yoon* (Recorvits & Swiatkowska, 2003), and *My Name is Sangoel* (Williams, Mohammed, & Stock, 2009). *My Name is Sangoel* is the story of Sangoel, a young boy from Sudan who travels to the United States as a refugee. His classmates and teachers struggle to pronounce his name so Sangoel creates a way to show his name with pictures (i.e., a sun and a goal). Nicole's students started thinking about how they would "draw" their names and discussed how their names are their own and belong to them.

Nicole also read the Author's Note in the book which explained that at one time officials took away refugees' given names and replaced them with Americanized names. Students talked about how devastated they would feel if the names their parents gave them were taken away. Nicole shared that sometimes refugees cannot bring money, food, clothing, or even other members of their families when they leave their homes and their names are all they have. The discussion gave Nicole's kindergarten students a new perspective on their identities, their families and homes, and the importance of their names.

Through these and other read-alouds, Nicole supported her students' language and literacy development, content knowledge, and listening comprehension. Just as importantly, with "Alma" as a member of the classroom community through the read-aloud, Nicole helped students strengthen their understandings and appreciation of themselves and each other as unique cultural beings with unique cultural identities.

Closing Thoughts

In the vignettes that follow, we invite you into the classrooms as teachers share details of their work and experiences with students. The vignettes demonstrate how the teachers are working to integrate global literature across their curriculum as much as they can. In "Exploring Identity Through Stories and Song," Jennifer Hook explores music. In "Global Literacy Journeys in First Grade—Far Away Places...Yet Close to Home!" Lacey Elisea and Jane Metzger discuss cross-cultural studies, reading/writing, and students' families. And, in "Learning About the Olympics: An Integrated Curriculum/Multi-Class Celebration," Cassandra Sutherland and Lacey Elisea share global literature/perspectives in physical education and art.

It was an exciting year of learning and growing for all of us. We hope that the vignettes provide a taste of our excitement and offer insights into how global literature enriches curriculum and students' understandings of themselves, others, and the world.

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