

University at Albany, State University of New York

## Scholars Archive

---

Literacy Teaching & Learning Faculty  
Scholarship

Literacy Teaching and Learning

---

2018

### Teaching Global Literature to “Disturb the Waters”: A Case Study

Kelly K. Wissman

University at Albany, State University of New York, kwissman@albany.edu

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarsarchive.library.albany.edu/eltl\\_fac\\_scholar](https://scholarsarchive.library.albany.edu/eltl_fac_scholar)



Part of the [Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education Commons](#), [Curriculum and Social Inquiry Commons](#), [Elementary Education Commons](#), and the [Language and Literacy Education Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Wissman, Kelly K., "Teaching Global Literature to “Disturb the Waters”: A Case Study" (2018). *Literacy Teaching & Learning Faculty Scholarship*. 9.

[https://scholarsarchive.library.albany.edu/eltl\\_fac\\_scholar/9](https://scholarsarchive.library.albany.edu/eltl_fac_scholar/9)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Literacy Teaching and Learning at Scholars Archive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Literacy Teaching & Learning Faculty Scholarship by an authorized administrator of Scholars Archive. For more information, please contact [scholarsarchive@albany.edu](mailto:scholarsarchive@albany.edu).

# Teaching Global Literature to “Disturb the Waters”: A Case Study

Kelly K. Wissman

Within this qualitative case study, I describe how a fifth-grade teacher in an affluent and culturally homogenous school attempted to “disturb the waters” through teaching global literature. Framed by transactional theories of response and critical language awareness, I identify three central pedagogical moves that supported disruptions of students’ assumptions and beliefs: (1) inviting students to share their aesthetic transactions, (2) privileging multiple perspectives and genres, and (3) calling attention to language choices as a central line of inquiry. I argue that both transactional and critical approaches to literacy and language are necessary in order to move students beyond disinterested and prejudicial responses to global literature and to challenge commonly held beliefs.

**W**ithin an increasingly globalized world, the decades-long call for the inclusion of global literature<sup>1</sup> within English language arts curricula has taken on renewed urgency (Liang, Watkins, & Williams, 2013). In light of exhortations to build walls and efforts to close borders to refugees, many educators see teaching with global texts as a “necessity, not a luxury” (Short, 2016, p. 3). Arguments for the teaching of global literature include its potential to foster respect for different people and cultural traditions (Bond, 2006; Jewett, 2011; Martens et al., 2015); to help students acquire dispositions necessary for global citizenship (Choo, 2014; Short, 2011); and to enhance children’s “cognitive, emotional, moral, and social” development (Lehman, Freeman, & Scharer, 2010, p. 6).

Despite testaments to its possibilities, many empirical studies exploring the incorporation of global literature reveal the complexities of teaching it. These complexities emerge in relation to both the content of the books as well as students’ responses to them. Research suggests that students from dominant groups in the United States can become disengaged with global texts because of unfamiliar names and settings as well as a lack of compre-

hension of the distinctive experiences of the characters within their unique social contexts (Bond, 2006; Montero & Robertson, 2006). Soter (1997) refers to this disengagement as an “aesthetic restriction” in which a reader may reject a global text because of its presentation of different value systems and social practices, thereby foreshortening a potentially transformative aesthetic transaction (Rosenblatt, 1982). Creating instructional contexts that take students beyond a focus on the external manifestations of cultural identities—or what Meyer and Rhoades (2006) refer to as “food, festival, folklore, and fashion”—can also be a daunting task (Jewett, 2011; Short, 2009). Depending on their literary quality, global books can leave students with reductive and superficial understandings of other cultures (Stewart, 2008; Xu, 2015). This is a particular concern with the global texts available in the United States, the majority of which are written by American authors (Stewart, 2008). Commercially successful books such as *The Breadwinner* (Ellis, 2000), for example, have been critiqued for perpetuating stereotypical or distorted representations of the Middle East, especially in depictions of girls and women (Sensöy & Marshall, 2010). Global texts available in the United States can reinforce hegemonic notions of U.S. power and privilege (Desai, 2011; Xu, 2015), positioning non-Western peoples as destitute, with Western readers as their “saviors” (Sensöy & Marshall, 2010). They can also

**How can teachers build on students’ initial responses to global texts that may reflect disinterest, judgment, or derision to deepen engagement and cultural understanding?**

run a risk of perpetuating an “us/them” duality and what Stewart (2008) calls a “we’re fortunate syndrome,” where readers assert “how lucky we are to be Americans” (p. 103).

These studies identify many of the ongoing tensions and conundrums that need further exploration related to the teaching of global literature, especially in culturally homogenous and affluent

U.S. contexts. How do teachers create environments where students—accustomed to seeing their own lives, beliefs, and experiences represented in texts—are willing and prepared to engage with texts that contain unfamiliar customs, settings, and situations? How can teachers build on students’ initial responses to global texts that may reflect disinterest, judgment, or derision to deepen engagement and cultural understanding?

In light of these persistent questions, some scholars have questioned the relevance and utility of transactional theories of response (Rosenblatt, 1982) to inform the teaching of global literature, questions that Cai (2008) also explored when considering if transactional theories could be a “valid and viable guide” (p. 212) for the teaching of multicultural literature. Reflecting on American students’ responses to *Red Scarf Girl* (Jiang, 1997), Loh (2010)

calls for pedagogical models that “encourage critical distancing rather than mere aesthetic involvement” (p. 111). Loh argues that promoting “critical distancing” can encourage students to be self-reflexive and to “distance themselves from American culture to examine their own culture from an outsider’s perspective” (pp. 110–111). Choo (2014) advocates for teaching with global texts in ways that “challenge the reader-response transactional model” (pp. 77–78). To Choo (2014), transactional models are “reader-centric,” valorizing the reader at the expense of the “other” in global texts. She argues that a “reader-centric approach promotes individualistic creativity by privileging the subject’s experience (satisfaction, pleasure) and affirmation of its ego (via aiming at newness, originality, distinction) while leading to an objectification of the other” (p. 78). Conversely, “an other-oriented approach seeks to draw the interpreting self into a responsible relation with the marginalized referent other in the world” (p. 78).

In this article, I present a case study of how a fifth-grade reading teacher, Simeen,<sup>2</sup> incorporated global literature into her classroom with the expressed purpose to “disturb the waters” for her predominantly White, upper-middle-class, American-born students. I explore how she aimed not only to create opportunities for students to think critically about their own identities and perspectives but also to come to a richer appreciation of the humanity of the people represented in the texts. I contend transactional theories can indeed play a role in fostering and illuminating the meaning-making processes of students engaged in reading global literature, especially when paired with teaching practices that heighten students’ awareness of how language reflects and constructs reality (Rogers, 2004). My research questions are:

1. What pedagogical and curricular choices did Simeen make in support of her goal to “disturb the waters” for her students when teaching global literature?
2. How did the fifth-grade students respond to this literature and to Simeen’s pedagogy?
3. What role did explicit attention to language play in meaning-making within this class?

To facilitate the analysis, I draw on transactional theories to illustrate how Simeen cultivated students’ aesthetic transactions in her teaching of global literature. I apply both Rosenblatt’s (1982) perspectives as well as Cai’s (2008) exploration of the potential for transactional theories to illuminate the possibilities and challenges of teaching multicultural literature. In light

of Simeen's particular emphasis on language within class discussions, I also layer on top of this analysis critical perspectives on language and literacy, particularly, critical language awareness (Fairclough, 1999). This layering of theoretical frameworks, I contend, is necessary to capture the broader sense of purpose embedded in Simeen's pedagogy to "disturb the waters" and to illuminate how she uncovered and cultivated the "seeds of critical reading" (Cai, 2008, p. 216) within students' aesthetic transactions.

## Theoretical Framework

### The Aesthetic Transaction

Rosenblatt (1982) theorizes reading as a transaction between the reader and the text, arguing that meaning is shaped by the stance a reader brings to the text. A reader's stance may fall along the aesthetic-efferent continuum, drawing from the Greek meaning of aesthetic ("to sense" or "to perceive") and the efferent ("to take away"). Rosenblatt (1982) explains that when readers read from the aesthetic stance, they create a poem, what she also describes as the "lived through experience" or an "evocation." Importantly, this evocation—what readers experience, feel, think, and bring forth while they read—is followed by "response" but is not identical to it. Rosenblatt (1981) contends that without the evocation, responses "will be like algebra, an intellectual exercise, an efferent analysis of components or devices in the text" (p. 20). She therefore encourages teachers to create space for the aesthetic transaction, suggesting they direct students "to pay attention to the interfusion of sensuous, cognitive, and affective elements" (1986, p. 127) that occur while they read. She argues, "[c]urriculums and classroom methods should be evaluated in terms of how they foster or impede the initial aesthetic transaction, and on whether they help students to savor, deepen, the lived-through experience, to recapture and reflect on it, to organize their sense of it" (1986, p. 126).

Narrow interpretations of the aesthetic transaction have resulted in classroom applications where students are directed to share personal experiences and to make "text-to-self" connections *after* they read.<sup>5</sup> Used in isolation, these requests do not invite students to pay attention to and share the full range of their aesthetic transactions, or the "personal, the qualitative, kinesthetic, sensuous inner resonances of the words" (Rosenblatt, 1982, p. 271) experienced *while* they read. Reducing Rosenblatt's multifaceted definition of the aesthetic transaction to a focus on formulating a personal connection can limit its potential in other ways. Lewis (2000) notes that "[c]onflating the personal and the aesthetic is problematic, because it strips

the aesthetic stance of its interpretive and critical possibilities” (p. 255). In discussing the potential of transactional theories to inform the teaching of multicultural literature, Cai (2008) similarly critiques this conflation, underscoring that aesthetic readings do not sublimate but instead reveal readers’ perspectives in ways that can inspire criticality:

Readers’ misconceptions, biases, and prejudices revealed in their aesthetic reading of a multicultural literary work should be seen as subject matter for analysis, interpretation, and criticism. They may appear as barriers to critical reading of multicultural literature, but in fact they can serve as the starting point for critical reading. (p. 217)

In my analysis of Simeen’s pedagogy below, I explore how she cultivated her students’ aesthetic transactions and how she drew upon them as catalysts for response and critical analysis through explicit and ongoing attention to language.

## Critical Perspectives on Literacy and Language

This study’s theoretical framework is also informed by critical perspectives on literacy and language. Critical literacy perspectives promote teaching practices that help students to uncover how texts are situated within the sociopolitical context, to look below the surface of the text to tease out ideological assumptions, and to consider possibilities for taking action within and beyond the classroom (e.g., Vasquez, 2010). As I progressed in my data analysis, I found that critical literacy lenses were illuminating, but they were not sufficient. I turned to critical language awareness (CLA) as a way to help me sharpen the analysis of the nature of the meaning-making with global texts in this classroom. Although Simeen identified critical literacy as foundational to her teaching philosophy and practice, she did not explicitly name CLA; however, as Rogers (2018) has noted, there is considerable overlap and synergy across critical literacy, critical discourse analysis, and critical language awareness.

Proponents of CLA bring a sociocultural lens to language education and call attention to the embedded ideologies within language practices (Fairclough, 1999). As an instructional application of the research method critical discourse analysis (CDA), CLA posits that language constructs reality and is used in the service of particular interests; therefore, language practices are never neutral (Lazar, 2014). To Fairclough (1999), language education is thus vital for helping students navigate a “complex world rather than just be carried along by it” (p. 76). While calling attention to how power and ideology circulate in all manner of texts, CLA proponents also focus

on intervening in systems of inequality and giving students tools to “seek alternative ways to represent the world that is more inclusive and egalitarian” (Lazar, 2014, p. 736). Awareness of language practices in the service of egalitarian ends therefore includes analysis of how students’ language may reflect biases and may perpetuate larger social inequities.<sup>4</sup> Within Simeen’s classroom, her keen attention to language when students shared their aesthetic transactions opened up opportunities for critical conversations. These dual frameworks of aesthetic transaction and critical language awareness inform my presentation and analysis of Simeen’s teaching of global literature to “disturb the waters.”

## **Methods**

This research is informed by the methodologies of case study (Stake, 2008) and practitioner research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). I chose case study because the emphasis on careful observations, exploratory interviews, and artifact analysis encourages the presentation of multiple perspectives on the lived experiences of participants (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). In my rendering of this case study, my intention is to capture the “rich ambiguity” as well as the “complexities and contradictions” (Flyvberg, 2004, p. 430) that characterize all contexts of teaching and learning, but particularly this one in which a teacher was teaching with explicit purposes of engaging students in readings of the world and themselves in relation to global literature. The case study of Simeen is nested within a broader 16-month research project in which I studied the participation of four teachers engaged in a teacher inquiry community (Goswami, Lewis, Rutherford, & Waff, 2009) exploring global literature. In philosophy and method, this study is therefore also informed by practitioner research, an approach that recognizes teachers as legitimate sources of knowledge on their own teaching resulting from systematic and intentional inquiry into their practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009).

## **Participants, Pedagogy, and Contexts**

### ***Simeen***

A fifth-grade reading teacher at the time of the study, Simeen brought a distinctive perspective to her teaching at Parkside Elementary School in a mid-sized town in the Northeast. Having spent her childhood in Nigeria and her young adulthood in Asia and Europe, she has prioritized multicultural and global literature and multiple perspectives across her teaching career. She identifies as Asian American. In her graduate studies, Simeen pursued

intensive study of critical literacy scholarship, which she credited with having further clarified and enriched her teaching goals and approaches. At the time of the study, she had taught at Parkside for 11 years. She was particularly aware of the lack of cultural and economic diversity within her district, noting that she wished to take every advantage of the year she had with her students to expose them to as many diverse books and perspectives as she could. As she explained to me, “If [the students] don’t know and they’re just swimming in this, everything is just normal for them. My work is to disrupt that a little bit, to disturb the waters for them.” Elaborating her teaching philosophy further, Simeen writes:

I want learning for my students to be more than just a set of facts that they learn from me. I want them to care about social issues that are outside their immediate experiences; I want them to question life, look at possibilities and alternatives, and position themselves differently so that they can transform their lives and their worlds. (Tabatabai, 2017, p. 103)

### *Curriculum and Pedagogy*

Over a period of six months, I observed one of Simeen’s fifth-grade reading classes. Simeen selected this class for me to observe because of the questions that had emerged for her when sharing global texts with these students in the months prior. In her classroom, student desks were arranged in groups of four with students facing each other to facilitate small-group discussions. Read-alouds of global and multicultural picture books, chapter books, and nonfiction texts were also a distinguishing feature in this upper elementary classroom. These read-alouds included multiple pauses for students to write notes in their reading journals and to share with each other and with the whole class. I observed roughly three phases of engagement with global literature (central books during each phase are listed in parentheses):

1. Literature circles featuring children living in countries outside, and sometimes journeying to, the United States (Huynh, 1999; Lai, 2011; Sheth, 2004)
2. Whole-class and small-group inquiries into experiences of child migrants across multiple contexts and genres (Atkin, 2000; Jiménez, 1997; Trottier, 2011)
3. Whole-class and small-group explorations of multiple perspectives on World War II across multiple genres (Coerr, 1997; Kodama, 1995; Tsuchiya, 1997)



### ***Students***

At the time of this study, 85 percent of the students in Simeen's school identified as White, 7 percent qualified for free or reduced-price lunch, and 5 percent were English Language Learners. This school had a reputation as high-performing, with 84 percent of fifth graders having met or exceeded the passing score on the state's ELA exam. Out of the 22 students in the class I studied, three were students of color. The class was heterogeneous in terms of ability, including four students with IEPs and/or instructional aides for reading comprehension and attentional issues.

### **Data Collection**

The primary data sources for this manuscript are derived from participant observation in Simeen's classroom, including 14 classes that lasted 60 minutes each. I took field notes and audiotaped the 14 classes, transcribing all but three that did not involve discussions of global texts. I also collected and photocopied students' journal writing and artwork. After each class I spoke with Simeen and recorded our conversations. I kept a record and photocopies of texts shared with the children. Additional data sources include transcriptions of monthly meetings of the teacher inquiry group Simeen participated in as well as two 45-minute semistructured interviews with her. Finally, I draw from the writing Simeen produced in the inquiry group.

### **Data Analysis**

I followed the constant-comparative method (Corbin & Strauss, 1990) for data analysis. I began with open coding the entire data set involving Simeen. I created initial codes to help me answer my first two research questions related to (1) the features of Simeen's pedagogy and (2) the nature of students' responses. I then refined the codes by focusing on how Simeen articulated her purpose for teaching with global texts in interviews and in the inquiry community. From this round of analysis, I developed axial codes that related the features of Simeen's pedagogy with her perspectives about her teaching across data sources. I identified a conceptual category related to Simeen's articulated aims to "disrupt" and "disturb." This analysis yielded the following themes related to my first research question: drawing on multiple genres to explore multiple perspectives; inviting students to narrate their own thinking in response to books and each other; inviting students to reflect on their cultural identities; telling stories from her own life; and focusing on experience (see Appendix A for exemplars of coded data representing each

theme). For my second research question, I coded classroom transcripts where students were actively grappling with the presence of multiple perspectives in global texts and where they were navigating multiple viewpoints in classroom discussions. This analysis yielded the following themes: questioning characters’ decisions; finding amusement in or remarking on the oddity of others’ cultural practices; feeling sorry for characters/people; comparing and contrasting with own experiences; and critiquing inequities (see Appendix B for data exemplars).

To answer my third research question related to how Simeen’s attention to language shaped meaning-making, I employed tools of critical discourse analysis (Rogers, 2004). As Fairclough (1999) explains, “Critical discourse analysis aims to provide a framework for systematically linking properties of discourse interactions and texts with features of their social and cultural circumstances” (p. 79). Although attention to language was embedded in the themes identified in response to my first two research questions, CDA led me to take a closer, more systematic look at language. With the lens of CDA, I looked for links between classroom conversations about global literature to societal discourses about American identity and “others.” Following Fairclough’s (2012) “orders of discourse” (genre, discourses, and style), I analyzed episodes in the data where language use was particularly salient to the meaning-making within this classroom community. When analyzing for *genre*, I considered the various structures and conventions that were in place related to classroom talk about global literature: turn-taking procedures, conventions for responding, expectations within small- and whole-group discussions, etc. When considering *discourses*, I was informed by Fairclough’s (2012) definition of discourses as “semiotic ways of construing aspects of the world (physical, social or mental) which can generally be identified with different positions or perspectives of different groups of social actors” (p. 11) Here, I looked for instances in student talk that included assertions about the world and how it should function. I also looked for invocations of “common wisdom” from parents or authority figures. Finally, for *style*, I analyzed how participants positioned themselves and others. I paid special attention to the use of pronouns *I*, *we*, and *they* to signal alignment with characters and/or to mark a distinction. I also highlighted which words were emphasized, noted through an underscore in the transcript excerpts below. When coding for what role attention to language played for Simeen, I identified three themes: to consider another perspective; to raise awareness of students’ cultural identities; and to probe for deeper understanding. For students, the themes included to forge connections with characters and to critique the inequities or uses of power (see Appendix C for data exemplars).

### ***Researcher Reflexivity***

Although my research and teaching commitments are centered in explorations of diverse literatures, as a White, monolingual, middle-class woman I have limitations in perspective and experience that shape how I read global literature and conduct research on the teaching of it. Due to these limitations, I may miss cultural nuances within global texts and be less attuned to important considerations when teaching it. In researching the teaching practices and perspectives of a multilingual teacher of color with multiple and diverse experiences living and teaching over the world, I endeavored to create multiple opportunities for Simeen to articulate her teaching purposes and dilemmas. Throughout the study, I engaged in informal member checking by sharing field notes, portions of class transcripts, and drafts of conference presentations and publications with Simeen. I revised initial hunches and understandings in ongoing conversation with her across the six-month period I was in her classroom and after formal data collection ended as we, along with other members of the inquiry group, wrote about our research (Wissman, Burns, Jiampetti, & Tabatabai, 2017). My dual roles as both a facilitator of the inquiry group and as a classroom researcher provided multiple angles on Simeen's teaching practice that I may not have had if I were only observing her class or only studying her participation in the inquiry group. While I believe these dual roles contributed in positive ways to my sense-making in the study, I also recognized the need to write analytical memos reflecting on my positionality. To provide further perspective and insight, I shared initial findings and analyses with other researchers who had deep knowledge of children's literature but were not affiliated with the inquiry group.

### **Findings**

Across the three phases of student engagement with global texts I explore below, I analyze class discussions that "disturbed the waters," by which I mean a disruption to commonly held beliefs or previously unexamined assumptions. Simeen made three central moves that supported these disruptions: (1) inviting students to share their aesthetic transactions, (2) privileging multiple perspectives across multiple genres, and (3) calling attention to language choices as a central line of inquiry. In presenting my findings, I pay particular attention to how Simeen cultivated the aesthetic transaction and how her attention to language shaped meaning-making. To do so, I provide analysis of class discussions informed by Fairclough's (2012) orders of discourse (genre, discourse, and style).

As I show in the findings, Simeen repeatedly paused while reading aloud and asked her students, “What are you thinking?” At the level of *genre* (Fairclough, 2012), or an expected and routine aspect of this classroom environment, this request prompted students to externalize their aesthetic transactions and to contemplate the transactions of classmates. In response to this recurrent question, students shared feelings that the text evoked in them, relayed questions that emerged while reading, and described associations they were making. Simeen asked clarifying questions in an effort to help students “organize their sense of” (Rosenblatt, 1986, p. 126) the transaction, to bring students in dialogue with each other, and to compel the conversation and inquiries forward. Her critical attention to language in response often prompted the most profound shifts in individual student perspectives and across the classroom community.

### Phase 1: “I Thought That Was Pretty ‘Weird!’”

In the first phase of Simeen’s teaching with global texts that I observed, students participated in literature circle discussions of two books: One set in Vietnam, *Water Buffalo Days* (Huynh, 1999), and one set in both India and the United States, *Blue Jasmine* (Sheth, 2004). She did not preface the reading with extensive background to the countries the characters came from. Instead, she focused on experience—those of the characters and of her students—noting:

I use experiences because immediately they can connect it to their lives and start thinking about it in that way. I want them to kind of own it and know that the characters or people have value. It’s like, “You have experiences; they have experiences, too.” Rather than just, “Here’s another person: a Vietnamese.”

Aligned with this focus on connecting cultural identity with experiences, in the week prior to the start of the literature circles, the students created cultural X-rays (Short, 2011) in which they represented aspects of their identities that were visible to others (language, family structure, religion, etc.). By drawing a large heart on the body, students then wrote the values and beliefs that were important to them. In this way, Simeen was not only asking students to recognize that they themselves have cultural identities, but also to expand an understanding of cultural identities beyond a focus on surface elements.

When students first shared their responses to global texts, many focused on cultural differences and often laughed while doing so. For example, before students met in their literature circle groups, Simeen started with a

whole-class read-aloud of a chapter from *Water Buffalo Days* and then asked for responses:

**STEPHANIE:** It's a really funny way to cook a chicken.

**SIMEEN:** Funny funny or funny strange?

**STEPHANIE:** Funny and strange.

**SIMEEN:** Funny and strange both. OK, so keep the story in mind as you go into your lit circles. Now, quick reminders, right? Remember, we did our cultural X-rays so we learned about ourselves. So, I want you to keep that in mind. Think about yourself and then think about those characters because those characters are made up of feelings, thoughts, and experiences and so on. Think of those characters in the same way.

After students spent about 20 minutes in literature circles, Simeen asked them to share with the whole class. Many made comparisons to the United States and commented on the resources the characters lacked. In sharing his group's discussion of *Water Buffalo Days*, Tom said, "We were talking about how people here we really value education, learning, and where they live they're worried about like surviving." From the discussion of *Blue Jasmine*, Daphne said, "We were talking about the family that lived in the shack behind Seema's house. They didn't have any furniture and they didn't have really have that much money to get, like, water or food. It was sad." Here, the students' responses echo Stewart's (2008) "we're fortunate syndrome." As class ended, Simeen asked, "Who can tell me one thing they learned today?"

**ERIC:** That in Vietnam, they chase chickens with sticks. [group laughter]

**TOM:** I learned another way to cook a chicken. [group laughter]

Even though Simeen had asked the students to look at the characters as people who were "made up of feelings, thoughts, and experiences," students seemed to hold them at a distance. At the level of *style* (Fairclough, 2012), this distancing can be seen through their use of pronouns to mark definitive distinctions ("we" and "they") as well as the laughter expressed both by the speakers and their audience when describing others' cultural practices. At the level of *discourse*, or a consideration of how the "semiotic ways of construing aspects of the world" (Fairclough, 2012, p. 11), the students' responses revealed their understanding of that world. Their responses,

aimed at drawing contrasts, reflected societal constructs that centered and valorized American customs and values.

Simeen told me after class she worried that students’ focus on difference, coupled with the laughter and pity expressed, may have prevented them from seeing the characters as “full human beings.” She explained, “For me, reading shouldn’t be like standing at a distance and, you know, giving a commentary on it, but trying to understand more.” Here, Simeen describes reading as a way to engender a closeness with others, to step out of a stance of evaluation, distance, or abstraction. Although Simeen valued students’ transactions—and their honest sharing of them—she also wanted them to think carefully about their responses and to add a more receptive and open eye to the experiences of others.

In future classes, Simeen made attention to language a more prominent component of her pedagogy to “disturb the waters.” Rather than correcting students or directly pointing out statements that may seem to carry assumptions or stereotypes, she often called attention to language practices as a place of inquiry. For example, the following week, when Simeen asked the students to share with the whole class their thoughts on their literature circle books, Jason recounted a scene in *Water Buffalo Days*. He described the practice of cricket fighting, saying, “I thought it was kind of weird, just putting two crickets on mats and they just start fighting.” Jason, along with other students, laughed as he continued describing this scene. Simeen paused for a moment. Looking carefully at her students, she said:

OK. Let me tell you an experience. You know when I came first to America and my husband took me to watch a game, a football game. Right? And I saw these people with these strange looking things on their heads, right? [laughter] And then they were attacking each other. Human beings, you know? Big guys! Running into each and then people were like falling down on top of each other. [laughter] They told me it was a game for fun! [laughter] Back home, in Africa, if people did that, what they would do is they would grab the people who were running into each other and take them to the elders in the village and they would make them sit down and they would play music to calm them down. And they would try to work on their brains, like, what’s happened to these people? [laughter] And what Jason said made me think about that. Come on, people! Like, you used the word “weird,” right? What do you think? I thought that was pretty “weird”!

Simeen used storytelling and a touch of humor to illustrate how perceptions of what is considered “normal” or “weird” behavior are actually cultural constructions. At the level of *genre*, analysis shows that she brought a focus to the impact of word choice and the values and perspectives embedded within

words. Simeen also introduced another kind of *genre* into the classroom: her personal storytelling. The impact was enhanced by the *style* she chose in retelling the story, emphasizing “I” multiple times in her retelling and highlighting the distinctiveness of her experience. Because of the lightness and humor with which she told the story, she invited students into her experience, encouraging them to consider a cultural experience like football, that many had grown up with and knew very well, through her own eyes.

Simeen drew contrasts in ways that illuminated a nondominant point of view, not to make fun of but to shed light on the logic and practices of another culture. She brought attention to Jason’s use of the term *weird* to illuminate and push forward another way of approaching cross-cultural understanding, wherein she asked students to reconsider their taken-for-

**She brought attention to Jason’s use of the term *weird* to illuminate and push forward another way of approaching cross-cultural understanding, wherein she asked students to reconsider their taken-for-granted understandings.**

granted understandings. As Cai (2008) notes, “We want our students to question the ideological and cultural assumptions of a text. That questioning, however, should start from the students’ own ideological and cultural assumptions exhibited in their personal aesthetic response to the text” (p. 218). Simeen started with Jason and his use of the word *weird*. In doing so, *weird* became a touchstone to consider how belief systems can vary greatly across contexts and that the words one uses carry complex meanings and assumptions. Across her teaching,

Simeen invited students to share their aesthetic transactions while also creating a classroom environment where members notice and analyze the language choices within their own retellings of these transactions, within the responses of others, and within the texts themselves, as I explore next.

## Phase 2: “Why Is It Called ‘Helping Out?’”

Within the first phase of engagement with global literature that I observed, Simeen emphasized the sharing of transactions in response to literature circle books. She foregrounded experience and perspective, encouraging students to engage deeply with the stories and to avoid a distanced point of view. As she transitioned into the second phase of her work exploring the experiences of child migrants, inquiry became an even more prominent thread in the class as well as the incorporation of multiple genres of texts. In this section, I emphasize how the students’ enhanced attention to language fostered critical awareness of social inequities. Following Rosenblatt (1982), I note that students’ investment in the experiences of child migrants

shaped these critical perspectives, originating from their “emotional and intellectual participation in evoking the work of art, through reflection on [their] aesthetic experience” (p. 276). A powerful support for these analytical moves was the emotional connection that the students articulated they felt with the children they met across multiple texts, most notably, within the short story “The Circuit” (Jiménez, 1997), in which a boy named Pancho describes his Mexican family’s experiences harvesting seasonal crops in California’s Central Valley. Simeen began the inquiry into the experiences of child migrants by sharing the Jiménez (1997) short story. In the classes that followed, the students often referred to this story, commenting on how sad they were when Pancho had to leave a school (where he had just begun to form a bond with a teacher) to move on to a different city. Sophia described her response:

It showed his emotion, like how he was, like how happy he was finally. Because in the beginning he was like so sad and everything and then in the end he finally had what he wanted and I felt happy. And then it came out that he had to leave again and it was going to happen again. . . . When I was reading it, I was like, “Oh, no! This is so sad!”

After creating a classroom context where students could share their feelings in response to Pancho’s story, Simeen built on their emotional investment to provide a more nuanced understanding of the working conditions of migrant families. She shared excerpts from *Voices from the Fields* (Atkin, 2000), a book containing interviews with migrant farmworkers and their families as well as photographs, poems, and contextualizing information. She read selections aloud, pausing as she would in a fictional text, to open up conversation with students:

**SIMEEN:** So, what are you thinking, so far? What are you thinking, Elise?

**ELISE:** Life is not easy for them.

**SIMEEN:** Life is not easy. Other thoughts? Kelsey?

**KELSEY:** They should tell the farmer.

**SIMEEN:** They should tell the farmer? Hmm? Do you think the farmers know or don’t know? What do people think? Do the farmers know that they might get health problems? What are you thinking? Rebecca?

**REBECCA:** I kind of think that they do, but it’s not like they have any options because the farmers don’t care.



In this exchange, the students are grappling with the various motivations of the people involved, trying to understand why some workers are staying silent about poor working conditions. With a critical discourse analysis lens, it becomes evident that the information shared bumped up against students' understanding of fairness and how the world should work (*discourse*). At another stopping point in the read-aloud, Jason responded to a passage describing the cancer-causing pesticides the migrant workers were exposed to by asking, "Why wouldn't they stand up to that nonsense? Like, risking getting cancer or bad things?" Katherine asserted, "I think that if the worker is being treated like that, being around all the pesticides, that he should go to the government and tell them that they're not following the regulations." Later, students also found it hard to believe that children who worked in the fields were not paid. Jason asserted, "Um, I thought it was kind of silly why they weren't paying them when they were younger, when they were forced to work." Through the lens of *discourse*, these responses reflect the students' belief that larger social systems like the government and people in authority such as employers will protect people, presuming that all employers could be compelled to treat workers fairly and that all people had equal standing to protest poor working conditions. Through the lens of *style*, Jason's use of words such as *nonsense* and *silly* seem to render the migrant workers' experiences unintelligible and their actions nonsensical from his point of view.

As the students continued to listen to Simeen read aloud the Atkin (2000) introduction and to make connections back to Pancho's (Jiménez, 1997) experience, slight shifts began to occur, especially with students' close attention to language in the text:

**DAPHNE:** I thought, like, why is it considered "helping out" [using her fingers to indicate quotation marks] when the children are actually working?

**SIMEEN:** Interesting question. Why is it called "helping out" and not working? They are working. Elise?

**ELISE:** I think it's because if they're "helping out," then they don't get paid.

**SIMEEN:** Ah! Ah. You think? It might be a clever way of wording things.

**KATHERINE:** Well, I think they should raise the pay, for the children, because these children are coming in to help you on their own time when they should be in school. And, the person that owns the farm, can always go outside and do the work themselves.

In describing the relationship between the aesthetic transaction and critical analysis, Cai (2008) notes, “Any critical perspective that is applied to the literary experience of a text should not be an imposition on or replacement of the reader’s aesthetic response. Rather, it should be an illumination and extension of the reader’s unique, individual, aesthetic response” (p. 218). Daphne started this line of inquiry and analysis by recounting her curiosity related to language use. Unlike Jason’s initial framing of this issue as “silly,” here the students try to understand the various motivations and the complex experiences of the people involved. Katherine and Daphne also carefully consider how language can obscure certain realities to benefit particular people. To do so, they needed to try to think from the perspective of people, rather than holding them at a distance to assess their actions. Katherine even directly addresses the farmers in the second person voice (*style*), chastising them for their decisions. With this significant shift in voice, Katherine seems to be reaching toward both an empathetic understanding of the migrant workers’ experiences *and* a critical reading of the social context in which the farmers exerted their power through deceptive language practices and actions.

Even with students’ budding attention to language and their critical readings of the social situation, Simeen continued to encourage students to stay personally invested in the inquiries they were pursuing and to recount their thoughts, feelings, and responses to texts as they read. Before introducing another perspective from the Atkin (2000) text, she again asked students to revisit the cultural X-rays they produced. She then read from an interview with José (Atkin, 2000), a boy who worked in the fields but who wanted to attend school. At Simeen’s invitation, the students began sharing their responses to José’s experiences with others sitting next to them. She circulated to each table, leaning down to students’ level, arms resting on the desks, asking what they were thinking. As the students talked, Simeen would respond with questions: “I wonder why . . . ?” and “What makes you say that?” At one table, Katherine told Simeen, “We were sort of talking about, like, how José sees the world differently than us because he was sort of like looking at his surroundings and commenting on how beautiful it was and not really complaining. Even though the work was hard and he wanted to go to school, he could still see how pretty the fields were.” Unlike in previous exchanges where students named differences in order to find amusement or to distance themselves, here, difference was named for contrasting purposes: to wonder, appreciate, and consider. Quite strikingly, Katherine was imagining what it would be like to look through José’s eyes and to appreciate beauty in an unexpected place. This is a marked contrast to earlier discussions where

people from other cultures were notable for eating in a “funny” way, doing “weird” things, or making incomprehensible choices.

Within future classes, Simeen continued the inquiry into migrant children by sharing *Migrant* (Trottier, 2011). In the picture book, a young girl accompanies her Mennonite family as they journey from Mexico to Canada to follow the seasonal crops. Whereas the Atkin’s (2000) text opened up opportunities for students to contemplate the lived experiences of migrants and to engage in critical analysis by considering language choices, the picture book opened up opportunities for students to convey feelings and analysis through close attention to both words in the text and the illustrations. They brought to the interactive read-aloud of *Migrant* the accumulation of knowledge built through engagement with the other texts, noting specific details, but also their significance. As Simeen opened the book to the endpages, she asked the students what they were thinking:

**SOPHIA:** It kind of like looks because of the arrows and like how they’re going one way and then they come back, going the other way . . .

**SIMEEN:** Hmm.

**SOPHIA:** Kind of like they’re going back and forth.

**SIMEEN:** Hmm. Talk some more.

**SOPHIA:** How they move one place and then they come back, depending on the season.

**REBECCA:** I think it looks like patterns. It’s like going places is like following a pattern.

**SIMEEN:** Hmm. Different patterns, different places. Daphne?

**DAPHNE:** I think every triangle represents each house and every place they’ve been.

The discussion of illustrations also gave further insight to the daily experiences of migrants, including both struggles and opportunities. Students commented on how the characters faced some judgment because of their attire and also considered how the author and illustrator conveyed what it was like to navigate multiple languages. Rebecca commented, “It looks like some of the [speech] bubbles are blank, like she can’t understand them because she doesn’t speak that language.” Sophia responded, “The words are different colors because there are different ways of saying different things.” When Simeen came to the end of the picture book, she read, “But fall is here

and the geese are flying away. And with them, goes Anna, like a monarch, like a robin, like a feather, in the wind” (n.p.). Sophia responded, “I like how the illustrator showed how she wanted to be like the tree, like she was being uprooted and moved to somewhere else.” In response to Sophia, Kelsey offered, “I think it’s kind of showing that she’s thinking of a time where she can just be and not have to leave,” and Elise added, “It kind of reminded me of the end of ‘The Circuit.’” As a result of this layering of inquiries across multiple genres, the students were able to access multiple experiences across multiple sign systems. Through their transactions with words and images, students began to build awareness of experiences of migrant workers through analysis of the social conditions and structures they navigated and the choices authors and illustrators made in representing them.

Simeen’s recognition of students’ emotions in response to Pancho’s experience, her introduction of multigenre texts to surround this short story, and her ongoing cultivation of a classroom where language was a focus of inquiry all contributed to the students’ analysis of the social issues embedded in the stories of migrant workers.

### Phase 3: “We’re Linked to Everything”

Approximately two months<sup>5</sup> after the child migrant inquiry ended, Simeen invited her students to explore global texts about World War II, including picture books, nonfiction texts, and autobiographical accounts that featured the experiences of children across the world affected by the war. Simeen’s read-aloud of *Sadako* (Coerr, 1997) anchored the inquiry. Drawn from the life story of Sadako Sasaki, this historical fiction book tells the story of an 11-year-old girl who contracts leukemia due to radiation poisoning from the dropping of the atomic bomb in Hiroshima. Simeen’s pedagogical choices mirrored previous approaches to teaching global literature: choosing a text with a main character close in age to the students’ age; reading aloud with frequent pauses for students to write down and express verbally what they were thinking; and sharing nonfiction texts to extend and enrich the inquiries.

Simeen was at times perplexed, however, by students’ reactions to *Sadako* and also frustrated with her teaching. She was taken aback when students questioned the main characters’ choices, placed blame on them for their adversities, and avoided invitations to question the U.S. role within the war. In this section, I explore these responses across two class sessions. I also analyze how even though many students appeared disengaged by *Sadako*, their attention to the language use of their fellow students’ responses in class discussion functioned to catalyze a different kind of engagement with the book.

As Simeen had done with other global texts, she read *Sadako* aloud to her students. She posted the following questions on chart paper at the front of the class and repeated them during the ensuing discussion: “What are our thoughts about Sadako? What is happening to her? Why is it happening to her?” She mentioned to me that she chose to ask these questions as a way to support students in developing critical perspectives on the book and to prompt additional engagement that she felt had been waning over the previous class periods when she shared chapters from *Sadako*. After she completed reading aloud one chapter and referred students to the questions posted, Jason responded, “Well, usually, sometimes, a lot of things happen for a reason, but I don’t really get the reason of why this happened to her.” Here, Jason invoked a common aphorism, “things happen for a reason.” Jason drew on this everyday use of language, or *discourse*, as a frame to ponder his confusion regarding Sadako’s situation. Jason’s comment was followed by other students who then began to focus on the choices made by Sadako and her family, often implying they were at fault for Sadako contracting leukemia. Chelsea said, “I think that maybe if she told her parents the first time when she was dizzy she might have been better. Like, when she was running, she got dizzy, but she still didn’t tell them.” Stephanie then added, “When you were reading that Sadako went to bed, um, I was hearing my mom, like, ‘No, you shouldn’t do that.’ . . . When you’re really sick and like if you hit your head, you shouldn’t go to bed, you might die.” Other students critiqued Sadako’s state of mind and reaction to her illness. Sophia found fault in Sadako for her belief in “bad luck,” asserting that instead, “you have to change your fate . . . like, you have to go out and do it yourself, instead of relying on other things.” Here, Sophia re-voiced a prominent strand of Western individualism and belief in personal responsibility. Sophia also criticized Sadako for not being more optimistic, another American trait, in the face of her illness. Across the many comments such as this where students critiqued Sadako and her family, a focus on discourse illuminates “how language does not simply reflect the world, but constructs the world and our places in it” (Rogers, 2018, p. 5). This range of responses is rooted in beliefs that individuals can take control of their own lives through better decision-making and positive thinking—beliefs that the students then applied to Sadako and her family as leverage to impose judgment.

A few moments later, Simeen paused after reading another chapter aloud and asked:

**SIMEEN:** Boy, that’s hard book to read, huh? What do you think? Is it a hard book to read? It’s a hard book for me to read. So, let’s kind of

think. <pause> How many people felt as though what was happening to Sadako was happening to them? How many people felt like they were part of the book? [About half the students raise their hands.]

**SIMEEN:** So, let me ask the people that didn’t feel that they were part of the book, what were you thinking? How were you, how were you reading it? <pause> What do you think? <pause> Come on, Jeremiah. [some laughter]

**JEREMIAH:** I guess I could have been reading it as if someone was like watching the whole thing.

**SIMEEN:** So, you’re at a distance from it?

**JEREMIAH:** Yes.

Jeremiah’s contention that he was “watching the whole thing” seemed to capture a larger feeling present in the room, one of not only distance from the text and the experiences of the characters within in it, but also one where the students were not engaged in analysis of the broader social context or the U.S. military’s role in what was happening to Sadako. Amid the nervous laughter, this distancing stance was one that Simeen had tried to shift months earlier when students responded to *Water Buffalo Days* with jokes and amusement.

Given Simeen’s assertion noted above that “reading shouldn’t be like standing at a distance and, you know, giving a commentary on it, but trying to understand more,” she told me after class that she was “disappointed” in her teaching that day. She went on to say that she even had a level of discomfort with the guiding questions she posted, noting, “I thought this was leading enough [her voice trails off]. But, they don’t get that in the broader picture. And, I don’t know why.” Instead of critiquing the individual actions of the characters, she wanted the students both to be engaged with the book and to consider the “broader picture.” Even though *Sadako* came near the end of an entire school year in which students had been reading global literature, it nonetheless surfaced many of the distancing and disapproving responses she had navigated months before.

In the next class period, Simeen decided to share with the students a first-person testimonial from a survivor of the Hiroshima bombing. After then reading aloud the final chapters of *Sadako*, she invited the students to talk together in their small groups and opened up the conversation to the whole class. Students continued to offer responses that echoed the discourses of taking individual responsibility and staying positive in the face of adversity that characterized earlier discussions; however, some students offered alter-

native readings of not only the characters' actions in the story but also of the role of the United States in the war. Interestingly, these comments drew close attention to their fellow *students'* language use, specifically their use of pronouns, as entryways into both connecting with the text and analyzing it. These comments, however, did not tend to get taken up by other students, at least not at first. Rather, Simeen or the speakers themselves had to work hard to sustain the conversational thread as many students insisted on reverting to earlier judgments related to the characters' choices.

Sophia was the first to introduce a perspective to the whole class that accounted for the role of the United States in the war, describing her small group's conversation in this way: "What we were thinking is like, our ancestors, like back then, that maybe, like, in a way, they killed Sadako." Sophia's use of the possessive pronoun *our* (*style*) caused a distinct reaction. When a student gasped in response, Elise hastily clarified, "Not on purpose, but maybe." Talk quickly moved on, however, in different directions, with one student reflecting on the symbolism of the dove in the book and another seeking information about Japan's role in the war. Simeen then directed the students back to Sophia's earlier statement regarding "our ancestors":

**SIMEEN:** Well, I'm interested in what Sophia was thinking first and I want to hear from people . . . Because she made a strong statement and she said, "Maybe we did kill her." So, what do you think? What about it? Why do you cringe, Katherine?

**KATHERINE:** Because it's just, like, thinking about all the pain her and her family went through <pause> thinking that we killed her it's just <pause> sickening.

**SIMEEN:** It's sickening? What other words come to your mind? Or, I mean, how does it make you feel?

**KELSEY:** Well, it makes me hope that we didn't do it.

Here, Simeen directed the students to think about Sophia's language choices again, picking up on students' nonverbal reactions of surprise, confusion, and dismay in response to Sophia's contention that not only did the U.S. government play a role in Sadako's illness, but that the students' "ancestors" did. However, this conversational thread was dropped again as Chelsea brought the conversation back to Sadako's and her parents' responsibility within the situation. A CLA lens brings to light the ideologies of individualism and self-help that reemerged as Sadako once again was characterized as a child responsible for her own illness.

As Simeen continued to gather multiple student perspectives, she turned to Andrew, who had not spoken in the discussion. His comment shifted the tenor of the conversation yet again:

**ANDREW:** I feel like we’re linked to everything that happened in the story.

**SIMEEN:** How?

**ANDREW:** Because we dropped the atom bomb and then that caused people to die. And then caused Sadako to start folding paper cranes and so on and so forth.

Andrew picked up on Sophia’s use of pronouns and line of thinking to critique American involvement and drew connections to Sadako. Attention to *style* in this analysis calls forth the significant shifts in meaning-making by individual students and the class as a whole.

Interestingly, after this shift to a more critical and reflexive stance, students then began to share responses more typically associated with aesthetic transactions, that of empathy, again most evident in analysis of their language and their use of pronouns. Elise noted, “We were talking about what would happen if one of our siblings got leukemia. We were saying how we would feel.” Daphne added, “Um, I’m thinking, if the war was still going on, and if we were in the Japanese [people’s] shoes, we wouldn’t feel good because we might have got radiation poisoning maybe like Sadako and everything would be so different.” It is noteworthy that the most charged moments in these class discussions came less from the text itself, but from classmates’ articulations of nascent critiques of America’s role in the war through the use of the possessive pronoun *our*. Catalyzed by close attention to language within the sharing of transactions, this suggestion of culpability stirred many students and prompted a deeper investment in the text and discussion.

## Discussion

Across the three phases of engagement with global texts explored in this article, Simeen brought multiple genres and multiple perspectives into her classroom, recognizing the danger of a “single story” (Adichie, 2009) and of one text standing in for an entire country or event. Her emphasis on the experiential nature of perspective-taking and of reading, as well as her ongoing attention to language within her pedagogy, reveal her attempts to shake students out of habituated ways of viewing characters in global texts from a more aerial or distanced points of view. To “disturb the waters,” Simeen



cultivated in her students an invested awareness of the lives and experiences of people unlike themselves. To do so, she nurtured the aesthetic transaction, valuing students' evocations and creating a place for them to share them with each other; as a result, students often invested in the readings, their responses to them, and each other's responses. Focusing on the characters' experiences, rather than approaching global texts as catalogues of different cultural traditions, also paved the way for the development of this kind of invested awareness. By adding another layer of attentiveness to language, she laid groundwork for students to embrace, but also extend, their own meaning-making. In this way, she did not seem to set up a binary between a transaction with a text and a critical reading of it, but instead recognized a symbiotic relationship between the two. Responses that reflected a kind of disruption were often characterized by both an analytical and an emotional dimension, whether it was anger at how migrant children were treated or shock that their own country might have engaged in egregious behavior. Rather than standing above the situation, Simeen encouraged her students to grapple with the complexities of the human condition, the experiences of poverty and inequities, and even the joys and beauty recounted by the people they met in the texts.

**Simeen faced what many teachers of global literature do when teaching in culturally homogenous contexts: how to engage students in texts that they may initially feel some antipathy toward, while at the same time creating conversational contexts that lead them to challenge their own assumptions and stereotypes.**

Reading global texts in Simeen's classroom resembled Sumara's (1996) contention that "reading requires moving, locating, and relocating one's self in relation to a co-emergent world" (p. 78) and involves a "continual bridging of newly opened spaces—gaps—that make themselves present in the ever-emerging intertextual fabric of lived experience" (p. 78). Importantly and uniquely, these reading and "bridging" processes were externalized and made public in Simeen's classroom. In the process of narrating their thinking aloud, students contributed to a classroom community where thoughts and responses were considered temporary markers of understanding

and as springboards for continual inquiry for the collective, as opposed to singular and definitive interpretations owned by individual students.

At the same time, Simeen faced what many teachers of global literature do when teaching in culturally homogenous contexts: how to engage students in texts that they may initially feel some antipathy toward, while at the same time creating conversational contexts that lead them to challenge their own assumptions and stereotypes. This double movement—of fostering engagement with texts that students are not immediately drawn to and also

facilitating conversations that may cause students to question their world-views—is a tall order. Simeen emphasized experiences and perspective-taking to break down some of the initial walls of resistance; however, even with carefully chosen texts and the creation of a classroom community open to aesthetic transactions, moving students beyond a judgmental or amused view took time, patience, and openness. For both Simeen and her students, this also required a certain courage: to voice honest responses to texts publicly, to raise questions about the language choices of a class member, to make observations that might challenge students’ own once firmly held or unexamined points of view. To make meaning with global texts in this way necessitated not only trust but also an expectation and an acceptance of the recursivity and nonlinearity of knowledge production.

### Limitations and Implications

The limitations of this study include its focus on a single teacher and its lack of student interviews. This study also does not engage with the problematic representations and ideologies within some of the global texts shared, most particularly, *Sadako*. As Apol, Sakuma, Reynolds, and Rop (2003) contend, potential for critical readings may emerge in close analysis of the various—and culturally distinct—versions of the life story presented in *Sadako*, the ideologies that these various versions reflect and promote, and the ways they position the reader. Finally, given my focus on noticing and documenting aspects of Simeen’s pedagogy that were in the service of her goal to “disturb the waters,” I likely neglected to account for other aspects of her pedagogy that could inform the teaching of global literature.

Even though Simeen is clearly a unique teacher in many ways in terms of her diverse life experiences and how she aligned her goal to “disturb the waters” with her teaching practices, I believe these attributes provide a valuable window into the challenges and possibilities of teaching with global texts. Simeen’s teaching reveals the particularly beneficial practice of reading aloud and *thinking* aloud in upper elementary classrooms. Simeen’s case points to the potential of externalizing literary response, to sharing publicly the vagaries and inconsistencies of making meaning with unfamiliar texts within a community of readers engaged in ongoing work together over time, across texts, and with complex ideas. This case also underscores the importance and promise of teaching with broader goals in mind than discrete skills. Simeen’s goals to disrupt and decenter, to teach toward perspective taking and self-reflexivity, shaped a range of curricular, pedagogical, and in-the-moment teaching decisions. Finally, this case underscores the numerous calls to avoid the teaching of a singular text to represent the experiences of

an entire country (Choo, 2014).

Theoretically, the study points to the continued need to create space for the aesthetic transaction within the reading of global texts, while also enriching literary discussions with critical language awareness. First, this study suggests that broadening understandings of the aesthetic transaction beyond requests for students to make personal connections can be generative. For Simeen, asking “What are you thinking?” as opposed to “What text-to-self connections are you making?” opened up opportunities for students to share the range and variation of their aesthetic transactions, moving beyond “personal connections” to the more expansive notions that Rosenblatt writes of across her scholarship. Second, Simeen’s case suggests that raising awareness of language can be a conduit for the emergence of more critical perspectives on students’ aesthetic transactions and their classmates’ responses to global texts. Finally, this case indicates that there need not be a binary between the aesthetic and critical, nor an assumption of a straight line from a personal response to a critical response; rather, these theoretical perspectives can inform, enrich, and craft each other in dynamic, recursive, and creative ways.

Future research is needed to explore how teachers attain not just the content and pedagogical knowledge necessary for teaching global texts but also develop the dexterity to navigate students’ complex responses to them. Additional research exploring the kinds of collegial and institutional supports for teachers pursuing teaching with global texts would also be illuminating. Finally, I see potential in providing preservice and inservice teachers opportunities to engage in explorations of global texts that have them chart their own responses, moments of resistance, and instances where their assumptions are challenged. If teachers themselves can come to readings of global texts in self-reflexive and dynamic ways, it seems more likely they can help nurture those types of readings with their students.

## **Conclusion**

This case study adds to the research base by providing rich description of the teaching of global literature by a teacher who is committed to including diverse texts in her curriculum and creating pedagogical openings where students may experience challenges to their prior understandings of other cultures as well as their notions of American identity. It responds to Möller’s (2012) contention that in literature study we “must be willing to examine systemic prejudice and privilege and to raise issues that might cause dissent in the hopes of moving to new levels of self- and group-reflection” (p. 33). It suggests that incorporating dual frameworks of transactional theories of response and critical language awareness in both pedagogy and analysis holds

promise in enhancing understanding of the complexities and possibilities of teaching global literature to “disturb the waters.” Simeen’s students point to powerful shifts in understanding that can take place when given time and opportunity to share their aesthetic transactions aloud and with each other, to attend carefully to language as a tool for uncovering assumptions and sharpening critical perspectives, and to grapple with discomfiting examples of inequities and unfairness. Importantly, her students also suggest the promise of expressing visions of more equitable futures within critiques of social structures and countries invested with great power. In an increasingly complex world, these kinds of opportunities to read about and grapple with global texts seem all the more important and vital.

### Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers, Tara Star Johnson, and Shea Kerkhoff for their invaluable insights on earlier drafts of this manuscript.

### Appendix A. Pedagogical and Curricular Moves to “Disturb the Waters”

Pedagogical and Curricular Moves to “Disturb the Waters”	Data Exemplars across Data Sources
Drawing on multiple genres to explore multiple perspectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interview with Simeen: “A change in genre forces a change in perspective”</li> <li>• Multiple genres within inquiries:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Child migration stories: picture book, short story, testimonies</li> <li>◦ World War II: novel, testimonies, newspaper articles, picture books</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Inviting students to narrate their own thinking	From class discussions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “What are you thinking?”</li> <li>• “Can you say more about that?”</li> </ul>
Inviting students to reflect on their own cultural identities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creation of cultural X-rays</li> </ul> From class discussion of <i>Water Buffalo Days</i> : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “So, old people are like looked up to and they’re copied, kind of? Like, they’re looked up to because they’re experienced? Is that what you’re thinking? Mmm. How are old people . . . how do we consider old people in our society?”</li> </ul>
Telling stories from her own life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Simeen’s story of attending school with classmates who spoke more than 20 languages</li> <li>• In response to a poem from <i>Inside Out and Back Again</i> where the speaker describes papaya trees: “OK. Have you guys seen a papaya tree? Have you seen how the papayas grow? Ohh! It’s really cool. In Africa, in our backyard, we had tons of papaya trees. And the fruit just grows from very close to the trunk.”</li> </ul>
Focusing on experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I use experiences because immediately they can connect it to their lives and start thinking about it in that way. I want them to kind of own it and, know that the characters or people have value.” (Interview with Simeen)</li> <li>• “I hear questions about why does this happen? I hear thoughts about how it’s different from our life. Right? So, what are you thinking? Do you identify with the child? Do you identify with the experience?” (Class discussion in response to stories of child migrants)</li> </ul>

## Appendix B. Students' Responses to Global Texts and Simeen's Pedagogy

Students' Responses to Global Texts and Simeen's Pedagogy	Data Exemplars from Class Discussions
Questioning characters' decisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Why wouldn't they stand up to that nonsense? Like, risking getting cancer or bad things?" (<i>Voices from the Fields</i>)</li> <li>• "[Kenji] died because he didn't have any hope and maybe if he would have had hope, he would have lived." (<i>Sadako</i>)</li> </ul>
Finding amusement in or remarking on the oddity of others' cultural practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "It's a really funny way to cook a chicken." (<i>Water Buffalo Days</i>)</li> <li>• "It feels like really different. Like, at school if you don't fit in, it's kind of like weird how when you're taking attendance and you have to stand up and everyone just stares at you." (<i>Water Buffalo Days</i>)</li> </ul>
Feeling sorry for characters/people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "They didn't have any furniture and they didn't have really have that much money to get, like, water or food. It was sad." (<i>Blue Jasmine</i>)</li> <li>• "I feel bad for him and I think he shouldn't have to work that long. He is so young. He needs his sleep." (<i>Voices from the Fields</i>)</li> </ul>
Comparing and contrasting with own experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "We were talking about how people here we really value education, learning, and where they live they're worried about like surviving." (<i>Water Buffalo Days</i>)</li> <li>• "We always think about entertainment first and they don't ever really get to think about entertainment." (<i>Voices from the Fields</i>)</li> </ul>
Critiquing inequities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Well, I think they should raise the pay, for the children, because these children are coming in to help you on their own time when they should be in school. And, the person that owns the farm, can always go outside and do the work themselves." (<i>Voices from the Fields</i>)</li> <li>• "Well, it doesn't seem fair because if somebody's coming into school knowing English and Spanish I think they shouldn't judge them and say they're not smart. . . . So, just by the language they are, they shouldn't just be judged." (<i>Voices from the Fields</i>)</li> </ul>

## Appendix C. Attention to Language

Role of Attention to Language	Data Exemplars from Class Discussions
<b>Simeen</b>	
To consider another perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Like, you used the word 'weird,' right? What do you think? I thought <u>that</u> was pretty 'weird'!"</li> </ul>
To raise awareness of students' own cultural identities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "It doesn't mean anything to <u>them</u>" to be a teenager? What does it mean to <u>us</u>, in our culture? What does it mean if you're a teenager? What does it mean?"</li> </ul>
To probe for deeper understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Well, I'm interested in what Sophia was thinking first and I want to hear from people . . . . Because she made a strong statement and she said, 'Maybe we did kill her.' So, what do you think? What about it? Why do you cringe, Katherine?"</li> </ul>
<b>Students</b>	
To forge connections with characters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "We were talking about what would happen if one of <u>our</u> siblings got leukemia. . . . We were saying how <u>we</u> would feel?" (<i>Sadako</i>)</li> </ul>
To critique inequities or uses of power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "I thought, like, why is it considered 'helping out' [using her fingers to indicate quotation marks] when the children are actually working?"</li> <li>• "It's, it's, in my opinion, it's like all <u>our</u> fault, meaning us, because we could have done it another way, kind of like, not just drop the bomb and kill like, like, an entire city, entire families. And then, to do it again." (<i>Sadako</i>)</li> </ul>

## Notes

1. In this article, the term *global literature* is an umbrella term that refers to texts, including fiction and nonfiction, that for readers in the United States are “international either by topic or origin of publication or author” (Lehman, Freeman, & Scharer, 2010, p. 17). See Wissman (2017) for additional explication and complication of the term *global literature*. For further exploration of the term *world literature* see Choo (2014).

2. At her request and with her permission, I am not using a pseudonym for Simeen in this article. I have, however, given pseudonyms to places and students.

3. See Soter, Wilkinson, Connors, Murphy, and Shen (2010) for an extended discussion of the scholarly debates related to the definition and meaning of the “aesthetic response.”

4. Many studies informed by critical language awareness draw specific attention to linguistic diversity, making connections between racism and White privilege in the construction of “standard” English and the denigration of other language varieties (Alim, 2010; Godley, Reaser, & Moore, 2015). This study focuses on how heightened attention to language within literature discussions opens up reflection and analysis on embedded ideologies and assumptions within language choices.

5. During this time, Simeen continued to teach some global texts when she could, but her curriculum shifted in response to mandated local and state assessments.

## References

- Adichie, C. N. (2009). *The danger of a single story*. [TED talk]. Retrieved from [http://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda\\_adichie\\_the\\_danger\\_of\\_a\\_single\\_story.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story.html)
- Alim, H. S. (2010). Critical language awareness. In N. H. Hornberger & S. L. McKay (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics and Language Education* (pp. 205–231). Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Apol, L., Sakuma, A., Reynolds, T. M., & Rop, S. K. (2003). “When can we make paper cranes?”: Examining pre-service teachers’ resistance to critical readings of historical fiction. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 34(4), 429–464.
- Atkin, S. B. (2000). *Voices from the fields: Children of migrant farmworkers tell their stories*. New York: Little, Brown.
- Bond, E. (2006). Reading outstanding international children’s books. *Journal of Children’s Literature*, 32(2), 70–76.
- Cai, M. (2008). Transactional theory and the study of multicultural literature. *Language Arts*, 85(3), 212–220.
- Choo, S. S. (2014). Cultivating a hospitable imagination: Re-envisioning the world literature curriculum through a cosmopolitan lens. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 44(1), 68–89.
- Cochran-Smith, M., & Lytle, S. L. (2009). *Inquiry as stance: Practitioner research for the next generation*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Coerr, E. (1997). *Sadako and the thousand paper cranes*. New York: Penguin.
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (1990). Grounded theory research: Procedures, canons, and evaluative criteria. *Qualitative Sociology*, 13(1), 3–21.
- Desai, C. M. (2011). The world as presented to U.S. children: Building bridges or confirming expectations? *Bookbird*, 49(1), 41–50.

- Dyson, A. H., & Genishi, C. (2005). *On the case: Approaches to language and literacy research*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Ellis, D. (2000). *The breadwinner*. Toronto: Groundwood Books.
- Fairclough, N. (1999). Global capitalism and critical awareness of language. *Language Awareness, 8*(2), 71–85.
- Fairclough, N. (2012). Critical discourse analysis. In J. P. Gee & M. Handford (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of discourse analysis* (pp. 9–20). New York: Routledge.
- Flyvberg, B. (2004). Five misunderstandings about case-study research. In C. Seale, G. Gobo, J. F. Gubrium, & D. Silverman (Eds.), *Qualitative research practice* (pp. 420–454). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Godley, A. J., Reaser, J., & Moore, K. G. (2015). Pre-service English language arts teachers' development of critical language awareness for teaching. *Linguistics and Education, 32*(1), 41–54.
- Goswami, D., Lewis, C., Rutherford, M., & Waff, D. (Eds.). (2009). *On teacher inquiry*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Huynh, Q. N. (1999). *Water buffalo days: Growing up in Vietnam*. New York: Harper-Collins.
- Jewett, P. (2011). “Some people do things different from us”: Exploring personal and global cultures in a first grade class. *Journal of Children's Literature, 37*(1), 20–29.
- Jiang, J. (1997). *Red scarf girl: A memoir of the cultural revolution*. New York: Harper.
- Jiménez, F. (1997). *The circuit: Stories from the life of a migrant child*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.
- Kodama, T. (1995). *Shin's tricycle*. (N. Ando, Illus.). New York: Walker.
- Lai, T. (2011). *Inside out and back again*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Lazar, M. M. (2014). Doing “critical” in a postfeminist era: Reviving critical consciousness through peer dialog. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education, 35*, 735–748.
- Lehman, B. A., Freeman, E. B., & Scharer, P. L. (2010). *Reading globally, K–8: Connecting students to the world through literature*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Lewis, C. (2000). Limits of identification: The person, pleasurable, and critical in reader response. *Journal of Literacy Research 32*(2), 255–266.
- Liang, L. A., Watkins, N. M., & Williams, V. S. (2015). A step toward global awareness: An examination of USBBY outstanding international books for the primary grades. *Journal of Children's Literature, 39*(1), 16–24.
- Loh, C. E. (2010). Reading nation and world: Cultivating culturally and critically reflexive readers. *English Journal, 100*(1), 108–112.
- Martens, P., Martens, R., Doyle, M. H., Loomis, J., Fuhrman, L., Furnari, C., Soper, E., & Stout, R. (2015). Building intercultural understandings through global literature. *The Reading Teacher, 66*(8), 609–617.
- Meyer, C., & Rhoades, E. (2006). Beyond food, festivals, folklore, and fashion. *Kappa Delta Pi Record, 42*(2), 82–87.

- Möller, K. J. (2012). Developing understandings of social justice: Critical thinking in action in a literature discussion group. *Journal of Children’s Literature*, 38(2), 22–36.
- Montero, M. K., & Robertson, J. M. (2006). “Teachers can’t teach what they don’t know”: Teaching teachers about international and global children’s literature to facilitate culturally responsive pedagogy. *Journal of Children’s Literature*, 32(2), 27–35.
- Rogers, R. (Ed.). (2004). *An introduction to critical discourse analysis in education*. New York: Routledge.
- Rogers, R. (2018). *Reclaiming powerful literacies: New horizons for critical discourse analysis*. New York: Routledge.
- Rosenblatt, L. M. (1981). Act 1, scene 1: Enter the reader. *Literature in Performance*, 1(2), 13–23.
- Rosenblatt, L. M. (1982). The literary transaction: Evocation and response. *Theory Into Practice*, 21(4), 268–277.
- Rosenblatt, L. M. (1986). The aesthetic transaction. *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 20, 122–128.
- Sensöy, O., & Marshall, E. (2010). Missionary girl power: Saving the “Third World” one girl at a time. *Gender and Education*, 22(3), 295–311.
- Sheth, K. (2004). *Blue jasmine*. New York: Hyperion Books for Children.
- Short, K. G. (2009). Critically reading the world and the world: Building intercultural understanding through literature. *Bookbird*, 47(2), 1–10.
- Short, K. G. (2011). Children taking action within global inquiries. *Dragon Lode*, 29(2), 50–59.
- Short, K. G. (2016). A curriculum that is international. In K. G. Short, D. Day, & J. Schroeder (Eds.), *Reading globally: Reading the world through literature* (pp. 3–24). Portland, ME: Stenhouse.
- Soter, A. O. (1997). Reading literature of other cultures: Some issues in critical interpretation. In T. Rogers (Ed.), *Reading across cultures: Teaching literature in diverse society* (pp. 213–230). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Soter, A. O., Wilkinson, I., Connors, S., Murphy, P. K., & Shen, V. F. (2010). Deconstructing “aesthetic response” in small-group discussions about literature: A possible solution to the “aesthetic response” dilemma. *English Education*, 42(2), 204–225.
- Stake, R. (2008). Qualitative case studies. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Strategies of qualitative inquiry* (pp. 119–149). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Stewart, S. L. (2008). Beyond borders: Reading “other” places in children’s literature. *Children’s Literature in Education*, 39, 95–105.
- Sumara, D. J. (1996). *Private readings in public: Schooling the literary imagination*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Tabatabai, S. (2017). Re-envisioning critical literacy teaching with global literature in culturally homogenous settings. In K. K. Wissman, M. N. Burns, K. Jiampetti, H. O’Leary, & S. Tabatabai, *Teaching global literature in elementary classrooms: A critical literacy and teacher inquiry approach* (pp. 102–112). New York: Routledge.



- Trottier, M. (2011). *Migrant*. (I. Arsenault, Illus.). Toronto, ON: Groundwood Books.
- Tsuchiya, Y. (1997). *Faithful elephants: A true story of animals, people, and war*. (T. Lewin, Illus.). New York: Houghton Mifflin.
- Vasquez, V. (2010). *Getting beyond "I like the book": Creating space for critical literacy in K-6 classrooms* (2nd ed.). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Wissman, K. K. (2017). Introduction: Global visions, local inquiries. In K. K. Wissman, M. N. Burns, K. Jiampetti, H. O'Leary, & S. Tabatabai, *Teaching global literature in elementary classrooms: A critical literacy and teacher inquiry approach* (pp. 1-17). New York: Routledge.
- Wissman, K. K., Burns, M. N., Jiampetti, K., O'Leary, H., & Tabatabai, S. (2017). *Teaching global literature in elementary classrooms: A critical literacy and teacher inquiry approach*. New York: Routledge.
- Xu, X. (2015). The image of China in *Red Scarf Girl*: Promoting international understanding or reinforcing Western hegemony? *Bookbird*, 53(4), 12-19.



**Kelly K. Wissman** is an associate professor in the Department of Literacy Teaching and Learning, University at Albany, State University of New York. She can be reached at [kwissman@albany.edu](mailto:kwissman@albany.edu). She has been an NCTE member since 2005.