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“Wow” Was Just about All We Could Say

Amy Seely Flint, Teri Holbrook, Laura May, Peggy Albers, and Caitlin McMunn Dooley

In the delightful picturebook, *Lilly’s Purple Plastic Purse* (Henkes, 1996), we are introduced to Lilly and how much she loves school and her teacher, Mr. Slinger, who brings a cool factor to the classroom. He provides the students with inquiry, choice, and a way of thinking about teaching and learning. Lilly is so impressed, the only thing she can say is, “Wow.”

“Wow. That was just about all [we] could say.”

This is the very sentiment we, as an editorial team, have felt during our first year. We’ve seen the field of literacy continue to transform and shift as new technologies become commonplace in our homes and classrooms; as our classrooms become more linguistically and culturally diverse; and as notions of text continue to expand. At the same time, we know teachers continue to face hurdles with standardized testing, common core standards, closing the achievement gap, measures of teacher effectiveness, and state-level funding practices that restrict rather than expand the possibilities. As Allen Luke (2012) writes, “Struggles over power are, indeed, struggles over the control of information and interpretation” (p. 5).

Educators’ responses to these restrictive practices have been vocal. We witnessed the protests in Wisconsin over unions and bargaining rights, Occupy movements around the country that challenged social and economic injustices in our country and worldwide, principals in New York standing up against the teacher evaluation system, and the Save Our Schools March and National Call to Action in Washington, DC, that drew national attention to the failing practices and policies of No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top.

These movements and efforts all demonstrate educators’ voice, power, and decision making. Paulo Freire, one of our most celebrated educators and philosophers of the twentieth century, writes about a pedagogy of liberation, of a theory of transforming action (1970), whereby action cannot be teased apart from reflection. Understood as praxis, change comes through a process of dialogue and reflection, leading to a change in action. “The act of knowing involves a dialectical movement that goes from action to reflection and from reflection upon action to a new action” (Freire, 1985, p. 50). Through praxis, then, we can use our voice, our decision-making capacity, to navigate the “enabling and disenabling local contexts of policy” (Luke, 2012, p. 9). When we—teachers, students, educators, parents, and citizens—unite in our schools and communities, and collectively stand up for reforms and practices that encourage innovation and change, our teaching and learning are transformed.

Watching these events and other social and political movements around the world has led us to consider our own actions and our response in Language Arts and the field. In our first year, we’ve had the privilege of reading many, many outstanding manuscripts. We walk out of our weekly meetings with a sense of awe and “wow” at all the innovation and dedication we see in them. We are pushed to consider how policy impacts our teaching, our use of technology in our classrooms and professional development, our broader understandings of texts, and our individual and collective history with language arts. We find the Conversation Currents and our departments (Research and Policy, Professional Book Reviews, and Children’s Literature Reviews)
THOUGHTS FROM THE EDITORS | “Wow” Was Just about All We Could Say

Moving into a second-grade classroom, S. Rebecca Leigh offers readers a view of how students were encouraged to use drawing as a way to visualize their thinking when responding to picturebooks and readalouds. The bubble hook, the zoom hook, and the group hook are highlighted as examples of what can happen when children have authentic opportunities to respond to and talk about illustrators’ images and the decisions they made when illustrating stories. Leigh writes, “Engaging students in rich art talks offers students one way to move beyond awareness by first discussing what they know about how objects mean, applying their understandings to a variety of images, and then looking closely at the visual content decisions illustrators make to convey ideas and emotion” (p. 399).

In our departments, Nancy Roser (Research and Policy) shares the insights of researchers who take a close and deep look at children’s thinking with images. The Professional Books Reviews and Children’s Literature Reviews bring to our attention new resources for teaching writing and a collection of notable books of poetry for children. Finally, Conversation Currents with Danling Fu and Jane Hansen has us considering where the “thinking” is in writing. Their conversation identifies challenges and tensions in teaching writing, the role of standards in writing, and how we may want to encourage young writers to talk about their writing processes.

At the end of our first year, “Wow, is just about all we can say.”

References