

The Global Reader and Meaning Maker

How do you view yourself as global? You may not be aware of doing so every day, but in multiple ways we engage with the world—through the lens of both a telescope and a microscope as we examine our surroundings, look out the windows at the landscape, check the weather, or indulge in the outdoors or intermingle with others. Many of us are global news junkies, continental and intercontinental travellers as well as planetary consumers—attending to world affairs and ever-conscious of our footprint. Even as we open our computers, we are apt to have e-mails or other forms of exchange, that have global trajectory. For those of us who are deemed foreigners, we may find ourselves interacting with family, friends and colleagues about both worldly and local issues as we contemplate planetary, national and local circumstances, including our engagements and how we are coping with our realities. These are family, friends and colleagues located thousands of miles apart, sometimes in transit. Yet, nowadays, it is as if we are in the same neighbourhood or near to one another as we share a focus on issues that are both local and planetary in scope.

Personally, as Rob noted:

I now look at my life through a global lens, though I don't think I was as overtly aware of my global existence as a boy or a teenager. Initially, I would not have considered my life or perspective as a young man growing up in Sydney, Australia in the 50s and 60s to be global, but rather predominately local and isolated. Despite the view that the world was shrinking, and despite the advent of telephones and television and the hosting of the Olympic Games, there was a sense of isolation. International flights to Australia took days; travelling by ocean liners required several weeks. I did not fret over travelling as I viewed myself an Australian living the good life in what was termed the Lucky Country (given its resources, climate, and quality of life). I viewed myself about as Australian as one could get; while I had a Norwegian grandfather, I was a descendant of an Australian "first fleeter" and my family lived in a Sydney suburb heavily into beach activities as well as tennis. I did not realize how mono-cultural, racist, and classist it was until later in life. At the time, we recognized that most Australians were British in heritage, but increasingly influenced by the U.S.

My schooling was state-controlled, mandated, and tied to the British Empire in such a way that I was expected to learn about British heroes and read British literature and respond to what was a form of British academic schooling. We took tests on occasion to sort us into three batches—workers, trade-persons, or higher-educated students. As I was able to pass the necessary exams and to receive the scholarships needed to receive a higher education, I

eventually became a teacher after a short fling with engineering. Our universities were very British and only educated a very small percentage of the population; for instance, at that time the proportion of males to females was a ratio of 8 to 1, while the percentage of Indigenous students was negligible. (The first Indigenous Australian to enrol in a university was 1957, and the first to graduate was in 1967.)

The population of Australia at that time was around 8 million and, despite a history of immigration, it was a country that prided itself on being mono-cultural and monolingual. It was a member country of the British Empire that morphed into the Commonwealth—with reservations. Anglo-Australia feared Asians and hence looked to Europe and the Americas or New Zealand rather than to any of its neighbours to the North or West (i.e., Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam, India, Japan, or China). Additionally, this Australia was a country of colonizers, who displaced and almost totally dismissed our Indigenous population (which had dwindled from an estimated 700,000 people in the late 18th century to around 100,000 during these years). In the 1950s, Aboriginal Australians were therefore displaced people—denied respect, the right to vote, and, with few exceptions, the right to own land or have a bank account. (They were given the right to vote in federal elections in 1962 and counted in the census beginning 1967.) Their history was kept invisible and they were deemed “non-civilized.” It was beyond racism—to the point of a kind of cultural genocide that was perpetuated over time.

*Growing up in these circumstances, I did not realize my place. I was not conscious of the history of my continent from a truly Australian perspective—one that recognized the colonization of Australia as an invasion, resulting in the displacement of the Aboriginal communities who had been the country’s custodians. I became aware of my own ignorance through the writings and guidance of Australian Aboriginal descendants who made visible the Australian Aboriginal Holocaust to me, through the stories of their lives. A book by a fellow literacy educator Eric Willmott entitled, *Pemulway—the Rainbow Warrior*, re-introduced me to the places that I roamed as a child. My neighbourhood was the land of the Cadigal and Gweagal peoples of the Eora nation. During the early years of the invasion, it became a site for skirmishes and resistance by the Aboriginals to the initial occupation by the British. This was a history and a geography that was purposefully kept invisible by the British invaders. It is a history still not fully addressed despite apologies by the government in recent years.*

Befitting the notion that you sometimes need to move away to “know thyself”, I was the beneficiary of a scholarship to the U.S. in the 1970s that interrupted my teaching career

and afforded me the opportunity to study and work in American universities. The early seventies were an extraordinary time to be in the States as Americans were wrestling with their own racism and the folly of the war in Vietnam. Most Americans were keen to know what the world thought of them in a manner that was critically reflexive to a higher degree than I have encountered since.

Professionally, I found myself weighing whether or not I should stay on beyond my doctorate and, in consultation with some colleagues (John Elkins and Michael Halliday), I chose to take a position as an Assistant Professor at the University of Arizona. Over the course of my career, I have served on faculties in the South, Southwest, West, Midwest and Northeast of the U.S. as well in Vancouver, Canada, Beijing (PRC), and Sydney, Australia—across Land Grant universities, Ivy, and Sandstones. Nowadays, I live what I would suggest is the life of an international, with strong global and cross-cultural interests—working across the borders of several countries on an annual basis.

I have been back and forth to Australia throughout my life but did not return to Australia to work until 2010. Australia is and is not different. It has shifted from a monolingual and mono-cultural country to being multicultural—where no group seems to be in the majority (i.e., more of a mosaic than a melting pot). The population—approaching 24 million—includes a mix of Asian and Europeans, with almost equal proportions migrating annually. Australia now looks to Asia rather than just to Europe and America for support and relationships. Its primary trading partners are from Asia and its university student bodies include large numbers of foreign students from Asia (i.e., over 20% of the students in most universities). The population of Indigenous Australia has also grown, but still only amounts to a small proportion of the overall population. And, while they have been granted rights such as the right to vote, Indigenous peoples still experience a great deal of discrimination within the dominant Eurocentrism that sidelines their cultural heritage and histories.

On one level, then, Australia is a multicultural, global tourist destination. In other ways, however, it is also quite racist—especially in terms of its treatment of Aboriginal Australians and people of color. Australia's global dispositions seem driven by economic purposes and interests, and still project a Eurocentric national image. Multiculturalism seems more of a supplement than a core value and practice. Indeed, Australia's curriculum—now nationalized—includes supplementary learnings that focus on Aboriginal history and other non-European cultures, including several in Asia, but in a fashion that is detached and not fully integrated. Globally, therefore, Australia has shifted its embrace and influence in

various yet complex ways. Although my position is no longer embedded in just Australia's globalism, I would suggest its model is somewhat isolationistic, racist, classist, and at times acultural.

In some ways, my global readings of the world have arisen as my journey across space and time has intersected with others on different global pilgrimages—other scholars working across cultures especially critical theorists and indigenous colleagues who are aware of my past ignorance, but encouraged by my commitment to challenging a world order that subjugates. You will find a discussion of the influence of these forces on my emergence as a global reader at

Along with our histories—including events and new technologies, the media, our countries' global ambitions and behaviours—we change as individuals as we travel across and adjust to global and local terrains and respond to the various forces that we experience. Some of these global forces include economic forces; others occur at the intersection of local and global as well as via personal connectivity with colleagues, family, and friends across cultures and locations. As we engage with our worlds and the world moves forward, we are learning to read ourselves and our worlds more discerningly—perhaps as an ally, advocate, activist or reactionary as recalibrate our views of the planet and its diversities. As a literacy educator, then, what does it mean to be a global reader?

In his “Critical Global Literacies” column for NCTE's *English Journal*, Bogum Yoon (2018) highlighted the importance of the global with her comment:

We no longer live in an isolated world; we live in a global era. Understanding dynamic human practices around the world is a necessity, not an option. Given that there is no “official” curriculum standard on global literacy, English teachers' agency to provide opportunities for students to expand their understanding of the world in their ELA classes becomes quite important. By linking local and global issues and adding global perspectives to traditional and multicultural texts, teachers can offer students more opportunities to envision “alternative ways of thinking and living” and to challenge global issues (Short, 2011, p. 145). When teachers invite students to become critical members of the global community with the lens of critical global literacies, possibilities open. (p. 94)

We would offer what might be a bolder proposal: Global meaning making should be integral to all of our reading. Our engagement with global matters goes beyond comparative analyses or a reading to learn about others; it involves reading ourselves and our worlds in the

company of other readers and other cultures—thereby recognizing “the others of our selves” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 560). Moreover, it involves reading the systems at play that limit or liberate, nurture or destroy. Critically oriented global meaning making is not passive but action-oriented, requiring us to act responsibly upon our readings.

Defining our reading as global may seem foreign, but it is not. Our reading of worlds is lifelong and life-wide. We are constantly crossing borders; as we do so, we read events either vicariously or as a participant, consumer, or connoisseur—with an eye to understanding the systems at play and the relationships between people, places, and events. Reading is not a simple act of retrieval but a form of cultural study and engagement. Readers are akin to researchers—conscious of the perspectives, positionalities, gaps, slants, and biases that inform their ongoing meaning making. Their contemplations may involve an aversion and opposition to or, alternatively, a resonance with calls for engaged support, action, or even activism. Approaching our engagements globally, from multiple perspectives, affords meaning makers opportunities to observe and participate aesthetically or vicariously, efferently and critically, with events, settings, characters, and issues.

Further, reading globally compels meaning makers to grapple with their own positionalities and identities, and to reach out for other perspectives to scrutinize the cauldron of socio-political forces involved in different circumstances. While it requires a consideration of how others see the world—hearing their voices and examining their ways of thinking—it also helps us to see ourselves, uncovering what may have gone unnoticed, misunderstood, or ignored. This may occur with as little effort as inviting others to bring their different knowledge sources to the reading; alternatively, it may necessitate a more strategic invitation to outsiders with different interests and histories to inform one’s reading. Such transformative readings can shape one’s own life or reading of others. It can occur as one participates in everyday events, engaging with different persuasions or attitudes or history. It might entail being faced with confrontations or circumstances that are racist, sexist, gendered or in other ways discriminatory.

Being global involves the everyday, requiring forms of multicultural cosmopolitanism including nuanced knowledge of others (e.g., norms, conventions, language) to connect. It may involve forms of border crossing or cross-boundary negotiations through translanguaging (e.g., Horowitz, 2012; Nelson et al., 2016) and language fusions or playful line stepping (Gutiérrez et al., 2017) that capitalize on readers’ plural identities and abilities to move across or interweave communities.

Texts and media can contribute to global considerations—from the simplest of picture books to graphic novels; from realistic to historical, fantasy, and science fiction to nonfiction, self-help guides, and naturalist writing; and from print media to films to online and social media productions—even Twitter feeds. Arguably, in these political times, global meaning making is integral to one’s reading of news releases, opinion pieces, and the writings of politicians. But it is also how we support, dismiss or position ourselves as an ally, adversary, or passive observer of forms of discrimination or advantage for one group over another.

Take, if you will, James Baldwin’s (1974) novel, *If Beale Street Could Talk*. Baldwin’s story moves readers across multiple perspectives, cultures, and worlds. It is not just story of love between an African American couple, as told by a wife, or that of love within a family, as told by a daughter. It is a story of families; of the broader society of humanity; of intolerance, and unconscionable racism. It is a story that engages readers in complex social dynamics within and across individuals, families, communities, and cultures. As readers encounter these various dynamics, they are transacting with and across cultures, bringing their own selves and their societal experiences to the text—especially as they contemplate the events and the cultural forces in play. In this way, as Baldwin seems to suggest, Beale Street is not just one place, within one story.

Similarly, consider some of the powerful Indigenous historical novels, such as Australian Aboriginal educator Eric Willmott’s (1988) book, *Pemulwuy: The Rainbow Warrior*. The novel recounts the story of Australian Aboriginal resistance to British occupation—a story kept invisible both to outsiders and across generations of Australian immigrants. Or take scholar and author Larissa Y. Behrendt’s (2004) work, *Home*—a modern day account of her experiences, as an urban Aboriginal, in visiting her place of heritage in a remote rural area where her community experienced horrific treatment. These stories reveal the current circumstances and dynamics of cultural experiences across time and place; they are educative, provocative, and may be transformative. For Australian readers such as myself, these texts might serve as antecedents to our reconsiderations of the systemic forces that have shaped us culturally including the unacceptable racism that persists. For North American readers, Thomas King’s (2012) work, *The Inconvenient Indian: A Curious Account of Native People in North America*, may provide a similar platform. His account introduces readers to a world that that they might claim to know, but likely narrowly or mono-culturally.

Many of us who read these stories are not just reading them as powerful narratives, but as accounts of societies that may be invisible or that may have been (and may remain) violent. Moreover, our readings reveal how the worlds of others are also part of “our worlds”

and “our selves” (Bhabha, 1994). They afford forms of transformative engagements in terms of understanding and situating our social and cultural time and place, including recognizing and, I would hope, interrogating and challenging the systems that may still contribute to persisting cultural and planetary affronts.

Cultural considerations, on a global scale or those that involve border-crossings, are pervasive in our lives as a result of our associations, links, and interests—to the point that they verge on planetary considerations. Our lives involve forms of trafficking as we attend to time zones, climate flows, migration, languages, health, trade, and politics. At times—such as with many of the events over the past few years—historical developments occur that reverberate throughout our lives, challenge the status quo, and make forms of global meaning making more overt. For example, consider the news in the spring of 2019 of the murder of some fifty New Zealanders of Muslim faith by an Australian white supremacist. The event brought to the surface a range of issues existing in our lives, including concerns over global terrorism and the rising white supremacist movement; the consequences of our interconnectedness with global media; and debates around the precipitousness of hate speech, from tweets to blogs (e.g., of individuals, such as PewDiePie, or those tied to political policy speeches, such as Trump). Yet in the midst of these concerns, New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern reminded us of the need for a moral compass—that is, the need to embrace one another as one, with all our differences. Among the most poignant moments occurred when, immediately following the tragic event, she stated:

Clearly what has happened here is an extraordinary and unprecedented act of violence. ... Many of those who would have been directly affected by this shooting may be migrants to New Zealand. They may even be refugees here. They have chosen to make New Zealand their home, and it is their home.... They are us.... The people who were the subject of this attack today, New Zealand is their home, they should be safe here. The person who has perpetuated this violence against us is not. They have no place in New Zealand. (“Christchurch mosque,” 2019)

As with other global affairs, this horrid event triggered discussions of xenophobic developments in various venues around the world, from classrooms to media to town meetings to informal conversations with friends. For some, it entailed interrogating the white supremacy movement, the growth of anti-Muslim sentiment, and the spread of nationalism—scrutinizing how these developments are fueled by certain political factions and policies. For others, it spurred contemplating the role of media conglomerates, including Facebook and

YouTube, as vehicles for trafficking hate speech—specifically through their failure to balance profitability with social responsibility, free access with censorship, and cultural diversity with respect. Some New Zealanders in particular questioned whether or not the country was as inclusive as it had been purported to be. Issues of firearms also resurfaced, and Prime Minister Ardern introduced legislation to revamp NZ gun laws. Australia interrogated its current role in advancing racism and the conditions for white supremacy. Adolescents reckoned with the role of social media, including the norms with regard to language used on certain sites. The United States examined the President’s role and use of social media in inciting the event. Globally, xenophobic attitudes, especially Islamophobic prejudices, were interrogated, and matters of responsiveness and responsibilities (especially moral and humanistic) to one another remotely or in our immediate worlds were brought to the fore.

As a reader you might view the event as creating a new site for engagement—a space that might include:

- Exploring the event through a range of social frames, including religious freedom and co-existence; immigration; individual expression, social responsibility, and censorship; and liberty and violence against humanity and community.
- Contemplating cultural developments and the flow of people and ideas along with global fusion, adaptation, translanguaging, border-crossing, and various forms of displacement.
- Unpacking the socio-political conditions that undergird these developments.
- Being responsive; reading oneself and one’s positioning as detached or complicit; as an ally, activist, or activist.

Engaging in global reading therefore involves contemplating ourselves in the company of others, deliberating on the socio-political and physical conditions that exist within and across the precincts of a community, country, and the planet itself. Such dynamics may play out in our everyday exchanges locally or may manifest themselves globally.

Influences that shape readers and the objects of readings and writings may exist separately or be woven together in a tapestry of events, patterned by socio-political circumstances or affordances. Though our specific circumstances differ, we all live across societies—from the local to the planetary—exploring and contemplating ourselves and others, deliberating on the social, political, cultural, and physical conditions of our worlds, and, at times, crossing

borders as we engage with global affairs patterned by those conditions. Our readings involve multi-layered, critical self-examinations—befitting forms of reflexivity as well as activism as we contemplate our positionality and roles as well as our responsibilities and responsive possibilities. If examined systematically, matters of complicities, responsibility, and possible responses will arise.

Arguably, global readers/meaning-makers transact with themselves and others they are contemplating the road ahead—with an eye to the systems at play across the spaces and times available to them and their collaborators. They engage with both a global telescope and microscope, attending to media coverage of worldly matters while scrutinizing their own affairs and those of their communities. Such scrutiny should be as sensitive to local circumstances as it is to the broader systems at play—whether they be the internet architecture that undergirds the traffic of communications, or the norms that relate to the incidental exchanges or updates on events between colleagues, family members, and friends.

These layered interfaces could be viewed as the local and global existing in combination, transacting, or trafficking within or across borders. They could include a number of topics anchored in the local but with an obvious global reach—including questions of western interference in the affairs of other countries; nationalism, populism, sovereignty, and trade within and across regions; intellectual property and extraditions; and matters of internationalizing and indigenising. These topics, though local in origin, may also be tied to a network of global interests and matters of alignment with regard to one's position and role—befitting cultural considerations of self in the company of others and a moral reckoning of interests.

Thus, global reading involves our mobilization and search for traction as we address local concerns that also may extend to regions, nations, and the planet. It is not uncommon nowadays to witness different publics taking the initiative to be engaged in local and global activism on social, political, and environmental issues. In the past years, for example, we have witnessed a range of movements—including the advent of global student reading, networking, and activism on issues such as gun control and climate change.

For these reasons global explorations should be pursued carefully; they should be well researched, consultative, and informed by an interrogation of one's position, interests, and potential roles. The contemplations of global readers should be reflexive and scrutinized, and any resulting actions should be pursued in ways that are supportive, not narcissistic or presumptuous. Actions should respect situatedness, befitting the indigenous nature of communities and the particular circumstances at play. Global reading should extend to

activism that is grounded in and consistent with ecological considerations and cultural respectfulness of local circumstances. It should involve critical analyses that stem from thoughtful explorations of multiple resources, viewpoints, and approaches; it should aim to understand socio-political circumstances; and it should demonstrate a reflexivity and recognition of oneself and one's position as insider-outsider, ally or partner—especially as one strives to leverage and support the needs and interests of others in a manner reverent of cultural practices.

Essentially, global meaning making involves leveraging an ecology anchored in the recognition of multiple voices—the pursuit of a multitopia that advances unity, but not at the cost of uniformity or suppression. It engages readers in a form of shared and transformative decision-making that involves a critical reflexivity of one's world as experienced through events and writings and encounters with media (Tierney, 2017). Global meaning making goes beyond being able to recant, connect, or even compare and contrast. As Rob has discussed in other papers (Tierney, 2018; Tierney, 2020), global reading is not scripted; however, there are some dimensions that are commonplace. It entails methods and strategies of critical analysis, including the following:

- Contemplating one's self and one's global presence, positionality, and purview.
- Exploring multiple resources, viewpoints, and approaches.
- Reading across time and space, including into, beneath, and beyond.
- Probing socio-political currents.
- Moving from connoisseur to activist.
- Bridging and leveraging information and knowledge.

Moreover, for each of us it involves dealing with and traversing cultures—whether within or across places, with various peoples, across our planet.

Global readings and consultations also entail a form of shuttle diplomacy tied to nuanced meaning making. They require inferencing, translating, situating, discerning, questioning, discussing, linking with, reconsidering, re-reading, re-thinking, composing, and acting upon. They involve accessing and weighing information that might be gleaned from multiple readings, multiple informants, and multiple sources, such as selected websites, tweets, and listservs; blogs, news bulletins, and papers (including developing drafts) related to ongoing projects; and various exchanges with friends and colleagues. Moreover, befitting forms of activism and advocacy, global reading involves navigating “tricky” spaces in

support of others including challenging the hegemonies and perhaps one's own complicity with systemic biases whether they be tied to racism, ethnocentrism, gender, colonialism or economic privilege (Andreotti & de Souza, 2011; Smith, 2005; Spivak, 1990, Spivak, 1999; Stein 2018; Tierney, 2018, Tierney, 2019).

We would hope that such readings are also done with an understanding of one's worlds in relation to others—requiring readers to step inside, outside, or to the side of various spaces as they observe and engage with themselves, peoples, and events. And we would hope they do so reservedly and respectfully, adopting an appropriate, balanced consideration of their interests so as not to override or displace others or be enlisted in opportunistic methods that objectify, commodify, or exploit. For educators in particular, we hope this prompts a rethinking of how we position global considerations especially tied to diversity in schools. We hope that it prompts us to wrestle with how we might pursue a curriculum where multiple perspectives can be seeded and grow as we embrace global reflexivity—one that seeks to build understandings of ourselves (individually and together) and does not retreat from advocacy and activism in the interest of our local and planetary diversities, despite the influence of forces that tout nationalism, patriotism, and ethnocentrism.

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