

Educating for a Global Tomorrow

William Shatner, best known for his role as Captain Kirk on the TV series *Star Trek*, recently took an actual journey to the final frontier. The 10-minute trip (taken courtesy of a wealthy space entrepreneur's new venture) afforded the actor an opportunity to travel above Earth's atmosphere and back again. Upon returning, Shatner commented on both the beauty and the fragility of Earth from his 66-mile-in-the-air viewpoint.

"This covering of blue is this sheet, this blanket, this comforter of blue around that we have around us," he said. "We think 'Oh, that's blue sky' and suddenly you shoot through it all of a sudden, like you whip a sheet off you when you're asleep, and you're looking into blackness."

When I heard his words, I couldn't help but think about the state of education today—the beauty and the vulnerability. On one hand, literacy educators are able to witness the blossoming genius of students learning to express their ideas and share their experiences both on and off the page. On the other, they are doing so in an incredibly demanding time, navigating waters in which they are expected not only to teach but also to provide a safe harbor for students and engender hope through partnering with caregivers and communities.

Shatner's observations of the tenuous line between the blue and the vast emptiness

beyond resonates with my own regarding the responsibilities educators assume and the learning opportunities they afford—ones that breathe light and life into our world. And, just as his words have become a powerful reminder of the preciousness of our planet, I hear them as a plea for protection.

It is with this in mind that I want to acknowledge my awe and gratitude for how educators have answered the profound call to action they've been issued. Teachers are some of the most valuable frontline workers we have—individuals working tirelessly to respond to the needs of students and their families. They are problem solvers using inquiry and innovation to respond to the challenges of COVID-19. They are architects building bridges between schools and communities, making learning relevant and meaningful. They are futurists empowering students and helping them realize their own potential to become agents of change.

In fulfilling all of these capacities, educators are in many ways the guardians of life on our blanketed-in-blue planet—ecologists cultivating and building upon diversities with compassion, responsiveness, and respect. Often, teaching is described in overly simplistic terms tied to modeling, practice, application, and assessment. I do not think this captures the essence of what it means to be an educator. Literacy teachers do so much

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more than ensure the mastery of skills and the ability to answer preset questions. True literacy development cannot be measured in terms of the tests we employ to track performance.

Educators foster literacy development in multifaceted and meaningful ways, including engaging in two interrelated pursuits:

1. Creating learning spaces that are responsive to and build upon diversity within our classrooms, communities, and the world at large
2. Supporting student agency in pursuing change that is respectful of our pluralities, both locally and with an eye toward global developments

These are environments that are more organic than product oriented, helmed by teachers and teams led by aspiration, not prescription. They reflect the confluence of current world views. They align with views that learning is situated and informed by socio-political-cultural forces. They correspond to calls and developments by Indigenous colleagues and others in different countries (e.g., Assié-Lumumba in Nigeria, Lester-Irabinna Rigney in Australia, Jo-Ann Archibald and Marie Battiste in Canada, and Graham Hingangaroa Smith and Linda Tuhiwai Smith in New Zealand) and they allow space to build the learners' local knowledge and ways of knowing and in turn bring shifts in what is taught, why, and how.

Likewise, they benefit notions of global meaning-making. They correspond with the shifts occurring in United Nations Sustainability Goals as well as changes in the orientation of key NGOs involved in literacy such as CODE, the Canadian organization with an emphasis

on "context matters." They are sites that build upon our diverse experiences and ways of knowing—sites enhanced by collaborations and networking that are not degraded by misrepresentations or devoid of compassion. They entail educational approaches that embrace the multiple over the singular and the participatory over the detached. They build upon learners' diversities including their different degrees and forms of multilingualism.

Developing literate students requires innovation and invention, inviting students to be curious, to inquire, to contemplate, and to express. As students seek answers to their questions and solutions to their problems, teachers must support them and create opportunities for them to pursue positive changes for themselves and others.

By embracing plurality, educators honor the ecologies of learners and the communities to which they belong, and in doing so, they are fostering a worldliness that will carry future generations beyond the metaphorical blue blanket. It is through engaging our students in reading and writing the worlds around them that we are equipping them to do more than protect the planet—we are giving them the tools necessary to build a better tomorrow. ■



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