

Media Review

From the Media Review Editor

Editor Carolyn O'Mahony

Citizenship Education in the Age of Connected Imagination

Recently, messages on my computer have reminded me of Nelson Mandela's passing and have put names to the faces of people suffering in the Philippines and Syria. The death of one of the world's most notable political activists and civil rights leaders, and the two degrees of separation I have between a comfortable academic life and news of celebration or tragedy around the globe, fit with Gregory Soden's timely review of Sarah M. Stitzlein's *Teaching for Dissent: Citizenship Education and Political Activism*. Soden has thought deeply about the role of music and literature in enabling the voice of multiple groups to be heard and studied in the classroom. Stitzlein advocates for giving young people opportunities and tools to become informed civic participants and political actors outside the classroom.

The tragedies around the world have sent me back to re-read three books that have their own particular positions on my bookshelf, (i.e. it is obvious when they have been borrowed.) Over recent years the ideas in Harm de Blij's *The Power of Place: Geography, Destiny and Globalization's Rough Landscape* (reviewed here by Shannon Dodt), Thomas Friedman's *Hot Flat and Crowded: Why We Need a Green Revolution and how it can Renew America, Release 2.0*, and Elise Boulding's *Building a Global Civic Culture: Education for an Interdependent World*, have helped me make sense of life on our rapidly changing planet.

Dodt's review of de Blij's book will bring to mind any biography of Nelson Mandela you might have read as the author reflects on living in 1950's South Africa. De Blij also makes us think about the reality of life for billions of people on the planet: they are destined to live within miles or kilometers of where they were born, regardless of how "inexpensive" international flights become or how devastated their land is by natural or manmade disasters.

Friedman's book, *Hot Flat and Crowded: Why We Need a Green Revolution and how it can Renew America, Release 2.0*, offers a disturbing message. Friedman points out that the rising level of consumption around the world since the mid-1900s means that those of us enjoying our 'middle class' lifestyles are changing the planet. He predicts that the headline news of the future will not be so much about wars and the like, but about the weather and the devastation it is wreaking. Since reading this book I have been watching the news with different eyes. Whenever I hear news and see images of natural fury, such as sandstorms and wildfires in Australia, floods in China, tornadoes in Oklahoma, hurricanes off the Atlantic Coast, or cyclones in the Philippines, I cannot help but wonder how (a) my lifestyle is contributing to the problem, and (b) what I can do to compensate or ameliorate the situation, given that I am just one person. I keep telling myself that I need to think beyond this, because anyone we read about in our history books was 'just one person', albeit collaborating with many others of like mind. Students who are seeing the same news of devastation need adults around who will help them

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Page 87

become informed and engaged in their social and political communities, to move from hopelessness to informed and cooperative action. In terms of the environment, Friedman suggests that we all need to have this awareness and sense of urgency so that we can not only consume more mindfully, but also advocate for legislation that will foster the development of a 'green' economy that is environmentally sustainable for the long term.

As I think about my role in making the world a better place for those who cannot escape the wrath of nature or mankind, the writing of Elise Boulding becomes extremely helpful. A pacifist Quaker like her husband, influential economist Kenneth Boulding, Elise Boulding was a sociologist who was one of the founders of Peace and Conflict Studies as a discipline. She believed that beyond governments, individuals, especially women, shape the values and beliefs of society, and that people are able to help each other through non-governmental agencies such as voluntary organizations and religious groups. Written in 1988, the basic premise of *Building a Global Civic Culture: Education for an Interdependent World* has even more relevance today when the Internet enables people to communicate with each other, both in groups but also on a person-to-person basis. We are living in a time when, in addition to non-governmental agencies, social media is enabling crowdsourcing and crowdfunding of aid efforts, where ever and whenever they might be needed. De Blij's 'global nomads', people not living in the country of their birth, are staying connected with their homelands in ways that were not possible in the past. They are building bridges of understanding across languages, cultures, and places. My colleague, Judette, who has multiple Syrian relatives now living with her in South East Michigan, made my son's collecting for [UNICEF](#) while trick or treating at Halloween more than just a tradition. Tracey [Alvarez-Martin](#), our International Assembly colleague, posted information on our list serve to help us support communities in the Philippines that were devastated by Hurricane Haiyan. Judette, Tracey and millions of our neighbors are enabling the rest of us to connect across great physical distances, and to use our imagination collectively as we think and act locally and globally.

As social studies teachers in democratic nations, our purpose is to help students become aware that they, like we adults, have multiple roles to play as global citizens. Engagement in humanitarian assistance is important. However, we also need reminding and help in understanding that socially-oriented triage, such as responding to disasters with funds earned from well-intentioned bake-sales and canned food drives, needs to be accompanied by engagement in policy-making and/or educational efforts that can help minimize the impact of such events on the planet's most vulnerable populations. An inspiring example of such educational endeavors comes from Japan. After the horrifying Indian Ocean Tsunami of 2004, Professor Toshitaka Katada and his colleagues at Gunma University Graduate School began giving emergency disaster lessons to students at elementary and junior high schools in the Kamaishi school district. When the Tohoku Tsunami of 2011 struck, all of the students who were in these schools survived (Parker, 2012).

Please consider sharing your thoughts and endeavors with the International Assembly by writing an article or review for the *Journal of International Social Studies*, or by participating in our annual conference.

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Page 88

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About the editor

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Page 89