The Reading Connection

By Jordan Fabish

THINKING BIGGER

“She already knew that she wanted to do something really important with her life. She longed, she later said, ‘for something worth doing instead of frittering time away on useless trifles’ " (Gorrell, 2000, p. 17).

The speaker, above, could be any one of us (apart from the gender) choosing education as a career. This important work, I dare say, has left few of us with a surfeit of time to fritter away. In fact, as we approach summer break, whether a couple of weeks or a couple of months, I think my lottiest plans aim at catching up on the ironing and, more seriously, creating new lesson plans, tweaking others, reading, and generally preparing to be an effective, compassionate, innovative teacher next semester. Isn’t that enough? Should I be “thinking bigger”? How about you? Does your “something worth doing” encompass a bigger dream? Maybe it should. Maybe that dream you glimpse but set aside is still waiting for you to fulfill.

The earnest idealist in the opening quote is Florence Nightingale. Hampered by the mores and social restrictions applied to wealthy young women in the mid-1800s, Nightingale nevertheless worked tirelessly to fulfill her calling, according to Gorrell’s children’s biography of the celebrated caregiver, elevating the work of nursing to professional stature with her gifts for organization and attention to detail, coupled with vision and purpose. There may or may not be Florence Nightingales among us, but there are many with vision and purpose. I find it inspiring to hear about them, and we don’t have to look any farther than our university, Cal State Fullerton.

CSUF faculty and graduates have vision and purpose! Our own professors write articles that appear in the finest peer-reviewed journals (check out the “Scholarship by Education Faculty” cabinet on the third floor of the education building). They write books, pamphlets, and textbooks. You may find the name of the nice woman you chatted with at the last R. E. G. dinner appearing on a list of distinguished Titan alumni (as did Peggy Hammer’s, organizer of Reading Is Fundamental for Placentia Unified Schools). A special, new room in the university library bears the name of a professor in CSUF’s department of elementary and bilingual education: Mildred Ransdorf Donoghue. I would like to tell you about the room and about her.

A member of the university faculty since 1962, Mildred Donoghue currently teaches graduate studies in early childhood education and in literacy, courses designed for teachers, although unless we took additional classes, we in the reading program probably did not know Dr. Donoghue. However, I often found her book The Child and the English Language Arts mentioned in my project research and am eager to see her recently published Using Literature Activities to Teach Content Areas to Emergent Readers, a work demonstrating that teaching literacy is enhanced by the melding of content areas and literature. Receiving her formal education at the University of Michigan, the University of Detroit, and at UCLA, Dr. Donoghue also holds a degree in law and taught several years in elementary education. Her doctoral research was on a subject she says still excites her, teaching a second language to elementary school age students, a concept that may only now be finding its way into the American consciousness—but that is another article.

“Our elementary teachers have to know A LOT about children’s literature. One course doesn’t really do it,” says Donoghue. As educator to other educators, as a way to lead teachers to know a lot about children’s literature, she has designed more than a great lesson plan, she has fulfilled a dream. The Donoghue Children’s Literature Center is that dream, one that Donoghue did not set aside, although it did
incubate about 10 years, she says, and one that she personally funded. (I once heard a speaker say if you wanted to know what someone really cared about, look at his/her checkbook.) Dr. Donoghue says she received encouragement throughout her career from her parents and late husband, and from her own two children.

“They expect me to do this sort of thing.” It is also clear that the soft-spoken-but-no-nonsense professor expects this sort of thing from herself. Perhaps that is exactly what it takes to bring such an ambitious project to fruition. Awaiting only carpet installation, the Donoghue Children’s Literature Center should be open by the time you read this newsletter, and you gotta see it!!

The purpose of the center is to offer a space of cheery comfort where teachers, present and future, and new readers can immerse themselves in the best current children’s literature—a place for impromptu relaxation and scheduled story hours. It is located on the fourth floor (north) of the Pollak Library, which houses the Juvenile and Curriculum Collection, impressive by itself. When I was a student in the reading program, I rarely got beyond the second floor journal articles in Periodicals! Although aware of the excellent children’s and curriculum books, I never knew that beyond them is a spacious study area, walled with windows and overlooking magnolias and jacarandas. Now, to the left is the Donoghue Literature Center, a cozy, corner room with a plush panda sharing the window seat; a squashy, round blue hassock; a big green table and desk top; framed pictures of Curious George and The Cat in the Hat; and gorgeous, new books displayed on the red, blue, and yellow bookshelves. All the titles are high-quality literature, not trade books; all are hardbacks and are catalogued in OPAC (labeled “Children’s Literature Center”). In collaboration with the center’s ideal board members, Mary Crimmins, who oversees the university’s juvenile, curriculum, and AV materials, and Carolyn Eckert, children’s services branch manager of the Fullerton Public Library, Professor Donoghue has seen to every detail. The board will continue to make title selections monthly from the reviews in The Hornbook and will likely include many of Donoghue’s favorite authors: Patricia MacLachlan, Tomie dePaola, Judith Viorst, Eric Carle, Eve Bunting, and Patricia Polacco. Circulating copies are planned for the library’s regular juvenile collection. Yes, these books are in school libraries, public libraries, and commercial bookstores, but when I visited the Donoghue Literature Center, it seemed to me I could see them better there because the room is so inviting, its size the perfect backdrop for the literature.

There is a balance of picture books and non-fiction—some you will recognize, others you will want to know. To name a few: a delightful version of “The Wheels on the Bus” called The Seals on the Bus by Lenny Hort, where seals, tigers, sheep and vipers make appropriate sounds and the people on the bus go “Help! Help! Help!”; a mysterious Easter Island, Catherine Arnold; Wemberly Worried by Kevin Henkes; that beautiful Michaelangelo (Diane Stanley) with “The Creation” detail from the Sistine Chapel ceiling on the cover; a biography of Satchel Paige; and (hot tip!!) So You Want to be President? by Judith St. George, brilliantly illustrated with caricatures by David Small, a very funny and informative book on U. S. presidents from George Washington to Bill Clinton. This is a wonderful collection!

When you visit the Donoghue Children’s Literature Center, I hope that you’ll discover some terrific new books and the time to enjoy them, that you’ll find yet another reason to be proud of CSU Fullerton, and that you’ll look at your own plans and dreams, inspired to think bigger.


A High School Teacher’s Ode to Elementary Teachers

By Marian Dickey, Estancia High School - May 2001

Read at a dinner hosted by Dr. Julie Chan
In Kara's tradition, I tried to prepare something that would rhyme,
Because now all of a sudden, I have some extra time.
What really hit home, as a mom and a teacher,
Is that teaching reading, is something incredibly major.
It's not what some might think is a natural occurrence,
And for many little ones, it's a torturous experience.
We hoity-toity high school teachers might be considered crazy,
But what elementary teachers do to get kids to read is really amazing.
To take a little one and help him find the best way to learn to read,
Takes courage, strength, and lots of love, indeed.
Thanks to all of you with first, second, and third grade classes,
Because without you, I wouldn't be able to teach 9th graders the classics.
Because of you they can read Shakespeare, Steinbeck, and Dostoyevsky,
And it's because you know all about Adams, Smith and yes, Vygotsky.
I can even teach them to read and write much better poetry than you're listening to now,
Because of you, who taught them their consonants and vowels.

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**Hancock Fund**

The Hancock Fund was established to honor Dr. Deborah Osen Hancock for her contributions to the field of reading and specifically to the Reading Department. The fund is solely for use by the CSUF Reading Clinic. Over the years, the fund has supplied books and technology for use by clinicians and students. REG would like to thank the following members for their generous contributions to the Hancock Fund:

Claudia Leyerl
Amy Talaganis
Patty Travis
Dian Urias

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**Congratulations New Grads!**

Congratulations to our record setting class of 2001. Ninety-five students graduated with their M.S. in Education, Reading, including 35 from our first cohort group from Newport-Mesa USD. Laurie Rooney of NMUSD was named Outstanding Graduate Student for the Class of 2001

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If you would like to contribute to the newsletter, by being a regular column writer or just an occasional article donator, please contact Jan Bagwell at jbagwell@fullerton.edu. We need all of you to help make REG great!