**7.2 Course synthesis and application to teaching**

Prior to my enrollment in this course it would not have been possible for me to name, or deliberate on, various awards in children’s literature. Over the course of the past six weeks in TE 836, I have been exposed to numerous children’s literature awards and the political yet detrimental decision process that goes into the nomination and presentation of each award. I was surprised that, being an avid reader myself and a lover of children’s literature, I knew so little about the awarding process and also so little about the variety of awards that are out there. I had no clue how awards were created or who was making these choices. You could have told me that it was listed as a google survey, or a voting phone number similar to those on American Idol and I would have believed you. My ignorance was embarrassing and I am very proud to say that I stand on the other side of the bridge after the six weeks in this course, with a much larger knowledge base regarding children’s literature awards, and the teaching of the awarded books.

Throughout this course, I learned the numerous reasons for critiquing the award process and labeling it as subjective. With this, I also realized the need for specific cultural and social celebration awards in order to promote a multicultural acceptance, historical societal understanding, and of course an equitable world view within young readers. I have woven in and out of my appreciation for the award committees, and my questionable apprehension for the choices the committees have made. It was not until Professor Apol, who had so kindly offered to review one of my assignments, pointed out the necessity of examining each award winning text through the lens of the time period it was published within. This opened a door for me and allowed me to even more critically analyze each awarded text I studied, through the view point and knowledge of what was occurring within the world concurrently as the book was written.

I began to ask myself what the distinction between a book that would win the prestigious Caldecott award or Newbery award, and a book that won an award such a Pura Belprè award which is a less esteemed but wildly important cultural book award. What of these committee member’s decisions regarding the appointment of awards did I agree with or disagree with? Prior to taking this course I would have grabbed a book of the Books-A-Million shelf that had a gold medal on its cover and truly just formed assumptions about the text being wonderful and engaging. However, this course has shown me that I am allowed, and as an educator encouraged, to mentally dispute or support the choices of award winning children’s literature books. This was important to me as I had never before felt like I had any say in what deems a book to be good, or better than other books. I begin to find myself reflecting on what I knew about teaching English Language Arts, and what I knew personally about being an avid reader myself.

As I continued this journey of self-reflection and growth as a reader educator, I realized I had used very little of the proper vocabulary whilst teaching picture books. While diving into the Sipe piece, and mastering the illustration vocabulary necessary, I realized that as a teacher I have an opportunity and a responsibility to showcase this vocabulary to my students. This vocabulary, and the knowledge of the words meaning, allowed me to view the different aspects of illustrations in a picture book through clear eyes. I will ensure that I teach terms such as these whilst teaching literacy next year. I also have decided that I will create award based units where we challenge and support the decisions of various committee members over the course of the years.

As I work in a district with very loose curriculum (none), I am able to build and create my own plans for literacy instruction within the second grade common core standards. With this being said, I have numerous ideas for how I will apply my learning within this course directly to my education practice. As a lover of literacy, I want to promote the same adoration for books and series that I was instilled with from a young age. As I mentioned in my previous papers, some of my fondest literary memories are anchored in reading award winning children’s literature at a young age. I would feel a failure if I could not find a book that each of my students could call ‘their favorite’ over the course of a school year. I want to not only instill a deep love and desire to continue reading within my second graders, but also open their minds to inquiry and analysis of texts that they come into contact with.

One idea I have for the upcoming school year of literacy instruction is to teach the awards as we have been taught them. How wonderful would it be to select 5 Caldecott’s and use 3 weeks of instruction within a classroom to teach my second graders about the necessary vocabulary to use when discussing illustrations and the required criteria to be a Caldecott award winner. I think that this would be an excellent introduction to award winning text, and also allow my students to have some fun with learning about the depth and breadth of illustrative choice.

Looking back on this course, a lightbulb moment for me occurred while listening to the 2015 Caldecott award winning illustrator Dan Santat’s acceptance speech. I was introduced to new concepts, plots, and hidden messages within a book I had spent years teaching and admiring. I would love to teach the story The Adventures of Beekle: The Unimaginary Friend, to my class and have them make all their possible evaluations on the text, and then have them listen to certain pieces of the recipient’s speech. I believe that second grade students minds would be as boggled as mine at the realization that even if we think we are literary master intelligence surveyors, we may miss a huge key piece in a text that wraps up the book in better ways than we could have ever imagine. This exposure would be instrumental for my students to engage with, and the learning of vocabulary and useful tools of analysis will prepare them for future reading, for school or pleasure.

With this being said I would love to implement studies such as the one I described above for numerous awards. I am specifically interested in using the Pura Belprè award within my classroom as I teach within a bilingual classroom with numerous students that are from Latin America. This award would be an excellent way to integrate a study of critical literary analysis, with that of cultural celebration, historical battles and triumphs of Hispanic culture, and current issues present within Latin America. I believe that this unit of study would be able to integrate into all areas of study and truly benefit my students learning.

I will also be diving deeply into Newbery award winners, and the impact of the time period’s each book was published in on the text itself. As this was an eye opening concept to me, I believe that it would be very interesting and influential to introduce to my students. I believe this opens doors for conversations on gender equality, racial equality, and cultural misrepresentation across the history of the United States. I believe that I would be able to use Newbery awarded books such as *A Wrinkle in Time, Number the Stars, or The Last Stop on Market Street*, to teach historical context and societal context within a classroom of young learners. I would be able to use these texts as read aloud mentor text, or in small group instruction, and format deep conversations around the numerous aspects of time period ties, literary choices, and of course our opinions on whether a book was deserving of an award.

Finally, my last idea, and the one I most eager to begin, is that of creating my own book award for our classroom. I believe that after instructing my students on the criteria that follows numerous book awards, introducing them to the ways that books are selected as winners, and exposing them to a rich selection of award winning texts, that it would be super cool to have my class decide what is important to us in children’s literature. I have researched this idea a bit online and have found other teachers write their own criteria and have the children be the committee members who use books they read in class and analyze them through the criteria the teacher created. I believe this would be a scaffolded approach to my idea of allowing students to choose their own criterion for an award. I believe that by allowing my student’s to determine what is important to them as young readers, and what they consider to be distinguished, will allow them to begin critical conversations regarding books and their story elements throughout our upcoming school year.

This course has introduced me to so many potentially promising units of study for my personal students. I am already eager to begin teaching the awards and their processes within my classroom as I feel so fulfilled from engaging in this learning myself. Thank you for an excellent semester of growth, analysis, and for allowing me to form excitement for the 2019-2020 school year just days after the previous school year comes to a close. Courses such as this one, remind me why I love my teaching profession.

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