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Literature Position Reflection

As Donald Smith's article, "Speaking My Mind" indicated that literature is important, but understanding and explaining why it is important becomes much more difficult. As he described the interaction between him and his student, he was quick to give a simple answer similar to a parent's "because I said so" type of response. Then he began to think about his student's question further. Later, he gave a more complete answer, but even after that, he began to dive deeper into the question that his student had posed to him, creating several different reasons for literature. We also had seen previous discussion of the word literature from the beginning of the semester as well. According to Hintz and Tribunella's *Reading Children's Literature*, "Literature has often come to be understood as being composed of fictional works of 'quality' – literary or artistic writing as opposed to popular genres such as comics or romance novels..." however, later continues by saying that "While 'literature' might long have connoted works of privileged status, it was always limited to fiction..." (Hintz and Tribunella, p. 50). This understanding shows that the meaning or definition of literature has been evolving over time and differs from person to person.

In my classroom, literature will play a vital role in each student's life; a purpose to each student, learning a lesson or "take away" from each book, and having it be meaningful. Each student may have a different reason for reading the literature that they read, but there will always be a purpose to what pieces of literature they have in their lives. The most important aspect for the literature I pick is that the readings are "attention-grabbing." The book has someone parts

that cause the student to not want to put it down. It may be for some of the reasons that Smith outlined in his article. For example, the book may take the reader to a place unimaginable, sometimes that it is unusual and out of their ordinary, everyday life. On the other hand, another reason they read it might be that the literature is exactly similar to their lives; a character and the reader have character traits that are alike from one another. These are a few of many “angles” Smith outlined in his article and the two that I take into account the most when picking my literature in the classroom. Each of these reasons shows that it is attention grabbing for the reader, which is my main objective when deciding what to read in the classroom; which will conclude with my role for literature.

For my students, I would like them to get something out of each book that they read. Maybe they can find some comfort of knowing that other people have similar hardships as them, or grand accomplishments. For example, last week when I explained my reasoning for picking *Esperanza Rising*; there was an important lesson to learn within that book; to make the best out of an unfortunate situation. My students were able to see the character’s point of view and choices. This is an example of what we discussed in the class as it is relatable for the students. This can also be connected to Smith’s article, within his cultural point of literature’s purpose. They make connections from their lives, including, but not limited to their experiences. In fact, they can also relate based on their background, culture, race, ethnicity, just to name a few. In my class, I tried to get them to read a wide range of books. Although, this upcoming year, we will be able to explore any and every area imaginable within literature, to make sure there is a book full of purpose and understanding for each of our individually unique students that makes reading engaging for them.

Another way that students can get something out of the book is having the ability to utilize their imagination to understand the book better. An example of this is when we read *Peter Pan*. My students had to be able to use their imagination and try to take themselves to the place of Neverland, not knowing about this imaginary place filled with magic. Each student was able to create a different Neverland that was unlike any of the others. This idea is similar to Smith's "escape" reasoning where students can independently be removed from their everyday life and the reader or student can be anywhere and everywhere by just flipping open a book and beginning to read.

I also want literature to be enjoyable both in and outside the classroom. I want it to show and say that there is always something for anyone to read. Many times in the classroom as teachers we have heard that a piece of literature is boring or too long. Some students might be engaged by long chapter books; whereas, the student that said it was boring might prefer a graphic novel type of literature. I want my literature to be used in a way that can be explored for anyone, and for my library of literature to be an exploration for even the rarest books for each situation and person. Ideally, I would like several books from each of our weeks from our own class that we learned about. Many of these books were underrepresented and I would like my students and me to be contributors to making these rare books about important issues, and more popular throughout the classrooms.

Before starting this class, I often picked books of literature that seemed interesting but also relevant to the curriculum and the grade level standards. Although, after taking this class, I noticed that I can bring in more beneficial books for my specific students. I can still go along with our normal curriculum, meet grade level standards, while also taking time to find individual books for my students; including ones that are crucial for personal growth for them and in

society. I have a better understanding that the books within the curriculum should be carefully picked; however, I have also understood why my classmates and I may not have been choosing literature that might be helpful to our students, but might be controversial as a society. It is not that we don't want to inform our students about the vast variety of books that are out there, but rather, worried about the repercussions or backlash from those that doesn't believe anything and everything should be and can be discussed through literature.

Overall, literature should challenge the reader just like these graduate class readings challenged us. Discussions arouse because of the readings and allowed for each piece of literature to be meaningful; which is what I would like for my class as well. Students will be engaged and have the right to form opinions about each book. They will be able to get exposure to events and issues that are happening around the world. All of these ideas encompass quality literature.

My ultimate goal for next year is to implement some of the books discussed from this class, for every person; to make sure – no matter what situation, event, problem, or accomplishment the students are going through, there will be literature to read that allows them to get involved in the book from a personal standpoint or from one of understanding. This allows them to communicate and discuss – by asking questions, such as “Have you had a similar experience to the character? If not – how would you approach this situation?” These questions seem complex for elementary school students, but we should not underestimate their ability of discussion. This discussion creates connection between them and the characters which will be more engaging, providing experiences from their own life. Discussions like this will also be seen as helping with our grade level standards, such as opinion or persuasion writing. As students read and discuss, they will have to form opinions, use critical thinking skills, write about

those opinions, which will enhance both their reading, writing, and speaking skills – all of which are important.

Ultimately, there is a lot of value within literature and how we pick what our students should be reading. As teachers we should only worry about the effect of literature on our students and no one else. The right choice of introducing some heavy material to children from a book that is from their reading level might not always be a popular choice. Throughout our class, I noticed we saw the most controversy with the LGBTQ section of our readings. Many were afraid of parent concerns, others were worried how it work to introduce a topic like that in a religious school, etc. As I was reflecting upon this, I went back to my understanding and interpretation of quality literature. I then reflected on every week. Was the reading meaningful, purposeful, attention grabbing, and educating about a subject with a lesson in mind – something to take away from the book? The answer is – yes. Each week was filled with literature that not many of us had read but were engaged in, it helped us look at different viewpoints in an educational way – which is exactly what I want my students to take away from the quality literature I choose for them.

Work Cited:

- Hintz, C., & Tribunella, E. (2013). *Reading Children's Literature*. Boston: Bedford.
- Smith, D. (1999). Speaking My Mind. *English Journal*.