

Come Together, Right Now, Over Me: Bridging the Gaps between Departments of Kinships

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One of my key projects as Director of English Education in my Department is to create courses bridging the unfortunate gap between Departments of Education and Departments of English. I now serve as liaison between these two departments at my four-year university, which means creating courses that connect literary theory with pedagogical methodology. Unfortunately, courses bridging this broad gap are very few in number, even when they are offered in English Departments. Many courses in English designed to bridge the gap between Education and English concentrate solely on presenting educational methods as they relate to the English classroom, whether Elementary or Secondary, ignoring literary theory, close reading skills, and the application of theory to literature.

I am convinced we can present both skill sets to students in such a way as to benefit prospective teachers by integrating literary skills of value to scholars of literature. As a mixed group of English teachers and English Education professors posit in *Language and Reflection: An Integrated Approach to Teaching English*, “[...] the job of the English teacher is to help students find the ways of learning, writing, and reading that work for them, rather than to impose ‘ideal’ ways on them” (73). Where many of our English courses fail prospective teachers is in a lack of focus upon teaching skills, and also in the well-meaning English professor’s unawareness

of political problems that will materialize for the first-year English teacher while said first-year teacher is choosing appropriate readings for students and meshing his/her (the teacher's) curriculum goals with district requirements. After all, we teach English. Many English professors never imagined high-school teaching as a career choice, and many would never set foot in public school, ever. In fairness, many of us didn't go to graduate school to engage with Secondary teachers at all. We wanted to read, write in our areas of specialization, get tenure, and live happily ever after. We live in the ivory tower where our decisions about what we teach is absolute. There is no committee we must consult. We are taken at our word as the highest professionals in the field. This is not always the case for the secondary school teacher. Those working in elementary and secondary schools must explain their curriculum choices (often at length). In other words, prospective teachers need to know how to articulate that their knowledge of Children's and Young Adult Literature is valid and that this knowledge should be both considered and respected when curriculum is being designed. In fact, it is not uncommon for first-year teachers to be called upon the summer before their teaching assignment to help develop English curriculum for the following year. Should this happen, prospective teachers should have something to say, and further, they should be able to use their knowledge of children and children's texts to create and implement a curriculum that not only looks good on paper to the administration, but that also serves child readers as they move through the intense psychological process of being a child, and of reading about it. The resistance between creating these types of courses stems from epistemological difference between English departments and Departments of Education. Admittedly, Secondary Education students in English courses can be

just as resistant to our ways of thinking. In short, they feel as though they cannot apply the skills we are teaching.

Presenting prospective teachers with theories that inform them of multiple readerships will help them to make informed decisions about what to read with their students and with their own children, and it will help them gain insight into the forces that are upon young children and adolescents because of societal pressure like the control and presentation of one's body. Therefore, this essay posits that creating courses in literature for children which address pedagogical concerns as well as the acquisition of literary analytical skills are now a necessary pedagogical move that English Departments should make in earnest. Further, I contend that such courses are possible despite the different goals and objectives existing between English Departments (where literature is studied in terms of analysis) and Departments of Elementary and Secondary Education (where Children's Literature courses deal with issues of literacy, reading, language arts pedagogy and comprehension). Furthermore, by exposing pre-service teachers to the art of close reading in our courses, we have the best possibility of escaping a troubling ideological pedagogy now seemingly naturalized over many decades of instruction: the deprivileging of any body type that is not the "norm."

I begin by assessing the necessary work of constructing hybrid courses to serve both sets of students (*ours* and *theirs*) via explaining how a resistance to literary theory is the first obstacle we must tackle, illuminating reasons for this resistance on the part of students who have chosen to pursue English/Secondary Education degrees rather than prepare for graduate study in English. I then move forward explaining why pushing against this resistance is so important: once we get students to understand there is a quantifiable result of learning the skills we are

asking them to learn, they can then use these skills to enact larger social change in their own classrooms. Finally, this essay concludes with several examples of specific texts, my own close reading and analysis, and further denotation as to why a blend of literary analysis and pedagogical theory is needed if both our future teachers and our students of literature are to become agents of real social change and start the needed work of deconstructing our societal absurdity of associating one's worth with the body one animates.

The Resistance to Theory

An observation I make while teaching classes in Children's Literature is that students want practical uses for the information that we give them. In fact, can we blame students for wanting to jump straight to what I would like to term the functionality (the practical uses of information in the outside world) of literature? We have, in essence, marketed collegiate education to students not so much as a process of developing skills for thinking and theorizing the world, but rather as the time in their lives where they will gain skills with which they will be able to function in the world at large. Certainly there is an argument that the latter two views of a college education should not necessarily exist in separate spaces. The fact is, however, that many of our students view college as a point-A-to-point-B experience, which closes their minds to ideas such as the theorization, explanation, and the deconstruction of points A and B. Admittedly, even when I was a doctoral student, there were times when the theorizing, or the "brainwork" of negotiating academia, became too much of a struggle. Most often, even though I would never admit this while interviewing for a position within academe, I just wanted to finish my degree and get on with my real life. So, I can on some levels understand the view of education that many of my students hold.

Further complicating the “typical” student demands for educational functionality is the fact that educational functionality varies from student to student. Though some will point toward a seeming paradox contained in the previous statement, I would argue that the “typical” student view, and the multiple implied functions, that is, the many different ways education can be used by many different students, are not separate. For our purposes here, let us give particular attention to the students who are most likely to appear in Children's Literature classes: Elementary and Early Childhood majors, English majors, and students of other majors who take Children's Literature classes as electives. These students, though different, can benefit from an exposure to literature in which embodiment issues are paramount, because most of these students will eventually be in positions to enact real social change via contact with students.

The majority of Elementary and Early Childhood education majors that I have encountered in my Children's Literature courses are concerned with teaching strategies, pedagogical theory, and the creation of hands-on assignments—things that can be kept and used in their own classrooms. Even now, I find myself constantly answering these questions, “How am I supposed to teach this?”; “How do we know the author intended this?”; and “Why would children have to analyze a text? Can't they just read for the sake of reading and for pleasure?” I always give some variation of the same answer: “Well, no, I am not saying that you should tell your 5th grade students about Lacan, or that you should point out just how odd it is that in *The Secret Garden* the first male figure that Mary Lennox takes seriously is named Dickon; but Lacanian theory will help you as a teacher to understand what might be happening to the child reader as she reads.”

I have two theories (read: guesses) about why many non-English majors react suspiciously to close readings of a text. My first guess is that many students naturally associate close reading with drudgery where readers assume the responsibility of “figuring out the text.” This approach is still being taught in high schools today, and our students are reacting so strongly against us because they feel that this approach didn't work for them in terms of any practical function when they were in high school so they are attempting to abandon it. They don't understand that we are using close readings for different reasons now, and that we no longer subscribe to what Kathleen McCormick, Gary Waller, and Linda Flower term the “old” method of reading in *Reading Texts: Reading, Responding, Writing*. It is no surprise then that students shut down when we ask them to do close readings because they have been taught under the “old” model, and they have been told that “[b]ecause texts are written by somebody, it seems equally commonsensical to assume that what is communicated comes ‘from’ a person somewhere ‘behind’ the text, the author” (5). Students want to know the function. Therefore, their usual response to Flower’s explanation is, “So what?” Arguably the response may sound flippant, but it is realistic. Of course, most literature can be applicable to one’s life. It is just that this applicability must be fully explained to students if we want them to “buy” it. Only when we explain to our students in Children's Literature courses that we are only using the tenets of the “old” way in order to help them arrive at the “new” way of reading will close reading and the application of theory begin to make sense to them. Therefore, I strongly agree with what McCormick and her colleagues explain is the “new” way of reading where “[r]eading is not a passive activity in which you just take in information [but] rather it is always an active one in which, whether consciously or not, you create your version of the text [because] what is literally

‘in’ a text is, of course, a lot of pages with black marks on them, pages of what linguists call signifiers that you, the reader, attach to signifieds” (6). What I want to do is make students aware that the value that they place on the fully functional body covered by white skin feels “right” because it has been naturalized and that they can deprogram their students by exposing them to literature that deals with various body types. What prospective teachers can learn to do is recognize societal viewpoints about marked embodiment that are reflected in literature and use that knowledge to help students in their own classrooms who might be victims of this unfairness. And, perhaps, these students will grow into adults who are at least aware of their bodily issues and will strive to correct their misconceptions and prejudices, rather than directing their energies of correction onto the bodies themselves.

Elementary and Early Childhood majors might also have problems discussing texts where bodily issues are central because pre-service teachers realize that curriculum in the public schools is largely “controlled”—that they will only be allowed to “plug in” a minimal amount of creativity into a skeletal curriculum guide that has been created for them by educational administrators, department chairs, and state agencies. If this is true, then it only makes sense that prospective teachers might sit in our courses preoccupied mostly with how the literature that they will be responsible for teaching fits into a state-approved curriculum model. We would do better to explain at length as does Gunther Kress in *Writing the Future: English and the Making of a Culture of Innovation*,

From a pedagogical point of view it is the English teacher's role, like that of any teacher, to make accessible knowledges, materials and resources which a child can use in their own making of themselves as a human social subject. The question, however, is precisely this: what kind of social

subject do we imagine, and what therefore should these knowledges, materials, resources be? In other words: what is English? And what does the English curriculum have as its goal for the young people who experience it? (5)

The reality of curriculum implementation in elementary, intermediate, and secondary schools is that most decisions have been made for teachers before they even arrive back to school for the new academic year. This continues and is reinforced in many ways by current pedagogical theory, which is presented not in the same ways that critical theories are presented in English Departments.

A final complication for the prospective teachers who enroll in children's literature courses is that their coursework in Education has more to do with creating tools to help others to construct knowledge, and less to do with gaining tools to construct knowledge for themselves. I do not in any way not to discredit what is happening in Departments of Curriculum and Instruction. I simply want to acknowledge the contrast in “need” between different types of students I have encountered while teaching children's literature courses. Moreover, because many of my students are prospective teachers, they concern themselves primarily with the creation of projects and the acquisition of materials that can be used at a later date during their teaching careers. They find little or no use for traditional literary analysis, because it doesn't seem to produce a tangible product. And although we can explain that literary analysis is a skill that can be taken into elementary and secondary school teaching careers, the fact that literary analysis and close reading skills are not something that can be physically carried from place to place might make them seem unnecessary to those outside of our field. To mediate this “problem” in my courses, I place equal amount of the course grades upon projects that help

students to generate “stuff.” This isn’t just so they will have materials to use once they leave my course, but rather so they will have materials that they can use to formulate and articulate their own pedagogical moves: what texts they will have their students read and why. For example, my students are often required to do group presentations in which they cover a five-year period in which the Caldecott (annual award for excellence in a children’s picture book) and Newbery (annual award for excellence in novels for children or young adults) Medals were awarded. Not only were they required to “report” on the texts that won these respective medals during the assigned years, but they are also required to present historical background for certain years and to speculate on just how these historical events may have influenced the production of these texts. I require that the projects start with the year 1980 so that students naturally find multicultural texts that center around children who have various body types. This way, students have to articulate why they would, or why they would not, include certain texts in their classrooms.

I expose my students to close reading as an ethos builder. I present many of the critical theories that we study in our field of English as critical knowledge that is required of professionals both within the field of children's literature and in the field of education. Once students understand that theory serves a function that is specifically applicable to their work in a professional setting, there will hopefully be much less resistance. Prospective teachers who are going into classrooms, whether they are collegiate, secondary, or elementary classrooms, need to understand that they will have to justify their selection of texts. They will not gain ethos as professionals if they simply assert that they want to teach *The Secret Garden* because it is a “classic” children's text, or because they read it as a child. No, they will have to be able to

articulate that their selection is based upon something, whether that something is the child reader's psychological processes as they negotiate childhood, or the acquisition of literacy for the child. Our prospective teachers must know that teachers at all levels are always being asked to explain themselves, especially in the teaching profession where assessment is "the" world of the millennium.

Don't Deconstruct Me, Doesn't Anyone Just Read for Pleasure Anymore?

Though the term "close reading" has come to have a negative connotation because of its attachments to the New Critics, we would do well to remember that "[t]oday, defenders of theory tend to equate the New Criticism itself with unreflective empiricism, but in its time the movement stood for theoretical reflection against the primitive accumulation of data," as Gerald Graff informs us in his book *Professing Literature* (141). In my courses, I actively seek to diffuse the danger that the incorporation of contemporary literary, race, cultural, and psychoanalytic theories will seem like an attack on those who are learning about them because, again, they are presented as a much-needed pedagogical tool that allows the professional to evaluate various readerships.

I explain to the prospective teachers in my courses at the outset that professional educators *must* make themselves aware of various readerships. Not only does this awareness help those training to become teachers at various levels, but it also helps these courses connect to other courses that students may be taking, which will aid students in their recognition that close, analytical readings of a text need not be separate from the development of curriculum. I can usually help students to make this connection as we read texts like *Nappy Hair*. Before starting

the various readings of the text, I explain to my students that the controversy surrounding the book may have been avoided if the teacher at the center of the controversy who introduced it to her elementary school classroom had been aware of a different readership of this text. In no way am I suggesting that this teacher made the “wrong” decision, because I truly believe that her intentions were good, but had she been aware of several lenses through which the text can be seen, she might have been able to present the text in a way that might have resonated with the African-American parents of the students in her classroom. Either way, her pedagogy would have been more effective with greater awareness of how different people read and what is valued in particular literatures for particular cultures.

Learning to Read and the Introduction of Theory

We must stop ignoring the practice of learning to read or becoming literate and the role that the acquisition of literacy plays in the way students react to theory, close reading skills, and how they pass these skills onto their students. Bridge courses should also go beyond literary analysis, perhaps even making connections between protagonists found in literature and the students that prospective teachers will be teaching. According to the contentions of Paulo Freire and Donaldo Macedo in *Literacy: Reading, the Word and the World*, “An individual may use language in the process of self-expression and world-expression, of creating and re-creating, of deciding and choosing and ultimately participating in society's historical process” (60). I once had a conversation with a well-published scholar in the field of Children's Literature about whether or not she should put *Push* on a syllabus for her adolescent literature course. This colleague seemed very concerned that this novel would be a tough read, especially since she was teaching at a conservative university in the south at the time. Further, she was concerned that the

language in the text would overshadow the close analytical work in which she would like her students to engage. But my stance on the issue was that she should most certainly include this text if for no other reason than to let prospective teachers know that students like Precious do indeed exist. This fact will be a surprise for most of them because many of the prospective teachers whom we see in our classes seem to assume the students in their own classrooms will be as white and able-bodied as the characters that they have been reading about for most of their own childhoods. We must tell our students that this is not the case—that the all-white, able-bodied classroom does not exist—so they don't go into shock as they are interviewing for positions as teachers. Moreover, the invisible, able-bodied protagonist is not a trump card in his or her positionality in literature either.

To further aid students in making connections between the literary characters and their own potential students, bridge courses may also require students to complete mandatory observation hours so that they see how the literature that we present to them is received by actual children in school settings. These observations will help prospective teachers get used to being around kids of difference races and perhaps even make them aware that different children have different needs. In addition, observation hours would help traditional English students see just how literary protagonists and antagonists mirror real-world children. Observation hours can be summarized in a weekly journal where students record their own reactions to literature, speculating upon the ways that actual children would react to characters in the text, how they will deal with these reactions and how they will use them in their teaching.

Are You Saying We Should Make Our Field “Education Friendly”?

I remember a conversation with a colleague about whether or not we should make extraordinary efforts to reach students from Departments of Education with our courses in children's literature. Dr. "No" stated emphatically that we should not change our courses in any way, and that it is the responsibility of the students themselves to adapt to "our ways of doing things." However, I cannot help but feel as though this stance will leave students feeling isolated and embarrassed—not the way that prospective teachers are supposed to feel. After all, prospective teachers are going to be teaching our children; how can we reasonably shun any activity that would help them develop their pedagogies? Why would we want to ignore genuine opportunities to make connections between their educational coursework and our own? What better way to open up ideological windows than to demonstrate, through literature, to the prospective teachers of the nation that there is a need for social change? And, although I do not agree with many of my colleagues who feel as though we should not strive to serve the Elementary Education and Early Childhood major, I can understand where the strong reaction against making children's literature classes "Education-major-friendly" comes from. In truth, such resistance towards addressing pedagogical issues in children's literature classrooms stems from the fact that our field is so new and is, at times, still striving to gain the respect of "traditional" literature in Departments across the country. Many instructors of children's literature may feel as though they would be "watering down" the course should they incorporate pedagogical strategies for teachers in their courses. This pressure, real or imagined, to uphold high standards in children's literature by ignoring pedagogical concerns is affecting the way we teach children's literature courses; and thus, it is affecting the way teachers are trained. For example, in her article "Young Adult Literature Evades the Theorists," Caroline Hunt describes

the field of children's literature as one that has lacked much application of theory because most of the students that we encounter are involved in teacher-certification programs. Hunt posits that although the field has at times been lacking in the application of theoretical concepts, we have now "learned [our] field, have justified [our] existence, and can now go on towards theory if [we] wish" (8). I would argue, however, that the use of theory when reading texts, and then having discussions about the pedagogical implications of that theory, is exactly what we should be doing, especially with texts that make us aware of our societal views of the body and of embodiment. The negative feelings about incorporating pedagogical strategies arise from an uncanny fear that if we begin to concentrate too much on the needs of the students in certification programs, we may fail to do what must be done so that we may still locate children's literature inside English Departments. What I wish to contend here is that this negative view of serving the multitude of students from Educational Departments is rooted in an false notion: that the way we read literature in English Departments cannot be used in pedagogical ways. In fact, it is this false logic that serves to further separate the two Departments. Feelings of separatism, of, "we do this here," and "they do 'that' over 'there'" is exactly what drives the rift between the departments in the first place. And, arguably, the incorporating of pedagogical theory does not take away from the merits of literary theory, or dumb down children's literature in the process. If anything, the incorporation of pedagogical theory serves to make children's literature as a newly emergent field even more complex, as does the incorporation of psychoanalytical, feminist, and Marxist theory that has been so readily accepted. Again, close reading and perhaps even the application of various theories is exactly what we should be presenting to students of children's literature whether they are involved in

teacher-certification programs or not. Where I differ from many of my colleagues is not in the matter of what we teach when we teach children's literature, but rather how.

A Responsibility to Culture at Large

In dealing with this issue of what to teach in my children's literature courses, I choose texts that naturally skew discussion toward the responsibility of a subject to his/her culture at large. This is not to say that I focus my course on what teachers should bring to the culture, but rather upon information that will make my students aware of their own subject positions, the social orders at work upon those subject positions, and even the ideological constructs that inform and reinforce their positionality as subjects. What students in my courses, specifically prospective teachers, do with this information is a decision that must be made themselves. By taking this stance, I am not attempting to ignore the fact that everything that happens in a course is political and that even my selection of texts is influenced in many ways by my own political and ideological biases; however, I do not advocate activism, which is to say that I hold a strong pedagogical belief that one must establish his or her own responsibility to the culture at large, and then negotiate a subject position accordingly in ways that produce the desired results, or lack thereof. I argue here that prospective teachers have some degree of responsibility to both culture and to society at large, but to lay out specific criteria would be against my pedagogical beliefs in that once we define what one's responsibility to culture actually is, then we have failed to deconstruct the notion of just who defines culture, and cultural "normity" in the first place.

Perhaps my own pedagogy might be best theorized by evaluating the types of texts that I choose each semester. I try not to choose texts that will reinforce my own political agenda, though is difficult. Instead, I choose texts that will allow students in the course to question what

we value as a culture, why such things are valued, who sets the value, and most specifically, how does this privileging, or deprivileging, affect the institution of American childhood as we know it. Julie Briggs tells us in her essay “Critical Opinion: Reading Children’s Books” in *Only Connect: Readings on Children’s Literature*, “The role of children’s books within the wider process of education, and in particular self-education, is of such importance that it has tended to eclipse their study as works of imagination with a history and taxonomy worth exploration, displaying complex significances that different critical approaches might unpack” (19).

Therefore, in my courses, we do not do readings of literature and apply theory solely for the sake of doing so. We strive to investigate just what texts tell us about the construction of the American child, and what these constructions say about us as a society. Further, we investigate what role the body plays in the entrance into adulthood and what we may do to make sure that those whose bodies differ from the norm have a chance to enjoy privileged positionality as well.

Specifically, hybrid courses interact with theory for me as they give me the ability to demonstrate my understandings about the young protagonist who animates what I term the “marked body” and use it to help teachers understand that we all have bodily issues, and that until we face these issues, those who animate marked bodies will never be given full consideration as adult subjects. In short, those who animate marked bodies are trapped in societal abjection. They are pushed away from the mainstream and marginalized to the borders of our ideological constructs. This happens, I suppose, because of a Western male, phallic preoccupation with embodiment seen from the ancient Greeks, and blatantly on display in Renaissance texts. The deprivileging of the marked body happens in favor of what I have termed the invisible body. Those who enjoy invisibility move freely throughout society gaining all

attendant privileged status. They never think of their embodiment as they need not define or code it in any formal declaration. To be sure, the invisible body is white, male, heterosexual, married, and Christian. To the extent that your body opposes the invisible body, it is to that degree that you are marked. Another way of saying it is thus: white, male, phallic sexuality never seeks to define itself in specific terms. It asserts itself quietly, invisibly. Meanwhile, marked bodies must define for not only ideological placement, but also for survival. Marked peoples cluster together and rally around commonality in the hopes that their self-recognition or acknowledgment of self-worth might bleed over onto invisible America.

When prospective teachers inevitably confront societal issues concerning those with marked bodies, they will then need tools to deal with those issues, which is why literature for children in which characters are marked can be used to dispel many of our inappropriate prejudices that revolve around embodiment issues. Moreover, my hope is that my students, especially those who are prospective teachers, will use the knowledge that we create about the marked body in their own teaching and interaction with children. This is the only way that we will begin to move toward an establishment of society where bodily type is not a primary qualifier of positive social recognition.

For our purposes here let us examine *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* and *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*, each of which are texts that I have used to theorize my pedagogical stance that students should be forced to confront the sensitive subject of depending upon one's body to negotiate childhood head-on. Close readings of these texts might aid pre-service teachers as they work to shift their ideology away from a belief that the disabled or marked body is less than a body that might be considered invisible.

In *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, we are introduced to Harry Potter, a wizard who must master certain skills before he is allowed to achieve a privileged subject position during his adult life. The various tests and trials through which Harry must go are similar to the rites of passage that children and adolescent subjects must skillfully negotiate in our own society if they are to be considered fully functional adults. The similarities between Harry's "adulthood training" and that of children in the non-magical world are still based on ideological constructs and belief systems. Thus, it is important that I help students make the connection between what Harry must do, how he does it, how his actions are similar to children of similar cultures in the real world, and which choices may or may not be possible for certain children. Undeniably, bodily issues are still paramount to Harry's positionality. In Harry's world, his entrance into adulthood depends upon a mastery of phallic symbols: his broomstick, his wand, and his balls while playing a game called Quidditch. Though these exact symbols are not the same in our own world, the fact that a mastery of the phallus is required to enter adulthood is a reality.

Now, am I saying that prospective teachers should explain this to their seventh grade Language Arts classes? No! What I am suggesting is that children's literature can be used in bridge courses to highlight and address the fact that children make the recognition from an early age that bodily control is a key factor for a person to gain privileged positionality. Prospective teachers can then use this information to decide whether or not they wish to change our constructions of childhood and adulthood. This will give students in children's literature classes various ways to look at and to evaluate literature so that they may become better readers, and in turn help young readers do the same.

A favorite text that I use when explaining the pedagogical uses of children's literature is *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*. Because many of my students have grown up in a postmodern world, it is imperative to me that they are exposed to some postmodernist theory in my bridge courses. Specifically, this text takes a story that has been told one way for years, and changes the reader's point of view so that s/he is forced to identify with the wolf, who is usually presented as both "big" and "bad." What we learn about the wolf is that he is neither "big" nor "bad" in his own viewpoint and that all of his "mischievous" doings happen for a particular reason—his labeling as a "big bad Wolf" is a big misunderstanding. This is very much in line with postmodernist theories in that what postmodernist theories seek to articulate is the various points of view of every individual. To this end, no one experiences the world in the same way, and therefore societal labels such as "right" and "wrong" are only constructions that are reinforced by ideology. In short, we are making it all up, and there is really no way to look at the world objectively. Several will argue with me here citing the need for labels such as "right," "wrong," "good," and "bad" if for no other reason than to keep social order. However, I am not advocating that we dismiss the need for ideological constructs and belief systems which reinforce what we have chosen to label "order," but rather what I wish to do is make readers aware that our ideological constructs are just that: constructs. I don't want my students to go out and burn bras, flags, or campus buildings in protest. I only want them to know that the symbolic order—those symbols, ideologies, and structures that we have agreed upon as "proper"—can and will change at any time should we, as a society, choose such change. In other words, if a system isn't working for us, we can change—an idea that is empowering at the very least for both the future literature teacher, and for her or his students.

Lastly, I would like to make it clear that most of what I do in my children's literature courses is aimed at all readers, but specifically at teachers of children's literature because they will be called upon to justify their own pedagogical decisions about what they make their students read, and what they do not. Perhaps this is why I take so much care in choosing texts that can be used to do close readings, and to which various literary theories may be applied. This issue usually comes up at least twice each semester, usually when a student questions my intentions for asking her to do such close readings of a text. I may be asked, "How do we know that this is what the author intended?" "Don't people just read for fun anymore?" or, as I was during the spring 2002 semester, "Why can't Harry's broomstick just be a fucking broomstick?" All three of these are good questions, and here is my answer: I believe that confronting students with difficult readings of texts helps them to theorize their own teaching. It helps them understand the concept of multiple readerships. Moreover, students need to know that not every text is read in the same way by different people. According to reader response theory, each text is different each time it is read depending upon who is reading, and what that particular person is bringing to the text, which can be both positive and negative. Just as *Nappy Hair* was barred from some schools, similarly, as a seventh grade teacher in Texas, I was not allowed to bring in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* because of the element of wizardry and magic. However, when questioned about why I wanted to incorporate the text, I wasn't limited to answers like "uh...because I really like it," or "because everybody is reading it." Rather, I could articulate that Harry's development as a pre-adolescent trying to negotiate his way out of childhood goes through a series of developmental rites of passage that mirrors those that are being set before many of the seventh grade students that I would be teaching that year. Further, I could also

articulate that bodily issues are very important to the target audience for this text, and that negotiating the control of one's own body is of serious importance for pre-adolescent and adolescent children as they make their way into adulthood. Now, this answer may or may not convince school boards, parents, and others who oppose controversial books for certain reasons, but it sounds a lot better than saying "my students read *Harry Potter* because I like it."

In my classes, I want my students to be able to intelligently articulate when asked why they choose one text over another. Thus, they can make informed decisions when reading children's texts and when teaching them. Prospective teachers will need to know how other people are reading so that they can themselves justify the texts that they choose to include in their classrooms. In the 21st century, it will no longer suffice for a teacher to say that she is teaching *The Secret Garden* because it is a "classic," or that she read it as a child, and so it must be "okay." Nor will teachers be able to say that they won't teach *The Cat in the Hat Comes Back* because it encourages children to misbehave. Although educational theorists have long required rationales for teaching texts, with the goal that reading a text could initiate an observable change in students—increased vocabulary, writing better sentences, or even being more aware of bodily issues, pre-service teachers should be more involved in the choices of texts used in their classrooms so that they are not completely influenced to let practical uses of literature in school neglect both aesthetics and pleasure.

As I continue to teach in the field of children's literature, I hope to use the close readings of text, coupled with theory, to bridge this gap between Departments of English and Departments of Education, helping prospective teachers to effect social change. Although I do not advocate that our courses be located within the same departments, or even within the same paradigms, I do

feel as though a common interest between these two departments is the successful training of prospective teachers and those who will work with and teach literature to children.

Works Cited

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