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STUDENT LEARNING & CHILDHOOD | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Educative experiences in picture books

Peggy Albers*, Tuba Angay-Crowder, Caleb Collier, Cindy Fujimoto, Myoung Eun Pang, & Jee Hye Park

Abstract: This study explored the educative experiences in award-winning children's picture books. Two questions framed a critical content analysis and critical visual discourse analysis approach: "What educative experiences do characters have in award-winning picture books?" and "To what extent are these experiences valuable and useful?" Using John Dewey's theory of education, this article analyzed 132 picture books that received a Caldecott, Choice Book, or Jane Addams award between from 2008 to 2017. This article more closely analyzed books that in which characters had educative and mis-educative experiences. Findings indicate that educative experiences arise from significant experiences, and characters' experiences carry positive messages but are mis-educative. Identification of educative experiences supports educators' approaches to reading award-winning children's literature, identifying significant experiences, and understanding how these experiences become critical and democratic approaches to children's learning.

Keywords: award-winning picture books; educative experiences; children's books.

In the early part of the 20th century, John Dewey, a noted philosopher argued that the purpose of education should have both a personal and a societal aim for the learner. He built his theory of experience (1938) around the everyday world, what humans have access to and how they interact within these spaces, and which experiences he considered valuable and useful. For Dewey, an educative experience is one in which humans make a connection between what we do to something and its subsequent consequences, an interaction with the environment that is complex, fluid, and continuous. He used the example of a child who walks into a room with a lit candle. The child reaches out to touch the flame which causes pain. This experience is educative when the child realizes that the pain from the burn is a result of touching the flame, and that if done again, will have the same consequences. This interaction is much more complex, Dewey would argue, than a mere stimulus response. This experience occurs naturally, and through reflection, in which the child learns about the interaction of flesh and flame, will become useful in future encounters. From Dewey's perspective, then, an educative experience is rooted in past, current, and future experiences, and activity and environment are part of a continually interacting circuit. These natural interactions with the everyday world and learning through and in them are what formed the crux of Dewey's theory of experience.

We signify the importance of Dewey's concept of educative experiences as important to children's literature to understand this "circuit" in the everyday interactions of characters in picture books. We wanted to study characters' experiences, the interactions that comprise them, and to what extent characters' experiences are educative. Dewey's theory offers a unique perspective on the extent to which picture books, and the characters in them, embody educative experiences. To explore this idea, we studied the following questions: What educative experiences do characters have in award-winning picture books? and To what extent are these experiences valuable and useful? Our purpose in studying these questions opens up a different dialogue about picture books to understand to how authors and illustrators convey "experience" through image and word. We suggest that such a study is critical in the extent to which these experiences are valuable and useful.

1. Dewey's Theory of Experience

Dewey's theory of experience (1938) arises from his work with children's learning in the Lab School at the University of Chicago during 1896-1916. A foundational principle guiding his theory of experience was the "... organic connection between education and personal experience" (p. 25). Dewey continued, while "all genuine education comes about through experience (this) does not mean that all experiences are genuinely or equally educative" (p. 25). He argued in his *Philosophy of Education* (2008) that an experience is comprised of a myriad of different interactions. Having an experience is continuous as there is always interaction happening around the self. Dewey likened having an experience to having a friend or having a good time and is not a possession as in having a car. As experiences are continuous, there are no stopgaps or holes in the experience but have, as Dewey argued, "pauses, places of rest, but they punctuate and define the quality of movement" (2008, p. 36).

For Dewey, the quality of an experience could be assessed for its educative value through two principles, continuity and interaction. The principle of continuity suggests that the quality of the present experience can be assessed by how it informs future experiences (for better or for worse), the direction or where the experience is going (for better or for worse), and whether it fosters growth. In other words, while an experience is whole in and of itself, this experience is integrated into a stream of experiences, and each experience has a unity and identity: "that haircut," "that march," "that shopping experience." In Dewey's principle of interaction, aspects and elements of the self and the surrounding conditions generate emotions and ideas so that conscious intent emerges. This interaction between the internal (self) and external (environment) is what Dewey called a "situation," a dynamic between the two. The quality of the experience, then, is assessed by the relationship between the subject and the environment.

Educative experiences also have purpose. Dewey (1938) distinguishes purpose from impulse and desire. A purpose has an end-view generated from observation that recognizes the significance of what one sees, and foresight of consequences which will result from the experience. On the other hand, impulse and desire lack reflection on the experience, and often do not generate growth. The difference between purpose and impulse/desire is that purpose has a plan or a method of action that takes into account the possible consequences of the experience and the surrounding conditions. As Dewey wrote, if a person has an impulse to build a house, for example, this requires careful planning and thought, a floorplan, financial support to build the house, among other factors. If the person does not take into consideration these factors, the person's desire will not lead to purpose. For Dewey, for impulse to transform into purpose three conditions must exist: 1) observation of surrounding conditions; 2) knowledge of and/or recall of what has happened in the past in similar situations; and 3) judgement that puts together observation and recall to see what they signify (pp. 68-69).

Experiences, Dewey stated, can also be mis-educative. A mis-educative experience is one that stops or distorts growth of further experience. "An experience may be such as to engender callousness; it may produce lack of sensitivity and of responsiveness. Then the possibilities of having richer experience in the future are restricted" (pp. 25-26). Experiences can also be mis-educative when no growth in the character is evident or can be foreseen at the end of the experience or story.

While Dewey presented his theory of experience as direction for teachers in classrooms with children, this theory can be contextualized in picture books. With Dewey's theory of experience in mind, readers can assess the quality of the experiences that characters have. Are they purposeful, valuable and useful experiences? Do characters act on impulse and desire? What methods of action do characters have in their experiences? Do they reflect and grow from their story world experiences? By studying experiences of characters in the story world in this way provides another perspective on surrounding conditions and how characters act within them.

2. Literature Review

Children's literature scholars have suggested that genuine education in children's award-winning picture books comes about when children are engaged in connecting books to the real world. Picture books are a major means of transmitting cultural heritage, history, societal ideologies, values, beliefs, and practices and knowledge about a range of topics (Albers, 1996; Banks, 1992; Crisp & Hiller, 2011a, b; Marshall, 2004; Norton, 1999), and which can have a profound effect on children's "conception of socially accepted roles and values" (Crisp & Hiller, 2011b, p. 198). From a critical perspective, picture books that address social issues invite readers to engage in critical discussion of complex issues of race, class, and gender, and position them to take on social action (Albers, 2009; Albers, Vasquez, & Harste, 2011; Lewison, Leland, &

Harste, 2018). Award winning picture books, especially, hold great capital. They are on many recommended lists, are those in library collections, and frequently purchased because of the award (Clark, 1992).

Across the decades, scholars have examined social markers and issues including gender, race, religion, death, material culture, among others within award-winning picture books (c.f., Almerico, 2014; Albers, 1996; Brooks & McNair, 2015; Crabb & Marchiano, 2011; Crisp & Hiller, 2011a, b; Marshall, 2004; Wiseman, 2013). Brooks and McNair examined how Black hair was theorized and represented across six picture books. They found historical connections between Black hair and African American history, hair as a bonding experience, and that all hair is good. Crabb and Marchiano studied division of labor in terms of gender keeping in mind historical context. They found that “picture books promote a stereotypical gender-marking system and division of labor” (p. 391) that has remained stable for 70 years. Wiseman did a close study of three picture books on death and dying and concluded that these stories offer a bridge to children’s understanding of grief and loss. Other researchers documented that minoritized populations as well as culturally and racially diverse characters in children’s books remain largely unrecognized by “mainstream” awards like Caldecott but recognize the importance of sharing children’s literature that is highly diverse (Colabucci, & Napoli, 2017; Jimenez, 2015; Martinez, Koss, & Johnson, 2016; Moffett, 2016; Taber, 2015; Tang, 2013; Wee, Park, & Choi, 2015). Martinez et al., studied Caldecott picture books and found that in the last 15 years there were no Asian or Native American characters, and only one Latino/a main character. In the past five years, all but two books were set in the US. They concluded that Caldecott books do not represent contemporary global society, and children need to see themselves in these books, as well as “need windows to see worlds different from their own” (p. 25). In his study of Caldecott books, Crisp and Hiller (2011a) found no books that testify to the existence of LGBT people or diverse queer identities (Lester, 2014). In Chaudhri’s (2016) study of Scholastic Book Reading club forms, this research found that in the few books that feature Native Americans, they “are woefully misrepresentative of culturally authentic Native American experiences” (p. 33). This group of researchers has been informative to understand the extent to which picture books reflect larger societal issues, and shape young readers’ understandings of societal discourses and issues. We have seen no study that has addressed the educative experiences that characters have in their everyday story world. As such, we build upon this excellent work in critically analyzing picture books by studying educative experiences in award-winning picture books, and to what extent the experiences of characters are valuable or useful, and speak to the larger societal issues identified by the aforementioned scholars.

2. Methodology

This study, part of a larger on-going study that started in Fall 2016, was a qualitative content analysis of approximately 132 picture books that received the Caldecott, Choice Book Awards, or Jane Addams award since 2008. This study focused on identifying to what extent characters experiences were educative in these books. We investigated two general questions: What educative experiences do characters have picture books? and To what extent are these experiences valuable and useful? We selected award-winning picture books as they often have the largest readership and were readily available in our local libraries. This research team of six included two European Americans, one Japanese American, two Koreans, and one Turk; we were five females and one male. Our cultural and gendered perspectives provided rich multicultural discussions to our readings and analysis.

2.1. Procedures, data collection & analysis

We met bimonthly to generate and discuss categories and draw findings from this work, focusing on additional 10 books per meeting. Our first meeting generated initial categories, and additional categories added as we added books to our study. Using a constant comparative approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), we aimed at understanding of educative recursively across picture books. With each meeting, we refined our definition of “educative experiences”. Our unit of analysis, both in written text and in illustration, identified how characters experienced continuity, or how an experience informed future actions, and interaction, or how the character interacted within her/his/it’s environment to produce an experience.

We employed critical content analysis (Beach, Enciso, Harste, Jenkins, Raina & Rogers, 2009) and critical visual discourse analysis (CVDA) (Albers, Vasquez, & Harste, 2011) to guide our analysis. According to Beach et al. (2009) critical content analysis is a conceptual approach to studying what a text is about and involves close readings of small amounts of text interpreted by an analyst. What makes a content analysis critical is how the data are analyzed through a specific theoretical lens that allows for “understanding of texts and readings of these texts in the social, cultural, and political contexts in which they are considered” (p. 130). For example, in *Each Kindness* (Woodson, 2013), we coded

"Each kindness, Mrs. Albert had said, makes the whole world a little bit better.", as direct teaching, Mrs. Alberto directly pointed out Chloe's lack of kindness, and taught Chloe to understand the concept of kindness in the larger context of the world. Chloe's experience was educative as she learned how her ignoring Maya, a child in poverty, helped her about being kind in future.

We also used CVDA to structurally and critically examine images and the cultural and social assumptions and discourses that underpinned them. What makes visual discourse analysis critical, like content analysis, is the specific theoretical lens through which data are interpreted by an analyst in the social, cultural, and political contexts in which characters are visually represented. To identify educative experiences in illustrations using CVDA, we studied how characters were illustrated in interaction with the environment, how the experiences were educative (for better or worse) guided by Deweyan principles, and how valuable or useful they were. Structurally, we studied how illustrators used size, volume, colors, object placement, gaze (among other syntactical arrangements) to understand how the experience was emphasized, how characters responded to these experiences, and to consider questions that engage a critical perspective: How does the illustrator visually express experience? What is included? What is excluded? What are the social meanings that objects take on in the image? What commonplace assumptions emerge in an image? Both methods of analysis were in complement; critical content analysis enabled us to study written text and CVDA enabled us to study the images. Both word and image are important to how and what children read in picture books, and the discourses that underpin the stories.

We started our study with 10 books from three awards: Caldecott, Choice Book Awards, and Jane Addams. Each researcher read all of these books, and each researcher was responsible for closer readings of two of books. We included both human and nonhuman characters in our study of these picture books. Each researcher presented her/his interpretations of their picture books to the research team. The group discussed these interpretations alongside their own readings to build consensus around what experiences that characters had in the picture book could be called "educative." We began to develop categories around types and quality of educative experiences. We refined these categories as we discussed the remaining picture books such as did the character have an educative experience through direct teaching, or when a character learned through another character's instruction or ideas; indirect teaching or through watching others or engaging in an experience that shifted how a character thought and/or acted; interactions with other characters in which the collaborative experience shifted how a character acted and/or thought. We discussed the extent to which the experience was educative and its purpose, or how what was learned by the character informed future actions and/or the extent to which the character learned through interaction with the environment. We studied character's nonverbal/body/face responses alongside the dialogue between and among characters, and the narrative. As we read, we designed a spreadsheet to capture these categories and which allowed us to expand the categories as new examples of Dewey's theory of educative experiences emerged across picture books.

These discussions enabled us to understand the concept of how the story world (James, 2015) represents, for better or worse, "educative". This concept included our study of how characters responded with others and through the environment that might inform how children may read the experiences of characters and what illustrators and writers of picture books may want them to learn.

3. Findings

Our research questions precipitated two findings: 1) Educative experiences arise from significant experiences; and 2) Characters' experiences carry positive messages but are mis-educative.

3.1. Character experiences are educative and purposeful in picture books with social justice themes

Across books, we identified ten of books we considered social justice, especially the Jane Addams award. In award-winning books that address the human condition, issues of social justice, equality, and civil rights, characters' experiences were educative and purposeful. In books that addressed themes of social justice, equality, civil rights, especially those in the Jane Addams award, characters overcame a social and political issue. The experiences in these books were educative for a number of reasons. In these books, characters' growth and educative experiences started with a critical experience in the past that prompted a desire to take action in the future. Characters' initial experiences elicited a strong, dynamic, and reflective emotional connection with the surrounding conditions that moved characters into action, based in previous experiences, with clear plans for future action.

In *New Shoes* (Meyer, 2016), Ella Mae, the main character had one critical experience, shoe shopping with her mother, that connected strongly with her. They entered Mr. Johnson's store; he looked but did not greet them. A white girl and her father also entered the store shortly after, and Mr. Johnson attended to them immediately. Ella Mae observed the relationship between the white family and Mr. Johnson, "Weren't we here first?" Visually, the mother, her body slightly bent, faced Ella Mae, placed her index finger on her lips to quiet her daughter. Facing towards the left, the mother signified what is "given," that African Americans always must wait. Ella Mae, with arms folded in defiance and in a strong upright stance, looked down and not at her mother. Fitted only from a drawing of Ella Mae's feet, Ella Mae and her mother leave the store with shoes that Ella Mae could not try on. Ella Mae shared this experience with her friend, Charlotte, who had a similar experience with Mr. Johnson. For them, reflection on their past experiences-initiated desire in Ella Mae and Charlotte to do something, opening their own neighborhood shoe store in which people can try on shoes before they buy them. Their desire takes on purpose. Together, they devised a plan to address the consequences of their end-view, money and shoes, and taking into consideration the surrounding conditions, folks' shortage of money and the opportunity to try on shoes. Their plan was moved into action: "They do chores. We scrub, we pick the last green beans, we mind babies." They worked "for a nickel and a pair of outgrown shoes." The quality of the experience in Mr. Johnson's shoe store was strong and was educative; it prompted Ella Mae and Charlotte into reflective and purposeful planning that shifted the surrounding conditions for others in their neighborhood.

In *Mama's Nightingale* (Danticat, 2015; Jane Addams), Saya had a significant experience, visiting her mother in jail. In Saya and Papa's visit to the jail, Saya cried when she had to leave her mother. The guards told Papa that Saya could come again if she cried. This past experience with the guard informed the second visit in which she did her best "not to cry." This experience was educative, valuable and useful. Reflection on the guards' response to her crying, Saya realized that the consequence of not seeing her mother outweighed her desire to cry. Through observation, Saya learned that prison guards and prisons do not tolerate crying children. Albeit useful and valuable information, Saya grows in her knowledge that crying would not allow future visits to her mother and an understanding of prisons and attempts to understand the injustice of her mother's imprisonment. Visually, there were two images that reference the prison visit. As the center of attention, Saya is nestled between her father and mother who leans in humming in Saya's ear, signifying a critical relationship and experience between Saya and her mother. In the second image, Saya's extreme grief is emphasized by the multiple right and left arms, her open mouth, and crescent eyes. With her body turned to the left, Saya is in a "given or known" experience, one that has occurred before. Like Ella Mae in *New Shoes* (Meyer, 2016), Saya experience is educative demonstrating a strong emotional and reflective connection that leads to future growth.

Delivering Justice (Haskins, 2008) is a true story of a mail carrier, Westley Wallace Law, and his determination to bring about change in his community. This picture book had a number of valuable and useful experiences, all of which built on the previous one: storytelling, shopping, schooling, praying, voting, being a mail carrier, training others, sit-ins, boycotting, picketing, peaceful protesting. From his first educative experience, listening to Old John's stories of slavery, to his last, eliminating segregation through peaceful protesting, Westley showed continual growth towards his end-view, to see segregation abolished in Savannah. The quality of each experience was more complex and impactful. Westley's initial experience with Old John's stories of slavery and being taken away from his mother at age nine, never to see her again, touched a strong emotional and empathic chord. This experience gave him purpose: He felt "lucky—at least he saw his mother once a week." Each of Westley's experiences elicited strong internal responses from anger to determination to triumph and in relation to contexts in which they occurred. For example, Westley's feeling of triumph was in dynamic relationship with the many "faces beaming with pride" who gathered in a church to celebrate the illegality of segregation in Savannah., all done by peaceful means. The quality of Old John's storytelling experience came full circle as Westley looked at his mother's face in this church gathering. Westley's initial experience at Levy's Department Store of a white salesman refusing to serve his grandmother came full circle as his protests occurred outside this very store decades later.

Across the stories highlighted in this finding, characters had one clear significant experience that led to purpose, an end-view. All observed their surrounding conditions to reflect on its significance: Ella Mae's observation of a white child her age being served before she was; Westley's listening to Old John's stories the loss of his mother, and Westley fortune to see his mother "at least once a week;" and Saya's experience with a prison guard who scolded her as she cried. These critical experiences encouraged them to recall past and similar experiences to judge just how they signify in their lives. From this significant experience, characters were able to grow in their knowledge and experience, and use this information to support future experiences in their story worlds.

3.2. Characters' experiences carry positive messages but are mis-educative

Across the books that we studied, we found that a number of them often presented positive concepts to readers. For example, friendship and belonging were evident in stories like *A Ball for Daisy* (Raschka, 2011, Caldecott Award), *A Sick*

Day for Amos McGee (Stead, 2010, Caldecott Award), *The Adventures of Beekle: The Unimaginary Friend* (Santat, 2014, Caldecott Award) and *Llama Llama Time to Share* (Dewdney, 2012, Choice Book). Parenting was also a common topic in such books as *Olivia Helps with Christmas* (Falconer, 2013; Choice Book); *Finding Winnie* (Mattick, 2015, Caldecott Award), *The House in the Night* (Swanson, 2008, Caldecott Award); *Llama Llama, Home with Mama* (Dewdney, 2011; Choice Book), *Knuffle Bunny Too* (Willems, 2007, Choice Book), *Fancy Nancy: Bonjour Butterfly* (O'Connor, 2013, Choice Book); *Eva and Sadie and the Worst Haircut Ever* (Cohen, 2014, Choice Book). While the messages were positive, they were not always educative.

Part of a larger series of Willems' books featuring Pidgeon, in *Pidgeon Wants a Puppy* (Willems, 2008), Pidgeon pleaded with the viewer to give it a puppy. Pidgeon's one experience in this book, receiving a puppy, was not one for which Pidgeon was prepared, is impulsive, and mis-educative. The imagined relationship with a puppy that Pidgeon communicated to the viewer was gender-marked. The concept of "puppy" is represented as small, cute, and feminized with ten small red hearts in Pidgeon's speech bubble. Pidgeon's anticipation was further emphasized and feminized in Pidgeon's four times repeated wish, "Puppy!" Pidgeon had wings folded on its chest in hopeful anticipation in a playful prance on a double-page spread. The actual experience in which Pidgeon's puppy arrived is also gender-marked. Pidgeon is confronted with the opposite of its imagined pet, a huge puppy, to which Pidgeon is thrown aback in fright, screaming "AAAAAAAAGGHH!!!" Pidgeon's perception of this puppy is masculinized--an aggressive, uncomely, huge puppy with undesirable characteristics of "The teeth!" "The hair!" "That wet nose," "The slobber!" and "The claws!" Pidgeon's naïveté of dog breeds takes Pidgeon completely by surprise. Pidgeon's embodied responses to the real puppy revealed a frightened Pidgeon with wide eyes that directly gaze at the reader in confusion, "I had no idea." The response to the huge puppy is visceral, and incited Pidgeon to sweat, fear, and scream. Theorized through Dewey, Pidgeon's experience with puppies is mis-educative. Pidgeon does not have previous experience with puppies, and the imagined experience does not move Pidgeon further or show growth in its desire to have a puppy other than the one imagined. While there is a clear transaction between the internal response (Pidgeon's fear) to the external objects or the environment (huge puppy), the transaction does not produce sensitivity or responsiveness. Rather this experience produces a callous Pidgeon, one that does not want a relationship, "I've changed my mind." Pidgeon's experience is stunted by its own accord. Pidgeon does not want to engage in this experience with a puppy, nor will this experience encourage Pidgeon to act differently in the future. Willems, most likely, created Pidgeon for humorous purpose, emphasizing Pidgeon's naïveté. Yet, the undesirable characteristics of the real puppy juxtaposed to the ideal characteristics of the imagined puppy creates binaries of large-small, masculine-feminine, cute-ugly, loved-not loved. The humorous message of Pidgeon's naïveté may be overshadowed by other messages that position the real puppy as problematic because of its looks and actions.

In *Eva and Sadie and the Worst Haircut EVER!* (Cohen, 2014; Choice Book), Sadie cuts her little sister's, Eva, hair, a mis-educative experience. Sadie's experience led to several other interactions, hiding her sister's hair, being confronted by her parents, going to the hair salon, and styling her sister's short hair. Visually, the experience of Sadie's haircutting comprised approximately 30% of the story through four double-page spreads and two single-pages. Sadie peeks out from behind a mound of Eva's hair while Eva's looks with trepidation at her sister's cutting skills. Sadie started this experience with a belief, "I think [Eva's hair] is too long, too curly, and way too MUCH!", and moved into an impulse or desire, "'Do you want a haircut?' I ask her." Sadie's question in bold purple font led to an action, a desire for her, the older sister, to cut her younger sister's hair. Under her breath, Sadie's "I ask her" represents a personal desire, not one sanctioned by her little sister. From a Deweyan perspective, Sadie did not have a purpose in mind when she cut Eva's hair. Sadie did not foresee consequences of cutting her sister's hair, and did not have a plan of action after the haircut. Sadie "knew" this experience would not sit well with her parents, which prompted her into another impulse, to hide the "evidence"—Eva's cut hair—under layers of disguise: a register, books, and stuffed animals "so no one can find it." In this haircutting experience, Sadie did not grow from the experience as she reluctantly tells her father, "I guess I shouldn't have cut Eva's hair." Sadie further justified her impulse, "But that kind of stuff happens a few times in everybody's life, right?" Upon reflection, Sadie admits, "Or maybe just once is enough." "That's right," [Sadie's father] says." Sadie's father stated, "...let's go get Eva a *real* haircut."

In terms of Dewey's (1938) concept of experience, Sadie starts the experience with an impulse rather than an end-view or purpose with little reflection on the experience. Sadie's consequences are parent-driven rather than child-driven, "So my

parents say I have to have a consequence for what I did.” The impulse to cut her sister’s hair was not thought through, consequences considered, and an action plan to address the consequences. The assumption in this story is that those older govern the learning of those younger and control their behavior. Sadie’s parents tell Sadie what is right and wrong, while Sadie continues to govern her little sister’s experiences thinking “After all, I am the big sister.” Sadie lack of reflection on the haircutting experience and her inability to consider a plan of action that allows her to grow, identify this experience as mis-educative.

In having an experience, Dewey (2008) argued that children learn by doing and is a continual process in which there is growth that informs future action. An experience that is initiated by impulse with no method of action and reflection does not provide the ideal environment in which Sadie can learn from this experience. In fact, Sadie comes full circle, absorbed by her younger sister’s short hair, and thus, as Dewey stated, “distorting the growth of further experience” (p. 25). Unlike, for example, Saya, Ella Mae and Charlotte, and Westley, all of whom had an experience that showed growth and plans of action, Sadie’s experience is one of stimulus-response: hair cutting and loss of chocolate. Sadie also understands that her experience of cutting Eva’s hair was not a growing experience for future action, but a revision of her earlier impulse—to style her younger sister’s hair.

In picture books we identified with mis-educative experiences, we also found that particular discourses underpinned characters’ experiences including intact heteronormative family units, privilege and power, socio-economic position and what characters can or cannot do, cultural and gender roles. Characters also engender callousness or lack sensitivity or responsiveness to the environment. For example, in *Knuffle Bunny, Too* (Willems, 2007, Choice Book), Trixie and Sonja’s stuffed bunnies were mixed up at school, an experience with consequences that their fathers take over. Trixie realized this mix-up at 2:30 a.m., and was distraught. On impulse, Trixie “marched” into her parents’ bedroom, and insisted that her father retrieve her bunny. Trixie and Sonja lack sensitivity and responsiveness to the surrounding conditions, demanding that their fathers and they meet up in middle of the night in a large city. While Trixie’s father suggests “to wait until morning,” Trixie suggests otherwise. The mother, a silent character, passively looks at her husband and child, unable to enter this experience meaningfully. Trixie’s and Sonja’s desire to retrieve their bunnies immediately could only be resolved by their fathers. Trixie and Sonja become friends, but there is no noticeable growth from this experience. In *Fancy Nancy: Bonjour Butterfly* (O’Connor, 2013, Choice Book), Fancy Nancy’s experience or desire to dress up to go to her friend’s party “as an azure butterfly” is conflicted. Fancy Nancy’s parents require her to go to her grandparents’ anniversary party. Fancy Nancy “scowls and sulks and storms around the house. . . . I am furious!” and has to be dragged to the hotel in fits and screams where the anniversary party is slated. Her grandparents and others older take on the responsibility that Fancy Nancy has a good time eating “tiny hot dogs on silver platters” in a fancy hotel with “bottles of bath gel and shampoos and cream. Ooh la la! “It’s like being at a beauty spa,” followed up the next morning at a butterfly garden. While Fancy Nancy ultimately enjoyed this experience, no noticeable growth emerged.

In picture books that have mis-educative experiences, characters act on impulses, desires for a material object, action or event. For these characters, having an experience means possessing something or some event. Characters do not consider the consequences of these impulses or develop a method of action to resolve aspects of the experience that allow them to grow. Rather, parents or those older resolve a younger character’s experience. They understand their “help” to their child as a learning moment. Characters in these picture books often do not think about the experience or reflect on its value or usefulness—it merely becomes a series of interactions in an event.

4. Discussion

John Dewey (1938) cared a great deal about the learning of children, the value of the experiences they have, and how these experiences enable them to participate and contribute meaningfully in society. He was stalwart in his stance that children learn by doing, and not in idle, rote, and meaningless activity. In tandem with Dewey, when discussing curriculum and democratic schooling, Ira Shor (1992) suggested that children must be positioned to ask questions, be curious, and develop their intellect. To be empowered, Shor wrote, children must make meaning and act from reflection instead of memorization of facts and values handed to them. Without questioning, Shor stated, children’s potential for critical thought and action will be restricted. Both Dewey and Shor believed in the power of experience to engage children in thoughtful mindful reflection on past experiences and plans for positive action and change in future experiences. Identifying educative and mis-educative experiences in picture books may ground how experiences in school are assessed for their educative qualities, and what discourses are evident from children’s experiences. Here we discuss how this study presents a unique perspective on characters, stories, and experiences in award-winning picture books.

In the picture books that we studied, we identified educative and mis-educative experiences that characters had. Dewey (1938) argued that the gulf between an educator's experience and that of her/his students is so wide that it is nearly impossible for children to participate in what is taught, and their experiences become an acquisition of knowledge, values, and beliefs already in the heads of adults. The picture books that had characters who had mis-educative experiences relied on adults' experiences to work through their own experiences, and encouraged adults to swoop in and take on the consequences of the character's experiences. In this way, from Dewey's perspective, children's growth in such situations is stunted, and does not advance future learning. In characters' experiences that were educative, characters observed the surrounding conditions, reflected on a plan of action, and moved themselves and others into social and political action. Ella Mae, Charlotte, Westley, and Saya found themselves in situations that arose from *social* and *political* legislation, and situations in which they had to fight for civil rights, access, and power. Westley, Ella Mae, and Charlotte shifted perspectives and initiated experiences that bettered their communities. Each desire, from trying on shoes to eliminating segregation, empowered them and members of their communities. Characters with educative experiences have entrepreneurial minds that enabled them to grow, develop habits of mind and action, and make their surrounding conditions better. Characters with mis-educative experiences often found themselves entangled in a personal dilemmas-rather than social/political-middle-class and privileged situations in which resolution rests in how the experience benefits the individual character. Characters with mis-educative experiences face simple and personal consequences that often are resolved by older others' experiences. These characters are not having experiences, but desire possession—having a puppy, having a dress-up party, or having a haircut.

We argue that close readings of characters' experiences from cultural and racial perspectives are critically important. The educational landscape in US schools has shifted in which there were more than 4.6 million English language learners (ELLs) in US public schools since 2014 approximately 10% of the K-12 student population in the nation (National Center for Education Statistics). Two of our research group were Korean mothers, who were stunned by the actions of some of the characters. For example, Sadie does not act in a way that is comprehensible; Korean children would not consider cutting a sibling's hair or hiding evidence of misdoing. Children would not question going to a family celebration, unlike Fancy Nancy who openly confronted her parents by scowling, sulking, storming, and physically resisting. Fathers, like those of Trixie and Sonja, would not go out at 2:30 a.m. to retrieve a stuffed bunny. Such privilege and entitlement and demand on parents are not culturally in line with Korean society. Yet, these Korean mothers stated that they have to allow their children to read such stories so that they develop an understanding of US expectations of children. We suggest that reading with and against picture books supports an understanding of the relationship between a character and her/his surrounding conditions in order to identify the discourses in place regarding this relationship. That is, from a cultural perspective, how do international readers understand US children who demand their fathers accompany them to retrieve their stuffed bunnies, or are given a simple consequence of not eating chocolate for a week, or removing the voice of mothers across these experiences. If, as scholars noted, children learn values, beliefs, and actions from picture books, how does this learning align with or run contrary to classrooms diverse in terms of markers of social identity.

Visual imagery in the story world also plays a crucial role in how characters' actions are rendered by the illustrator, and emphasizes aspects of the experience s/he wishes a viewer to attend to. Double-page spreads of Sadie's haircutting or Ella Mae and Charlotte's polishing shoes emphasizes the significance of that particular experience to them. A pointer emphasized a list of actions that Westley wanted African Americans to take. The playful prancing of Pidgeon emphasized the giddiness that Pidgeon had in imagining his life with a puppy. The use of objects associated with characters also marked how discourses of gender, race, socio-economics entered into the experience. Ella Mae and Charlotte started a neighborhood shoe store where community members could try on shoes, an experience underpinned with race and socio-economics. Fancy Nancy and Olivia, as characters of privilege, worry about parties, presents, play clothes, and celebrations at expensive hotels. The close-ups of Saya's face, one crying and one content, position immigration as a political issue with extreme social and family implications. For Goodwin (2009), visual imagery in children's book has the capacity to help children "to infer deeper meanings" (p. 154) and generate meaning to construct narratives. To what extent narratives are educative matter to the shaping of children's values, beliefs, and actions.

5. Conclusion

In their book, *Teaching Children's Literature It's Critical!*, Lewison, Leland, and Harste (2018) argue that readers should have experiences reading picture books that enable them to enjoy a story, dig deeply into visible and invisible messages, and take social action. These researchers emphasize the criticality of starting with what readers know, and encouraging them to critically and intellectually change their current surrounding conditions. We suggest that identification of

characters' experiences in picture books brings into the fore the significance of the experience itself, how the surrounding conditions shape the character and the experience, and to what extent this experience allows a character to grow. In our study, we considered, should all picture books require characters to contribute to society? To think deeply and act democratically? Or can a story just be a story? We suggest that Dewey's concept of educative experiences provides insights into the extent to which characters' experiences speak to imaginative and critical approaches to social and personal issues with compassion, creativity, and justice in mind. Picture books that received the Jane Addams awards confirms our argument that individuals and societies can know themselves only to the extent that they realize the experience of others. Addams (1902) believed that social empathy and knowledge that is gained by disrupting one's perceived experience and understanding are essential for democracy.

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