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Childrens' Responses to Storybook Reading

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CHILDREN'S RESPONSES TO STORYBOOK READING

By

Gentri Seawright

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

DEPARTMENTAL HONORS

in

Elementary Education in the School of Teacher Education and Leadership

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Abstract

This research began with the question, "How do children respond and connect to literature? The purpose of the research was to collect data about how children make connections to literature through text-to-text, text-to-self, and text-to-world connections. Three picture books were selected, and using an intact, 1st grade classroom over a period of three days, the teacher read the children the three different stories. The children were asked to listen to the stories and then respond to them. During the class discussion, field notes were taken to record childrens' responses to different questions. Data were collected in the form of written and oral responses from children. Children were allowed to write or draw their answers to the questions they were asked;and they had the opportunity to elaborate on their responses. All date were analyzed qualitatively.

The study suggested that children were able to make more text-to-self connections than any other type of connections. Further, they and were able to feel empathy for characters and expressed advocacy.

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Simply stated, "Bibliotherapy is the use of books to help people solve problems" (Prater, Johnstun, Dyches & Johnstun, 2006; Jackson, 2006). Bibliotherapy is defined as the "use of selected reading material as therapeutic adjuvant in medicine and psychiatry; and, guidance in the solution of personal problems through directed reading" (Jackson, 2006). It is also defined as "therapeutic reading in which children find duplications of their own problems and observe how children similar to themselves face their difficulties" (Jack & Ronan, 2008). The assignment of reading alone is not bibliotherapy. It becomes bibliotherapy when there is a discussion component. Bibliotherapy is thought of as a sensitive and non-intrusive method of guiding people [and children] towards problem solving and coping in their personal lives (Jack & Ronan).

The Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this study was to develop an understanding of how first graders respond to text. A first grade class was selected from an intact classroom to address the research question: How do first graders experience read-alouds and discussion of books on the topic of bullying? A group of approximately 25 ethnically diverse children ranging from Caucasian, African American, Asian American and Hispanic American students participated in the study. Parents were informed about the study, children were not required to participate, and were allowed to withdraw at any time from the read aloud/discussion sessions.

Three books were selected to embody different themes of bullying and bossing others around: *Thank You, Mr. Falker*, *Oliver Button is a Sissy*, and *Babushka's Doll*. This topic was selected because recent research suggests that between 80% and 90% of adolescents and pre-adolescents will face bullying sometime in their schooling (Oliver & Young, 1994). This percentage is extremely high, and it is a topic that children begin dealing with

as young as kindergarten in many areas. After the books were selected, they were read aloud by the classroom teacher, Mrs. Coulombe. Pre-written questions were used to create discussion among the students in response to the books that they read as a class.

Small groups of about eight students were asked each day to fill out a response sheet after the class discussion had concluded. They were allowed to write responses or draw them.

What is Bibliotherapy?

Bibliotherapy involves reading books to help children cope with problems and realize that they are not alone and that their emotional responses are perfectly normal (Russell, 2009). It can be used with an entire class, a small group or a single child (Jackson, 2006; Cook, Earles-Vollrath & Ganz, 2006) to teach social skills. Bibliotherapy can be a proactive intervention for at-risk youth and can also be used to foster social and emotional development in children (Regan & Page, 2008).

Bibliotherapy can help develop children's self-concept by increasing their appreciation for themselves and helping them to understand themselves better. It can nurture and heal self-esteem. It can be used to help children relieve emotional pressures and realize they are not the only one to experience a certain problem or challenge.

Bibliotherapy fosters discussion and helps children find constructive problem-solving methods (Stamps, 2003).

History of Bibliotherapy

Bibliotherapy was originally created for use with adults for educational and recreational treatment (Jack & Ronan, 2008). Samuel Crothers coined the term "bibliotherapy" in 1916 when he wrote an article for the *Atlantic Monthly* and described how fiction and non-fiction

books were being prescribed as medicine for adults with a variety of ailments including depression. Bibliotherapy was used mainly in medicine and mental hospitals when it was first introduced.

In 1930, G.O. Ireland was the first to explicitly discuss how literature could offer solutions to modern problems and to help minimize student's inner turmoil (Cook, Earles-Vollrath, & Ganz, 2006). Later, as advancements were made in children's literature and books for children shifted from being of a didactic and moralistic nature to that of entertaining and fun, bibliotherapy came into play for children. Dr. Thomas Moore stated in 1944, "Some time ago it occurred to me that children might be helped by giving them a book to read which would touch upon their specific problem and illustrate principles of conduct that they might absorb and be guided by in the determination of their behavior" (Jack & Ronan, 2008).

Bibliotherapy was first introduced to the educational circuit in the 1960s when educational psychologists Zaccaria and Moses presented bibliotherapy for use by teachers and counselors as a therapeutic medium for the mental well being of students (Jack & Ronan, 2008).

Types of Bibliotherapy

There are three main kinds of bibliotherapy: Institutional, Clinical and Developmental (Jack & Ronan, 2008; Cook, Earles-Vollrath, & Ganz, 2006). Institutional Bibliotherapy is used to treat clients who are institutionalized. Most often mental-hygiene texts are recommended (Jack & Ronan, 2008). Clinical bibliotherapy is facilitated by a counselor, therapist or psychologist in a structured setting to help individuals cope with serious emotional and behavioral disorders. Developmental bibliotherapy is best used in a

school media setting, or in a classroom as guided reading to help children interact and connect with the literature (Cook, Earles-Vollrath, & Ganz, 2006). Developmental bibliotherapy is this type of bibliotherapy that was used in this study.

Reasons for Using Bibliotherapy

Books are used for multiple purposes: to escape reality for a little while, to have adventures, to visit places we are not able to, to connect with others emotionally. Books can help us solve problems and alleviate stress associated with those very problems. Children of all ages love to read because it can be therapeutic (Stamps, 2003). Books can also help us increase in self-knowledge and self-esteem, gain relief from conflicts, clarify personal values and understand other people better (Jackson, 2006).

According to Jean Piaget, children are often very egocentric until age seven. Depending on the cognitive and social development of the child, they may be somewhere between the stage of the preoperational period and the period of concrete operations. During the preoperational period and the intuitive stage, children are not capable of complex reasoning and use intuition to make decisions, rather than facts or logic. Students at this age begin to understand feelings and relationships, and when they move into the period of concrete operations they are able to better empathize with others and relate to theirs (Russell, 2009).

There are many reasons for using bibliotherapy with children in a classroom setting. Bibliotherapy helps children to cope with fears and death, depression, foster solutions to problems and lessen social stressors among children. When children's problems are allowed to go unresolved they could become moral crises. When children participate in bibliotherapy sessions they may identify with a character and see how that particular

character copes with his/her problems. They may realize that they too, are capable of finding a solution to their problem and that it is possible to find more than one solution (Regan & Page, 2008; Cook, Earles-Vollrath, & Ganz, 2006). After identifying with a particular character, the child is in control of identifying a solution. They are given the choice of how to proceed and resolve a problem, or leave it unresolved (Jackson, 2006).

In addition to identifying solutions to problems, children can learn to mirror positive behavior and values of characters in the books they read (Regan & Page, 2008). Bibliotherapy allows children to see the basic motivations of a character and the values and facts associated with solving the problem at hand (Jack & Ronan, 2008). Bibliotherapy has been proven to be a safe avenue for children in confronting the challenges they face. Though it is not a cure-all, bibliotherapy can be a starting point between students and teachers to open communication about problems and feelings (Stamps, 2003).

Bibliotherapy can help at-risk students to learn to identify solutions to problems before their problems become overwhelming. However, bibliotherapy must be used with a deliberate plan of action and a definite goal or it may be ineffective and may result in unresolved emotional issues (Prater, Johnstun, Dyches & Johnstun, 2006). Bibliotherapy is frequently used with children who experience emotional and social difficulties and who have difficulty coping with stress and maintaining social relationships (Jackson, 2006).

Many children's lives are traumatic because they deal with problems like death, divorce, bullying, teasing, name-calling, isolation and abuse on a regular basis. There are still more students who experience stress linked to failing grades, overly demanding classroom environments, athletic requirements, peer relationships, tests, conflicts with teachers and self-esteem issues. The goal of the school employees and personnel is not to

eliminate stress entirely, but rather to help children cope with problems and learn to find solutions to them (Jackson, 2006). Schools are expected to have intervention plans to help students cope with stress and childhood traumas. Bibliotherapy offers hope that there are solutions to problems (Jackson).

Bibliotherapy can also help teachers to identify the concerns of their students (bullying, teasing) in a non-threatening way. Teachers can use bibliotherapy to prevent or address classroom problems and social or emotional problems and to provide children with examples of how other young people have dealt with similar concerns (Cook, Earles-Vollrath, & Ganz, 2006).

Many students, particularly those with disabilities have trouble expressing or verbalizing their thoughts, feelings and behavioral responses to situations. Bibliotherapy is a tool to help these students understand and verbalize their feelings. By discussing a character's situation and solutions from a safe third-person standpoint, they are better able to understand and verbalize their own feelings and cope with their problems (Cook, Earles-Vollrath, & Ganz, 2006).

Bibliotherapy is not just for use in elementary school classrooms, but rather it is a tool that can help children throughout their lives. If they begin to understand how to identify their problems and come up with solutions, they will be more successful adults and can use these vital skills for a lifetime. As children participate in bibliotherapy today, they will be better equipped to meet tomorrow's challenges (Jackson, 2006).

Drawbacks to Using Bibliotherapy

There are benefits for using bibliotherapy, but like anything, there are drawbacks as well. Some of the drawbacks include the scarcity of literature available on a certain topic,

students' possible unwillingness to read, or students may not be *ready* to read. Many students or parents may deny family problems, and therefore be defensive about the use of bibliotherapy. Bibliotherapy is not a single approach or a cure-all, but rather a part of an intervention to teach social skills and problem solving skills (Prater, Johnstun, Dyches & Johnstun, 2006).

In a study conducted by Dr. Jerome Schneck (1946), research found that improvements were noted with four out of the five troubled children in their attitudes and conduct. However, only one in five actually connected their problems to the characters in the book, so the change in behavior may not have been a direct result of bibliotherapy (Jack and Ronan, 2008). If children are unable to personally connect to bibliotherapy and the characters in the book, it may be less effective.

Implementation of Bibliotherapy in Elementary Schools

Before bibliotherapy can ever be used, teachers must build a rapport with students. They must get to know the students and gain their trust for it to be effective (Prater, Johnstun, Dyches & Johnstun, 2006).

Selecting appropriate books is one of the most, if not the most important step in the Bibliotherapy process. A teacher must carefully select the literature for students. The teacher must ensure that it is developmentally and age appropriate, as well as on a reading level the children can understand. The books must contain a sensitive representation of the topic at hand, as well as portray realism and honesty in the characters, and contain literary quality (Prater, Johnstun, Dyches & Johnstun, 2006; Jackson, 2006). Another important factor in selecting a book is to make sure it is fiction, because that allows the children a

safe distance from themselves. Children can discuss a fictional character more easily than they can discuss themselves or their own problems (Stamps, 2003).

Bibliotherapy can be implemented using various strategies and reading activities. If the students are young, a read-aloud by the teacher is most appropriate. If the students are older, then it may be more appropriate to have them read the book silently, or read with a partner (Prater, Johnstun, Dyches & Johnstun, 2006).

Teachers need to build background knowledge before reading to help students create meaning from books (Pardo, 2004). It is also necessary to discuss the genre of the book with students (fiction, non-fiction, biography, etc...) and introduce unfamiliar and unknown vocabulary words by explaining them with student friendly definitions to help students understand the book better (Santoro, Chard, Howard & Baker, 2008; Prater, Johnstun, Dyches & Johnstun, 2006).

Teachers need to help students identify with the book and connect prior experiences by linking their background knowledge of the topic to the book before reading ever begins (Jackson, 2006). Teachers can help students increase their understanding of the book they will read by having students predict what might happen based on clues from the pictures, title, back cover, etc...(Prater, Johnstun, Dyches & Johnstun, 2006). Teachers should allow students to predict similarities and differences between their lives and the characters in the book (Jackson, 2006). As the teacher reads, it is helpful to students' understanding to constantly revise predictions based on the new information gleaned from the text (Prater, Johnstun, Dyches & Johnstun).

A crucial aspect of bibliotherapy is the advance preparation of specific questions that can be used throughout the story to help focus on major points (Jackson, 2006). Many

teachers use bibliotherapy as a means of problem solving in the classroom (Jackson, 2006). For example if there are bully or teasing problems, the teacher could read a few books about the problem topic and discuss with the children what some possible solutions are before the problem gets out of hand, and how the victims of these books might feel, how the bully might feel and why the bully might think that they need to pick on others.

Bibliotherapy can bring to light information and insight into a specific experience or situation, help create alternate solutions to problems and stimulate a discussion of what the problem actually is. Use of bibliotherapy in the classroom will help children feel they are not the only ones who have experienced a particular problem and there are realistic solutions to the problem (Cook, Earles-Vollrath & Ganz, 2006).

Bibliotherapy provides children a safe place to talk about problems and social justice in the context of the story, rather than in a negative personal experience (Dever, Sorenson, & Broderick, 2005). As children are given a safe setting for discussion, personal discovery can occur. Children will be more likely to discuss issues openly if they are not hindered by negative judgments or attitudes.

Stages of the Bibliotherapy Process

During the bibliotherapy process, there are four stages that children must experience: identification, catharsis, insight and universalization (Stamps, 2003, Jackson, 2006).

Step One. During identification, teachers can show students that their text-to-self connections need not be limited to connecting with "real" characters. Many children can make connections to animal characters as well as fictional human beings. Identification

with a character simply entails recognizing the thoughts and behaviors of others (Jackson, 2006).

Step Two. Teachers must teach how to make text-to-text, text-to-self, and text-to-world connections. For example, in one study a first grade teacher was reading the book *Ira Says Goodbye*, by Bernard Waber. Before reading she said, "Oh I see that the author is Bernard Waber and the title is *Ira Says Goodbye*. I think this book is about the same Ira as in *Ira Sleeps Over*... I am making a text-to-text connection" (Pardo, 2004).

Step Three. When children make a text-to-text connection they enter the second stage, known as catharsis, in which they are able to release tension, which will allow children to apply what they are learning to themselves. This results in the third step, insight, which targets a specific problem and brings the issues to the surface so they can be addressed (Jackson, 2006). Students can also compare their own experiences with the characters'. These comparisons can be made during reading or during post-reading activities. Insight allows children to realize that attitudes and behaviors can be changed in a positive way (Stamps, 2003).

Step Four. During the fourth phase, students are able to realize that many people struggle with the same problem as the character, or as they do. They are able to process the story and the characters in a more universal way after reading (Stamps, 2003). Teachers must use follow-up activities to help the students further process their thoughts and feelings about the book. For example, they may keep a journal, or write about how they would feel if they were in the character's position. Teachers may implement learning tools, such as graphic organizers into the bibliotherapy process. Graphic organizers (such as a Venn diagram or character weave) help students better connect the information in the text to

themselves. Character weaves can help students compare the feelings of two different characters, and empathize better with other's perspectives, helping them to create text-to-self connections, whereas a Venn diagram allows students to compare and contrast two books, or two topics, thus helping them make text-to-text connections (Prater, Johnstun, Dyches & Johnstun, 2006). Students can also be involved in activities that use social skills in a real-life situation or in incidental learning, such as role-playing (Jackson, 2006).

Extending Bibliotherapy to Other Subjects

Creative art and writing projects are commonly used post-reading activities, and are especially beneficial for students who struggle to express themselves verbally, and some specific examples include collages that represent feelings or experiences in the story, a poster about the story, a picture of a favorite scene that the child recreates, a clay sculpture of something from the story, writing a letter to the character in the story, poetry, selecting part of the story to rewrite and change, compiling a Venn diagram that includes similarities and differences between the character and the child, or a Venn diagram to show relationships among new words to assimilate vocabulary or connections the child makes to another text, or writing a story about the character five years in the future. These activities can help the child realize that like the character, their life can improve too (Prater, Johnstun, Dyches & Johnstun, 2006; Pardo, 2004; Jackson, 2006).

Types of Childrens' Responses to Literature

For this study we focused on three types of responses to text which include intertextual responses (text-to-text, text-to-world) and personal responses (text-to-self) (Sipe, 2008). In each of these types of responses, children are able to link the literature to themselves, to their experiences, their emotions and they may analyze, or make meaning of

the story, or interpret the story in their own way and manipulate details and make it their own (Sipe, 2008).

How Do Children Experience Literature?

When children sit down to listen to a story during a bibliotherapy session, or during a regular read-aloud time, there are certain elements of the literature that capture their attention and help them respond to the literature.

The elements of literature that capture children's attention are the size of the book, choice of colors, the positioning, layout and shape of the illustrations. Illustrations are able to capture how children feel, as well as what the visual images convey. (e.g., a lonely zoo animal) (Sipe, 2008). The text content, difficulty of text and even the font type and size play a role in how a child interacts and connects with the text. Even though these features are "surface features," studies have shown that the quality of a text on the surface help a child create effective meaning (Pardo, 2004).

Drawing the Text to Self. Children respond to literature through a combination of background knowledge and previous experience, information in the text, and the new stance the reader takes in relationship to the text. If however, the reader's background knowledge disagrees with the new information presented, the child will either adjust the information to make it fit (accommodation), or they will reject it (Pardo, 2004). To effectively ensure understanding of the text teachers must model, think aloud, and demonstrate how to create meaning (Pardo, 2004).

During bibliotherapy, one thing that can help children to understand and respond to the text is to have children describe in their own words what happened in the text and what they noticed were the problems and solutions (Santoro, Chard, Howard & Baker, 2008).

This can help them internalize what they learned and help them to apply their newfound knowledge in a real setting.

When listening to a story, young children will make connections to their own lives. They may be as simple as having a character named Christopher in a story and having a child say, "I know someone named Christopher." These simple connections help children build a foundation to help them make more sophisticated literary interpretations later in life (Sipe, 2008). No matter how weak some of these connections may seem, they are a springboard to help children make deeper connections later on in life (Sipe, 2008).

Yet another way that children draw the text to themselves is by giving themselves agency in the stories and arguing about what they would or wouldn't do on behalf of the character. These statements allow children to shape the story by inserting themselves in it (Sipe, 2008).

Examples using Text-to-Self Connections. In a study done by Arsenio and Kramer (1992), they read a story where a child commits a moral transgression (steals another child's candy or pushes another child off the swing) and they found that when they asked children ages four and six how the victimizer would feel, they responded "happy because he/she got what they wanted." On the other hand, eight year olds were more likely to respond that the victimizer would feel both "good and bad" (Laguttuta, 2005). Many times, children's responses to literature vary simply by age and developmental level, as illustrated in this example. You could potentially read the same story to a group of children of various ages and come out with a completely different response from each child.

This study also showed that seven year olds provided more future-oriented explanations about stories and characters than any other age group (Laguttuta, 2005). Essentially, seven year olds seem to view the consequences of characters' actions with future-oriented perspectives, ie: if the character steals, then they will be grounded or they will lose their fun privileges.

Another study conducted on children's text-to-self connections revealed the following example: Mr. Taylor, a kindergarten teacher, was reading the book *The Tunnel* where a brother attempts to frighten his sister at night. A boy named Juan said, "My brother, every time I got to sleep, my brother creep under my bed and try to scare me, but I clock him on the head with a shoe for messin' with me!" (Sipe, 2008, p. 153).

Another study (Case & Okamoto, 1996) showed that children are able consider multiple perspectives of a story around age seven to eight years of age, whereas children that are younger can usually only center on one aspect of a situation (Laguttuta, 2005). It is important to consider that though children may be the same age, their developmental levels may differ, and therefore children of the same age group can have various responses to the same story.

Dever, Sorenson, and Brodrick (2005) found that second graders made the most connections to stories when the story context was similar to the childrens' own lives. For example, when the story characters were like them as in the stories *Amazing Grace* and *The Story of Ruby Bridges* the children expressed both advocacy and empathy. Perhaps, it is because both characters, Grace and Ruby, were young children in a public school, just like the children in the study. Children were able to express empathy in the story *Fly Away Home*, about a boy and his father who were homeless so they lived in an airport. However,

in that case they did not express advocacy, perhaps because they did not relate to the characters from personal experience.

Procedures

For this study, a first grade class was selected from an intact classroom. Three books were selected to address the theme of bullying and picking on others: *Thank You, Mr. Falker*, *Oliver Button is a Sissy*, and *Babushka's Doll*. After the books had been selected, they were read aloud by the classroom teacher, Mrs. Coulombe, and pre-written questions were used to create discussion among the students in response to the books that they read as a class.

Mrs. Coulombe read the books in fifteen minute segments, over a three day period. Mrs. Coulombe led the class in a discussion about the books and field notes were taken on the childrens' responses.

Following the whole-class discussion, small groups of about eight students were asked each day to fill out a response sheet. This was used as a follow-up activity to the reading and discussion and all follow-up work was facilitated by the researcher. Children asked a series of questions and were allowed to write responses or draw them. Students were asked six of the same questions each day, regardless of the story: *How did the characters feel in the story?*, *Why do you think the characters felt that way?*, *What did you like about the book?*, *What did you dislike about the book?*, *How does the character relate to you?*, *Do you have any text-to-text, text-to-self, or text-to-world connections?* These questions were created with the intent of discovering how children are able to connect to the text.

Overall Findings

Upon completion of reading three books, *Thank You Mr. Falker*, *Oliver Button is a Sissy*, and *Babushka's Doll*, children responded with more text-to-self connections than any other type of connections. It is reasonable to assume that children make more text-to-self connections because of age, developmental level, and limited experience. Furthermore, multiple themes emerged related to text-to-self connections: similar experience, expressions of empathy, and expressions of advocacy. Following is a description of each book and a discussion of these findings.

Thank You, Mr. Falker. This book was written by Patricia Polacco and is about a little girl named Tricia (the author) when she was a little girl. She was unable to read until the third grade and this book tells the story of the students teasing her and her triumph over the teasing and bullying to go on to become a beloved children's author.

Oliver Button is a Sissy. This book is written by Tomie DePaola. It is about a boy named Oliver Button who does not like to do "typical" boy things. Instead he likes to sing and dance and draw and dress up and put on plays. The kids at school (mostly the boys) tease him and write on the wall, "Oliver Button is a sissy." He is teased continually until the community talent show where he performs a tap dance routine. The children come back to school and the words have suddenly changed to "Oliver Button is a star!"

Babushka's Doll. This story is also written by Patricia Polacco. It is about a young girl named Natasha who impatiently demands her grandmother's (Babushka's) attention and wants everything right away- her toys, her lunch, etc. While they are eating lunch Natasha sees Babushka's doll and asks if she played with it every day when she was young. She tells her that she only played with the doll once. The grandmother leaves to go to the

store and the doll comes to life. At first Natasha enjoys herself but then the doll starts demanding things of her just like Natasha demanded them of her grandmother. Babushka returns to find Natasha in tears and tells her she must have had a bad dream and she puts the doll back on the shelf.

Childrens' Responses

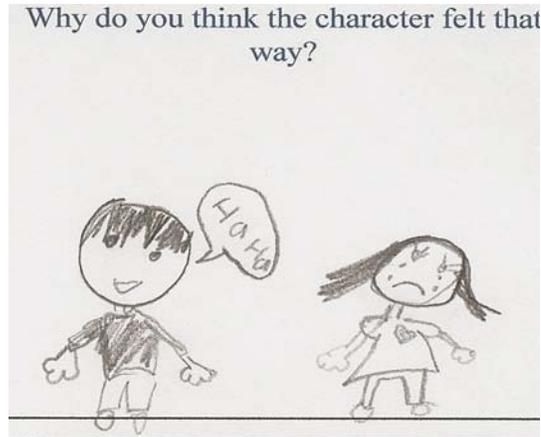
Childrens' responses were generally text-to-self responses. Sub-themes included similar experiences, empathetic responses, and advocacy. Children also made text-to-text connections and text-to-world connections.

Text-to-Self Connections

Similar Experiences. Within the category of similar experiences children were primarily at the identification stage of bibliotherapy (Jackson, 2006). When reading *Thank You, Mr. Falker*, seventy-five percent of children noted that the character felt sad and 88% of children said they had felt like the character before when they were teased by siblings, kids at school, or other family members. Comments included, "I felt dumb because my sister sead that she was beter than me," "I felt like my family didn't like me" (when they got mad at him), "I ben balled by my sester" (I've been bullied by my sister.), and "My sister teesed me."

In Figure 1, one student shows why she believed that Trisha felt like she was being teased or bullied because kids were laughing at Tricia.

Figure 1

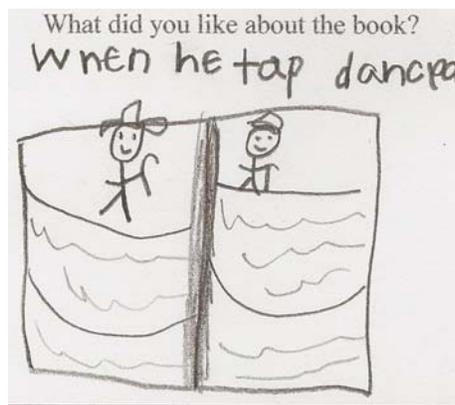


During the group discussion of *Oliver Button is a Sissy*, students made text-to-self connections about breaking gender stereotypes. One girl said, “I used to play soccer.” And then a boy added, “I did gymnastics.” Other children chimed in, “I’ve seen a guy dancing,” and “I’ve seen a guy doing ballet.” One girl even did a backbend on the carpet during the discussion to remind everyone that she, too, connected with the discussion.

During written responses, 100% of students also indicated that they were able to make a text-to-self connection with Oliver Button: “I’ve bin called a sissy,” “Bathrs tesd me, (brothers teased me), and “We’ve both been bulled (bullied).

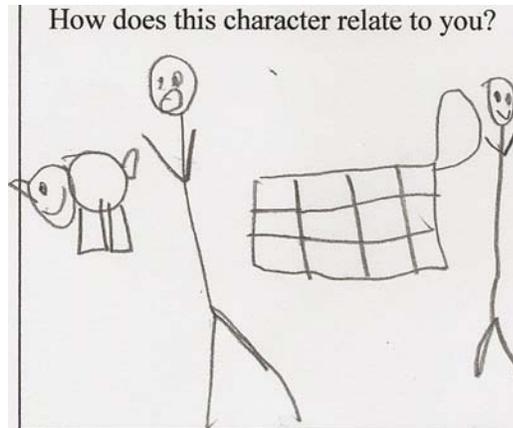
One girl (Figure 2) indicated that she connected with Oliver Button because she liked the tap dancing. When asked why she liked it, she responded that she also tap danced.

Figure 2



During discussion of Babushka's Doll, students were asked if they have ever acted like the doll. They responded, "I do that at dinner," "I do at home when I don't get the lunch I want," and, "I'm like that because we both scream and boss our moms." One girl even remarked, "I did that at the store because my mom would not buy me the toy unicorn I wanted." (See Figure 3)

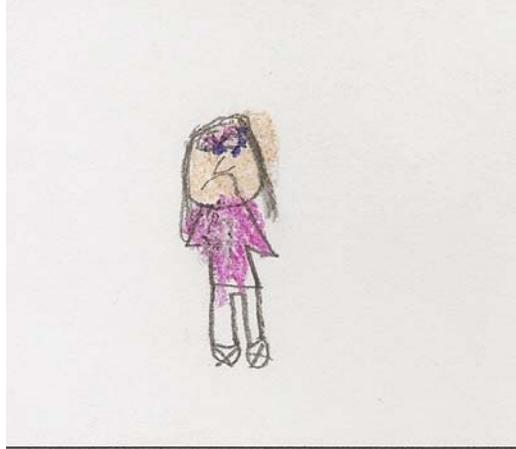
Figure 3 is a picture of a girl at the store with her mom and the toy unicorn she wanted her mom to buy for her.



Empathetic Responses. When children demonstrated empathetic responses they were in the catharsis stage of bibliotherapy (Jackson, 2006). Written responses to *Thank You, Mr. Falker* indicated that children were able to feel empathy with the main character who could not read. One girl made the remark that she disliked the book because, "her grandparents dide" (grandparents died).

One hundred percent of student responses to *Oliver Button is a Sissy* indicated that their *least* favorite part of the book was because of the "bullies, mean boys, or a parts where Oliver Button was teased." Furthermore, 100% of students' responses also noted that the character, Oliver Button felt either "sad" or "bad" when he was teased. These empathetic responses demonstrate that children as young as first grade are able to empathize. Figure 4 shows one girl's response to the question, "How did the character feel in the story?"

Figure 4



During the discussion of *Babushka's Doll* the students were asked, "What did the doll do to Natasha?" and "Why would she do that?" Two girls responded with an empathetic understanding, "Now she sees how the grandmother feels." and, "She was doing what Natasha did to her grandma."

During the collection of student responses in the small group, 88% of students said the character felt "sad or mad" and one said "she feeled like a little embarrassed." When asked, "How does the character relate to you?" the students responded, "She cys and I cra." (She cries and I cry.) See Figure 5.

Figure 5



Advocacy. When children responded with thoughts of advocacy, they were doing so within the catharsis stage of bibliotherapy (Jackson, 2006). During *Oliver Button is a Sissy*, students were asked, "What would you do about the wall where it says, *Oliver Button is a Sissy*? "I would erase it," "I would tell Dr. Peterson" (He is the principal), and, "I'd feel sad."

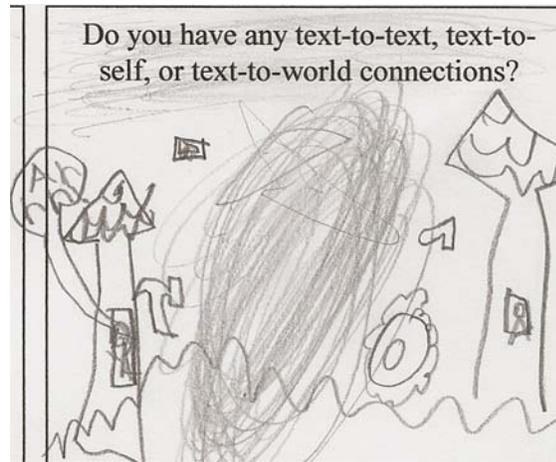
Text-to-Text Connections

Before reading, *Thank You, Mr. Falker*, two students made text-to-text connections between it and the book, *Mrs. Katz and Tush*, noting that both were written by Patricia Polacco. One boy made a text-to-text connection during the class discussion between *Oliver Button is a Sissy* and the book *Molly's Pilgrim* when he said, "We read a book about the Indian girl who could not speak English and the kids teased her." (She was actually Russian in the story.)

Text-to-World Connections

One student made a text-to-world connection that could possibly be considered to be in the catharsis stage of bibliotherapy (Jackson, 2006) between bullying and the 2008 Virginia shootings when she remarked, "Iy hrad a boy in coleg who kld 9 kids and 1 ticher" (I've heard about a boy in college who killed 9 kids and a teacher.) After reading *Babushka's Doll*, one girl made a text-to-world connection by drawing a picture of a tornado and trees (see Figure 6). When she was asked about its significance she said, "My sister Amanda saw this. It's a tornado. The tornado was being mean to the country, just like the doll was being mean to the girl."

Figure 6



Summary

Consistent with the findings of Sipe (2008), 92% of students were able to relate to the characters in the books, thus making text-to-self connections or demonstrate the identification stage of bibliotherapy (Jackson, 2006). On the contrary, only 63% of students were able to make any sort of text-to-text or text-to-world connections. This seems reasonable given that first graders are just growing out of their egocentric nature. Eighty-eight percent of children were able to empathize in some form with the main character and relate it back to themselves and how they have felt, thus demonstrating the catharsis stage of bibliotherapy (Jackson). Consistent with the findings of Dever and colleagues (2005) children were able to connect best when they could relate personally to the characters.

Implications for Educators

This research suggests that children as young as six or seven are capable of connecting with others. Educators can be explicit in teaching young children how to make text-to-text and text-to-world connections. Educators may need to practice implementing this on a daily basis in the classroom by giving explicit examples and modeling how *they* connect literature to other literature and the world.

Educators may draw upon children's ability to empathize with others and use it as a teaching tool to teach social justice. Teachers can use childrens' abilities to connect with others as a vehicle for teaching about tolerance, differences, treating others fairly, racism, prejudice, etc. Educators may use good follow-up questions to understand childrens' ideas on a deeper level. However, many teachers simply do not take the time to ask the follow-up questions that would lead to deeper understanding.

Educators can help children learn to make better connections through this daily, explicit instruction and by using bibliotherapy as a regular tool in classroom learning. It is the responsibility of educators to teach children to think more critically and analyze things. Using bibliotherapy regularly would help individuals and the classroom as a whole to solve problems and feel validated for their feelings.

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Gentri Seawright, a native of South Jordan, UT, graduated in 2003 from Bingham High School. Upon graduation, she was awarded a full-tuition scholarship for academics at Utah State University, where she began her college career in the fall of 2003. Gentri wanted to be an elementary teacher and Utah State University is nationally acclaimed and number one in the state of Utah for Elementary Education.

As an Aggie, Gentri had the opportunity to complete numerous hours of practicum, working directly with seasoned elementary school teachers, in local schools around Logan, Ut. During the 2005-06 school year, Gentri was selected as the Peer Advisor for the Elementary Education Department, where she won the award for "Outstanding Peer Advisor of the Year." In addition to her Peer Advisor responsibilities, she served as a member of the A-Team in 2005, USU's Orientation Staff, where she mentored and kept weekly contact with more than 85 freshmen through their first-year university experience.

Gentri took four semesters off school between the 2006-2008 school years to complete a service mission in Budapest, Hungary, where she became fluent in Hungarian. Gentri majored in Elementary Education, with an emphasis in Fine Arts and Hungarian and will graduate with Departmental Honors in May 2009, where she was also named the Undergraduate Scholar of the Year for 2008-09 for the School of Teacher Education and Leadership. Upon graduation, she will get married and she plans to teach in a Primary grade classroom in the Logan, UT area for a few years until she and her husband will move to the East Coast, where she will resume teaching. Gentri plans to obtain a Masters Degree in Education, and a Reading Endorsement, and one day hopes to work as the Literary Specialist in an elementary school.