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Using literature and role-playing to teach social skills to students in self-contained classrooms

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USING LITERATURE AND ROLE-PLAYING TO TEACH SOCIAL SKILLS TO

STUDENTS IN SELF-CONTAINED CLASSROOMS

by
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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore the role of educators in teach social skills to self-contained students. Bibliotherapy, which utilizes books to help people solve their problems and role-playing were the two methods used to teach social skills. For this study, five data collection instruments were utilized: audio taped class discussions, video recordings of role-playing sessions, a teacher research journal, an instructional unit, and student projects and artifacts. For the sake of privacy and confidentiality, the names of people and places were altered. The qualitative research study was conducted in a Kindergarten self-contained classroom, located in southern New Jersey. There were eight students in the class who participated in the study. The classifications of the eight students varied. According to the students' IEPs, classifications included multiply disabled, autistic, communication impaired, and multiple sclerosis. In analyzing the data, it became clear that bibliotherapy and role-playing were effective in teaching students social skills. Implications for using bibliotherapy and role-playing to teach social skills to students in self-contained classrooms are discussed in detail.

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Introduction

Bob (pseudonym) was a friendly 12-year old boy that came from a loving family. Like many boys his age, he was very active and loved sports. He was often seen swimming and doing flips off the diving board into his family's pool. In addition to enjoying sports and physical activity, he also enjoyed being a spectator at sporting events. He attended his sister's traveling soccer games. Her team loved Bob so much that they decided to make him their unofficial mascot.

However, unlike most 12-year olds, Bob suffered from a genetic neurological disorder called Angelman syndrome. Bob, like other people that have Angelman syndrome, frequently flapped his hands, laughed, and smiled. In addition to these behaviors, which are associated with the syndrome, he is nonverbal and cognitively delayed. Due to his condition, he goes to a private school called Sunny School (pseudonym). Sunny School specializes in educating students with severe physical and mental handicaps.

Throughout the course of the school day, Bob would give hugs to everyone. He constantly hugged his teachers, teacher aides, and classmates. When giving hugs, he did not use any discretion or consider whether it was an appropriate time, place, or person. Bob's teachers began to worry about him. How would people outside of the classroom environment respond to him? Would people be scared of him? Would his peers ridicule him?

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Some people may not see anything wrong with Bob's behavior. Hugging may seem like a harmless act of kindness, but what happens when a student that gave harmless hugs in elementary school grows up and continues hugging complete strangers? Would somebody take advantage of a student like Bob? Could he accidentally hurt someone?

This was a real concern for Bob's teachers, and they were concerned for his future. As Bob aged, he would get bigger. Could Bob accidentally hurt a person by unexpectedly hugging a stranger? Would Bob be able to maintain a job if he continued to behave this way? Furthermore, would he even be able to gain employment or would he be viewed as a liability or a potential risk?

One of Bob's teachers decided she wanted to intervene and do something about this behavior before it was too late. She called a team meeting and invited everyone who worked closely with Bob. Collectively, the team decided that they could no longer reinforce Bob's hugging behavior. The team came to the decision that Bob would only be permitted to give hugs when it was appropriate or at designated times, such as at the end of the day when he was saying goodbye to his teachers and classmates. If he tried to hug his teachers at inappropriate times during the day they would not hug him back, and he would be reminded that he needed to wait until the end of the day. Though this was not part of the written curriculum, the teachers foresaw that his behavior might be viewed negatively by the general public and impact Bob's future. The teacher made an informed decision and tried to teach Bob social skills that the general population considered more

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appropriate. Eventually, with time, help, and support from his teachers, Bob learned that there was a time and place for hugs.

Story of the Question

Every year, the freshmen from the Science Academy (pseudonym) participate in a class-trip to the Sunny School. In the year 2000, I was one of the high school students that visited the school. Sunny School is designed to meet the needs of students that are both physically and mentally handicapped. The class-trip was coordinated with the intention of helping high school students learn about different conditions (cerebral palsy, shaken baby syndrome, fetal alcohol syndrome, autism, etc.) and types of therapies (speech, occupational, and physical).

While visiting Sunny School on a class trip, I learned more than I anticipated. I did not just learn about different conditions and therapies, but also learned about the rewards of being a teacher. I quickly fell in love with the students and teachers and began volunteering there. The students were in a self-contained environment. However, the teachers made a concerted effort to provide the students with social opportunities and made every attempt to mainstream them into the general population. It was at this school that I met Bob.

While volunteering at the Sunny School, I witnessed all of the efforts the teachers put into teaching students like Bob. They seemed to believe and value the importance of social emotional learning. By following a social emotional learning approach, students were able to learn "the process of acquiring the competencies to recognize and manage emotions, develop care and concern for others, establish positive relationships, make

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responsible decisions, and handle challenging situations effectively" (Elias, 2006). The teachers made every attempt to foster both academic and social skills.

Continuous efforts were made to provide the students with opportunities to socialize in age-appropriate ways. Social opportunities for these students served a dual purpose. Not only were these social opportunities beneficial to the students in self-contained classrooms, they also helped educate the general population about people with multiple disabilities. There are several examples of the efforts teachers made to incorporate students with the general population. Every winter the teachers arranged for college students to visit and bring the students gifts. Also, volunteers at the YMCA allowed the students to utilize the pool. The students loved swimming, and the therapists believed that the exercise helped students with physical disabilities build strength and endurance.

In addition to these efforts, frequent class trips were planned. These trips allowed the students to generalize the social skills that they learned in the classroom to contexts outside of the learning environment. In the past, students have gone on a variety of trips. Some of the trips have had the sole objective of helping the students meet their social goals. Examples of class trips with social skills objectives included trips to malls, beaches, restaurants, and movies. Other trips have served multiple purposes. For example, pool parties and adaptive bowling have helped the students exercise and build strength, while providing them with opportunities to practice socially appropriate behaviors. Additionally, students have visited local stores, such as Wegmans, to make purchases. Trips to local stores provided students with the chance to practice using their

communication skills and exchange currency. The students also went to Jenkinson's Aquarium, which has a touch center, where students can pet different aquatic animals. This multi-sensory exhibit allowed students to learn about the different animals through hands-on experience. It also gave students opportunities to engage and interact with peers from the regular education setting.

While at the school, I could see how involved the teachers were and how much they cared. I soon began to wonder what life for these children would be like if teachers did not take the time to focus on improving the students' social skills. How would the students adjust? How would the general population react to these students? What did the future hold for these students if these efforts had not been made?

I became even more interested in the topic when I recently read in a local newspaper that my hometown was allowing autistic students from a nearby self-contained school to attend Shore Elementary School (pseudonym) with general education students. The students came from Smile Day School (pseudonym). The students from Smile Day School were invited to attend Shore Elementary School for either two or four hours of the school day. The students were there to participate in social activities that would help mainstream them into the general population. From my experiences at Sunny School and recent initiatives to mainstream self-contained students for a portion of the school day, I became interested in what teachers were doing to help their students adapt and successfully integrate with the general population and the effectiveness of these efforts.

<u>Purpose Statement</u>

I believe that students need to learn appropriate social skills to be successful in their future. Each student is unique and comes to the classroom with different skills, backgrounds, and experiences (Johns, Crowley, and Guetzloe, 2005). As a future teacher, I feel the need to be aware of these variations, so I can help my students succeed. I cannot assume that every student comes to school with an extensive repertoire of socially appropriate behaviors. Rather than make this assumption, I want to be proactive and take steps to ensure that students learn the appropriate social skills.

As a future teacher, I believe I would be doing my students a great disservice if I did not teach them appropriate social behaviors. While working with special education students, I have often seen students ridiculed and isolated. Many times the students want to be accepted and understood by their peers, but are unaware of social norms. I became more aware of this after reading a memoir by John Elder Robison, entitled *Look Me in the Eye: My Life with Asperger's.* The memoir helped me understand how a child that does not understand social cues and facial expression might feel. John Elder Robison provided memories from his childhood and recalled not having many friends. Many times he considers his behavior socially appropriate, while his peers found him to be awkward. He was often unaware of how others perceived his behaviors and social interactions, but sensed that he was different from his peers (Robison, 2008).

Like John Elder Robison, students that are classified as special education often compare themselves with their regular education peers and are aware that they are different from their peers (Conley, Ghavami, VonOhlen, & Foulkes, 2007). Students that

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are classified as special education sometimes consider themselves less competent than their regular education peers in certain areas, including academics, social skills, and leadership skills (Conley, Ghavami, VonOhlen, & Foulkes, 2007).

As a future teacher, I want to make all students feel like competent and valuable members of the learning community. In my teaching experience, I have witnessed the frustration isolated students experience. Their frustration often leads them to act in ways that are not considered socially appropriate by the general population. For example, one student I observed at a school did not know how to express her feelings and would bite people. It became evident that she needed to learn a more appropriate way to express her feelings. If I were working with a student like this, I would want to help her because students with deficient social skills tend to have other concurrent issues, including behavioral, psychological, and academic problems (McDougall, Hymell, Vaillancourt, & Mercer, 2001; Parker, Rubin, Price, & DeRosier, 1995; Kupersmidt, Coie, & Dodge, 1990; Parker & Asher, 1987).

Students that are not equipped with the appropriate social skills may face a number of challenges in their future. For example, students with poor interpersonal skills are less likely to gain and maintain employment. Also, students with maladaptive behaviors are more likely to experience mental health problems and have a higher rate of juvenile delinquency (Lo, Loe, & Cartledge, 2002).

One strategy that can be effective in teaching social skills is bibliotherapy. The simplest definition of bibliotherapy is "the use of books to help people solve problems" (Aiex, 1993, p.1). "Storytelling has long been used as a vehicle for guiding individuals in

appropriate ways to behave. One only has to review the body of existing folktales in

order to realize that many were designed not only to answer questions about our universe

but also to transmit wisdom and help form socially approved values and beliefs"

(Cartledge & Kleefeld, 1994, p.8). I plan to use bibliotherapy to serve the dual purpose

of meeting academic standards and incorporating social skills into the curriculum.

<div align="center">Statement of Research Problem and Question</div>

Many students in special education settings not only struggle with academics, but

also struggle with learning appropriate social skills (Gresham, 2002; Parker & Asher,

1987). "Social and emotional skills create responsive, caring, and inclusive classrooms

and provide the foundation for building and sustaining learning relationships that lead to

academic success and responsible citizenship" (Schonert-Reichl & Hymel, 2007). For

students in self-contained classrooms, social skills are often an area that is lacking and

needs development. Teachers, myself included, can help their students by playing a more

active role in social skills instruction. Teachers can help their students learn appropriate

social skills and assist students in generalizing their knowledge and skills to multiple

settings.

Based on this research problem, my question becomes, *What role does the*

classroom teacher play in the socialization of students in self-contained classrooms? Sub

questions based upon this research question are: *How can a social skills program be*

successfully incorporated into the academic curriculum? What are ways to teach

students social skills without losing valuable instructional time? Is it possible? How?

Can bibliotherapy effectively be used to teach students in self-contained classrooms social skills?

<u>Organization of the Thesis</u>

Chapter I introduced the research question, as well as the story behind it. Chapter II takes an in-depth look at research related to the socialization of students in self-contained classrooms. Within Chapter II, the importance of appropriate social skills is emphasized, as well as the possible negative outcomes that result when the appropriate social skills are not taught. Additionally, the components of successful social skills training programs and the effectiveness of bibliotherapy in teaching social skills are examined. Chapter III explains the context of this qualitative teacher research study, as well as the research design and methodology. Chapter IV and V analyze the collected data, summarize the findings of the study, and explore the possible future implications of the study.

Chapter II Review of the Literature

Introduction

Chapter II presents a review of the literature regarding the importance of teaching students in self-contained classrooms appropriate social skills. The teacher plays a crucial role in students' social development. The teacher's role becomes even more important, considering students in self-contained classrooms often need additional help and support with their social skills (Johns, Crowley, & Guetzloe, 2005; Lane, Miller, Wehby, 2005; Grace, 2006). The first section focuses on the effects of maladjustment and how students' futures might suffer if appropriate interventions are not taken and maladaptive social behaviors are not corrected. The second section explores the benefits of integrating self-contained students with their regular education peers. In the third section, the components of effective social skills training programs are revealed. The fourth section examines the use of literature to teach social skills, which is referred to as bibliotherapy.

Importance of Social Skills

Students come to the classroom with different backgrounds and varying knowledge bases. For some students, school might be the first opportunity they have to actively interact with peers in a social context (Johns, Crowley, & Guetzloe, 2005). Teachers cannot be under the assumption that every child will come to school knowing how to respond appropriately in social situations (Johns, Crowley, & Guetzloe, 2005).

There are many questions about how students with special education classifications are impacted socially. One of the major questions being, "Do students who are set aside from their peers and placed in special education classrooms suffer from decrements in self-esteem, relative to students who are in the regular education classrooms?" (Conley, Ghavamu, VonOhlen, & Foulkes, 2007, p. 775). A study by Crocker & Major (1989) "found that stigmatized individuals as a group d[id] not have lower self-esteem than their nonstigmatized peers" (pp. 608-630). Countering this notion was a more recent study that found that students in special education did in fact have lower global self-esteem in comparison to regular education students (Conley, Ghavamu, VonOhlen, & Foulkes, 2007). Though the special education students' perceptions of their common sense, physical attractiveness, artistic, musical, and athletic abilities were not significantly different when compared to their regular education peers, the special education students did feel as though they had certain skill deficits (Conley, Ghavamu, VonOhlen, & Foulkes, 2007). According to this study, the special education students perceived themselves as being less competent than regular education students in terms of their academic, social, and leadership skills (Conley, Ghavamu, VonOhlen, & Foulkes, 2007).

In addition to special education students perceiving a deficit in their social skills, large bodies of research have indicated that students with high-incidence disabilities (emotional disturbance, learning disabilities, mild mental retardation, and other health impairments) often exhibit maladaptive behaviors that have an adverse effect on their relationships with peers and adults alike (Gresham, 2002; Parker & Asher, 1987). When

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students are not successful in maintaining social relationships, they may not develop appropriate interpersonal development skills (Kupersmidt, Coie, & Dodge, 1990). These students may experience rejection from peers and adults and fail academically (Kupersmidt, Coie, & Dodge, 1990). Studies indicate that inadequate social skills make finding and maintaining employment more difficult (Elksnin & Elksnin, 1998). Additionally, students lacking in social skills have a higher risk of becoming juvenile delinquents and are more likely to experience mental health problems (Lo, Loe, & Cartledge, 2002).

It has been reported that students in special education settings often experience problems understanding and interpreting other people's behaviors. They often have trouble reading nonverbal cues and facial expressions (e.g., Cartledge, Stupay, & Kaczala, 1996; Forness & Kavale, 1996; Nixon, 2001). Furthermore, they often have difficulty problem solving (e.g., Cartledge, Stupay, & Kaczala, 1996; Forness & Kavale, 1996; Nixon, 2001). Additionally, these students may not know how to start a conversation with a peer or understand turn taking (Causton-Theoharis & Malmgren, 2005). This may make it difficult for these students to form meaningful, lasting friendships with their peers.

Since the 1970s, psychologists have found a connection between peer relationship problems and maladjustment (McDougall, Hymel, Vaillancourt, & Mercer, 2001; Parker, Rubin, Price, & DeRosier, 1995; Kupersmidt, Coie, & Dodge, 1990; Parker & Asher, 1987). Children dealing with peer relational problems frequently report other concurrent issues, including behavioral, psychological, and academic issues (McDougall, Hymel,

Vaillancourt, & Mercer, 2001; Parker, Rubin, Price, & DeRosier, 1995; Kupersmidt, Coie, & Dodge,1990; Parker & Asher, 1987). These students have higher rates of suicide (Carney, 2000), drug abuse (Spooner, 1999), academic problems (Woodward & Fergusson, 2000), and delinquent behaviors (Brengden, Vitaro, & Bukowski, 1998). Teachers should play a role in providing these students with the tools to develop appropriate social skills that will lead to success in the classroom, as well as in the real world.

<div align="center">Integrating Self-Contained Students with Regular Education Peers</div>

Self-contained students may have more difficulties with socialization because they have restricted social choices. Students in self-contained classrooms tend to have fewer students. Additionally, self-contained students may be isolated from regular education students further limiting the number of opportunities these students have to interact with peers. "A reduction in the number and quality of interactions with prosocial peers decreases opportunities for skill development, which results in less adaptive socioemotional competencies and less mature friendship relations" (Newcomb & Bagwell, 1996). Self-contained students are often isolated from their peers, which further limits their ability to learn and practice social skills.

Students with disabilities often feel disconnected from their regular education peers. "Students with disabilities, whether they are developmental, cognitive, or physical, can find the 'unwritten curriculum' of social life at school painfully isolating" (Grace, 2006, p. 27). According to Pamela Dixon, Ph.D., of the University of Michigan, "Social integration is really a cycle. When children don't have social encounters, they

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don't learn how to interact with others, and then ultimately, others don't want to interact with them" (Grace, 2006, p.29). Self-contained students should have opportunities to interact with peers from the regular education setting. Students that have weak social skills need these opportunities to practice the social skills they are learning (Grace, 2006).

Another option that can help students is having programs and initiatives that allow special education students to spend a portion of the day in a regular education setting. In Shore, New Jersey (pseudonym), the school board recently approved a program that allows four first-grade students from Ocean Township's Smile Day School to attend Shore Elementary School for a portion of the day. This program is intended to help mainstream autistic children into the general population. Of the four students, two will attend Shore Elementary School for six hours a week, and the other two will be there for two hours a week (Bowman, 2008). This innovative program will give self-contained students new opportunities to learn and practice social skills. The basis behind the program is to help provide autistic students with the skills necessary to be "mainstreamed into the general population" (Bowman, 2008). Past research has indicated that if autistic students are mainstreamed at an early age, their behavior tends to improve (Bowman, 2008).

By giving students from self-contained classrooms the opportunity to interact with peers in the general education classroom, students can practice utilizing their newly acquired social skills. "Learning is inextricably linked to the social contexts within which children learn" (Brofenbrenner, 1989). Positive relationships between peers can inspire students to participate in learning activities, as well behave in socially appropriate

ways (Connell & Wellborn, 1991). Self-contained students can look to their peers as models of appropriate social behavior. "The positive role models in the classroom expose special education students to and reinforce appropriate social behavior which reduces or eliminates negative feedback from peers" (Office of Educational Research & Improvement, 1996).

<div align="center">Components of Good Social Skills Training Programs</div>

There is evidence that supports the use of social and emotional skills in schools. "Social and emotional skills create responsive, caring, and inclusive classrooms and provide the foundation for building and sustaining learning relationships that lead to academic success and responsible citizenship" (Schonert-Reichl & Hymel, 2007, p. 21). Students that attended schools that placed an emphasis on social emotional learning enjoyed school more, tended to have better attendance, performed better academically, behaved more appropriately, and experienced less disciplinary issues (Weissberg & Duriak, 2005). "Social emotional learning (SEL) offers educators, families, and communities relevant strategies and practices to better prepare students for 'the tests of life, not a life of tests'" (Elias, 2001, p.1).

In order for social skills training to be effective, there needs to be a great deal of planning and advanced preparation. There are several components that comprise good social skills training programs. The seven crucial components are:

1. "Direct instruction

2. The teachable moment

3. The teacher as a role model for appropriate social skills

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4. Recognition of appropriate social skills throughout the day

5. Special group projects

6. Conflict resolution

7. Teaching self-management, including social skills strategies and anger

management"

(Johns, Crowley, & Guetzloe, 2005).

A number of the components that comprise good social skills programs are based on Vygotsky's social context for learning. According to Vygotsky's theories, there is a connection between social and cognitive processes (Hausfather, 1996). A child's social environment plays a crucial role in his or her development. Beginning at a young age, children collaborate with other people to learn (Vygotsky, 1978). Teachers can collaborate with students in order to help them achieve and internalize appropriate social skills. Additionally, teachers can help students learn how to collaborate with each other.

The first component of a good social skills program is direct instruction. During direct instruction, inappropriate behaviors should be defined. "Social skills, like other skills (e.g., academic, athletic, vocational), can and should be taught directly" (Cartledge & Kiarie, 2001). Upon identifying the social skill deficit, teachers can break the skill into smaller steps. The teacher can then demonstrate and model the appropriate social skill that should replace the problem behavior (Johns, Crowley, & Guetzloe, 2005). According to good behavior management principles, teachers should help students develop positive replacement behaviors. For example, if a student needs the teacher's assistance and pulls on a classmate's hair to get the teacher's attention, the replacement

behavior might be to have the student use a communication device or sign to ask the teacher for help (Xin, 2008). Once a replacement therapy has been chosen, the student needs to practice utilizing the newly learned behavior.

The teacher should scaffold and support students in learning and practicing the newly learned behavior. Scaffolding occurs when teachers "create[] supported situations where children can extend their current skills and knowledge" (Hausfather, 1996). Scaffolding can be used during role-playing, which is an effective way of teaching social skills. During role-play, the skill can be broken into smaller tasks, so it is easier to manage. After the students role-play, the teacher can provide constructive feedback and reinforcement. After this, the teacher can model the ideal version of what could have been done (Rogoff, 1990).

After role-playing sessions, a system needs to be created to help students generalize the skill to multiple contexts. (Quinn, Kavale, Mathur, Rutherford, & Forness, 1996). Stimulus generalization means that the student is able to use the skill in multiple settings and situations, not just the classroom. For example, if the student is taught to say, "please" in school, but also uses it at home stimulus generalization has occurred (Zirpoli, 2008). Response generalization has to do with how much the new behavior influences other behaviors. If a student is taught to say "please" more often and also begins saying "thank you" more often, it is an example of response generalization (Zirpoli, 2008). Ideally, students will be able to generalize the skill to environments and situations outside of the school setting.

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An informal way of improving social skills is to take advantage of teachable moments. It is not uncommon for teachers to discipline students for inappropriate social behaviors and then forget the incident. In failing to fully address the issue, a teacher has missed an opportunity to transform a negative situation into a learning experience. Students do not always know and understand the appropriate responses to classroom situations. Student may be unaware of what they did wrong. Rather than punish the students and move on, take the time to teach them what might have been a more appropriate choice or behavior. Ask the students, "What happened? What did you do? What can you do the next time it happens?" (Johns, Crowley, & Guetzloe, 2005). Teachable moments provide ways to quickly address problem behaviors and devise ideas and strategies on possible ways to act differently in the future. By teaching students to think about their thinking, students are better at "creating learning plans [and] using appropriate skills and strategies to solve a problem" (Dunslosky & Thiede, 1998).

The next component in a good social skills program is to have the teacher as a role model of appropriate social behavior. The ways that teachers treat students sends a certain message. If students do not feel that they are being respected, they in turn will not respect their teacher (Johns, Crowley, & Guetzloe, 2005). Students learn a great deal from watching others, especially people that are supposed to be role models (ex. teachers and parents (Zirpoli, 2008). In addition to acting as positive role models, teachers need to provide positive feedback and recognize when students are acting properly (Johns, Crowley, & Guetzloe, 2005). Teachers need to lead students by example.

Students need to work together and support each other in learning social skills. Students can work together on special group projects and help educate each other about social skills, while learning how to work together. Conflict resolution is also an important skill that students should be taught. Students learn how to negotiate and discuss their problems, which it is more effective in resolving issues than suspensions and expulsions (Johns, Crowley, & Guetzloe, 2005). Students can learn social skills together and help each other by practicing appropriate social skills.

The final suggestion is to teach students self-management strategies, which help students learn how to manage their own behavior (Johns, Crowley, & Guetzloe, 2005). When students can manage their own behaviors, they are able to generalize the skills to multiple settings.

There are seven elements that tend to lead to high success rates in the acquisition of social skills. By teaching students social skills using these seven components, students receive direct instruction, see proper behaviors modeled, participate in guided practice (role-playing, group projects, and teachable moments), and then practice independently (self-management).

<div align="center">Use of Literature</div>

Literature can be used to teach students appropriate social skills, while still following academic standards (Cartledge & Kiarie, 2001). Using literature in this way is called bibliotherapy. "Storytelling has long been used as a vehicle for guiding individuals in appropriate ways to behave...Literature that reflects the real-life challenges of children and youth is extremely important for social skill instruction" (Cartledge &

Kiarie, 2001, p. 42). The use of bibliotherapy is a way to incorporate social skills academically into the formal written curriculum.

A number of reputable sources support the importance of literature in children's personal and social development (Ford, Tyson, Howard, & Harris, 2000; Lamme, Krogh, & Yachmetz et al., 1992; Kilpatrick, Wolfe & Wolfe, 1994). The teacher plays a major role in aiding the students to see similarities between themselves and the main character of the story. Once the students are able to identify with the main character, they will be able to express this understanding through verbal discussion or nonverbal means, such as artwork (Cartledge & Kiarie, 2000). Teachers play a significant role in engaging the students, as well as helping them gain insight. Utilizing bibliotherapy has a number of benefits.

There are a number of positive outcomes associated with the use of bibliotherapy. Some of the possible benefits of bibliotherapy include:

o Helping with self-concept and self-esteem

o Helping students understand themselves better

o Aiding children in finding interests outside of themselves

o Reducing emotional pressures

o Helping children understand that they are not the first or only person to face certain challenges

o Showing that there are multiple ways of solving a problem

o Helping children learn to converse about their problems

o Aiding students in developing problem solving methods

(Aiex, 1993).

Bibliotherapy can be used to teach students appropriate social behaviors. Bibliotherapy teaches students that they are not alone; they are not the only person who has ever had to deal with difficult problems or situations. Using literature often makes students feel more comfortable expressing themselves and their ideas. By discussing issues through literature, students can formulate plans and courses of action when they encounter certain problems or issues. Additionally, bibliotherapy helps students in the development of self-concept (Forgan & DeHass, 2004). Studies support that bibliotherapy is effective in bringing about positive changes in both a student's self-concept and academic achievement (Afolayan, 1992; Bauer & Ballus, 1995; Borders & Paisley, 1992; Lauren, 1995).

Conclusion

As the literature suggests, social skills play an important role in a students' future success. Students lacking in social skills face a number of possible risks in their future if efforts are not made to correct these deficits (Elksnin & Elksnin, 1998; Lo, Loe, & Cartledge, 2002). Providing inclusion opportunities and strong social skills programs can be beneficial to special education students and help improve their interactions with their peers (Connell & Wellborn, 1991: Johns, Crowley, & Guetzloe, 2005). Bibliotherapy, in particular, seems to be effective in teaching prosocial behavior (Ford, Tyson, Howard, & Harris, 2000; Lamme, Krogh, & Yachmetz et al., 1992; Kilpatrick, Wolfe & Wolfe, 1994). "Because many of our students' interpersonal interactions occur there [in schools], schools provide adults with a unique and natural setting in which they can

intervene and foster the development of social and emotional skills" (Schonert-Reichl &

Hymel, 2007).

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Chapter III Research Content Design

<u>Teacher Research Paradigm</u>

Students in self-contained classrooms often face difficulties when it comes to socializing with peers. Students spend a significant portion of their day in the classroom. Teachers can play an important role in teaching these students appropriate social behaviors. This particular research study hopes to examine and explore the role of the teacher in promoting and developing appropriate social skills among students in self-contained classrooms.

For this study, I will be utilizing a qualitative, teacher researcher paradigm. This approach "has a primary purpose of helping [me as] the teacher-researcher understand [] students and improve [my] practice in specific, concrete ways" (Hubbard & Power, 1999, p. 3). Teacher research is often the extension of good teaching practices. As a teacher, I want to observe the students and environment, identify the needs of the students, and adjust the curriculum to meet their needs (Hubbard & Power, 1999). In order to obtain this data, I plan on audio taping group discussions, videotaping role-playing sessions, collecting student projects and artifacts, and maintaining a teacher research journal. Additionally, I would like to implement an instructional unit. For the sake of privacy and confidentiality, the names and places used are pseudonyms.

<u>Context</u>

The qualitative research study will be conducted in a Kindergarten self-contained classroom. The school is located in southern New Jersey and will be referred to as, New Jersey Early Childhood Center (pseudonym). There are eight students in the class, and all of them were participants in the study. Each of the students' parent(s) signed consent forms, allowing the children to participate in this study.

The classifications of the eight students varied. According to the students' IEPs, classifications included multiply disabled, autistic, communication impaired, and multiple sclerosis. My cooperating teacher, who will be referred to as Mrs. Amazing (pseudonym), tried to provide multiple opportunities for her self-contained students to socialize with regular education students. Out of the eight students in her class, four of them go to regular education classrooms for a portion of the school day. These four students usually spend between a half hour and an hour in regular education classrooms with their peers. Every Friday, students from a regular education classroom participate in activities and lessons with the students in the self-contained Kindergarten. Mrs. Amazing's efforts to integrate self-contained students and regular education students seemed to be effective, considering five of the eight students will be moving to inclusion classrooms for the first grade.

In addition to practicing appropriate social skills with their regular education peers, the guidance counselor visited once a week to reinforce these skills. I was only able to observe her teach two lessons because she had IEP commitments and transition meetings. One of the first days I observed the class, the guidance counselor was teaching

students about eye contact and how to appropriately greet someone. The students seemed to do very well during this lesson.

Before implementing my qualitative research study, I asked Mrs. Amazing what social skills she though the students needed to improve upon. Mrs. Amazing said she thought sharing would be a good skill to focus upon. She noticed that some of the students tended to grab from each other. She said she had been working with the students on this skill, but it still needed improvement. Her observations of her students seemed to align with the research, which stated that classified students tend to have more difficulty with turn taking (Causton-Theoharis & Malmgren, 2005). Sharing became the main focus of the study.

Research Design/Methodology

The research design for this study is qualitative. Unlike quantitative data, which is based heavily on mathematical and statistical data, qualitative research is introspective and much more subjective (Hubbard & Power, 1999). I utilized multiple modes of data collection methods in order to ensure accuracy, as well as to check for triangulation. The data collection methods included audio recordings of class discussions, video recordings of role-playing sessions, a teacher research journal, an instructional unit, and student projects and artifacts.

Audio Taped Class Discussions

One source of data collection will be audio taped class discussions. Students will be able to share their ideas and perspectives during class discussions. Class discussion questions might include:

1. Who were the main characters in the story?

2. What was the problem in the story?

3. How was the problem resolved?

4. How did the main characters feel? Why?

5. Have you ever felt the way the main characters did?

6. What did the main characters learn?

7. What do you have in common with the characters?

8. If you were the characters, how would you have dealt with the problem?

9. If you were in a similar situation as the characters what would you do?

Teacher Journal

As a teacher researcher, I will keep a journal documenting my observations and reflections. In the journal, I will record what social skills instruction I observe. I will also write about the lessons I teach and how effective they are in educating the students about social skills. I also want to take note of how the students interact with their peers, teachers, and other members of the school community. This data will be coded and categorized and utilized in chapters IV and V.

Instructional Unit

Additionally, I will be implementing an instructional unit, which focuses on using literature to teach social skills. This use of literature is referred to as bibliotherapy. For bibliotherapy, there are typically four phases, which make the program effective (Sridhar & Vaughn, 2000).

1. Getting ready

2. What do I teach before reading?

3. During reading

4. After reading

During the first step, getting ready, the teacher needs to do some advanced preparation. The teacher should make sure the main character in the story is one that the student can identify with. Additionally, the teacher needs to ensure that the book is at the appropriate reading and developmental level (Sridhar & Vaughn, 2000). If the book is not at the appropriate level, it might cause the student to become frustrated.

The second step is to figure out what needs to be taught before the student begins reading the story or book. The teacher should discuss the overarching themes of the book with the students before delving into the story. Students should have the opportunity to interact and converse about how they would feel if they were placed in certain situations. The final step before beginning the story is to make predictions based on past social experiences (Sridhar & Vaughn, 2000).

While reading, the teacher should take brief breaks from the story to ask the students questions. Asking questions allows the teacher to make sure the students comprehend the story and are attentive. This step helps students synthesize the text and eliminate minor details. Additionally, teachers can ask guiding questions that help students identify with the main character, such as has this ever happened to you? How did you feel? What would you do if you were in the main character's shoes? (Sridhar & Vaughn, 2000). These questions force students to use their higher level thinking skills, while teaching students about social skills.

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The final phase of implementing bibliotherapy is the after reading activities. The teacher helps guide students by prompting discussion and asking questions. During the discussion, students can provide peers with feedback and ask them questions. By asking questions, students have the opportunity clear-up misunderstandings (Sridhar & Vaughn, 2000). Students identify and internalize social skills upon the completion of the four phases of bibliotherapy.

By using literature to teach social skills, functional skills are incorporated into the academic curriculum. There is increasingly more evidence to support the use of bibliotherapy (Afolayan, 1992; Bauer & Ballus, 1995; Borders & Paisley, 1992; Lauren, 1995). Bibliotherapy helps teachers meet two goals, which are literature instruction and social skills education (Forgan & DeHass, 1996).

The use of literature can be quite effective because students can often identify with the main character of the story, as well as the situations and struggles that the character experiences (Cartledge & Kiarie, 2001). Teachers should model appropriate social skills and give students opportunities to role-play and practice the appropriate social skills.

Video recording

In order to capture students' words and understanding of sharing, role-playing activities will be conducted. Some of these sessions will be video recorded, so they can be reviewed during data analysis. By recording the role-playing sessions, words, faces, and actions can be captured and interpreted. This is particularly crucial because special education students often have difficulty reading and expressing facial expressions.

Products & Artifacts

Throughout the unit, students will create products and artifacts that will illustrate their knowledge and understanding of social skills. Students will write, draw, and role-play. These items will be saved and examined during data collection.

Books to be Used During Research Project

- *I Can Show I Care* by Jeanette Donovan Guntly

- *I Can Share with Others* by Jeanette Donovan Guntly

- *Rainbow Fish* by Marcus Pfister

- *Rabbit and Hare Divide an Apple* by Harriet Ziefert

- *Want to Play?* by Marissa Moss

- *The Doorbell Rang* by Pat Hutchins

- *Head, Body, Legs* by Won-Ldy Paye & Margaret H. Lippert

- *Chubbo's Pool* by Betsy Lewin

- *Let's Share!* by Jillian Harker

The books were chosen for a number of reasons. Most of the books were chosen because they had characters that the students could easily identify with. For example, *I Can Show I Care* and *I Can Share with Others* had realistic photographs of children acting in socially appropriate ways. *Want to Play?* was about a brother and sister, while *Let's Share* was about friendships. The children in these books served as good role models. I chose books like *Rainbow Fish* and *Rabbit and Hare Divide an Apple* because the books were colorful and interactive, and I thought the students would find them to be engaging.

Other books were chosen because they aligned well with curriculum. For example, *The Doorbell Rang* and *Rabbit and Hare Divide an Apple* were incorporated into the math curriculum. Students learned about sharing, as well as how to divide a set of objects evenly among friends. When the students learned about the letter 'z,' there was a zoo theme for the week. During that week, I used the book *Chubbo's Pool*. Additionally, my teacher tries to incorporate multicultural lessons into the curriculum, so I decided to read the students an African folktale, called *Head, Body, Legs*.

Limitations of the Study

There were some limitations to the study. I was able to implement one or two lessons a week on social skills. However, the implementation of lessons was not as continuous or fluent as I intended. I am not sure if students always connected information from prior lessons. Additionally, I had to change some of the books I was going to use, as well as the order that the books were read in order to align with the curriculum.

Another challenge I encountered had to do with one of the research subjects. One of the students experienced some health issues and missed a number of the early lessons. The student missed more than two consecutive weeks of instruction.

Looking Ahead

Chapter IV examines the results of the data collected from audio taped interviews, student projects and artifacts, teacher research journal entries, video recordings of role-playing sessions, and data collected throughout the implementation of an instructional

unit. Chapter V will discuss the possible implications of the study, as well as provide

possible recommendations for future studies.

Chapter IV Data Analysis

<u>Introduction</u>

Chapter IV examines the data collected throughout this qualitative teacher

research. A number of different approaches were utilized in order to obtain this data.

Multiple modes of data collection were used in order to ensure accuracy, as well as to

check for triangulation. For this study, modes of data collection included audio taped

class discussions, video recordings of role-playing sessions, teacher research journal

entries, an instructional unit, and student projects and artifacts. The data was analyzed

and used to draw conclusions about *What role the classroom teacher plays in the*

socialization of students in self-contained classrooms? Sub questions that were explored

throughout this study included: *How can a social skills program be successfully*

incorporated into the academic curriculum? What are ways to teach students social

skills without losing valuable instructional time? Is it possible? How? Can

bibliotherapy effectively be used to teach students in self-contained classrooms social

skills?

<u>Research Findings</u>

1. What role does the classroom teacher plays in the socialization of students in self-

contained classrooms?

Considering one of my research questions examined what role the classroom

teacher played in the socialization of students in self-contained classrooms, I wanted to

observe what role my teacher, Mrs. Amazing, played in teaching her students social skills. It soon became evident that Mrs. Amazing played a crucial role in educating her students on how to behave in socially appropriate ways. Mrs. Amazing also provided multiple opportunities for her self-contained students to socialize with regular education students.

Inclusion Opportunities

Out of the eight Kindergarten students, four students spend a portion of their day in a regular education setting. These four students are in a regular education classroom with their peers for between a half hour and an hour. In addition to this inclusion opportunity, all of Mrs. Amazing's students engage in activities with their regular education peers on a weekly basis. Every Friday, students from a regular education visit the self-contained Kindergarten classroom and participate in lessons with Mrs. Amazing's students. Her efforts to integrate self-contained students and regular education students seem effective, considering five of her eight students will be moving to inclusive settings for the upcoming academic year.

Teachable Moment

Mrs. Amazing took an active role in teaching her students social skills. She often took advantage of the teachable moment. According to research, taking advantage of teachable moments is one aspect of effective social skills training programs (Johns, Crowley, & Guetzloe, 2005). It is not uncommon for a teacher to discipline a student for inappropriate social behavior and then forget about the incident. However, the student may not be aware of what he or she did wrong. Rather than punish the student and move

on, Mrs. Amazing would take time to teach the student what might have been a more appropriate response or behavior. (Johns, Crowley, & Guetzloe, 2005).

One example of the many times Mrs. Amazing intervened and took advantage of a teachable moment was when she overheard two students, who wanted the same toy.

K told J, "Gimme."

Mrs. Amazing said to K, "No. We do not use gimme."

Mrs. Amazing prompted K to rephrase his statement when she reminded him not to use the word "gimme." Mrs. Amazing did not tell K what he should say. Rather, she gave him the opportunity to reformulate a more appropriate response on his own. Mrs. Amazing stood close by and waited to hear K's response.

K reworded his statement to J and said, "May I please have it?

K knew a more appropriate way of talking to J. He was polite when he asked J for the toy. I am sure that the teacher's proximity to him influenced how he spoke to J. However, the important thing to note is that with a little bit of redirection, K can correct himself and speak in a more socially appropriate way.

J responded, "No thank you."

J was not ready to finish playing with the toy. He politely responded to K. Mrs. Amazing has worked with the students and taught them polite ways to say no. On several occasions, I have heard students say, "No thank you" or "Not right now" when another student has wanted to play with the same toy as them at the same time.

Mrs. Amazing then told K, "Well, you will have to find something else to do for now. Maybe J will want to share later."

Mrs. Amazing does encourage sharing, but she also wants the students to be aware that sometimes people say no. She explained to the students and me that in real life people do not always say yes and that there will be times when people say no. Mrs. Amazing tries to prepare her students for what to do when someone says no. After J said, "No thank you," K found something else to do. K did not cry or complain, instead he found something to do to keep him occupied.

Outside Support

In addition to taking advantage of the teachable moment, Mrs. Amazing also brought outside support resources into the classroom to help teach social skills. Mrs. Amazing enlisted the help of the school's guidance counselor, applied for a grant for dance therapy services, and invited guest speakers.

Guidance Counselor

As stated in Chapter III, the guidance counselor would come visit on a weekly basis to teach social skills. Prior to beginning student teaching, I observed the guidance counselor teaching a lesson on maintaining eye contact and greeting people appropriately. The guidance counselor used a book with realistic photographs of children modeling the skills she was trying to teach the students. The students in the pictures were shaking hands and maintaining eye contact. She explicitly pointed out what the children in the pictures were doing, as well as their facial expressions. Then she asked the students if they wanted to try. The guidance counselor chose a volunteer to help her model the appropriate way to greet someone. The student stood up, walked to the guidance counselor, smiled, shook her hand, and maintained eye contact. She then provided the

student with positive reinforcement in the form of a sticker. Each student then had a chance to practice greeting someone appropriately. The students all did very well. Some of them needed a little bit of prompting about maintaining eye contact, but they all shook the guidance counselor's hand and smiled, which is what they were instructed to do.

I observed another lesson that the guidance counselor taught. During this lesson, she focused on teaching the students about raising their hands and taking turns. To start the lesson, she played a familiar song about sharing. The students joined in and sang, "The waiting for my turn song will help me get along." She asked the students, "What does it mean to wait to take a turn?" V responded, "You wait for the teacher to call on you." The guidance counselor told her what a good job she did. She asked the students if they say anything when they raise their hand. They all replied in unison, "No." Next, she reminded the students that when they raise their hands their eyes belong on the teacher. After she said this, the students made eye contact with her, and she complimented them. She then asked them all to show her the proper way to raise their hands. T in particular was complimented because he did not make any noise when he raised his hand. After the students demonstrated the right way to raise their hands, the guidance counselor asked them how they would react if the teacher called on someone else. She asked them if they would get mad. Jo raised his hand and responded, "You wait, and she will call on you later." The guidance counselor praised him for having "such a great answer." Overall, the students responded very well to the lesson and did a great job raising their hands.

<u>Dance Therapist</u>

Besides weekly visits from the guidance counselor, Mrs. Amazing applied for a grant to have a dance therapist work with the students in group sessions. The terms of the grant called for the dance therapist to integrate groups of regular education and special education students. The dance therapist talked to the students about kinosphere. The dance therapist explained that every student has his or her own kinosphere. However, by working in groups and moving together, she encouraged them to share space and share kinospheres. During dance therapy sessions, students would ask permission to enter someone else's space. If a person said no, students were urged to ask a different peer if they could enter his or her space.

The dance therapist often planned and coordinated activities that encouraged sharing and gave students opportunities to practice social skills. For example, she did an activity with hula-hoops, where students pretended that their hula-hoop was their own ocean. The dance therapist would sing,

"Swim, swim, swim around the room

Swim, swim, swim around the room

And everybody stop."

While the dance therapist was singing, the students pretended to swim within their ocean. When the dance therapist stopped singing, all the students would stop moving. The dance therapist gradually took away hula-hoops, which meant there were less hula-hoops than students. This forced the students to share hula-hoops and share space. At this point, the students were forced to ask their peers if they could share spaces. As the number of

hula hoops decreased, more and more students had to share their space. Most of the students were willing to share. However, if a student said no, the student would ask someone else if he or she would share.

Guest Speakers

Another way Mrs. Amazing addressed social skills was by having guest speakers visit. Mrs. Amazing planned a career month. She had people from all different professions speak about their jobs. Guest speakers included police officers, a veterinary nurse, a neonatal nurse, a firefighter, and a pretzel maker. The speakers tended to be very engaging. The police officer showed the students his car and flashed the lights. When the veterinary nurse came, she showed the students how to use a stethoscope. The day the neonatal nurse came, the students were instructed to bring a stuffed animal from home. The neonatal nurse brought in scrubs for the students. Also, she gave them diapers and showed them how to put them on their stuffed animals. The firefighter showed the students a video set to music. When the pretzel maker visited, the students learned how to make pretzels. The students found the career speakers very interesting and were quite attentive.

Once the presenters were done speaking, the students had the opportunity to ask relevant questions. Mrs. Amazing had done role-playing activities with the students to prepare them for the guest speakers. During the role-play activities, she used puppets and taught the students how to ask appropriate questions. Students asked the speakers questions, such as, "What do you like about your job? What do you dislike about your job? What is your favorite thing about your job? What is your least favorite thing about

your job? What tools do you use?" The students learned a lot from the career speakers and found them very enjoyable.

<u>Puppets and Role-Play</u>

Mrs. Amazing used puppets to teach students about different jobs. When using the puppets, she modeled the appropriate social skills and provided the students with opportunities to role-play. I think part of the reason the students were so good at role-playing during my study had to do with the fact that Mrs. Amazing had given them opportunities to engage in role-playing activities.

In addition to using puppets to learn about different careers, Mrs. Amazing allowed each student to choose what career he or she was thinking of pursuing. Mrs. Amazing had life size cutouts of people acting in different professions. The student could choose which cutout they wanted and color it. These cutouts were proudly hung in the hallways for everyone to see. There were cutouts of teachers, doctors, police officers, and bakers. She chose a variety of careers, which required different skills. Some of the jobs required college degrees, while others did not. I think Mrs. Amazing chose these careers because she hoped to convey a certain message to her students. She wanted her students to know that they were capable of being anything they wanted and that she believed in them.

2. *How can I use bibliotherapy throughout the school day?*

After observing Mrs. Amazing, I was now aware of her role in teaching her students social skills. Now it was my turn to determine how I was going to use bibliotherapy to teach students social skills. As a student teacher, I had to follow the

academic curriculum, but still find and provide opportunities to enhance the students'

social skills. I talked to Mrs. Amazing about my goals. She tried to give me

opportunities to incorporate my social skills lessons into the curriculum and

recommended I focus on sharing.

My main approach to incorporating social skills into the academic curriculum was

through the use of bibliotherapy. As stated earlier, "Storytelling has long been used as a

vehicle for guiding individuals in appropriate ways to behave...Literature that reflects the

real-life challenges of children and youth is extremely important for social skill

instruction" (Cartledge & Kiarie, 2001, p. 42). I carefully chose books that focused on

sharing. My five modes of data collection were audio taped class discussions, video

recordings of role-playing sessions, a teacher research journal, an instructional unit, and

student projects and artifacts. In terms of student projects and artifacts, these took the

form of art projects, journal writing, and shared writing activities.

Bibliotherapy During Reading

In order to incorporate social skills into the academic curriculum, my main goal

was to try to substitute stories related to sharing into the reading blocks that were already

scheduled in Mrs. Amazing's lesson plans. During the reading blocks, I was able to

incorporate the books *I Can Show I Care, I Can Share with Others, Rainbow Fish, Want

to Play?, Head, Body, Legs, Chubbo's Pool,* and *Let's Share!.* In most instances, I would

have time to read the stories and have group discussions. However, It was often difficult

to fit role-playing sessions and interactive activities into the day.

Multidisciplinary Uses of Bibliotherapy

In addition to incorporating literature into the reading block, I attempted to effectively use literature to teach social skills during the math block. Everyday after lunch the students participated in afternoon circle. During afternoon circle, the focus was on mathematics. This block of time provided the perfect opportunity to integrate books on sharing into the academic curriculum. *Rabbit and Hare Divide an Apple* and *The Doorbell Rang* were the two books used to achieve math and social skills objectives. While reading these stories, students engaged in activities on dividing sets of objects. The students worked cooperatively with a partner to divide the set of objects so each person had the same number of objects. The students also had the task of figuring out what to do if there were an odd number of objects. Students had to determine what to do with the extra object. The students seemed to enjoy these activities, which met math, reading, and social skills objectives.

Bibliotherapy and Writing

Being that there were time constraints, I wanted to try to incorporate social skills into as much of the school day as possible. Rather than just limit myself to using literature during the reading blocks and afternoon circle, I incorporated social skills into shared writing and journal writing activities. Being that my teacher conducted a shared writing lesson each week, I decided to have students participate in a writing lesson on sharing. During a shared writing lesson, students would work together to create a cohesive, logical story. All of the students would have the opportunity to participate and contribute to the story.

In addition to including social skills during a shared writing activity, students also wrote about sharing during journal writing. On the first occasion, students were given a picture prompt. There were two children sharing ice pops in the picture. Students were asked what the children were doing in the picture. The students correctly responded that the students were sharing. I then provided the students with examples of ways to share. After I gave examples and modeled a sentence, I asked the students to provide examples of ways they share. I did this to check their understanding and ensure that they understood the concept. Then, I asked the students to independently write ways that they share.

The next time I asked the students to write in their journals, I gave them a different prompt. I asked them to recall some of the characters from the books we had read. The students named characters from *Rainbow Fish*, *Rabbit and Hare Divide an Apple*, and *Chubbo's Pool*. I told the students to choose a character. After the students chose a character, they were instructed to write about the character's experiences and feelings.

Teachable Moment

In addition to making social skills part of the formal written curriculum, I tried to teach social skills by taking advantage of the teachable moment. For example, if I saw a student sharing or practicing appropriate socials skills, I would compliment the student in front of his or her peers. I tried to use the students as positive role models for each other.

Another way I took advantage of the teachable moment was by working with a student named, K. It was his second time in a self-contained Kindergarten. He did not

really care about academics. However, as the year progressed, he started to take more interest in books and educational games. If he asked me to read a book, I would give him choices of books that discussed sharing. While I was reading to him, he told me that he wanted to be a good sharer and said, "You turn the page first. Then, me." Additionally, playing academic games served as a good way for him to practice turn taking.

<u>Positive Reinforcement</u>

I created a sharing award to motivate and reward students for engaging in socially appropriate behaviors. The award was given to a student at the end of each day. When I presented the student with the reward, I would explain to the class what behaviors the student had exhibited that warranted earning the award. I used the reward as a form of positive reinforcement. Research indicates that "clear, consistent, behavior-specific praise is essential when addressing social skills acquisition deficits" (Elliott & Gresham, 1991). "When attempting to build and maintain any new skills, be it academic or social, positive feedback is essential" (Sulzer-Azaroff, & Mayer, 1991; Wolery & Lane, in press).

3. Can bibliotherapy effectively be used to teach students in self-contained classrooms social skills?

Once I had determined how I wanted to use bibliotherapy in the classroom setting, I then wanted to examine its effectiveness. Throughout the course of the research study, nine books were used to teach students about appropriate social skills. The main objective was to use literature that focused on sharing. Sharing was a skill that they had been practicing in the classroom, during dance therapy sessions, and during structured

lessons with the guidance counselor. This seemed an appropriate area to focus upon

considering many students this age have difficulty sharing. Additionally, sharing would

be a skill that all of the students would need when they advanced to first grade, especially

since many of them were moving to larger, more inclusive classrooms.

Bibliotherapy did seem to be effective. Many of the students seemed to take

something away from the experience. However, some of the students seemed to have

deeper understandings of sharing than others. The students that tended to have a deeper

understanding of sharing were able to generalize what they learned from the stories to

their own experiences. Examples of the students' writing helped demonstrate their

understanding of sharing. When I asked students to participate in a shared reading

activity, here was the dialogue and the responses that were generated among the students:

> Teacher: "We are going to write together. While writing, we are going to take
>
> turns. I know you have practiced writing stories like this before, like when you
>
> wrote a story about a windy day. Today, we are going to write about sharing. Let
>
> us call our story *Sharing*. Is that okay with everyone? Who would like to start?
>
> Go ahead K."
>
> K: "I share a cupcake."

K is a student that is in a self-contained Kindergarten for a second year. It is

interesting that he said he would share a cupcake during this writing activity because this

was not the response he had during a follow-up activity for the book, *The Doorbell Rang*.

During the activity, I told the students that I had four cupcakes. I had one for myself, and

I invited M, K, and J over. Then, R, V, T, and Jo came over. I asked the students if it

was fair that four of us had cupcakes and four of us did not have cupcakes. They did not think it was fair, so I asked them what we should do. I asked the students that did not have cupcakes how they felt. They all said they were sad. I asked K, what I should do with the cupcake, and he said I should "eat it all." I asked if anyone else had any other ideas. R said I should, "split it in half." I modeled how to split mine in half. Then, I asked M what he was going to do with his cupcake. M was willing to share it. When it was K's turn, he was still reluctant to share. Though K was reluctant to share during this activity, he remembered what he was supposed to do an applied it to this writing activity.

> Teacher: "Good job. Who would like to add to the story? Okay V."
>
> V: "Daddy's ring."
>
> Teacher: "Thanks for sharing. Can you tell me though if you can think of something that might go better with K's sentence?"
>
> V: "I share it with R."

V is currently dealing with a lot of issues at home. Her parents are getting divorced. When she discusses daddy's ring, she is referring to a wedding ring. This was a reoccurring theme, and it turns up later in her journal writing as well. Her socioemotional health seems to be impacting her answers. According to Vygotsky's sociohistorical approach to cognitive development, there is a connection between social and cognitive processes (Hausfather, 1996). A child's social environment plays a crucial role in their development (Vygotsky, 1978). After I asked V to rethink her sentence, she decided to share with R. R is one of V's best friends, and they ride the bus together, so it is logical that she would select him to share a cupcake with her.

Teacher: "Great job. I love your sentence. Who would like to go next? R."

R: "I want to share it with J."

R decided to relate his sentence to V's sentence about sharing. Like V, he decided to share the cupcake with a friend. He chose to share the cupcake with J, one of his best friends, who rides the same bus as him.

Teacher: "Good. Who wants to add the next sentence? Go ahead Jo."

Jo: "I share it with (hesitates) V."

When Jo was deciding who he wanted to share the cupcake with, he hesitated. When he hesitated, he was looking around the room to see which students had not been chosen yet. He noticed that V had her hand raised. He chose V to share with because no one had shared with her yet and because she had her hand raised.

Teacher: "Who would like to help me next? Yes M."

M: "I am sharing a cupcake with Ms. Massa."

M chose to share with me. M tends to seek adult attention. Often during playtime, he would rather play with his teachers than his peers. He likes to speak with adults and listen to their conversations. Knowing M, it makes sense that he would pick an adult over a student to share with.

Teacher: "That is a great sentence. That was very nice of you. Thank you. Who has not had a turn yet? Okay, T it is your turn. Can you try to tell me why we share?

T: "I am sharing it with K."

T is a very happy boy. He tends to be friends with everyone in the class. He probably picked K because he knew no one had shared with K yet.

Teacher: "Good. Can you think of why we share?"

At this point in the writing, I noticed that the students were saying whom they were sharing with. The story was cohesive and logical. However, students were not identifying what sharing was or why people share.

T: (shrugs and does not say anything).

Teacher: "Okay. Can someone who has not had a turn help me out and tell me why we share? Yes D."

D: "I am sharing with Ming Ming."

D often discusses characters from television shows, especially ones from *Dora the Explorer.* During this activity, she did not identify a person to share with, rather she chose a character. This theme reemerges in her journal writing.

Teacher: "Great job. J you have not had a turn. Can you try to tell me why we share?"

J: (long pause). "I don't know."

When J first arrived at the school, he was very defiant. His defiant behavior was part of the reason why he got a one-on-one aide, named Mrs. D. His behavior has improved a great deal. However, he often says he does not know when he does not want to answer questions.

Mrs. D: "Yes you do. J you share because it is a nnnn..."

Mrs. D. often prompts him when he is being defiant. She usually provides him with a prompt because he does not always know the answer. However, sometimes he knows and just refuses to answer.

J: "because it is a nice thing to do."

J was able to provide a reason why we share, but he needed prompting. I do not think he would have provided this response if he were not prompted.

The completed story read:

I Share

I share a cupcake. I share it with R. I want to share it with J. I share it with V. I am sharing a cupcake with Ms. Massa. I am sharing it with K. I am sharing with Ming Ming. I share because it is a nice thing to do.

In looking at the completed story, some themes seemed to emerge. K wrote the initial sentence. He referred to an experience that he had during a bibliotherapy lesson, which means he internalized the lesson of the story and that it had meaning to him. After the initial sentence was written, it was V's turn. She started to take the story in a different direction related to events going on in her personal life. However, when she was asked to provide a sentence related to K's, she decided to share with her friend on the bus, R. When it was R's turn, he also decided to share with his friend from the bus, J. Both V and R thought it would be a good idea to share with one of their friends.

At this point, a pattern was beginning to emerge. The students were choosing to share with people that they identified with. V and R identified with their friends from the bus. While Jo and T identified with people that no one had chosen to share the cupcake

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with. When it was Jo's turn, he looked around at his classmates before choosing someone to share with. He looked for people that had not had a turn yet, and then chose someone with a hand raised. Not only did he look for someone who had not had a turn, but he also chose someone that was behaving in a socially appropriate manner. Similarly, T looked at his classmates and chose someone that had not had a turn.

M and D did not choose members of their class to share with, but they did choose people that they valued. M tended to seek adult attention, so he chose to share with me. D tended to relate most to cartoon characters, so she chose Ming Ming. Even though the students chose different people to share with, they all picked someone or something with personal meaning to them.

Though the students were able to generate a story illustrating that they understood the concept of sharing, they often had difficulty verbalizing what sharing actually was and the purpose of sharing. It was much easier for them to provide examples of sharing than define it.

The students' journal writing provided evidence of what they had learned. The first set of journal entries was on different ways the students shared.

<u>Jo</u>: "I am sharing my popcorn in my home. I am sharing with my daddy."

<u>R</u>: "I share with Z a monster lollipop."

<u>V</u>: "I am sharing with my dad. I share the ring."

<u>M</u>: "I am sharing wrestlers with Mason (M's brother)."

<u>D</u>: "Dora shares her necklace. Swiper swipes it."

K: "I am sharing purple Popsicles."

T: "I am sharing toys with my brother."

The next set of journal writing focuses on student's ability to relate to the main characters from the different stories they heard. The students were asked to recall characters from the different stories that they had heard and discussed.

Jo: "Rainbow Fish is sharing scales. The fish is happy."

R: "Rainbow fish shares his scales with everyone (shark, eel, me, turtle, and the other sharks)."

V: "The rabbit had a little cupcake. Raccoon didn't share the cupcake."

M: "Rainbow Fish is sharing his scales. That makes me feel happy."

J: "Rainbow Fish is sharing with J."

K: "Rainbow Fish is sharing his scales."

T: "Rainbow Fish shares his scales I am happy."

In examining the data collected, there a number of trends that became evident. In general, the students that had more inclusion opportunities were more likely to use critical thinking skills. Of the eight students, four of the students have the opportunity to go to other classrooms after lunch for between a half hour and an hour. These four students, as well as one other student, are moving to inclusion classrooms next year. Of the four students that have fewer opportunities for inclusion, two have one-on-one aides. The students that did not have as many inclusion opportunities provided more text-based and simplistic responses. The students with more inclusion opportunities tended to provide longer responses.

Figure 1: Journal Writing Comparison I-How do you share?

Students with More Inclusion Opportunities	Students with Less Inclusion Opportunities
Jo: I am sharing my popcorn in my home. I am sharing with my daddy.	D: Dora shares her necklace. Swiper swipes it.
R: I share with Z a monster lollipop.	K: I am sharing purple Popsicles.
V: I am sharing with my dad. I share the ring.	T: I am sharing toys with my brother.
M: I am sharing wrestlers with Mason (M's brother).	J: Absent

In looking at the responses of the students with more inclusion opportunities, I noticed that these students were able to generalize sharing to contexts and environments outside of the classroom, which is called stimulus generalization (Zirpoli, 2008). Jo, M, and V all mentioned their families when they wrote about how they shared. I noticed that many of V's responses tended to fixate on discussing her dad and sharing a ring. V was going through a difficult time. While I was implementing this research project, her parents were going through a divorce. When she was referring to a ring, it was a wedding ring. Her social emotional health seemed to impact her responses. Her responses linked with Vygotsky's theoretical stance that makes connections between social and cognitive processes (Hausfather, 1996). A child's social environment plays a crucial role in their development (Vygotsky, 1978). R tends to have a very vivid

imagination, so during journal, he tended to draw elaborate pictures of monsters and sea creatures and wrote creative and elaborate stories.

I then compared the responses of the students with more inclusion opportunities with the students that had less inclusion opportunities. There was a distinct difference between the responses. For example, K wrote, "I am sharing purple Popsicles." K's sentence was directly related to a picture I showed the students. The picture showed two children sharing Popsicles. I intended for the picture to serve as a prompt to stimulate a discussion about sharing, but for K he associated the picture as the definition of sharing. D tended to relate to cartoons and television shows and refers to these characters in her responses. Her sentence was "Dora shares her necklace. Swiper swipes it." D was unable to explain how she shared, instead she spoke about how other characters do and do not share. T was able to generalize his learning to a context outside of the classroom and wrote about how he shared with his brother. Though T has less inclusion opportunities than some of his other classmates, he like the four students that have more inclusion opportunities is going to an inclusion classroom next year.

Figure 2: Journal Writing Comparison -How characters from stories share

Students with More Inclusion Opportunities	Students with Less Inclusion Opportunities
Jo: Rainbow Fish is sharing scales. The fish is happy.	J: Rainbow Fish is sharing with J.
R: Rainbow Fish shares his scales with everyone. (When I asked him, "Who is	D: did not complete because of behavior plan

everyone?" He said, "the shark, eel, me, turtle, and the other sharks.")	
<u>V</u>: The rabbit had a little cupcake. Raccoon didn't share the cupcake.	<u>K</u>: Rainbow Fish is sharing his scales.
<u>M</u>: Rainbow Fish is sharing his scales. That makes me feel happy.	<u>T</u>: Rainbow Fish shares his scales. I am happy.

In looking at the students' journal responses, I again noticed that the students with more inclusion opportunities tended to provide more detailed responses than the students with less inclusion opportunities. The students with more inclusion opportunities were more likely to discuss the character's feelings, while the students that had less inclusion opportunities tended to have responses that were more egocentric.

<u>Comparison of students with different opportunities for inclusion</u>

It seemed to be a reoccurring theme that the students with more inclusion opportunities tended to have more detailed responses than the students with less inclusion opportunities. Research tends to show that students in self-contained classes may have more difficulties with socialization because they have restricted social choices (Newcomb & Bagwell, 1996). Students in self-contained classrooms tend to have fewer students. Additionally, self-contained students may be isolated from regular education students further limiting the number of opportunities these students have to interact with peers (Newcomb & Bagwell, 1996).

I began to wonder why there was such a difference between the students with more inclusion opportunities versus the students with less inclusion opportunities. All of the students in the study came from a self-contained environment. Did it have to do with the fact that the students with more inclusion opportunities had more chances to practice socially appropriate skills? Was it because the students with more inclusion opportunities were exposed to larger groups of students? Were the students with more inclusion opportunities exposed to a greater number of positive role models? Were the students that had more inclusion opportunities developmentally more advanced in terms of social skills or was it more related to academics and the students' written and expressive language abilities? I also wondered whether students' responses had to do more specifically with their disability and their learning challenges?

Effectiveness of Texts Chosen

When examining the data, another theme emerged that was common to all of the participants in the study. At this point in the study, students had heard a number of different stories with a number of different characters. However, almost all of the students decided to write about the character Rainbow Fish. Out of the seven students that participated in this journal writing session, six chose Rainbow Fish. The only student that did not choose to write about Rainbow Fish was V. V chose to write about Rabbit and Raccoon from *Rabbit and Hare Divide an Apple.*

I grew increasingly curious about why the students chose to write about these two stories and not any of the others. There were two possible reasons that I thought might explain why students chose these stories over the others. One reason was the characters

might have been easier to identify and remember. The other reason was related to the number and type of activities done with the stories.

Characters

I began to wonder why students tended to identify more with certain characters over others. Some of the stories used in the study gave characters specific names, while other stories just showed examples of characters behaving in socially appropriate ways. If a story had a specific character with a specific name, it seemed to be easier for the student to recall the character. This may have been because the characters were more concrete and less abstract to the students when they had a name.

I also noticed these characters stood out because their names were often animal classifications. Rather than give Rabbit, Raccoon, or Rainbow Fish a name like Bob, the characters were just referred to as their animal classification. Students could connect the name of the character easily with the pictures and images in the story, making the characters easier to recall. Students might have been able to identify more with these characters because it was easier for the students to recall them. According to the principles of bibliotherapy, when a student is able to identify with the main character, he or she is better able to express this understanding through verbal discussion or nonverbal means, such as artwork (Cartledge & Kiarie, 2000).

Number and types of activities

Students might have been able to identify more with the characters from *Rainbow Fish* and *Rabbit and Hare Divide an Apple* because of the number and types of activities done with these characters. Due to time constraints, many of the follow-up activities to

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the stories were class discussions after the book was read. There was not always time for role-playing, writing, or art activities. However, with *Rainbow Fish* and *Rabbit and Hare Divide an Apple* there was time for activities following class discussion.

Rainbow Fish

Rainbow Fish probably had the most impact on the students because in addition to being a character that was easy to identify with, the students engaged in two follow-up activities. During the first activity students colored Rainbow Fish. The Rainbow Fish the students were coloring did not have any shiny scales. I went around to each student and asked, "How many scales does Rainbow Fish have after he shares-one or a lot?" All of the students correctly responded one. I gave them each an aluminum foil scale for them to glue to their Rainbow Fish. I also asked the students how Rainbow Fish felt when he shared, and they correctly answered that Rainbow Fish felt happy.

Student Work 1: Rainbow Fish after he shares

Next, I wanted to have the students color another picture of Rainbow Fish. After coloring the second Rainbow Fish students would say how many scales Rainbow Fish had before he shared and how he felt. I took opportunities over the next two days to have

students complete this task. Students had a little more difficulty recalling how many

scales Rainbow Fish had before he shared, but did remember that Rainbow Fish was sad

because he had no friends. Out of the seven students that participated in this activity, J,

T, M, R, and K immediately knew that Rainbow Fish had lots of scales before he shared.

Jo and V eventually told me that Rainbow Fish had lots of scales, but it required

prompting and rephrasing of the question. Jo does not always understand questions

because his mom does not speak much English. V was having trouble answering, so I

decided I would try working with her later in the day. Sometimes V had difficulty

focusing in school because of her home situation. When I asked her later in the day, she

had no difficulty answering. Ultimately, all seven students that participated got the

correct answer that Rainbow Fish had lots of scales before sharing and that he was sad

because he had no friends.

<u>Students Work 2: Rainbow Fish before he shares</u>
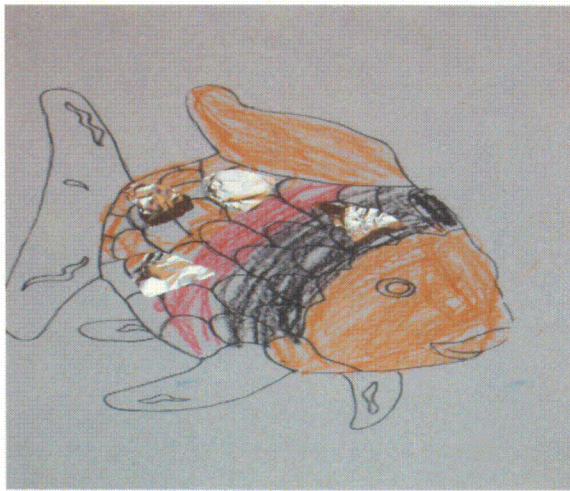
After participating in the art project on Rainbow Fish, students had the

opportunity to role-play. Mrs. Amazing had a huge Rainbow Fish with Velcro scales.

After I modeled with Mrs. Amazing, the students had the opportunity to take turns role-playing. Students had the opportunity to be Rainbow Fish and the little fish that wanted scales. Students stated how they felt during the role-playing session. Students shared scales. However, some students needed to be reminded not to grab the scales. Instead of grabbing the scales, the students were reminded to wait for Rainbow Fish to give them the scales.

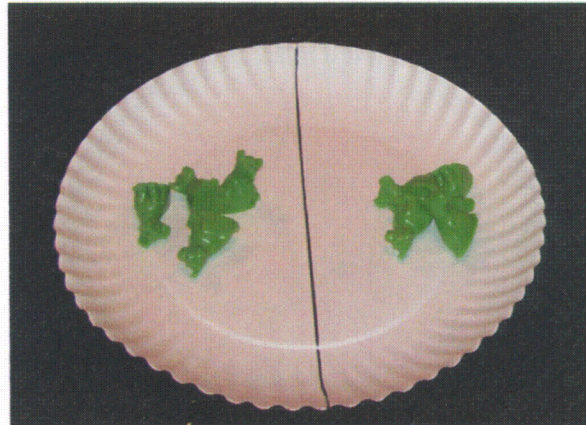Student Work 3: Rainbow Fish with Velcro scales

The students did very well in responding to the book *Rainbow Fish*. As stated earlier, the combination of a character that is easy to identify with and multiple activities seemed to really engage the students. Even though *Rainbow Fish* was the first story we read, the students were able to recall the most about it.

Rabbit and Hare Divide an Apple

Rabbit and Hare Divide an Apple was the other story that students were able to

recall characters from. During the story Rabbit and Hare try to divide a mushroom.

When they split it in half, the two pieces are not the same size. To show students this, I

made a large mushroom and split it into two unequal pieces. I then gave the small piece

to Jo and kept the big one for myself. I asked Jo if it was fair, and he said, "no." I asked

how he felt, and he responded that he felt, "sad." As we read on in the story, Rabbit and

Hare decide to split the big piece in half and split the little piece in half. By doing this,

Rabbit and Hare would each have one smaller piece of the mushroom and one larger

piece of the mushroom. I then, tore my mushroom the same way. To ensure the students

understood, I would sometimes give a student two small pieces and keep the two large

pieces and ask if it was fair. Then, I would give a different student two large pieces and

keep the two small pieces and ask if it was fair. All of the students did very well during

this activity and responded correctly. Some students did need more prompting than

others to understand the exercise.

After the book was finished, the students were partnered with a neighbor. I

modeled what I wanted the students to do before I gave them the materials. Then, I gave

the students a set of manipulatives and a paper plate with a line down the middle. The

students had to take turns putting the manipulatives on their side of the plate. The

students had to be good sharers and make sure they each had the same number of

manipulatives on each side of the plate.

The students also had to decide what to do if there was one left over. When I asked the students what they were going to do, someone suggested to put the extra one on the line in the middle of the plate. Some of the students did very well with this, but others struggled. Being that some students experienced difficulty, the activity was repeated on a different day. When the activity was repeated, all of the students showed improvement, which demonstrated an increased understanding.

Student Work 5: Figure of students sharing even number of manipulatives
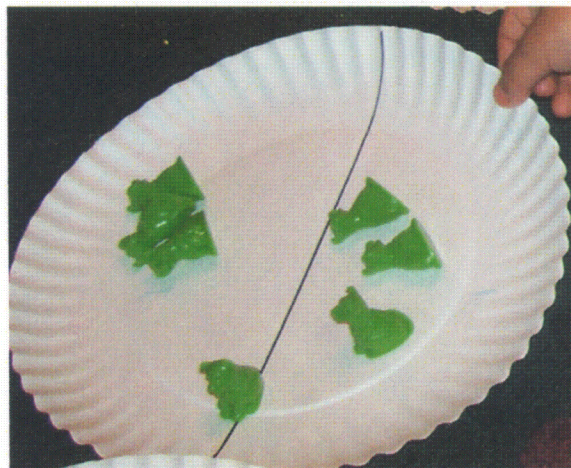
<u>Conclusion on the effectiveness of literature</u>

In order for the literature to be effective, it seemed as though students needed to have both characters that they could identify and at least one follow-up activity after reading the book. *Rainbow Fish* and *Rabbit and Hare Divide an Apple* were effective because both of these elements were present.
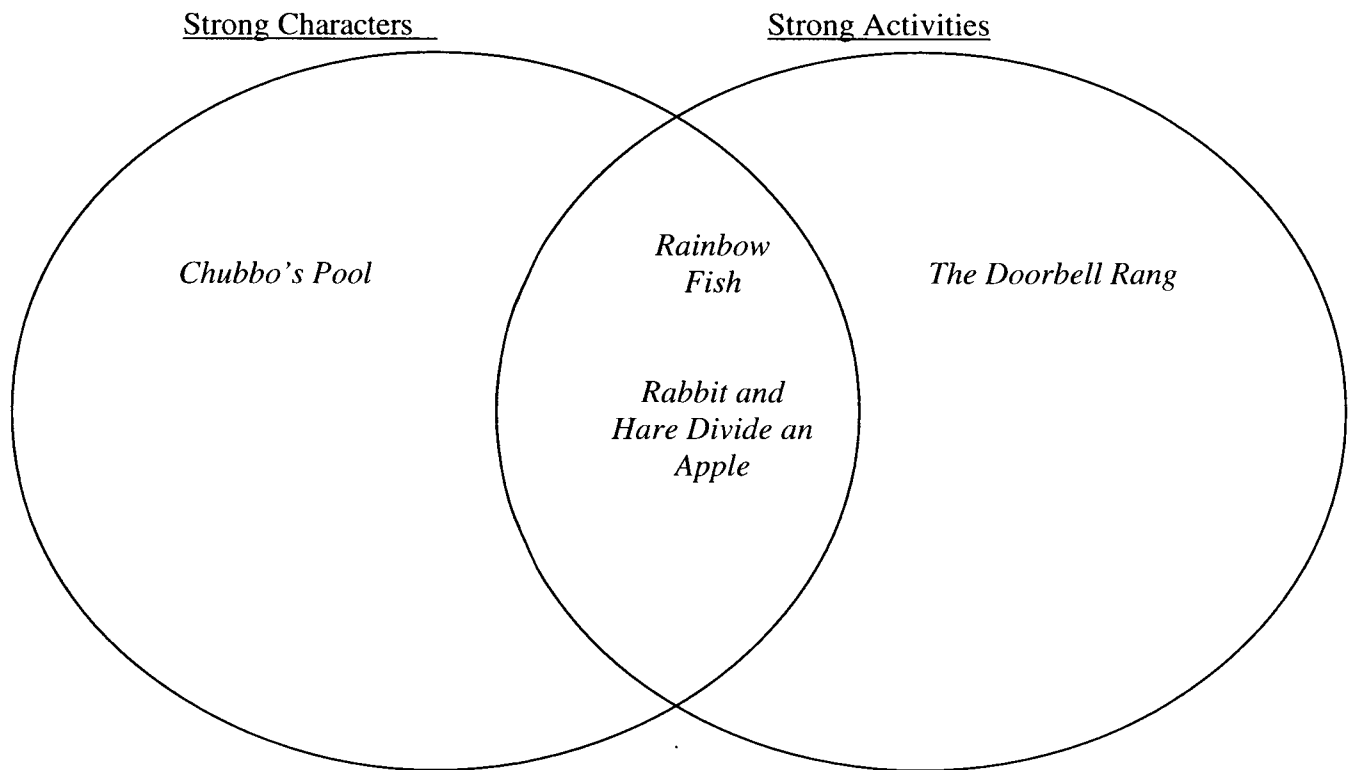
If a book had a character that was easy to identify with, but no corresponding activities it was not as effective. During the journal writing activity, the students were able to recall Chubbo, from the book *Chubbo's Pool*. However, none of the students chose to write about Chubbo. The students remembered who Chubbo was and what the story was about. However, it did not have as much meaning because there was not time to do a follow-up activity.

Additionally, if a book did not have easily identifiable characters, but had strong activities, the students were able to recall the activity associated with the book, but not the characters. One example of a book that did not give the characters specific names was the book, *The Doorbell Rang*. The students did not mention this book or the characters during the journal writing session. However, I know the students remembered the activity that corresponded with the book because K referred to sharing cupcakes during shared writing. This made me think that the number and types of activities impacted the ways students internalized the knowledge.

The other books that were used during bibliotherapy did not seem to resonate with the students. The students did not seem to connect with or recall information from *I Can Show I Care*, *I Can Share with Others*, *Want to Play?*, *Head, Body, Legs*, and *Let's*

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Share!. Of these books, none of them had characters that were given explicit names. In many of the books, the characters were very abstract. Additionally, there was not always time for follow-up activities or the follow-up activities were rushed.

Figure 3: Effective texts used during bibliotherapy

Strong Characters   Strong Activities

Chubbo's Pool   *Rainbow*   *The Doorbell Rang*
                         Fish

                    Rabbit and
   *Hare Divide an*
                    Apple

Teacher Reflection

After exploring themes in the data and the effectiveness of the texts chosen, I wanted to explore the effectiveness of my teaching. My teacher, Mrs. Amazing had a number of strategies in place when I arrived. She took advantage of the teachable moment, recruited outside supports, and utilized puppets and role-playing activities to teach social skills. Mrs. Amazing incorporated social skills effectively into her academic

curriculum, which laid a strong foundation for my research study. When I reflect on my

teaching, I notice some similarities in our strategies, as well as some differences.

Like Mrs. Amazing, I took advantage of the teachable moment. I also conducted

role-playing activities, which Mrs. Amazing did as well. In addition to taking advantage

of the teachable moment and engaging students in role-playing activities, I also tried to

use bibliotherapy and writing activities to teach social skills. If I had more time, I might

have tried to incorporate more of Mrs. Amazing's effective strategies into my teaching,

such as using outside supports and creating opportunities to use puppets.

Figure 4: Comparing teacher strategies

Mrs. Amazing   Me

- Outside Supports
- Puppets
  - Teachable
    Moment
  - Role-
    playing
- Bibliotherapy
- Writing
  Activities
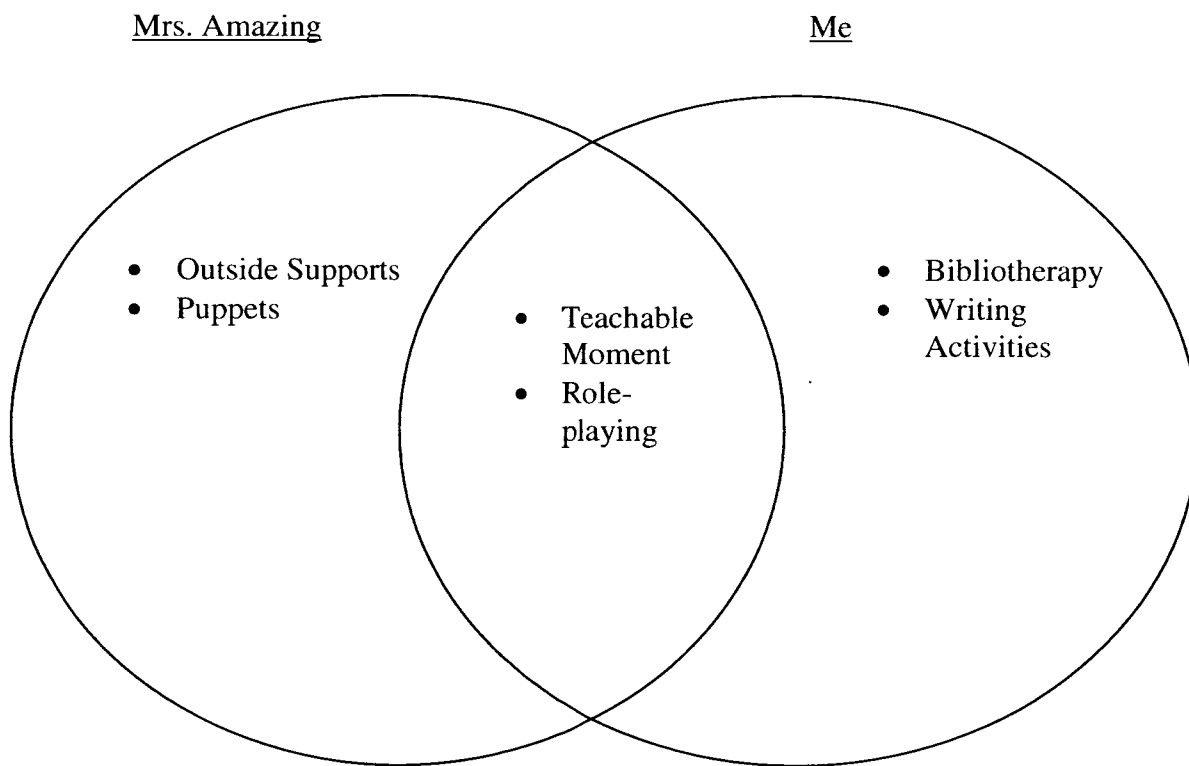
Significant Findings

After implementing my qualitative research study, I made some interesting discoveries. I was reassured that teachers do play an important role in teaching their students appropriate social skills. I could see what an important role Mrs. Amazing played in teaching her students socially appropriate behaviors. She laid a strong social skills foundation that I was able to build upon.

In implementing bibliotherapy, I noticed a number of trends. One trend was students with more inclusion opportunities tended to provide more detailed responses to questions about sharing. Also, they were able to generalize their learning to contexts outside of the classroom. Another trend had to do with socioemotional health. Students' environments impacted their learning. One of the students had parents going through a difficult divorce, and her responses often reflected how she was feeling during this trying time. Another significant finding was certain texts are more effective than others. Books that had both strong characters and follow-up activities were most effective.

Ultimately, bibliotherapy was effective in teaching students social skills. Students demonstrated their understanding through role-playing activities, writing, interdisciplinary lessons, and the creation of student products. Bibliotherapy allowed me to teach students social skills without sacrificing instructional time.

Chapter V Summary, Implications, and Conclusions

Summary

This qualitative research study was intended to explore what role the classroom teacher plays in the socialization of students in self-contained classrooms. Sub questions based upon this research question investigated how a social skills program could be successfully incorporated into the academic curriculum, as well as the ways to teach students social skills without losing valuable instructional time. The main way that I sought to teach students social skills through the use of bibliotherapy.

In my quest to examine the effectiveness of bibliotherapy, I gathered information using a number of methods of data collection, including audio taped group discussions, videotaped role-playing sessions, student projects and artifacts, and a teacher research journal. While unpacking the data, a number of themes emerged.

First, I noticed that Mrs. Amazing set a strong foundation for a social skills curriculum. She provided her students with inclusion opportunities and took advantage of teachable moments. Also, she utilized outside supports and encouraged students to engage in role-playing activities. I worked off of her teaching framework, while incorporating new strategies that I had researched. Throughout my research, I implemented bibliotherapy lessons to teach social skills.

I then set out to explore the effectiveness of bibliotherapy and my teaching. I noticed that students with more inclusion opportunities were able to generalize lessons from bibliotherapy to more contexts than students with fewer inclusion opportunities. I

also noticed that the student with more inclusion opportunities tended to provide longer answers. Another theme was students tended to recall more information from books when the characters were easier to identify and there were multiple, engaging activities to reinforce the concepts from the story.

Implications for Teaching

Beyond enjoyment for both the students and the teacher researcher, implementing social skills was effective in teaching students about sharing. However, I often experienced challenges and difficulties in my attempts to incorporate social skills into the academic curriculum. While implementing the study, I had to face the demands of teaching and assessing what material students would be evaluated on for report cards. Also, there were assemblies, which intruded upon my instructional time. Additionally, I was conducting my research project while transition meetings were occurring and IEPs were being written. This meant that I was not necessarily in the classroom as much as I wanted. Considering these struggles, I became more concerned with the question of the ways to teach students social skills without losing valuable instructional time and whether or not it was possible.

Like all teachers, I felt the constraints of time when teaching. Many times it was difficult to meet all of the academic demands, never mind trying to incorporate social skills in addition to the curriculum. As stated earlier, the main way I hoped to incorporate social skills into the academic curriculum was by using literature. According to research, stories can be used "not only to answer questions about our universe but also

to transmit wisdom and help form socially approved values and beliefs" (Cartledge & Kleefeld, 1994, p.8).

Bibliotherapy allowed me to hone in on social skills without losing valuable instructional time. By incorporating appropriate texts into different subject areas, bibliotherapy lessons were able to fulfill multiple objectives. Bibliotherapy was used during reading, writing, and math instruction. It seemed to be effective in engaging the students and reinforcing appropriate social skills. Sometimes I would have liked to conduct more activities with the books than time allowed. Students tended to recall more when time permitted role-playing activities or the creation of art projects.

<u>Implications for Future Research</u>

After examining the themes that emerged, there seemed to be a number of implications for future research. A trend that seemed to reoccur was the students with more inclusion opportunities tended to provide longer, more detailed responses. Also, they were able to generalize their learning to settings outside of the classroom. I wondered why this happened and had a number of questions about this finding. Did it have to do with the fact that the students with more inclusion opportunities had more chances to practice socially appropriate skills? Was it because the students with more inclusion opportunities were exposed to larger groups of students? Were the students with more inclusion opportunities exposed to a greater number of positive role models? Were the students that had more inclusion opportunities developmentally more advanced in terms of social skills or was it more related to academics and the students' written and expressive language abilities? I also wondered whether students' responses had to do

more specifically with their disability and their learning challenges? In addition to investigating these questions, I would try to provide self-contained students with as many inclusion opportunities as possible. Additionally, I might try to us bibliotherapy in an inclusion setting because I think all of the students involved could benefit.

Since certain books seemed to be more effective than others, I would reconsider some of my book choices. The most effective lessons were ones that had strong characters that students could easily identify and strong follow-up activities. In the future, I would make sure all of the books I chose to use had concrete characters that students could easily identify with. I would also make sure the main characters had names because it made it much easier for the students to remember. Since strong follow-up activities were much more effective than class-discussions, I would provide students with many opportunities to role-play and engage in hands-on activities.

Conclusions

Teachers can have a significant role in teaching students social skills. My cooperating teacher, Mrs. Amazing, laid a strong foundation for my qualitative research study. I focused upon using bibliotherapy to teach students social skills. In reviewing the data collected, bibliotherapy seemed to be effective. However, the students understanding of the material presented varied. Students' socioemotional health impacted their responses. Students' socioemotional health can be taken into account when choosing texts to utilize during bibliotherapy. If students are struggling with particular issues, books that have main characters in similar situations might be effective. Another factor that influenced students understanding was the number of inclusion

opportunities the students had. Students with more inclusion opportunities were able to recall more information and generalize it to multiple settings. Books containing characters that students could identify with were more effective than those with more abstract characters. Also, the types of follow-up activities impacted how much information students were able to recall. Overall, bibliotherapy seemed to result in positive behavior changes.

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