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“We listened to each other:” Social-emotional growth in literature circles

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“We listened to each other:” Social-emotional growth in literature circles

Abstract

Literature circles undoubtedly foster literacy. Yet successful participation in literature circles requires social and emotional competence of students. This article presents findings from a study of a fifth-grade student who demonstrated social-emotional growth while participating in literature circles. Specifically, growth in intrapersonal and interpersonal skills such as self-management, social awareness, social metacognition, and empathy were evident. These findings suggest that literature circles not only foster literacy but also social-emotional learning.

Teaser Text

Students hone their literacy skills within literature circles, but can social-emotional learning also occur within literature circles?

Pause and Ponder

1. In what ways do you presently foster your students' social-emotional learning?
2. What are your students' specific social-emotional strengths? How can you utilize their current social and emotional competencies to facilitate literacy learning?
3. In what specific area(s) do your students' social and emotional competencies need improvement? How can literature circles promote their social-emotional learning?
4. What text(s) have you, or could you, use to support your students' literacy development and social-emotional skills?

Introduction

A literature circle is a small group of students discussing the same text (Daniels, 2002). Literature circles differ from book clubs by emphasizing reader response theory and cooperative

learning through “divid[ing] up the cognitive labor of reading” (O’Donnell-Allen, 2006, p. 11) amongst several roles. Whereas book clubs involve dynamic, collaborative learning and “draw on other literary theories” to “emphasize a wider range of response tools than role sheets” (O’Donnell-Allen, 2006, p. 11).

Literature circles work well for students who need structure, modeling, and scaffolding to successfully engage in text-based conversations (Heydon, 2003). There is no singular way to conduct literature circles, which are appropriate from the primary grades (Jewell & Pratt, 1999) to graduate school (Bromley et al., 2014). Educators are therefore free to utilize this instructional strategy in a manner that best meets their students’ unique needs.

The flexibility of literature circles makes them appropriate for various contexts and genres, including informational texts (Barone & Barone, 2016). Studies have shown literature circles foster disciplinary literacy skills in social studies (McCall, 2010), science (Colburn, 2010), and yes, even math (Kridler & Moyer-Packenham, 2008). Literature circles can occur not only via face-to-face discussions but also in hybrid or fully online contexts (Bromley et al., 2014).

Literature circle benefits

The benefits of literature circles abound. Literature circles promote higher order thinking via student-centered instruction (Cameron, Murray, Hull, & Cameron, 2012). Within literature circles, students practice reading comprehension strategies such as making connections, questioning, inferencing, summarizing, and evaluating (Daniels & Steineke, 2004). Teachers can capitalize on students’ enhanced motivation to read for literature circles (Clarke & Holwadel, 2007).

Literature circles benefit an array of students. In literature circles, English Learners develop their second language skills while thinking more deeply about the text (Goatley, Brock, & Raphael, 1995). English Learners showcase their cultures and contribute unique connections to and/or perspectives on the text while peers model authentic use of academic language in a socially supportive context (Heydon, 2003).

Students with learning disabilities make valuable contributions to discussion (Goatley et al., 1995) while improving their reading comprehension and social skills (Whittaker, 2012). Literature circles, as opposed to short, skills-focused passages, promote sustained and successful engagement with authentic literature (Venegas, 2018). Venegas (2018) found that this positively influenced the reader self-efficacies of marginalized readers who came to identify their strengths as readers and whose attitudes towards reading improved.

Social-emotional skills in literature circles

Successful literature circles are dependent upon students' social-emotional skills. Dysfunctional literature circles may result when students lack "the necessary discursive moves that define positive discussions" (Clarke & Holwadel, 2007, p. 23). The social competence needed to engage in productive text-based discussions may be underdeveloped in students (Lewis, 1997). Students may even socially position themselves positively and/or their peers negatively in striving to achieve power within literacy events (Clarke, 2006).

Within the literacy classroom, students may not only grow in term of their literacy but also socially and emotionally (Kozak & Recchia, 2018). This article presents findings from a case study of Grace (pseudonym), who honed her social-emotional skills in literature circles. Presented first is a review of the sociocultural perspectives that influenced this study followed by

evidence of Grace's social-emotional learning. Recommendations for classroom practice conclude this article.

Social-emotional learning and literacy

According to Lev Vygotsky (1978), social interaction and cooperation are central to learning. Social interaction, which facilitates cognitive development, entails interactions with others, objects, and events (Wang, Bruce, & Hughes, 2011). Engagement in the social and cultural contexts surrounding an individual is mediated by “culturally constructed tools such as language, materials, signs, and symbols” (Wang et al., 2011, p. 298). Relatedly, both language and literacy are socially constructed (Perez, 2004) and fostered through demonstration and dialogue (Diehl, 2005).

Literature circles feature many characteristics of sociocultural learning. As students discuss, they interact with one another in a cooperative learning context. Language, literacy, and dialogue are central to literature circles, which fosters academic and social-emotional learning. *Literacy events* are “situated actions where people coordinate talk, texts and other non-verbal resources to communicate and create shared meaning in different social contexts” (Tanner, 2017, p. 401). Thus, literacy events, such as literature circles, are mini social and cultural contexts with their own unique dynamics.

“Social interactional rules” (Heath, 1983, p. 386) govern literacy events. The rules governing social interaction necessitate development of one's intrapersonal and interpersonal skills. Regarding intrapersonal skills, the individual must be able to self-regulate, or engage in metacognitive thinking to monitor his or her comprehension and employ fix-up strategies (Diehl, 2005). Self-management skills, including impulse control, intrinsic motivation, and self-confidence are also needed (Dresser, 2013).

For successful literature circle participation students must possess interpersonal skills as well. Needed interpersonal skills include *social awareness*— “negotiating with others, resolving conflicts, expressing one’s point of view, and listening to the perspectives of others” (Lobron & Selman, 2007, p. 528). *Empathy*, or “the ability to understand other people’s emotions” (Nikolajeva, 2013, p. 249), is another prerequisite. The group must possess *social metacognition*, or “the ability to regulate group learning” (Rapchak, 2018, p. 384).

Literacy events not only necessitate social-emotional skills but also present an opportunity to develop and refine these skills. Dialogic reading, for example, is a literacy event featuring teacher-led strategic questioning and active student participation through text-based conversations (Doyle & Bramwell, 2006). Lobron and Selman (2007) argued that conversation is instrumental to developing both literacy skills and social awareness. Thus, dialogic reading may prepare students for peer-led conversations experienced in literature circles. Reading fiction specifically can foster *social understanding*, or “the ability to understand and sympathize with others’ emotions, cognitions, and motivations” (Kozak & Recchia, 2018, p. 1).

Grace: A case study

This article focuses on Grace because of the marked social-emotional learning that she undertook as a literature circle participant. Mrs. Ian (pseudonym), Grace’s teacher, articulated an awareness of Grace’s social-emotional growth. My observations of Grace’s improved demonstration of intrapersonal and interpersonal skills are presented in this article.

At the time of this study, Grace was a ten-year-old African-American female in the fifth grade. Grace enjoyed math, especially “get[ting] to work out the problems.” Grace liked to read only “Sometimes,” adding, “[i]t just depends on if the book is interesting.” Grace did not read for

pleasure but instead liked playing with her sisters outdoors. Mrs. Ian described Grace as a “little teacher” because “she wants to be in charge.”

Literature circles in Mrs. Ian’s classroom

The racial/ethnic composition of Grace’s school was 65.10% Hispanic, 14.81% African-American, and 17.16% White at the time of this study. Most students (75.37%) were classified as economically disadvantaged and 5.57% received special education services. Mrs. Ian’s classroom reflected the school’s racial/ethnic demographics as well as socioeconomic status and consisted of 20 students from across fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-grades. One student received special education services. Mrs. Ian hoped literature circles would engage her students in “read[ing] for pleasure.”

Each of Mrs. Ian’s students elected to read *Rules* (Lord, 2006) from amongst several book choices. *Rules* (Lord, 2006) is a contemporary realistic fiction novel centered on Catherine, a twelve-year-old girl whose brother has Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Mrs. Ian did not explicitly communicate to me her rationale for selecting *Rules* (Lord, 2006). Yet Mrs. Ian remarked, “[A sixth-grade student] had a lot of great background knowledge, especially with reading the book *Rules*. He had personal experience...something of value to add.” Therefore, I presume Mrs. Ian selected the text because at least one student connected to the protagonist as a sibling of a child with special needs. Moreover, each of her students interacted daily with their peer who received special education services. Thus, I presume that Mrs. Ian sought to encourage inclusivity of students with special needs (Sigmon, Tackett, & Azano, 2016) and/or to foster social understanding (Kozak & Recchia, 2018).

Regarding fiction-based literature circles, the text selection arguably influences students' social-emotional learning. Nikolajeva (2013) argued, "reading fiction is not only beneficial, but indispensable for our cognitive and emotional development" (p. 254). As discussed later, the novel influenced Grace's social-emotional learning.

Table 1 presents a list of children's novels teachers may use to refine the intra- and interpersonal skills featured in this article. Kozak and Recchia (2018) suggested the best books for fostering social-emotional learning are works of literary, not genre, fiction that feature high-quality writing and complex characters who drive the plot. Literature circles are well-suited for ensuring each student reads an extrinsically motivating text with these characteristics since students select from several book choices (Kozak & Recchia, 2018).

Reading a common novel afforded Mrs. Ian more flexibility in constructing each literature circle than if her students read several novels (in which case students would be grouped by novel). The composition of each literature circle changed over the course of the eight weeks that students read *Rules* (Lord, 2006). Mrs. Ian intended to facilitate "community-building" through this dynamic grouping. Mrs. Ian added, "I tried to create groupings with them where they were working with lots of different people. We want students to learn how to work together and give them a common goal to reach."

Each student undertook a specific role (i.e., Discussion Director, Connector, Literacy Luminary, Artful Artist, Word Wizard, or Summarizer) during each literature circle. Table 2 describes each role. Notably, Discussion Directors lead the conversation through strategic questioning. Roles rotated so that ideally each student functioned in each role at least once during the eight weeks so as to approach the novel from multiple perspectives. Students

completed a correlating role sheet each week, which Mrs. Ian collected to evaluate their preparedness for discussion.

Daniels (2002) suggested using role sheets as a temporary scaffold for students accustomed to more teacher-centered instruction. Ideally, the teacher introduces one role at a time so that all students practice functioning in and understand the expectations associated with each role (Daniels, 2002). Mrs. Ian stated that students participated in a “practice round” of literature circles at the beginning of the school year. The second literature circle cycle (observed for this study) began in November. Mrs. Ian “re[taught] procedures for literature circles” and engaged her students in “a lot of practice with discussion” before the second cycle began. Although students had some prior experience with the roles and role sheets, Mrs. Ian continued using both.

Study design

This case study stems from a larger research study on literature circles. For the purposes of this single case study, I interviewed Grace on two occasions: before and after participating in the second literature circle cycle. I visited each literature circle of which Grace was a member over the eight weeks. I recorded my observations of Grace and her peers as they interacted and discussed the novel. I collected Grace’s role sheet each week.

After reading the data collected from Grace in its entirety, I categorized it into the specific intrapersonal and/or interpersonal skills that emerged from each data source (i.e., interviews, observation notes, and role sheets). The data and findings presented below primarily stem from my observations of Grace as she interacted with her fellow literature circle members. While three to five students comprised each literature circle, only the pseudonyms of those who

participated in the larger study are mentioned in this article. The data and findings below capture Grace's social-emotional learning.

Grace's social-emotional learning

Throughout the observed literature circle cycle, Grace was an active participant and oftentimes informal group leader. Grace's self-management (an intrapersonal skill) and social awareness (an interpersonal skill) were initially mixed but refined as her literature circle participation continued.

Intrapersonal skill: Self-management

In our pre-interview, I asked Grace how she reacts in frustrating moments. Grace answered "[S]ometimes if it bothers me a lot, I get louder. But then if it don't bother me a lot then I'm not that much loud and stuff." When she became loud, Grace noticed her peers quickly tried to resolve the issue. As you will read, Grace attempted to dominate the initial literature circles by making her voice heard to the exclusion of others. Perhaps this was in response to her not being Discussion Director and/or being grouped with peers with whom she did not want to work.

Initially mixed self-management skills. During the first three literature circle meetings, Grace demonstrated mixed self-management skills. Grace exhibited poor impulse control during literature circle one by precluding the participation of her peers. I recorded the following observation,

Grace was the most dominant personality in her literature circle aside from the Discussion Director who led the meeting. The Discussion Director would pose a question, and Humberto would begin to answer, but Grace would interrupt him and offered her answers.

I noted during literature circle three, “At times, Grace and another female student were off-task,” which again indicated poor impulse control.

However, Grace exhibited impulse control during literature circle two. My observation notes read,

[Grace] was in a group with two boys (Humberto and another student.) She did not dominate the group as she did during observation 1. She was more reserved but still participated.

Notably, Humberto was Discussion Director (the *de facto* leader) during literature circle two.

Although Grace interrupted Humberto during literature circle one, she refrained from doing so during their second encounter. Coupled with her respect for the Discussion Director in literature circle one, this exemplifies impulse control as Grace deferred to the authority imparted to her peers who were assigned leadership roles.

Grace demonstrated positive self-confidence as a self-appointed informal leader of literature circle one. This behavior aligned with Mrs. Ian’s characterization of Grace as a student who likes to take charge. I observed the following during literature circle three,

Grace did not have a problem telling others (i.e. Ximena) what to say to contribute to the literature circle, but she did not want another student to answer for her. [For example,] another student tried to tell her what to say, but Grace told him to be quiet.

Grace exuded self-confidence by offering Ximena what she considered valuable contributions to discussion and advocating for herself when a peer tried to preclude her own participation.

Improved self-management skills. During the remaining literature circles, Grace continued to exhibit self-confidence. Mrs. Ian assigned Grace the leadership role of Discussion Director in week five. I noted, “Grace seems to enjoy being the Discussion Director. She did not appear to write her own questions, but the questions that she chose generated conversation and were open-ended, requiring deeper thinking.”

Grace demonstrated positive impulse control during literature circle seven. Instead of precluding the participation of Lucita (who was grappling with the text) or giving her contributions to make to the discussion, Grace provided scaffolding to Lucita and the other literature circle members. Mrs. Ian commented on Grace's improved self-management, "I have seen her more willing to work in different groups and more willing to participate."

Interpersonal skill: Social awareness

In our pre-interview, I asked Grace if she felt comfortable openly expressing her feelings in Mrs. Ian's class. Grace responded, "My friend, Naomi, [supports me]." Outside of literature circles I often observed Grace and Naomi working together. Grace confirmed to me that Naomi was her best friend. Mrs. Ian remarked that both girls often failed to realize there was "more than one other person in the room." This suggests that both Grace's and Naomi's social awareness were primarily attuned to each other, to the exclusion of most of their peers.

Mrs. Ian stated her intention in incorporating literature circles in her classroom was to

[G]ive [students] the opportunity to talk to people that they normally don't talk to in class, and...see that each had their value and everyone had an opinion. I really wanted them to see that collaborative learning is about learning to work with any and everybody.

Notably, Grace and Naomi were never present in the same literature circle.

Initially poor social awareness. Grace demonstrated a lack of social awareness during the first four literature circles. For example, Grace did not actively listen to the perspectives offered by Humberto during literature circle one or Ximena during literature circle three. Mrs. Ian stated, "[Grace] complain[ed] when she was in groups with people she didn't want to be in groups with" at times.

I recorded the following observations of Grace during literature circle four, "Grace told two others that they were off topic." Although she demonstrated poor impulse control the previous week through off-task behavior, Grace sought to regulate her peers' behaviors during

literature circle four. This exemplifies a lack of social awareness. At that time, Grace became a *self-appointed monitor* (Peterson, 2016) by correcting her peers' off-task behavior as opposed to attempting to resolve the issue with them.

Improved social awareness. Conversely, Grace exhibited social awareness during the latter literature circle meetings. As Discussion Director in week seven, Grace exuded social awareness by intentionally creating a space for each literature circle member to be heard.

In week eight, I wrote, "Grace showed her maturity by actively listening to a student with special needs as he shared his perspective on the book." Notably, Grace actively listened to the contributions of this peer with a learning disability who was participating in literature circles for the first time. This moment starkly contrasted her behavior in weeks one and three when she disregarded the potential contributions of Humberto and Ximena.

In reflecting upon her experience, Grace focused on the positive aspects of social awareness fostered in literature circles. Grace described her literature circle experience as "Positive because we all got along with each other, and we didn't fight, and we all read, and we listened to each other."

Interpersonal skill: Social metacognition

In the latter half of literature circles, Grace facilitated her group's social metacognition. As Discussion Director in week five, Grace asked questions such as, "What do you think the author wanted you to know? What are special relationships in the book? What is the main conflict in the book?" These questions facilitated social metacognition by requiring her peers to engage in higher-order thinking to deepen their understanding of the novel.

Answering such questions arguably fostered social metacognition in terms of the group's social-emotional learning. For example, Grace stated that Lord wrote *Rules* (2006) to help the

reader better understand the complexities of having a loved one with ASD. This can foster empathy. The special relationship featured in the book is between Catherine, a typically developing pre-teen, and her brother, David, who has special needs. This can foster social awareness. Finally, the conflict in the book stemmed from David's lack of self-management skills due to ASD.

My observations from literature circle seven captured Grace providing scaffolding for her peers.

Lucita asked the group what *nutmeg* means to which Grace said, 'It's a spice.' Grace continues to show depth in her thinking. She actively participates in literature circles each week. No matter her role, she emerges as a leader in the group. She chose 8 questions to ask her group and was intentional about eliciting a response from each group member. She helped Lucita to define two words—*nutmeg* and *stroking*. She exhibited her literary knowledge by explaining to her peers what *genre* means.

In this example, Grace's literary knowledge facilitated her peers' understanding of the text.

Spiegel (1996) wrote that through reader-response groups, such as literature circles, peers can provide scaffolding in which they "help each other sift through ideas, consider alternate perspectives, and expand their understandings" (p. 337).

I observed in week eight, "Grace showed leadership again by helping her peers who were confused by the assignment." Here, Grace helped her peers understand the task-at-hand. In our post-interview, Grace communicated that she facilitated social metacognition. Grace stated, "I kind of helped [my peers] understand the book and my point of view."

Interpersonal skill: Empathy

Grace's contributions to literature circle six revealed her propensity for empathy as my observation notes read,

[Grace stated that she] would recommend [the] book to someone who has a brother who has Autism [Spectrum Disorder]. [Grace added that the] author wanted [the] reader to know what it's like to have a brother or friend with [Autism Spectrum Disorder].

As previously mentioned, Grace demonstrated an understanding of the author's purpose: to provide readers with a better understanding of the joys and challenges of living with and caring for a loved one with special needs.

In literature circle eight, Grace intently listened to the contributions made by a peer with a learning disability (who was participating in literature circles for the first time). This denotes Grace's empathy as she supported this peer while he expressed his unique perspective on the novel.

Grace's reading of *Rules* (Lord, 2006) helped her to understand life for persons whose loved ones have a disability. This echoes Nikolajeva (2013) who suggested reading fiction can help students develop empathy. Relatedly, reading fiction can stimulate the reader's understanding of what others are experiencing in a given situation (Kozak & Recchia, 2018).

Social-emotional growth observed

Initially, Grace demonstrated mixed ability in terms of self-management (intrapersonal skill) and social awareness (interpersonal skill). As the literature circle cycle progressed, however, Grace exhibited more positive self-management and social awareness. In the latter literature circles, Grace began to exhibit the interpersonal skills of social metacognition and empathy. Mrs. Ian noted,

I think that [the different groupings in literature circles] kind of kept [Grace] on her toes a little bit. She couldn't always dominate. She couldn't always be the one in charge. Everyone had to be in charge, so I think that helped her begin to learn collaborative learning.

Thus, Mrs. Ian also noticed the refinement of Grace's intrapersonal and interpersonal skills.

Literature circle roles and social-emotional learning

Each role assigned to Grace may be found in Table 2 along with plausible implications of the roles on her intrapersonal and/or interpersonal skills. As evident in Table 2, the specific roles

assigned to Grace did not appear to directly influence her social-emotional learning. For example, Grace demonstrated mixed self-management skills and low social awareness as the Discussion Director in week three, but she demonstrated positive intra- and interpersonal skills in the same role during weeks five and seven. This is especially interesting given the authority bestowed to Discussion Directors and Mrs. Ian's description of Grace as someone who likes to be in charge.

This further suggests that Grace's continued participation in literature circles, rather than a specific role, influenced her social-emotional learning. Even so, utilizing roles in literature circles may indirectly foster social-emotional learning by requiring students to approach the text from varied perspectives. Nevertheless, the book itself and engaging in discussion with one's peers within the context of student-led cooperative learning seem most influential upon social-emotional learning within literature circles.

Social-emotional learning through literacy events

Social-emotional learning is a prerequisite to successful literature circle participation. As Spiegel (1996) asserted,

If students are to control their own discussion groups, they must learn how to respond to group members' remarks, both when they agree and when they don't. They must learn how to build upon someone else's comment, rather than ignoring it in order to present their own perspectives. (p. 335)

Doyle and Bramwell (2006) argued social skills are necessary for the social and academic success of students. "While usually thought of as two distinct fields," Lobron and Selman (2007) wrote, "the worlds of literacy and social awareness are actually closely linked. In some cases, the same skill is practiced in both worlds, but called by different names" (p. 535).

The potential of literacy events to build social-emotional skills has been previously documented. Doyle and Bramwell (2006) noted that dialogic reading may facilitate problem-

solving and cooperation. According to Kozak and Recchia (2018), reading fiction may evoke emotion and present an opportunity for sociocognitive learning. Lobron and Selman (2007) argued that text-based discussions present an opportunity to foster academic and social awareness skills.

Literature circles combine several characteristics of these literacy events. For example, questioning to facilitate reading comprehension is central to dialogic reading (Doyle & Bramwell, 2006). The literature circles organized by Mrs. Ian entailed discussing questions posed by the appointed Discussion Directors with the purpose of deepening students' understanding. Mrs. Ian's students read and discussed the contemporary realistic fiction novel, *Rules* (Lord, 2006), which helped to evoke empathy (Kozak & Recchia, 2018) from Grace. Finally, a literature circle is one text-based discussion strategy, which Lobran and Selman (2007) and this study suggest can facilitate students' social awareness. Although Grace was one student in Mrs. Ian's classroom, her case has potential implications for the literacy classroom.

Implications for the literacy classroom

Findings from Grace's case study, coupled with those of previous studies, suggest the potential academic and social-emotional benefits of literature circles merit their inclusion in the literacy classroom. More specifically, findings from this case study suggest that intrapersonal and interpersonal skills can be fostered within literature circles. For Grace, reading *Rules* (Lord, 2006) evoked empathy for families of persons with disabilities and helped her to translate that empathy to her own classroom interactions with a peer with a learning disability.

However, literature circles must be purposefully crafted in order to maximize their potential to foster academic and social-emotional learning. Mrs. Ian intentionally changed the membership of each literature circle for each of the eight meetings. For Grace, the dynamic

composition of each literature circle worked, and arguably helped further develop her intrapersonal and interpersonal skills. Grace also participated in the larger study focused on marginalized readers in literature circles (Venegas, 2018). As suggested by both studies, Grace's self-efficacy as a reader improved along with her intra- and interpersonal skills through literature circle participation.

Yet grouping must be carefully considered to maximize the potential of literature circles for each student. Each student needs the opportunity to fully participate in his or her literature circle. Thus, the social dynamics amongst group members must be weighed when forming each literature circle (Doyle & Bramwell, 2006).

To accomplish this, a teacher might create a sociogram to understand the underlying social dynamics within the classroom. A sociogram results from asking each student to list two peers with whom they want to work. Upon mapping the results, the sociogram will reveal students with whom most of the class wants to work and students who might be socially isolated.

Figure 1 shows an example sociogram. According to this sociogram, most students want to work with Charlize and Justin. However, not one student expressed a desire to work with Zoe, Liam, or Oliver. Thus, the teacher would need to be mindful of Zoe, Liam, and Oliver to ensure they are included as active participants in their literature circles or other cooperative learning groups.

Teachers can assess their students' social and emotional competence through a tool such as the DESSA-mini. The DESSA-mini is appropriate for students in kindergarten through eighth grade and can be administered in one minute via eight questions (Aperture Education, LLC, 2018). After obtaining results, weigh the temperament and personality of each student as you decide how to group them (Doyle & Bramwell, 2006). Teachers may want to intentionally

partner students with initially lower social awareness with a peer with initially higher social awareness (Lobron & Selman, 2007). Undoubtedly, grouping students—whether for literature circles or other purposes—requires intentionality from the teacher. Yet the academic and social benefits make the work behind grouping worthwhile.

Teachers may benefit from professional development opportunities related to social-emotional learning. The school librarian may share an array of children’s literature that could be used to foster social-emotional learning. The school counselor may offer further insight into how to develop students’ social and emotional competence. Finally, the school literacy coach can directly support teachers who are new to integrating literature circles or other literacy-based cooperative learning opportunities in their classrooms.

Conclusion

This article presented the findings of a case study of Grace, a fifth-grade student for whom participating in literature circles refined her social-emotional learning. Grace honed her self-management (an intrapersonal skill) as she interacted with her peers in literature circles. Grace exhibited growth in terms of interpersonal skills such as social awareness, social metacognition, and empathy. Although the findings presented in this article emerged from one case study, when coupled with previous research, these findings suggest that literacy events such as literature circles can foster students’ social-emotional and academic learning.

Figure 1 caption: Example sociogram

Take Action!

1. Choose one or more texts for students to read in literature circles based on your instructional goals for academic and/or social-emotional learning.

2. Assess the social and emotional competencies of your students. (A tool such as DESSA-mini may be helpful.)
3. Determine the underlying social dynamics within your classroom through a sociogram.
4. Purposefully group students into literature circles, bearing in mind the underlying social dynamics amongst peers and the social-emotional competence and needs of each student.
5. Students will meet to discuss the text(s) in their literature circles.

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Table 1

Suggested children's novels for social-emotional learning

Title	Author	Issue(s)	Intrapersonal and/or interpersonal skill(s)
<i>The Crossover</i> (2014)	Kwame Alexander	Death Relationship changes Teamwork	Empathy Social awareness Self-management
<i>Merci Suárez Changes Gears</i> (2018)	Meg Medina	Aging grandparents Bullying New school Socioeconomic issues	Empathy Social awareness Social metacognition Social understanding
<i>The One and Only Ivan</i> (2012)	K.A. Applegate	Abuse (animal) Fighting for change Orphan (animal)	Empathy Social awareness Social understanding
<i>River Runs Deep</i> (2015)	Jennifer Bradbury	Illness Slavery	Social awareness Social understanding Self-management
<i>Wonder</i> (2012)	R.J. Palacio	Bullying Physical deformity	Empathy Social awareness Social understanding Self-management

Table 2

Literature circle roles and plausible implications for social-emotional learning

Meeting	Grace's role	Role description	Plausible implications
1	Connector	Make text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world connections	Intrapersonal: mixed self-management skills (i.e., positive self-confidence; lack of impulse control) Interpersonal: low social awareness
2	Word Wizard	Infer and/or define meanings of unknown words	Intrapersonal: positive self-management skills

3	Discussion Director	Write questions to lead text-based conversations	<p>Intrapersonal: mixed self-management skills (i.e., positive self-confidence; lack of impulse control)</p> <p>Interpersonal: low social awareness</p>
4	Literacy Luminary	Identify puzzling, powerful, and/or important selections within text	<p>Interpersonal: low social awareness</p>
5	Discussion Director		<p>Intrapersonal: positive self-management skills (i.e., positive self-confidence)</p> <p>Interpersonal: facilitated group's social metacognition</p>
6	Summarizer	Summarize the assigned text selection	<p>Intrapersonal: demonstrated empathy</p>
7	Discussion Director		<p>Intrapersonal: positive self-management skills (i.e., positive impulse control)</p> <p>Interpersonal: facilitated group's social metacognition; demonstrated social awareness</p>
8	Students were not assigned a specific role for this meeting but instead completed a self-evaluation on their learning and participation during the literature circle cycle.		<p>Intrapersonal: demonstrated empathy</p> <p>Interpersonal: facilitated group's social metacognition; demonstrated social awareness</p>
