"Teacher, It's Just Like What Happens at My House"

Claire E. Verden
Peggy Hickman

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Abstract

This article describes a sixteen-week, read-aloud intervention conducted using culturally and experientially-relevant literature with six urban middle school youth with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD), to facilitate prosocial skill development through opportunities for personal reflection and sharing through journaling and group discussions. Key elements of this daily read-aloud time included the selection and reading aloud of experientially-relevant literature reflecting the lives of the students in the classroom, as well as group discussions and individual journaling related to the story content. Findings from the study indicated that, through this intervention, 1) students identified with the stories’ main characters and saw them as role models for prosocial choice-making in interactions with others; and 2) through opportunities for reflection on story events similar to their lives, students gained insight into pivotal events shaping their own inappropriate behavioral choices and shared them with the teacher, who was then able to shape more effective functional behavior interventions. Findings provide the context for suggested practices.

Keywords

emotional and behavioral disorders; read-aloud; prosocial choice making; urban youth; culturally relevant books; social skills

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Students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) stand out in the literature in the field of disabilities as a group that consistently experiences negative school and life outcomes. Behavioral difficulties that typify students with EBD, in conjunction with poor academic (in particular, reading) outcomes, correlate with antisocial behavior throughout young adulthood; it can be predicted that once they leave school, roughly 70% of students with EBD will be arrested within three years (Babyak, Koorland, & Mathes, 2000; Scott & Shearer-Lingo, 2002).

One of the defining characteristics for diagnosis of EBD, according to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (2004), is *an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers* (IDEA, 2004). Because children with EBD are often recognized by their negative interactions with others, social skills training has been the focus of treatment and intervention for these students for over 50 years (Algozzine, Serna, & Patton, 2001). The goal of this article is to describe procedures and outcomes of a sixteen-week action research intervention, conducted in an urban middle school classroom supporting students with EBD. In this investigation, experientially-relevant literature[1] was read-aloud daily to students with the goal of facilitating prosocial skill development, personal reflection, and sharing through structured and strategic group discussions and individual student journaling in relation to the text.

Social competencies are often at the root of many judgments made about students and their abilities to function in general education environments.

Social Skills: School and Life Outcomes

Sugai & Lewis (1996) contend that behavioral problems are intricately linked to social skills problems. Social competencies, or the ways in which students utilize social skills, are often at the root of many judgments made about students and their abilities to function in general education environments. When students display socially incompetent behaviors such as calling out, failing to follow teacher directives, and interacting inappropriately with peers, they are not accepted by either their teachers or their peers (Carter & Sugai, 1989; Gresham, 1998). Evidence also suggests that an increasing number of children are entering school without the academic and social competencies necessary for achievement and are at greater risk for problems later in their schooling; schools are thus compelled to focus on the whole child and provide training to address both academic and social needs (Lane, Wehby, Menzies, Doukas, Munton & Gregg, 2003). A major advantage of a social skills approach to working with students with EBD is that it is a positive approach, one which assumes that children can be taught the skills necessary to interact with others in prosocial ways (Cartledge & Milburn, 1995).

As adolescents with EBD become young adults, the consequences of poor social

[1] The term “experientially-relevant” literature is used in this article to describe texts which integrate topics and themes similar to those these students encounter on a daily basis in their personal and school lives, as well as in their community. For these students, experientially-relevant texts included those with urban settings in which the main characters encountered violence, abuse, and strained interpersonal relationships, yet through tough decisions and prosocial choices, were able to move forward in productive ways.

skills are grave, as "these persons encounter difficulties living successfully in the community and display marital difficulties, substance abuse, depression, violence, and arrests in excess of the national norms for their peers without EBD" (Bullis & Davis, 1997, p.29). There is evidence, however, that experiences adolescents have in relation to learning, testing, and refining social skills based upon the positive and negative social encounters that are a part of their daily lives, are important in their development of resiliency and interpersonal skills that are critical for becoming productive members of a group and community (National Association of School Psychologists [NASP], 2004; Schloss, 1984; Taylor & Larson, 1999).

Table 1: Participants.

Name	Race	Grade	Disability	Years in this class
Oscar	Hispanic	6	ADHD Impulse control disorder	1st year
Bart	Caucasian	7	ADHD Oppositional Defiant Disorder Reading Disorder	2nd year
John	Caucasian	7	Oppositional Defiant Disorder Dysthymic Disorder	2nd year
Alizay	African American	8	Depression Impulse Control Disorder	2 1/2 years
Derek	Bi-Racial	8	ADHD Oppositional Defiant Disorder	2nd year
Omar	African American	8	Depressive Disorder NOS ADHD	3rd year

Social Skills Instruction

Research has shown that a particularly effective way to teach social skills is to integrate them in authentic ways within the academic curriculum; in doing so, students are exposed to additional opportunities to learn and generalize these skills across contexts (Anderson, 2000; Forgan & Gonzalez-

DeHass, 2004; Gresham, 1998). Language arts is one content area that lends itself well to this integration, particularly through the use of experientially-relevant literature (Bauer & Balius, 1995; Sullivan & Strang, 2003). By using literature as a means not only to develop language skills, but also to become engaged in the lives of characters similar to themselves, students are given authentic, appealing, and meaningful opportunities to interpret story events, empathize with characters' experiences and feelings, brainstorm alternative solutions to problems, and predict different outcomes not only for characters, but also in their own relationships and interactions (Forgan & Gonzalez-DeHass, 2004).

Particularly for students with EBD who have often faced negative or even traumatic life events (Trout, Epstein, Mickelson, Nelson & Lewis, 2003), reading and reflecting in relation to characters and events in experientially-relevant literature may provide them with self-awareness, problem-solving skills, and perspective-taking as they uncover new possibilities for growth, change, and resiliency (Johnson, Wan, Templeton, Graham, & Sattler, 2000; Pardeck, 1990). However, few research studies have spoken to the efficacy of combining reading experientially-relevant literature aloud with discussions and opportunities for reflection. The integration of these skills as an emotional and prosocial support for urban youth with such high levels of need in these areas may indeed prove valuable.

The Context of the Investigation

To this end, an action research study (Sagor, 2000) was designed, in part, to determine how experientially-relevant literature could be utilized with middle-school, urban youth with EBD, to both build their interest and engagement in reading, as well as promote prosocial skill development (Verden, 2005). At the time of the study, the principal investigator was the lead teacher in a self-contained, public school classroom serving middle-school students with emotional and behavior disorders (referred to throughout as Room 11). Action research was a particularly appropriate research strategy given her role and previous experiences as a special education teacher at Oliver Middle School, in which Room 11 is located, for 2 years prior to the year of the study. She was well acquainted with her students, the school, and the surrounding community.

During the year of the study, more than half of the students in Room 11 had established relationships with the teacher/researcher, and had built a level of trust with her through their enrollment in her classroom for this, their third year. In many ways, the findings of this research must be understood within the context of the positive, consistent, and trusting relationship the students had developed over time with the teacher/researcher. A review of research by Jones and Jones (1998) concluded that the quality of relationship between students and their teachers often influences student achievement and behavior in parallel ways: the more positive the relationship, the more positive student achievement and behavior. Students enrolled full-time in self-contained classrooms for students with EBD are dependent upon the teacher to become the primary positive model and instructional agent for learning, not only in terms of academic skills, but also prosocial skills and attitudes (Jackson & Veeneman Panyan, 2001). The significance of the quality of the relationship between the teacher and students, as a mediator of learning in these particular settings, is quite clear. In this particular intervention, it is important to view the findings within the context of an ongoing,

trusting relationship between the teacher/researcher and the student participants.

Outside the classroom, many of the students in Room 11 had experienced instability in their young lives and continued to have difficult and challenging circumstances in their home environments. Many had fallen behind academically; most had diagnoses signaling a significant lack of appropriate / prosocial interpersonal interactions (See Table 1). The types of behaviors they exhibited daily in the school environment were often characterized by teachers and administrators as inappropriate, challenging and counterproductive to societal definitions of social success, and often interfered in their academic learning.

Table 2: Selecting literature for read-aloud with students with EBD.

- Know your students: match their interests, experiences, and emotional needs with that of storylines and characters in the literature to be read (Afolayan, 1992; Sridhar & Vaughn, 2000). Topics might include: interacting positively with peers and adults, coping with difficult family situations, social problem solving skills, etc.
- Ask for student input regarding books to be read and use these suggestions whenever possible and appropriate (Zientarski & Pottoroff, 1994).
- Choose a book that you have read, enjoyed, and can deliver in an interesting fashion (Trelease, 2001).
- Choose books that can be read in chapters that will approximately match the amount of time that you have allotted.
- Select books that build on each other, either in storyline such as a series of books, or in theme.
- If a new book is not holding interest after a concerted effort, choose something else and begin anew.
- Show enthusiasm for what you are reading and discuss the book at other times during the day, e.g., “I can’t wait to see what happens today to Tyrone.”
- Model interest and comprehension skills (e.g., prediction, inference, summary, drawing conclusions) through “think alouds” about the text both prior to, during, and after reading, and at appropriate times during the day when these issues or ideas might surface. (Reutzel, 2001)

However, over the course of the three years in which the primary investigator was a teacher with these students, it became increasingly notable over time that the one strategy that met with consistent academic and social success– in terms of increasing interest in reading in general, assisting in redirecting negative behaviors, and increasing prosocial skills– was reading experientially-relevant chapter books aloud on a daily basis (Verden, 2002, Unpublished Pilot Study). This was true not only for the youngest children (students in grades 3-5 as well as grades 6-8) who struggled with reading, but also for older students who could read above grade level, yet often chose not to read due to disengagement. Of particular note was that during read-aloud time, the classroom which was otherwise characterized by students’ negative physical and verbal interactions with teachers and

peers surprisingly became a quiet, supportive learning environment.Students would listen to the comments of others without negativity and provide appropriate feedback and problem-solve in relation to their family, community, and interpersonal issues.

This study was developed in an effort to understand the connection between read-aloud and literature response activities, and student prosocial behavior more clearly. In particular, this intervention was developed to investigate, in a structured and strategic way, how the development of, engagement with, and integration of social and problem-solving skills might be made more relevant to students through read-aloud activities targeted to their experiences, interests, and daily social and emotional issues. To that end, the project is described next, followed by a discussion of student outcomes. These outcomes included increased prosocial awareness in terms of student identification with story characters as positive role models, personal reflection leading to insight into their own interpersonal interactions, and sharing personal feelings and experiences, leading to new discoveries about their own behavior.

Narrative texts were chosen that would reflect environments and situations that the participants experienced daily, in their family, school, and community settings.

Reading Aloud in Room 11: Methods and Procedures

Room 11 was part of Oliver Middle School, situated within a large urban district in the Northeastern United States serving over 210,000 students, in over 250 elementary and secondary schools during the year of this study (2004-2005). Oliver Middle School, at the time of this study enrolled approximately 1100 students: Forty-one percent African American; 26% Caucasian; 28% Latino; and 5% Asian. Approximately 62% of the students received free and reduced price lunch, and approximately 13% were identified as in need of special education services (School District Website).

Read-aloud Planning and Data Sources

Many of the students in Room 11 (6th, 7th, and 8th graders) had been receiving services from the lead teacher/researcher for more than a year. Each student in Room 11 had an individualized schedule: some were included in general education academic subjects, others received learning support or ESL instruction at varied times of the day. However, there was a block of approximately 40 minutes each day when all of the students were present together in Room 11. Read-aloud intervention activities, consisting of 1) daily teacher/researcher oral chapter reading of experientially-relevant texts; 2) strategic reflection and discussion of text characters and events; and 3) opportunities to respond to the text in journal writing, occurred during this 40 minute time period, at least four times per week, for sixteen weeks. Reading texts and literature aloud was a normal operating practice for this classroom prior to this study; as such, it was not seen by the students as something different from the typical routine, and did not disrupt the classroom or curricular program.

Data from student interviews, teacher/researcher field notes, and student reading interest surveys (to note student topics of interest, used in choosing relevant texts) were additional sources of data. An individual student Social Skills Rating System

(SSRS: Gresham & Elliott, 1990) was also completed in relation to each student participant, by the teacher, student and parent prior to, and at the conclusion of, the intervention period, to note any changes in social skill development. However, due to pre- and post-intervention lack of response by parents to the survey, as well as questionable reliability in relation to student self-reports, data from the SSRS was deemed untrustworthy and not utilized in relation to the findings of the study.

All six students in Room 11, with their parents consent, agreed to participate in the study. Each student was interviewed once, for approximately 45 minutes each. Interviews focused on the students' experiences during read-aloud in order to discern how they felt about the read-aloud experience and if it had an impact on their interest in books or their desire to read for themselves. Interviews were recorded and transcribed for subsequent data analysis, which included coding; generating themes from patterns in codes; and development of tentative conclusions emerging from the themes across all data sources (Creswell, 2003; Schwandt, 2001).

Choosing Texts

Experientially-relevant texts were chosen, in part, based on the following (See Table 2):

- results of the student interest surveys;
- noted student areas of interest from informal conversations;
- areas of social and emotional skill need, determined from Individualized Education Plan (IEP) goals as well as classroom observation; and
- research-based principles of effective literature and read-aloud selection.

In addition, narrative texts were chosen that would reflect environments and situations that the participants experienced daily, in their family, school, and community settings. As these youth experienced significant interpersonal stress, community violence, and often, harsh and sometimes abusive relationships with their family members, books that would reflect their realities and experiences were chosen, yet with intentional and significant care and sensitivity to: 1) appropriate yet authentic and realistic descriptions of character feelings and events such as parents divorcing and being around peers who are violent; 2) reflection on the part of the characters in relation to events, interpersonal relationship dynamics and individual choices, which would provide opportunities for reflection and discussion; and 3) prosocial choice making on the part of the characters in relation to such events, interactions, and choices (again, which would potentially provide prosocial skill modeling for participants). Some of the books were part of a series of stories with experientially-relevant themes and, at times, similar characters; others were single texts offering unique points of view.

Each day, between two and five sequential chapters of a book were read-aloud, stopping after 40 minutes where there were natural breaks in the story. Each session began with a review of the events in the text from the previous day, and a preview and prediction about what might happen in the current day's selection. While the teacher/researcher read-aloud, students were allowed to sit where they wanted; many chose to bring their chairs into a circle around the teacher/researcher, although this was not required. Some students drew pictures of characters during the reading; others wrote down significant events that they wanted to remember.

Group Discussions and Journals

After the daily 40-minute read-aloud of a section of the book, group discussions and individual journal writing were conducted based on the content of the story and the behavior and decisions of the characters. A range of questions were developed strategically– to highlight social and behavioral events and character experiences from the texts– that would not only encourage student reflection, critical thinking, and identification of problem events and solutions, but also recognition of key prosocial character traits and behaviors that could provide emotional, behavioral, and social skill models for the participants in light of their relevance to their own lives (See Table 3). Students also initiated and contributed to the topics of the discussions based on their interests, ideas, and questions. Discussion sessions were open-ended in structure, allowing sharing of personal experiences between students, which generated further discussion and prompted thoughts for positive changes in their behavior and in lives. After these conversations, students wrote in personal journals regarding how the difficulties of the stories' characters related to similar issues and problems they were experiencing in their own lives, based on a selection of open-ended prompts created strategically to promote reflection and critical thinking in terms of participants' comparisons of story events and characters with their own lives (See Table 3).

The participants changed their interpersonal actions, thought processes, and communication styles as they identified with the characters in the literature.

Findings: "Teacher, it's just like what happens at my house…"

In listening to stories with characters "just like" them, and discussing issues and problem-solving in relation to the characters' lives, decisions, and behaviors (as opposed to only focusing on their own lives), the students became willing to discuss personal issues and events via the characters and the texts, in ways that maintained their dignity and feelings of self-worth and security, yet allowed honesty and self-disclosure. The students showed insight and candor as they were provided private writing opportunities to reflect on the characters and stories and how they might be similar to their own lives and decisions. Further, as the investigation continued, they were able to apply the prosocial skills they had discussed in relation to the novels to their own interactions, both in Room 11 as well as in their resource and inclusive general education classes. Specific themes emerged with regard to student engagement in the texts and their use in building prosocial skills, including identifying with the characters as role models for prosocial choicemaking, using the story events as opportunities for individual and personal reflection on their own lives and experiences, and gaining insight into their own behavior in the process. Students seemed to gain a willingness to deeply share emotional and pivotal experiences with the teacher and with each other.

Positive role models

As the read-aloud activities developed, the students found themselves identifying with characters in the stories as role mod-

els, choosing prosocial actions similar to those of the characters as they experienced similar situations. One critical finding of this research was the ways in which the participants changed their interpersonal actions, thought processes, and communication styles as they identified with the characters in the literature, generalizing the prosocial behaviors of the characters into their own thinking and interactions.

One particular example, about four weeks into the study, involved Alizay, a 7th grader, speaking of a behavioral incident that occurred in the lunchroom that day with another female student who called her a 'smut'. She relayed to the teacher/researcher that, taking offense to this word as it was a colloquial way of calling someone a "slut," she began to argue with the other student. Yet she stated that it had occurred to her, as she began arguing, that the other student was "just like" a character from a text the teacher had read-aloud (the character Brisana, from *A Matter of Trust* (Schraff, 2002)). Alizay remarked that the other student, who called her a "smut", was "always gossiping, judging, and 'talking down on people'," just as the character Brisana did in the story when she "rated people on a scale of 1 to 10."

In response, Alizay chose to seek assistance from a teacher to resolve the matter, rather than escalate the incident into a fight. Alizay was able, in her words, "to think like [the character] Darcy" and make an appropriate and prosocial behavior choice. This behavior choice was significant, in that Alizay had a long history of fighting with students, lacking impulse control and resisting prosocial guidance or assistance from others in these types of situations. Her spontaneous reflection on the situation, and her identification with the choices of the character from the read-aloud text, showed the influence of read-aloud and connections with story characters and experiences on her progress in developing prosocial skills and behaviors (e.g., impulse control, and seeking help when needed from appropriate sources to resolve situations peacefully).

Reflection

Another important theme that became evident through analysis of fieldnotes, students' journals, interviews and class discussions was that of personal reflection and resulting insight on the part of students as they related story events to their own experiences. During group discussions and journaling, students communicated about difficult situations at home and with their peers, reflecting not only on their own responses to those situations, but also on the actions, needs, and perspectives of others involved in the events. The students' willingness and ability to take emotional risks by sharing their own circumstances in relation to the literature, indicated important gains in their emotional development. During discussions, students would openly connect their own significant negative experiences with those of the characters and situations in the stories, particularly in relation to choice making and learning to cope with and address difficult life circumstances. These opportunities for reflective discussion seemed to provide them with opportunities to develop a deeper understanding of their own feelings and reactions, as well as a better understanding of other individuals in these, and other similar, situations (empathy).

Evidence of empathy for others through story events can be see in Derek's response to a discussion question, framed around the story, *A Matter of Trust* (Schraff, 2002), in which a character struggles with forgiveness. In his response to the journal question, "How hard or easy is it to forgive

someone when they are mean to you?", Derek acknowledged his own need for attention, and his empathy for others who would seek it in similar, albeit inappropriate, means. He wrote,

> To me it's easy to forgive someone when they're mean to me because they [sic] just doing it to get attention. I know this for a fact because I used to do it to get some attention, so why wouldn't I forgive them? They probably aren't getting any attention or love. I kind of do feel sorry for those kids but then again why don't they take their anger out on a punching bag? (Derek, Personal Journal Entry, October 4, 2004).

As a result of the conversation around forgiveness brought about by a character in a storyline, Derek was able to acknowledge to the teacher/researcher and share his reflective thinking about his own behavioral intentionality, his emotional insight, and empathy for others experiencing similar circumstances.

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Insight and Sharing

In addition to self-reflection, the read-aloud and response activities seemed to foster self-awareness of pivotal personal life events and circumstances that affected subsequent student behavior. Students seemed to arrive at insight about those experiences and circumstances through the identification with characters and story events. They then shared these events and insight with the teacher/researcher, who was then able to more clearly understand setting and antecedent events, as well as the functions, of students' inappropriate behavior (and in doing so, develop effective responses to them).

An early example of gaining and sharing personal insight through connections with the storyline and characters in the literature, can be found in a personal written journal entry from Omar, a 7th grader. After hearing a portion of *Lost and Found* (Schraff, 2002) read-aloud, Omar reflected on a particular story event, connecting it honestly and openly to a significant early experience in his own life:

> One day I came home from school. I must have been around 10, and I found another man in our apartment. When my Dad came home I told him that my Mom had been with another man and he went crazy. They were yelling and cussin' [sic] at each other until the cops were called and they took my Dad away. I always felt like it was my fault that my parents broke up because I told my Dad about the other man and *it is something that makes me act the way I do now because of what happened* [emphasis added]. After that I lived with my Mom and didn't see my Dad much.

Through his writing, in relation to the frustrations felt by the characters and their relationships with their parents in the story,

Omar was able to reveal his feelings about a pivotal incident which significantly influenced his relationship with his parents. Through this connection, Omar provided insight into his resulting feelings of guilt about the incident, and the way in which this had influenced his subsequent behavior in profound ways.

Although this was the third year Omar was in Room 11 with the teacher/researcher, this was the first time that he revealed this situation with his parents to her, and his feelings of responsibility for their break up and the major impact this event has on "why [he is] in this class and acts the way that [he does]." Without the literature to make the connection, it is unclear if there would have been opportunities for him to gain insight into the influence of this experience and to disclose and work through his feelings about it in an appropriate manner in the classroom environment.

Further, in sharing this insight with the teacher/researcher, Omar allowed her to use this information positively to help him learn how to respond in appropriate ways to his feelings about the situation. In previous years, in response to interactions with his father, Omar would release his anger and frustration by fighting or not following directives of teachers, often resulting in suspension from school. After Omar disclosed this pivotal event, the teacher/researcher was able to understand the root of his anger, and develop and provide responses to effectively respond to his emotions and encourage him to utilize prosocial strategies to process his feelings and be able to re-engage in the daily activities of the class.

Another example of sharing personal insight resulting from group discussions and journal entries occurred after reading a section of the text *Someone to Love Me* (Schraff, 2002), in which the character's single mother has to work late into the night in order to support her family. In response, Alizay wrote openly in her journal about her feelings of connection with the experiences of the character vis-à-vis her relationship with her own mother. She wrote:

> I know my parents are always at work to buy us clothes and food and paying bills, but when they come home, then they can say "Hi" or "How was your day?" But they come in the house and say "Clean this, clean that, and your [sic] so bad". They hardly ever pay attention to me anymore. They just stopped caring when I turned 11 or later.

Although prior to this investigation, Alizay frequently and openly communicated dissatisfaction with her relationship with her parents, she often chose to express her feelings through screaming, yelling, and swearing. In her written response to the text read-aloud, she reflected on her experiences, which mirrored those of the character. Although this was the third year that Alizay was with the teacher/researcher, this was the first time she had shared her thoughts about the underlying reason for her frustration and tension with her parents. Through this writing, Alizay expressed that she felt that her parents stopped caring about her, and that she felt she did not get the kind of attention she needed from them.

On another day during the investigation, similar thoughts about needing, but not receiving, attention from her parents surfaced when Alizay was required to return to Room 11 from another class due to persistent, negative, "acting out behaviors" centered on attention-seeking. Upon return, Alizay imme-

diately began crying loudly that her parents did not "care about her and that getting in trouble is the only way to get their attention." Through her experience of emotional and experiential validation through the literature read-aloud, Alizay was able to reflect on and share her thoughts about her own experiences and resulting behavior. In doing so, her teacher gained a clearer understanding of the function of Alizay's behavior, and in turn was able to develop effective, prosocial ways to respond to her before any negative behaviors occurred or escalated. For example, if Alizay appeared upset and agitated, the teacher would ask her privately if Alizay needed to speak with her mother, facilitating making the phone call so that she could speak to her mother and gain the attention she needed in positive and appropriate ways. This, in turn, allowed Alizay the opportunity to work through her emotions and turn her attention back to her academic work in the classroom much more quickly than she had before.

These instances of sharing in relation to experientially-relevant literature read-aloud were significant not only in that they opened avenues for student reflection, insight, sharing, and social and emotional development, but also that they provided the teacher/researcher with insight into the underlying histories, functions and setting events of students' emotional and behavioral issues. This, in turn, influenced the appropriateness and effectiveness of her responsiveness to their needs, as evidenced by their ability to resolve the situations with guidance, and return successfully to classroom activities and academic work.

Although in other research, bibliotherapy, or reading books with a therapeutic intent (Afolayan, 1992), has been shown to be a useful strategy to enhance self-understanding for students who have significant learning and behavior problems (Sridhar & Vaughn, 2000), the findings of this study suggest that providing students with strategic and ongoing opportunities to discuss and reflect on their life experiences through the use of experientially-relevant narratives in a context of safety and trust can be a powerful tool in understanding their emotional needs and the functions of their behaviors.

In this intervention, the literature read-aloud experience became a tool to provide emotional and behavioral supports for students (Crone & Horner, 2003). It also became quickly apparent that, for the students in Room 11, hearing and reading experientially-relevant literature provided an opportunity for them to explore topics relevant to their lives. Without exposing their personal vulnerabilities, it allowed them to be "somewhere else" for a while and, at the same time, understand through relating to the stories' characters that they were not alone with their problems, that others have experienced similar issues, and that others have overcome them through resiliency and prosocial choices. They were able to discuss major historical, life-altering events through connections with the literature, giving insight to themselves and their teacher regarding critical underlying emotional needs.

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Conclusions and Implications

Many experts agree that reading aloud to children is a vital experience in literacy development (Morrow, Rand, & Smith, 1995; Ouellette, D'Agostino & Carifio, 1999; Trelease, 2001). Findings from this study suggest that reading aloud has far more comprehensive potential across higher grade levels and in classrooms with students who may have emotional and behavioral disorders or other disabilities, providing them with opportunities to identify with prosocial role models, and reflect on circumstantial, relational, and behavioral similarities between the stories and themselves, which have the potential to positively influence behavior choices.

Table 3: Sample group discussion and journal reflection questions.

Book	**Lost and Found** Schraff (2002). New Jersey: Townsend Press
Discussion	1. How do you think Darcy and Jamee feel about the fact that their Mom works so much that she cannot give them much attention? 2. What it must have been like for Darcy and Jamee when their father left? 3. How does Darcy feel about taking care of her younger sister? 4. What does Grandma mean when she tells Darcy "Love is worth it, even when it hurts"?
Journal Reflection	1. Do you ever feel like your parents are too busy to give you any attention? How does this make you feel? 2. Are you affected by the relationship between your parents? If so, how? 3. Do you ever have to be responsible for a younger child in your house? How does this make you feel? 4. Do you think "Love is worth it, even when it hurts"?

Book	**A Matter of Trust** Schraff (2002). New Jersey: Townsend Press
Discussion	1. How do you think Hakeem felt about stuttering in front of the class during his presentation? 2. How does Roylin feel when he makes fun of Hakeem in front of the class? 3. How does Darcy feel when she saw Brisana on the back of Hakeem's motorbike? 4. How do Darcy and Jamee differ in their feelings about Dad returning? Who do you think is right and why? **(A Matter of Trust #2)** 1. Have you ever been able to forgive someone for being mean to you like Hakeem forgave Roylin for teasing him? 2. How did Roylin feel when he returned to school and had to face Hakeem after the shooting? 3. How does Hakeem feel when he wins the talent show? Does it make up for the stuttering?
Journal Reflection	1. Have you ever felt embarrassed in front of a group of kids? What happened? 2. Have you ever made fun of someone and made others laugh at them? What happened and why did you do it? 3. How would you respond if somebody wanted to be with your girlfriend or boyfriend to get back at you? 4. Would you be able to forgive one of your parents if they came back after not contacting you for a long time? Why or why not? **(A Matter of Trust #2)** 1. How hard or easy is it to forgive someone when they are mean to you? 2. Have you ever had to face someone that you were mean to and be nice to them? How did they react? 3. Have you ever had the opportunity to show off your talents? How did it make you feel to be good at something?

Table 3: Sample group discussion and journal reflection questions (continued).

Book	**Someone to Love Me** Schraff (2002). New Jersey: Townsend Press.
Discussion	1. How does Cindy feel about her Mother's boyfriend Raffie? 2. Why is Cindy skipping school? 3. How does Cindy feel about herself? 4. What kind of life does Cindy have right now? **(Someone to Love Me #2)** 1. Should you warn a friend if they want to date someone who is 'no good'? Why or why not? 2. What should Cindy do when Bobby grabs her wrist and yells at her? 3. How can Mom and Cindy get along better? 4. How does Cindy start to think of Harold in a different way?
Journal Reflection	1. Have you ever had to deal with a boyfriend or girlfriend of your parents that you did or do not like? 2. Have you ever felt like skipping school? Why? 3. How does your home life affect the way you feel about yourself? 4. What kind of life do you think you have right now? Explain why. **(Someone To Love Me #2)** 1. Have you ever tried to persuade a friend not to hang out with the wrong crowd? What happened? 2. What would you do if someone was verbally or physically abusive toward you? What would be the best thing to so? 3. What could you do to get along better with your parents? 4. Have you ever changed your mind about a person and become friendly with them? What happened?

Book	**The Bully** Langan (2002). New Jersey: Townsend Press
Discussion	1. How did Darrell feel when he had to leave all of his friends behind in Philadelphia? 2. What kind of person is Tyray? 3. What kind of life does Darrell have now? Is there anything good about it? 4. How are Darrell and his little cousin Nate similar? **(The Bully #2)** 1. Why is Amberlynn embarrassed to talk to Darrell in school? 2. How does Darrell feel about himself now that he has joined the wrestling team? 3. How does Darrell stand up to Uncle Jason? 4. How is Darrell's life changing? Is his life getting any better?

Journal Reflection	1. What would it be like to move to a new city and a new school in the middle of the school year? 2. Have you ever met a person like Tyray? How did you deal with it? 3. What would you do if you were Darrell? 4. Have you ever helped someone who was being bullied? Tell what happened. **(The Bully #2)** 1. Have you ever been embarrassed to talk to someone because of what others may say? What happened? 2. Have you ever joined a team or a club? How did that make you feel? 3. Have you ever had to stand up to an adult? Tell what happened. 4. In what ways could you be like Darrell and make a positive change in your life?

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About the Authors:

Peggy Hickman is Associate Professor at Arcadia University, and consults on topics related to literacy, biliteracy, and leadership for diverse learners in general and special education.

Claire Verden is an Assistant Professor of Special Education at West Chester University.