

Bibliotherapy for Classroom Management

Teachers can use bibliotherapy, the practice of helping individuals grow and develop through books, as one tool in classroom management.

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The focus and goal of classroom management should be first and foremost learning. When trying to prevent interruptions to learning, or dealing with interruptions to learning when they occur, teachers need to move beyond simply imposing a consequence and assuming students have learned from the interaction. Students need to be taught the skills and knowledge necessary for growth in self-control, expanding on self-regulated-learning where the teacher's role is interactive and personal, helping students reflect on and validate their experiences (McCombs, 2001). **Bibliotherapy**, the practice of helping individuals grow and develop through books, is one tool that teachers can use across the curriculum, and in particular, in the field of classroom management.

Historically, bibliotherapy dates back to the 1930s when librarians began compiling lists of written material that helped individuals modify their thoughts, feelings, or behaviors for therapeutic purposes. The underlying premise is that students identify with literary characters similar to themselves, an association that helps the students release emotions, gain new directions in life, and explore new ways of interacting (Gladding & Gladding, 1991).

At its most basic level, bibliotherapy involves selecting reading material that has relevance to the person's life situation. Often the practice will also involve writing, play, or reflective discussion. Books provide a safe medium for children to explore different concepts, feelings, and attitudes while allowing them to better understand their environment, community, and societal expectations. Students may be more willing to engage in open discussions about their thoughts and feelings through discussion of carefully selected texts.

Stamps (2003, p. 26) defined bibliotherapy as, "a strategy that helps students overcome or deal with a current problem or issue in their lives." Bibliotherapy has obvious value in that it provides the opportunity for participants to recognize and understand themselves, their

characteristics, and the complexity of human thought and behavior. It may also promote social development as well as the love of literature in general, and reading in particular (Gladding & Gladding, 1991). In addition, Harvey (2010) examined how bibliotherapy could serve as a vehicle for individual change, by serving as a practice in which the reader enhances problem solving skills. Bibliotherapy reduces feelings of isolation that may be felt by people with problems. All of the aforementioned promote learning self-control, a long-term goal of classroom management.

Four Stages of Bibliotherapy

There are four stages that the student is believed to experience during bibliotherapy:

1. **Identification**, when a student identifies with a character.
2. **Catharsis**, in which the student experiences a release of emotions as he/she "follows" the character.
3. **Insight**, at which point students connect their lives to the lives of the characters in the book.
4. **Universalization**, the stage in which students realize people all over the world face similar life changes. (Stamps, 2003).

Many teachers practice bibliotherapy in some manner, often without giving their practice a formal name. However, effective follow-up activities, thoughtful questions, and focused discussion require that teachers are mindful about their use of books to address individual and group issues in classroom management. Bibliotherapy may be used individually, with small groups, or with an entire class, depending on the need and can also involve parents in the reading activities. Teachers can use children's literature to teach about difficult issues by encouraging students to make personal connections with characters in the book, thus allowing readers to evaluate their own

behavior and emotions through the experiences of the characters in the story (Forgan 2002; Iaquinta & Hipsky, 2006).

Using Children's Literature

Early childhood teachers use read alouds for a number of purposes in a variety of classroom settings. One of the benefits of children's books is their versatility. They can be used in a wide-range of subject areas to teach content standards, and are often used as models, or mentor texts, for exemplary writing. In addition to academic content, they can also be utilized to deal with common classroom management concerns and sensitive classroom issues. When introducing children's books, teachers have the option of implementing them in a whole group setting, a small, focused group, or for independent reading during designated times. The versatility of children's literature lends itself to the wide variety of situations that arise in classroom management.

Whole Group Instruction

Children's books are effective in the whole group setting for a number of reasons. Besides the numerous documented literary benefits of read aloud in the areas of fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, and writing (Beck & McKeown, 2001; Fox, 2001; Heisey & Kucan, 2010; Trelease, 2006), whole group read aloud of children's books allows teachers to address topics that affect and/or can benefit the entire class. In addition, in the field of literacy, researchers have emphasized the need for exposure to a variety of texts, across genres, and have discussed the differentiation between window and mirror texts. (Mirror



Photo by Nancy P. Alexander

Select books to correspond to each child's individual needs.

texts are defined as those that allow individuals to see themselves in the texts, while window texts allow individuals a glimpse into the lives of those unlike themselves (Glazier & Seo, 2005). This is especially pertinent in the field of classroom management. Because the ultimate goal of classroom management is learning, teachers must address the issues or occurrences that impede or interfere with learning. Using the books listed in this article can allow teachers to address common management issues in the least intrusive ways possible, as well as to develop a sense of empathy for people and sit-

uations both similar and different from themselves.

Whole group read alouds are excellent opportunities for teachers to broach blanket issues or topics that affect a large portion of their students. Good management is invisible management and should occur with the least amount of disruption possible. Therefore, incorporating children's books that weave stories around characters, situations, or issues similar to those faced by students provides opportunities for teachers to approach matters that affect their classes without singling out specific students. Plus, by reading

a variety of read alouds, including those that deal with moral, behavioral, and social issues, teachers are able to expose students to situations that otherwise may be overlooked.

Incorporating children's books in whole group lessons is not difficult. When introducing the books, teachers may ask students to make predictions based on the title or cover. During the read aloud itself, teachers should:

- stop and ask questions regarding the reading at appropriate parts in order to clarify confusing material
- check for comprehension
- allow students to ask questions if needed

Additionally, teachers should stop at strategic points in the story to address issues that relate to problems in the classroom. Asking students to predict what a character will do in a tough situation, or what could be done to solve a problem the character is facing allows students to think through issues without the problem being personal.

When using these types of books in the whole class setting, teachers should also allow students to reflect and respond to the literature. Connections, including text to text, text to self, and text to world should be encouraged (Keene & Zimmerman, 1997). Time for class discussion following the reading should be built into the lesson as well as time for questioning, both by the teacher and from the students. Discussion following the reading is a prime opportunity for teachers to ask students to determine if the issues outlined in the book currently affect their classes. Students can brainstorm possible solutions to the problems discussed and also determine ways

they can apply what was learned in the book in their own lives, both home and academic.

Good books for whole class implementation include:

- *Have You Filled A Bucket Today?*
- *What If Everyone Did That?*
- *Stand Tall Molly Lou Melon*
- *Spaghetti in a Hot Dog Bun: Having the Courage To Be Who You Are*
- *Enemy Pie*

because they address blanket, global issues that are most likely to affect the greatest number of students and have the most profound effect on the class as a whole.

Discuss and address difficult issues with children's books.

Small Group Instruction

Traditionally, small group instruction is an excellent venue for enrichment or supplemental instruction, and allows teachers the opportunity to interact with students in a setting other than whole group. Small group instruction often takes place during guided reading blocks, a time when teachers focus on strategic activities for reading (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). Response to Intervention (RTI) also employs small group instruction in Tier 2 of the program across academic content areas. Small group instruction is also a prime strategy for dealing with classroom management issues that might be af-

fecting a small group of students.

Small group instruction has more than academic benefits for students and teachers. One of the main benefits of small group instruction is the social nature of the approach. While small group instructional methods may differ, the key component of working with them is discussion that is prevalent throughout the multitude of strategies. Utilizing the children's books discussed in this article in the small group setting allows for social interactions and rich discussion that may not be feasible during whole group due to time constraints or other limitations.

While whole group read alouds allow teachers to address issues that mainly impact the entire class, introducing some of these books in the small group setting allows teachers to address concerns/issues that may only affect a smaller group of students. Plus, teachers can also use books that have already been introduced in a whole group setting to emphasize a point or area that a small group of students may still need. The books used in small groups may address narrower topics or sensitive topics that are better suited for small group settings as well.

Introducing a book in a small group setting is similar to that of whole group. The main difference occurs in the amount of discussion and focus of questions and conversations that emerge as a result of the book. In this venue, students are able to delve deeper into the text and develop additional connections between the material and their situations. Teachers and students may spend more time talking about the characters, situations, as well as solutions to problems and discussing ways they can implement what was learned from the books.

Books that would be beneficial in the small group setting include:

- *My Mouth is a Volcano*
- *The Frog with the Big Fat Mouth*
- *The Recess Queen*
- *Lacey Walker-Non Stop Talker*

Individualized Instruction

Effective classroom management includes the provision of individualized instruction corresponding to each individual's unique needs and ability. In the classroom, one way that teachers address individual ability levels is through the

differentiation of reading materials. It is especially common in early childhood classes to see individual book boxes for students that contain "just right" books on individual student levels that can be read during independent or self-selected reading time. The books in these boxes are often literary works cooperatively chosen by both the students and teacher. Similarly, it is not uncommon to see differentiation of instruction in other academic areas as well. This differentiation could also be in the area of classroom management. Because each student has a unique set of needs, classroom management should be tailored to best fit these needs.

Implementing certain children's books with individual students allow teachers to differentiate based on specific student needs. Because some students have management issues that may be less prevalent or distinctive to an individual, the use of certain books that address selected topics are best used in an individual setting. However, it would also be pertinent to allow students to re-read certain books that may have been shared with the whole class or in a small group if the student continues to have issues with a specific topic or issue.

Providing the right types of books for individualized instruction requires the teacher to know each of his/her students. In doing so, the teacher is able to choose books that may help students to better manage their conduct and performance in the classroom. Specific books may be selected and placed in a student's book boxes if those are employed, or the teacher may simply suggest that a student read a certain title during independent reading times. As with the other instructional approaches, time must be built in for the student to discuss the book with the teacher or with peers. This allows teachers to discuss the content of the book with the student and provides the student with opportunities to relate connections made when reading.

Books that would be good to use with individual students include:

- *When Sophie Gets Angry-Really, Really Angry*
- *My Mouth is a Volcano*
- *Personal Space Camp*
- *You Get What You Get*
- *The Honest to Goodness Truth*



Photo by Nancy P. Alexander

Children can use books to deal with personal concerns like going to the dentist.

Suggested Books for Implementation

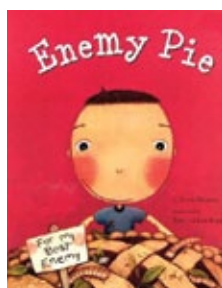
Below is a list of possible books that could be used in early childhood classrooms to address a myriad of classroom management concerns. They are grouped based on the behavior each book addresses. A brief synopsis is included as well as a suggested topic for discussion and implementation in the classroom.

Anger Issues



When Sophie Gets Angry—Really, Really Angry
by Molly Bang
(1999)

Getting angry is something everyone can relate to. Sophie, the main character in this book, gets angry when she does not get her way, whether it is when her sister is playing with her toys or when her mother informs her she needs to share. Sophie's temper gets the best of her initially, but time away helps comfort and relax her. Because most students experience the emotion of anger at some point, this book could serve as a good resource when addressing emotions and feelings of students.



Enemy Pie by
Derek Munson
(2000)

Summer is going well for the narrator in this story until a new boy moves into the neighborhood and becomes the neighborhood enemy. With his father's guidance, the narrator prepares a pie for Jeremy, but additional instructions for delivery includes playtime with the enemy, which

Choose books that assist students in managing their conduct.

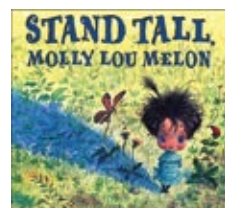
requires the two to get to know each other. In the end, the two become friends and the enemy pie winds up being more about friendship. This book could be used in class to discuss friendship and kindness.

Bullying



Spaghetti in a Hot Dog Bun: Having the Courage to Be Who You Are by Maria Dismundy
(2008)

Lucy is a unique little girl and the class bully, Ralph, loves to bring this to everyone's attention. Although Lucy is unlike anyone else, she is confident in herself and knows what she stands for and what is most important. In the end, when Ralph is in need, Lucy is able to help because she knows that it is important to be kind and nice to everyone, regardless of who they are. This book is a good resource to address bullying in the classroom, as well as the importance of being confident in who you are as an individual.



Stand Tall Molly Lou Melon by
Patty Lovell
(2001)

Molly Lou Melon, the main character in this book, is short in nature, has buckteeth, a terrible singing voice, and is clumsy. When Sally begins school, she is picked on by

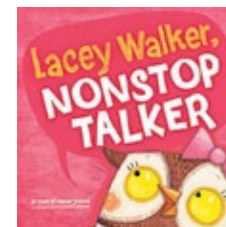
Ronald the class bully. Every time Ronald makes a comment about her, she responds in a positive manner. In the end, Molly Lou Melon's positive attitude helps her deal with life at a new school and even helps her win over the class bully.



The Recess Queen
by Alexis O'Neill
(2002)

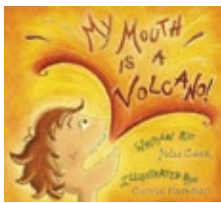
In this story, Mean Jean rules the playground – no one swings, slides, or plays before Mean Jean does. This continues until a new girl, Katie Sue, shows up and does whatever she wants at recess without Jean's permission. This new girl even asks Jean to play with her, something that no one else does, which solves the problem of the bully on the playground, by showing compassion, kindness, and the meaning of friendship.

Excessive Talking



Lacey Walker, Non Stop Talker
by Christianne
C. Jones (2012)

Lacey Walker loves to chatter. Throughout the day she talks non-stop, whether it is at the breakfast table, in class, or in the library. Her constant jabbering continues until she loses her voice and is forced to be silent for the day. However, during this time she realizes that because she can't talk, she is able finish tasks earlier and enjoys listening to her friends. In the end, although Lacey still enjoys talking, she also realizes that it is important to listen as well. This book would be a good resource to reinforce the importance of listening.



My Mouth is a Volcano By Julia Cook and Carrie Hartman (2005)

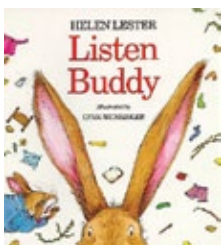
Louis, the main character in this story, has so much to say that he often can't control his words and when they come out. Many times, Louis interrupts others, blurts out comments, and has difficulty determining when it is appropriate to share his thoughts. In the end, Louis learns the importance of listening and waiting his turn to speak so he doesn't interrupt others with his outbursts. *My Mouth is a Volcano* can be used when teaching group norms and expectations for sharing time.

Listening Skills



Howard B. Wigglebottom Learns to Listen by Howard Binkow (2005)

Howard B. Wigglebottom is not a good listener. He often does not listen to his teacher's instructions in class, does not hear warnings or suggestions from family and friends, and does not pay attention to his friends when they are talking. After a required time out from art class, Howard realizes that he needs to work on his listening skills. The next day, Howard makes a conscious effort to be a better listener and it pays off.



Listen, Buddy by Helen Lester (1997)

Buddy the bunny is born with huge ears, but they don't seem to help him when it comes to listening. Always

misinterpreting directions and conversations, Buddy is forever finding himself in precarious situations. An encounter with Scruffy Varmint, a cunning and conniving animal, results in Buddy almost ending up as a meal for Scruffy. Once he realizes the potential consequences, Buddy begins to focus more on listening.

Respecting Others



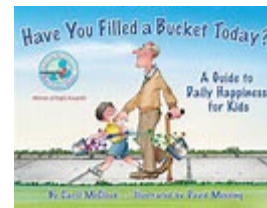
The Frog with the Big Mouth By Teresa Bateman (2008)

The Argentinian rainforest is the home of a frog who catches a large fly for dinner and then continually brags about his score to all those around him. As he hops through the rainforest, he regales the animals around him with stories of his monumental catch, taunting each one and asking each, "Don't you wish you were me?" A final meeting with a jaguar, who loves to eat frogs for dinner, sends the frog with the big mouth running for cover to escape the hungry animal.



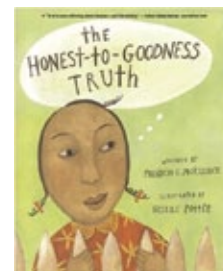
Personal Space Camp by Julia Cook (2007)

Using outer space as a comparison, Julia Cook addresses the concept of personal space to young children. Because young children may not be self-aware enough to understand the concept of personal space and the need to respect the personal space of others, *Personal Space Camp* is a good book to integrate in the classroom when tackling this topic.



Have You Filled a Bucket Today? A Guide to Daily Happiness for Kids by Carol McCloud (2007)

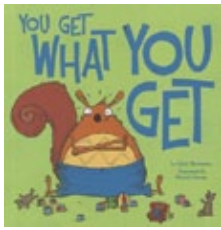
Through examples of random acts of kindness, empathy, and positive actions, readers learn how these acts can have residual positive effects on those around them. This book could be used to demonstrate the importance of kindness and empathy to others.



The Honest to Goodness Truth by Patricia C. McKissack (2000)

Caught in a lie by her mother, Libby vows to make a change and only tell the truth from that point on. The problem is she begins spreading the truth about everyone, regaling those she meets with stories about her neighbor's yard that looks like a jungle, a school mate who didn't have money for lunch, and her friend's socks with holes. At first, Libby can't understand why telling the truth is making everyone so upset with her, but after a talk with her mother, and a spoonful of her own medicine, she learns how to tell the truth in a way that shows empathy to others. *The Honest to Goodness Truth* could be used to address the issue of telling the truth as well as the need to be cognizant of other's feelings.

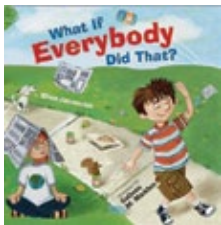
Rules and Consequences



You Get What You Get by Julie A. Gassman (2013)

Sometimes young children have difficulty

dealing with situations they consider unfair or when they do not get their way. Melvin the squirrel often throws a fit when he does not get his way, that is, until he learns a new rule at school. Melvin learns that this new classroom rule, “You get what you get and you don’t throw a fit.” applies not only at school, but at home as well. Learning to cope when you don’t get your way is something children and even some adults need help with.



What If Everybody Did That? by Ellen Javernick (2010)

This book loosely addresses

the concept of rules and guidelines for behavior through illustrations and examples of irresponsible actions and the possible consequences. With actions ranging from blurting out loud during story time to littering and rude restaurant behavior, the author poses the question, “*What if everybody did that?*” after each questionable action. By doing so, readers are able to imagine the impact of irresponsible behavior by viewing the possible consequences on a larger scale. This book could be used to help establish group norms, class rules, and expectations for behavior in the classroom.

Conclusion

The use of multiple books for a variety of problems and issues

encountered in classroom management can yield a number of benefits. By exposing students to a variety of literature with unique, yet relatable characters, students and teachers are able to discuss and address difficult and important topics in the classroom setting.

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