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Learning Our Lessons: A Proactive Approach to Bibliotherapy and Its Application to Children

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LEARNING OUR LESSONS: A PROACTIVE APPROACH

TO BIBLIOTHERAPY AND ITS APPLICATION

TO CHILDREN

being

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The research described in this thesis utilized human subjects. The thesis prospectus was therefore examined by the Human Subjects Research Committee of the Psychology Department, Fort Hays State University, and found to comply with Title 45, Subtitle A – Department of Health, Education and Welfare, General Administration; Part 46 – Protection of Human Subjects.

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Date

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Ethics Committee Chairman

ABSTRACT

The current study examined whether children can learn behaviors from fictional characters in books. Additionally, the researcher explored whether discussion of the topic at hand would improve the learning of those behaviors or if it would have no effect and reading alone can elicit change. Children in kindergarten and first-grade ($n = 85$) took both a pre-test and post-test about two separate topics, bullying and trying new things. They were assigned to four different groups: book only, discussion only, both book and discussion, and unrelated book. No significant differences were found between groups regarding the "trying new things" topic, whereas there were significant differences between groups regarding the "bullying" topic. The results indicate that bibliotherapy may be more effective for some topics rather than others or that children relate to characters or topics differently.

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INTRODUCTION

Bibliotherapy is a technique that is often used in conjunction with various forms of therapy, but it can also be used on its own. It has been defined several different ways, depending on how it is applied. In general, bibliotherapy aims to help people deal with events or emotions they experience in their lives, typically those which are negative or traumatic, by assigning books to be read that touch on those events or emotions (Prater, Johnstun, Dyches, & Johnston, 2006). Some mental health professionals give a more specific definition: that bibliotherapy involves the use of self-help books and focuses on psychological well-being (Floyd, Scogin, McKendree-Smith, Floyd, & Rokke, 2004). Bibliotherapy is helpful because books can provide a model for an individual to use when dealing with specific issues, help facilitate emotional healing and growth (Heath, Sheen, Leavy, Young, & Money, 2005), and promote understanding of both issues and solutions to problems (Bray, 1993).

There are differences in how bibliotherapy is used with adults and children. Generally, bibliotherapy for adults requires a self-help type book, while for children and teens, the books are selected based on how well they "foster personal insight and self-understanding" (Doll & Doll, 1997, p. 7) rather than whether they focus on psychological well-being or self-help. The authors also note that books can bring enjoyment as well as inform children about life events and issues. Phinney (1977) states that unless there is evidence of some form of psychopathology, what appears to be bibliotherapy is in fact simply guidance; however, the use of the technique is encouraged in order to prevent psychopathology from developing. Rubin (1978) goes a step further and includes "insight into normal development" (p. 2) as one of the goals of his form of bibliotherapy,

in addition to more pathological conditions. Several different names exist for this type of therapy; sometimes two different terms have the same definition, while other terms are used to distinguish other types of therapy. Literatherapy "refers to the intentional planned use of literary writings and/or literary forms … to facilitate and enhance psychotherapy" (Shiryon, 1973, p. 159). This form of therapy tends to rely more on literary forms such as metaphors, similes, and allegories when working in a psychotherapeutic setting (Shiryon, 1973).

History

Bibliotherapy by name may have originated in the early 20th century (Crothers, 1916), but reading for health has existed for centuries, dating back to ancient Greece. Aristotle was known for recommending reading to his students in order "to arouse healing emotions" (Cornett & Cornett, 1980, p. 11). Another ancient appearance of bibliotherapy was in Alexandria, a city in Egypt. The library there featured the phrase, "Medicine for the Mind" (Cornett & Cornett, 1980, p. 11; Heath et al., 2005, p. 563). Other libraries around the world have carried similar inscriptions, such as "Healing of the Soul" (Thebes, in ancient Greece; Heath et al., 2005, p. 563) and "Medicine Chest for the Soul" (Abbey Library of Saint Gall, Switzerland; Cornett & Cornett, 1980, p. 11). Libraries were not the only location where reference to bibliotherapy could be found; Cairo's Al-Mansur Hospital included readings of the Koran as part of medical treatment (Rubin, 1978). In addition to ancient references to the healing powers of reading, one can see evidence of this in colonial America, where public schools were created in order to encourage reading of scripture with the intention of "provid[ing] citizens with direction in their daily lives" (Cornett & Cornett, 1980, p. 11). Somewhat more recently,

bibliotherapy became a popular topic in both psychology and library science. In 1964, the first national bibliotherapy workshop was held with the support of the American Library Association as well as the National Institutes of Mental Health (Rubin, 1978).

Settings and Guidelines

Bibliotherapy is a technique that has been used in many different contexts, such as medical and mental hospitals, schools, prisons, drug and alcohol treatment centers, and nursing homes, as well as libraries (Rubin, 1978). How the technique is used sometimes depends on the setting; in mental health-related settings, it is more likely that self-help books will be used, while in schools and libraries, children's literature is most commonly used.

Bibliotherapy has been shown to be effective in adult populations. Floyd et al. (2004) compared the effect of both individual psychotherapy and bibliotherapy on depression in older adults. Overall results immediately after treatment showed that both groups improved, and there was no significant difference between groups. A post-treatment assessment after three months indicated that the recipients of individual psychotherapy had lower levels of depression than the bibliotherapy recipients, but those who received bibliotherapy continued to improve over time, until the levels of both groups were approximately the same. The bibliotherapy group received no treatment other than reading a self-help book and completing the homework assignments included in each chapter. The fact that this is comparable to several sessions of individual psychotherapy indicates that bibliotherapy can be a valuable psychological technique, even on its own.

Bibliotherapy has been successfully applied to children's problems as well. Amer (1999) studied the effect of bibliotherapy on children with insulin-dependent diabetes mellitus (IDDM) and children with short stature. Results showed that reading books that featured main characters with IDDM and short stature, respectively, helped the children open up and discuss their own feelings and experiences. This indicates that bibliotherapy can be useful in conjunction with therapy, to facilitate building rapport or to aid children in feeling comfortable discussing sensitive issues with professionals.

When choosing whether or not to use bibliotherapy within a particular setting, it is important to note any problems specific to the chosen setting. For example, if a client has a visual impairment, a well-lit room and large-print texts may be necessary, or the literature can be read to the client. Furthermore, any bibliotherapeutic objectives or techniques must naturally match the problems that will be dealt with within that setting. The room itself must also be considered; it is preferred to have a well-lit room in which both the client and therapist can be comfortable (Rubin, 1978).

While the influences and skills of educators and librarians are valuable and necessary, it is important to include mental health professionals in the process, especially when the focus of the bibliotherapy program is to foster change in an individual's behavior. Mental health professionals are also indispensable in order to ensure that an individual's emotional response is not too harsh or intense (Doll & Doll, 1997).

Purpose and Uses of Bibliotherapy

Regarding specific therapeutic purposes of bibliotherapy, it is meant to help readers find insight and catharsis regarding their own lives, as well as to help them learn new approaches to dealing with past, present, and future issues. Bibliotherapy techniques

can be used to improve children's interaction, communication, and problem solving skills, as well as their ability to make choices. Additionally, this technique can help children feel less isolated, particularly in the case of children with disabilities or social skills issues (Doll & Doll, 1997). When an individual is able to relate to a character in a book, that individual invests interest in someone other then him- or herself. It also assists the individual in staying in touch with reality, which can be further supported through the use of a bibliotherapy group (Menninger, 1937). These benefits are significant whether the focus is children or adults. Even when used individually, bibliotherapy can help children identify their own feelings and motives, as well as simply help them improve their reading abilities (Mohr, Nixon, & Vickers, 1991). When used in the clinical setting, bibliotherapy frequently includes follow-up activities and evaluation to ensure that readers have been able to apply aspects of what was read to their own lives (Doll & Doll, 1997). With children especially, the process may also incorporate reflective activities such as drawing, journaling, and role-playing in order to generalize the information from the book to a broader spectrum of situations (Heath et al., 2005). Critical thinking is another skill that can be further developed through the use of bibliotherapy, as readers analyze the situations and characters in the book and compare them to situations or people in real life (Schreur, 2006).

Many of the skills that can be fostered through bibliotherapy can begin in childhood and further develop as the individuals become adults. Learning these skills early on provides a strong and stable foundation for using these skills as time goes on.

Bibliotherapy has been recommended specifically as a "developmental or preventive" measure, meaning that it can be used for general adjustment and character

development issues as children deal with new situations as they grow up (Brown, 1975, p. 181). Bibliotherapy may be able to redirect a child who is starting down the wrong path, and it may help any child who is experiencing obstacles in his or her life. The key here is to "replace the destructive power with a new, constructive one—that of insight and understanding" (Rubin, 1978, p. 9). The changes required for this kind of development include affective changes of attitudes, values, and emotions; as well as cognitive changes regarding intellect, reasoning, and thinking (Cornett & Cornett, 1980).

Doll and Doll (1997) report that bibliotherapy can range from "simple" to "comprehensive" (p. 2). This continuum mirrors the range of complexity found in human problems; because of this, bibliotherapy can likely be beneficial to anyone (Doll & Doll, 1997). In fact, bibliotherapy has been used with a wide range of individuals, including depressed adults (Floyd et al., 2004), children with medical problems (Amer, 1999), children with difficulties handling their aggression (Sullivan & Strang, 2002), and children having trouble adjusting to school (Heath et al., 2005). It also has been used in group therapy environments (Rubin, 1978). The theme here is that bibliotherapy can assist in the development of "effective coping strategies" (Duimstra, 2003, p. 8). However, there is a lack of research regarding how well non-troubled children internalize messages presented in books that teach a lesson rather than personal development.

Related Theories

Bibliotherapy as a therapeutic technique has its roots in observational learning and social learning theories, as put forth by Albert Bandura in the 1960s. In his research, Bandura found that people, including children, can learn vicariously by observing another individual's behavior. Specifically, Bandura focused on whether or not individuals

copied the behavior based on whether the observed individual was rewarded or punished for that behavior. His research showed that observing the individual receiving a punishment decreased the likelihood that the behavior would be copied, while observing the individual receiving a reward increased the likelihood of copying the behavior. This showed that one does not have to experience the reward or punishment in order to copy the behavior or refrain from it (Hockenbury & Hockenbury, 2006). The current study proposes that children can identify with fictional characters in much the same way as they can with the models they observe.

Another relevant theory is that of social perspective taking (Selman, 1980). This theory outlines a framework on which "the child's understanding of a significant number of social and psychological relationships can be organized" (p. 23). Selman's research involves presenting a child with a moral dilemma, then determining whether the child is able to take another person's perspective in order to solve the dilemma. If a child is able to take another person's point of view, then it is likely that the child is able to empathize or understand that person in a better way. It may also be more likely for a child to understand why another individual would choose a particular behavior, and for the child to choose that behavior for him- or herself.

In many children's stories, the main characters involved are animals, rather than people. There is evidence that suggests that children can relate to animal characters just as well as they can relate to human characters. The Children's Apperception Test (CAT), a projective test similar to the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT), features animals in human-like settings. This test has been approved for use with children, especially those ages three to ten, and can even elicit richer and longer narratives (Bellak & Abrams,

1997). The CAT-H, a version of the CAT that features humans rather than animals in the same settings, has typically been shown to be superior to the CAT when the children were ten to twelve years of age or of higher intelligence (Bellak & Abrams, 1997), but not with younger children as in the present study. Because the CAT-H uses human figures, children can determine age, sex, and ethnicity of the characters pictured in a particular item of the assessment. However, these identifying characteristics are more ambiguous in the CAT, due to the depiction of animal characters rather than human ones. In many of the items, the animal characters lack cues, such as long hair or clothing style, that help children identify age, sex, and ethnicity. That ambiguity may allow children to identify themselves more closely to animal characters; however, it is not so personal that children are hesitant or unwilling to provide information about themselves (Bellak & Abrams, 1997). Just as children can personally identify with animals featured in the CAT, children should be able to personally identify with fictional animal characters.

The current study aimed to identify whether or not vicarious learning can take place when a child is not necessarily observing an individual's behavior, but rather is observing the behavior of a fictional character in a book. Rather than seeing someone else perform an action or learn from an experience, children saw fictional characters performing actions, learning from experience, and reacting in certain ways. As put forth in Selman's work, the current study focused on determining whether children can empathize with fictional characters and adopt the behaviors portrayed themselves.

Gender

Although children should be able to personally identify with fictional animal characters, this leaves the issue of whether or not children can personally identify with

fictional characters who are of a different gender. Children realize what sex they are themselves, and that there are physical characteristics that differ between sexes, by four years of age (Mealey, 2000). In Bandura's social learning research, it was found that children observe and imitate models more closely when those models are similar to the children themselves. Therefore, children were more likely to attend to models that are the approximate age and the same gender of the children themselves (Lips, 2005). Additionally, when children are presented with gender-exclusive language, they respond with the same gender-exclusive language. Children tend to see gender-ambiguous characters, such as animals, as male even when a gender-neutral pronoun (e.g., "they") is used. Only if feminine pronouns are used in text are children then likely to see a character as female (Lips, 2005). This gender-exclusive language, as well as the process of identifying one's own gender, is reinforced by reactions from peers, adults, and society as a whole.

However, society views gender-role violations by females as less serious than gender-role violations by males. Males are much more likely to be reprimanded for engaging in feminine-typical behaviors than females are for engaging in masculine-typical behaviors (Lips, 2005). Due to this discrepancy, it is likely that girls will be able to relate to fictional male characters nearly as well as they can relate to fictional female characters, whereas boys may show some difficulty relating to fictional female characters.

Regarding the cognitive tasks involved in identifying with fictional characters, as well as processing a story and recalling the behaviors and thoughts modeled by the characters, there are few gender differences. Males and females score similarly on tests

of memory, although some studies show that females are better at recalling visual material. However, this could be due simply to better description of the material by females as compared to descriptions by males (Lips, 2005). Based on past research, it is not likely that gender contributes to any differences in memory or recall of the stories and the behaviors and thoughts encouraged by them.

CURRENT STUDY

The purpose of this study was to show whether or not vicarious learning can take place when a child is not necessarily observing an individual's behavior, but rather is observing the behavior of a fictional character in a book. Rather than seeing someone else perform an action or learn from an experience, children saw fictional characters performing actions, learning from experiences, and reacting in certain ways. As put forth in Selman's work, this study helped to determine whether children can empathize with fictional characters and adopt the behaviors portrayed themselves.

Based on these theories, certain assumptions were made by the researcher: that the children would be able to relate to fictional animal characters as well as fictional human characters, and that the children would be able to relate to characters of both genders. The researcher hypothesized that the group that experienced both the target-topic book and discussion would show the greatest improvement from pre-test to post-test, with both the group that experienced the target-topic book only and the group that experienced the discussion only would perform better on the post-test than the control group, but not as well as the group that experienced both the book and discussion.

METHOD

Participants

The study involved children in kindergarten and first grade who were divided into four groups, each with a different level of treatment: reading an informational book about a common childhood issue, discussing the issue only, both reading about and discussing the issue, or reading a book unrelated to the issue. The sample was obtained from area after-school care programs based in elementary schools. Based on past literature, it was likely that simply exposing children to the issues would elicit a change in responses from pre-treatment to post-treatment; however, it was hypothesized that the group that both read the book and discussed the topic would show the most change from pre-treatment to post-treatment. Eighty-five children participated in the study. This falls between the number required for using an ANOVA with four groups when a large effect size is expected and the number required when a medium effect size is expected at the .05 alpha level (Cohen, 1992).

The participating children were 31 males and 54 females. The average age was 6.39 years. Table 1 shows further details regarding children's age and sex. Regarding older siblings, 34 children reported that they did have older siblings, while 41 reported that they did not. Ten children did not report their age or whether they have older siblings.

TABLE 1

Age Distribution within the Sample

| | Males (n = 31, 36.5%) | | Females (n = 54, 63.5%) | |
Age	Percentage	*n*	Percentage	*n*
5	9.7	3	3.7	2
6	38.7	12	44.4	24
7	45.2	14	37.0	20

Note. Ten children did not report their age or whether they have older siblings.

Materials

Demographic information, including age, sex, and number of older siblings were collected. The participants were asked a series of questions before reading a book or engaging in a discussion (the pre-test) and after reading a book or engaging in discussion (the post-test). These pre- and post-tests were written by the researcher specifically for each of two books: *Blue Cheese Breath and Stinky Feet: How to Deal with Bullies*, by Catherine DePino, Ed.D., and *When Lizzy Was Afraid of Trying New Things*, by Inger Maier, Ph.D. These books are published by Magination Press, a publisher associated with the American Psychological Association. In the first book, a pre-teen boy struggles when a bully starts picking on him, but his parents help him form a plan to stop the bullying. In the second book, a young sheep named Lizzy works to get over her shyness and fear of failure, and in doing so becomes closer to her family and friends. It should be noted that one book features a human male while the other book features an animal female, although this did not appear to affect the results of this study.

Procedure

Participants were kindergarten and first grade students at four area elementary schools where institutional permission was granted. Approximately one week before data collection began, a parent or caregiver of each of the children was asked to sign a consent form to allow their children to participate in the study (see Appendix A). A copy of the consent form was sent home with the parent or caregiver; additionally, the information included in the consent form was summarized verbally by the researcher, and any questions the parent had were answered at that time. Data collection began the following week. At that time, the children were asked to sign an assent form (see Appendix B), which was read aloud and summarized for them. After assenting, the children provided demographic information: age, sex, and whether or not they had older siblings. The children then completed a pre-test asking them questions about one of the topics (see Appendix C). Questions for the pre-test were read aloud to the group of children, and they responded to each question by circling a response on a color-coded sheet of paper that corresponded to the question. They responded by circling a happy face ("I should use that behavior in that situation") or a sad face ("I should not use that behavior in that situation"). The particular after-school program attended by the children determined the condition that they would experience. One group had the target-topic book read to them, while the second group engaged in a discussion about the target-topic. The third group both heard the target-topic book and engaged in a target-topic discussion, while the control group had an unrelated book read to them. The children then completed a post-test, which consisted of the same questions they answered in the pre-test and administered in the same manner. Because they circled their responses, it was possible to

ask the questions of the group of children as a whole, while still being able to obtain individual responses.

The data collection process took place over two weeks. The researcher met with each group of children once during the first week and once during the second week. In each of the experimental groups, the target-topic was the focus of the first week, while the other target-topic was the focus of the second week. The conditions themselves remained the same from week to week (e.g., the group that engaged in target-topic discussion during the first week also engaged in target-topic discussion during the second week), although the topic itself will be different. The control group had one unrelated book read to them during the first week, while a different unrelated book was read to them during the second week; they still completed the respective pre- and post-tests for each target topic. Once the post-test was completed by all of the children and was collected by the researcher, the behaviors included in the target-topic book were explained to the children so that they received the appropriate information meant to be gleaned from the text. Because this summary occurred after completion of the post-test, the summary did not affect the children's answers. This, in addition to coloring unrelated pictures, served as a debriefing method for the children: they received the appropriate information and ended on a positive, fun note.

To further guard against extraneous effects and to help ensure comparability, two of the groups took the pre- and post-tests for the "bullying" topic during the first week and then completed the tests for the "trying new things" topic during the second week; while the other two groups completed the tests for the "trying new things" topic during

the first week and the tests for the "bullying" topic during the second week. In this way,

results should not have been affected by any learning or time effects.

RESULTS

Because this study included two different target topics that were tested, an independent *t*-test was run in order to determine whether or not there was a difference between these two topics regarding learning (i.e., a greater difference between pre- and post-tests for the "bullying" topic than for the "trying new things" topic). The *t*-test revealed a significant difference between the "bullying" topic ($M = 0.76$, $SD = 1.21$) and the "trying new things" topic ($M = 0.14$, $SD = 0.99$), $t(68) = 2.38$, $p = .02$. Because it was shown that a difference existed between the two topics, two one-way ANOVAs were run: one to test for differences between the conditions within the "bullying" topic, and one to test for differences between the conditions within the "trying new things" topic.

To determine whether differences existed among the groups regarding their scores on the pre- and post-tests for each topic, a one-way ANOVA was conducted with "group" as the factor. A significant difference was found for bullying pre-test scores, $F(3, 31) = 9.76$, $p < .001$. A Tukey HSD post-hoc analysis revealed that the participants in both the Discussion Only group ($M = 1.14$, $SD = 0.69$, $p < .001$) and Both Book and Discussion group ($M = 1.56$, $SD = 0.73$, $p < .01$) scored significantly lower than participants in the Control group ($M = 3.00$, $SD = 1.03$) on the pre-test. There were no significant differences when comparing the Book group's pre-test scores ($M = 2.67$, $SD = 0.58$). This could indicate that the different groups of participants, and thus students at different schools, have received different levels of education about bullying, with those participants who scored higher on the pre-test receiving more detailed information about bullying than other participants. Interestingly, the one-way ANOVA showed that differences between the groups on bullying post-test scores, means of which are shown in

Table 2, were only approaching significance, $F(3, 30) = 2.82$, $p = .06$. From these results, we can infer that all participants arrived at an approximately equal level of education regarding bullying regardless of group and condition by the end of the study.

TABLE 2

Summary of Post-Test Scores for "Bullying" Topic

Group	M	SD
Control	3.50	1.03
Book Only	3.33	1.16
Discussion Only	2.33	1.03
Both Book and Discussion	2.67	0.71

While there was a significant difference among groups regarding the "bullying" pre-test, no significant differences were found between groups regarding the "trying new things" topic for either the pre-test, $F(3, 32) = 1.56$, $p = .22$, or post-test, $F(3, 32) = 0.93$, $p = .44$. These results are shown in more detail in Table 3.

TABLE 3

Summary of Scores for "Trying New Things" Topic

Group	Pre-test		Post-test	
	M	SD	M	SD
Control	3.78	1.00	3.83	1.15
Book Only	4.75	0.50	4.75	0.50
Discussion Only	3.57	0.79	3.86	1.35
Both Book and Discussion	3.86	0.90	4.14	0.38

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to identify whether or not children could learn by observing the behavior of a fictional character in a book. The researcher hypothesized that both reading a book as well as having a discussion about the book's topic would result in greater learning than either of these alone. This expectation was based on past research that incorporated reading with therapy or additional activities that helped ensure that participants did fully understand and learn from the reading materials. The study by Floyd et al. (2004) used a self-help book for the reading material, while also requiring participants to complete the homework assignments included with each chapter. Amer (1999) used bibliotherapy to assist children with discussing their own feelings. In that particular case, bibliotherapy was used as a means to elicit discussion that was beneficial for the children. In both cases, bibliotherapy was incorporated with materials or activities that went beyond simply reading materials. The discussion and homework activities helped participants relate the issues addressed by the literature to their own lives, which further helped them incorporate any lessons learned into their own lives. Reading alone in these studies would likely not have resulted in the same level of benefits. Menninger (1937) noted that group discussion about reading materials can help individuals stay in touch with reality, such that the discussion can be better incorporated into individuals' lives. In fact, the field of psychology considers the discussion or incorporation aspect to be so important that in most clinical settings, bibliotherapy also includes follow-up activities and evaluation to ensure that the information gleaned from the reading has been fully incorporated into an individual's life (Doll & Doll, 1997). However, in the current

study there was no evidence that including both reading and a discussion led to better incorporation of the information.

There are several possibilities to consider regarding the significant difference between the two topics, bullying and trying new things. The first possibility is that this difference was influenced by external variables. For instance, children may simply be more familiar with bullying as an issue and could relate more to the story about bullying. Bullying may be so commonly discussed in both the school and home environments that children readily see it as an issue and are more likely to pay attention to, as well as glean information from, materials on this topic. Trying new things may not be an issue that most children, especially those within the participants' age group, see as problematic. Perhaps this is an issue more likely to occur in younger children who have not been exposed to a school environment, where trying new things has become commonplace and expected by the children. If children do not see trying new things as an issue, it is less likely that they will see the lessons or information presented by the materials, simply because they do not identify it as a problem.

A second possibility is that the difference was influenced by the species of the main character. The book about bullying featured a human main character, while the book on trying new things featured a sheep main character. While past research and current assessments used in the field of psychology note that children are able to relate to animal characters as well as they can to human characters, it is possible that when looking at issues or problems and how to deal with them, human characters elicit a better response. For instance, the Children's Apperception Test (CAT) uses animal characters and has been shown to elicit responses as well as the CAT-H, which uses human

characters, although this is typically shown in younger children (Bellak & Abrams, 1997). However, the purpose of the CAT is to elicit narratives from the children about what is occurring in various pictures. These narratives are then assessed to reveal information about an individual's personality or psychological wellness. It is possible that when eliciting narratives, animal characters are just as effective as human characters; but when asking children to incorporate a book's ideas into their own lives, human characters are more effective.

The third possibility is that the difference was influenced by the gender of the main character. The main character in the bullying book was male; in the trying new things book, female. Past research indicates that children are more likely to identify with models the same gender as themselves (Lips, 2005). It would then follow that boys would be more likely to identify with the character in the bullying book, and girls would be more likely to identify with the character in the trying new things book. However, because gender-ambiguous animals are often seen as male (Lips, 2005), the participating children—including the girls—may have seen the sheep main character as male, even though gender-specific language was used throughout the book. Additionally, because gender-role violations by females are perceived as less severe than those committed by males (Lips, 2005), children in general may have an easier time relating to a male character. It is difficult to tell in this instance whether children's responses were influenced by the gender of the main character or by the species of the characters. Further research may benefit from comparing responses to books that both feature human characters but different genders, or that both feature characters of the same gender but different species.

Further research in this area should include topics that are more unique or obscure, as bullying seemed to be a topic that is already commonly discussed in a school environment. As noted above, bullying may also be an issue that is more commonly experienced by children in general, while trying new things may not be seen as a problem by most children. This may account for the "bullying" pre-test differences found between the groups: it is possible that some schools incorporate education about bullying in their curriculums while others do not.

The way the topics were approached by each book may have influenced children's responses as well. The two books used in this study focused on positive behaviors and empowered main characters. Children's responses may be different if a book's characters engage in negative behaviors and learn a lesson based on their mistakes. It would be beneficial for future research to include a book that is written in this way for comparison.

The current study may have been limited by the fact that the pre- and post-tests did not allow for a neutral response; rather, the children had to choose between answers of "yes" or "no" only. It is possible that their responses may have been different had they used a Likert-type scale that included a neutral response choice. Additionally, the questions included in the pre- and post-tests may have elicited more variation in responses if they had been rephrased. Instead of simply asking the question, including a phrase such as "Some children would hit someone who was bullying them, and some children would not," may have made it more acceptable for children to give either answer, not just the one that is socially acceptable.

It is possible that there was little change between the pre- and post-tests due to the short amount of time that passed between them. Children may have simply remembered what answer they provided for the pre-test and provided the same answer for the post-test, instead of changing an answer due to the information provided in the book or discussion. Further research might include another activity between the pre- and post-tests or otherwise allow more time to pass between the pre- and post-tests.

Further research should also aim for groups with more equal size. Due to the fact that data was collected near the end of the school year when several other events and activities were scheduled, several children whose parents had consented did not attend after-school care on those days that data was collected. More equal groups were expected due to the number of consent forms completed, but due to these absences, groups were less equal than is ideal.

The current study's results showed that regarding the bullying topic, differences among the groups' post-test scores only approached significance, while the groups' pre-test scores were significantly different from each other. While some groups had greater knowledge about how to deal with bullying to begin with, as shown by the differences between pre-test scores, all groups who read the book about bullying showed improvements from pre-test to post-test, regardless of whether or not discussion was included in the conditions of the group. This implies that bibliotherapy can indeed be beneficial for children and help them deal with commonly-experienced childhood issues. However, due to varying results for each topic, bibliotherapy may not be the best option for helping children with every situation. In addition, bibliotherapy may be most beneficial when the subject matter of the chosen materials coincides with a child's

specific area of concern. For instance, if a child is concerned about trying new things, they may be more focused on material dealing with that particular issue and glean more relevant information in greater amounts when compared to a child who is not concerned about that issue.

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CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

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APPENDIX A

Parent Consent Form

PARENT PERMISSION FOR CHILD TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Department of Psychology, Fort Hays State University

Learning Our Lessons: A Proactive Approach to Using Bibliotherapy with Children

Researcher: Marleah Augustine Supervisor: Dr. Carol Patrick
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Ellis, KS 67637 Department of Psychology
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You are being asked to allow your child to participate in a research study. Before you give your permission, it is important that you read the following information and ask as many questions as necessary to be sure you understand what your child will be asked to do. It is your choice whether or not your child will participate.

Your decision of whether or not to allow your child to participate will have no effect on benefits or services to which you are otherwise entitled, including your child's academic status. Please ask questions if there is anything you do not understand.

What is the purpose of this study?
The purpose of this study is to find out whether or not children can learn lessons from books and discussing those books. Many people believe that children can learn lessons, such as good manners or why they should clean their room, from books and the characters in those books. However, there is no known research that scientifically supports this idea.

What does this study involve?
If you agree to let your child participate, I will ask her/him to answer questions about two different topics: bullying and trying new things. These questions are to see if the child already knows some things to do when dealing with bullies or trying new things. After answering those questions, your child will participate in ONE of four different activities. These activities include having a book read to her/him, discussing a topic, or both. Then I will ask her/him to answer the same questions that s/he answered earlier. This will let me see if children can learn from just having a book read to them, or if children also need to talk about that information so that they can learn. This will take place during the usual time your child is at the after-school program. None of the procedures used in this study are experimental in nature. The only experimental aspect of this study is the gathering of information for analysis.

If you decide to let your child participate in this study, you will be asked to sign this consent form after I answer all of your questions and you understand what will happen to your child. When your child participates, it will take about 1 hour. I expect 100 children to participate in this study.

Are there any benefits from participating in this study?
If your child participates in this study, s/he will help us learn more about how children learn from books and how lessons from books should be taught by teachers. Your child will also get to talk with me and other children about bullying and trying new things.

Will you be paid or receive anything to participate in this study?
No compensation is offered to you or your child.

What about the costs of this study?
There are no costs for participating in this study, other than how much time the child will spend listening to a book and/or discussing the topic and answering questions.

What are the risks involved with being enrolled in this study?
It is not likely that participating in this project will cause any harm to your child. Your child might feel uncomfortable talking about how s/he feels. To help your child feel comfortable, I will tell your child that s/he can raise her/his hand and stop participating at any time. Your child could return to participate when s/he feels comfortable again, if s/he wants to. Your child might be shy around a new person, but your child's regular teacher or service provider will be in the room at all times to help your child feel comfortable. The topics discussed (bullying or trying new things) will not likely be uncomfortable for your child, but some children may become uncomfortable when talking about bullies or new situations. If your child becomes visibly uncomfortable, s/he may be excused from participating and talk with the teacher or other qualified personnel.

How will your child's privacy be protected?
The information collected for this study includes your child's gender, age, grade level, and his/her answers to questions asked during the study. If your child makes comments about the information discussed, these comments may be noted by me and included in the data. These comments help identify what helps children learn from books or discussions. Your child's answer sheets and personal information will be kept in a secure, locked file cabinet. Only the faculty supervisor and me will have access to the records. All personal identifying information will be kept in locked files. All of these files and other records will be deleted or destroyed when the study ends. Computer files will be erased and paper copies will be shredded when the study ends.

I will make all possible efforts to protect your child's identity and keep her/his information confidential. Your child will be assigned a number that will be used on her/his response sheet and other information so that s/he cannot be identified. Only I will have the means to identify which responses belong to your child or other children.

All information collected during this process will be used only for this study. What we find from this study may be presented at meetings or published in academic journals, but your child's name will not ever be used in these presentations or publications.

If any child in the study says that they may hurt themselves or others, the law says that I have to report that to the proper authorities. I will not tell anyone the answers your child gives. But if your child tells me that someone is hurting her/him, or that s/he might hurt her/himself or someone else, the law says that I have to let people in authority know so that they can protect your child.

Other important items you should know:

Withdrawal from the study:
If you decide to let your child be in this study, you can withdraw your consent at any time. This means that you can stop your child from being in the study at any time and her/his information will not be used in the study. There will be no penalty to your child if you decide to stop her/him from being in the study.

Funding:
There is no outside funding for this research project.

<u>Whom should you call with questions about this study?</u>
Questions about this study may be directed to the researcher in charge of this study: Marleah Augustine at (785) 650-4206.

If you have questions, concerns, or suggestions about human research at FHSU, you may call the Office of Scholarship and Sponsored Projects at FHSU – (785) 628-4349 – during normal business hours.

<u>Resources</u>

This study aims to identify some ways in which children learn. These ways might include reading books or discussing topics. After hearing about bullying and trying new things, your child may have some questions. If you or your child have any questions about this study, you may contact the researcher, Marleah Augustine, at **785-650-4206**.

If you or your child have any questions about how to deal with bullying or other concerns, there are many resources available. The website of the American Psychological Association (**http://www.apa.org**) includes many resources involving parenting, children, and bullying. This website can be valuable in helping parents understand concerns that children have and how to deal with those concerns. Your child's school may also have programs in place that focus on these topics.

Another good resource is your school's counselor or psychologist, if you feel that you or your child needs additional or more in-depth assistance.

If you would like to see a summary of this study's results, you can check the Fort Hays State University Psychology Department website at **http://www.fhsu.edu/psych/** after October 2009.

CONSENT

I have read the above information about *Learning Our Lessons: A Proactive Approach to Using Bibliotherapy with Children* and have been given an opportunity to ask questions. By signing this I agree to allow my child to participate in this study and I have been given a copy of this signed consent document for my own records. I understand that I can change my mind and withdraw my consent at any time. By signing this consent form I understand that I am not giving up any legal rights.

_____

Parent or Legal Guardian Signature   Date

_____

Name of Child

APPENDIX B

Child Assent Forms

Child Assent (Discussion)

My name is Marleah Augustine. I work with grown-ups and children, and I go to school myself. I am asking you to be in a study that will help me learn more about how children learn things when they read books.

If you say it's OK for you to be in this study, I will ask you and other children some questions about things like bullies or trying new things. Then I will talk to you and other children, and then I will ask you and the other children some questions again.

Sometimes it might be scary thinking about bullies or trying new things, but you can talk to me or your teacher or your mom or dad about how you feel if you want to. Learning about how children learn things when they read books is important because it will help teachers and other people learn different ways to teach children.

Please talk with your mom or dad about being in this study. I will ask your mom or dad if it is OK for you to be in this study. But even if your mom or dad says that it IS OK, you can still decide not to be in it and that's OK. If you don't want to be in this study, you don't have to be. Remember, being in this study is up to you and no one will be upset if you don't want to be in it. You can even change your mind later if you want to stop, and that's OK too.

You can ask me any questions that you have about being in this study. If you have a question later that you didn't think of now, you or your mom or dad can call me at **(785) 650-4206** or you can ask me about it next time.

Signing your name at the bottom means that you say it's OK for you to be in this study. I will give you and your mom or dad a copy of this form after you have signed it.

_____
Name of Child (please print)

_____
Signature of Child   Date

Investigator: Marleah Augustine

_____
Signature of Investigator

Child Assent (Book)

My name is Marleah Augustine. I work with grown-ups and children, and I go to school myself. I am asking you to be in a study that will help me learn more about how children learn things when they read books.

If you say it's OK for you to be in this study, I will ask you and other children some questions about things like bullies or trying new things. Then I will read a book to you and other children, and then I will ask you and the other children some questions again.

Sometimes it might be scary thinking about bullies or trying new things, but you can talk to me or your teacher or your mom or dad about how you feel if you want to. Learning about how children learn things when they read books is important because it will help teachers and other people learn different ways to teach children.

Please talk with your mom or dad about being in this study. I will ask your mom or dad if it is OK for you to be in this study. But even if your mom or dad says that it IS OK, you can still decide not to be in it and that's OK. If you don't want to be in this study, you don't have to be. Remember, being in this study is up to you and no one will be upset if you don't want to be in it. You can even change your mind later if you want to stop, and that's OK too.

You can ask me any questions that you have about being in this study. If you have a question later that you didn't think of now, you or your mom or dad can call me at **(785) 650-4206** or you can ask me about it next time.

Signing your name at the bottom means that you say it's OK for you to be in this study. I will give you and your mom or dad a copy of this form after you have signed it.

_____
Name of Child (please print)

_____
Signature of Child   Date

Investigator: Marleah Augustine

_____
Signature of Investigator

APPENDIX C

Pre- and Post-test Questions

Blue Cheese Breath and Stinky Feet: How to Deal with Bullies

       by Catherine DePino, Ed.D.

1. Would you want your parents to find out that you were being bullied?

2. Should you stand up for your friends if someone is bullying them?

3. If someone is bullying you, should you speak loudly so that others can hear?

4. If someone is bullying you, should you hit them?

5. If someone is bullying you, should you make a joke?

When Lizzy Was Afraid of Trying New Things

       by Inger Maier, Ph.D.

1. Do you like trying new things that you don't know how to do?

2. Can you still try something even if you think it is too hard to try?

3. Can you still try something even if you don't do it right?

4. Should you be scared of trying new things?

5. Can you have fun trying new things?